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# Journal of African Cinemas

Volume 12 Numbers 2 & 3

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# Journal of African Cinemas

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'The Filmic and the  
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## Aims and Scope

The *Journal of African Cinemas* explores the interactions of visual and verbal narratives in African film. It recognizes the shifting paradigms that have defined and continue to define African cinemas. Identity and perception are interrogated in relation to their positions within diverse African film languages. The editors are seeking papers that expound on the identity or identities of Africa and its peoples represented in film.

The aim is to create a forum for debate that will promote inter-disciplinarity between cinema and other visual and rhetorical forms of representation.

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## INTRODUCTION: THE FILMIC AND THE PHOTOGRAPHIC

**CORINNE A. KRATZ**

Emory University and Museum of International Folk Art

# From mugshots to movie stars: Orchestrating attention and constituting visual cultures through film and photograph

Prison mugshots recast as memorial grave markers, a pioneering Black South African movie actor, ubiquitous bicycles in 1950s Zanzibar's Stone Town, the entwining of Harlem and West African migration in life and art, and a much-debated and banned film on Xhosa male initiation and homosexual desire – the wide-ranging topics and issues addressed in this Special Issue present a sampling of work from the 2018 workshop *The Filmic and the Photographic: African Visual Cultures*.<sup>1</sup> The articles address central concerns of work on photography and film in Africa, examining how they portray different places, circumstances and lives, how people engage those visual practices

1. Held in Ann Arbor, Michigan, the workshop was organized by Kelly Askew and Pamila Gupta as part of a partnership between the African Studies Center at the University of Michigan and the Wits Institute of Social and Economic

Research (WiSER) at the University of the Witwatersrand, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Other articles from the workshop will appear in an edited volume.

in forming identities and subjectivities, how they might help constitute varied political relations and forms of community, link imaginaries and places, and how both films and photographs move across different contexts, networks and formats. Beyond these concerns, however, the articles also foreground commonalities and distinctions in how these processes play out through film and photography.

Produced through encounters mediated via cameras, both photographs and films entail a reflexive sense, a 'process of looking with a certain interest, a certain will' (MacDougall 2006: 3, 7). In both cases, seeing through the camera lens brings a heightened attention through the use of framing and focus, orchestrating attention across different scales. Filmmaker MacDougall finds that this visual selection and orchestration 'distills and concentrates experience', often producing an intensification of perception but also hinting at what lies beyond the frame (2006: 4). The two articles about photographs in this Special Issue, by Pamela Gupta and Bianca van Laun, illustrate this well. Moreover, Gupta shows that attentional orchestration is in fact a delicate dance among photographer, photograph and viewer in her analysis of Ranchhod Oza's photographs of Zanzibar's Stone Town. Gupta's own attention centres on the relatively inconspicuous but commonplace and ubiquitous bicycles that appear in the images, thereby reframing Oza's own framing.

Compared to the Zanzibari photographs, the prisoner ID photos that van Laun considers have uniform blank backgrounds, framing and depth of field; their focus is on individual men, their purpose to place and trace them in the bureaucratic system. Telling details of the prison context appear, including a metal stand rising over their heads, showing prison and fingerprint numbers. It is those details that were removed when the photos were reused and recontextualized years later in the Gallows Memorialisation Project, as part of a memorial museum display and as identifying placards on formerly unmarked graves being exhumed so remains of the politically hanged men could be returned to their families. Focus and tone in the photos were also digitally adjusted, cropping to zoom in on each man's face. In this case, new attentional orchestrations were fashioned long after the photographs were taken, adjusted for changed politics, changed viewership, and recontextualizations that moved the images towards more performative and relatively public displays. They were still embedded in bureaucratic processes, but had left behind the file folders that initially formed their primary context.

Film and photos alike make sense and meaning through their composition, but their relationships with narrative are somewhat different, if overlapping. Still images hold a plentitude of narrative potential that builds on a certain semiotic openness and ambiguity. Attention is directed by framing and composition, but viewers can interpret and build in different ways from the iconic and indexical surplus present in photographs (Pinney 2003: 3–4, 6–7; Kratz 2002: 94, 213; Berger 1987). Photo sequences and groupings might lead towards particular narrative frames, but 'discontinuities within the arrangement will be far more evident' and viewers' assumptions will actively bridge them (Berger and Mohr 1982: 287). In film, a director shapes that narrative potential through the edited montage and progression of images, framings and scenes, drawing viewers towards particular narrative paths. MacDougall notes that a shot taken from a film shares with a photograph the capacity to 'signify a variety of things. [...] But', he goes on, 'even within the context of a film, shots do not entirely lose their multivalency' (MacDougall 2006: 40). Litheko Modisane's article in this issue draws attention to the ways that

actors, like Ken Gampu, as well as other film professionals also add layers of meaning for different viewers and bring nuance and affective depth to film narratives, while Susan Levine's article points to the way film narratives can become entangled with wider social controversies and debates.

Scholars and critics continue to discuss and contest differences, similarities, complementarities and interactions between film and photography – from Berger's contention that 'photographs are the opposite of films' (1982: 279) to MacDougall's sense that 'photographs [...] have their own dynamism, and groups of photographs can conjure up connections similar to those produced by the shots in a film' (2006: 2).<sup>2</sup> Indeed, artists like Simon Gush have built on these interactions, blending features of the filmic and photographic. Gush's film *Red*, part of an installation of the same name, intercuts interviews with participants in 1990 events at the Mercedes Benz plant in East London with contemporary scenes from around East London, held still for ten or twenty seconds, some for close to a minute, without pans, zooms or other camera motion. There is only the scene's own ambient motion: waves, cars passing, people crossing streets, windblown trees, creating segments somewhere between film and still image (Gush and Cairn 2014; Kratz 2016; Pinney 1990). The aesthetic effect of the juxtapositions introduces seeming temporal contrasts and reflective moments (Kratz 2016: 32–34). Gupta (this issue) and an interview with Seydou Keita mention another kind of film–photo interaction when film viewers take on the dress or gestures of favourite film actors when staging their own studio portraits (Kratz 2002: 120).

The articles in this Special Issue, then, extend and add to a dynamic and productive conversation about the filmic and the photographic. Combining case studies of both can help bridge literatures that have focused on one or the other, drawing on critical languages and approaches from their different traditions to cross-activate and seek synergies from their combined influences from art history, anthropology, literary studies, cultural studies and with work under the broader rubric of visual studies to engage other visual practices and events as well, such as museum exhibits and performance. A simple example of these synergistic activations might be exploring how the notion of *mise en scène*, originally applied to theatre and film, might illuminate photographic analysis, bringing attention to the use of space and mood in image composition, to the more literal sense of creating and lighting a set in studio work, or to the sense of place and context that emerges from Oza's oeuvre in Zanzibar (Gupta), or the inflections brought to images of Harlem both through African immigrants in New York and as films and photos of Harlem travel to Africa (Sawadogo).<sup>3</sup>

Discussion about the photographic and the filmic has also come to reflect ongoing shifts in associated visual and political economies. As an *African Arts* Special Issue on African photography noted, since the 1990s, video documentation of ceremonies and major life events has joined photography as a ubiquitous visual practice throughout the continent (Gore 2015: 1), even as photoshop digital services have altered photographic possibilities and extended previous photomontage and collage manipulations (Kratz 2019: 324). While several articles here consider moments before the democratization of visual production heralded by cell phones and digital visual technologies (Vokes 2019), those affordances figure significantly in other articles that consider contemporary visual practice and products.

The redeployed prison photos that van Laun considers, for instance, are touched up, enlarged and reproduced through digital means, enabling

2. Berger meant this in relation to their temporal orientation. 'Photographs are retrospective [...] films are anticipatory. Before a photograph you search for what was there. In a cinema you wait for what is to come next' (1982: 279).
3. For the components of *mise en scène* and their photographic application, see <https://petapixel.com/2016/10/04/15-principles-mise-en-scene-thatll-help-photographers-tell-better-stories/>. Accessed 26 May 2020.

the new uses and meanings they take on and showing how they too are enmeshed in state bureaucratic processes. Similarly, Levine's article on *Inxeba (The Wound)* makes an important point about how debates about the film escalated through social media. It seems that many participants in the debates did not watch the film itself, but saw only the trailer, whose brevity and smaller file size more readily allowed online posting and circulation, even as it curtailed more nuanced discussion of the actual film. This format influence resonates with my own analysis of an earlier visual proliferation of images of Wodaabe people of Niger. In that case, after several films about Wodaabe had been made in the 1950s–80s, Carol Beckwith's stunning photographic book on Wodaabe appeared in 1983. With that change of format from film to still photos, they became one of the sparks that launched the images into popular worldwide circulation across various visual domains. Single images could much more readily be isolated 'to circulate widely, be incorporated into other formats and uses, and recast' (Kratz 2018a: 37), much like the circulatable short trailer format.

In another facet of visual circulation, film and photos alike have also seen their canonical viewing events and contexts expanded and begin to overlap. At one time, films were shown almost exclusively in theatres; going to see them was something of a special event, especially at festivals and premieres. Over time, films were also shown in classrooms and other settings, with some eventually available at home, on television and video players. Personal photographs were kept in albums, envelopes and boxes, displayed in homes, galleries and museums, exchanged among friends and family, while other photos had diverse commercial and marketing uses. Now, of course, many films can be watched on demand via the internet and on cell phones and people can curate personal albums on their phones, crafting image entourages from diverse sources (Kratz 2012, 2019). Such digital viewing and circulation has become a common denominator for film and photography alike, changing the social and material nature of filmic and photographic experiences, even as cell phones provide the means for all to be photographers or filmmakers.

The articles collected here delve into a range of such issues raised by film and photography in and about Africa. They examine what visual resources can do, and the many things that people do through them. Films and photographs alike provide resources through which people fashion, assert and contest identities, subjectivities and communities; give diverse meanings to particular places; negotiate power and politics; and fashion affecting narratives and biographies. The ways that films and photographs circulate and their diverse viewers provide ways to map and excavate other aspects of visual culture in Africa. The concentration of South African case studies here is complemented by articles on Zanzibar and on connections between Harlem and West Africa. A number of common themes and approaches, as outlined below, create counterpoint and dialogue among the articles and illuminate wider issues of visual culture.

### **PEOPLE, PLACES, POWER: CRAFTING IDENTITIES AND RELATIONSHIPS VISUALLY**

Each article in the issue examines the way visual images can shape, signal and express personal and social identities and at the same time be part of particular politics and power relations played out around and through such identities. As van Laun follows photographic biographies, tracing prisoner

mugshots through transforming systems, she shows how the men pictured are first removed from their families and social relationships through bureaucratic processes that turn their visual identities into identically framed images, numbers and files, reading their bodies as a particular kind of masculine sign within the apartheid system.<sup>4</sup> Under the post-apartheid dispensation, memorial projects sought to recast and redefine those same images as a means of connecting with their families and restoring those personal identities, images which were indeed taken up by relatives as well.

Modisane and Levine also foreground visual expressions of Black masculinities and their physicality. Modisane identifies the complex identity dynamics of actor Ken Gampu, 'fabricating fictional characters that were, in turn, inscribed on his body and the memory of his subjectivity' (p. 122 in this issue) as he performed particular Black male roles in apartheid-era films and simultaneously experienced the constraints of apartheid as an actor and worker. His brief 'faithful servant' role in *The Hellions* showed his social place with tattered clothing and physical endurance, yet Gampu's gestures and direct gaze simultaneously brought the role a certain dignity. As a father in search of justice in *Dingaka*, Gampu again portrayed a stereotypical apartheid role, this time the rural ethnic man. Yet his journey to the city brought out a different Black masculinity, again portrayed in part through attire to suggest the modern urban man. This was echoed in fan magazines as Gampu took on a public persona as a star featured in photospreads, one exemplar of the *Drum* man, a cultural figure and set of values, aspirations and identities created in part through film and photography.

The film Levine addresses, *Inxeba*, also highlights rural and urban masculinities. It follows a young Xhosa boy from the city, brought to rural initiation to lose the city's 'softness', who finds that initiation settings also contain homosexual desire, yet another Black masculinity intimately portrayed. In this case, the politics that engulfed the film circled around depiction of both sexuality and of scenes about what was taken as a deep cultural tradition of identity formation, constituting 'real men'. Echoing Gampu's identity dynamics, the public debates brought out parallels and blurring between the roles played by *Inxeba*'s actors, their own life experiences and identities, and their public personas.

Sawadogo's article focuses on the way African immigrants appear in films and photos of Harlem. Some films, creative works, and institutions discussed are concerned with how immigrants have come to understand their new home, at once reshaping their own sense of self and simultaneously marking and transforming their neighbourhood home over time. Indeed, he argues that African presence more generally is seen in the signs, storefronts and interactions on the street, as Harlem becomes 'a character' in films visually. Sawadogo shows the embeddedness of African/African American interactions and the layers of belonging in Harlem's history. Relatively recent circulations of people from Africa to the United States become both the topic of narrative films made in Harlem by African directors and one basis for reshaping production and distribution in the neighbourhood as the presence of African film festivals and exhibits increases. But what kind of character is the neighbourhood? How does Harlem itself shape the everyday interactions central to the films described? Yet other profiles show how Harlem figured in West African imaginaries of modernity and the US even before a significant number of people came there, through the circulation of images and films. How is Harlem now seen in Senegal or Congo? And how are non-immigrant Harlem

4. Masondo (2019) and Minkley (2019) consider the bureaucratic systems, instabilities and ambivalences associated with South African ID photos produced for the pass system from the perspectives of the state, photographers and photographic subjects.

residents engaging with their African neighbours and the burgeoning African film production and presentation in their midst? In a sense, Sawadogo's article is as much about visual representation of place and how wider imaginaries form through creative work as it is about particular immigrant communities.

Gupta takes an unexpected analytical path through bicycles as she weaves together two strands of identity embedded in Ranchhod Oza's photographs of Zanzibar's Stone Town. Like Sawadogo, one is a strong sense of place. But Gupta's careful attention to the images and their context brings out a greater sense of both the material sociality of place – places where people gather, where ships are unloaded, where daily rituals unfold – and of the temporality of place – e.g. with popular Sunday film screenings marking time and leisure. The other strand of identity is seen more obliquely. Oza runs a photo studio in Zanzibar for decades, but Gupta does not read the portraits and commissions he produces there so much as she reads the photographic practice and the photographer himself. The bicycle was part of his own personal identity and daily life and the urban scenes tracked his own experience. The bicycle seen in so many of the images, then, becomes a sign of person, place and time as well as a sign of sociality (pp. 201–202 in this issue). Oza and Zanzibar in the 1950s are both seen and presented visually as cosmopolitan, foregrounding the role of trade, transport and the diversity of Indian and immigrant communities there during pre-Revolutionary Omani times. While studios and albums were often 'sites in which cosmopolitan "theatricalities" could be indulged' (Vokes 2019: 215–16), Oza showed the vernacular cosmopolitanism that permeated Zanzibari life.

Gupta and Sawadogo's articles draw attention to the capacity of images for immersive, textured portrayals of specific places, contexts, scenes and relations – a capacity for making place identities and making identities through place. Film and photography alike have this capacity, by attending to detail or capturing telling interactions and decisive moments. That potential builds on their indexical and iconic nature, but we might think about the different ways each medium works with this, the different ways they build impressions, suggest interpretations or narratives, and the kinds of engagements photography and film each foster. That immersive capacity also allows and enriches comparative interactions between the worlds of viewers and the worlds shown on-screen or in photos. While these aspects of visual place making and identity are particularly prominent for Gupta and Sawadogo, they are also found in the other three articles, if less specifically highlighted. Both Modisane and Levine, for instance, note the entanglement of rural and urban spaces with defining characters' identities as well as with general stereotypes. Modisane develops this more particularly, with the filmic portrayal of 'the prison, the courtroom, factory and dancehalls [...] all part of black urban reality' and the 'dynamics of black urban life' providing a landscape on which 'Gampu as a modern actor [...] assumes the subjectivity of the man of the city with panache', creating visual avenues for 'black audiences' negotiation of their relation to and claims on South Africa's cities' (p. 130 in this issue). Van Laun's article, too, shows how photographs help constitute not just prisoners' bureaucratic identities, but the prison itself as a place-based mode of governmentality. It is all the more poignant, then, when the images later help to establish memorial spaces, in both museum and graveyard, where families reclaim their missing, deceased relatives. The articles in this Special Issue show clearly that the way images are engaged in identity formation combines personhood and place, a profoundly socially defined intertwining.



We often focus on what photos and films do, the role they seem to play in creating, affirming or showing identities, identification and subjectivities. In some cases, it can also be illuminating to examine their involvement in misaligned identifications or aberrant decodings. In thinking about this focus on what are sometimes individually oriented, psycho-social effects, it is important not just to consider what film and photograph seem to do, but *how* they do so. Why is film compelling in shaping the way people see themselves? What is it about the images, the filmic narratives, scenes and characters, the contexts in which they are viewed, or the conversations that occur around them that gives them the power to so engage and move viewers? Answering those questions calls, in part, for closer attention to the visual composition, structure and resonances of the photos and films in question. Are good westerns more effective than ones with mediocre acting or second-rate plots and writing? Such questions run into all the challenges of working with the history of film reception, but they nonetheless help call for a more nuanced sense of how photographs and films work, moving beyond assuming simple exposure is all it takes. Similarly, our claims about what filmic and photographic images do will benefit from keeping a clear eye on wider social processes involved in the formation of identities and subjectivities: how various interactions figure in the way films and images are taken up, how they are invoked in discourses and interactions outside viewing contexts *per se*, how they become touchstones for particular social groups, and what local understandings are about film, photos, the power of images, and the power of potentially immersive experiences like film screenings (Griffiths 2008).

### SEEING THROUGH BIOGRAPHY AND MATERIALITY

One way the articles here keep wider social processes in view is by using analytical approaches grounded in notions of biography and materiality, seeing photos and films through processual and phenomenological lenses. Building on later developments of the ‘social life of things’ perspective in material culture studies (Kopytoff 1986; Edwards and Hart 2004), van Laun does both, tracing different life chapters of a particular set of South African prison photos with particular attention to their changing material forms and formats. She examines how they were configured with other objects – from government records to human remains – to produce particular narratives and meanings over time, dehumanizing and objectifying prisoners, heightening the materiality of memorialization or filling museum space with narrative and affect through massing techniques (p. 146 in this issue) (cf. Kratz 2018b: 240–243). In each context, photographs rebalance different roles and registers, combining the evidentiary, affective and performative.

Modisane’s biographical method takes a different angle. His study of actor Ken Gampu considers how film roles that he played might have infiltrated and interacted with Gampu’s life and career, bringing out dynamics among personal, public and institutional meanings, identities and subjectivities. Heeding the apartheid context of these dynamics, Modisane also outlines the material conditions under which Gampu worked, both in his early life and then on various movie sets. Those contradictions and constraints may have also contributed to Gampu’s development as an actor.

Gupta discusses photographer Ranchhod Oza’s life and how his entanglement with a particular moment and place emerges in his urban landscape photos of 1950s Zanzibar, but her emphasis is more on the materiality of place

5. Agbo (2019) traces the intricacies of digital image circulation as constituting images simultaneously as weapon, evidence and 'magical object' in Boko Haram conflicts in Nigeria, forging a new kind of war.

and photography. Her take on this is tied to a close reading of images that takes off from Margaret Olin's title phrase 'tactile looking' (2012). Olin's book focuses on how people form relationships and communities through photographic practices, but never actually develops 'tactile looking' as a concept. Gupta puts it into practice by extending Geoff Dyer's (2005) approach to photographs, a more contemplative viewing that recognizes both their lingering power and how the idiosyncratic eye of the beholder interacts with photograph and photographer. This leads Gupta to close inspection of the pervasive presence of bicycles in Oza's images, even personifying them at times. The form of materiality her method highlights echoes several of David MacDougal's commentaries. Discussing the effect of close-up framing in films and photos, for instance, he observes its emphasis on tactile qualities, 'allow[ing] for a curious kind of identification with material objects [...] we inhabit its qualities in some way' (2019: 3). His notion of social aesthetics understands a 'social landscape' (like Stone Town) as a 'distinctive sensory complex' that filmically might best be approached 'obliquely, through events and material objects', like bicycles (2006: 58, 108). Tactile looking, then, might be thought of as 'extending our own feeling of being into our seeing' (2006: 1).

As already noted, Levine's article includes moments when actors' own biographies and experiences seem to blur and overlap with those of the roles they play, as in Modisane's exploration of Ken Gampu. Her case study of *Inxeba* might be seen as the biography of a debate within a longer contest over cultural politics, but Levine's case would emphasize that biography entails movement, development and especially modes of circulation. This is in keeping with her avowed grounding in work on reception theory, and raises the final thematic threads to consider in this collection of articles.

## MAKING AND TRANSFORMING MEANINGS: CIRCULATIONS AND VIEWERS

Levine recognizes film viewers as active, 'politically and historically situated producers of meaning, analysis and social commentary' and meaning production as an uneven, variable process (p. 177 in this issue), insights that gained wide currency through Stuart Hall's work beginning in the 1970s–80s. His encoding/decoding model foregrounded the interactive and socially embedded nature of media interpretation and the integral connections (and disconnections) across processes of production, circulation and reception (1993, 1994). Adding contemporary modes of circulation via internet and social media has made these processes even more complicated, as Levine's itinerary indicates.<sup>5</sup> She shows how *Inxeba's* meanings were shaped within the political contexts of #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall and prior controversies over Xhosa initiation photographs and produced across settings far beyond viewings of the film and its trailer, including protests, hearings of the Film and Publications Appeal Tribunal where the film was banned, university seminars, newspaper columns, Facebook, Twitter and art exhibits.

Several other articles also consider how images take on different meanings through circulation and recontextualization, sometimes in different political circumstances, as in van Laun's analysis. Sawadogo outlines both institutional landscapes of visual circulation in Harlem – including film festivals, art galleries, music venues, cultural centres, West African-owned businesses, and various cultural events – as well as the way images interact across

media, considering how Harlem and her West African residents have taken on varied meanings in literature, film, photography, exhibits, music and more. Such cross-media connections are an important aspect of circulation to keep in mind when thinking about visual economies, different ways of seeing, and questions of reception, interpretation and images' potential effects. Parallel circulations and interactions across media might amplify, reinforce or contradict effects attributed to film and photography. Films screening in South Africa in the 1960s were in conversation with photos, journalism and fiction in *Drum* magazine that portrayed modern fashions and a sophisticated urban life, as Modisane notes, and also with earlier tours by US choirs and musical groups that Erlmann similarly identifies as providing a comparative foil for imagining other social and political arrangements (1991).

In these ways, visual culture also circulates across and blurs various domains – personal, public, political, governmental, commercial, journalistic – accumulating (and shedding) layers of meaning and history and working in counterpoint with varied cultural forms and histories to produce meaning and enrich felt experience as part of the social lives of photographs and films. Pinney has suggested thinking about the nature of networks involved in visual interpretations and relations, tracing understandings that emerge along 'a path of exchanges characterized by contingency' (2006: 140–41). In this case, that would focus on networks that shape distributions and form both connections and disjunctions, recognizing historical patterns of distribution and political economy that are shaped in various ways, e.g. nationally or through colonial relations (which might cross national boundaries). Other networks might reach in other directions, binding and separating people, visual practices, and visual economies along different dimensions.

Tracing such networks and circulations reveals not only different contexts of viewing, but also the different viewers and audiences involved – a topic which many of these articles touch upon. Levine delineates the different responses to *Inxeba* that undergirded the debates, with viewers fractured along lines that included South African vs. international, and the entangled concerns of 'traditional and religious leaders, decolonial theorists, LGBTI activists, journalists, the film's director, writers and actors' (p. 179 in this issue). Modisane notes that South African films in the 1950s–60s were almost entirely targeted for White English- and Afrikaans-speaking audiences, with *Dingaka* being an early film that also addressed Black African viewers and helped establish Gampu's acting career, leading to his 'growing popularity among black audiences, and respectful admiration from white critics' (p. 130 in this issue). The different viewers that Van Laun recognizes are largely associated with the prison photos' different contexts and uses: government workers who created the images for bureaucratic reasons; family, friends and media who attend and also document exhumation and reburial events; and the limited number of visitors to the Gallows Memorial Museum displays, not yet open to the public but visited during exhumation events. While Gupta's article gives little attention to the various people who saw and used Oza's photographs in Zanzibar at the time, it draws attention to the viewings and meanings of images over time, posing questions about how viewers now might see images relative to those who were contemporaneous with Oza.

Each article, then, recognizes a variety of viewers and perspectives involved in working with and working through the meanings of the filmic and the photographic in each case. At the 2018 workshop in Michigan, Phindi Mnyaka raised a key question in approaching research on viewer responses: how to

do reception work without homogenizing along racial lines? The articles in this Special Issue suggest that strong work on audiences and reception takes into account far more than race as a broad distinction, recognizing the range of intersecting positionalities and dimensions that might define variation in viewers and their interpretations.

## CONCLUSION

While engaging with work on the filmic, the photographic and visual culture more broadly, the articles in this Special Issue interlace analytical themes related to the ways visual images figure in representing and constituting identities, subjectivities, communities and experiences of place, how notions of biography and materiality can be used in thinking about visual work, and the insights generated by tracing visual circulations and considering different perspectives and interpretations across the range of audiences and viewers. Together, these cases create a lively conversation about how African visual cultures are crafted through filmic and photographic resources and how their meanings emerge and their effects unfold. Seeing and showing become ways of knowing, orchestrating attention and intensifying perception. The alternate worlds portrayed may also provoke critical perspectives on viewers' own experiences and circumstances. This Special Issue will help understand how people might fashion, appropriate, synthesize, contest and creatively interpret visual resources from Africa and beyond as they simultaneously create counterpoints, new contexts and meanings for the places, relationships, identities and ideas that shape their lives.

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