

BOOK REVIEWS

ANTHROPOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGY

John L. Comaroff, Jean Comaroff, and Deborah James, eds. *Picturing a Colonial Past: The African Photographs of Isaac Schapera*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007. xv + 224 pp. Photographs. Notes. References. Index. \$60.00 Cloth. \$25.00 Paper.

Why do scholars think photographs are important? And why photographs from seventy-five years ago, now? Is it because Schapera had a special fondness for his Botswana fieldwork pictures that the editors wish to oblige and honor him toward the end of his life? Is it because of the genealogy of visual anthropology, which has marked out the visual record as a way of adding observational details? Or is there some key methodological or theoretical purpose here? The editors of this volume do not raise such questions directly. But implicitly they suggest that many factors are in play.

This volume comprises an editorial note about Schapera's photographs and their belated publication; a substantial introductory essay by John and Jean Comaroff; Adam Kuper's succinct but dense analysis of Schapera's biography and position within anthropology; Schapera's own fascinating field report from 1933; the 136 selected photographs (by Schapera with a small number by other notables) divided into discrete categories, each with an explanatory ethnographic exposition; notes; and acknowledgements. Finally, each photograph has an original or revised caption. The book therefore assembles a wealth of crucial textual cues for the reading of the images. On first impression this makes the volume appear very grounded and well-rounded. The reader is given thick and multivocal accounts of how Schapera conducted his research, and a sense of how he might have taken photographs adjacent to this. There are different angles of perception and interpretation, making it a sensitive but complex tribute to the man and how he related to the subjects and spaces of his research.

As one encounters Schapera through these texts and images, something of a conundrum emerges, however—that “paradoxical” thing to which the Comaroffs refer (1). The often loose, informal, and even intimate sidelong style of Schapera's photographs, especially in Mochudi, comes as a surprise when one learns that his research was not an intimate business. His talented intermediaries, like Sofonia Poonyane, engaged in very close interviews

with residents and wrote up their findings; among other things, this complicated authorship. For example, Schapera's pathbreaking anthropological study of marriage and sexuality was made possible by these educated, young male researchers negotiating and to some extent crossing the local boundaries. Schapera, by contrast, seems to have maintained certain hierarchical borders. Perhaps this was reassuring, along with his routine morning walks around the village. Perhaps that is why he could get close with his camera, which the fixed lens required. With some exceptions (e.g., 199), people seemed to be comfortable with the dimensions of his presence. It is notable, however, that there are no photographs of interiors. Also, the sense of "palpable proximity" is heightened by Schapera's clever technique of lowering the lens to the same level as the subjects (not just children, as suggested on page 7), whether they were standing, sitting, or squatting. This automatically brings them into more egalitarian perspective in print.

In their elegant and finely tuned essay the Comaroffs point to the usefulness of considering photographs alongside Schapera's ethnographic texts. The two are not simply "isomorphic" but reveal unspoken dimensions to his relationships, which means that new questions should be asked about the sense of control and finality in the text, and about academic repression (my phrase) concerning the *process* of anthropological writing at the time. Despite their silence the photographs, it is inferred, raise a possible echo in the official ethnography.

This is an extremely productive volume that puts forward an important photographic archive to be used in open-ended ways, besides the lessons it provides in historicizing anthropology. I would, however, question two conclusions made by the Comaroffs. First, that Schapera is in the mold of Bourdieu's "middle-brow art," when technically he is proficient enough to slightly overexpose people's faces in harsh light conditions so that the tone is consistently wonderful in the images selected here. Second, that the photographs are "co-productions" between photographer and photographed (10). In an ideal world we should be able, each time, to give much deeper qualification to every gradation of the dance.

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Tracy Luedke and Harry West, eds. *Borders and Healers: Brokering Therapeutic Resources in Southeast Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006. vi + 223 pp. Photographs. Bibliography. Index. \$65.00. Cloth. \$24.95. Paper.

This edited compilation includes seven essays that focus largely on contemporary issues of healers and healing in southeast Africa. While the book is well written, it is highly theoretical and thus most likely to appeal to fellow anthropologists or those interested in the impact of evangelical and