Giulia Paoletti. 2024. *Portrait and Place: Photography in Senegal, 1840-1960*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 230 pp.

Place and Portrait: Photography in Senegal presents a clear perspective on photography in postcolonial Africa, particularly in Senegal. Giulia Paoletti offers a unique perspective that critiques and challenges Eurocentric biases, which often utilize photography as a reflection of African civilization. The text emphasizes how Western photographs may seem deep, mirror-like, and meaningful on the surface, but, in reality, they do not genuinely engage with the society where they are taken. The purpose behind these cameras and images was not to accurately represent the subjects but to serve as an imperial tool for colonial propaganda in Senegal (p. 45). Paoletti's argument is persuasive, highlighting that such studies overlook the importance of photography in Africa, particularly in Senegal, and tend to produce a biased view of its universality in postcolonial African studies (p. 11).

In examining the relationship between photography and technology in Senegal, Paoletti introduces three key concepts: photography's objectivity, legibility, and its connection to the technologies of domination in the early nineteenth century. These concepts are effective in challenging commonly accepted ideas about what photography is and how it functions in postcolonial Africa. Photography's objectivity questions the assumption that photographs are neutral, factual, and unbiased. Photography's legibility examines the notion that photographs accurately and clearly represent reality. The concept of technological domination analyzes how technologies like photography were historically linked to colonial control, power, and exploitation during the 19th century, and how they broadly portrayed Africa to the West (p. 32). Paoletti's work does not rely on the traditional themes that form the foundation of Western photography's overarching narrative, but rather centers her analysis around portraits, daguerreotypes, and other art photographs from Senegal while engaging with contemporary local generational photographs.

In an effort to decolonize European narratives, Paoletti highlights key trends among Muslims in Senegal, noting that portraiture was not widespread in Senegalese art; however, Muslim communities in Senegal were among the first to popularize it in the country. This challenges the idea that Islam always discourages human images. They spread portraiture using older techniques such as lithography and *souwer* (painting on a two-dimensional surface), which became common artistic practices among Muslims (p. 66). The arts, especially portraiture within Muslim communities, have fostered a vibrant and thriving cultural scene.

The author's presentation of African life, embedded in a beautiful collection of photographs, is thought-provoking. It raises questions about the unknown identity of the photographer and how the family photo wall style would reveal a powerful yet untold story of African photography. Paoletti argues that some anonymous photographs are painful and serve as a poignant reminder of the fragility of history and the neglect of memories. This reminds us that recovering an artist's name can be a crucial step in decolonization practices, changing how people perceive photographic objects, and acting as a gesture of connoisseurship (p. 103). Paoletti emphasized that current African photographers use these captured images of the locals to tell their stories, which was especially important after independence. The rise of curators like Okwui Enwezor and others' exhibitions demonstrated how African photographers' work

should be understood within the context of African liberation—not just as pictures, but as political and cultural expressions (p. 132). The photographs serve as visual decolonization, offering a way to resist colonial perspectives on Africa and to reclaim African identity through African eyes.

Paoletti recognized the importance of Léopold Senghor's cultural photography in Africa. She pointed out that he chose to take part in the rise of the African image-making scene, which powerfully expressed his dedication to modern self-representation through visual identity and decolonial imagery (p. 168). Looking back, photography serves as a tool to portray Africa with dignity, challenge stereotypes, and create compelling images that showcase Black identity and strength. He employed photographic language and ideas to discuss African aesthetics. The author's reminder of Senghor's highlight on African art was profound (p. 171). It shows that African art, as depicted through images, isn't just about portraying the nature of Africa as it has been since colonial rule, but should also be about transforming symbolic meaning in terms of expressing ideas, culture, feelings, and history.

Place and Portrait: Photography in Senegal is a paradigm-shifting publication that exemplifies a universal approach to photography, particularly in its embrace of African photography within the African context. It challenges dominant narratives and aims to broaden perspectives on photography's role in shaping life in Africa's narrative.

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