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Reimagining Todd Webb's Photographs of 1958 Colonial Africa

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This paper charts the path of Todd Webb's 1958 U.N.-commissioned photographs of colonial Africa across oceans and continents, creating cross-cultural collaborations, resulting in their recent reinterpretation by authors from the African continent and their installation at the National Museum of Tanzania.

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A 1958 photograph of fourteen men in Togo questions the visual politics of seeing and being seen, and invites a reimagining of the transatlantic circulation of images. Wearing white and hats marked "ablodé" (freedom), they celebrate the April 27, 1958 election. One man with a Père Noël (Santa Claus) mask salutes the photographer, Todd Webb. Arriving in Togoland (Togo) to record industry and technology for the United Nations Office of Information, Webb, an American photographer, documented ecstatic celebrations after the election of the first Togolese Prime Minister, Sylvanus Olympio. This was his initial stop on a five-month trip through eight African countries for the UN, which had a vested interest in the colonial dynamics at play on the continent during this moment of industrial expansion. This photograph embodies the diplomatic connections and entangled exchanges (cultural, economic, political, technological) across the Atlantic world. Through both its material structure and social biography, it references the channels of trade and transport that brought the French Père Nöel mask, Webb's German Rolleiflex camera, and American Kodacolor film to Togoland (Togo). Through these transatlantic networks, the image also returns (with approximately 2,000 others) to the United States in 1958, and in 2020, is reinterpreted by authors from the African continent, and exhibited at the National Museum of Tanzania in 2021.

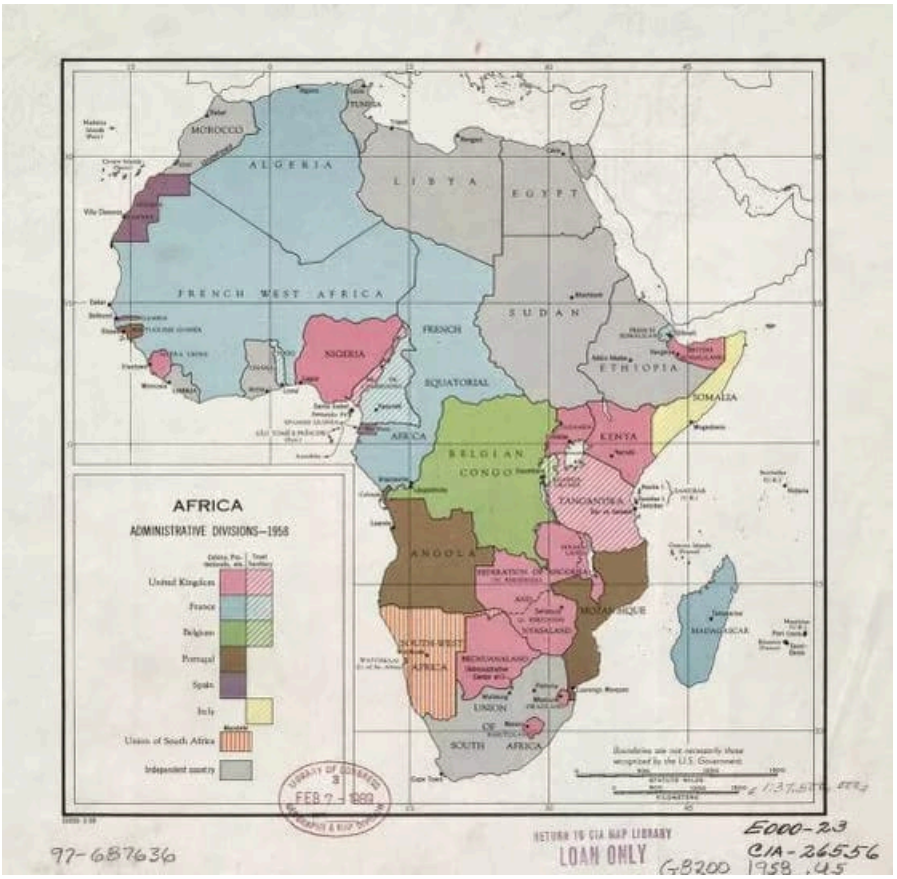


Todd Webb, *Untitled* (44UN-7925-071), Togoland (Togo), 1958. Group of men with white hats, one with the slogan "Ablode" (freedom), and a Santa Claus mask on election day, 27 April 1958.

Source: Todd Webb Archive

This paper charts the path of Todd Webb's photographs across oceans, cultures, and continents, acknowledging their itinerant nature, and opening a new space of dialogue about the reinterpretation of political and racial power dynamics in colonial images from a twenty-first century perspective. While the photographs had distinct propagandistic purposes in 1958, today, their reenvisioning in the exhibition and book project, *Todd Webb in Africa: Outside the Frame,* by African scholars, artists, and thinkers such as Ali Jimale Ahmed, James Barnor, Emmanuel Iduma, Rehema Chachage, and Gary van Wyk, dismantles hierarchies of value that are embedded in photography's colonial project. Iduma articulates his own reimagining of Webb's commission "To look at these photographs is to consider the outset of modernity in several colonial and postcolonial African countries. Webb was there to photograph the moment of promise, and now I am looking at the remains of those who have passed into history." [1] His interpretation suggests a new way of entering and understanding these images that does not reinscribe colonial frameworks, but instead presents a self-determination and futurity in his recollection. This kind of reclamation requires that "we become undisciplined," to summon Christina Sharpe, and actively embraces various forms of collaboration, privileging personal histories, fictional reimaginings, and creative curatorial strategies, methods uncommon in the academy that intervene in the white and Euro-centric narratives that have long dominated the discourse. [2]

Todd Webb's UN Commission



United States Central Intelligence Agency, map showing the political status of African countries, 1958

Source: Library of Congress

In the fall of 1957, Todd Webb was hired by the United Nations to photograph diplomats and official meetings at its headquarters in New York City. Following this first commission, the UN enlisted Webb to photograph throughout Mexico in February 1958 and on the African continent in April of the same year. [3] The UN Office of Public Information hired Webb to document emerging economies in what were then eight different African nations: Ghana, Kenya, the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (now Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe—Webb visited the territories Northern Rhodesia, now Zambia, and Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe), The Trust Territory of Somaliland Under Italian Administration (now Somalia), Sudan (now Republic of Sudan), Tanganyika and Zanzibar (now merged as Tanzania), and Togoland (now Togo). [4] This appointment came in the wake of a decades-long connection with John Rawson, whom Webb met while working for the Marshall Plan in Paris after World War II. By March 26, 1958, Webb's trip was booked: "I have my shots and my ticket is being arranged. I leave here on April 11 and have four days in Paris, leaving there on April 16 for Lomé in Togoland where I will be working for the first couple of weeks." [5] Although his Airworks Limited flight did not follow this exact itinerary, he did arrive in Togo (Togoland)—via London; Cape Verde; Dakar, Senegal; Bathurst (present day Banjul, The Gambia); Freetown, Sierra Leone; Accra, Ghana—in time to document the first-fully suffrage vote on April 27th, which marked a turning point toward the country gaining its independence from France only two years later. The energy surrounding this election is palpable in Webb's photographs.

As was true in Togo, 1958 was a time of intense change for the countries Webb visited, three of which were trust territories of the UN Trusteeship Council: Togoland, Tanganyika, and Italian Somaliland. Founded in 1945 "to promote the political, economic, social and educational advancement of the inhabitants of the Trust Territories and their progressive development towards self-government and independence," the Trusteeship Council played a role in supporting the movement of the trust territories and other African nations toward a post-colonial identity. Many of these countries were on the cusp of independence, with Ghana becoming independent from Great Britain in 1957. The Trust Territory of Somaliland (Somalia) and Togoland (Togo) followed in 1960, with Tanganyika in 1961, Zanzibar and Kenya in 1963, Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) in 1964, and much later, Southern Rhodesia in 1980. Webb's images present a diplomatic aesthetic of the Cold War era, illustrating the UN's desire to document modernization in the different countries, and at the same time, revealing his own experience and self-described preconceived notions of the continent.

Webb's Photography for the UN Commission

Webb's understanding and experience of the continent evolved throughout the trip, as evidenced by his photographs and journal entries. He wrote about his excitement in seeing Africa for the first time, creating an almost mythologized notion of exoticized space with such statements as: "I am breathlessly awaiting my first glimpse" and "Minutes away from the realization of a dream." [6] Throughout the journey, Webb noted moments when his preconceived notions of the continent were not matched by his experience, specifically in the case of Northern and Southern Rhodesia (Zambia and Zimbabwe), which he found invariably disappointing or "unAfrican," describing them in different journal entries and letters to his wife Lucille as like Topeka (Kansas) or Omaha (Nebraska), perhaps his own examples of unexotic American cities. [7]



Todd Webb, *Untitled* (44UN-7985-545), Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), 1958. Philips Radio sign at Treger House, Bulawayo

Source: Todd Webb Archive

Using three different cameras, Webb photographed both black and white and color images of industrial progress in each of the countries, as per his UN mandate to document a "changing Africa." [8] He followed an itinerary organized by the UN, and was introduced to officials—who helped facilitate his travel and arrange for translators (such as Mahmoud Mohammed Ali in Wad Medani, Sudan) and accommodations, generally smoothing his path in the different countries. In addition to photographing the election in Togoland (Togo), Webb made a wide range of images from cocoa farming and bustling trade at the seaports in Ghana, small- and large-scale economies in Sudan, thriving cities and seaports in Somalia, cityscapes and the mining industry in Northern and Southern Rhodesia (Zambia and Zimbabwe), and agriculture and power plants in Tanganyika and Zanzibar (Tanzania) and Kenya. These photographs challenge romanticized and exoticized visual narratives of the African continent prevalent in the popular imagination of the time, as seen in such publications as *National Geographic*.



Todd Webb, *Untitled* (44UN-7967-001), Somaliland (Somalia), 1958. Men with fishing boat, near Mogadishu

Source: Todd Webb Archive

Indeed, Webb's images, like one of the Pangani Falls hydroelectric power station, reflect a different photographic story of the continent than was imaged through other outsiders' lenses at the time. This photograph, which was not reproduced or published until 2021, shows a chain link fence separating the power plant from its worker. Two rows of barbed wire sever a corner of sky at the top of the photographic frame, and expose a triangular section of earth at the bottom that has been left ungroomed, dry, and patchy. Connecting the green grass to a cloudless sky, the shiny serpentine coils promise a pristine landscape where even the earth and air feel groomed. In contrast to the sleek technology of the power station towers, which seem to pulse with energy, a man in an olive colored suit and white hat pushes a lawnmower.



Todd Webb, *Untitled* (44UN-8011-469), Tanganyika (Tanzania), 1958. Man mowing the lawn at a power transfer station

Source: Todd Webb Archive

The division of the picture plane, between what is inside and outside of the fence (and frame of the photograph), presents a pictorial tension that is often present in colonial era photography. For this Tanganyikan worker, perhaps his avoidance of the camera's gaze is, as Rehema Chachage writes, a subtle form of resistance, "which refused the very terms of photographic subjection that perhaps Webb's commission was engineered to produce." [9] Chachage gives voice to the subjects of Webb's images, such as this man mowing the lawn:

> *As if [he is] saying, "we are much more than this photograph." And indeed, they were so much more than what Webb's camera was able to capture. They were also mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, husbands, wives, sisters, brothers, neighbors, lovers, friends, confidants.*

Outside the frame, these human stories soften the photograph's manicured order. Inside the frame, this photograph embodies the UN mission of documenting a modernizing and "civilized" Africa as taken by an American photographer who is an outsider to the culture and physically on the other side of the fence. Photographs such as this one and much of Webb's corpus of images made during his five months in Africa challenge the dominant primitivizing colonial narratives of the late 1950s. And yet, it is important to note that Webb was not alone in doing this. African photographers had long approached their practice on the continent with self-definition and agency that countered exoticizing imagery.

It is unclear why the UN did not hire an African photographer for this commission, one who would have already had deeper insight into the intricacies of industry and technology on the continent in the late 1950s; they instead chose an American who had never traveled to Africa. The many *Drum* magazine photographers active in 1958, specifically in South Africa, or established photographers in other countries, such as James Barnor in Ghana, would have been ideal candidates for the job. Barnor was a part of a thriving local photographic community who photographed Ghana's transition from colonialism to Independence. He worked for *The Daily Graphic* and *Drum* magazine, opened the first Agfa-Gevaert color processing laboratory in Accra in 1969, and currently photographs between England, France, and Ghana.

In an interview about Webb's photography with Aimée Bessire on November 1, 2019, Barnor discussed what it was like to photograph in Ghana in the 1950s: "even right from the beginning of 1958, when you are talking about Todd Webb's work... photography was buoyant." [10] He described the vibrancy of his thriving practice at the Ever Young Photographic Studio.

> *I lived near two important night spots. One was one of the best hotels in Accra, called Sea View Hotel. I was just two doors from the Sea View, so people who visited there came to my studio. There was a nightclub and drinking place about a quarter of a mile from me with dances and bands and so on and so forth. People from there came to me, or I could take my camera and go there and take pictures.*



Todd Webb, *Untitled* (44UN-7997-226), Ghana, 1958. Unloading cargo with Customs House and Ghana Railway and Harbors in the background, Accra

Source: Todd Webb Archive

In seeing Todd Webb's images of the James Town Harbour in Accra, such as one with the Customs and Ghana Railways and Harbours buildings in the background, Barnor recalled the many photographs he took of the same scene when it was still a "wholesale area, where imported things were stored before being delivered to the owners and offices for the workers". Barnor's memories give personal perspective to the now historical moments in the photographs, as in his description of the details of the working harbor:

> *That was a very, very busy time when [Webb] went there. You could photograph this all day. The boats were numbered. I lived just a stone's throw from the harbor. Even then, there was no restriction on whether you could go there or not. Most of the workers lived around where I lived and had my studio. You see this one, I think where the boat is in the middle somewhere, apart from the breakwater. I think Webb took this picture from somewhere where the boat is out of the water... It was the front of the warehouse where people worked and even lorries could drive into the warehouse and take deliveries. There's where he stood and took the picture.*

Barnor's position as a local photographer demonstrates an intimate knowledge of the landscape and the labor that brought goods to the shore at the James Town harbor.

While Barnor envisions where Webb planted his feet to make a photograph, Emmanuel Iduma, in his piece "Mileage from Here: Nine Narratives" in *Todd Webb in Africa: Outside the Frame*, reimagines a new story for another of Webb's James Town Harbour images.



Todd Webb, *Untitled* (44UN-7913-191), Ghana, 1958. Unloading cargo from the boats, Accra harbor

Source: Todd Webb Archive

In the photograph, a young boy navigates the current while balancing three cardboard boxes stamped with the Heinz logo—signalling the wide ranging global trade presence of multinational American corporations. A pointing elbow punctures the photographic frame, echoed by the triangle of dock visible in the lower right of the composition. In viewing this photograph, Iduma weaves a magical story about a boy, his mother, and the river:

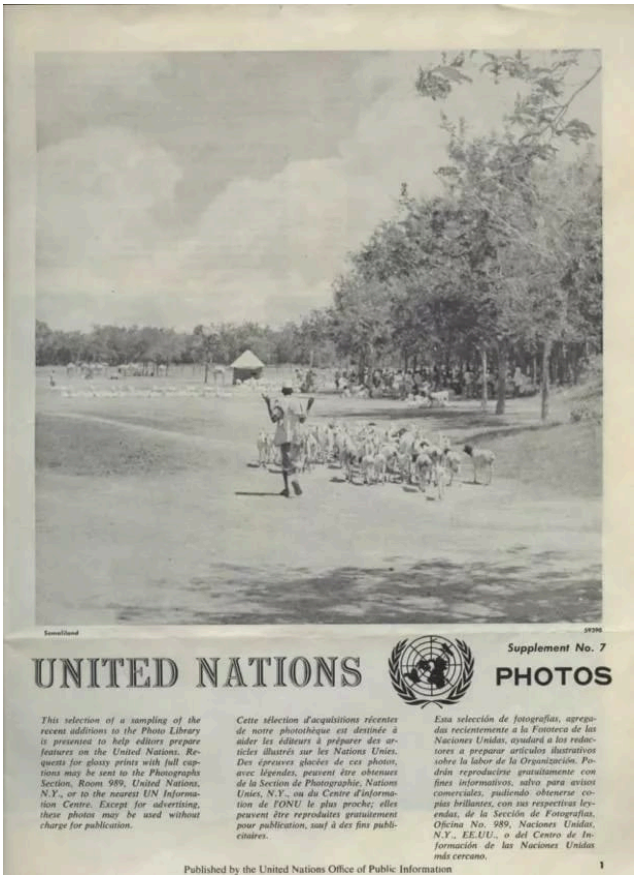
> *She seeks his face in the approaching light, and wonders. What is this son the river has brought?.... She holds his face against the light of dawn, but it is not bright enough for her to see. She brings his face to hers and pours breath on his chin. Then he sneezes, what sounds like a purr. For her it is then he comes alive. She pours breath on his chin and he comes alive.... This is how it is with her. She wouldn't, from this morning on, refer to the child as anything but hers.* [22]

This otherworldly story of new life exploits assumptions about documentary objectivity and expands the visual narrative beyond what the UN Office of Information might have envisioned when Todd Webb focused his lens on these boats bringing goods into port.

Tracing Webb's Images back to the States

When Webb returned to the States in August 1958, he brought with him approximately 2,000 photographic negatives. Despite the many images taken during the trip, only twenty-two of them were published in the seven-page brochure *United Nations Photos, Supplement No. 7* designed to present a narrative of the "changing face of Africa". The brochure highlights an oppositional distinction between the visuals of a modernizing Africa and what it suggests were its more non-industrial origins—thatched housing and ox-tilled farms:

> *Across the whole continent of Africa vast changes are taking place—multi-storey buildings rise where before nothing but the thatch of an African village broke the long sweep of the golden veld —new cities, expanding industry and mining are powered from the harnessing of its mighty rivers—scientific, large-scale agriculture is taking over from the ox-drawn plough. The people of Africa are increasingly represented in the councils of the United Nations as more nations emerge from tutelage, and from UN Trusteeship. The UN Economic Commission from Africa provides a focal point for the expression of their economic needs.* [23]



"United Nations Photos, Supplement No. 7"

Source: United Nations Office of Public Information

The brochure's photographs suggest modernizing economies through representations of factory machinery, thriving seaports, and also through small scale industries. The black and white images present clinical evidence of Africa's colonial era industrialization. For example, page three presents close ups of factory work in Tanganyika (Tanzania), images of thriving harbors offloading material goods suggesting the country's economic vibrancy, the harbormaster of Mogadishu, Somalia overseeing his docks, and miners carrying materials in Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), all with clean, photographic precision. The UN was invested in documenting the colonial systems and economic realities during this time of industrial expansion, all of which Webb was hired to record with his cameras. They highlighted this premise in their text accompanying Webb's image of the Natural Resources School in Arusha, Tanganyika (Tanzania):

> *Although the overwhelming majority of the 210 million people in Africa make their living on the land, enormous changes are taking place. New nations are being formed, there is an interesting world-wide demand for the continent's minerals and raw materials, power sources are being developed, communications opened up by rail, road, and sea, and local industries are springing up. Through the new United Nations Economic Commission for Africa the governments are also working together to promote the economy of the continent and to raise living standards. At the Natural Resources School near Arusha, students, among other things, attend classes in forestry.* [24]

Such captions highlight the UN's propagandistic objective—for Todd Webb's images to promote the "good works" of the UN Economic Commission for Africa in raising economic standards.



Todd Webb, *Untitled* (44UN-7981-177), Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), 1958. Molten slag running down a hill at a copper mine, near Ndola

Source: Todd Webb Archive

It is notable that Webb's lush color photographs were only reproduced in the black and white brochure and press images; the vast index of negatives went unseen until 2017. Webb hoped to publish a monograph of his photographs of the continent, but was unable to find a publisher. On April 4, 1960, Webb wrote in his journal that the images of "modernizing" African countries did not meet the expectations of publishers who might have wanted to present a more exoticized and undeveloped view of the continent: "The Africa book is off as a picture book—too expensive and limited by its interest in economics. I think they are wrong —I have an idea that they want a picture book full of Watusi, Pigmys [sic], Ma[a]sai, lions and women with exposed breasts." [11] He understood that his images of the industrializing countries, such as the mountain of slag with molten liquid in Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) or a man spraying pesticides at a Ghanaian cocoa farm, did not meet the visual expectations of publishers more interested in selling books that perpetuated racially primitivizing and objectifying photographs of the continent.



Todd Webb, *Untitled* (44UN-7776-038), Ghana, 1958. Spraying pesticide on cocoa crop

Source: Todd Webb Archive

In 1975, Todd Webb sold off a large percentage of his archive, including the nearly 2,000 negatives from his UN commission. Forty-three years later, in 2017, these images were rejoined with Webb's larger archive as part of a recovery project by his estate. A 25 x 37 x 24-inch steamer trunk sent from California to Maine contained over 170 rolls of color film and black and white vintage prints made by Webb in the 1960s. This was reunited with his journal from the trip and tourist ephemera such as hotel receipts and travel brochures. The movement of the photographs from New York to California to Maine echoes their earlier and later transatlantic journeys moving from Africa to the US and then back to the continent.



Steamer trunk with Todd Webb's negatives from the UN commission in Africa

Source: Photograph credit: Sam Walker

Reimagining Webb's Colonial Era Images

When the photographs were rediscovered and reunited with the Todd Webb Archive, they provided an opportunity to reevaluate the spaces between colonialism and independence and the unequal power dynamics at play in the 1950s and still present today.



Todd Webb, *Untitled* (44UN-7994-515), Northern or Southern Rhodesia (Zambia or Zimbabwe), 1958. Woman in red dress with a baby

Source: Todd Webb Archive

Many of the images raise questions about positionality and privilege and illuminate the ways that photographs are multi-authored objects. In one image, a woman and baby from Northern or Southern Rhodesia (Zambia or Zimbabwe) directly return the viewer's (and photographer's) gaze and in another, a Texaco worker holds the gas pump, and seems to smile.



Todd Webb, *Untitled* (44UN-8002-165), Togoland (Togo), 1958. Attendant at Texaco Station, Togo

Source: Todd Webb Archive

But such performances for the camera do not always tell the whole story; only those photographed know what they were thinking the moment the shutter clicked. This photographic tension and ambiguity is also visible in Todd Webb's photograph of the fourteen men after the election, specifically in the Père Nöel masked man. The seriousness of most of the men's faces juxtaposed with the smile of one man seen in the background between the mask and the saluting hand and the man on the lower left holding the pink bougainvillea and just slightly sticking out his tongue, creates another ambiguous expression. This photograph raises many questions: Is the mask worn in celebration or satire? Is the wearer saluting farewell or issuing a charged gesture to the French administration? The multiplicity here is simultaneously compelling and uncomfortable, visible and invisible—and requires what Mark Sealy would call a kind of "forensic looking," beneath and underneath the surface of the photograph. [12] Such images demonstrate the ways that photographic meaning is made from a harmony of many voices, including the positionality of the viewer, the perspective of the photographer and that of the commissioning agent (in this case, the UN). At their depth, the images depict the political and complex power dynamics at play during the Cold War era in which they were photographed and the possibilities of rewriting the dominant colonial histories of the continent through their reimaginings by contemporary African authors allowing personal histories and memories to both intervene in the historical narrative, and, at the same time, construct a new one.



Todd Webb, *Untitled* (44UN-7907-144), Togoland (Togo), 1958. Portrait of a woman

Source: Todd Webb Archive

In his piece "Mileage from Here: Nine Narratives," Emmanuel Iduma imagines new stories about the 1958 photographs in much the same way that he does in his book *A Stranger's Pose*, finding empowerment through the archive of colonial images. [13] He envisions the identities of the people in Webb's photographs, as he writes new stories. As he suggested in the endnotes to the piece, "If documentary photographs, when they depict unnamed subjects, require particularized responses, my goal was to speculate on the identities of individuals in Webb's photographs, by allotting stories and meditations to them." [14] In one of these narratives, Iduma tells a story about the transatlantic circulation of images. He reimagines Webb's portraits of a man and a woman as pictures the couple have sent to each other while living far away. "While in New York for graduate school, she sent him several dozen photographs of herself," Iduma tells the reader. We learn of the couple's life together:

> *Once when they lay on the asphalt, those years ago when neither had declared love for the other, they tried to distinguish one star from another. Once---again when their love was undeclared---she let him take selfies of their faces together, so close he wondered if she would flinch from the bristles of his closely shaven skin.* [25]



Todd Webb, *Untitled* (44UN-7907-145), Togoland (Togo), 1958. Portrait of a man

Source: Todd Webb Archive

Iduma brings his reader into the intimacy of a shared moment with such haptic precision that it is not only possible to envision the settings, but also to feel the absence of whiskers on the man's face. He cracks open the emotion hidden in these photographs of "unnamed subjects," weaving the relationship of the man and woman here, for example, into the longing and grief of separation:

> *What matters is that to linger on any portrait she left behind is to wait for the moment grief reenters a cosmos of tenderness... He remembers everything. What occurs to him is like an album of old photographs, peopled with strangers in remote places, to whom he may allot their past. He has become insomniac from a slideshow of memories.* [26]

Iduma's prose constructs new narratives, recasting the lives of the people in Webb's photographs and "naming" them through his creative reimaginings.

For Gary van Wyk, Webb's images reflect the long history of colonial occupation and systemic racism in what was then the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (today Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe). van Wyk highlights the "decisive moments" in the visual and cultural landscape that impacted his family history in Southern Rhodesia and mapped his own life's migratory path. In his essay in *Todd Webb in Africa, "*Yesterday Today Tomorrow Bush—Shooting in the Federation," van Wyk "browse[s] through Todd Webb's 1958 images of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, slivers of time, with familiarity and unease." [15] Many of these show urban settings and mining industries, which signify the political and racial turmoil on both subtle and overt levels. van Wyk tells the reader: "I'm uneasy viewing Webb's

images because development is linked to displacement, construction requires excavation, foundations are unstable; but especially because civil war is coming, and a bush war is the antithesis of what Webb is shooting." [16]



Todd Webb, *Untitled* (44UN-7982-128), Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), 1958. OK Bazaars in Kitwe town

Source: Todd Webb Archive

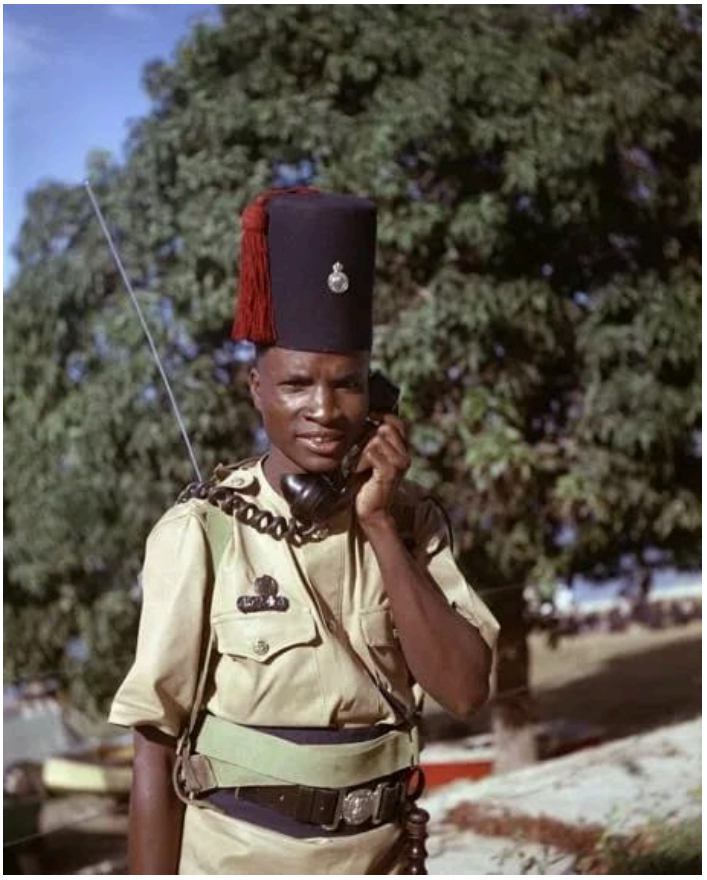
He exposes the racial inequities in seemingly innocuous images such as one of the OK Bazaars shop in Kitwe, Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), which he tells the reader supplies "commodities that soak up the miners' wages." In an image of pedestrians walking under the colonnade in Bulawayo city in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), van Wyk envisions the man in the white suit as having a "steady job" at the nearby Palace Hotel:

> *Perhaps, like nearly half of the employed Africans in Southern Rhodesia, he too is an immigrant, sending a portion of his wages home to Nyasaland or Northern Rhodesia. Perhaps he served my great-grandfathers, my grandfather, my uncles at the Palace bar, each, of course, on their side of the 'color bar.'* [27]

Interweaving his own family history in colonial Southern Rhodesia and his parents' decision to escape political authoritarianism, van Wyk views Webb's 1958 photographs as living "exactly halfway between James Cowden's arrival in Matabeleland in 1897 and my being here in the United States in 2019."

Providing insight into the ways that photographs of so-called "modernization" expose deep inequities, he suggests: "My unease about Webb's pictures also emanates from their programmatic glorification of progress. I suspect all representations of 'progress' and 'development' of being justifications for exploitation that fails to deliver what really matters: an equitable distribution of wealth." [17] This personal and circumspect analysis of the critical racial, political, and socio-economic inequities of the time addresses the implicit colonial trauma that is not always visible inside the photographic frame.

Rehema Chachage views Todd Webb's images "with curiosity" and with a critical eye to the "narration of two tales—that of the outsider and that of the insider." [18] In her essay "Listening to Todd Webb's Images of Tanganyika and Zanzibar," Chachage employs Tina Campt's methodology of *listening* to images, [19] as she "hears" the stories of Webb's photographs of Tanganyika and Zanzibar (Tanzania).



Todd Webb, *Untitled* (44UN-8021-415), Tanganyika (Tanzania), 1958. Tanganyika Police Officer using field telephone

Source: Todd Webb Archive

After emphasizing Webb's status as an outsider to the individuals he was photographing, Chachage attempts to understand the "tale from the inside," as in her analysis of a Tanganyikan police officer using a field telephone:

> *One can feel the discomfort communicated through this man's smile, which does not appear to be a complete one. Rather than trying to smile, he looks like he was instead about to say something but stopped from doing so as the shutter of the camera released. His slightly furrowed brows, as well as the half-open, half-closed eyes are further evidence of his unease.* [28]

Chachage suggests that one does not fully "hear" the individuals' stories through the photographs, ones that might reflect: "the active, resilient spirits, possessing the dynamism to employ whatever means necessary to not only accommodate but also subvert the very systems designed to dispossess them as a people. They are the stories I wish I could have seen and heard more of." [20] Webb's images recall that absence for Chachage, and she provides greater connection through telling the story of her grandmother, Bibi Mkunde. In her narrative of Bibi Mkunde, the reader might even smell bread baking in the kitchen, as they gain a sense of the "unheard narratives of the people Webb captured in his images." [21] Chachage and the other authors of *Todd Webb in Africa* magnify the potential and necessity for African voices to reflect on the transatlantic history of Webb's UN commission, which sits at the interstices of colonialism and independence. Through creative research methods and undisciplined approaches to archival interpretation, Chachage, Barnor, Iduma, van Wyk, and Ali Jimale Ahmed open new imaginings of the past and the possibilities of the future.

Todd Webb's Photographs Return to the African Continent

In 2021 Webb's photographs returned to the African continent for an exhibition at the National Museum and House of Culture in Tanzania. Colleagues at the Museum installed Todd Webb's photographs from his 1958 trip across Africa. The Museum's director, Dr. Noel Lwoga, assembled a group of curators, including Halfan Hashim Magani, Sixmund Begashe, Sekela Charles, Chance Ezekiel, Rehema Habibu, and Baltazar Nyamusya, to form the Committee for the Todd Webb Exhibition. The curators reviewed all of Webb's photographs and researched his journals and letters to Lucille. Their exhibition which opened on December 3, 2021, in honor of Tanzanian Independence Day, provided an overview of Webb's work in the eight countries and included a section juxtaposing his images of development in Tanganyika and Zanzibar (now merged as Tanzania) with photographs of contemporary industry and technology. The curators' exhibition statement discussed their use of Webb's photographs as historic documents that demonstrate how far the country has advanced since 1958:

> *The National Museum of Tanzania's exhibition "Todd Webb in Africa: Where We Came From and Where We Are" showcases the pictures taken by Todd Webb in the 1950s in Africa and Tanzania in particular. The exhibition provides the visitors with a survey of the level of development of African countries. It enables the visitors to travel in those countries just like Todd Webb did through pictures. The Exhibition has two parts. The first shows Todd Webb's journey in the African countries he visited. The second part presents a comparative analysis (through photographs) of the level of development in Tanzania specifically, between the 1950s and 2020s.* [29]

The Tanzanian exhibition highlighted Webb's images as a means to demonstrate autonomous distinction from the industrialization of the colonial era to the country's achievements post-independence. The curators' and the director's choice to open the exhibition on Independence Day further points to the important developments in industry and technology after Independence.

Conclusion

This project acknowledges the complexity of Todd Webb's photographs made for the United Nations, while considering what it means to disrupt hierarchies of value as images move across geographies and through time. When considered collectively over nearly sixty-three years, Webb's 1958 commission embodies cross-cultural contact where meaning is imagined, reimagined, and amplified through the harmonics of multiple voices. This transatlantic collaboration engages in new and undisciplined methods of thinking about the colonial photographic archive and, effectively, puts these images, which had been dormant for decades, to work by celebrating the self-determination of biographical narratives, fictional interpretations, and cooperative curatorial tactics. Working within a networked history of photography, one that recognizes boundaries, oceans, and the borders of nation states as porous, and where photographs move across the Atlantic, in between continents and countries, this analysis de-centers the 1958 commission as tethered to national identity. Instead, it emphasizes photographic circulation as a method for re-evaluating Webb's photographs as chapters in longer and more intimate stories about post-colonial African identity reimagining the perspectives of those pictured but not yet heard.

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NOTES

1. Emmanuel Iduma, "Mileage From Here: Nine Narratives," in *Todd Webb in Africa: Outside the Frame*, ed. By Aimée Bessire and Erin Hyde Nolan (Thames & Hudson, 2021), 234.
2. Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake. On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 13.
3. Todd Webb, Journal, January 29, 1958. Todd Webb Archive.
4. For historical accuracy, we use the names of the countries in 1958 at the time of Webb's visit with the contemporary names in parentheses.
5. Todd Webb, Journal, March 26, 1958. Todd Webb Archive.
6. Todd Webb, Africa Journal (1958): 1. Todd Webb Archive.
7. Todd Webb, Letter to Lucille Webb, Salisbury, South Rhodesia, June 23, 1958. Todd Webb Archive.
8. "United Nations Photos, Supplement No. 7," United Nations Office of Public Information.
9. Rehema Chachage, "Listening to Todd Webb's Images of Tanganyika and Zanzibar," in *Todd Webb in Africa: Outside the Frame*, ed. by Aimée Bessire and Erin Hyde Nolan (Thames & Hudson, 2021), 216.
10. "James Barnor on Photography in Ghana in the 1950s: James Barnor, interview with Aimée Bessire," in *Todd Webb in Africa: Outside the Frame*, ed. Aimée Bessire and Erin Hyde Nolan (London: Thames & Hudson, 2021), 82.
11. Todd Webb, Journal, April 4, 1960. Todd Webb Archive.
12. Mark Sealy, "Troubling Images: Curating Collections of Historical Photographs," Zoom symposium, February 25, 2021, hosted by Harvard Art Museums.
13. Emmanuel Iduma. *A Stranger's Pose* (Cassava Republic Press, 2018).
14. Iduma, "Mileage," 234.
15. Gary van Wyk, "Yesterday Today Tomorrow Bush—Shooting in the Federation," in *Todd Webb in Africa: Outside the Frame*, ed. Aimée Bessire and Erin Hyde Nolan (London: Thames & Hudson, 2021), 182.
16. van Wyk, "Yesterday," 188.
17. van Wyk, "Yesterday," 191.
18. Chachage, "Listening to Todd Webb's Images of Tanganyika and Zanzibar," 214.
19. Tina Campt, *Listening to Images* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).
20. Chachage, "Listening," 219.
21. Chachage, "Listening," 219.
22. Iduma, "Mileage," 233.
23. "United Nations Photos, Supplement No. 7," United Nations Office of Public Information, 2.
24. United Nations Press Photograph, "A Continent Awakes," NICA ID 362913, Arusha, Tanganyika (Tanzania), Photograph (Photoscan 026) taken by Todd Webb, January 7, 1958.
25. Iduma, "Mileage," 234.
26. Iduma, "Mileage," 234.
27. van Wyk, "Yesterday," 190.
28. Chachage, "Listening," 216.
29. Halfan Hashim Magani, email correspondence with Aimée Bessire and Erin Hyde Nolan, 23 February 2021.