




Figure 1: Suitcase containing photographs by Alice Hausdorff.

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Migratory Memories: A Suitcase as Photo Archive

Abstract The chapter examines a suitcase as photo archive whose physical map(ping) constructs an autobiographical memory that informs us about its history as well as of the larger historical context. The unfolding of the layers of photographs provides fragmentary insights into the life and work of the forgotten photographer Alice Hausdorff who escaped Nazi-Germany and went into exile in Palestine/Israel. Furthermore, they construct an aesthetic, iconographic, social, and historic matrix, presenting a previously missing female perspective on the cultural sphere of the Weimar Republic and the Zionist nation-building process in Palestine/Israel which will be inscribed into the canon of photography studies.

Keywords Photography, Archive, Memory, Cultural Transfer, Gender

About ten years ago, an old brown leather suitcase filled with photographs and letters was found on a rubbish heap in Haifa, Israel, and brought to a private photograph collector near Jerusalem. The collector does not provide much information in his account of the incident, instead emphasizing the almost mythical aura enveloping the suitcase, its contents, and its recovery, presuming it was the original suitcase of a woman photographer who escaped Nazi Germany in the 1930's. After her death, the suitcase was thrown in the garbage, according to the collector. When the suitcase was opened, it was found to contain a trove of documents bearing witness to the life and work of its forgotten owner, Alice Hausdorff: Photographs taken in Berlin in the 1920s and in Israel from the 1930s to the 1960s, as well as correspondence between the photographer in Israel and her artist friend Franz Winninger in Berlin.

Adding to the shroud of mystery surrounding the suitcase and its putative former owner is the fact that the photographer is not mentioned in the literature on photography in either Israel or Germany. This exclusion from the canon of photography studies is characteristic of a generation of German-Jewish women photographers who participated in and shaped the artistic and emancipatory avant-garde movements of the Weimar Republic and who were then forced to escape the Nazi regime and immigrated to Palestine in the 1930s. As a symbol of travel, migration, and storage, the suitcase and its contents as well as its negligent handling and recovery reflect the status of those forgotten photographers in both collective memory and scholarship.

Against this background, the suitcase and its contents may be analyzed as a photographic micro archive (► **Photo Archive**) regarding the macro-historical context of the visual culture and socio-political history of the Weimar Republic and Palestine / Israel.

This essay aims to do just that on the basis of the theoretical and methodological framework developed by Gabriella Giannacchi in "Archive Everything," where she suggests "that archives should be read as 'material' archeological sites" (Giannacchi 2016, 27). Thus, "both objects in the archive and archives as objects [...] can be thought of having social lives, entailing biographies and associated narratives" (112). The archeological approach allows us to construct timelines and establish relationships to the remains of the past (31–32). In this sense, Giannacchi understands "archives as laboratories for memory production" (57) where memories are constructed based on traces of the past and their reinterpretation, thereby creating future memories (58–59).

A close reading of the object will serve to uncover the various layers of the previously unknown photo archive in both material and historical terms, in order to create a narrative of a previously missing perspective. In this micro-historical (► **Microhistory**) case study, the object will come to be seen as illustrative of the macro-historical context and, as such, it will inscribe itself into the canon of photography studies and collective memory in both Germany and Israel.

The initials "AH" and the name "A. Hausdorff" written in white letters on the front of the suitcase point to the presumable owner of the suitcase, Alice Hausdorff. The name was probably added to make it easier to identify her luggage, which would have been necessary during its transport together with other people's suitcases. Based on this assumption, we can speculate that Hausdorff used the suitcase to carry her personal belongings while fleeing Germany. Like most German-Jewish refugees who escaped Nazi Germany, she probably boarded a ship to Palestine which was a British Mandate at the time. In exile, the suitcase became a place of storage. The photographs, documents, and letters preserved in the suitcase provide fragmentary insights into the life and work of Alice Hausdorff. Her birth certificate provides us with the date and place of her birth: December 15th, 1899 in Gleiwitz (today Gliwice in Poland). In the 1920s, she worked as an independent photographer in Berlin, focusing primarily on commercial photography. In the early 1930s, she escaped Nazi Germany and settled in Tel Aviv and later in Haifa, where she worked as a photographer for newspapers, Zionist magazines, the Habimah Theatre, and the Women's International Zionist Organization.

The suitcase held a total of nineteen boxes containing photographs. The inscriptions on the boxes indicate that Alice Hausdorff used 13 × 18 cm Kodak film, while the trademark "Made in Great Britain" suggests that her photography equipment was imported from Britain. The boxes also bear handwritten inscriptions probably by the photographer herself, some of which are in German, some in Hebrew, and some in a combination of both languages. Using descriptors such as "Settlement and Architecture," "Habimah," or "Gertrud Kraus," they refer to the contents of each box. They also provide some insight into Alice Hausdorff's use of language in everyday life in exile. Like most German-Jewish immigrants, the so-called Yekkes, she probably never gave up the German language and used it on a daily basis in conversations with other immigrants from German-speaking countries as well as in her correspondence and private documents, while Hebrew was used in official or business contexts and only when necessary.

The photographs by Alice Hausdorff offer a wide variety of iconographic, aesthetic, historical, and social perspectives. A yellow folder labeled "Kodak A-G – Berlin SW 65" holds photographs from Berlin and is probably the only folder she took with her to Palestine. In terms of subject matter and aesthetic language, the photographs reflect her involvement in avant-garde cultural movements of the Weimar Republic such as "New Vision" and "New Woman," where the field of photography, in particular, offered women independence and mobility (Kühn 2005). In Berlin, Alice Hausdorff focused on commercial photography and aesthetic experiments, whereas in Palestine/Israel her iconographies are related especially to the cultural, economic, and social nation-building process (**► Nation**) and notions of the "Orient." Her interest in theater, on the other hand, is a common thread running through her entire photographic production in Berlin and Palestine/Israel.



Figure 2: Alice Hausdorff: *Untitled (The Dancer Gertrud Kraus)*. Photograph.

Of special interest are the experimental dance photographs and photographic portraits of actors of the Habimah theatre, particularly of the Viennese dancer Gertrud Kraus (see Fig. 2). Kraus escaped the Nazi regime in 1935 and immigrated to Palestine where she became a pioneer of modern expressionist dance (Jewish Women's Archive 2017). This dance style, as well as the experimental dance photography associated with it, were important artistic expressions of avant-garde cultural life in the Weimar Republic. Brought to Palestine/Israel by German-Jewish immigrants, expressionist dance and the aesthetic language of dance photography were appropriated by Israeli dance and visual culture. The close friendship between Hausdorff and Kraus, moreover, points to their involvement in the socio-cultural network of German-Jewish immigrants in Palestine/Israel, who cultivated German language and culture even in exile (Zimmermann 2005).

In other photographs, Hausdorff adopted stylistic elements of "New Objectivity," "New Vision," and documentary photography, depicting subjects that were widespread in the visual culture of the period. In some photographs, for instance, she takes up the topos of the pioneer (see Fig. 3) who embodied the notion of work as a sacred obligation for the Zionist undertaking, or she addresses socio-political issues such as the immigration of various ethnic Jewish groups from the Diaspora to Palestine (Le Vitte-Harten 2005). The images reveal an ethnographic interest in



Figure 3: Alice Hausdorff: *Untiteled (Workers)*. Photograph.

the anthroposphere and everyday activities as well as in the ethnic and cultural diversity of the population in Palestine/Israel, attesting to Alice Hausdorff's fascination for the "other." Against this background, the suitcase and its content may be read not just as an archive but also as an archival object whose physical map(ping) constructs an autobiographical memory that informs us about its history (Giannacchi 2016, 182) as well as of the larger historical context.

The suitcase as object is entangled with notions of movement and storage. In the context of this case study, the suitcase is both a material entity and a symbolic object linked to notions of migration, escape, journey, and exile and inscribed with personal as well as collective experiences of hope, loss, and displacement. As a portable object, it was carried by the migrant, the photographer Alice Hausdorff, and multiple vehicles on the escape route from Germany to Palestine, crossing borders, time, and space. As a container, it was filled with the migrant's personal possessions that serve as memories of the lost home, as exemplified by the paper folder holding photographs from Berlin. In exile in Palestine, the suitcase was used as a place of storage, thus becoming an archival space where past, present, and future memories meet and materialize in photo objects (Dogramaci 2013, 235–236; Morley 2000, 44–46; Schlör 2014, 76–92).

As three-dimensional visual and tactile objects, the photographs may thus be read as carriers of knowledge, experience, and affect relating to

the fate of a German-Jewish woman photographer, the socio-cultural life of the Weimar Republic and Palestine/Israel, and Holocaust-induced flight and exile (► **Affect**). Those dimensions are inscribed into the bodies of the photographs and shape their biographies and identities. As agents, the photographs participated in the process of migration and actively circulated in social, political, and institutional spaces, such as the socio-cultural network of the Yekkes, Zionist institutions, and newspapers, or archives. At the same time, their aesthetics, performative qualities, and iconographies exemplify notions of cultural transfer from Germany to Palestine/Israel relating to the visual language as well as experimental and avant-garde concepts of "New Vision" and "New Objectivity." In the new environment of Palestine/Israel, the novel aesthetic language was then absorbed into the existing culture, creating a new hybrid visual language (► **Hybridity**). In terms of visual culture in Germany and Israel, the photographs discussed here construct an aesthetic, iconographic, social, and historic matrix, presenting a female perspective (► **Gender**) on the cultural sphere of the Weimar Republic, the 'Orient,' and the Zionist nation-building process in Palestine/Israel. The archive materializes and generates those narratives.


The suitcase as photo archive may be understood as a diasporic archive which, according to Gabriella Giannacchi,

has the potential to transform our reading of [...] processes of marginalization, making it possible for oppressed cultures to be brought to light and their histories to be rewritten. [...]. The diasporic archive in fact shows that [...] it is also what it is not, what was left out, what was destroyed or hybridized [...] and, [...] what is still open to interpretation. In other words, the diasporic archive entails essential absences: it is intrinsically unstable, but also unfinished, in progress, potentially able to initiate a knowledge revolution (Giannacchi 2016, 95).

Despite its inestimable value in terms of material and visual culture, the suitcase and its content were neglected for decades. Reasons for this may have been socio-political, based on gender and exclusion. While Alice Hausdorff participated in and shaped avant-garde cultural life in the Weimar Republic and in Palestine/Israel, she was at the same time a minority, both as a Jewish woman in German society and as a German woman in Israeli society. Thus, the photo archive discussed here may be read as a symbol of loss and absence. It constitutes a "lieu de mémoire" of the Holocaust that, while remaining invisible, is referred to in terms of a confrontation with its consequences and its aftermath. At the same time, the photo archive delineates a "found object." As W.J.T. Mitchell writes: "The secret of the found object is [...] the most intractable kind: it is hidden in plain sight [...]. Once found, however, the found object should [...] become foundational" (Mitchell 2005, 114). Therefore, the recovery of the suitcase and its contents from the rubbish heap and their transfer to the archive

may be understood as an auratization of the profane, a process of ascription of meaning. As an archival object, it may be read as a sign, symbol, or icon (Dogramaci 2013, 245) or “as a closely woven palimpsest of [...] shifting meanings in material culture” (Edwards and Hart 2004, 60) with the potential to reshape the canon of photography studies in both Germany and Israel.

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Figures

Fig. 1–3: © Buki Boaz Collection of Israeli Photography, Israel.

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