

Decoding Memory Through Photographs in the Visual History of the Kedjom Keku Fandom: A Historical Assessment

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Abstract

Photographs have increasingly been recognised as historical evidence that preserves collective memory, documents indigenous knowledge, and shapes cultural identity. Despite this growing recognition, scholarship on the Kedjom Keku Fandom in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon has relied predominantly on oral traditions and written records, with limited attention to photographs as historical sources capable of reconstructing the community's past. This article addresses this gap by examining how photographs function as visual archives that preserve cultural heritage, document historical transformations, and transmit indigenous knowledge across generations. This study employs Visual Culture Theory and collective memory perspectives; the study adopts a qualitative historical-ethnographic case study. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, photographic documentation, and archival research involving twenty purposively selected participants. Secondary data were obtained from university libraries, archival collections, and relevant scholarly publications. The findings demonstrate that photographs extend beyond their documentary function to become repositories of historical consciousness, visual memory, and cultural identity. They preserve evidence of royal succession, traditional institutions, ceremonies, education, artistic practices, landscapes, and everyday life while facilitating intergenerational transmission of indigenous knowledge. The study further reveals that inadequate documentation, poor preservation practices, and limited digitisation threaten the survival of family photographic archives. The article contributes to African visual history by demonstrating that photographs constitute indispensable primary historical sources that complement oral traditions and written records in reconstructing indigenous histories. It argues that safeguarding photographic heritage requires integrating community-based documentation, digital preservation, and museum practices that recognise photographs as living repositories of memory rather than passive visual records.

Keywords: Photographs; Visual history; Collective memory; Cultural heritage; Kedjom Keku; Cameroon.

Introduction

Photographs occupy a unique position in historical scholarship because they document events, preserve cultural memory, and communicate meanings that often extend beyond written and oral sources. Rather than serving as mere illustrations, photographs constitute historical evidence that captures material culture, social relations, cultural performances, and historical change, enabling communities to reconstruct and interpret the past visually (Edwards, 2021; Rose, 2022; Azoulay, 2023). In line with this perspective, visual history increasingly recognises photographs as active producers of historical knowledge and semiotic resources that shape understandings of identity, cultural heritage, and collective memory (Cobley & Machin, 2020).

Across Africa, photography has become an important medium for documenting colonial encounters, political transitions, indigenous institutions, and everyday cultural life (Naude, 2018; Rizzo, 2019). Beyond recording historical events, photographs preserve intangible heritage by capturing rituals, festivals, architecture, craftsmanship, leadership, and landscapes that embody collective identity (Edwards, 2022; Gordon & Kurzwelly, 2018; Rizzo, 2019; Thomas, 2021). As visual repositories of memory, they bridge tangible and intangible heritage by facilitating the intergenerational transmission of indigenous knowledge and cultural values (Vellanki, 2023). Despite these developments, historical scholarship in Cameroon continues to privilege oral traditions, archival documents, and colonial records, while the analytical potential of photographs remains underexplored. Studies on the Bamenda Grassfields have examined kingship, migration, customary institutions, and material culture (Knöpfli, 1997; Wihbongale, 2022), yet photographs have largely been treated as supplementary illustrations rather than primary historical sources. Consequently, their role in preserving indigenous knowledge, reconstructing collective memory, and interpreting cultural heritage has received limited scholarly attention.

The Kedjom Keku Fendom in the Bamenda Grassfields provides an important context for addressing this gap. Rich in royal institutions, customary governance, artistic traditions, festivals, and sacred landscapes, the Fendom possesses extensive family and community photographic collections documenting royal succession, cultural ceremonies, environmental change, education, craftsmanship, and everyday life. These images function not merely as visual records but as repositories of historical memory through which the community continually negotiates and reproduces its cultural identity. This article examines photographs as visual archives that preserve the historical development, cultural heritage, and collective memory of the Kedjom Keku Fendom. Drawing on Visual Culture Theory and the Collective Memory Perspective, it argues that photographs are active agents in the production and transmission of indigenous knowledge rather than passive reflections of reality. The study makes three contributions. First, it demonstrates that photographs constitute primary historical evidence that complements oral traditions and archival records. Second, it shows that photographic collections preserve both tangible and intangible heritage by documenting the cultural practices that sustain community identity. Third, it broadens African visual history by illustrating how photographs reinforce collective memory and facilitate the intergenerational transmission of indigenous knowledge. Ultimately, the article contends that safeguarding photographic heritage is essential for preserving not only visual records but also the historical consciousness and cultural continuity of indigenous communities.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative historical-ethnographic case study design to examine how photographs function as visual archives of cultural heritage, collective memory, and historical knowledge in the Kedjom Keku Fendom. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the research sought to understand the meanings, interpretations, and cultural values embedded in photographs rather than to quantify photographic collections. The historical dimension enabled the reconstruction of social and cultural transformations from the selected photos employed in the study between, while ethnographic inquiry facilitated an understanding of how community members continue to interpret photographs within their

everyday social and cultural settings. This design allowed photographs to be examined not merely as visual objects but as historical evidence situated within broader lived experiences.

Study Area

The research was conducted in Kedjom Keku Fondom (Big Babanki), Tubah Subdivision, Mezam Division, North West Region of Cameroon. The Fondom was selected because of its rich photographic heritage documenting royal succession, festivals, environmental conservation, craftsmanship, education, trade, and everyday life. Family albums, community archives, studio collections, and institutional photographs serve as repositories of collective memory and indigenous knowledge that complement oral traditions and documentary sources. Consequently, Kedjom Keku provides an information-rich setting for examining photographs as visual historical sources through Visual Culture Theory and the Collective Memory Perspective.

Population and Sample

The study targeted individuals with extensive knowledge of the historical, cultural, and photographic heritage of Kedjom Keku. Using purposive sampling, 20 participants were selected for their specialised knowledge and access to photographic collections. The sample included the Fon, kingmakers, elders, family heads, prince, retired teachers, Ex-pupils, photographers, sculptors, dancers, environmental activists, market traders, researchers, journalists, educationists, and members of traditional council. Participants were assigned pseudonymous descriptions to ensure confidentiality, consistent with qualitative historical research. Twenty informants, divided into three age groups, were chosen for in-depth interviews. For instance, young (ages 20 to 35), adult (ages 36 to 50), and elder (ages 51 and up).

Data Sources

The study relied on both primary and secondary data. Primary sources included oral interviews, participant observation, photographic documentation, family photograph albums, community archives, institutional records, and the researcher's field photographs. Secondary sources comprised scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, archival records, dissertations, museum publications, and historical reports on photography, visual culture, collective memory, and the history of the Bamenda Grassfields. Integrating multiple sources enabled historical triangulation and strengthened the interpretation of photographs within their broader social and historical backgrounds.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and photographic documentation, enabling the triangulation of oral narratives, visual evidence, and observed cultural practices. Semi-structured interviews explored participants' memories, interpretations, and the historical significance of photographs, while participant observation documented ceremonies, festivals, and everyday practices to compare contemporary cultural expressions with historical images. Photographic documentation drew on family albums, studio collections, community archives, and photographs produced during fieldwork, treating images as primary historical evidence for interpreting cultural identity, indigenous knowledge, social relationships, environmental change, and historical continuity. In addition, the data collection lasted between forty-five (45) and sixty (60) minutes to each participant.

Validity and Reliability

The trustworthiness of the study was enhanced through several complementary strategies. Data triangulation was achieved by comparing photographs with oral testimonies, participant observation, archival materials, and published historical literature. Source triangulation enabled the verification of historical events through multiple participants occupying different social positions within the community. Member checking allowed selected participants to review interpretations of photographs and interview transcripts, ensuring that the reconstructed narratives accurately reflected indigenous understandings.

Prolonged engagement in the community further strengthened contextual interpretation by enabling familiarity with local customs, institutions, and visual traditions. Collectively, these strategies enhanced the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the findings.

Methods of Data Analysis

Data were analysed using historical analysis, thematic analysis, and visual content analysis. Historical analysis contextualised photographs through oral traditions and documentary sources, while thematic analysis identified recurring themes from interviews, observations, and photographs. Visual content analysis examined symbolism in dress, artefacts, architecture, landscapes, and ceremonial settings. The findings were interpreted using Visual Culture Theory and the Collective Memory Perspective, enabling photographs to be understood as both historical evidence and repositories of cultural memory.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained before fieldwork, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Permission was granted to use photographs from private collections and institutional archives. Confidentiality was maintained where requested, while participants who consented to identification were acknowledged. The study also respected indigenous cultural protocols governing access to sacred knowledge, royal institutions, and customary ceremonies, ensuring culturally appropriate documentation and interpretation of photographic materials.

Conceptual and Contextual Clarification of Photography

Photography is a cherished heritage appreciated by enthusiasts. It involves capturing light with a camera to create images, focusing on visual communication and permanent records (Bull, 2020; Pinney, 2021; Cox, 2022; Wihbongale & Gemoh, 2023). In this regard, photography has evolved beyond a mechanical process of image production to become a powerful medium through which societies construct, negotiate, and transmit meanings about themselves. Contemporary scholarship increasingly recognises photographs as cultural texts that embody historical experiences, political ideologies, social identities, and collective memories rather than merely visual representations of reality (Bate, 2020; Rose, 2022). From this perspective, photographs do not simply record events; they actively participate in the production of historical knowledge by selecting, framing, and interpreting what becomes visible and what remains invisible. The use of the Visual Culture Theory in this study provides an important lens for understanding this relationship. Mirzoeff (2015) argues that visual images should be understood as social practices through which people create, contest, and communicate meaning. Photographs derive their significance not from what they depict but from how they are produced, circulated, interpreted, and remembered within particular cultural contexts. Similarly, Rose (2022) maintains that every photograph embodies a relationship between the photographer, the subject, and the viewer, making photographic meaning socially negotiated rather than objectively fixed.

Within African societies, this perspective is particularly important because photographs often function as repositories of indigenous histories that have remained absent from colonial archives. Rather than simply documenting individuals or landscapes, photographs preserve ceremonial practices, political authority, kinship structures, artistic traditions, religious beliefs, and everyday social life. They therefore constitute visual archives through which communities reconstruct their own historical narratives and cultural identities. Another important theory employed in appreciating photographs, as memory is the Collective Memory Theory, which further deepens the understanding by arguing that memory is socially constructed rather than individually retained (Halbwachs, 1992). Communities remember through shared symbols, ceremonies, monuments, oral traditions, and increasingly with photographs. Assmann (2011) extends this argument by explaining that visual media transform personal recollections into cultural memory through continuous circulation across generations. In this regard, photographs become reminder devices that connect past experiences with present identities and future cultural continuity.

The Kedjom Keku case exemplifies this theoretical relationship. Photographs documenting enthronements, family succession, traditional dances, royal ceremonies, indigenous architecture, sacred

forests, and community festivals do more than preserve visual evidence; they continually reproduce Kedjom historical consciousness and reinforce communal identity. They transform individual events into collective memory by enabling subsequent generations to visualise people, places, and ceremonies that they never personally experienced. In this light, connecting through Visual Culture Theory, these photographs function as cultural narratives through which Kedjom people negotiate identity, authority, and belonging. Simultaneously, through the lens of Collective Memory Theory, they become living archives that preserve historical continuity despite changing social and political circumstances. Photography therefore emerges not simply as documentary evidence but as an active cultural institution mediating the relationship between memory, identity, and heritage.

Colonial Photography and African Visual Epistemologies

Photography in Africa emerged within the broader context of colonial expansion, where missionaries, colonial administrators, explorers, and anthropologists introduced the camera as a tool for documentation and governance. However, colonial photography was far from a neutral recording technology. Rather, it functioned as an instrument of imperial power that classified, exoticised, and often decontextualised African societies to legitimise colonial domination (Edwards, 2021; Morton & Newbury, 2020). From the perspective of Visual Culture Theory, photographs were embedded within regimes of visual authority that determined what could be seen, who could be represented, and how African identities were constructed. In this response, colonial images frequently portrayed African rulers, rituals, sacred objects, and cultural landscapes as ethnographic curiosities, detaching them from the indigenous knowledge systems that gave them meaning. However, reducing African photography to a colonial invention overlooks the continent's long-standing visual traditions. Before the introduction of the camera, African societies preserved historical knowledge through woodcarvings, royal sculptures, murals, textiles, and other forms of material culture that functioned as visual archives. As one sculptor explained:

"Before photographs, our ancestors carved the images of the Fon, the Queen Mother, and royal symbols on wood. These carvings preserved their lives so that future generations could know who ruled, what they achieved, and why they should be remembered."

This testimony demonstrates that photography represented a technological extension, rather than the origin, of African visual culture. The significance of these visual forms lay not merely in their artistic qualities but in their ability to communicate societal lifestyle that represents political authority, historical legitimacy, and collective identity. Photography therefore expanded existing African systems of visual knowledge instead of replacing them (Haney, 2010; Pepper & Cameron, 2013). In connecting with the Collective Memory Perspective, it reveals the limitations of colonial photographic archives that shows how collective memory is socially constructed (Halbwachs, 1992; Assmann, 2011); colonial photographs often institutionalised selective memories that privileged European interpretations while marginalising African voices. Vokes (2012) argues that colonial photographs carry multiple meanings that often reflect colonial philosophies rather than indigenous perspectives. As results, the circulation of ethnographic and nude photographs in museums, books, and exhibitions exemplified this unequal visual relationship, transforming African bodies into objects of colonial knowledge and reinforcing what contemporary scholars describe as epistemic violence. Photography thus became a mechanism through which colonial power controlled both representation and historical memory.

The emergence of African-controlled photography challenged this visual regime by reclaiming the authority to represent African societies from indigenous perspectives. Hicks (2020) observes that many Africans regarded photography as a mechanism through which Europeans appropriated both bodies and identities, remarking: "These white people want to rob us and take us with them, far into lands which we do not know, and we shall remain only an incomplete being." This observation illustrates that colonial photography often extended beyond documentation to become a symbolic form of dispossession. For instance, in South Africa, Afripix photographers increasingly documented everyday life, political struggles, cultural ceremonies, and community histories, replacing colonial stereotypes with narratives of dignity, resilience, and historical agency. The work of Afripix during apartheid South Africa illustrates how

photography became a visual activism that challenged official state narratives while preserving historical evidence for future generations (Pogoson & Akande, 2012; Naude, 2018; Rizzo, 2019; Thomas, 2021). In the contemporary South Africa, these photographs became prompt archives through which South Africans continue to remember, interpret, and convey the legacy of apartheid associating the lens of Collective Memory Theory.

A retired photographer claims that the viewpoints of Cameroonians are in opposition to colonial observation, which is represented in family albums, palace collections, and community photographs that document everyday life, royal succession, festivals, rituals, and handicrafts. The meanings of images are influenced by oral traditions, customary knowledge, and local interpretation, demonstrating that their cultural background extends beyond their visual context as they also exhibit historical relevance. Gordon and Kurzweilly (2018) attest that photographs derive historical value from the social and cultural contexts surrounding their production and interpretation rather than from their visual content alone. Relating with the Collective Memory Perspective, it describes how images retain historical knowledge that is pass to future generations, whereas Visual Culture Theory views them as restoring indigenous visual authority. In line to articulation, photography serves as a living archive through which Kedjom Keku continuously reconstructs its history, cultural identity, and heritage from within its own epistemological framework.

Photography in Cameroon: A Historical Reflection

The historical development of photography in Cameroon reflects a broader transformation from a colonial instrument of visual domination to an indigenous medium of historical reconstruction and cultural memory. Following developments across West Africa, photography expanded in Cameroon during the late nineteenth century through the activities of German colonial administrators, Christian missionaries, traders, and explorers before evolving under French and British colonial administrations as explained by a photographer. According to Schneider and Haney (cited in Zeitlyn, 2019), the period between the mid-nineteenth century and the 1950s was characterised by colonial photography, while the subsequent period (1955–1985) marked the rise of administrative and commercial studio photography, often described as the "Golden Age of the Studios." During this transition, black-and-white analogue photography gradually gave way to colour photography, reflecting both technological innovation and changing social demands. The establishment of permanent studios by photographers such as Gerhardt L. Lutterodt in Batanga and George E. Goether in Douala institutionalised photography as both a commercial enterprise and a documentary practice, while Nigerian photographers significantly influenced photographic production in British Southern Cameroons through the supply of technical expertise and photographic materials (Zeitlyn, 2019).

However, photography was never a neutral technology when viewed through the prism of Visual Culture Theory. According to a researcher, with the introduction of colonial photography, their authorities were able to categorise African communities, justify colonial rule, and generate information about colonised populations. In this light, indigenous communities were frequently portrayed through Eurocentric assumptions that privileged exoticism, ethnic typologies, and cultural otherness over historical complexity and local agency (Edwards, 2022; Morton & Newbury, 2020). Therefore, colonial photographs reveal as much about colonial ideologies as they do about African societies, demonstrating that photographs are culturally and politically constructed visual texts whose meanings are shaped by relations of power rather than objective representations of reality. Following Cameroon independence, photography underwent a profound epistemological transformation as photographers increasingly appropriated the camera to document their own histories, cultures, and identities, thereby challenging colonial visual narratives and reclaiming authority over historical representation. A retired photographer explained:

"When Cameroon gained independence, photography gradually underwent an epistemological transformation. Indigenous photographers increasingly documented their own histories and cultural practices. Photography became a medium for cultural self-representation, historical reconstruction, and identity affirmation rather than colonial observation."

This transition illustrates a broader shift from colonial visual authority to Cameroon visual sovereignty, whereby photography became an instrument through which communities actively interpreted rather than merely inherited their histories. The expansion of photography accelerated after the establishment of

Cameroon Radio Television (CRTV) in 1985 and the emergence of private media houses, which broadened the visual documentation of political, cultural, religious, and historical events across the country as remarked by a journalist. For instance, in towns such as Bamenda, landmark political visits and growing commercial demand stimulated the proliferation of private studios, while photographic genres including portraiture, ceremonial photography, fashion, and lifestyle photography expanded the visual language through which Cameroonians represented themselves and their cultural identities (Pogoson et al., 2012; Nyamndo, 2024).

Furthermore, technical developments transformed photographic practice by enabling the shift from analogue to digital photography and expanding photographic output outside metropolitan centers to rural villages like Kedjom Keku. Photographers also employed the use of backdrops as an alternative technological innovation in photography, which is observed by a teacher. According to Nyamndo (2024), studio backdrops depicting traditional architecture and carved motifs visually embedded indigenous aesthetics within photographic practice, while digital technologies transformed image production, editing, and dissemination (Borgatti, 2013). These developments illustrate that photography evolved beyond simple documentation to become an important cultural practice through which communities preserved artistic traditions, conveyed identity, and recorded social change.

According to the Collective Memory Perspective, images serve as repositories of shared historical consciousness by preserving memories of political leadership, traditional institutions, festivals, landscapes, family histories, and everyday social life. Their historical value stems not only from what they show, but also from their ability to evoke memories, reinforce communal identity, and transfer indigenous knowledge across generations (Jenkin & Geary, 1985; Geary, 1986; Nkwi, 2011; Nkwi, 2017; Wihbongale & Tum, 2023; Nyamndo, 2024). In the nutshell, the development of photography in Cameroon indicates the progressive reclaiming of historical agency through visual representation rather than merely technological advancement. Photographs have developed into living visual archives that supplement written records and oral tradition in communities like Kedjom Keku. This allows local communities to reconstruct histories that colonial narratives marginalised while continuously reaffirming their cultural identity and historical continuity.

Genesis of Photography in Kedjom Keku

Historically around 1913, the Kedjom Keku people permanently settled at their location. This cemented their interaction with European visitors, especially missionaries, and researchers who visited the fondom. Their visits were always linked with photography as they took photographs of the ruler and entourage, buildings, indigenous people, and among others. Their prime objective was to build closer connections with the people and their environment, positioning them as documentary photographers within the fondom through their research endeavors, explained by the fon (ruler). In Kedjom Keku, photography offered residents a fresh means of communication. This community's photographers, who lived in big towns and cities including Limbe, Douala, Buea, and Bamenda, regularly returned home to capture festivities and events such as annual festival dances, marriages, weddings, and death celebrations. In this context, photography developed became an essential medium for the transmission and preservation of a community's cultural legacy, indigenous knowledge, and historical consciousness. As a result, the birth of photography in Kedjom Keku led both photographers and the indigenous population to interpret photos in terms of their own conceptions of memory, identity, and authority. The social implications ingrained in royal succession, festivals, sacred landscapes, Kedjom photographers extended to events that captured material culture, education, artistry, and the people's daily life.

In Kedjom Keku, photography entered a new era thanks to the combined efforts of those who pursued it as a career. In this way, rather than relying just on their outward look, images in Kedjom Keku function as cultural texts whose meanings are produced inside local perspectives. Each image is a reflection of culturally rooted symbols that are mainly understood inside the community. However, viewers interpret these visual features through indigenous cultural codes, portraits of Fons, individuals, dancers, artisans, or ritual specialists, communicate authority, lineage, prestige, and customary obligations. Photographs are important not only for their documentary value but also for their ability to encode cultural knowledge that

the community as a whole recognises. In order to preserve the visual recollections of the community's past, it is crucial to recognise the photographers who have contributed to the historiography of photography in Kedjom Keku (as shown in Table 1).

Table 1: Survey of Kedjem Keku Professional Photographers

No	Names	Occupation (1970-1990s)	Occupation (1990-present)	Studios Names
1	Vemingsi John Nyingcho	Photographer		Spaceman Photos
2	Lucas Ghotum Toh (RIP)	Photographer		Mountain Photos
3	Vugah Michael	Photographer		Mountain Photos
4	Anthony Vunying Ngwa	Photographer		Vanny Photos
5	Abongeh Julius Mbicho		Photographer	Photo Abongeh
6	Vuchase Lawrence		Photographer	Larry Photos
7	Samson Vubeum		Photographer	Saga Horizon Photos
8	Bong Macdonald (RIP)		Photographer	Photo Donald's Studio
9	Chembe Fedilis		Photographer	Photo Fidelis
10	Vulielie Joseph Mbicho		Photographer	Young Man Photos

Source: Author's Compilation, 2024

This survey indicate some of the professional photographers in Kedjom Keku with Vemingsi John Nyingcho as the first photographer. The growing professionalism of the art of photography help individuals and the entire community decode memories and histories of the fondom through the understanding the photographs. One of the photographer observed:

"Photographs preserve far more than individual biographies. Images of traditional attire, royal regalia, monuments, natural landscapes, educational institutions, and ritual performances constitute visual narratives that continuously reproduce Kedjom cultural identity. Rather than functioning as isolated historical records, photographs create interconnected visual histories through which successive generations understand the evolution of their community. Portrait photographs, for example, preserve memories of respected elders, warriors, titled persons, and community leaders while simultaneously reinforcing the values they embodied."

In my opinion, these remarks remind us that photos serve as reminder tools that brings to mind remembrance and maintain intergenerational communication. When people in the community come across old photos, they remember not just the people depicted but also other attached values such as the rituals, political occasions, family backgrounds, and cultural customs connected to those pictures. As a result, photos do more than just store data; they actively contribute to the reconstruction of collective memory. By enabling the past to continue existing inside modern social life, they transcend temporal limits. A photographer attests that photography should be viewed as a discipline that continuously creates and transmits cultural heritage, collective identity, and historical knowledge rather than just as a technique for producing images.

According to a family head, photos support oral tradition by improving the accuracy and coherence of historical narratives. For example, oral testimonies clarify the cultural connotations attached to visual images, whereas photographs provide concrete proof that grounds those stories in observable historical circumstances. Even though photography is becoming more and more popular in Kedjom Keku, photographers still struggle to preserve their images, much like families who continue to expose their photos to physical deterioration, mould growth, humidity, and the loss of contextual details like names, dates, and locations. In the absence of adequate documentation, these photos have the potential to become historically detached despite their physical survival. Another issue is that the number of "amateur" photographers has increased along with young people's interest in photography, as remarked by a photographer.

Although, the photographers are faced with multiple challenges, they reinforces the need for digitisation and systematic documentation as essential strategies for safeguarding visual heritage and ensuring that photographs continue to function as repositories of collective memory in Kedjom Keku.

According to a photographer, photography should not be understood merely as a technology of image production but as a practice through which historical knowledge, collective identity, and cultural heritage are continuously created, and transmitted. In my view, photographs emerge as active historical agents that shape how communities remember their past, legitimise their present, and imagine their future, especially in Kedjom Keku. Despite the numerous obstacles they confront, the photographers emphasise the necessity of digitalisation and methodical documenting as crucial tactics for preserving visual history and guaranteeing that photos continue to serve as archives of community memory in Kedjom Keku. Nonetheless, photography has developed into an active complement to historical agents that influence how communities, especially in Kedjom Keku, remember their past, justify their present, and imagine their future.

Photographs as Historical Evidence and Visual Memory in Kedjom Keku

Photography occupies a distinctive position within the Kedjom Keku because it functions not merely as a technology for recording images but as a visual medium through which history, memory, identity, and cultural continuity are produced and transmitted. While oral tradition has historically constituted the principal repository of indigenous knowledge in the Bamenda Grassfields, especially Kedjom Keku. Photography have increasingly complemented oral narratives by preserving visual evidence of cultural practices, rituals, leadership, and historical transformations.

Understanding Royal Transition and Photography

Royal photographs constitute an important component of Kedjom Keku's visual heritage because they preserve the historical continuity of traditional leadership while simultaneously legitimising the institution of kingship across successive generations. Rather than functioning merely as portraits of individual rulers, these images operate as visual archives through which the community reconstructs its political history, cultural identity, and collective memory as observed by a kingmaker. The Visual Culture Theory proposes that royal photos are cultural texts that convey authority, continuity, legitimacy, and historical transformation rather than passive depictions of the past. Through oral interpretation, public display, and communal remembrance, their meanings are continuously replicated. According to the Collective Memory Theory (Halbwachs, 1992), this image preserves collective memories that help people in the community find their place in an ongoing historical tradition. For example, the triptych photograph of Fon Simon Vugah I¹, Fon Philip Vubangsi², and Fon Simon Vugah II³ (Picture 1) exemplifies this process by visually narrating the historical evolution of the Kedjom Keku Fondom across different political periods.

¹ Fon Simon Vugah I was fondly called "Colonial Fon" who ruled the fondom from 1835-1936. This colonial appellation meant Fon Vugah I witnessed the arrival of the Germans, their departure, and the arrival of the British in his fondom and Cameroon. He moved his subjects from the old settlement site called Abongphen to the present site, and initiated activities leading to modern Kedjom today. For example, He embraced the introduction of education and Christianity and collaborated with the colonial administrators. He recommended pfenə mbvīmə as a native burial site for indigenes who died of contagious diseases around 1913. Fon Simon Vugah I disappeared (died) in 1936 and was succeeded by Fon Philip V. Vubangsi as the new ruler of the fondom in 1936

² Fon Philip V. Vubangsi was a Catechist before his enthronement in 1936. He received his theological training in the Catechist Seminary in Bali and worked with the Basel Mission Church. He opened the Basel Mission Stations at Fundong, Kom, and Bafmeng in the Menchum Division during his pastoral work while sensitizing the communities on the importance of Christianity. He was a wood carver and trained his children in this artistic profession. His work of art is still seen in royal architecture as pillars displayed in the fondom. Fon Vubangsi disappeared in 1979 at the age of 90, and was succeeded by Fon Simon Vugah II in 1979.

³ Fon Simon Vugah II, received education in the then Basel Mission School in Kedjom Keku. From 1961 to 1963, he took a three-year training at the Catechist Training Institute of the Presbyterian Church in Nyasoso. After the training, he served in various congregations of the Bamenda Grassfields as an Assistant Pastor. In 1974, his father was called home by his father where he started a private business (pharmaceutical shop) as a chemist. In 1979, he was crowned as the new Fon in the fondom. Fon Simon Vugah II handed over his business to one of his wives to continue to run the pharmaceutical shop in the village. In 2004, Fon Simon II resigned as the heir to the throne and disappeared in

Beyond recording successive rulers, the image encapsulates changing relationships between indigenous governance, colonial administration, Christianity, education, and modern state formation. Consequently, the photograph becomes a visual chronology of institutional continuity rather than simply a collection of royal portraits. For instance, the photograph of Fon Simon Vugah I extends beyond documenting his reign (1835–1936) to symbolise the community's encounter with German and British colonial administrations. His reign is remembered as a transformative period characterised by the relocation of the Fandom from Abongphen to its present settlement, the introduction of Christianity and Western education, and the institutionalisation of new administrative structures, noted by member of traditional council. In this sense, photos functions as reminder device were major historical transformations are remembered and transmitted across generations. The interpretation of the triptych photograph depends fundamentally on local historical knowledge of the people. As prince explained:

"People consider this as ordinary royal portraits, but to us each photograph tells the history of a different generation. We recognise the clothes, the places, and even the events surrounding each image because they remind us of how our fathers ruled the Fandom. Therefore, the triptych photograph tells persuasive stories about the Fons' past link to particular events in their eras."

This testimony illustrates that photographs do not communicate historical meaning independently; instead, their interpretation depends upon collective cultural knowledge preserved through oral tradition. Without the narratives provided by elders, princes, and royal custodians, much of the historical relevance embedded in this image would remain inaccessible. In this light, photographs function as educational tools which indigenous history is retold.

Picture 1: The triptych photograph of Kedjom Keku Fons



Source: Mountain Photo Studio, 2023.

This royal photograph of Kedjom Keku Fons bridge oral tradition and historical documentation. By preserve memories of successive reigns and bridge oral tradition, historical contexts within which they unfolded. It also contribute to the construction of collective identity and demonstrate that photography functions as an indispensable medium for safeguarding indigenous political history.

Cultural Expressiveness and Photography

Photography has long been a powerful medium for documenting history, culture, and traditions. It serves as a visual archive that allows societies to preserve their heritage for future generations. In an era of rapid globalization and technological advancement, photography plays a crucial role in safeguarding cultural identity, ensuring that traditional practices, historic landmarks, and indigenous ways of life are not lost to time (Sliz, 2025). Photographs of traditional marriages, festivals, dances, initiation rituals, and ritual acts clearly depict cultural expression in Kedjom Keku. In addition to preserving the outward aspect of cultural events, these photographs also convey the symbolic meanings associated with customs that oral traditions

2006 while attempting to regain power. Fon Vubangsi Benjamin Vutsiboung succeeded him in 2006 as the new ruler of the Kedjom Keku fondom.

might not be able to adequately convey. Among these cultural performances, the Ndzowain or "fertility dance" (literally, song for a child) occupies a distinctive place within the community's cultural heritage (Picture 2). The photograph transcends its documentary function by preserving an indigenous intangible heritage in which fertility could be understood as both a biological and spiritual blessing embedded within communal life.

The image conveys the principles of gender, motherhood, solidarity, and spiritual intervention that characterise Kedjom social identity through the visual depiction of ceremonial dances, ritual objects, and costumes by a kingmaker. In this sense, images serve as visual archives that support cultural continuity and preserve indigenous knowledge in Kedjom Keku. According to Visual Culture Theory analysis, the image turns a fleeting performance into a long-lasting visual story that can help future generations understand Kedjom cultural values. The artwork reproduces connotations related to gender, spirituality, kinship, and traditional healing techniques in addition to documenting the occurrence. According to the Collective Memory Perspective, community members can reconstruct shared memories of rites that strengthen social cohesiveness and cultural identity by repeatedly viewing photos.

Picture 2: Ndzowain dance



Source: Author's Collection

In line with the photograph, a dancer explained:

"Ndzowain is more than a dance. It is our prayer for life and continuity. Every calabash of water we carry represents hope that a woman who has waited for a child will receive God's blessing through the ancestors and the Fon."

This narrative demonstrates that the photograph documents far more than a cultural performance; it captures the spiritual philosophy underpinning the ritual. The dancers, dressed in distinctive traditional attire and each carrying a calabash filled with water and a stalk of the nkeng (peace plant) visually communicate a symbolic language of purification, fertility, peace, and renewal. The ritual songs, performed collectively, invoke divine and ancestral intervention for women experiencing infertility or prolonged intervals between childbirths. During the ceremony, the Fon or, in his absence, an authorised kingmaker blesses the women by pouring water from the calabash over their backs and, in severe cases, anointing them with palm oil, remarked by kingmakers. These ritual actions reveal that fertility is conceived not merely as a biological condition but as a communal concern requiring spiritual mediation and collective participation. Therefore, photographs have become important instruments for safeguarding Kedjom's intangible cultural heritage. As ritual performances become increasingly vulnerable to social change, photographic documentation ensures that the visual knowledge embedded in ceremonial practices remains accessible to future generations as observed by the dancers. In the course of replacing oral tradition, photographs complement it by preserving visual dimensions of culture that might otherwise disappear. As a result, the Ndzowain photograph illustrates how photography document evidence, cultural memory, and living heritage, reinforcing the resilience of Kedjom cultural identity through visual representation.

Environmental History and Photography

Photographs have become indispensable visual sources for reconstructing environmental history because they preserve evidence of changing landscapes, ecological transformations, and human interactions with the natural environment. As societies continue to evolve, photography ensures that the richness of human heritage is documented, celebrated, and passed on to future generations (Sliz, 2025). In this light, photographs reveal how communities perceive, utilise, and negotiate their relationships with nature over time. In articulating the with the Visual Culture Theory, environmental photos are cultural texts that influence how the public perceives landscapes by highlighting the ecological values, human activity, and conservation issues embedded within them. In line with the Collective Memory Perspective, images serve as archives of environmental memory, allowing communities to identify environmental change, recall lost landscapes, and pass on ecological knowledge to future generations. Thus, photos not only document environmental circumstances but also have an impact on how societies create environmental identities and obligations.

In the Kedjom Keku, the environment has historically sustained livelihoods through agriculture, hunting, craft production, construction materials, medicinal plants, and water resources. It also contains culturally significant landscapes, including the Abongphen Community Forest, waterfalls, caves, sacred sites, and mountain ecosystems that embody both ecological and cultural values. These landscapes constitute living heritage because they preserve biodiversity while sustaining indigenous knowledge, customary practices, and spiritual beliefs as anchor by a researcher. However, increasing agricultural expansion, bush burning, illegal logging, and other human activities have transformed sections of the natural landscape, threatening both ecological sustainability and the cultural practices associated with the environment. In my view, environmental photos provide visual evidence through which transformations could be historically records and preserving traditional ways of life that may be forgotten. For example, pictures 3a–3d show many aspects of Kedjom Keku's environmental history, from community-based conservation efforts to ecological destruction. These photos were taken at World Environment Day celebrations on June 5, 2018, which were organised by the Conservation Association for Sustainable Development (CASUD). The photos depict how CASUD have been raising public awareness and increase community involvement in environmental conservation while collaborating with government ministries and environmental NGOs. In this situation, photography evolved from a passive medium to a tool for environmental advocacy.

Picture 3: Environmental Advocacy



Source: CASUD Archive/Author's Collection, 2018

The Abongphen Community Forest's gradual deterioration due to farming, bush fire, and unchecked land clearing is depicted graphically in Picture 3a. The picture turns environmental deterioration into tangible proof that can encourage public contemplation and ecological responsibility. As one environmental activist explained:

"When people see these photographs, they realise that the forest they inherited is disappearing. The images speak more loudly than our words because everyone can compare what the forest was and what it is becoming."

Photographs are used to illustrate environmental issues into concrete visual realities; this story illustrates the persuasive power of photos. In addition to merely depicting deforestation, the vivid raises public awareness of the negative effects of unsustainable resource use. On the other hand, Pictures 3b, 3c, and

3d show how the community has responded to environmental degradation as a whole through youth involvement, cultural engagement, and environmental education. To reduce bush burning, safeguard water catchment areas, and encourage sustainable forest management, CASUD and its partners run awareness campaigns, which are depicted in Picture 3b. A traditional dance performed during the World Environment Day celebration is seen in Picture 3c, demonstrating how environmental protection is conveyed through both indigenous cultural displays and scientific discourse. Picture 3d captures students and young people engaged in forest conservation initiatives, illustrating the generational environmental stewardships. Sliz (2025) attest that photography ensures that the richness of human heritage is documented, celebrated, and passed on to future generations.

These photographs illustrate that environmental conservation in Kedjom Keku is simultaneously an ecological and cultural process. The integration of traditional performances with conservation campaigns demonstrates that indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage remain central to contemporary environmental governance. Through the lens of the Collective Memory Perspective, the photographs preserve memories of community participation that strengthen environmental identity while encouraging future generations to assume responsibility for protecting their natural heritage. Therefore, photography functions as an important medium through which environmental history is constructed, communicated, and preserved. Beyond recording ecological conditions, photographs document the evolving relationship between people, culture, and the environment while fostering collective environmental consciousness. In Kedjom Keku, environmental photographs reinforce community resilience by linking ecological conservation with cultural heritage preservation. In my view, photography emerges as a critical heritage resource that bridges environmental history, collective memory, and indigenous conservation practices, rather than only preserving visual evidence of landscape transformation.

Handicraft and Photography

Craftsmanship represents one of the most enduring expressions of Kedjom Keku's cultural heritage, reflecting generations of indigenous knowledge, artistic innovation, and historical experience. Traditional crafts such as woodcarving, horn carving, weaving, blacksmithing, calabash decoration, and embroidery embody not only technical skills but also the cultural values and political philosophies of the community as explained by the members of traditional council. In line with the Visual Culture Theory, photographs of these artistic productions are visual texts through which symbols of authority, identity, and historical experience are interpreted and communicated. Likewise, the Collective Memory Perspective suggests that photographs preserve artisanal knowledge by enabling communities to remember the historical meanings embedded within cultural objects long after their original contexts have changed. Consequently, photographs transform craft objects into enduring visual archives through which Kedjom society continually reconstructs its cultural identity.

Photography has played an important role in documenting the artistic heritage of the Kedjom Keku people. For instance, the publications of Hans Knöpfli (1997), among other scholars, have significantly contributed to preserving the visual history of Bamenda Grassfields art through photographic documentation. Their publications capture carved stools, palace architecture, royal masquerades, ceremonial objects, and sculptural traditions that might otherwise remain inaccessible to wider audiences by a researcher. These visual records preserved evidence of indigenous craftsmanship, political symbolism, and historical memory. A sculptor explained:

"When people take pictures of our work, they are not just taking pictures of wood; they are preserving the history, wisdom, and identity of our ancestors. Photography plays a crucial role in safeguarding cultural identity, ensuring that traditional practices, historic landmarks, and indigenous ways of life are not lost to time."

This testimony shows that photos maintain both the tangible items and the cultural tales they contain. They are valuable because they preserve the indigenous knowledge, oral traditions, and symbolism related to handicraft. For instance, Picture 4 shows a carved seat decorated with human heads that symbolise past captives of war. Through the public display of adversaries' heads and forearms, these symbols have historically celebrated military successes and the Fon's political authority. The symbolic carvings were

integrated into royal furnishings and palace design when conflict decreased during colonial rule supplanted these tangible exhibits. This change demonstrates how the Kedjom Keku community maintained continuity with its history while preserving historical memory through cultural symbols adaptation.

Carved stool demonstrates how material culture preserves memories of historical events long after the events themselves have disappeared. A sculptor explains that:

"The carved heads no longer celebrate violence; instead, they function as reminder symbols that recall Kedjom military history, political authority, and the evolution of customary governance. Photography strengthens this commemorative function by preserving visual evidence of these carvings for future generations, enabling both community members and researchers to reconstruct aspects of Kedjom history that survive primarily through artistic expression and oral tradition."

This suggests that by maintaining both creative forms and the indigenous knowledge systems that give them cultural significance, pictures play a major role in protecting Kedjom handicraft. They make it possible for craft items to transcend their physical form and carry on passing along cultural values to future generations. In this sense, photography acts as a link between material culture and communal memory, guaranteeing that Kedjom craftsmanship continues to be a living artistic legacy that upholds the political traditions, cultural identity, and historical experiences of the community.

Picture 4: Carved Stool with Human Heads



Source: Author's Collection, 2023

Education and Photography

Education has long served as a catalyst for social transformation, community development, and cultural continuity in the Kedjom Keku. Beyond transmitting literacy and vocational skills, formal and informal education have shaped civic identity, leadership, and community participation across generations, explained by a teacher. According to the Collective Memory Perspective, educational photos serve as archives of collective memory that allow future generations to reconstruct the development of educational institutions and recognise the people who contribute to their achievements. Photographs thus become important historical records that can be used to reconstruct and analyse Kedjom Keku's educational history. According to a teacher, the introduction of formal education in Kedjom Keku marked a significant turning point in the community's social history. The establishment of the Basel Mission School and the Roman Catholic School in 1942 reduced the need for children to travel to neighbouring communities for education and expanded access to formal learning. These institutions created new opportunities for social mobility, professional employment, and community leadership. Therefore, photographs associated with this period capture more than school buildings or teachers; they visually document the emergence of education as a transformative institution that reshaped the social and economic landscape of the community.

Pa Petrus Vuzhung Adams⁴ (see Picture 5) was one of the educators who promoted education in the Kedjom Keku community. His distinguished teaching career, spanning several schools in the Bamenda Grassfields, is an illustration of the growing influence of formal education in producing indigenous professionals who later became agents of community development. Therefore, educational picture symbolises the larger role that educators play in promoting national development and transferring knowledge between generations. One of the former pupil recalled:

"Pa Adams did not only teach us how to read and write; he taught us how to become responsible members of our community. Whenever I look at his photo, I remember the discipline, respect, and hope that education brought to our village"

This testimony demonstrates that photographs preserve not merely the physical appearance of educational actors but also the social values and collective memories associated with their service. Through the lens of the Collective Memory Perspective, the portrait enables the community to honour educators whose contributions continue to shape local identity long after their passing. For instance, in one of the photos, Pa Adams can be seen in the images wearing traditional Bamenda clothing, carrying a decorated drinking horn cup, and donning a Christian cross, all of which convey a variety of cultural meanings.

Picture 5: Pa Petrus Vuzhung Adams



Source: Adams's Family Album, 2024

In addition, the 1984–1985 photo of Class Seven (7) pupils at Government School Kedjome Keku (Big Babanki) explores memories of education and is much more than just a class picture as shown in Picture 6. As explains by one of the pupil of the batch, the photo visually captures educational epoch of the community encompasses interpersonal relationships between pupils and teachers. It also maintains collective memories of pupils and school communities as the class motto says "We Shall Overcome," that represents hope, tenacity, and the community-changing potential of education. A former pupil explained:

⁴ Petrus Vuzhung Adams was born November 13, 1924, and hailed from Kedjom Keku. He attended Basel Mission Vernacular School in Fungom, Subdivision of the then Wum Division from 1928 to 1935, English Primary School at Nsem, Bafut from 1936- 1940, Higher Elementary School, Mbengwi from 1940 to 1941 where he graduated with a Lower Middle Certificate. He taught at the following schools: Basel Mission School (BMS) Nsem, 1943, BMS Wum from 1944 to 1945, BMS Bali from 1946 to 1950, BMS Mbengwi 1951, BMS Kedjom Keku from 1952 to 1955, BMS Kumbo from 1956 to 1961, BMS Kedjom Keku from 1962 to 1966, Presbyterian Teacher Training Center Batibo from 1967 to 1968, BMS BuweBukai from 1968 to 1969, BMS Manji from 1970 to 1972, Presbyterian School (PS) Macha from 1972 to 1974, PS Mbelewa from 1974 to 1989 where he retired. He also served as trade union president in Bamenda in 1991 and passed away in 2021

"Whenever we gather today, this photo reminds us where our journey began. Some have now become teachers, nurses, civil servants, and business people, but we all see ourselves first as classmates from Government School, Big Babanki."

This illustrates that class photographs serve as powerful memories of the past through which former pupils reconstruct personal and collective histories. They reinforce social bonds while preserving memories of educational experiences that continue to influence community identity decades later. According to a teacher, the image also shows how the community's educational options significantly expanded throughout the administrations of Fon Philip Vubangsi, Fon Simon Vugah II, and Fon Benjamin Vutsiboung. According to oral testimony, the Fondom currently has three secondary schools and eleven primary schools, demonstrating consistent investment in educational advancement. But given the current Anglophone conflict that started in 2016, these visual records also take on new significance. Due to the disruption of formal education caused by the destruction and closure of schools in the North West Region, historical images are becoming more and more significant as visual records of educational experiences and institutions that have been lost or interrupted. In my view, the photo serve as essential resources for recreating Kedjom Keku's educational history. It maintain memories of social mobility, community ambitions, and educational development in addition to recording instructors, pupils, and schools. When viewed through the combined lenses of Visual Culture Theory and the Collective Memory Perspective, educational photographs become living visual archives that reinforce the community's dedication to learning, resilience, and cultural continuity while connecting historical educational successes with current issues.

Picture 6: Class Seven Pupil in G.S Big Babanki



Source: Lilian Abong Akuhi's Family Album, 2024.

Trade and Photography

The Kedjom Keku people's economy and social life have traditionally been underpinned on trade, with the market serving as both an economic and cultural institution. According to the Visual Culture Theory, images of market activities shows indigenous social interactions, commerce, and daily cultural practices are organised. In a similar vein, the Collective Memory Perspective views these photos as visual archives that help communities recreate collective memories of social interaction, production, and exchange. The main source of income is still agriculture, with household economies being supported by crops like maize, cassava, beans, yams, potatoes, and cocoa. The culmination of these activities is the periodic market day (kyezgin), where customary governance, community connection, and economic exchange come together as account by a trader. Another trader observed:

"Our market is more than a place for buying and selling. It is where families meet, friendships are renewed, disputes are settled, and news spreads throughout the Fondom. When we look at these photographs, we remember how alive the market used to be."

This evidence demonstrates how market photos capture not only business dealings but also the interpersonal connections and shared experiences that shape a community's identity. Indigenous market activity is shown in Pictures 7a–b. Plate 7b emphasises women's crucial role in marketing agricultural produce and maintaining household economies, whereas Plate 7a shows woven fowl cages (nkimm'bvə), illustrating how local crafts serve both ceremonial life and commercial livelihoods. These pictures show how

indigenous markets concurrently represent gendered labour, cultural heritage, and economic production. According to the kingmaker, the market place is seat of traditional governance. Market photos also capture connotation that links with protection. This is the case with the Kwifon Society where the holy shrine Chuhfam Wong are site to announce community decisions and to provide spiritual protection for traders, demonstrating the intimate connection between trade, spirituality, and indigenous authority. In addition, the images show how the Anglophone crisis has affected local lives and decreased market participation. "You could hardly find space to walk on market day before the crisis," a trader said. These images serve as a reminder of what we have lost and what we intend to rebuild today. These images document the social and economic fallout from conflict while preserving the memories of a once-thriving marketplace. Thus, this photo allows individual to provide a tangible way to document trader's social mobility and traditional practices in kedjom Keku community.

Picture 7: Partial View of the Kedjom Keku Market



Source: Author's Collection, 2024

Institutional Photography: The Portrait of Pa Tsongwain Thomas Wundo

Portrait photography is increasingly recognised as more than a representation of personal identity; it functions as a visual archive through which communities preserve collective memory, legitimise authority, and sustain cultural identity across generations (Edwards, 2021; Assmann, 2011; Rose, 2022). In articulation through Visual Culture Theory, portraits convey leadership, social status, and institutional legitimacy rather than being neutral depictions. In a similar vein, the Collective Memory Perspective views portrait photographs as visual archives that preserve individual biographies within broader collective histories. In this light, portraits enable future generations to reconstruct the contributions of important people whose lives created positive development in their communities. This is a pure reflection of Mr. Tsongwain Thomas Wundo of Kedjom Keku. Every time we interact in various academic fields, his epistemology has inspired me. Wundo frequently says, "Today is the outcome of yesterday and tomorrow will be the outcome of today," which offers an insightful perspective on the significance of history and photography. Meaning the present cannot exist without the past, and the future cannot exist without the present, according to him. This demonstrates the connection between how images serve as tangible proof of historical texts.

According to the chairperson of the traditional council remarked:

"Pa Tsongwain Thomas Wundo represents one such institutional figure in the Kedjom Keku Fandom. His distinguished career as an educator, educational administrator, scholar, cultural leader, and kingmaker illustrates the interconnectedness of formal education, traditional governance, and community development. His academic trajectory from teacher training through university education to senior administrative appointments reflects the emergence of indigenous intellectual elite that mediated between state institutions and customary authority. Beyond public service, his leadership as President of the Kedjom Keku Cultural and Development Association (KEKCUDA) and his contribution to documenting local history demonstrate how education became an important vehicle for preserving cultural heritage."

Accordingly, Wundo's portrait (Plate 8a-b) reveals his personality, life story, and experiences. He is a griot whose vision is captured in his activities and its contribution towards the development of Kedjom Keke. As a

result, his portrait photos act as mementos, reflecting aspects of his life and identity that convey a narrative. An excerpt from Pa Tsongwain Thomas Wundo's biography is provided here:

"Pa Tsongwain Thomas Wundo was born on November 28, 1945, in Big Babanki. His parents, Pa Tsongwain Vubannong Vutung and Ma Ngum Frida Juh Azo'oh, are of blessed memory. He is a Christian and a respectable traditional titleholder in the Kedjom Keku fendom. He was married to his first wife, Tifuh Christine Sanji, who is of blessed memory, and they had six children together. He also has two stepchildren with his second wife, Muma Hilda Kuwong. He attended Basel Mission Boys' School in Victoria and completed standard six in 1960 for his primary education. Wundo pursued his secondary education at the Baptist Teacher Training College and the Presbyterian Teacher Training College in Batibo from 1961 to 1967 and obtained a Teacher Grade Two Certificate.

His ambition for education made him pursue distance education with the University of London through Rapid Results College, Tuition House, London, from 1969 to 1972, obtaining his General Certificate of Education Ordinary and Advanced levels. He attended the Federal University of Cameroon (Yaoundé) from 1972-1975, earning a BA. (Hons) In Geography with an option in teaching and from 1976 to 1977, earning a DES (Master's) in Geography with a specialization in Urbanization. His professional life as an educationist groomed his teaching experience, and he taught in the following schools: Government Secondary School, Nyasosso (1976-1980); Basel Mission/Presbyterian Mission Theological College/Theological Seminary (1977-1980); part-time Tutor at Cameroon College of Arts, Science and Technology (CCAST) Bamibili (1980-1981); and Government High School, Mamfe (1988-1991).

He served as principal in the mentioned institutions: Government High Schools Nkambe (1981-1984), Wum (1985-1988), Mamfe (1988-1991), Jakirri (1991-1992), and Government Teachers' Training College Bamenda (1996-2002). Additionally, he received promotions in his educational administration career, serving as Pedagogic Inspector Coordinator (PPIC) for the North West (1995-1996), Provincial Sub-Delegate for National Education, North West Province (1982-1995), and Divisional Delegate for Education; General Education (2002-2004) and Basic and Teacher Training (2004-2005) in charge of Ngoketujia Division. His educational curiosity led him to attend national and international seminars. He co-authored the book "One Hundred Years of the Gospel" in Bafut/Tubah Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (P.C.C), served as the President of the Kedjom Keku Cultural and Development Association (KEKCUDA) from 2005 to 2014. He retired from public service in 2005."

The picture 8a depicts the imposition of both customary obligation and political legitimacy in 1979 as chehfoin (kingmaker). He was dressed in the traditional embodiment encompasses daleh attire, cap, necklace, and other regalia serve as visual representations of status and authority. According to Visual Culture Theory, these cultural symbols communicate meanings that transcend visual depiction. Similar to this, picture 8b shows Wundo taking part in the 1998 Kebeng Ke Ndong festival, illustrating how portrait photography retains both individual identity and cultural performance. The crimson feather, the Ndop fabric, and his rainbow daleh all stand for social distinction, honour, and service.

Picture 8: Pa. Tsongwain Thomas Wundo



a



b

Source: Wundo's Family Album

Observing with the Collective Memory Perspective, these portraits preserve more than the biography of one individual. They document the evolution of leadership, educational achievement, and customary

institutions within Kedjom Keku. The photographs function as visual repositories of institutional memory, allowing community members to reconnect with historical events, leadership transitions, and cultural values that continue to shape collective identity. Although serving as static remembrance images, they actively maintain historical consciousness by linking individual experience with the broader narrative of the Fondom. This example shows how institutional portrait photography fulfills several heritage purposes at once: it records biography, upholds authority, conserves indigenous knowledge, and strengthens communal memory. As a result, portrait photos make up a significant visual legacy that allows Kedjom Keku's history to be continuously understood, passed down, and revitalised through the generations. Instead of just documenting the look of significant people, photography becomes an active agent in preserving both institutional history and the community's living cultural identity through this process.

Discussion and Limitations

This study establishes that photographs are primary historical sources through which the Kedjom Keku community preserves and reconstructs collective memory, indigenous knowledge, and cultural identity. Guided by Visual Culture Theory and the Collective Memory Perspective, the findings demonstrate that photographs do more than record events; they actively produce historical meaning, challenging the dominance of oral traditions and archival documents in Cameroonian historiography. The analysis shows that photographs function as visual archives documenting royal succession, festivals, environmental conservation, craftsmanship, education, and trade. Collectively, these images capture the interaction between political institutions, cultural practices, and everyday life, enabling the community to convey historical continuity across generations. This extends African visual history by positioning photography as a significant source for reconstructing indigenous pasts rather than as a supplementary illustration.

The findings further reveal that photographic meanings are socially and culturally constructed. Unlike colonial images that often reflected imperial ideologies and external interpretations (Edwards, 2022; Azoulay, 2019), photographs produced within Kedjom Keku embody indigenous perspectives and serve as instruments of cultural self-representation. They illustrate the transition from colonial visual domination to indigenous visual sovereignty, allowing communities to reclaim authority over their own histories. From a collective memory perspective, photographs function as enduring memory sites that preserve biographies, institutional histories, and community experiences. Portraits of rulers, educators, artisans, and cultural leaders, together with images of ceremonies, markets, and environmental initiatives, reinforce social identity while facilitating the intergenerational transmission of historical knowledge (Halbwachs, 1992; Assmann, 2011).

The study also contributes to heritage scholarship by demonstrating that photographs preserve both tangible and intangible heritage. They document material culture alongside rituals, customary authority, artistic knowledge, and social practices, reinforcing the view that heritage is sustained through continuous cultural practice rather than the preservation of objects alone (Poulios, 2014). Moreover, the triangulation of photographs with oral testimony, participant observation, and documentary sources highlights the methodological value of visual evidence in producing more nuanced historical interpretations. In this light, the Kedjom Keku case shows how resilient indigenous tradition is in the face of Anglophone struggle, colonialism, postcolonial transition, environmental change, and commercialisation. The photographic collection confirms photography as a dynamic medium for conserving African legacy and indigenous knowledge by showing how communities constantly reinterpret the past to maintain cultural identity and historical continuity, rather than portraying static practices.

Although this research provides important insights on the photograph visually in Kedjom Keku, limitations were also acknowledged in the study. First, its focus on the Kedjom Keku Fondom limits the broader applicability of the findings to other Fondoms or African communities with different historical and cultural contexts. Second, the analysis relies primarily on photographs from family albums, private collections, and community archives, which may exclude lost, damaged, or undocumented images, resulting in gaps in the visual record. Third, photographs require contextual interpretation through oral testimony and documentary evidence, making the findings partly dependent on participants' recollections

and subjective interpretations. Fourth, the historical scope (1979–2022) provides limited visual evidence for earlier periods, which continue to rely largely on oral traditions and archival sources. Finally, the study focuses exclusively on still photography and does not consider other visual media, such as film, digital archives, or social media, which increasingly influence heritage preservation and collective memory. Future comparative and digital heritage studies could address these limitations.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that photographs are more than documentary images; they are historical sources through which the Kedjom Keku community preserves collective memory, cultural identity, and indigenous knowledge. As visual archives, they document royal succession, cultural performances, environmental change, craftsmanship, education, trade, and institutional development while preserving the social meanings attached to these experiences. The study makes three key contributions. First, it advances African visual history by establishing photographs as primary historical evidence that complements oral traditions and archival records. Second, it extends heritage scholarship by showing that photographs preserve both tangible and intangible heritage through the documentation of material culture, customary institutions, rituals, and indigenous knowledge. Third, it enriches visual culture and collective memory studies by demonstrating that photographs are dynamic cultural resources through which communities continually reinterpret their past and sustain cultural continuity. The findings further reveal the transformation of photography in Cameroon from a colonial instrument of representation to a medium of indigenous visual sovereignty, enabling communities to reclaim historical agency and preserve their own cultural narratives. Ultimately, safeguarding photographic collections requires preserving not only the images themselves but also the oral histories and cultural contexts that give them meaning. Future comparative studies across the Cameroon Grassfields and other African societies would further enhance understanding of photography's contribution to indigenous history, heritage preservation, and African visual historiography.

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