

Photographing Against the Grain: A History of Photography, Part I

By Siba Aldabbagh

Introduction

Where does one begin when writing a history? Can it ever be possible to trace the chronological development of an artistic genre? And, when doing so, doesn't one assume a certain pretentious approval of canonical artists, shadowing the efforts and work of equally creative and well-crafted artists? What region does one focus on? For surely, any attempt at writing a history should be comprehensive, studying the development of the genre in different cultural and social contexts. Although I do not suggest that my reading of the history of photography is a fully comprehensive, error-free, completely unbiased piece of writing, I will try and address these issues by looking at the history of photography not only in the Western context – by Western I refer to the United States of America, Australia, France, Germany and the UK –, but also in the Middle Eastern and African contexts. Rather than being due to a decision to ignore the Indian, South American, Far Eastern and Turkish developments of photography, there is simply not enough space in these limited pages to do justice to all these regions in one work. Thus, it has been decided that a sequel will be necessary to attempt to do justice to some of the photographic efforts of these other regions.

What is so fascinating about photography that makes it worth a two-part dedication? Roberto Lopardo explains, "Photography has become the most widely 'spoken' as well as the most widely recognized of the global languages", Photography crosses borders without thought for the fact that it is foreign. This allows photography to take on a privileged place in societal [sic] discourse." Yes, it is true. Photography appears to disguise its foreign nature, creating a visual lingua franca, a common tongue through which the concerns and issues of the modern day can be expressed and questioned. Identity, exile, homophobia, racism, gender, ontology and epistemology are grappled with before the camera's lense, to be cemented in the final photograph.

But there is another appeal of photography, which isn't matched by other forms of art: it is the profuse presence of cameras, which has given rise to the commonplaceness of taking a photograph. There is very little pretentiousness as literally anyone who tries can acquire the skill of taking a decent photograph. From the pretend cameras of the early childhood years, to the mobile phone camera and the digital camera, photography is everywhere. This has made the division between professional, talented photographers and inexperienced amateurs sharp, thus making the job for the critic ever easier. For a photograph to be accepted as a work of art, there needs to be a concept, a profound relationship with the social and political dimensions of the modern age. As Charles Pocock has asserted, there is too much 'poor quality' photography out there. The art world is flooded with photographers who assume their work to be considered fine art. . 'It is a recognised statement that 90% of today's contemporary artists and their work will be irrelevant in 50 years time.'

There seems to be some form of circular reasoning used here, does there not? I began with an attack on the canonization of artists, to later find myself writing on the very process of turning my nose up at amateurs. Let me explain.

The Middle East

Where shall I begin in this messy narrative? Or shall I say metanarrative? Well, since I am writing for Contemporary Practices, why not begin in the Middle East? Photography has become a very popular medium for expressing social and political concerns, to the extent that there are so many amateur and experimental artists with little or no background in photography. It doesn't cost a fortune to purchase a good camera, and there is a myriad of self-help tips readily available on the internet where practically anyone can pick up the basic skills of capturing a shot. What this has inadvertently created



Halim Al-Karim, *Witness From Baghdad 1*, 2008, Lambda print, 150 x 300 cm, Triptych, 1/2 AP - Courtesy of XVA Gallery Dubai.

is a small bunch of exceptional photographers whose art is so easy to spot and is thus recognised by various establishments, from leading art historians and curators to international awards.

The Middle East has seen a surge of fine art photographers, and those who claim to be fine art photographers. What you will find in the pages to follow is not so much a reconfirmation of canonical artists, but an eye ready to identify and evaluate the work of emerging artists, whilst simultaneously critical enough not to eulogize work created by an uncritical and disengaged hand.

An example of this is Iraqi born Janane Al-Ani who most recently won the Abraaj Capital Art Prize on show at Art Dubai 2011. Her photography is not simply an 'art for art's sake' approach, instead it is informed by the cultural and political circumstances of her surroundings. It is a more educated, refined and intellectual angle, which is, of course, in a creative discourse. Writing on her experiences and influences, she pens, 'My interest in Orientalism was the beginning of a long process of re-examining my Arab cultural background which I had rejected out of hand on arrival in Britain. In 1991 the war in the Gulf brought me face-to-face with the issue of my own cultural identity with a great jolt, and it was out of this experience that a body of work emerged in

which I attempted to explore the events that occurred during and after the conflict.'

Not purely aesthetic, but also socially responsible, the collection of photography which won the Abraaj Capital Art Prize was the result of carefully constructed and meticulously mind-mapped photographs. What underlies her works is the exposure of the complexities of previously reduced concepts such as that of insider/outsider, the Orient/Occident and the much debated veil. Al-Ani is not the only artist from Iraq to have reached such a stage in her art photography practice. She is joined by Halim Alkarim, who spent a tortuous secluded existence in the southern Iraqi desert, a life-saving attempt to escape military conscription. Alkarim's photography is more ontological than Al-Ani's, questioning the very essence of how we come to know, truth, perception and reality in his tightly stretched silk covered out-of-focus portrait photographs. The subjects become blurred suggesting not only the 'optical instability' of the photographic image and its subjectivity, but also the politically unstable Iraq of the 1980s where the people were 'stripped' of their 'humanity and values', causing people to become confused and distrustful of everyone'.



Maha Malluh, *This Way*, Shemagh Mirage series, 125x165cm, Edition 3/3 + AP, 2010 - Courtesy of the artist.

Another artist who is equally concerned with perception and knowledge of our world is Abbas Kiorastami, hailed by Charles Pockock as one of the greatest living photographers of today. Having won acclaim from successful sales at Christies Dubai sale of 2010, the same could not be said of Christies Dubai most recent sale in April April 2011. So, do we brush aside the efforts, achievements and aesthetic excellence of an artist acquired consistently over a long period of time because of one sale? Have we been completely transformed by the fickleness of our superficial age to be capriciously won over by the slight dip in an artist's market value? And yet, when writing an art history this is what we are unduly driven towards, a certain presumptuous appraisal of economically successful

candidates whipped into the canon of art history. An artist who has received relatively little critical acclaim, compared with her contemporaries, is Maha Malluh of Edge of Arabia and also represented by Athr Gallery, whose works are haunted by the harrowing effects of globalization on our cultures and traditions. Her exhibited works have been comprised predominantly of photograms, pioneered by one of the earliest Hungarian contributors to photography, László Moholy-Nagy.

When carrying out research for this article there was a huge amount of information about a few of the Edge of Arabia artists, who have unfortunately shadowed the efforts and achievements of the rest. Our media is partly responsible, but so are our curators and market

watchdogs. It is at times unfortunate that there are a small number of people who influence the success of an artist. Yet this can simultaneously be to the benefit of the artist. We cannot refute Steve Sabella's proposition that having connections with institutions, curators, dealers and collectors in 'countries with well-established art systems, artists achieve higher ratings and their critical success translates into an economic value'. This is also true of Sabella himself – the Mahmoud Darwish of photography - who has lived in Berlin and London, and who has been churned out of the prestigious Sotheby's Institute of Art, London with an MA with distinction in Art Business. His works have been acquired by various cultural institutions from the British Museum, London, to Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, and he is also the holder of the Ellen Auerbach Award (2008) granted by the Akademie der Künste (Academy of the Arts) in Berlin. But, how long does this culture of dependence have to go on for? As proposed by both Elie Domit and Charles Pocock, the Middle East requires more cultural institutions and a more rigorous art education system, which will train and produce the future curators and dealers from the Middle East.

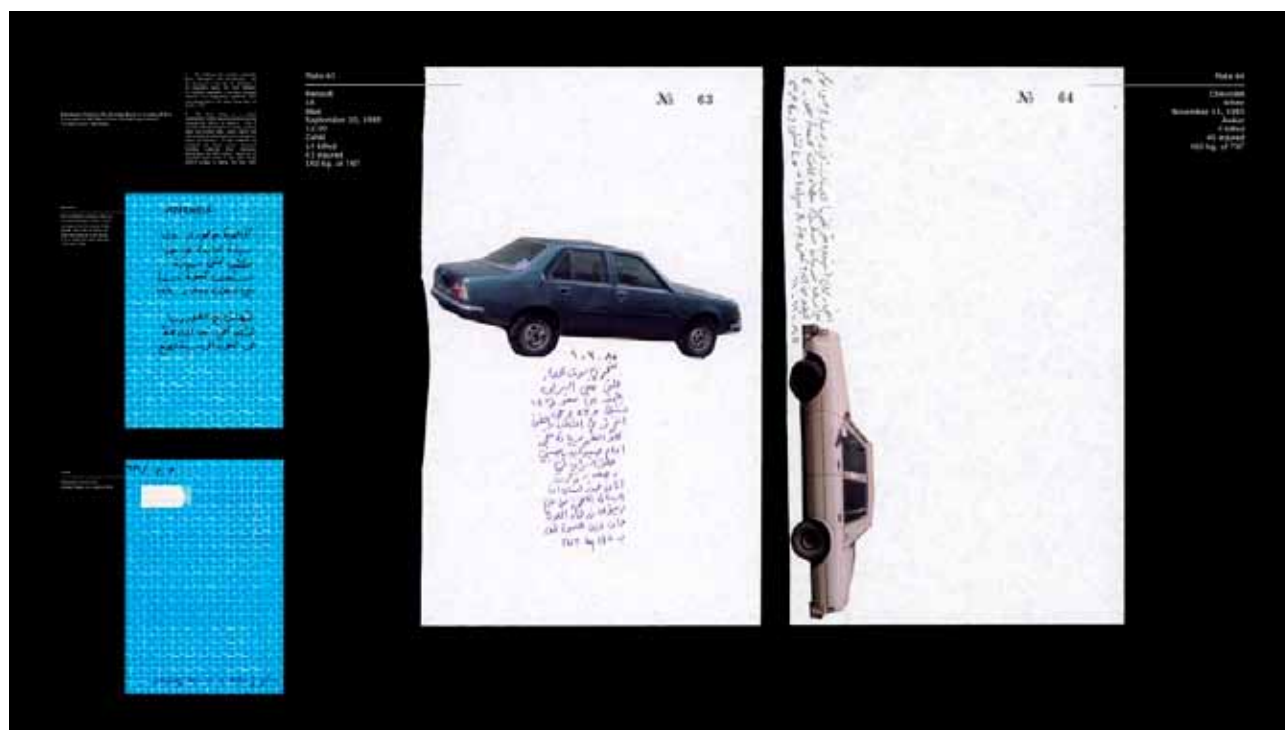
Significant amounts of Arab and Iranian photographic work have been exported to the wider international art community including pieces by Bahman Jalali, Alireza Fani, Sadegh Tiraf Kan, Afsoon and Shirin Neshat, all of whose works went under the hammer at Bonhams' April Auction on Photographers in early 2011. Lalla Essaydi work *Night of the Henna* also went under the hammer at \$9,600, and represents one of the few artists who deal with Orientalist depictions of female sexuality. The photography of Hassan Hajjaj is another example of work consumed by the notion of the gaze and the reinterpretation of Orientalist female depictions. In addition, Youssef Nabil is another one of those photographers concerned with representations of femininity and sexuality who nostalgically retreats back to the grandiose and glitzy Golden Age (1950s-1960s) of Egyptian cinema. His works are 'often interpreted as challenging traditional concepts of women' (Christies' Dubai April Catalogue). All the abovementioned artists are negotiating an alternative construct of female Arab identity in a politically volatile region.

Iranian artist, Sadegh Tirafkan, is profoundly influenced

by the immense richness of his cultural heritage. He weaves this into his work to question how we maintain tradition and identity in a world 'rapidly subsumed by the powerful duality of Western globalisation and Islamic dogmatism'. Thus, through his art he sets out to challenge this threat to the continuity of his heritage'. As Khaled Al-Berry, author of *An Oriental Dance* which was shortlisted for this year's International Prize for Arabic Fiction, has mentioned, the Arab literati feel an increasing need to create a distinction between Islamic religion and Islamic civilisation, and to save the civilisation from the destructive effects of those who attempt to undermine Islamic heritage in the name of religion (*The Arab Spring A Literary Perspective*, SOAS, 21 July 2011).

In London's Shubbak Festival, Hassan Hajjaj celebrated Middle Eastern photography in *The Jameel Prize 2011 Celebration* at the Victoria and Albert Museum (London July 2011). His works belong to an artistic string of photographic practices which are concerned with the self amidst the profuseness of global brands, often presenting a stark image of identity being obscured in the torrent of globalisation's storms. Mounir Fatmi's works also belong to this thread of artistic endeavour to respond to the identity and cultural crisis caused by the advent of standardisation and globalisation. His series of photographs, *Connections*, travel in a slightly different vein, exploring how texts are always in dialogue with other texts and discourses. This notion leads us of course to the wider ontological question of how we come to know the world, and how knowledge itself is not formed in a vacuum, and that writers are not the sole agents of their creations but recycle and reformulate, creatively adding, revising and omitting ideas and styles of their predecessors and contemporaries.

Some photographers choose to work in a more political grain such as Laila Shawa whose black and white images of Gaza's city walls are aggressively superimposed by stark symbols of nationalism and American support, including parts of the American flag and American money that is used to support Israel's brutal activities. Walid Raad injects his creative juices into a body of photography hinging on themes of memory and trauma, national identity and the process of 'writing history' in a wider context of the Lebanese wars of 1975-1991.



Walid Raad, Notebook Volume 38: Already Been in a Lake of Fire (Plates 63/64), 1991/2003, Archival inkjet print, 44x78 1/4 inches - Courtesy of Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

His fictional institution the Atlas Group taps into the discourse of the national archive and its importance in forming and directing national consciousness.

How has Middle Eastern photography reached such heights? Shall we start at the so-called 'very beginning'? Well, the colonial legacy is as relevant to photography as it is to almost any other cultural aspect of postcolonial nations. Before colonisation proper, an imperialist interest in Middle Eastern scholarship gave rise to the employment of the daguerreotype to those unstudied parts of the world. An anthropological tool to get digging into the deep earth of those undiscovered countries from which no man could apparently come back with a clear picture of the topography, the photograph became the ideal way through which anthropologists, sociologists and those interested in other regions have managed to study, scrutinise and become aware of other lifestyles, cultures and peoples. 'Topographic and ethnographic photography [emerged] when there was a thirst for images recording locations remote and exotic to the West. Thus, the majority of images are from the period between 1850 and 1890. There are fewer

images included from the late 1890s onwards as the picture postcard began to gradually replace the travel photograph. The finishing date of 1925 was chosen as it is about the time when modernism really started to change the photographic world. By the mid-1920s, the modernist movement was in full swing, with the dominant photographers of the time, including Moholy Nagy, Weston, Man Ray, Kertesz, and Sheeler, even producing photographs that were complete abstractions. After that time, fewer photographers would have started their careers by creating the sort of early 20th century pictorial works focusing on the romantic essence of the Orient, such as those of Lehnert and Landrock and Emile Frechon.'

The earliest evidence of photography being used in Iran tells us that it was the preserve of the upper classes, used predominantly by the leading aristocratic figures of the Qajar period, mostly notably Nasserodin Shah where Persia introduced its own daguerreotype in 1844 (Rose Issa 2008, p. 11). As noted by one critic, 'the early Qajar photograph was both an Oriental tool, which helped visually inscribe Iran in colonial relations of power,

and an efficient vehicle for the indigenous monarch to empower himself within Iran.’ By the time the Saqaa-Khaneh school was in full swing, photography was already part of the middle class lifestyle tapestry with studios being established. Yet, it was not until the 1960s that art photography proper was explored. How has the flow of photographic development bled into the work of the leading photographic artists of today? When attempting to trace the trajectory of any artistic or social discipline, it is important to take a look at the changing political and economic scene. What was taking place in the Middle East during the 1960s? Why did artists feel a need to employ a photograph to create a discursive practice for exploring, debating and questioning their new found issues, complexities and realities? The most obvious answer is the rise of Arab nationalism and subsequently, according to Mahmud Amin al-’Alim and ‘Abd al-’Azim Anis, the need for culture - and hence photography - ‘to express the struggle without the ‘octopus’ of imperialism’. Following an optimistic period of Nasserism and ardent belief in the Arab cause, failure of talks between Egypt and Syria in 1961, civil war in Yemen preceding the North and South divide in 1962, and the crisis of the 1967 October war with Israel served to shake the very foundations of Arab culture and society, economic structure and political establishments. This was a period of time when the foundations of Islamic and Arab thought came under scrutiny, causing an upheaval in perceptions of Arab and Islamic identity and culture. It became apparent that an increasing number of artists felt an even greater need to employ non-Arab and Islamic art forms to express their intellectual, social and political concerns. This is where the photograph comes in. Although it had been prevalent in Middle Eastern societies before the First World War, it took on a more creative turn and was subject to critical use following the events of the 1950s and 1960s.

The West

In the West however, photography began as an anthropological tool. As argued by Geoffrey Batchen, photography began as a ‘means of grasping and fixing social position from within the turbulent flow of social change’. I purport that the intent was not just simply



Robert Howlett, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, Courtesy of V&A Images

to document a lower class, but also a desire to bottle up difference, to posit the other in a frame to be viewed and studied. In conjunction with the contemporary development of photography, it would be safe to argue that the rise of photography was in tune with a greater voracious scholarship plan to provide logical and rational evidence of ‘difference’, as coined by French theorist Jacques Derrida. This approach was on the rise alongside positivist science and social Darwinism.

Photography, then, as a technology and practice of observation, seems to increasingly fit within the model of how ‘positivist’ science developed and progressed. This may well explain why the term itself was so often synonymous with the concept of objectivity, a notion encapsulated in the dictum ‘the camera never lies’.

The photographic print was equated with a truth value, an objective concretisation of reality. For William Henry Fox Talbot, photography is ‘the art of fixing a shadow’: ‘The most transitory of things, a shadow, may be fettered by the spells of our ‘natural magic,’ and may be fixed forever in the position which it seemed only

destined for a single instant to occupy as to be no more capable of change'. The photographic subject was thus destined to an imprisonment within a certain discourse, and in support of a discourse. In return, it was used by scientists to create and confirm difference within Western society and thought, but also in comparing races. As Batchen has shown, the framework within which photography was applied conformed to the creation of a scientific discourse surrounding social and racial difference.

Walter Benjamin also has a Marxist reading on the development of early fine art photography, what he terms 'arty journalist', in the West. As early as 1931 he writes, 'The lens now looks for interesting juxtapositions, photography turns into a sort of arty journalism. The more far-reaching the crisis of the present social order, the more rigidly its individual components are locked together in their death struggle, the more has the creative – in its deepest essence a sport by contradiction out of imitation – become a fetish, whose lineaments live only in the fitful illumination of changing fashion.' Benjamin attributed the rise of art photography to class struggles. If we synthesise these two critiques of the rise of photography with postcolonial thought, we can more accurately conclude that it was not just simply class struggle which gave rise to the photographic form, but also racial theory developments. As Edward Said has shown in *Orientalism*, racial theory was developed by scientific, political and cultural discourses 'to raise Europe or a European race to dominion over non-European portions of mankind'. I feel that the way in which photography was used was not solely to raise European races over non-European races, but to continually write a system of difference, be it between European and non-European, higher and lower classes, male and female or other noted binary oppositions.

Since we could safely put forth that photography began, since its invention in 1839, as a documentary, anthropological and scientific means, the earliest photographs could be divorced from later artistic innovations of the photograph. Subjects were 'still life' images and composite pictures in the tradition of historical painting. This was the subject of a lawsuit in Paris between 1861 and 1862. The judge ruled 'that photographs could be – the conditional tense is

significant – products of thought and spirit, of taste and intelligence, bearing the imprint of a personality and thus works of art'. Despite this, photographs were not included in the Salons after 1850 (when a few had been hung among lithographs). Instead, they were being shown from 1859 in separate officially sponsored annual exhibitions of the Royal Academy in London, even though one photograph coloured by hand was unknowingly accepted in 1861. Up until the early half of the twentieth century photographs remained excluded from artistic Salons. This was mainly because of the predominance of painting as a canonical and high art form. It was against these thoughts that early photographers had to fight, and once having overcome these difficulties began to mould a distinct photographic identity free from the shackles of canonical artistic practices. It was not until after the beginning of World War One that photographers were elevated to the ranks of the pictorial avant-garde. Alvin Langdon Coburn from the United States was one of the first photographers to make one of the earliest completely abstract photographs. Alfred Stieglitz was one of those leading American photographers who actively sought to promote photography to the status of fine art through running some of New York's most important art galleries. Edward Steichen, America's first modern fashion photographer and a leading contributor to military photography, helped Stieglitz create the Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession. Their contemporary Edward Weston is perhaps one of the most influential American photographers and a leader of twentieth century photography.

Emanuel Rudnitzky, most notably known as Man Ray, was a leading American photographer and noted for his photograms. One of the most important French photographers of the twentieth century was Henri Cartier-Bresson, whose subjects from the streets helped to develop the 'street photography' genre. Andreas Gursky, like Hassan Hajjaj, focuses his photographic images on the alienating effects of capitalism, and globalization and its consequential dehumanization of society. His images speak volumes to topical debates surrounding these themes. Tracey Moffatt is a leading contemporary Australian artist, whose images challengingly spin around a multi-faceted globe of constructed realities,



Richard Mosse, *Pool at Uday*, *The Spectacle of War* series, 2009, Digital C-type, face mounted to plexi, mount on dibond, Edition: of 2, 72x96inches - Courtesy of The Empty Quarter Gallery, Dubai.

identity, history, race, representation and sexuality. Like Youssef Nabil, Moffatt is also interested in the phenomenon of celebrity culture, often glamorizing her subjects. War, destruction and toil are one of Richard Mosse's concerns, his images represented a 'carnavalesque' reversal of Saddam Hussein's era of extraordinary extravagance and luxurious lavishness, where American soldiers are depicted sunbathing around Uday's pool, which is filled with rubble. There is a comic turning-on-its-head element to Mosse's image; water and life are replaced with a wasteland of rubble, and, in exchange for Uday's prolific heap of women, we now have American Troops

In London, a series of events dedicated to early photography have recently surfaced including, but of course not limited to, the Royal Academy of Arts exhibition of the pioneering Hungarian photographers of the twentieth century. The selection of images by photographers, such as Brassai, Robert Capa, André Kertész, László Moholy-Nagy, Martin Munkácsi,

Károly Escher, Rudolf Balogh and József Pécsi, were chosen for the profound contributions they made to photojournalism, as well as to abstract, fashion and art photography. Over two hundred photographs from 1914 to 1989 displayed and explored the stylistic and thematic changes and developments, the achievements of which left a strong legacy to international photography. The Victoria and Albert Museum also houses a large collection of photographs from as early as 1852, which is from the time of its first director, Henry Cole, who was an amateur photographer and supporter of fine art photography. Since then, the V&A's collection has rocketed to include over 300,000 photographs which carry across an international, thematic and generic scope. It will open its doors to a new photography gallery on 25 October chronicling the history of photography from 1839 up to the 1960s. Artists to be included are Julia Margaret Cameron and Robert Howlett.

Africa

Recently exhibited at the V & A was *Figures & Fictions: Contemporary South African Photography* an exhibition of photographs by South African photographers including Jodi Bieber, Kudzanai Chiurai, Hasan & Husain Essop, David Goldblatt, Mikhael Subotzky. The exhibition is part of a curatorial initiative to display the beauty and richness emerging from a culture haunted by its apartheid past. The images represent a string of people of different ages and cut across the racial differences in South Africa to see each person at their most vulnerable, completely unguarded doing the most usual and unsuspecting of daily activities. What was presented ultimately involves a profound ontological questioning concerning what it means to be human in today's South Africa.

The series of photographic works on show are pertinent to issues of race, gender, class and politics, giving them all a relevant voice to various identity discourses in contemporary South Africa. By illustrating the acute and colourful photographic culture that has arisen in post-apartheid South Africa, the exhibition has allowed its audience to appreciate and come to terms with the fact that identity issues are still being debated and rethought. This could not bear any weightier significance than with those looking to document and archive identity.

David Goldblatt is one of the artists whose works was exhibited at the V&A. His perspective is a contradictory one of someone living on the margins of South African society. Being born to parents who had escaped persecution in Lithuania in 1890, and thus part of an alienated and victimised group of people, in South Africa he was part of a privileged white society. Having a unique outlook on South African society, due to the perspectives he was able to experience and adopt he became a full time photographer in 1963, photographing and studying the rich South African culture of his time. His photographic explorations are complex deconstructions of the suffocating simplicity prevalent in discourses on South African culture, politics and identity.

Contemporaries of Goldblatt are South African Bob Gosani and Peter Magubane. Gosani was a photographer for the widely read periodical *Drum*, not only in South Africa but throughout the African continent. It was in



Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-79), *Circe*, c. 1865 - Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Gosani's and Magubane's roles as photographers for this highly acclaimed periodical that they were able to contest the South African government's policies of oppressive segregation and incitation of racial enmity at a time when apartheid policies were sweeping the country into a dark corner of brutal history. Gosani gained critical recognition for his exposure of the practice of prisons that forced detainees to dance naked in the courtyard before re-entering their cells after a day of manual labor in order to ensure they were not in possession of weapons. These images of the *Tauza* dance were secretly taken from a building overlooking the prison. What made these images stand out in stark contrast to his other less controversial photographs was the fact that the detainees had their rectums thrust into the air in order for the warders to inspect them. The sheer scale of *Drum's* readership meant fantastic news for Gosani, a public outcry meant that the apartheid government was cornered to act. The power of photography to document the inequalities and atrocities of apartheid society gave photography an added weight and depth. No longer



David Goldblatt, *Holdup in Hillbrow, Johannesburg, November 1963*, Silver gelatin photograph on fibre-based paper, Edition of 10, 40x30cm, © David Goldblatt.

simply a tool to illustrate the beauty of cover girls, it was transformed into a political vehicle through which it mobilized the masses into forcing the government into a public enquiry.

Photography in Africa, similar to the Middle East, began with the scramble; the imperialist and later colonialist pursuit of pillage and destruction to ultimately 'gain in power', or because 'wealth was to be obtained for ourselves [the British] at home, and wealth deducted from our enemies abroad'. Africa, with its resources and surpluses, was doomed to decades of scholarship denouncing the African nations as retrograde, incapable of ruling themselves and utterly

unsuitable for managing the natural resources of the continent. Thus, in the scramble for Africa came a scramble for creative and original research enhancing and reinforcing the foundation of imperialist ideology. The photograph hence became 'an essential tool to further scientific observation and to fulfil voyeuristic yearnings' representing 'people and communities as either raw data or spectacles. Such representations had a twofold purpose, as both a model of ritual, dress, and habitat, and as aberrant disclosure or anathema.' John Kirk and Charles Livingstone were some of the earliest photographers in sub-Saharan Africa on the 1858 Zambezi Expedition. As Okwui Enwezor and Octavio Zaya have shown, the most famous of expeditions to Namibia 'was that of Sir Francis Galton. The first actual photographic studies in Namibia were produced between the 1860s and 1870s, and were undertaken by photographers from the Cape. James Chapman's stereoscopic photographs taken in southern and central Namibia in 1862 were the first. The next important photographic occasion was in 1876, during the tour of William Coates Palgrave's first commission in Namibia. Palgrave was commissioned by the Cape Parliament to approach Namibian leaders with a view to officially extending British influence in the territory.' This is a perfect example of how photographs were used as case studies to promote imperialist activities.

Following on from the introduction of the camera to the African continent, photography became a means of documenting family life, social customs and natural landscapes, especially in the early half of the twentieth century when European settlements were dwindling into a more remote and less visible seat of power, and a new urban class had risen. Seydou Keita, one of the photographers whose works were exhibited in the Guggenheim Museum exhibition *In Sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the present*, shows his affluent subjects outdoors as he preferred to work in natural light. These subjects are shown amongst a host of other signifying items including sport wristwatches, handbags, a radio, a telephone or even a car. There is a form of self-fashioning taking place here where the trinkets and luxuries of the industrialised modern age have been requisite for the identification of an elite, wealthy class of individuals. Claire Bell says of Keita

that his photographs are 'most pronounced in the use of a diagonal plane that projects the subject beyond the artifice of the studio and into the viewer's space'. The men and women are not playing dressing up, but are taken out into the light, onto a pedestal where they are showing themselves to be equal to the 'white' man. In other words, the images 'offer evidence of their medium's critical role throughout Africa as a social and political agent of self-determination', a tool of asserting an independent identity free from the constraints and limitations of an imposed 'othering' approach. The photography of Africa today has adopted a different tone in line with a changed political and social climate. Kiluanji Kia Henda is one these contemporary photographers whose postcolonial photographic readings of contemporary Angola are a form of resistance. What is most interesting about Henda is the fact that he has not allowed himself to passively waft down the stream of legitimization through connections with Western contemporary art capitals. His works combine myth, humour and history to weave a commentary of postcolonial Africa. South Africa's Andrew Tshabangu creates hybrid images of the coexistence of European Christian churches and aspects of African rituals such as dance, song and drumming. His constructions are of an alternative representation of black people, which are contrary to media stereotypes of the violent and morally murky black subject. His images are noted for their spiritual and mystical characteristics. Aida Muluneh, on the other hand, is less concerned with the negative aspects of her Ethiopian hometown. Whilst her images are equally indifferent to utopian depictions of Africa, she captures images which are true to daily lived experiences. This assumption raises eyebrows, as photographs are rarely windows of truth. Despite this, there is a genuine attempt to construct an alternative vision which is more celebratory than it is critical.

Conclusion

It is evident from this reading of photography in Africa, the Middle East and the West that a philosophy of 'Derridean *différance*' had much to do with the need to capture subjects. In Africa and the Middle East this need found its way into the construction and foundation of high imperialism and later colonisation. The later photography, which emerged, grew to become more revolutionary and sceptical of the earlier generations of photographers, seeking to challenge the very paradigms and structures which made photography available to them in the first place. The next part of this study will analyse the extent to which imperialism and colonization played a role in the coming of photography in other regions, notably India, China, South America and Turkey.

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- 15- Anthony Trollope, *Australia* quoted in Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (London: OUP, 2005), p. 39.
- 16- Curated by Clare Bell, Okwui Enwezor, Danielle Tilkin and Octavio Zaya, 'Introduction' by Clare Bell in *In/ Sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the present*, (Guggenheim Museum Publications: New York, 1996), p. 10.
- 17- Okwui Enwezor and Octavio Zaya, 'Colonial Imaginary, Tropes of Disruption: History, Culture, and Representation in the Works of African Photographers' pp. 17-48.
- 18- Clare Bell, *In/ Sight*, p. 11.
- 19- Ibid..