

**School of Media, Culture and Creative Arts**

**Looking Again: Violence, Photography, Spectatorship, and Conflict Images of Children**

**Christopher Dennis Lewis**

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## Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

**Human Ethics** (For projects involving human participants/tissue, etc) The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) – updated March 2014. The proposed research study received human research ethics approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00262), Approval Number MCCA-18-12.

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## Abstract

This thesis examines questions of photographic violence, ethics and spectatorship. It focuses these questions through images of children in situations of war and conflict, ranging from one of the earliest instances of ‘disaster photography’, Willoughby Hooper’s images of the Madras famine of 1877, to the picturing of the drowned refugee toddler, Aylan Kurdi, on the shores of the Mediterranean in 2015.

The thesis begins by engaging with the critique of photography as a form of symbolic violence, articulated most notably by Susan Sontag. It seeks a point of departure from Sontag’s emphasis on figure of the photographer by drawing on Ariella Azoulay’s notion of the spectator as an active agent in making and remaking a photograph’s meaning.

At the centre of the thesis are relations of spectatorship: those that look at the event, those that look after, those that look now. Photographs are always taken with a view that they will be shared and looked at again and again, both by the photographer and by others. In every chapter, relations of spectatorship, the connection between the viewer, the medium and the image, are constantly present and constantly changing. The thesis pursues several key interrelated elements of the spectatorial relationship: context, presentation, temporality, photographic technologies and ethics. At the core of the thesis is the ethics of the imperative to look beyond the first glance – an imperative which, in the case of such violent, confronting images, particularly when children are involved, often forces us to look away (Carrabine 2011).

Each of the chapters looks again and again at a single image: a trophy of lynching from the southern U.S; a pre-execution photograph of the Cambodian genocide; a partially destroyed relic of the war in Yugoslavia; an infamous tweeted image by the ISIS fighter, Khalid Sharrouf; an official U.S combat photograph of the wounded Omar Khadr, the youngest inmate of Guantanamo Bay prison.



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Most importantly, to the children I write about, dead or alive, I hope to show the respect and consideration they deserve, not glorifying, condoning, or, minimizing deaths and violence I would not wish on anybody.



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## **Preface: Sontag, Soft Murder and Open Wounds**

Scholars have a lot of baggage, and they like to unpack up front the story of the research (Carol Saller, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2012).

Last year, after viewing one particularly poignant, moving, image of two young girls hanging in a tree, murdered, after being subject to a gang rape, I did not sleep for the whole night as the image tormented me every time I dozed off. The anguish I felt was nothing compared to the pain the parents must have felt; not only losing their children to a horrific crime, but, then in making the decision to leave them hanging to bear witness to their loss and act as a reminder to all around of the evil that lurks in humanity. The parents can only imagine the final horrors their children suffered at the hands of what we would term ‘animalistic’ behaviour, though in reality, historically and today, it is all too human behaviour. I looked once, then looked again and read the image deeper, before finally turning my gaze away from a scene that I wish had never occurred. The original scene showing two girls dangling in death from a tree surrounded by wailing relatives was recorded via a photographic device, a mechanical witness leading to the image’s consumption and spectatorship with the potential to reach thousands via the inter-connected world we live in. This dissemination of photographs, the act of looking and looking again, the shared spectatorship of children subjected to violence, is at the core of the journey I will undertake in this research.

I have been subject to numerous innuendos along the way, with the implication that inside me there resides a sickness for resurrecting photographs and discussing images of children in situations of violence that some would prefer to keep buried. Or, perhaps they would rather write about it without including graphic, confronting photographs that seem to be disrespectful of those who can no longer protect themselves. It is hard not to personalise the criticism, as if in some way I am responsible, or, as I have been a professional photographer for many years, that the profession I am part of is complicit in this violent, ocularcentric regime of voyeuristic spectatorship and gloating that often profits from the demise or degradation of others.

For me, the hardest hitting critique that rubbed salt into an open wound was not a face-to-face confrontation, rather it was my first reading of *On Photography*, the ground breaking book by essayist Susan Sontag. Even now, despite multiple readings, I still

find it hard to read Sontag's views on photographers. Her book does not adorn my bookshelf, it ekes out its existence on the floor, water-stained, tarnished, abused, perhaps, just like a photographer abuses his subjects. It is in the pages of *On Photography* that I am confronted with her perverse view of 'picture-taking':

If professional photographers often have sexual fantasies when they are behind the camera, perhaps the perversion lies in the fact that these fantasies are both plausible and so inappropriate. (Sontag [1977] 2008, 13)

I read that:

a camera is sold as a predatory weapon. The camera/gun does not kill, so the ominous metaphor seems to be all bluff – like a man's fantasy of having a gun, knife, or tool between his legs. Still, there is something predatory in the act of taking a picture. To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed. Just as the camera is a sublimation of the gun, to photograph someone is a sublimated murder – a soft murder, appropriate to a sad, frightened time. (Sontag [1977] 2008, 14)

I am taking this personally. I am not even out of Chapter 1, 'In Plato's Cave', and I have already been linked to soft murder, rape scenarios and sexual fantasies all in the guise of taking photographs (Sontag [1977] 2008, 3). Perhaps the brightness of the exit from Plato's cave (the truth?) will be too much for me to bear. Yet again I subject the poor book – after all it is just a collection of words on paper – to another session of eternal damnation and banishment on the floor. The pages have become twisted and gnarled, yellow piss-like stains and leached ink from numerous crosses and explanation marks blend together in a sorry mess of abuse. Deliberate abuse – can you violate a book, commit soft murder as you delicately tear feathered pages from between its penguin wings?

Susie Linfield, in the book *The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence*, takes exception to the approach of critics such as Sontag take when they write about photography:



There you will hear precious little talk of love, or terrible nakedness, or passion's pitch. There, critics view emotional responses – if they have any – not as something to be experienced and understood but, rather, as an enemy to be vigilantly guarded against. For these writers, criticism is a prophylactic against the virus of sentiment, and pleasure is denounced as self-indulgent. They approach photography – not particularly photographs, or particular photographers, or particular genres, but photography itself – with suspicion, mistrust, anger and fear. Rather than enter what Kazin called a “community of interest” with their chosen subject, these critics come armed to the teeth against it. For them, photography is a powerful, duplicitous force to defang rather than an experience to embrace and engage. It's hard to resist the thought that a very large number of photography critics – including the most influential ones – don't really like photographs or the act of looking at them, at all. (Linfield 2010, 5)

If, as Linfield contends, critics are trying to ‘defang’ photography, I want to approach it instead as something to ‘embrace and engage’. With fangs intact, to mangle a metaphor, I approach the head of Medusa with a sense of awe, ugliness and beauty combined: poisonous, viperous, but strangely alluring. I will be hurt, tainted, poisoned; I cannot expose myself to such imagery without this occurring. Photography is a strange medium; something that can be controlled to a degree, but never totally so. The light, flashing across glass plates and acetate negatives, or, imprinting on multi-media flash cards, leaves its mark at times in unusual, mysterious ways.

This thesis will attempt to mirror photography's strange allure. Interspersed with critical engagement will be some flashes of personal insight and moments of autobiographical reflection. While this is not a work of creative practise, my own photographs will be used to add a visual dimension to the thesis. Dealing with graphic photographs of children in situations of violence is confronting, so, in some respects the photographs I present on the page leading into each chapter will act as a break and an interpretation. As with all photography, the meaning of what I am saying, thinking, or trying to portray will vary dependant on the viewers. Each chapter begins with a detailed analysis of a single photographic image in bold type. Where the narrative, reflection, is purely personal and experiential, it is presented in italics. This use of multiple typefaces, and the combination of visual and textual elements, personal

narrative and analysis reflects the complex, and at times frustrating, responses evoked by the images I discuss. This thesis was born out of a period of angst, frustration and deep questioning. Just like the medium of photography, it is etched with light and dark, personal and critical, truth and lies.

Figure 1.1. Chris Lewis, Digital Print, 2014.

## **Introduction: Towards an Ethics of Spectatorship, Photographs and Salted Secrets**

The famed social documentary photographer Sebastiao Salgado, in his biopic, *The Salt of the Earth*, adds an element of romanticism and a level of skill to the craft of photography by defining it as ‘writing with light’ (Winders and Salgado 2014). Salgado’s explanation is a neat and eloquent one because photography is so interconnected with words. Photographs are often used to explain and illustrate an argument or add a visual component to a written piece. Diane Arbus has a more ambiguous interpretation: a photograph ‘is a secret about a secret’ (Arbus 2003, 58). Arbus in her description shows that photography may not be the big revealer of truths it is often held up to be. If that is the case, then, while photographers may be revealers of truth, writers of light, as Salgado would have it, they are also, in equal parts, concealers of truth: the photograph as a secret, the recorded scene as a secret, a confusion on a confusion, leaving people to ponder whether they can ever completely see the meaning behind the image.

Steve Metzler in a *Shutterbug* article, “Seeing the World in Black and White: The Majestic World of Sebastiao Salgado”, comments on the religious connotations of *The Salt of the Earth*:

Salgado’s gorgeous black-and-white imagery of people and places is, to say the least, “biblical” in scale. The movie’s title is another of Salgado’s biblical references. Called “The Salt of the Earth” (Le sel de la terre) it gets its title from the Sermon on the Mount: “You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt has lost its flavour, with what will it be salted?” (Metzler 2014)

The lofty biblical references, coupled with several decades of photographing the displaced, disadvantaged and the dying members of society, may position Salgado, and for that matter, dozens of other social documentary photographers, as the ‘salt of the earth’, adding ‘flavour’ to a world that has ‘lost’ its way (*The Salt of the Earth* 2014). Conversely, too, the ‘salt’, or rather the lack of salt, may refer to people who have lost their humanity, who have become in the mind of the deeply troubled Salgado as revealed in the film, the most ‘aggressive species’ (*The Salt of the Earth* 2014). Using salt as an example of the good suggests that the converse also can apply: too much salt can be harmful. It may add flavour, but too much salt destroys flavour. Salt, despite its palatable addition to enhance the taste of food is also viewed as dangerous, linked to high blood pressure, fluid retention and an increased burden on the heart.

At the centre of the thesis are these tensions and ambiguities, between light and dark, seeing and obscuring, salt and surfeit, good and evil, truth and illusion.

### **A Weapon Against Truth**

Susan Sontag’s *On Photography*, though particularly powerful and influential, is by no means unique in its criticisms. In 1931 German playwright Bertolt Brecht wrote in the tenth anniversary issue of the newspaper *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung*:

The tremendous development of photojournalism has contributed practically nothing to the revelation of the truth about the conditions in this world. On the contrary, photography, in the hands of the bourgeoisie, has become a terrible weapon against the truth. (quoted in Linfield 2010, 20)

According to Linfield, ‘it is Brecht whose shadow hangs over photography criticism and whose sensibility continues to define it’ (Linfield 2010, 20). Linfield characterises the above Brecht quote as ‘influential on the indictment of photography’ launched by a number of its subsequent critics, including, ‘Sontag, Barthes, Berger, and the postmoderns’ (Linfield 2010, 21). Linfield also references Allan Sekula’s comments that photography has ‘contributed much to spectacle, to retinal excitation, to voyeurism, to terror, envy and nostalgia, and only a little to the critical understanding of the social world’, and likens them to the claims of Brecht (Linfield 2010, 21). Allan Sekula, in his article “The Traffic in Photographs”, says:

Photography is haunted by two chattering ghosts: that of bourgeois science and that of bourgeois art' an attempt 'to bridge the philosophical and institutional separation of scientific and artistic practices that has characterized bourgeois society since the late eighteenth century. (Sekula 1981, 15)

Sekula discusses the claim that photography is a universal language as advertised by Eastman, the founder of Kodak, concluding that if this is the case the language is 'primitive, infantile and aggressive – the imaginary discourse of the machine. The crucial question remains to be asked: can photography be anything else?' (Sekula 1981, 25).

Perhaps the problem lies in viewing photography as a universal language, something accessible to all and understandable to all. This, as Sekula alludes to, has not been the case; it has to be acknowledged that photography was not, and perhaps is still not, readily accessible to certain groups of people, particularly those marginalised, or in a minority group. Photography/photographers, just like most other disciplines, are slanted and aimed at their particular audience, their consumers. Viewing photography as a language, although not a universal language, hints that it can be read and understood. However, to achieve this understanding you need to be aware of its particular traditions and nuances, the tricks, and methodologies you need to employ as an aid to read and interpret the photograph. A photograph at its base level is a piece of inked paper of an event or person (unless of course it has been tampered with or changed). It may, if you have been trained, or know what it depicts, contain clues to its meaning, but often it requires more to understand the message better. At that base level, devoid of any caption, any written text, any explanation, a photograph may do little to aid critical understanding of our world. I would contend that if we do not go beyond this first surface level, any interpretation may be false, rudimentary: photography requires, perhaps demands, a deeper knowledge, another look.

Eamonn Carrabine in his article "Just Images: Aesthetics, Ethics and Visual Criminology", links the views of critics such as Sontag and Berger to Walter Benjamin's 1934 address 'to the Institute for the Study of Fascism in Paris, which was later published as "The Author as Producer"' (Carrabine 2012, 477). Here Benjamin talks about photography as making 'misery into a consumer good' transforming it into 'an object of pleasure by treating it stylishly and with technical perfection' (Benjamin

[1934] 1970, 5). You can't photograph a pile of shit without beautifying it, or, in the more refined words of Benjamin, 'It becomes more and more subtle, more and more modern, and the result is that it can no longer photograph a run-down apartment house or a pile of manure without transfiguring it' (Benjamin [1934] 1970, 5).

The quotes taken from the works of Benjamin and Brecht come out of a particular time period of upheaval and change in the late 1920s and early 1930s in Germany, with a particular Marxist view of the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. In this same period, Edwin Hoernle wrote the article "The Working Man's Eye", in which he attacks the use of photography by the bourgeoisie as reflecting the 'cult of leisure and idleness' (Hoernle [1930] 1978, 48):

We must proclaim proletarian reality in all its disgusting ugliness, with its indictment of society and its demand for revenge. We will have no veils, no retouching, no aestheticism; we must present things as they are, in a hard merciless light. We must take photographs wherever proletarian life is at its hardest and the bourgeoisie at its most corrupt; and we shall increase the fighting power of our class in so far as our pictures show class consciousness, discipline, solidarity, a spirit of aggression and revenge. Photography is a weapon; so is technology, so is art! (Hoernle [1930] 1978, 49)

Hoernle defines photography as a weapon, something that should be used as a transformative force, used to make a difference by showing the true condition of humanity. Herein lies one of the alternative functions of photography, as a medium which activists, individuals and oppositional, collective, grass roots movements deploy, using the power of the image to push for change and alternatives to the dominant. Sometimes, even the same photograph can, by being placed in another context, achieve a completely different result than the original intention of the photograph/er. At other times, through manipulation, the image is changed to reflect the oppositional or counter-meaning. The artwork of oppositional activists, who take an original photograph or photographic concept and convert it to a statement, or protest art piece, while of interest, is beyond the scope of the narrow field this thesis focusses on.

Taking as my point of departure the view of critics such as Brecht, Benjamin and Sontag, that photography and photographers are caught up in a form of symbolic

violence enacting possession, power and control over their subjects, I want to analyse whether there are other ways to explain the forms of ethics and spectatorship that attend certain fraught photographs, even as they are the products of histories of racism, colonialism, and abuse of the ‘other’ that permeate photography.

### **Looking Again: The Changing Nature of Meaning**

At the centre of the thesis are questions and relationships of spectatorship in photographs of children in situations of violence. Those that look at the event, those that look after, those that look now. Lilie Chouliaraki in the book *Spectatorship of Suffering*, comments, ‘Meaning is always an unfinished business because these marks constantly alter their relationship to other marks as they travel from context to context’ (Chouliaraki 2006, 73). In photography, this is a key principle: photographs are always taken with a view that they will be shared and looked at again, both by the photographer and by other individuals. If a photographer is present when a child is subject to violence and they record the scene, the meaning of that photograph can change drastically as the context of the image changes. In every chapter of this thesis this changing context, this relation of spectatorship, the connection between the viewer, the medium and the image, is constantly present and constantly changing. The thesis pursues several key interrelated elements of the spectatorial relationship: context, presentation, time and temporality, photographic technologies and the ethics of photographing, editing and reproducing. The discussion begins with images from photographers who used cumbersome early cameras and proceeds through the photojournalistic phase, to the ‘everyone has a camera’ smart phone era. In a world where by a push of the button an image can be transmitted to the other side of the world in an act of instantaneous shared spectatorship, it is important to consider the constraints and differences in the modes of transmission and viewing that occurred in the past.

The thesis begins in the 1870s when the photographer was restricted by long exposure times, the need to develop negatives immediately using dangerous chemicals and the difficulty of working with heavy, hand-cut glass plates. These constraints had an impact on what could be achieved and the aesthetic and compositional aspects of the finished result reflect these technological hardships. In the early days of photography, the long mode of transmission of a paper-based product, often involving lengthy sea

journeys to distant audiences, affects the response, sympathy and reaction to images of violence. Today we think in terms of the now, the photography and the ethics of the present, and we often erroneously apply this knowledge as a mirror to judge the past. In this thesis I want to journey back in time to understand the technologies and prevailing attitudes that influenced these early examples of representation and spectatorship. Likewise, in the modern examples, the mode of transmission and our reaction, or inaction, are examined to highlight changes in the role of both the photographer and their audience. The changes documented throughout this thesis are vast: now, a photograph can be taken and distributed to almost anywhere in the globe within seconds. The negative no longer exists and photographs are more fluid, subject to layers of change, edits, distortions leading to questions of authenticity, and an increasingly saturated social media environment of looking and sharing.

### **The Spectre of Death**

In talking about the spectatorship of looking at photographs of violence involving children it is inevitable that much of the discussion will revolve around death. The spectre of death is at the core of all photographs involving people. In Roland Barthes memoir, *Camera Lucida – Reflections on Photography*, and in Sontag's *On Photography*, the recognition of the photograph as a record of death is ever present. In *On Photography* Sontag describes how most people feel about photography when she says, 'Photographed images do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it, miniatures of reality' (Sontag [1977] 2008, 4). The reality is that we all die, and a scrap of inked paper, fragile though it is, will survive our demise. Eduardo Cadava and Paola Cortés-Rocca observe that this 'indexical character of photography offers the promise of immortality' the 'utopic hope of interrupting or stopping time: a fragment that comes to us from the past and permits us to dream that the totality that produced it is still here and, moreover still belongs to us' (Cadava and Cortés-Rocca [2006] 2009, 120). According to Barthes, death is what is present in all portrait photographs; 'The *noeme* of Photography is simple, banal; no depth: "that has been"' (Barthes [1980] 1982, 115):

in Photography I can never deny that *the thing has been there*. There is a superimposition here: of reality and of the past. And since this constraint exists



only for Photography, we must consider it, by reduction, as the very essence, the *noeme* of Photography. (Barthes [1980] 1982, 76)

In both Sontag and Barthes there is a semblance of fear, a wariness and a weariness that life rewards us with death. Photography is a medium that records and preserves the memory of our existence until that too fades: a discarded frame in a second hand antique store where our clothes, hairstyle and an aged paper print eloquently proves we no longer exist. Or worse, in today's digital world, a set of pixilated dots left on a memory card that never sees the glory of being semi-immortalised as ink on paper. This spectre of death resonates in both *On Photography* and in *Camera Lucida*; Sontag called it the 'image-world that bids to outlast us all' (Sontag [1977] 2008, 11). Barthes' comments are even more poignant when he discusses the photograph of Lewis Payne awaiting execution for an assassination attempt:

I read at the same time: *This will be* and *this has been*; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future. What *pricks* is the discovery of this equivalence. In front of the photograph of my mother as a child, I tell myself: she is going to die: I shudder, like Winnicott's psychotic patient, *over a catastrophe which has already occurred*. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe. (Barthes [1980] 1982, 96)

Figure 1.2. Alexander Gardner, Black and White Photograph. Lewis Payne Awaiting Execution, 1865.

The ‘catastrophe which has already occurred’ (Barthes [1980] 1982, 96) took Lewis Payne when he was executed aged 21; it took Barthes’ mother Henrietta at 85, Barthes himself after being hit by a tram aged 65, and Susan Sontag after a battle with cancer at 71. The image-world outlasted them all and predicts, or, more accurately, reveals, the reality, that we too will never escape that ‘every photograph is this catastrophe’ (Barthes [1980] 1982, 96). Perhaps this is what is hated and rallied against, the inevitability of our loved ones’ demise and the inevitability of our own, the progressive record of a march to oblivion. The older we get, the stranger the world of our childhood becomes. The world has moved on from 126 and 110 photographic film and the thickened printing paper with white edging of a bygone era. We – that is, if you are old enough, and privileged enough in the economic sense, to have our catastrophes recorded – look at them with awe and bewilderment, black and white tinged with age, signalling that we are well on the way to joining Barthes, Sontag and Payne into oblivion, or if you prefer, in another realm. Who really knows? Death is never pleasant, if it is accompanied by violence it must be worse. In these circumstances one would expect there is a certain sensitivity that becomes involved in how that death is recorded; if indeed it should be recorded at all.

### **Ethics of Respect and Spectatorship**

Photographs, especially ones that contain scenes of violence seem to compel us to make a choice, take an action, and choose between one side or the other. Carrabine discusses this obligation in “Images of Torture: Culture, Politics and Power”:

Today, one of the fundamental requirements of viewing is that we are obliged to take sides. The act of not looking, or changing channels, if the story is too disturbing is to ignore the pain experienced by others. To turn away, feel pity, get angry or be overwhelmed by the horror of it all are each dispositions that a culture of spectatorship encourages. (Carrabine 2011, 7)

Carrabine’s comments are borne out in images of the recent crisis involving Syrian refugees. Bodies of young victims who drowned at sea have washed up on the shores of Europe and been photographed to show the tragedy and helplessness of their plight. The initial response on Facebook, when Syrian artist Khaeld Barakeh posted such images on his page, was to censor and remove them (Shabir 2015). In this same time

period, the world reacted strongly when one image of a dead toddler, Aylan Kurdi, was used extensively by the media. Some deemed it inappropriate, disrespectful to the dead, a form of ‘trauma porn’ (MacKenzie 2015), while others felt that posting and sharing gave people the opportunity to view and do something if they so wished (Wibben 2015). It seems the middle ground is hard to stand on considering the fiery nature of each side. In images of violence involving children, there is a duality: the photograph as an entity that stands for what it shows, but, one that is also dependant on how it is seen. The consequences of not looking may mean that we do not fully understand what is going on and fail to develop the means to read an image in its full significance. Angela Davis, in discussing the torture images from Abu Ghraib, says we have to develop ‘a visual literacy necessary to critically understand’ such images (Davis 2005, 51). According to Davis, images cannot be seen as unmediated representations divorced from ‘the particular economy within which images are produced and consumed’ (Davis 2005, 51). This is important in reading photographs of children in situations of colonial and racial violence. If we are going to discuss, and ‘critically understand’, implying a depth of understanding beyond the superficial, we need to look deeply, and then look at the circumstances surrounding the creation of the photograph and its usage. In this thesis, part of the understanding and discussion comes out of my own grounding as a professional photographer. A good example of this added ‘critical understanding’ can be seen in Chapter Two where I discuss lynching photographs; here, drawing on my professional knowledge, I argue that a large percentage of these photographs were formally composed, posed and crafted by professional photographers who made a living out of these paper trophies that they sold to their eager white clientele.

The photographer brings to their camera their own perceptions as tainted and stained as my copy of *On Photography*: their prejudices, their agendas, faults, and, neutrality aside, these will surely leach onto the negatives and flash cards of the photographer. What is new? Writers and artists have done that for hundreds of years. Photography: that frozen moment in time with real people, real scenes, you can almost smell and touch it if the photographer is good at their craft: we are led to believe it is truthful and honest. It is not. We see a photograph as a whole, a defining moment. This is it. The truth. It is not. Because it happened, it does not mean it reveals the truth. A photograph is never viewed as a sequence, we are trained to view it as a whole, but it is not. It is a

tiny sliver, a revealer, or concealer of truth, subject to its surrounds and the all-important framework.

Paul Lester in *Visual Communications: Images with Messages* discusses what happens when we initially view an image:

Upon first viewing any image, everyone draws a quick conclusion about a picture based entirely on a personal response... Words and phrases such as “good,” “bad,” “I like it,” or “I don’t like it” are the usual quick responses. These answers indicate that a person initially analyzes an image on a superficial, cursory level. Personal perspectives are important because they reveal much about the person making comments. But such opinions have limited use simply because they are personal. (Lester [1995] 2013, 135)

The problem with images of violence is that a quick, gut-level conclusion is all we can stomach. Who wants to be scarred by looking at images that debase humankind and reveal the peculiar cruelty that people engage in, especially if they involve children? Resisting this instinctual turning away, I want to think deeper and calmer about Sontag’s connecting of violence to the act of photography. Yet, to get deeper, I have to look, think, look, think, and look again. Or as Nicholas Mirzoeff says in “The Right to Look”: ‘It means requiring the recognition of the other in order to have a place from which to claim a right and to determine what is right’ (Mirzoeff 2011, 474). Visceral, gut-wrenching reactions start to metamorphose into an examination that takes into account the other perspectives needed to come to some kind of final critical analysis. In some ways, blaming the photographer is easy, it saves us from looking deeper, it saves us from questioning, enquiring, probing; it stunts and blocks our growth. Not necessarily a bad thing, after all who really wants to know? Let the past be the past. Except it is not past, and each event recorded, or, if you will, captured (the gun metaphor again) seems to repeat continually through history creating a combined, complicit amnesia, a ‘visualization of history created for information, images and ideas’ (Mirzoeff 2011, 474).

Photography is forever changing, with increasing redistribution of images, re-appropriation, consumption, voyeurism, digestion and digitalisation only to be spat out and regurgitated again. In photographs of violence it is as if the photographer is somehow responsible, a participant in the violence meted out on another person.

Photography and death become especially sensitive when the image involves children – particularly if it is perceived that the photographer has not operated in the right manner. Here the power that critics assign to the photographer, the spectre of death and the ethics of dealing with the sensitive topic of children’s rights, collides with opinions divided over how it should be done; or, whether a photographer should even take a photograph of a child in a situation of violence. So armed (there I go again with the metaphor of the camera as a gun) with the scathing comments of the critics and my piss coloured copy of *On Photography* I embark on examining photographs of violence involving children. However, before I commence, I need to explain the perimeters of my definition of what constitutes a child.

### **Defining Childhood**

The definition of a child, or the age at which an individual can be held responsible for their actions, is, as the chapters that follow will reveal, fraught with conflicting viewpoints. I am going to define it in the simplest possible way: a child is a minor under the age of 18. Perhaps this is a legalistic definition, but defining by any other method in the light of what is revealed in the subsequent chapters is too complex. Defining a child in this manner draws a line in the sand and avoids the legal arguments and opinions that assign criminality and its presumption of guilt at ages as low as six or seven. Defining a child as anyone under 18 offers a degree of protection from the guilt, punishment and cruelty that so often is administered by people in positions of power. Defining a child as anyone under the age of 18 enters the realm of the ‘bleeding heart’, the ‘softie’, who cannot judge or condemn a child. Who would have thought the ‘soft murderer’ could hold his ‘camera gun’ and fire a blank (Sontag [1977] 2008). The blanks photographers’ fire sear across acetate film, or in today’s technology, pixelate the dots on a flash card for the world to judge. If it is a photograph, it has to be truth. But it often is not. It may well have been an event that occurred, but it is a small split second in a sequence of time. A before, the split second moment, the after. Spaces in between, glaring gaps, multiple interpretations, in that split second, the ‘writing with light’ brands and defines a miniscule moment that may reveal nothing and may reveal everything.

Perhaps that is the problem, especially when dealing with spectatorship involving violence against children: the photograph does not change anything, it just records. It

is people who need to change, and faced with Adriana Cavarero's interpretation of children in *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence* as 'perfect victims', it seems it is preferable to use them as dispensable pawns in a deadly game:

It is an aberrant logic, in which the slaughter of innocents becomes a criterion that justifies, indeed demands, the slaughter of other innocents. The criterion of the warrior thus recedes into the background, confirming that today it is no longer the concept of war that holds the field. Nor is the reference to children to be understood, here and elsewhere, as rhetorical artifice or pathetic exaggeration. Far from killing them by mistake, horrorism actually prefers children, because in them it finds the perfect victims. The vulnerable par excellence, in fact the absolutely defenceless, they restore to today's horror its originary stamp and transmit its destructive message more effectively than any other victim. (Cavarero 2009, 105)

Cavarero's view of children as 'perfect victims' is borne out in the numerous campaigns run by charities, NGO's where the end image we are left with is a child looking up pleading for our help, the starving, the displaced, the refugee; young, vulnerable, cash cows. After photography was invented, it was inevitable, given the pulling power of the 'perfect victims' and the power of the visual, that children would be used to manipulate and elicit certain responses from viewers. Benjamin was well aware of the power of photography as previously mentioned, 'it has made the *struggle against misery* into a consumer good' (Benjamin [1934] 1970, 5). The use of photography in the manner described by Benjamin has been utilised for many decades in the advertisements of The United Colors of Benetton, where campaigns have sparked controversies with their photographic interpretations of sensitive issues involving children. Notable examples include the 1982 angelic white child with the less than angelic dark skinned child, and an advertisement featuring a baby highlighting the spread of AIDS at birth (Ganesan 2002, 56). As discussed in later chapters, there is in our own times a disturbing trend to show some of the most horrific images of past child violence in settings that transfigure them into a product for consumerism, especially in books destined for the art market.

The use of photographs of children in controversial poses has a long history. According to Gus McDonald in the book *Camera Victorian Eyewitness: A History of*

*Photography: 1826-1913*, the first person to ‘enlist photography in a social crusade’ was Thomas Barnardo, and yes, the campaign involved Cavarero’s ‘perfect victims’, children (MacDonald 1979, 110).

With his showman’s flair for fund raising, Barnardo set up a photographic unit in 1874 and sold ‘before’ and ‘after’ pictures of urchins reclaimed in his Homes. This aroused the indignation of a rival evangelist who alleged, ‘Barnardo’s method is to take the children as they are supposed to enter the home, and then after they have been in the Home for some time. He is not satisfied with taking them as they really are, but he tears their clothes so as to make them feel worse than they really are. They are also taken in purely fictional positions’. (MacDonald 1979, 110-112)

The resulting court case that Barnardo lost due to his use of posing children in a fictional manner prompted him to photograph all children from then on in studio mug shot poses (MacDonald 1979, 112). It could be contended that studio mugshots, devoid of context, are also works of fiction, no different than the posed urchin photographs. Well over a century later, the Barnardo charity group is still running strong and still using children in an exploitive, tug at the heart strings manner. In *The Guardian*, November 13 2003, John Carvel reports of the use of images in Barnardo’s campaign:

The children’s charity Barnardo’s ran into a storm of public protest yesterday when it launched a £1m advertising campaign showing a new-born baby with a cockroach crawling out of its mouth. The provocative campaign was designed to overcome indifference about the continuing influence of poverty on children’s lives. Other ads in the campaign prepared by the advertising agency BBH feature a baby with a syringe, and one with a bottle of methylated spirits poking out of its mouth.

Barnardo’s is one of the biggest children’s charities in the UK, perhaps proving that using perfect victims in confronting campaigns can lead to financial rewards. The Barnardo’s website features two stick figure adults against an olive green background holding a child aloft between them (<http://www.barnardos.com>). The perfect family, mum, dad and child. The charity in their advertisements hits out at the maligned, the poor, the disadvantaged as if this group cares less for their children; hence imagery of

addiction and affliction, the cockroach, the alcoholic drinking methylated spirits, and, the addicts choice of a needle to feed their desperation. These images are meant to be read (not viewed; viewed is a cursory look, read is a deeper contemplation) along with the captions and slogans as a call to donate and support their charity via donations.

### **Reading Images**

While Benjamin's comments on photography have been seen as reflecting a negative view, his opinion of photography was not always adversarial, as can be seen in *A Short History of Photography* in which he discusses the need for a methodology of reading photographs:

But must not a photographer who cannot read his own pictures be no less accounted an illiterate? Will not the caption become the most important part of the photograph? Such are the questions in which the interval of 90 years that separates us from the age of the daguerreotype discharges its historical tension. It is in the illumination of these sparks that the first photographs emerge, beautiful and unapproachable, from the darkness of our grandfathers' day. (Benjamin [1931] 1978, 75)

Benjamin shows one of the most important aspects of spectatorship is that a caption, an explanation, is at times needed to assist in understanding photographs. We are led to believe that a photograph stands alone and does not need an explanation, aided by popular sayings such as 'a picture is worth a thousand words'. This has led, as is shown in this thesis, to many photographs being presented devoid of proper analysis and contextualisation. Just how important the context is can be seen by Carrabine's article, 'Seeing Things: Violence, Voyeurism and the Camera' in which Carrabine analyses four photographs taken by members of the *Sonderkommando* of an Auschwitz gas chamber. Here the interpretation of the photographs and the meaning is contingent on the four photographs not only being printed together but shown in full frame. While Carrabine does not offer a definitive solution on how to present images of violence, he does show the importance of the context in understanding visual imagery.

The *Sonderkommando* photographs cannot reveal the horror of Auschwitz in its entirety, but the very fact they were made at all and in sequence, acts as a



powerful reminder that all archives need to be interpreted and they are always contradictory in character. (Carrabine 2014, 49)

In attempting to interpret images of violence involving children the nature of the photographs, their history, often steeped in racism, colonialism and pejorative representations of ‘the other’, makes any reading ‘contradictory in character’. In this thesis it will be shown that the understanding, interpretation, and even the meaning of a photograph, can change by context, printing methods and by a viewing by different spectators. Or as Alberto Manguel states in *Reading Pictures: A History of Love and Hate*, ‘Every photograph (blown up, cropped, taken from a certain angle, lit in a certain way) misquotes reality’ (Manguel [2000] 2001. 73). This play between truth and lies, positive and negative, will be highlighted throughout this thesis.

### **An Open-minded Photographic Approach**

Suzanne Schneider in the article, “Louis Agassiz and the American School of Ethnoeroticism: Polygenesis, Pornography, and Other ‘Perfidious Influences’ ”, uses the analogy of a car crash to emphasise the analytic examination of photographic evidence:

Like a car accident, in which, in the last moments before impact, the occupants of each vehicle simply close their eyes and give themselves over to the forces of physics, the explosive event that the camera flash records represents an instant of mechanical collision with the world. It is a collision that, while it may for all intents and purposes encapsulate a real occasion in time, is nevertheless a moment, some would say of crisis, that only exists through the interpretation of the result – the “real” has been lost somewhere in those seconds of the shutter’s snap. Thus, in the same way that in order to speak of the “truth” of the crash that was to bring two automobiles and individual worlds into violent contact, we must begin by piecing together the story that preceded proximity in order to get to the “truth” that the photograph synthesizes, we need first ask what came before – a before that necessarily included not only the person(s) driving the camera to that shape-shifting, earth-shattering *click* but also the forces that steered the individual(s) to this instant of impact. (Schneider 2012, 211-212)

The image of a car accident where children are the occupants is a fitting and sobering analogy of the chapters that will follow; the examination of photographs is hard, confronting and forensic. The photographs I have chosen span many decades, from close to the birth of photography to modern day exponents disseminated via smart phones and social media. There are numerous examples of photographs involving children in situations of violence that it is impossible to include them all. For example, I have not included two Pulitzer Prize winning photographs that are often listed among the most iconic photographs of all time, namely Nick Ut's 1972 picture of a girl burning from a napalm bomb in Vietnam and Kevin Carter's 1993 photograph of a vulture waiting for a Sudanese toddler to die from starvation. These photographs by Ut and Carter have been influential in debates about how we read photographs and also have shaped practices that attempt to control the access to controversial images of children (See Marinovich and Silva 2000, Batchen et al 2012). Yet, I have omitted discussing them in detail here as they have been subject to much prior commentary, and I wish to scrutinise different photographs to which I can bring fresh insights. Another exclusion from this thesis is that caused by state policies of restricted access. While I write this from a Western and supposedly democratic country, I have yet to view any photographs in recent years of the 'collateral damage' caused by the use of drones by the 'coalition of the willing.' These images that may sway our view of what we (i.e. our governments) do, very rarely come to light, especially in mainstream.

### **Towards a Civil Photographic Contract**

At the heart of the thesis is the interplay between photography as what some view as a violent, exploitive ocularcentric regime, and the use of photographic images to broaden and deepen our understanding by adding an empathetic edge. According to French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy:

The truth of violence destroys and destroys itself. It is the kind that snickers, spits, and yells, that enjoys its display of violence (enjoyment, for violence, is without pleasure and without joy; it feeds on the very image of its violence). The violence of truth is something completely different from this. It is a violence that withdraws even as it irrupts and – because this irruption itself is a withdrawal – that opens and frees a space for the manifest presentation of the

true. [Once again, let us put something on hold: are there not, corresponding to each side, two kinds of images?]. (Nancy 2005, 8)

The duality that Nancy describes will be shown throughout the thesis, as an image of violence changes its meaning depending on the nature of the spectatorship it evokes. Some are of the opinion that to look and re-look at images is to resurrect the violence and abuse that has been meted out on them by their antagonists. I have no easy answer to these questions of morality. Whether it is ethically right or wrong, I argue, depends so much on the setting. Those moral, ethical dilemmas will interplay throughout the chapters. My aim is not to produce answers, but to provide new angles, views and directions in the quest to decipher the issues surrounding spectatorship of photographs of violence against children.

The method of analysis I pursue takes as a point of departure the ‘truth vehicle’ model advocated by Ariella Azoulay in *The Civil Contract of Photography*. According to Azoulay, since its inception ‘photography appeared as a new tribunal, a universal and impartial judge that could do justice to the past, present and future’ (Azoulay [2008] 2014, 121). Such a lofty ideal seems destined to hit major pitfalls, but it is that ideal of photography as a ‘civil contract’ that is of interest to me when comparing the different methods of engaging in critical analysis. Azoulay’s viewpoint differs explicitly from that of Sontag:

Sontag focuses on the photographer and sees him or her as responsible both for the photograph and for the fact that the photograph is represented one way and not another or conveys one experience rather than another. According to Sontag, the picture’s fate as good or bad is sealed as soon as it is printed on photographic paper. The civil contract of photography shifts the focus away from the ethics of seeing or viewing to an ethics of the spectator, an ethics that begins to sketch the contours of the spectator’s responsibility towards what is visible. The individual ... has the possibility of *positing herself* as the photograph’s addressee and by means of this address is capable of becoming a citizen in the citizenry of photography. (Azoulay [2008] 2014, 130)

In line with Azoulay, I cannot engage with the photograph as a sealed fate, or the idea that the photographer is solely responsible for the way the photograph is taken and how it is read and interpreted. By adopting Azoulay’s methodology, I wish to connect

with the photograph as if it has been taken for me to engage and join with the citizenship of photography in a ‘common interest’ (Azoulay [2008] 2014, 131). In short, my looking at photographs must bring some engagement, some change in how I interact and deal with the issues and questions that will occur in looking at images of violence involving children. It means, that on some level, instead of being a critique of dead, past history, I need to make an engagement in adding meaning to a world that at times can be saturated with images of mind-numbing horror.

### **Outline of the Chapters**

In 1931 Benjamin wrote about the appropriate use of photographic images in *A Short History of Photography*.

The camera is getting smaller and smaller, ever readier to capture fleeting and secret moments whose images paralyse the associative mechanisms in the beholder. This is where the caption comes in, whereby photography turns all life’s relationships into literature, and without which all constructivist photography must remain arrested in the approximate (Benjamin [1931] 1978, 75).

These words by Benjamin written over 80 years ago are still relevant today, cameras have become smaller and smaller via mobile smart phone technology, and, the need for an explanation, the caption, still seems important.

The early chapters of the thesis examine photographs produced in times of burgeoning scientific discoveries, expanding colonialism, and models of Darwinian evolution coexisting alongside religious concepts of superiority and racism. In line with this, Sekula juxtaposes the view of August Sander (again from the 1930s) who described photography ‘as the truth vehicle for an eclectic array of disciplines, not only astronomy, but history, biology, zoology, botany and physiognomy’, against readings of photographs that highlighted ‘the “diseased,” “deviant,” or “biologically inferior” object of cure, reform, or discipline’ (Sekula 1981, 18). Sekula claims that Sander was ‘insensitive to the *epistemological* differences between peoples and cultures’, thus allowing camera bearing scientists ‘to prove the absence of a governing intellect, in criminals, the insane, women, workers, and non-white people’ (Sekula 1981, 18). Sekula’s comments show the need for caution in examining any photograph as often

it is embedded with the views and theories that prevailed at the time they were taken: likewise, too, subversive views may be present without the photographer or viewer being fully aware of what is occurring.

This thesis starts by analysing an early social documentary style photograph in Chapter 1, “Early Disaster Images: Madras Famine 1877”. The photograph, taken by a British army officer during the Madras Famine, is examined with regard to content, history, interpretation and technology. It considers how conventional notions of images of people nearing death are unsettled and discomfited by the photographing of the famine victims in a studio set up. Examined in the context of the available technologies, I ask whether the photograph holds other meanings and readings than those perceived by previous critics.

Camera technology also comes under examination in Chapter 2, “The Trophy Business: Lynching in the South 1916”, in which the photographer not only used an older style camera, but also printed work through the night to sell as photographic trophies to the crowds who assembled to watch the lynching of African-American teenager, Jesse Washington. The lynching is analysed in the context of the post-slavery era and connects to ideas of masculinity, sexuality, control and the link between the carnivalesque atmosphere in which an animal is tortured, killed and barbecued. All these elements come together in the photograph discussed in this chapter, taken by professional photographer Fred Gildersleeve. This chapter also addresses how important context and presentation are in reproductions of such photographic work, in particular, the collection of lynching photographs in the art book *Without Sanctuary: Lynching in America*.

The usage of controversial photographs of children in the context of gallery and art and book settings is taken up again in Chapter 3, “The Bureaucracy of Genocide: Cambodia 1975-1979”. This chapter begins by considering Cambodian pre-execution photographs as a form of defining bureaucratic criminality. One major point of emphasis in this chapter is the fact that the photographs were taken by a teenager, Nhem Ein. Ein’s actions are placed in a context of a climate of fear, abuse and repression, circumstances that turned into genocidal atrocity. Ein’s photographs were taken on a medium format camera, and again the technology relates back to how the images have been used, especially in their subsequent presentation as quasi-art works.

Progressing through to the photo-journalistic era, in Chapter 4, “The Forensic Witness: Vukovar 1996”, the thesis turns to the genre of forensic photography. This chapter looks at a burnt photograph containing images of two children that was recovered from the graves of genocide victims in the former Yugoslavia. The photographer, Gilles Peress, by photographing a precious family photographic artefact, signals that this is unusual and we start questioning what happened to the children and the circumstances surrounding the image. This photograph along with a selection of others taken by Peress were used in the book *The Graves: Srebrenica and Vukovar* which approaches the images and topic in a much more sympathetic way than the publishers discussed in Chapter 2 and 3.

Ariella Azoulay in *The Civil Contract of Photography* advises a sceptical approach when looking at images in war zones ‘where rules concerning the use of photograph are fabricated by those in charge’ (Azoulay [2008] 2014, 146). Similarly, Judith Butler writes in *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?*

This “not seeing” in the midst of seeing, this not seeing that is the condition of seeing, became the visual norm, a norm that has been a national norm, one conducted by the photographic frame in the scene of torture. (Butler 2009, 100)

It is this ‘not seeing’ (Butler 2009, 100) that makes me proceed with caution in the analysis of the Omar Khadr images discussed in Chapter 5, “The Image as Propaganda: Abu Ykhiel to Guantanamo Bay 2002 -2012”. This caution is especially pertinent as the two photographs on which I base the discussion were taken by Western governmental authorities, one, a photograph for a Canadian passport application, the other, a photograph taken by a U.S. soldier in an aftermath of a gun battle. This chapter on the genre of photography as a form of propaganda differs from previous chapters as it threads and traces two images used by opposing sides, one for Khadr, the other against. This chapter introduces the questions raised by the prevalence of digital photography in war zones and the implications of the availability of multiple means of distributing images.

The discussion of the uses of digital technology is further developed in the propaganda, or, trophy photograph discussed in Chapter 6, “Censored Images: Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham 2014”. It centres on the Australian ISIS fighter Khaled Sharrouf’s use of a shocking image of his young son to taunt and provoke the Western

alliance. This chapter deals with a particularly graphic photograph that has been completely censored by the media. Despite this censorship this edited, pixelated photograph contains important insights into presentation and the ethics of spectatorship. Importantly too, it looks at how modern technology and modes of transmission allow the creator to initially avoid censorship thus having more control over the photographs dissemination and the audience.

The thesis concludes with the Chapter, “Refugee Drownings: Mediterranean Sea 2015” which discusses the photograph of Aylan Kurdi, the toddler who drowned with other family members as they fled war torn regions of the Middle East. The revelations in this chapter are designed to challenge our notions of the photographer and the idea of a ‘truth’ in the photographic genre. Here, too, I wish to readdress my original feelings and apprehensions with the works of Sontag and other critics.





## Chapter One

### Early Disaster Images: Madras Famine 1877

Figure 2.1. Willoughby Hooper, Madras Famine. Black and White Photograph, 1877.

*It's 1877, Madras, India. The famine, which will result in the death of millions, is in full swing. There are nine of them, dying, emancipated, led, mustered, and cajoled: a posed photographic scenario of truth and lies blended together. It's so wrong, immoral, cruel: why didn't he feed them? It's so right: the truth, (if there is such a thing), exposed to the world so they too can see the horror of famine. Four of them sit on a bare wooden seat, no padding, no protection for their aching bones, one man, two women with babies on their laps, and, seated on the end, a young child.*

*The light is strong, overhead, rendering their eyes as sunken pits, highlighting cheekbones and defining skin covered ribs. The man who is seated rests his arm*

*comfortably on the back of the seat, although in contrast his face is distorted by a grimace; his chest is bare, as are all the men; a loose material, a loin cloth, draped around his crotch. The women sit breasts exposed, one with her top totally wrapped around her waist, her ribs protruding, perhaps her breasts are still able to provide sustenance and comfort to the infant on her lap. The other woman's top is pulled to the side, hanging off her shoulder to expose one breast, shrivelled, contracted, seemingly devoid of nourishment, she too holds a painfully thin baby. In contrast to the others in the photographs their faces and expressions look angry; as if they have been exposed to yet another indignity. The photographer, as is evident in the posing, demonstrates a bizarre form of artistry that takes it out of what we now expect of the famine genre. Two of the men sit knees raised, side views, heads bent forward crouching in a foetal position, comforting, back to the womb, the position of advanced starvation where death is imminent. The biblical view: what God has given, God will take away. Another rose for his garden, albeit a withered and emaciated one.*

*The man crouching in front looks eerie. Long, lithe limbs, devoid of any muscles, while the others grimace, he is smiling, his time to shine. The posing, the slight tilt of the heads, like the work of a true professional draws us into the scene, leading to the familiar triangular pyramid formation that forces us to stare at the raw nakedness of exposed female flesh. At first you don't want to look, but if you force yourself to over an extended period of time, you note features of pride and dignity, something unexpected, as if there could ever be any dignity in the ignoble death by slow starvation. Some have small necklaces on, understated but whimsically fashionable to the Western eye. The baby on the lap wears a thick bracelet, as does the mother, and both women look like they have tried to brush and part their hair. The men have shaved their heads and in a striking 1877 fashion statement reminiscent of a show of individuality one has shaved the side of his head completely leaving a Mohawk-type feature running down the centre. These bracelets, necklaces, shaved heads, far from devoid of meaning have cultural meaning, religious significance and are traditional markers of status. Despite the closeness to death, these small symbols and rituals are adhered to as they define who they are as individuals. The babies look non-descript, undefinable: one, oblivious to the long exposure necessary in a glass plate negative era, has moved, rendering their features*

*as a slow blur, the other has thrown back their head, abandonment, the light, strong and overhead, obliterating shadows, a pure white face with the strongest feature being the bony arm, twig thin, a clawed bird-like Darwinian appendage.*

### **Prelude to Madras 1877**

The photographer, Willoughby Wallace Hooper, was born in Kennington, England in 1837 and was assigned to the 7th Madras Light Cavalry in British occupied India in 1858. The year before in 1857, the British faced a widespread rebellion from the Indian people caused by a variety of reasons, including a punitive tax system, lack of consideration for religious beliefs and an unrewarding environment that did little to encourage progress and respect. Faced with ongoing revolt, the British deployed more troops to the country and eventually succeeded in suppressing it. After the British regained control, one of their goals was to photograph and document the various tribes and people of India. This project, *The People of India*, contained contributions by many writers and photographers, including the army officer Hooper. The end result filled eight volumes compiled between 1868 and 1875 and contained over 460 pasted-in photographs.

According to Christopher Pinney in *Camera Indica*:

Early photographic projects in India took form within a much broader museological discourse which created parallel registers of images, artefacts and records of behaviour. *The People of India* is a major contribution to this ongoing project of documentation, but more than any other element it had a pragmatic political edge that attempted to directly relate these registers to the pressing question of the sustainability of British rule in India. (Pinney 1997, 35)

*The People of India* was a project conceived by Charles Canning, who would become the first viceroy of India. The aim was to document the ‘topography, architecture and ethnology of that country’ (Watson and Kaye 1868, foreword). Descriptive notes accompanied some photographs and they form part of the text, professing to be no more than:

mere rough notes, suggestive rather than exhaustive, they make no claim to scientific research or philosophic investigation. But although the work does not aspire to scientific eminence, it is hoped that, in an ethnological point of view, it will not be without interest and value. (Watson and Kaye 1868, foreword)

The ethnographical approach of the volumes fits in with the confusing blend of science and religion that was prevalent in the late nineteenth century. Scientists such as Alfred Wallace, Thomas Huxley and Charles Darwin were heralding a new era of understanding, albeit at times combined with current trends and opposing views such as those held by Wallace on spiritualism and phrenology (Schwartz 1984, 284). On the other side, opposing Darwinism, were individuals such as the biologist/geologist Louis Agassiz, who was anti-evolution, blending special creation rhetoric and Polygenism (Dewbury 2007, 132), or more specifically, scientific racism with its pinnacle of Caucasian superiority. People were interested in ordering, calculating and working out where everything was placed in a fast changing world. Other cultures, especially the so-called primitive cultures, were classified and slotted into categories of fauna and zoology with the Caucasian racial type firmly placed on the top, the most caring, most advanced and most civilised. Conquering, colonising the world, the others, so-called inferior members of the human race, had to defer and give – by way of money, or servitude, to their superiors. In some respects, ethnographic photographs such as Hooper's represent a particular style, embodying a set of beliefs and values that at its heart was the inferiority of races of people based on a concoction of science, creation and religion.

According to Chaudhary in *Afterimage of Empire: Photography in Nineteenth-Century India*, a text which discusses Hooper's famine photography at length, this look serves 'two contradictory ends: they satisfy a latent sadistic desire even as they provide the basis for a sympathy that could lead to altruism' (Chaudhary 2012, 176).

The word *sadistic* takes the discussion to a new level. The camera replaces the gun and the photographer becomes a sadist with the hapless viewer by implication, deriving sexual gratification from the image. Sex and violence. This argument against

photography, especially images of death, continues to be raised. Chaudhary's view and Hooper's actions seem to be encompassed by Susan Sontag in *On Photography*:

A photograph is not just the result of an encounter between an event and a photographer; picture-taking is an event in itself, and one with more peremptory rights – to interfere with, to invade, or to ignore whatever is going on. After the event has ended, the picture will still exist, conferring on the event a kind of immortality (and importance) it would never otherwise have enjoyed. Photographing is essentially an act of non-intervention. (Sontag [1977] 2008, 11)

In Hooper's photograph, it is evident that the dying were interfered with, invaded if you will; after all, corralling dying famine victims into a photographic studio and artificially posing them can be seen as a final insult on the march to oblivion. Truthful, too: the photograph has conferred 'a kind of immortality (and importance)' (Sontag [1977] 2008, 11) on an event that we would have just consigned to the history books, to read about, but confer no human face on an event in so distant a past. The photograph ensures, due to what we now see as a controversial approach, that it will endure and have a life, an immortality peculiar to the act of photography. And yes, in the case of most photography, and especially in Hooper's case, it would seem to be 'an act of non-intervention' (Sontag [1977] 2008, 11). Hooper, commissioned to photograph different tribes and social castes, was a hired army officer with a penchant for photography. As he was in the military when he took the famine photographs, he could well have been requested by his superiors to photograph the famine as part of his work as a soldier and part-time photographer. Our view of death is so removed from what it used to be. In the early days of photography, people without cameras of their own at times had photographs made of their children and babies after they had died (Godel 2007, 256). We have sanitised the experience and it has become the forbidden taboo. Photographing the dead or the dying is viewed as callous, a thoughtless indignity.

### **Tinged With Necrophilia**

*My own photography in a niche domestic market avoided the big issues that Hooper tackled, what Chaudhary writes about as 'the ethical conundrums surrounding the*

documentation of suffering (Chaudhary 2012, 169). *Not that I never documented suffering and death, it's just that it was a rarity, not the norm. When I have, I wonder whether the issues are similar or vastly different. Once, I am asked to photograph two young children, a brother and sister, perhaps three and five; boisterous, carefree and happy. The parents bring along the grandparents. It is obvious something is wrong, or perhaps I am acutely aware of observing this as I have been told the grandmother has terminal stomach cancer and has already lost thirty kilos. She is dressed neat and regal alongside her husband who is nervous, flinching, consumed by an energy and angst at the everyday, looming prospect of losing the one he loves. It is, for all intents and purposes, a death photograph. Taken of one about to die. I feel uncomfortable, dry mouthed, sad. What do I say to someone about to die? Treat them normal, or, like the other, still living, yet dead, the living dead. I watch as she winces in pain when one of the children bounces on her stomach. I watch as her partner wanders aimlessly around the lakeside. I photograph: it is bland, uncreative; a death scene memorandum. After the obligatory death scene is photographed, I do what I am really commissioned to do: record photographs of the two children, the still living among the one about to die. I feel it is rather cold, callous; don't separate the two portrait sittings, saves money and time. Photograph the one about to die, with those that embody the vibrancy of life. I know as she painfully walked across the park etched in her mind would have been the knowledge that this was being done because her departure from the land of the living was imminent. I wonder if the posing, the style, the scenario is any different than Hooper's. I wonder if there is, in the company of the one about to die, anything I can do to make a difference. A herbal remedy to add another day or so of life, perhaps a suggestion to her relatives; when death is imminent, a warm blanket to prolong those final moments, so you seemingly suspend time and savour the still living. Perhaps in Hooper's case, he could have offered a meal as a fee for posing? I don't know. It seems so futile, so stupid, but, according to those who judge, so necessary.*

While photography is often looked on as a memory, preserving life, it is also intimately about death. Life and death, truth and lies, judgement and non-judgement. Roland Barthes in a French radio interview with Bernard-Henri Lévy and Jean-Marie Benoist broadcast on the 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1978 talked of his interest in photography as it not only immortalised a person but allowed 'an interest that is tinged with necrophilia, to be

honest, a fascination with what has died but is represented as wanting to be alive' (Calvet [1990] 1995, 220).

It is this morbid fascination, the link between the living and dead that is so disturbing about Hooper's photograph. We know, due to the indexical nature of photography in this time period, that these people existed. We know by looking at them, the emaciated bodies, and the desperation on the mothers' faces, that they are very near death. Looking comes with perversity. It is this unsettling nature of this famine scene that makes us look away, or, find the need to blame someone for the immorality of the scene. To blame Hooper is narrow and a deeper look is needed at both his photograph and the politics behind famine in India.

### **The Politics of Famine**

Famine is far more about money than food. While Hooper's nine subjects were so close to death, thousands outside of the studio were not. To understand the famine we need to look at some of the guiding principles, the forces operating in 1870s India and Britain. The British were greatly influenced by Thomas Malthus, a cleric and famous advocate for population control, the author of the 1798 publication, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*. Malthus stated what he felt was 'an obvious truth, which has been taken notice of by many writers, that population must always be kept down to the level of the means of subsistence' (Malthus 1798, 1). It is from here that Malthus outlines two things he feels are undeniable:

First, That food is necessary to the existence of man.

Secondly, That the passion between the sexes is necessary and will remain nearly in its present state. (Malthus 1798, 3)

According to Malthus, in view of the inability of people, in particular poor people, to control the 'passion between the sexes', the only means of containing a catastrophic explosion of population is a regulation of food supply (Malthus 1798, 3). S. Ambirajan in his article, "Malthusian Population Theory and Indian Famine Policy in the Nineteenth Century", sums up the doctrine: 'if there was not sufficient land to sustain the population, the surplus should be removed either by emigration or by death. The

Malthusians among the Indian servants felt that the Indian famines were doing just that' (Ambirajan 1976, 8).

According to Malthus:

The fare should be hard, and those that were able obliged to work. It would be desirable that they should not be considered as comfortable asylums in all difficulties; but merely as places where severe distress might find some alleviation. (Malthus 1798, 10)

Ambirajan's research showed the 'famines seriously affected only the bottom 20 per cent of the population according to their income or wealth, a class composed of labourers, beggars, potters and weavers, etc' (Ambirajan 1976, 8). In biblical terms, the precedent is set 'For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat' (2 *Thessalonians* 3:10). Little does it matter that the poor may have been willing to work, because with no work available they had no money to buy food. Famine: biblical again, the apocalyptic black horse of Revelation:

Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand. Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures, saying, "A quart of wheat for a day's wages, and three quarts of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!" (*Revelation* 6:5-6).

True to the scriptures, the British did not harm the 'oil and wine' as they continued to tax and reap revenue while handing out a meagre ration 'the quart' only available to those who worked on labour projects at a rate that did little to alleviate starvation.

In 1879, Cornelius Walford, while putting the cost of the 1877 famine in lost revenue and remedial measures at '10 millions sterling' (Walford 1879, 88), also reveals the wealth of the British Empire that was gained from good grain harvests:

It seems an anomaly that, with her famines on hand, India is able to supply food for other parts of the world; but it has to be remembered that the natives



there subsist very much on *rice*, and on inferior cereals designated as “dry crops” of which we know very little in this country; and then there is the internal transport difficulty. It is estimated that a good *grain harvest* in the British Empire and dependencies, and in those countries from which we draw our food supplies, means an aggregate bounty of some 200 millions sterling, “poured from the heavens into earth’s treasury.” (Walford 1879, 126-27)

This view of India as a cash cow for the British Empire is backed up by Romesh Dutt in *Famines and Land Assessments in India*, a study of the Madras famine, which shows the land was over-assessed and taxed at a rate of ‘between twelve and thirty one percent of the gross produce’ (Dutt 1900, 42). These heavily taxed areas meant that the cultivators were often in debt and forced to either pay back loans or risk losing their crops. In the famine of 1877, in true Malthusian style, the poor were made to work on state projects for which they were paid a food wage lower than imprisoned criminals. The famine delegate Sir Richard Temple set the rate of pay at one pound of rice per day:

“I myself think that one pound per diem might be sufficient to sustain life, and the experiment ought to be tried.” The unhappy experiment was tried, and abandoned after three months, and it was also then decided that the weakly persons, incapable of performing half the task work, should be supported at their homes. (Dutt 1900, 33)

Faced with taxation, food shortage and lack of money, the dire situation was complicated even further by greedy moneylenders. Mike Davis in *Late Victorian Holocausts* describes how the ‘annual process of revenue collection began with the impounding of grain in village stockyards. In order to eat from their own harvest, the ryots had to immediately borrow money to pay off their taxes’ (Davis 2001, 325).

The rates were exorbitant and in very little time the borrower found himself before an Indian court which ‘applied English civil law against them with the deadly efficiency of a Maxim gun’ (Davis 2001, 325). The reference to the Maxim gun, a fast loading machine gun capable of firing 500 rounds per minute, is fitting as it was widely viewed as a symbolic colonising weapon (Yazzie 2000, 41). In the famine the punitive

restrictions and punishments were as effective as physically shooting someone. The problem facing the people of Madras in 1877 wasn't a lack of the availability of food, but rather the lack of money to purchase food especially in famine periods when the prices of staples rose dramatically. Not all people in Madras were starving; rather it was the poor and impoverished at the lower end of the socio-economic scale. The British establishment, of which Hooper was a member, deemed it right to allow nature to take its course in famine times as part of their Malthusian model. The burgeoning religious and scientific theories of the day put these dying individuals at the lower end of humanity, little more than brutish beasts.

### **Smiling in the Face of Death**

When I first saw Hooper's photograph I felt sick, I felt that it breaks the norm, or rather what I consider the norm of famine photographs. I have been conditioned to view famine photographs in the photo-journalistic way, a child outside, bowl extended, with Western aid charity, just out of reach, or just about to occur if we just donate a little more. Hooper's artistic posing, studio location, the subjects' nakedness and the multiple images (some of the individuals are used in another photograph) seems to make a spectacle of the victims. I want to break it down, dissect it, a clinical autopsy. His smile. Above all this just gets me. Smile and death don't go together.

Take the controversial case of the photographs of Sabrina Harman posed over the dead body of Al-Jamadi at Abu Ghraib in 2003. Wearing thin green medical gloves, she bends low, thumbs up and an ear to ear smile, posing for the camera over Al-Jamadi's corpse, who died of asphyxiation. In the subsequent backlash, the image of Harman smiling comes to define the event. Errol Morris discusses a conversation he had with editors as he put the finishing touches to his film *Standard Operating Procedure*:

“How can you say she's a good person?” I was sitting in the editing room in Cambridge, Massachusetts, arguing with one of my editors. I replied, “Well, exactly what is it that she did that is so bad?” We were arguing about Sabrina Harman, one of the notorious “seven bad apples” convicted of abuse in the Abu Ghraib scandal. My editor was becoming increasingly irritable. He looked at me as you would a child. “What did she do that is so bad? Are you joking?”

And then he brought up his trump card, the photograph with the smile. “How do you get past that? The smile? Just look at it. Come on”. (Morris 2011, 97)

The more Morris investigates the case, the more the smile keeps on being raised prompting Morris to send twenty pictures of Harman to Paul Ekman, professor emeritus of psychology at the University of California, a facial expression expert.

It’s something you learn a lot about when you have done thousands of portraits, the fake smile, the camera smile, exasperated parents yelling at their kids to smile properly, the scars carried into adulthood where the very sight of a camera produces a kitsch curl of the lips and baring of the teeth. I understand the fake smile in real practical terms; Ekman understands the smile in scientific terms, the cheesy smile, ‘zygomaticus major’ with ‘the absence of the orbicularis oculi pars lateralis’ (Morris 2011, 115).

Harman, according to Ekman, is faking it.

Most people will not realize that’s a say-cheese smile. They’ll think, because of the broadness of the smile and the thumbs-up gesture, they’re having a good time. That’s what makes this a damning picture to the typical viewer. I’ll add one more thing. When we see someone smile, it’s almost irresistible that we will smile back at them. Advertisers know that. That’s why they link products to smiling faces. And when we smile back, we begin to experience some enjoyment. So this photograph makes us complicit in enjoying the horrible. And that’s revolting to us. (Morris 2011, 116)

Ekman has tapped into something, not so much the smiling photograph, but our reaction to it.

It is not an upsetting photograph just because we see someone smiling in the context of the horrible, but because when we look at her, we have to resist smiling ourselves. We see her smile and start smiling ourselves. But when we see the dead man, we recoil in horror. Our “almost irresistible” need to smile

makes us feel complicit in the man's death. And it makes us angry. (Morris 2011, 116)

*Is this why Hooper's photograph is so unsettling? Is that man smiling? It seems inappropriate. I find myself wanting to smile back, to share, be complicit, I find it irresistible. His smile isn't like Harman's, it's more subdued, not as broad, any sign of the presence of orbicularis oculi pars lateralis is obliterated in the strong overhead lighting. Perhaps, I, like those who interpret Harman, get it wrong and all I am seeing is a grimace of pain, or discomfort. That is the nature of photography: one frozen moment, one expression caught in infinitely more possibilities. Perhaps it is the bared teeth of a man soon to die, a grinning skull, a smile in the face of inevitable death.*

Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* describes photographers as 'determined upon the capture of actuality,' yet unaware 'that they are agents of Death' (Barthes [1980] 1982, 92). The photographic image of a living person becomes a precursor to death, no man's land, purgatory, the link between the two opposite states, death and life. Philippe Aries in "The Reversal of Death: Changes in Attitudes Towards Death in Western Societies" looks at death in literature and death in life and the large gap between the two.

Although literature has continued its discourse on death, with, for example, Sartre or Genet's "mort sale," ordinary men have become mute and behave as though death no longer existed. The chasm between the discussion of death in books, which is still prolific, and actual death, which is shameful and not to be talked about, is one of the strange but significant signs of our times. (Aries 1974, 537)

### **Those About to Die**

*People don't die anymore they pass on. Like everyday fodder, roast meat, vegetables and gravy; pass the salt please, a little condiment to make life palatable. No wonder photography is reviled. It makes us uncomfortable, the twilight in-between world, neither dead nor alive, lukewarm. A fragmented childhood memory comes back, the nether world of bizarre cultism, the booming voice of pious superiority: 'I wish you were either hot or cold. But because you are lukewarm I will vomit you out of my mouth.' I am neither refreshingly cold, nor, invigoratingly hot. I am lukewarm; the*

*cup of tea left on the side that forms a slight skin before it goes rancid. Faced with this skin, the thin membrane that separates two different worlds, we retreat. It is uncomfortable, unfamiliar, we prefer our own version of the world cocooned, sheltered, oblivious to what exists beyond the membrane, fetuses cushioned in the amniotic fluid of our lives. A photographer. Vomited out of the mouth, strangely it does not leave a bad taste. I get Hooper, and I get the critics.*

In *Purity and Danger* Mary Douglas writes:

Occasionally the odd species or individual gets out of line and humans react by avoidance of one kind or another. The very reaction to ambiguous behaviour expresses the expectation that all things shall normally conform to the principles which govern the world. (Douglas 1966, 178)

Douglas observes how ‘punishments, moral pressures’, rules and a ‘firm ritual framework’ all play a role in defining and modifying a person’s behaviour (Douglas 1966, 178). The photograph and photographer, especially in the case of Hooper’s famine photograph, break the rule. The photograph is the link between two worlds – the living and the dead. Hooper’s photograph shows us the forbidden. Those about to die. If they had fleshed out bodies, muscle under the skin, we would not give it a passing thought, save for perhaps a jibe about his abusive colonial take on a female breast. Faced with the truth – after all it is pretty hard to fake a famine photograph – we face our own mortality. If it was a written account we might read and understand it, but, would it etch in our memory? The photograph etches: it draws us to the inevitable conclusion that they are going to die (and have died) and we are going to die. With the need to lash out, we hit out at the very person who shows us the truth, the person who records what is going to happen not in a year, but in a few weeks; the photographer who dares record those about to die.

Hooper does more than reveal our discomfort about death, he also records our uncomfortableness about sex, nakedness and sensuality. He has exposed the women’s breasts. Looking at starving famine victims is hard enough, but, looking at contrived nakedness is even more disturbing. After viewing hundreds of early photographs of Indian women, it becomes evident to me that exposed breasts are not the norm; rather

most women cover them. Hooper's photograph plays with us, because he knows this is the case. We now have to confront two worlds we prefer to keep hidden, death and sex. One woman sits with her cloth covering one breast, with the other one exposed. The other sits with her top pulled asunder, cropped in a bundle around her emaciated waist. It is deliberate. Not only are we confronted with a 'shameful death', we are also confronted with an image that demeans. There is a connection with ethnographic images such as John Lindt's semi-naked Australian Aboriginals (Grafton Regional Gallery, 22) and Joseph Zealy's 1850 commissioned daguerreotype of a topless girl, daughter of a slave, photographed to further the racist theories of Louis Agassiz (Wallis 1995, 50-51). There are far too many to list, dark skinned people, women, marginalised and abused. The other. This is my first take on the images. In looking at the exposed breasts it is hard not to think of the obsession that the explorers and collectors had for the various races they encountered in their travels. It is also possible that the flaccid breast tissue of the famine victims emphasised their marginalisation and the right of the British to allow slow starvation to take its inevitable toll. Kathleen Wilson in *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* concludes: 'Through "naturalism" in visual and textual accounts, the conflation of the cultural and the physical gets presented as a social fact, and pendulous breasts come to signify, and legitimate, the ethnological notion of the savage' (Wilson 2003, 183).

I look again and again: then one night, I wonder if there could be a different take. Could there be an altruistic compassionate reason? The breast as an object of nurturing?

### **The Duality of Breasts**

The breast is as confusing as a photograph. The no man's land of nurture or desire. It is an erogenous zone, capable of giving sexual pleasure; it is also a means of sustenance, capable of sustaining life. It is confusing. During intercourse the breast is often sexualised, then, confronted by a baby feeding we try to desexualise, it doesn't work very well. Bernice Hausman in "Things (Not) to do with Breasts in Public: Maternal Embodiment and the Biocultural Politics of Infant Feeding" says, 'there seems to be a general proscription against images of lactating breasts. This failure to imagine breastfeeding suggests a disavowal of women's specific embodiment as

mothers' (Hausman 2006, 480). Hausman goes on to discuss the cover of the August 2006 issue *Babytalk* which showed a baby latched on to a breast. The response, over 700 letters, showed that 'Americans do not want to see breasts in public.' 'One woman stated to a reporter, "I don't want my son or husband to accidentally see a breast they don't want to see"' (Hausman 2006, 479). This response is interesting as it is not a wife, or daughter, that the concern is about, but rather, the husband, or the son. Confronted with a breastfeeding mother (heaven forbid if a nipple was exposed) the husband and son do not know how to react. If they look and stare a moment too long, they risk objectifying and sexualising the breast, if they notice and look away, and then avoid any glances, or eye contact, they have already by their actions and embarrassment objectified and sexualised the breast. Damned if you do, damned if you don't. The correct response, of course, is to act like it is normal, which it is. It is so natural, so normal, it is so unnatural, so abnormal.

*I look again at the Hooper photograph. I find it difficult to see it in a different light, it just looks so confronting, so unnatural. I wonder if this is my British, strict religious heritage coming through, traumatised by childhood imagery of fakery. I want to understand the image more. I take Moleskin post-it notes and cover the other people so I am left concentrating on the two women and their children, grey lines and white, edged with baby green. I hate to say it, I feel it may come across as colonial racism, but, I am glad their breasts are showing. It is horrific. I feel palpable anger, not from me but from the faces of the women. They look so angry. Why not, in those about to die? But it is more than that, it is those about to die with children who are also about to die. Kudos to Hooper. The monster lighting works. Strong overhead, it defines the bones, every thin protruding one. The eyes, the window of the soul, blackened in their sockets, dark, moody, deathly.*

Figure 2.2. Chris Lewis, Digital Print, 2015.

*Again I look; initially in my prudish Britishness, I have read the anger in their faces as a reaction to the humiliation (probably not the correct word) of sitting with their breasts exposed, another insult in their indignant march to the grave. Now, devoid of the other distractions in the photograph, I see something else. It is the helplessness of two women who know their children are about to die. No longer is it about exposed breasts, no longer is it about an old famine photograph to pull apart and decipher 120 years after it was taken. This is about two mothers and their two babies. The anger, the injustice, destined to die, yes destined to die because of their status at birth, the lowly ones who cannot change what will be.*

### **Altruism and False Sympathy**

*The British Medical Journal* defines the progress of death by starvation in the 1985 article by A. Stewart Truswell, “Malnutrition in the Third World – 1” as ‘lax, pale skin with pigmented patches, subnormal temperature, bloody diarrhoea, diminished insulin, ketosis, metabolic acidosis, sinus brachycardia, leucopenia and thrombocytopenia’ (Truswell 1985, 526). Truswell defines severe starvation in a weight for height ratio of under 70% with advanced malnutrition becoming completely



inactive assuming a flexed foetal position (Truswell 1985, 526). I look at Hooper's photograph again, and what I assume was his posing, returning to the womb, the foetal position, now appears as a true reflection of a medical famine phenomenon. Hooper is either aware of this, and poses accordingly, or, these people, those about to die, crouch in the foetal position. It is position of comfort. Rocking in bed, frightened about the world, we curl foetus-like to get some relief. But there is no relief for these people.

This is not just about death from starvation, but life without food. The absence of food will cause death but at the time of the taking of the photograph they still had life. So what does a starving person do all day long, as the days go into weeks, and the weeks to months, as they wait to die? I assume they do what we all do; the photograph reveals subtle hints that this is the case. There has been an attempt to brush and part the hair of the women. The men have shaved parts of their head and beards. The children, men and women still have bracelets and ornaments, necklaces around their necks. The two women sit with their dying babies on their lap and have not abandoned them. They cling to hope that things may get better. The prognosis is a terminal one, death. Faced with it they try to live life as normally as possible, a life almost devoid of any hope for the future, but not quiet. I wonder about their end of day, the twilight never-world where light gives way to darkness, hope gives way to fear, day goes to night, what do they do? No food for yet another day. Do they talk, cuddle, fuss, bath children, plan for tomorrow, stroke someone's cheek, wipe away a tear? I don't know. Do they rally against an unfair system, sit and watch the sunset and wonder if they will see sunrise? Do they lay naked against each other to feel the closeness of skin against skin, the soft reassuring pounding of a heartbeat? I don't know. Sentiment, sympathy 'that could lead to altruism' (Chaudhary 2012, 176).

Hooper's work did lead to sympathy, altruism. Once his work was viewed overseas there was an outpouring of sympathy, indignation and numerous cash donations. According to Chaudhary, the Christian children's magazine *Weslyan Juvenile Offering* regularly printed drawings of famine victims that were taken from Hooper's photographs (Chaudhary 2012, 171, 180), leading to children donating pocket money to the relief fund. (Three children in England asked to forgo a trip to the sea-side and go without butter and sugar for a week with the savings going to the fund, and in Australia some gaol prisoners asked to halve their food intake to contribute. [Digby

1878, Vol 2. 90, 466]). Part of this large response is directly related to the use of Hooper's photographs in various different formats as can be seen in the speech by Surgeon General George Smith:

The illustrated journals, too, deserve special notice. By a correct reproduction of sketches and of photographs of famine scenes they greatly assisted in bringing home to the public some of the terrible catastrophe. The hearts of men were moved to their very depths, and liberality was evoked which saved thousands of lives. The photographs from Madras told effectually their own tale of sorrow and suffering. (Digby 1878, Vol 2, 467)

Christina Twomey and Andrew May in the article, "Australian Responses to the Indian Famine, 1876-78: Sympathy, Photography and the British Empire" analyse other famine relief funds of the same period and conclude that, due to the power of the visual, that is, Hooper's photographs, the money donated was well above the other relief funds (Twomey and May 2012, 233-252). The use of the photographs in the campaign is an early example of how photography has been used to aid and assist in altruistic donations especially as the photographs did not have the official sanction of the British government (Twomey and May 2012, 259). At the time of the Madras famine the British Parliament and some of the press were scathing against Hooper for photographing so many famine victims and not feeding them. Likewise Hooper's reasons for taking the photographs have been questioned. Chaudhary writes:

Whether or not Hooper personally felt sympathetic or unsympathetic to any of his photographic subjects is, from an institutional as well as from a technophenomenological point of view, an irrelevant question. In fact, reports circulated in *Punch* and other publications that Hooper would group famine victims together, take his photograph, and then ask them to move along without providing any assistance. And yet not only are these photographs mobilized today in contemporary accounts that aim to foster sympathy with the famine victims; they have also provided the basis for the entire tradition of famine photography, complete with repetitions of essentially the same ethical conundrums surrounding the documentation of suffering. (Chaudhary 2012, 169)

On the commercial aspect of Hooper's work, Chaudhary says the photographs 'circulated in private photographic collections, commercially produced albums, and as postcards into the early twentieth century' (Chaudhary 2012, 155). The work was widely copied by other people and used, presumably in an altruistic way, to support the donation process for the famine relief.

Tied into the commercial usage of the photographs is the cost of producing the photograph. In the era of film the cost of producing photographs was extremely high and the glass plate negative work that Hooper was doing would have been very labour intensive and expensive. When faced with work based on sympathy or altruism there seems to be a notion that you should not be paid for it. This seems particularly true of photography. Modern day charities tug at our heart strings and often we, photographers, are asked to donate time and services free or at a greatly reduced rate even as the charity itself, while not for profit, generates huge amounts of money. While Chaudhary maintains that it is irrelevant whether Hooper was sympathetic or unsympathetic, he makes a point of indicating that he was not. In situations of famine, faced with starving people, it is the photographer who is often chastised for not providing food or assistance. Still, the usage of Hooper's photographs generated thousands of dollars for the famine relief fund, far in excess of what would have been achieved without them.

In India there were still grain supplies, shops providing food, exporting produce to England while people were dying for want of money to buy food. Perhaps Hooper should have given food: perhaps soldiers should not guard rice, shopkeepers could have given food free, and, I could go on. Judging Hooper is a shooting of the messenger: to ease the collective role in the raping and pillaging of India, it is easy to condemn the person who exposes it, the whistle-blower (albeit Hooper himself was very much part of the establishment involved).

So where does this leave us with regard to understanding Hooper's photograph better? That, I think, depends on the viewer. The famine photographs of Hooper do not seem to allow for a middle ground. Chaudhary devotes a whole chapter to Hooper, and it is evident where his opinion lies. He discusses Hooper's false sympathy and sadism

along with the faked tiger hunts, delayed executions and lack of compassion surrounding Hooper. The discussions portray a flawed man, a photographer lacking a conscience. It seems that in the debate about Hooper's famine photography, it is not about what he saw and photographed and the response to that work: it is what he did not, or allegedly did not do that evokes ire. We may be condemned for our false sympathy and our sadistic pleasure in viewing the unfortunate, but Hooper is condemned more, then and now, for not assisting. Alex Selwyn-Holmes in the blog, "W. Willoughby Hooper on Famine" discusses Hooper as an early practitioner of famine photography with the ensuing debate taking sides for and against. Nihav posts:

Not giving food when u are so closely associated with the situation reeks of cruelty (and it's completely hypocritical to say that the photographer has 'done his bit' by raising awareness in the outside world – if he was so concerned he could have given the starving people a simple meal). U may argue saying that the photographer went all the way to take the picture, but he/she makes a living out of taking those photographs. A painter would pay their model to sit for them (I'm guessing photographers would do the same). In this case, the least u could do is provide food... (Selweyn-Holmes 2011)

With millions dying in Madras during the two year famine, a simplistic view would be that Hooper should have fed them at least one meal, some rice perhaps without dhal or meat, definitely no beef. This simplistic view seems to be repeated often. Hooper, as has already been commented on, was criticised at the time and repeatedly since. So let us for a moment assume that he fed the individuals he photographed, say a diem each, the ration of the day, a fee for their participation in the photo shoot. What happens the next day? Do they return and get another feed? What if Hooper fed them for a week? Would the word spread and all other famine victims come to the altruistic photographer? Would this have incurred wrath and condemnation from the establishment? It was not just the British who had access to food, but also a large percentage of the Indian population. The famine started with the most marginalised, lowest paid, lowest viewed denizens of Madras. Millions died, millions survived. If Hooper had fed them as a fee what would that have achieved? It would, perhaps, have added a sympathetic touch to his work, but, once analysed the question would have to be asked, what then? A photographer who photographs his starving subject, feeds them

a meal, then sends them on their way to death. What a sadistic approach, it is not even latent. There is no answer, no solution. It was too late for that. Simple solutions are left to those that judge.

As a professional photographer I question how I would have approached the subject of photographing famine victims in 1877. It seems that those who have been able to show wide panoramic shots of horror scenes such as Salgado's photographs of huge Rwandan refugee camps get less scrutiny than someone like Hooper who fleshes out the scene with visible, some-what personalised individuals. Yet, while Hooper's focus is narrower, the framework he is working with is just as epic as Salgado's. The truth of each photographer's work is concealed in a framework that does not reveal the whole truth. Part of this concealment of truth in regard to Hooper's photograph is integral because of restrictions faced by practitioners of the Wet Plate technology used in that time period. In appendix 1 I have enclosed an extract from Jack Cato's book *The Story of the Camera in Australia* which outlines the technology and process. Suffice to say photographers had to have a large amount of equipment nearby resulting in staged photographs similar to Hooper's. People being photographed had to endure long exposure times of several seconds that could produce scenes that seem, at first glance, abusive and controlling. The staged famine photographs are nothing like the documentary style ones we see today; likewise the baby's blurred distorted face shows the limitations of technology bereft of a fast shutter speed to freeze action. The bizarre result of these technological restraints are evident in Hooper's photograph.

Perhaps too, drawing from the photographs of Salgado and Hooper, something is occurring that segregates the living from the dying, the acceptance and denial. In Hooper's time period the dying, the starving walked among the living; this, as we see by looking at the Hooper photograph, is confronting. Who, as an affluent Westerner, or Indian, wants to buy, or eat food, while looking at these skin and bone figures deemed unworthy of assistance? Shopkeepers kept armed guards and some of the starving died at the front of the store unable to get food. Salgado shows the modern day refugee camp, interned, fed by volunteers and charities, but, ultimately sealed off, restricted in how far they can go. For the rest of us, those even in close proximity to those camps, life can go on, happy, well-fed and oblivious to what may be happening. Truth and lies blended together.









## Chapter Two

### The Trophy Business: Lynching in the South 1916

Figure 3.1. Fred Gildersleeve, Lynching of Jesse Washington. Sepia-toned Photograph, 1916.

*Fred Gildersleeve's photograph, taken in Waco, Texas in May 1916, shows a large crowd torturing and lynching the teenage African American, Jesse Washington. The print is used as a double page spread to form the end papers for the Twin Palms book, Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America. The black and white photograph has been sepia toned, a brown stain on humanity. Washington is framed slightly off-centre with the photographer high above shooting down from a distance to record as many in the crowd as possible. What looks like a chain has been wrapped around Washington's neck and pulled over the fork in the tree where a man, sleeves rolled up, holds the other end to pull him up and down to maximise the time it will take him to die. Below Washington is a large pile of wood that*

*smoulders; enough to cause pain and produce smoke, but, not enough to provide a quick death. In front, another man wields a cane, a birch, blurred at the end, signifying movement as he beats the collapsed, prostrate body. The white men in the crowd are dressed neatly, some in suits, others with collared shirts with ties. Most of them wear hats; while their delicate pale skin is protected from the sun's rays, the black skin of Washington blisters from the heat of the fire. There is a sense of comradeship, not just because of the sheer number, or close proximity of body to body, but, also in the way hands and arms drape casually across one another's shoulders. This is a communal experience, one to be prolonged and savoured. The original owner of this now vintage print has marked an X (Allen [2000] 2003, inside cover) in black ink to show his position in the crowd. The X is a timely reminder that this occasion was to be shared not only amongst the crowd but also with those that weren't there.*

### **The Colour of Death**

In the article, "The Tears of Photography", Herta Wolf says 'the actual referents of photographic images are to be found not *in* the images themselves but in the discourses that influence the way they are read' (Wolf 2007, 83). It is with this in mind, before I discuss the Gildersleeve photograph; I wish to look at how the phenomenon of lynching developed after the abolition of slavery, its connections with racist ideologies and iconographies that located black bodies as animalistic and nonhuman and the American social tradition of barbecues, and how photography links both in its celebratory nature, steeped in racial sadism printed onto a paper medium for future gloating.

Hugh Thomas in *The Slave Trade: The History of the Atlantic Slave Trade 1440 – 1870* dates one of the earliest examples of European slavery to when the Portuguese brought 235 African slaves to Portugal in August 1444 (Thomas 1997, 21-22). While it would be another hundred years before England visited the West coast of Africa, the concept of judging colour based on religious grounds and perceived interpretations of what constituted beauty was already engrained in English society. Winthrop Jordan in the classic text *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro 1550-1812* writes:

White and black connoted purity and filthiness, virginity and sin, virtue and baseness, beauty and ugliness, beneficence and evil, God and the devil.

Whiteness, moreover, carried a special significance for Elizabethan Englishmen: it was, particularly when complemented by red, the color of perfect human beauty, especially *female* beauty. This ideal was already centuries old in Elizabeth's time and their fair Queen was its very embodiment: her cheeks were "roses in a bed of lillies". (Jordan 1968, 7)

The recurring themes of judgement based on skin colour were often justified and explained, in a religious, or, scientific belief system. It is these belief systems and viewpoints of the white perpetrators that cause them to carry such an air of superiority that they viewed themselves with sanctimonious righteousness, placing people of colour in the category of non-human. The July 1916 edition of *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races*, while noteworthy for its supplement discussing the lynching of Washington, also bears testimony to the categorisation of coloured people as the 'other' as shown in the proposal of the Washington branch of the American Bible Society:

A great pageant had been planned on the "Bible and Human Life" to celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of the organization. They proposed, however that the colored people, not being "human," should have a "separate" pageant, for which the Bible Society would pay. The proposition was unanimously rejected by the colored ministers: I found myself saying, How this wretched, miserable, utterly unworthy spirit of race prejudice injects its poison into everything. (DuBois 1916, 134)

As if it was not enough for believers in God to view African-Americans as non-human, they fared no better under proponents of Darwinian evolution. Nicole Rafter in *The Criminal Brain: Understanding Biological Theories of Crime* said that nearly all nineteenth century criminologists after reading *The Origin of Species* concluded that 'the law-abiding are among the most perfect products of evolutionary progress and criminals must therefore be closer to less evolved forms of life – apes and dark-skinned savages' (Rafter 2008, 94).

In the book *The Descent of Man* Charles Darwin perpetuates the racism with his hope of a gap that would elevate the so called 'civilised races':

The break will then be rendered wider, for it will intervene between man in a more civilised state as we may hope, than the Caucasian and some ape as low as a baboon, instead of at present between the Negro or Australian and the gorilla. (Darwin 1871, 201)

Figure 3.2. G.R.G. Corr, Illustrated Tableau from *Types of Mankind*, 1854.

During this period naturalist Professor Agassiz presented a counter view that man was a product of multiple direct creations, not evolution, or a single pair of created descendants, allowing for specific racial groups, and the view that some humans were created inferior (see Figure 3.2). These ideas are frequently shown in the publication Agassiz collaborated on, *Types of Mankind*, including insinuations ‘that the Negro races possess about nine cubic inches less of brain than the Teuton’ (Nott and Gliddon 1854, 189).

The bottom line with all these religious, evolutionary, and purportedly scientific viewpoints was that dark skinned people were morally and intellectually deficient. The progress to the pinnacle of humanity, whiteness, started from the darkest skin colour and progressed its way through till it became white. This shameful viewpoint allowed atrocities to be committed in the name of God, science or whatever excuse was garnered to prove the superiority of the white person. Or, as Leon Litwack writes in “‘Hellhound on my Trail’: Race Relations in the South”:

The social sciences validated theories of black degeneracy and inferiority, providing scholarly footnotes to traditional racist assumptions and helping justify on “scientific” grounds a complex of racial laws and practices. (Litwack 1998, 197)

With religion, science and alternate theories pointing to the inferiority of coloured people this led to a racism which is defined by George Fredrickson in *Racism a Short History* as having:

two components: *difference* and *power*. It originates from a mindset that regards “them” as different from “us” in ways that are permanent and unbridgeable. In all manifestations of racism from the mildest to the most severe, what is being denied is the possibility that the racializers and the racialized can coexist in the same society, except perhaps on the basis of domination and subordination. (Fredrickson 2003, 9)

These differences in the whites’ minds were ‘permanent and unbridgeable’ and as such the former slaves could only exist ‘on the basis of domination and subordination’ leading to the practise and ritualised spectatorship of death: lynching.

### **The Birth of Lynching in America**

The lynching of Jesse Washington, and, for that matter, all lynchings, showed that the perpetrators not only felt they were above the law, they were the law. Phillip Dray, in *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America*, traces the term lynching back to the American Revolutionary War when a justice of the peace, a Quaker called Charles Lynch with ‘some of his neighbours created an informal court in Chestnut Hill to deal with suspected Tories and horse thieves’ (Dray 2003, 21). If found guilty, in true Biblical style where the maximum number of strokes to be administered was not to exceed forty (Deuteronomy 25:3), they were ‘tied to a walnut tree in his front yard and given thirty nine lashes’ (Dray 2003, 21). This ‘homegrown summary justice’ produced ‘the uniquely American confidence that there are no societal functions off-limits to individuals; in a word, that anyone can do anything, including enforce the law’ (Dray 2003, 20, 21). This set of belief systems allowed abuse to flourish and included punishment against anyone who called into question the legality, or right, of people to practise homespun vigilante justice.

Although the American Revolutionary War from 1775-83 gave independence from England and its crippling tax system, it did not give freedom to enslaved people of colour who had already experienced several centuries of enslavement to European nations. In antebellum America slavery and abolition came to the fore as other countries relinquished their use of slaves. According to Dray, in an attempt to resist the intrusive nature of the Northern abolitionists, the South resorted to night patrols aimed at controlling people of colour who faced the prospect of experiencing severe penalties of intense brutality (Dray 2003, 27). These punishments as described by Theodore Weld in *American Slavery As It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses* often left 'permanent scars and ridges', the slaves 'mangled flesh' further assaulted with chilli, salt, hot brine and turpentine (Weld 1839, 62).

These events became the catalyst for the Civil War in 1860 when seven Southern States seceded and formed a Confederation of States in a revolt designed to retain black people in slavery. With the Northern States not recognising the secession tensions escalated until war broke out with an eventual death toll reaching 625,000. The Confederates, defeated in 1865, had to rebuild in a post-slavery world. While being defeated was humiliating, giving up on slaves meant giving up on free labour and a possession that one could treat and control anyway he or she liked. In 1865, the same year the war ended, according to Patsy Sims in *The Klan*, 'six young confederate army veterans gathered ... to form a club to relieve their postwar boredom' (Sims 1988, 3). This group 'draped themselves and their horses in sheets', delighting in tormenting 'recently freed slaves' and gaining notoriety as their 'nocturnal appearances soon evolved from innocent to violent, spreading across the Reconstruction-torn South' (Sims 1988, 3).

The Klan was not some innocent fraternity, but an aggressive response to the perceived power of the newly liberated former slaves. Shrouded in white, the Klan became synonymous with the torture and persecution of black people, a symbol of terror and white supremacy. Reverting back to antebellum America with its use of nightriding and the increased use of the whip, 'prolonged and often ritualistic', with the women naked from the waist up, the Klan 'explicitly reminded blacks of their former status' (Dray 2003, 43).

The act of stripping someone and ritualistically beating them indicates sexual pleasure is being obtained by the perpetrators. Lynching, with its sadistic floggings and torture often including the removal of genitalia, had sexual overtones. Jordan notes white men's obsession with the size of Negro genitalia commenting:

If a perceptible anatomical difference did in fact exist, it fortuitously coincided with the already firmly established idea of the Negro's special sexuality; it could only have served as striking confirmation of that idea, as salt in the wounds of the white man's envy. (Jordan 1968, 159)

Freedom from slavery had not led to freedom from abuse. The sexualised treatment of women and the numerous restrictions placed on all African-Americans firmly established a hierarchal system with them at the bottom. After the civil war, with slaves now free, the South resorted to the practice of lynching that combined together several elements of power: genital mutilation, flogging, torture and ultimately death. The difference between antebellum times and the time period after abolition was the shift in the nature of possession. Before the civil war, the enslaved African-American was a valuable commodity, a savage whipping did not kill; rather, it branded a mark of ownership. With the abolition of slavery, ownership gone, the spectacle of lynching reinvigorated a sense of power, control and possession. There existed an odd duality: on the one hand, the shrouded white Klan members with identities and bodies hidden wreaking havoc and torture for fun; on the other, the lynchers, whose identities as participants and onlookers were open and unabashed, where centuries worth of control, torture and anger could be meted out in one session.

In 1916, at the lynching of Jesse Washington, the thousands of onlookers did not cover their identity. There was no need for anonymity; they had the support of the town officials, religious ministers, and behind them was the weight of Southern justice, lynching style. The only person shrouded, covered in a cloth, was Fred Gildersleeve, a renowned professional photographer (Dray 2003, 218) in the Waco region. His cloth was black, not white. Gildersleeve was old school. Despite the advancement in photography, he remained in the past, and was a figure greatly admired in Waco. According to Terri Ryan in an interview with Texas radio stations, he affectionately went by the name of 'Gildy' or the 'Matthew Brady of Waco', a comparison to Matthew Brady, the famous photographer who recorded graphic images of the Civil

War (Ryan 2010). Gildersleeve, 'preferred a Brady-style box camera that he balanced on a wooden tripod pulling a black cloak over his head' (Ryan 2010), a technology used fifty years earlier. Draped in a black cloak that blocked out any light or peripheral vision, face obscure, like an ancient hangman, he practised his craft. The black cloth: a hangman hiding his identity from the crowd, a judge donning the cap as a sentence of death is passed. Judge, executioner and photographer. The black cloth helped him hone and concentrate his senses to focus on the scene of torture with its accompanying smell of barbecued flesh and the screams of pain amidst the jeers of the crowd. While the white shrouds of the Klan hypocritically look clean and pure, symbolising the supremacy of whiteness, equally, the black cloth of Gildersleeve was rich in symbolism: condemnation, judgement, and death.

### **Trophies, Pigs, Picnics and James Baldwin (*Meet the Man*)**

This symbolism, the sense of theatre, is a spectacle that is reminiscent of the slaughter of an animal and its subsequent use as a trophy display, be it on a wall, or, in a photograph. Suvendrini Perera says in the article "Dead Exposures: Trophy Bodies and Violent Visibilities of the Nonhuman":

What distinguishes the trophy among this multiplicity of relations, organic and inorganic, living and dead, at the edge of human, are its aesthetics of exposure, display and performance, its representation and re-production as artifact and performance of the bodies and properties of that which has been captured or killed. (Perera 2014, 3)

This sense of performance, the interplay between killing and viewing another person as nonhuman, an animal commodity, can be seen by comparing the treatment of pigs and the lynched victim which culminated in acts of sadistic ritualistic torture. Erich Fromm in *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* describes sadism as:

the passion to have absolute and unrestricted control over a living being, whether an animal, a child, a man, or a woman. To force someone to endure pain or humiliation without being able to defend himself is one of the manifestations of absolute control, but it is by no means the only one. The person who has complete control over another living being makes this being into his thing, his property, while he becomes the other being's god. (Fromm 1973, 288-9)



Fromm connects sadism, not only to dominating another human being, but also to controlling animals. One of the great Southern traditions was the barbeque, and the links between the treatment of animals, notably the hog, is evident in the procedures and iconographies in the lynchings of African-Americans. This is demonstrated, for example, in the note accompanying the lynching photograph of William Stanley taken by the Katy Electric Studio in Texas: 'This is the barbeque we had last night my picture is to the left with a cross over it your son Joe' (Allen [2000] 2003, plate 26). At a barbeque and at a lynching the proceedings were drawn out, social and celebratory. S. Johnathan Bass in the article, "'How 'bout a Hand for the Hog': The Enduring Nature of the Swine as a Cultural Symbol in the South", notes that 'local communities slaughtered hogs as part of harvest festival celebrations' (Bass 1995, 306). In the article "The Antebellum Southern Herdsman: A Reinterpretation", Forrest McDonald and Grady McWhiney list three different ways hogs were raised, including large hog drives and free range grazing where they 'fatten themselves in the woods' (McDonald and McWhiney 1975, 159). Like hogs being driven and flushed out from the woods many hunted African-Americans were likewise subject to a drive, a flushing, as they were beaten, whipped and humiliated before they were eventually lynched.

This ritualisation of hunting, flushing hogs mirrored the practice of lynching. Simon Harrison who likens lynching to game hunting in *Dark Trophies: Hunting and the Enemy Body in Modern War* breaks down the stages of lynching: first, a hunt for the accused, second, an identification by the white victim, third, an announcement of the time of the lynching, fourth, the killing and mutilation, and finally, the photograph of the scene (Harrison 2012, 108). The photograph was an integral part of the lynching, just as it was an integral part of the conquest of game animals by white colonial hunters. The resulting paper trophy, the photograph, allowed for a preservation of the event. It allowed for a replaying of the prowess of the white protagonist, be it in the slaughter of an animal or a lynching. In the subsequent months and years, the photographic paper trophy allowed the viewers and the perpetrator to relive, recall, and gloat over the show of power and control. Food, drink, celebrations and ritualised torture, (even in game animals often the first shot does not kill instantly but a bloody trail leads to the struggling, dying victim) followed by the obligatory, triumphant, victory photograph.

Figure 3.3. Fred Gildersleeve, Waco Crowd. Sepia-toned Photograph, 1916.

The late James Baldwin's famous short story "Going to Meet the Man" underscores the connection between racial and sexual sadism, lynching and the picnic carnival atmosphere where there is a hint of sexuality, tension in the way Baldwin describes the scene, 'thin legs', a group of men, laughing, dressing up and the shared wink with other men (Baldwin [1965] 1997, 1757). Baldwin describes the woman in his story as putting on 'a better dress, the dress she wore to church' (Baldwin [1965] 1997, 1757). Lynchings, like the attendance of church, can be both solemn and celebratory in nature. In Gildersleeve's photograph (see Figure 3.3) the same careful presentation can be seen in the way the people are dressed. Button down shirts, hats, ties, suits, waist coats – the attire looks more fitting for a church, wedding or a date. The photographs Gildersleeve took of the crowd illustrates how neat and manicured they were; this was an occasion of note in their minds, warranting dressing in Sunday best. Baldwin in his story picks up on the particular look, the celebratory feel, and the carnival atmosphere, part of the Southerners' long history of communal barbeques.

By the time there were three cars piled behind the first one, with everyone looking excited and shining, and Jesse noticed that they were carrying food. It was like the Fourth of July picnic.

“Don’t bother putting up no food,” cried a woman from one of the other cars, we got enough. Just come on.”

“Why, thank you, said Jesse’s father, “we got enough. Just come on”. (Baldwin [1965] 1997, 1757)

Remove Jesse Washington’s body and start roasting a hog on the raised area around the embers, and one would have a community barbeque: everyone dressed neat and festive, a few men tending the pig and the aromatic odour of sizzling crackle. ‘Excited and shining, like the Fourth of July picnic’ (Baldwin [1965] 1997, 1757). There is something primal about a barbeque; the pit master (a man in control – like a modern day barbeque – the sense of spectacle is the same) and the restful odour of sizzling meat. The hogs were not like the farm raised pigs of today, they were omnivorous, browsers that ate a huge variety of food including carrion, seeds, roots and fruits, thus providing a much cheaper form of meat than a farm-fed animal. The hogs subsisted on their own and were rounded up and driven in musters with sticks and whips. Children took the day off school and it became a much revered festival. The ‘slaughter provided the first taste of fresh meat’ and was watched by all as a celebration of manliness and power (Bass 1995, 306). Nothing was wasted from the tip of the tail to the end of the snout, it all served as food for the Southerners. Some of it was eaten immediately in the picnic atmosphere, while larger pieces were salted, cured and stored for later use. There is another aspect of hogs (pigs) that is relevant here: their reputed sexual prowess. Pigs have been known to have orgasms that last up to thirty minutes and have a corkscrew penis that can grow up to 18” in length. Like the bull’s penis that is dried to form a pizzle to be used as a whip, the corkscrew penis was also dried and affixed to a stick to form a whip. According to Bass, hog raisers preferred sexualized names that reflect the size of external genitalia, the testicles: Golden Stretch, Bonded Intruder, Go-Boy, Hams – A – Poppin and Mr Standout (Bass 1995, 317).

Then the man with the knife walked up to the hanging body. He turned and smiled again. Now there was a silence all over the field. The hanging head looked up. It seemed fully conscious now, as though the fire had burned out terror and pain. The man with the knife took the nigger’s privates in his hand, one hand, still smiling, as though he were weighing them. In the cradle of the

one white hand, the nigger's privates seemed as remote as meat being weighed in the scales... (Baldwin [1965] 1997, 1760)

The pit master, the smile, the removal of genitalia, the crowds and the ritual of slaughter are all displays of sadistic dominance over animal or the categorised non-human. While it may be argued that the hogs that form the basis for Baldwin story and the ones driven in the celebratory hog drives were similar to the domesticated pigs of today that was not the case. The animals, were self-sufficient wanderers and only rounded up when needed. These hogs once released started to change and revert to wild game animals, feral and far less domesticated in looks and actions. Today, in the same manner as the posed celebration photographs of big game hunters from Africa and India, people pose in America with their kill, the wild hogs, that still roam free in many of the states of America. Typically the animal is laid out, and the hunter, at times surrounded by his partner and children, proudly poses with his gun to show off his supposed hyper-masculinity. The contest despite the supposed danger, is no different than lynching, heavily weighted in the favour of the victorious white perpetrator.

Karl Jacoby in the article "Slaves by Nature? Domestic Animals and Human Slaves," says:

Whips, chains, castration, and branding are ultimately all means to enforce a common end: control by the master.

The drive for control is so essential – and so similar, whether the object of control is a slave or a domestic animal – as to overwhelm most distinctions between humans and animals. (Jacoby 1994, 92)

At the start of Baldwin's story the central character, a white man called Jesse, is lying in bed next to his wife frustrated because he cannot get an erection. Jesse lays there, unable to sleep, frustrated sexually and pent up after he ferociously beat up a Negro. As he lays there he reflects on the childhood memory of the lynching and this sadistic memory of the torture, burning and removal of the genitals causes him to get sexually aroused and the story concludes with him having sex with his wife. Baldwin in this short story hits all the elements: the control, the spectre of the picnic, the prolonged sadism and the undercurrent of sex and power.

What is needed, however, is the final act. The photograph. Matthew Brower in the article “Trophy Shots: Early North American Photographs of Nonhuman Animals and the Display of Masculine Prowess” shows that ‘animal trophies are indexically linked to the practice of hunting’ yet a ‘trophy still needs to be produced’ as ‘dead animals decay’ (Brower 2005, 23). It is here that the trophy comes in; while some may skin or employ a taxidermist, often a trophy is represented by the photograph. Especially in the picnic atmosphere of lynchings where the mob of revellers may number dozens, hundreds, or thousands, the chance of a physical body part as a souvenir are slender. Here everything combines: sadism, remembrance, comradeship, enjoyment, an X marks the spot, the tick of approval of white superiority, a photograph as a memoir of shared spectatorship. The use of the camera as a tool in this manner puts it ‘midway between hunting with a gun and hunting without one’ (Brower 2005, 16). Likewise in the African safari the birthplace and origin of the supposedly savage African-American, the Africans were, as James Ryan points out in the article, “Hunting with the camera: Photography, Wildlife and Colonialism in Africa”, viewed as being ‘closer to the animal ancestry of the human race than Europeans’ (Ryan 2000, 215). Hence the treatment of these so-called ‘savages’ was often violent and sadistic.

Sexual sadism is a recurring theme as can be seen in Van Yelyr’s account of a Negro girl being whipped for burning waffles in *The Whip and The Rod*:

Mr Ferraby, flogged her bare buttocks with a leather harness-trace, intermingling the blows with kicks from his heavy boots. He sent for a stick of sealing wax, struck a match, and dropped the blazing wax into the deeply cut gashes in the girl’s flesh: then as a final interlude, and incidentally an exhibition of skill and grim ingenuity, switched the pieces of wax out of the fleshy ruts with his riding whip. His daughters, who presumably had sadistic inclinations, were witnesses of the operation from a bedroom window overlooking the yard. (Van Yelyr [1941] 1948, 156)

Fromm says about the sadist:

He is sadistic because he feels impotent, unalive and powerless. He tries to compensate for this lack by having power over others, by transforming the worm he feels himself to be into a god. But even the sadist who has power suffers from his human impotence. He may kill and torture, but he remains a

loveless, isolated, frightened person in need of a higher power to whom he can submit. (Fromm 1973, 292)

In many of the accounts of lynching there is discussion of the alleged crime, or, some explanation and justification for the treatment of the offender. What has to be remembered and emphasised is that lynching was an attempt to regain power by sadistic, ritualistic torture. The perpetrators may have 'power over others' but they still suffer from their 'human impotence' (Fromm 1973, 292).

### **Sex, Sadism, Spectacle and Photography**

Central to Baldwin's short story and the slaughter of hogs are the nature of celebration, a sense of spectacle blended with the sadistic treatment of another living creature with sexual undertones. Photography's function is to record an event, preserve it for future reference, thus occasions that have a celebratory element have always been favourites for photographers. One of the main features of lynching photographs is the common mode of killing, hence the name lynching; a slow form of killing closely linked to sex and sadism. J Paul Fedoroff in the article, "Sadism, Sadoomasochism, Sex and Violence", showed studies supporting the view that sexual sadists' preferred method of killing frequently involved strangulation leading to the opinion that 'these murder methods are compatible with sexual control of another person' (Fedoroff 2008, 642). The photograph of Jesse Washington shows a man allowing Washington to collapse down, only to be pulled up again by the chain links around his neck. This sustained pressure on the neck would lead to asphyxiation and, once released, revival. This along with the whipping, genital removal and torture fits with the description of sadism that Donald Thomas uses in the book *The Marquis De Sade* where sadism requires 'a degree of mockery or irony towards its subjects rather than any physical act' (Thomas 1976, 304). It is ironic and sadistic in the case of Jesse Washington that not only did they remove the genitals, symbolic of the sexuality they were afraid of, but they also used asphyxia, an activity known to increase the pleasure serum norepinephrine. Fedoroff in looking at surveys involving 'sexual arousal in response to sadistic stimuli' found that the 'degree of arousal increased together with the degree of distress' (Fedoroff 2008, 639). The more pain for Washington, the more pleasure for the crowd. In the scenario of Jesse Washington's lynching in Waco, a community with women and children, the absence of any protests and an acceptance of the rightness of lynching

fits in with the opinion of Fedoroff that while ‘men far outnumber women convicted of sadistic sex crimes, surveys have found no difference in frequency of sadistic fantasies in men and women’ (Fedoroff 2008, 640).

The sadistic spectacle of lynching was enhanced by photographing the victim, often accompanied by white perpetrators’ surrounding the swinging corpse. The label of sadist aptly applies to the active torturers, likewise the large crowd of onlookers and, afterwards, those who purchased or viewed the photographs as an act of complicit support, a shared friendship and alliance with the lynchers. While the lynching of Washington connects the watchers and participants in a shared guilt and a sadistic perverted pleasure, the photographs made sure it went beyond the hundreds of bystanders at Waco.

Wolf comments that photographic images ‘seem to command and implicate their viewers’ and in regard to ‘torture victims, or persons having died a violent death, such images can be credited with actively appealing to the viewer’ (Wolf 2007, 71). The act of looking at graphic images of torture leaves a mark, no matter the reason you look. The deeper you the look the more pronounced, the mark, or effect, as is evident by the lament of the philosopher Georges Bataille when he exposed himself continually to a graphic photograph of the death of a man in China by *lǐngchí*. One of the problems of execution methods such as hanging and *lǐngchí* is the supposed link, a seemingly masochistic, orgasmic release of pleasure, perpetuated in the sublime peaceful faces in artwork and occasional anecdotal evidence of seminal fluid on the pants of victims. Executed victims, unlike masochists, do not have a choice and the evidence of pleasure does not seem to be backed up after vigorous scrutiny. In the case of the *lǐngchí* photographs the authors of *Death By a Thousand Cuts* draw attention to what they believe are erroneous readings, namely that the horripilation of the hair and the supposed ecstasy of pain of the victim are part of the hallmarks of the torturous death (Brook et al 2008, 238). While Bataille references two photographs, Brook, Bourgon and Blue examine over fifty photographs and documents, and come to the conclusion that death is not ecstatic, and the hair standing on end was rather due to the prisoner’s inability to shave their heads in prison while awaiting execution (Brook et al 2008, 238). The nature of photography, a nano-second of time, on the surface is deceptive. In the case of the *lǐngchí* the look on the prisoners’ face as his body is cut is read as a pleasurable ecstasy of release as death approaches akin to the religious

artworks of martyrs painted as they seem to peacefully exit the world albeit by torturous methodology. The photograph tells the truth, that this form of execution existed, it also perpetuates a lie, for in that short exposure it does not reveal the true agony and horror of a painful death. The prolonged examination of historical documents and the continually looking, albeit at shocking imagery, makes for a much more compelling and accurate reading of the *lingchi* photographs. This approach is voiced by Wolf in regard to images of torture, killing and death:

In spite of its apparentness, its evidence, what is depicted can be made to speak only by the addition of discursive elements. Be it the viewer's knowledge, historical sources, judicial discourses, or other types of written documents – only these allow photographic images to be embedded in a wider context (of meaning). (Wolf 2007, 83)

It is with this in mind I wish to go back to the events and aftermath of Waco to aid in a closer understanding and reading of the Jesse Washington lynching and the phenomena of lynching photographs.

#### **‘Without Sanctuary’: Gildersleeve’s Inside Cover**

So it is back to 1916, lynching, sex and violence, innocence and guilt. They are guilty and they do not care. The mob, estimated to be over 10 000, treat it like a Sunday outing. Gildersleeve photographed the events as they unfolded, focus, click, record. He is high above, looking down on the crowd and the torture and death as it progresses. The smell of burning flesh must sear his nostrils as the minutes tick by. I do not think he cares. This is his meal ticket. That night while everyone else sleeps, after their fervent prayers to their God, content with their Southern white victory, he stays up. All night he prints photographs. He knows the urgency, the immediacy, of what he has to do. He knows that the next day they will be queuing impatiently at his studio to buy a memento of such a special occasion. He knows that if they have missed out on some fingers, toes, genitalia, teeth or skin, some treasured scrap of charred black humanity, they will want one of his photographic postcards. His prints come in 5 ½ x 3 ½, standard size with postcard backing. Little postcards, his moment of fame. Little postcards, to send to relatives and friends. Little postcards, with handwritten mocking captions. Little postcards, white men gloating over the death and torture of a fellow human being.



The postcard was a mode of communication that marginalised and excluded African Americans. According to Daniel Gifford in *American Holiday Postcards, 1905-1915: Imagery and Context*, the postcard was used to further racist jokes and stereotypes, asserting that African Americans had an intelligence level less than the animals consumed at holiday celebrations (Gifford 2013, 53). Malek Alloula in *The Colonial Harem* exposes further the racist usage of postcards:

It produces stereotypes in the manner of great seabirds producing guano. It is the fertilizer of the colonial vision.

The postcard is ubiquitous. It can be found not only at the scene of the crime it perpetrates but at a far remove as well. Travel is the essence of the postcard, and expedition is its mode. It is the fragmentary return to the mother country. It straddles two spaces: the one it represents and the one it will reach. It marks out the peregrinations of the tourist, the successive postings of the soldier, the territorial spread of the colonist. It is the comic strip of colonial morality. (Alloula [1981] 1986, 4)

The postcard is a celebration of place, a shared act of spectatorship; the lynching photographs are a shared, complicit artefact of the white colonialist view. They are, in many instances, taken by professional photographers, which adds to their legitimacy and acceptance in that era and place. It is the professional aspect of the photographs that reveals lynching was not a hidden, covert operation but rather an open celebratory event, ‘excited and shining like the Fourth of July picnic’ (Baldwin [1965] 1997, 1757).

One of the differences, quite noticeable in the various images anthologised in *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*, is the dissimilarity between an amateur photograph and a professional one. An amateur photograph is often about immediacy, the photographer is taking it for his own gratification and pleasure, perhaps to share with a few friends: ‘Hey look what I saw.’ The amateur’s focus is on the lynched body, the visceral raw sexuality of being a viewer, participant of death. This is evident in the four prints reproduced (see Figure 3.4) from a 1902 lynching of an African-American male in Georgia. The look of the finished prints, the position of the people and the candid, covert, voyeuristic style have the hallmarks of an amateur photographer where the focus is on the scene and the hanging body. In an era when professional

photographers developed and printed their own work, the amateur status of this print is further attested to by the stamp on the back that signifies the film was outsourced and printed at 'Wrights Kodak Finishing Shop'.

The professional may take a photograph of the lynched body, but to just do that limits his saleability. To make money, the gaze in the photos, the viewpoint, has to be different. Hence in so many photographs the black lynched body hangs, surrounded by white men, and in some cases women, who are not looking at the body as the focal point of the image, but instead are staring at the camera. Gildersleeve's photograph, while a professional photograph, is somewhat different. As a rare example of a lynching as it happened, while the victim is still alive, the gaze of the crowd is focussed on the torturous scene of Washington's slow demise. Once the body is deceased it remains central to the photograph, but the direction of the crowd's gaze changes. No longer is it so much about the object, the corpse, rather the dead body becomes a symbol of conquest, just like for a hunter with his gun, the vanquished animal/human becomes a trophy and the scene is taken over by the photographer who demands a gaze that emphasises the victors. The scene now, dictated by the photographer, actively commands the crowd to look, not at the dead body, but at the photographer. The trophy now is no longer the body as such, but the image of remembrance that the photographer will create. This collective, performative gaze is created by a deliberate action of the photographer, it unites the crowd, the men and women who attended the lynching, and also results in the photographer being able to maximise the money he can make by the sale of the image. They are here, no longer marked by an X, but by the visibility of their faces. This positioning also emphasises the trophy nature of the image, the white man's prize, the possession of a hung 'Negro'. This is an image that has been created and controlled by a professional photographer. People do not stand around a dead, hanging body and look straight at a camera; they are posed, and positioned, to do this.

In the 1920 lynching of three African-Americans in Duluth (see Figure 3.4) the scene shows the hallmark of significant posing as revealed by Michael Fedo the author of *The Lynchings of Duluth*. Fedo says the photograph was significantly posed with the use of several cars with their headlights on to provide the illumination required to light the scene:

What this looks like is the kind of photo you would see at a hunting lodge, where the guys had been out shooting bear, and they came back and they said, 'We got three.' You can see people on tip-toe. They've crowded into this shot. These are not people who are ashamed to be seen here. This is, 'I want to be in this picture'. (Julin and Hemphill 2001)

A bear, a wild hog, a lynched African-American and the obligatory pose of power of the Anglo-Saxon conqueror.

The 1911 G.H. Farnum photograph (see Figure 3.5) shows similar elaborate proceedings to record the lynching of Laura Nelson and her teenage son hanging from a bridge in Okemah, Oklahoma. The shot is wide and shows the bridge and over fifty people standing on it, all staring at the camera. While included in the photograph, the suspended bodies of mother and son underneath the bridge are invisible to the people staring at the camera. The manner of posing, women grouped together, the men on the other side, and all the faces clearly visible show the work of a professional photographer taking trophy photographs for the participants. According to Tim Corvin in the documentary film 'The Nelson Lynching of 1911' the photographer stood on a boat in the middle of the river in order to achieve this shot (Corvin 2014).

Often accompanying these trophy images are the markings on the print of copyright, or, the stamping of the studio name. In all the photographs in *Without Sanctuary* the camera is forever present, as it has to be as it was used by the photographer to record the scene, but it is also totally absent, invisible. In the audiences that collectively number in hundreds, if not more, not one person has a camera. These people came not to take photographs, but to view the scene, and have their photograph taken. In the back section of *Without Sanctuary*, entitled 'Notes on the Plates', written by James Allen the self-styled 'picker', a white man who collected the images, some details about what is known about the lynching and the various photographs are discussed. It is here you see how many are etched with inscriptions and copyright symbols of various photographers:

Real photo postcard 3½" x 5½" Etched in the negative, "Copyright applied for by J.G. Franklin, Photographer."

Studio label on reverse: J.V. DABBS PHOTOGRAPHER GROUND FLOOR STUDIO, Frames and Mouldings, 407 Market Street. FORT SCOTT, KANSAS.

Printed on the border: "Copyright (sic) 1908. Sold by J.Q. Adams, Greenville, Texas."

Reverse of postcard (plate 25). This card bears the advertising stamp, "KATY ELECTRIC STUDIO TEMPLE TEXAS. H. LIPPE PROP". (Allen [2000] 2003, 165-201)

When we look at these lynching photographs, and photography as a whole just prior to the time Gildersleeve took these Waco images in 1916, it is very likely that trophy lynching photography was almost exclusively the domain of professional photographers.

David Cycleback, in his guide to identifying photographs, places the albumen print process from the 1850s into the 1890s:

The albumen process was time-consuming and difficult compared to modern photography. Most practitioners were well-trained professionals with a working knowledge of chemistry. Except for a few technically gifted and wealthy hobbyists, there were no amateur photographers as in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (Cycleback 2005)

In the early twentieth century, the postcard market, the camera and its products were still firmly aimed at the professional market. Importantly from a professional viewpoint, it is the direction of the crowd's gaze in these trophy images that shows the professional nature of the photographs. In so many of the photographs, the participants are not looking at the spectacle but at a point out of the frame, directed to the photographer. This marks a gathering at the scene that is being recorded by predominantly a professional photographer, who knows that those present will want to buy a memento. This viewpoint is backed up by the fact that Gildersleeve was selling prints to the public, something that would not have been necessary if there was an abundance of amateur photographers. The prints that Gildersleeve made and sold to the participants and supporters of lynching, were like coveted masturbatory aids for a sadistic group of people intent on not losing power by inflicting pain on minorities.

The methodology to print the postcards, the postcard printer, was aimed at the professional photographer as Jacqueline Goldsby says in the book *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature*: ‘Anyone with \$7.50 to spend could purchase the printer at list price, but professional photographers were given a 40 percent discount on the device, suggesting they were the principal target market’ (Goldsby 2006, 274). Gifford lists several reasons why the photograph postcard market of lynchings was done by local photographers interested in selling their photographs. Firstly, the time frame of many of the photographs’ appearance in the mail was very close to the date of the lynching as the recorded chronology of lynching to postcard was in one instance seventeen days and in another two, five days and a week respectively (Gifford 2013, 55). Secondly, Gifford notes that in regard to mass produced plates, ‘it’s unlikely that postcard printing factories would have gone to the expense of producing a plate to create such a postcard, when the audience for such a postcard was relatively small’ (Gifford 2013, 55). This is even more obvious ‘after August 1908 when the Post Office Department ruled that lynching photographs could not be sent through the mail’ (Gifford 2013, 55).

What fits with the scenario of the collective outward gaze, the use of flash, postcards and the copyright and ownership symbols is that ‘lynching photographs were printed locally and often on-the-spot through portable printing presses and by local photographers with printing equipment’ (Gifford 2013, 56). The use of professional photographers (I define professional as someone selling prints to make profit) gives the lynching photographs a further stamp of social approval.

Figure 3.4. *Plate 28 from Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America.*  
Allen, James, (2000) 2003. Santa Fe: Twin Palms Publishers.

Figure 3.5. Plate 38 from *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*. Allen, James, (2000) 2003. Santa Fe: Twin Palms Publishers.

*Social occasions, celebratory in nature, a gathering of associates, a wedding party – a shared vision: a memento, perhaps a certificate, a small bag of sugared almonds, if you are extra special, a bouquet, that like an animal trophy will wither, decay and die, definitely you need, you want, a photograph. The process, methodology, of a lynching and a wedding are so similar, yet so different. The bride and groom, happy, surrounded by the supporters. So many photographs. The set-up shots: the bride and bridesmaids, groom and groomsmen, parents from both sides, the family members, the friends, all in a cliché line-up to record their support and to ultimately purchase a piece of inked paper, coloured dots to record and immortalise their attendance at the wedding. The one difference is that I, do something to make them smile, a lame joke, a gimmick, who knows, every time, hundreds of times somehow I make it happen, they all smile. Click. Click, click – just in case someone inevitably closed their eyes. The lynching is no different. The social occasion more sombre, the hung body replaces the bride and groom. Yet, like the guests at the wedding they are dressed, prim, proper, this is important, this is memorabilia, this is a shared spectatorship of the greatness of the occasion. They scramble for a photograph, piling into cars, buggies, or other*

*means of transport to get there – or perhaps a walk across the street. I think they do not smell the sickly odour of death. The difference is that despite, their agreement, their involvement, the manoeuvring of people to make sure all are visible (a little to the left, yep that’s right, now can you all see me – ok – good) – the photographer does one less thing; he does not make them smile. While some cannot help but smile, by far, the vast majority, in a show of Anglo-Saxon hunting prowess, stand solemn in front of, or around their prey. Click – the scene is recorded – immortalised. Now for the printing and sales.*

As those white faces stare sternly back at the camera they are not worried about being identified: the town’s officials, the law enforcers, the church leaders and the women support the lynching. Professional photography, the ability to purchase prints, gave the perpetrators a means to distribute their message, their method of control, and their sadistic gloating to friends, family and supporters who may not have been privy to the event. By posing next to the lynched body, it becomes the other, a burnt sacrifice to appease their spirits at the perceived loss of control over former slaves. When dozens of people look out from the frame towards the photographer, the hanging body is not viewed or gazed upon, there can be no sense of guilt, no feelings, it is just a piece of death, animal or human, they are contemptuous in their false righteousness.

It brings to mind apt descriptions of Perera’s ‘edge of human’, via Derrida (Perera 2014, 3), or Fromm’s ‘living being’ made into a ‘thing’ (Fromm 1973, 288) and Billie Holiday’s ‘*Strange Fruit*’ (1939). It is as if some ancient artefact, some dead flesh, has been dragged out of a primordial soup to hang so these people can transform their wormlike lives into gods (Fromm 1973, 292). Fully aware of the need for the event to be recorded and distributed the lynched bodies are hung long enough for the photographer and his cohorts to pose and gaze outside of the frame to deliver a memento to be savoured, not by all, but by those that support their viewpoint. For the others it is a testament of atrocity. Again this duality, so evident in photographs, becomes a reason to both celebrate, and condemn; to highlight that the medium is dependent on its usage. But perhaps this sentence too is erroneous: it is not the medium, i.e. the camera, the photograph, that should be scrutinised as a possible celebration or condemnation, but rather everything around the image and in the image that should be interpreted and read. The duality of Gildersleeve’s photograph used to condemn and condone in the same year shows this is the case.



I don't like Gildersleeve; his actions, his motives, were born out of the mob of white cohorts he photographed. While I say this, though, I don't hate the photograph. It is what it is, a piece of paper with a message, decipher as you will. Arguably, it could have been taken by someone who was protesting and risking his life to record a lynching, the photograph may not have differed if this were the case. Some may, similar to the Baldwin's characters in his short story, get sexual satisfaction out of it, others may keep it as precious, a shared act of spectatorship of white supremacy, still others may feel it is part of a historic past, time to forget and move on. In line with my understanding of this, as a printed paper with a message, I wish to present some other readings and uses, along with other lynching photographs to show how they can be read and used in so many different ways.

### **Gildersleeve and Twin Palms**

In response to the lynching of Washington (I have deliberately not talked about the alleged crime, guilt or innocence of Washington as lynching is not about guilt or innocence – it is about power and control) the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) published an eight page supplement about the event, complete with the graphic photographs, in their monthly journal, *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races*. The supplement, published two months after the lynching, was based on the investigation of the crime by suffragist Elizabeth Freeman. Her exposé detailed the participants and the lack of response by church and state:

The photographer knew where the lynching was to take place, and had his camera and paraphernalia in the City Hall. He was called by telephone at the proper moment. He writes us: "We have quit selling the mob photos, this step was taken because our 'City Dads' objected on the grounds of 'bad publicity,' as we wanted to be boosters and not knockers, we agreed to stop all sale. (Freeman 1916, 6)

Looking at written words and trying to get at the truth is fraught with as much danger as interpreting photographs. So much of the meaning of spoken words is conveyed by body language and tone. Having said that, the message from Gildersleeve and the city officials are not a judgement on the moral depravity of lynching, but rather addresses the damage to Waco's reputation. Gildersleeve, in referring to the authorities as 'City Dads' evokes a mocking sense of despair, spoil sports, who ruin his fun and dent his

ability to earn money from his photographs. Freeman's investigation detailed the participants in the lynching and the lack of response by both church and state. While the men, 'city dads', ministers, sweep it under the carpet, a woman, interested in humanity highlights the truth.

### **The Photographs in *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America***

Gildersleeve's photograph of a massive crowd surrounding the ongoing torture of Jesse Washington provides the end papers for the volume, *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*, published in 2000 by Twin Palms. The photograph is a sepia-toned black and white, showing a tree and the burning body of Washington suspended by a rope. Smoke from the fire and simmering body drifts away as participants poke, prod and haul the rope to prolong Washington's torture. The prints have been sepia toned by Gildersleeve, a style of toning that is mirrored in almost all of the other photographs in the book. Sepia toning is a chemical process where the image is bleached out then restored with the black and white colouration being replaced by a reddish brown tone. This toning also shows the professional nature and the uniformity of the photographers' approach to the genre of lynching photographs. The sepia toning acts as a brand, a distinctive look and feel that marks it as different than black and white. Some of the images have harsh illumination, reflecting the lighting of the time period; unlike today, with Through the Lens (TTL) balanced flash, the artificial light sources in the past could be too strong and overpowering. If these were professional prints destined for a wall display, more care would be taken in the printing, burning and dodging to produce a better result. This has not been the case. The photo is taken, printed as is, toned and then sold. The purpose of the print was covert, a hidden, forbidden, sadistic object akin to pornography, though far worse than images of sexual titillation.

The small images fits the way they would have been viewed, a postcard shared with people who agree with the racial viewpoint of the owner. The book *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* like the stained prints, is raw, real, visceral, confronting and ultimately very disturbing. There is a racial and sexual, violent edge that permeates through its covers, hard to put down and hard to pick up. There is little writing in the bulk of the book, just photographs, cards and captions presented in the style of an art book. Perhaps, this is part of the problem – a presentation in which these

little dirty cameos, white men's prizes, are suddenly enlarged and elevated to take pride of place in an art book. Art books have a unique mode of presentation, frequently with an introductory essay and a closing essay, with the art, be it paintings or photographs, dominating, often printed one image per page. On the last page of *Without Sanctuary* the book lists the breakdown of its printing techniques.

#### COLOPHON

WITHOUT SANCTUARY is limited to 5,000 fifth edition casebound copies. The photographs reproduced in this volume are part of the Allen/Littlefield Collection, and are on deposit in the Special Collections Department, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University. They are open to researchers by appointment. GWTW is copyright Hilton Als, 2000. Hellbound is copyright Leon F. Litwack, 2000. The contents of this book are copyright Twin Palms Publishers, 2000.

Book design is by Arlyn Nathan and Jack Woody. The typeface is Centaur originally designed by Bruce Rogers based on the roman type cut by Nicolas Jenson in the mid fifteenth century.

Figure 3.6. Front Cover from *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*. Allen, James, (2000) 2003. Santa Fe: Twin Palms Publishers.

The book is a hardcover with a graphic photograph of a lynched Negro complete with a bright red band that repeats part of the image and can be slid up and down. The bright red band with the repeated image has been digitally enhanced, sharpened and cleaned, reproducing a lynched victim's feet with a stern man staring upward, and a grinning boy in the corner. The use of a Colophon is now an unusual practice adopted by private art press publishers such as Twin Palms, the publisher of *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (they are also the publishers of *The Killing Fields* discussed in Chapter Three). The Colophon, Limited Edition (including 30 slip cased signed editions), the band, the dozens of graphic photographs unaccompanied by text, all lead to the conclusion that it is an art book. While most books on photographs attribute the print to the photographer underneath the print, *Without Sanctuary: Lynching in America* does not. This is not to say it does not have a section on the photographs, it does, although in the case of Gildersleeve the image despite providence and description is not attributed to him: 'Spectators at the lynching of Jesse Washington. May 16, 1916, Waco, Texas. Gelatin silver print. Real photo postcard. 5 ½ x 3 ½' (Allen [2000] 2003, 165).

It seems an unusual practice, in a book of this type, not to acknowledge the photographers, especially the professionals. Doing so would have shown how closely implicated photography was in the process of lynching, especially the wide spread assimilation of professional photographic souvenirs. The fact that it is known that the photograph was taken by Fred Gildersleeve, and still not acknowledged, begs the question, how many more were taken by professional photographers? This seems particularly relevant given the previous discussion of studio and photographers copyright claims that Allen does include if they form part of the print or frame from his 'pickings'. Gildersleeve's work, and many others, were printed on photo postcards showing that they were designed for a wider consumption; for others to share and gloat at the destruction of a human life. As noted previously, it is only when you read through "Notes on Plates" which is included at the end of the book that you start to see the implicit link between spectators and photographers. People watched the lynching, professional photographers photographed the lynched victim, and they printed them as post cards so spectators could purchase them for their own enjoyment and to share with supporters, friends and families outside of the area. X marks the spot.

Reverse of postcard (plate 54). Ink inscription on reverse of this card. "This was made in the court yard, In Center Texas, he is a 16 year old Black boy, He killed Earl's Grandma, She was Florence's mother. Give this to Bud. From Aunt Mrytle". (Allen [2000] 2003, 184)

The complicit relationship between professional photographers, lynchers and the wider public can also be seen in the image of the lynching of Frank Embree.

42. Frank Embree standing on buggy, facing camera, stripped, deep lacerations and wounds, his handcuffed hands placed to cover his genitals. Lynch mob July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1899, near Fayette, Missouri. Card mounted gelatin printing-out paper, 4 ¼ x 6."

The defiant victim of this mob is forced to pose on a buggy for the camera. The handcuffs bite into his inflamed lower arms. He stares directly into the camera lens with undiminished dignity. In the right-hand corner, wearing a soft-brimmed hat, edging into the camera's view, is a grinning man with a whip. A coarse blanket rests on the buggy seat.

The three cabinet cards depicting the torture and hanging of Frank Embree (plates 42, 43 & 44) were at one time laced together with a twisted purple thread, so as to unfold like a map. (Allen [2000] 2003, 181)

*Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* includes a foreword and afterword discussing the way African-Americans have been treated and represented. James Allen writes in this afterword:

I believe the photographer was more than a perceptive spectator at lynchings. Too often they compulsively composed silvery tableaux (natures mortes) positioning and lighting corpses as if they were game birds shot on the wing. Indeed, the photographic art played as significant a role in the ritual as torture or souvenir grabbing – creating a sort of two-dimensional biblical swine, a receptacle for a collective sinful self. Lust propelled the commercial reproduction and distribution of the images, facilitating the endless replay of anguish. Even dead, the victims were without sanctuary. (Allen [2000] 2003, 205)

The problem with James Allen is that his presentation, his pickings, presented in *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* as ‘photographic art’, helps facilitate ‘the endless replay of anguish’. Lynching photographs are not art. Page after page of dominant whiteness, blank pages of whiteness, honed into images of sepia-toned darkness does not add to a meaningful (if there is one) understanding of lynching. There is something confronting and dirty in visualising a white man, a ‘picker’, over a period of several years asking dealers and fellow pickers whether they have in their possession a scrap of paper showing the lynching of an African-American. As Wendy Wolters says in her review of the book “Without Sanctuary: Bearing Witness, Bearing Whiteness”:

White positions of looking at and of enacting violence are also resurrected. These postmemories and memory traces emerge together in the hidden and visible violence that haunt the lynching photographs. (Wolters 2004, 417)

The editors also chose to include an article by African-American art critic, Hilton Als, “GWTW”, which is scathing in its criticism of the ‘whiteness’ of their book:

What isn’t talked about is what interest the largely white editors (who constitute what we call publishing), have in hiring a colored person to describe a nigger’s life. For them a black writer is someone who can simplify what is endemic to him or her as a human being – race – and blow it up to cartoon proportions, thereby making the coon situation “clear” to a white audience.

I want to get back to the first question I posed: What is the relationship of the white people in these pictures to the white people who ask me, and sometimes pay me to be the Negro on the page? (Als [2000] 2003, 39)

Als emphasises the dilemma facing the ‘largely white editors,’ they either write the text and run the risk of saying something wrong, or, abdicate the responsibility to a black critic to lend authenticity to the work. Als’ article shows the problems associated with the representation of lynching photographs in the publication. This same dilemma was faced by Malek Alloula in the previously quoted book *The Colonial Harem* where he reproduces numerous postcards of dressed and semi-naked Algerian women. Alloula, like the editors of *Without Sanctuary: Lynching in America* legitimises his

project by getting a woman, Barbara Harlow to write the introduction. Alloula, to his credit, also provides a written commentary alongside the photographs. However, this does not help him escape the criticism by Carol Shloss, who labels his book as ‘male-centered and concerned with women as property’ (Shloss 1987).

If Algerian women were vulnerable and disgraced by their original display on colonial postcards, they are once again exposed by their display in this book. Their images leave them still silent and newly imprisoned by the very text that purports to liberate them. (Shloss 1987)

What Alloula and Allen (along with his white publishers), encounter is the difficulty in presenting controversial photographs in a book format without reinforcing the embedded stereotypes. A picture may speak a thousand words, but those thousand words it speaks will vary from person to person, leaving the potential for the words and message to be ambivalent and confusing. Context is so important, and if a trophy photograph is accompanied by words, those words must contain a meaningful explanation as to why it is valid to look at the photograph in the first place, or, in the cases of Alloula and Allen, why it is necessary to revisit previously printed material. It can be done in a positive manner, as I feel it has in Brook, Bourgon and Blues’ book, *A Death by a Thousand Cuts* and in the Stover/Peress book *The Graves: Srebrenica and Vukovar* (This book and a photograph taken by Peress are discussed in Chapter Four). Both books deal with extremely sensitive material without resorting to further cliché exposures of branded marks of possession. The problem lies not just in the content and words, but in the book format as well, with Alloula and Allen’s both presented as larger, more coffee-table, art-style publications. *A Death by a Thousand Cuts*, on the other hand presents the material in a normal sized book, with the photographs occupying a smaller space and accompanied by a large amount of textual analysis. The authors, despite their claim to have viewed over fifty photographs of *línghí*, resist the need to print so many, thus avoiding exploitation. Peress and Stover in *The Graves: Srebrenica and Vukovar* print page after page of the photographs in full bleed in a smaller art format. The written words show compassion, an explanation of why, but, ultimately, despite the photographs of bones and the dead, the book seems to be successful, thoughtful. Alloula, on the other hand, spends so much time belittling the photographer (yes! of course that influences my reading) that he adds nothing more to the argument, and then, proceeds to do what he condemns by putting the

photographs of topless women on display, full page, one per page; nakedness for male and Western consumption. Allen's book appears to me worse, as it is about torture and death via lynching. Perhaps it succeeds in showing the rawness of the violence, but it does not add to any intellectual or critical understanding. The coffee-table style, devoid of written text, makes the photographs seemingly hang in mid-air, like another lynched body. But if we question the format and design of the book, we also encompass the aims of the publishers and the whole premise of commercialisation. Perhaps the driving force is very similar to that which would have driven the photographers who made the postcards of Algerian women and those who photographed lynchings?

This is something we can see in Gildersleeve's photograph: it was a commercial exercise, money making. Photography in many instances is about maximum saleability. Gildersleeve is not content just to get close ups of the lynching. A small man in stature, he pushed his way through a crowd of several thousand to get to a higher vantage point. Laden down with tripod, camera, plates and his black 'death' drape, he knows he needs to make this lynching count. The endpapers of *Without Sanctuary*, Gildersleeve's expansive crowd shot, show hundreds of people watching the lynching. Tellingly one of them has an X marked on his hat. Purchased from Gildersleeve with his position marked in the crowd. Another sale for Gildersleeve, another gloating participant, another postcard for wider assimilation.

### **Reclaiming Lynching Photography**

Gildersleeve was part of the establishment that either actively or covertly profited and/or agreed with the lynching of Jesse Washington and of other African-Americans. Although the book *Without Sanctuary: Lynching in America* may have had lofty ideals, its presentation and treatment of an extremely sensitive topic seems to elevate the prints themselves into precious pieces of art. Yet the same images, Gildersleeve's in particular, also have been used to convey very different meanings, proving again that once a horrific event has occurred, it is the context, the framework, that gives function and meaning to the photograph.

In a different context, situated within a framework of anti-racist activism, attempts were made to expose the horror of lynching and garner support for change. As previously mentioned, the suffragist Elisabeth Freeman was commissioned by the



NAACP to write about the lynching for the supplement in July 1916. Amy Wood in *Lynching and Spectacle, Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* describes Freeman's attempt to purchase photographs:

As might be expected amid this atmosphere, Freeman had a particularly difficult time obtaining copies of the lynching photographs. She made numerous attempts to buy them from the mayor and from the sheriff, who told her he did "not dare" sell them. The photographer himself eventually agreed to sell some, but then "he got cold feet" and let her have three at fifty cents apiece. (Wood 2011, 181-2)

The perpetrators did not want adverse publicity or anyone unsympathetic to the cause getting hold of the photographs. In spite of this mentality, and as a result of the graphic nature of the photographs that the NAACP published in the supplement, the resulting campaign helped raise funds, over \$10 000 dollars, to 'support more lynching investigations and to establish the foundation for later campaigns for federal antilynching legislation' (Wood 2011, 182).

By publishing Gildersleeve's photographs in the supplement of *The Crisis*, the NAACP had changed the framework for these images from one of gloating, power-fuelled sadism, to sadness and horror, instilling people with the urge to fight against the scourge of lynching. The editor, William Du Bois, was well aware that even if people were sympathetic to the cause they may react with horror at having to view lynching photographs:

We make no apology for including in this number a detailed account with pictures of perhaps the most horrible lynching that has taken place in the United States. We know that those who so hate the evil of this world that they are unwilling to be disturbed by it will question our taste, but as we have already questioned theirs on numerous occasions there is here, at least, no chance for misunderstanding. (Du Bois 1916, 136)

The NAACP continued in this vein, when, in 1935, they organised an art exhibition 'An Art Commentary on Lynching' which invited artists to send in their interpretations of the lynching phenomenon. According to Dora Apel, in *Imagery of Lynching: Black Men, White Women and the Mob*, both the NAACP and the American Communist party organised anti-lynching art exhibitions in 1935 'each trying to outdo the other in

marshalling support for their program' (Apel 2004, 83). At the NAACP exhibition the artists used various media and techniques to illustrate the horror of lynching. Isamu Noguchi hung a monel metal sculpture entitled *Death (a Lynched Figure)*, a twisted form of sinewy muscle and raw power suspended by a hangman's noose. Apel says:

By producing the lynched figure at about three-quarter size of an actual human figure, smoothing away the facial features and genitalia, and giving it an appealing surface and compositional shape, Noguchi universalizes the lynched body and makes it more bearable to look at, in effect aestheticizing it even as he conveys the agony of death. (Apel 2004, 94)

Harry Sternberg in his lithograph entitled *Southern Holiday* shows a castrated black man hanging tied to pillar with a strong well-muscled upper body. The theme of black male strength despite lynching and castration is continued in George Bellows work, *The Law is Too Slow*, where the black male body is shown tied to a tree, burning. Bellows, like Sternberg, emphasises the muscular frame with taunt stomach, pronounced quadriceps and adductors along with bulging pectoral muscles. Both Bellows and Sternberg send a message of power, hyper masculinity to the white viewers who may be sympathetic to lynching. The black person may be castrated, dying a horrible painful death, but he will not go away, the powerful muscular body is repeated in the thousands of other black people that they encounter on a day to day basis that have not been subjected to a lynching. Reginald Marsh in his ink and crayon artwork entitled, *This is Her First Lynching*, tries a different approach in which he concentrates on the crowd at the lynching, with the victim of the violence not represented. According to Apel, Marsh's focus on the perpetrators 'emphasizes lynching as a communal entertainment and makes visible the participation of women, who were usually stereotyped as peace-loving and nurturing, and the initiation of children in acts of race terror' (Apel 2004, 90). By using art as a means to show the plight many African Americans faced, the exhibition opened up more discussion and a different perspective perhaps in response to the apathetic attitude of most Americans

These uses, and responses, to the Jesse Washington lynching image show a duality, that both, good and bad meanings or uses can surround a particularly horrific photograph. The power of Gildersleeve's photograph was not lost on the NAACP. This was not a professional record of people standing around a hanging body, staring

proudly, looking back at the camera and saying ‘look what we’ve done’; rather, the power of Gildersleeve’s photograph is that it shows what they were doing. When numerous white people surround a lynched body and stare back at the camera it suggests that they are sending a message of power, a warped sense of (white) justice carried out. When numerous white people are photographed jockeying for position as Jesse Washington is yanked on a chain and beaten, the image sends a message of cruelty and torture. Essentially, a photograph is a piece of paper with an encoded message on it. How one interprets that message builds part of the framework. When Gildersleeve originally took the photograph it was part of a process of abuse, racism and a sign of white supremacy. When it was purchased and shared between the supporters and perpetrators of lynching, it reaffirmed the viewer’s racist opinions and supported their belief that people of colour were inferior. However, the same photograph carried a completely different encoded message when it was printed in *The Crisis*. The photographer had not changed, the photograph had not changed, and the scene of a lynching had not changed but the change of framework lead to a completely different message. The 1916 lynching photograph was used by people both for and against lynching in the same year it was created.

The important difference was the framework it was contained in. The importance of the frame can be seen again in the problematic book discussed above, *Without Sanctuary: Lynching in America*. Hilton Als’ contribution underscores the frustration he feels at the way in which the lynching images are encased within the format of an art book. Being coloured is the:

experience of being watched, and seeing the harm in people’s eyes – that is the prelude to becoming a dead nigger. “Nigger” is a slow death. And that’s the slow death I feel all the time now as a colored man.

And according to these pictures, I shouldn’t be talking to you right now: I’m a little on the nigger side, meant to be seen and not heard, my tongue hanged with it my mind. But before that happens, let me tell you what I see in these photographs: I see a lot of crazy-looking white people, as crazy and empty-looking in the face as the white people who stare at me. Who wants to look at these pictures? Who are they all? When they look at these pictures who do they identify with? The maimed, the tortured, the dead, or the white people who

maybe told some dumb nigger before they hanged him, You are all wrong, niggerish, outrageous, violent, disruptive, uncooperative, lazy, stinking, loud, difficult, obnoxious, stupid, angry, prejudiced, unreasonable, shiftless, no good, a liar, fucked up – the very words and criticism a colored writer is apt to come up against if he doesn't do that woe-is-me Negro crap and has the temerity to ask not only why collect these pictures, but why does a colored point of view authenticate them, no matter what that colored person has to say? (Als [2000] 2003, 40).





## Chapter Three

### The Bureaucracy of Genocide: Cambodia 1975-1979

Figure 4.1. Mother and Child from *The Killing Fields*, edited by Chris Riley and Douglas. Translated by Choeung Pochin and Moeun Chhean Narriddh. Santa Fe: Twin Palms, 1996.

*The photograph, taken at the Tuol Sleng prison in Cambodia during the 1970s where it is estimated around 14 000 inmates were executed, shows a young woman seated with a naked toddler lying next to her. In reading and understanding such a*

*photograph I am influenced by what I know, not just what I see. According to Sara Colm and Van Nath in The Killing Fields, only seven people survived the prison: they were people who had skills, such as artists who could make realistic images of the Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot (Colm and Nath 1996, 94, 99).*

*I am staring at an image of those about to die, the deed now done, those who have died. As the weeks of analysis and looking continue, I am drawn to the peaceful, gentle features of the naked toddler, a little boy, and I find myself wondering how he died. I don't search for the answer; it comes to me via Rebecca Frey's book Genocide and International Justice, where I am told, 'Because the Khmer Rouge wanted to save military ammunition, most of the victims of the so-called killing fields were put to death by handheld tools, including pickaxes, hoes, and lengths of bamboo', proving that the written word can be just as cruel as a photograph (Frey 2009, 91).*

*The photograph. The photograph is black and white, printed in a square format, thus alluding to the medium format camera on which it was taken. The picture, illuminated with a flash mounted to the side of the camera as indicated by the heavy shadowing behind the woman and the lack of strong illumination surrounding the toddler, shows the claustrophobic closed-in space of a prison cell. The mother is young, teens, perhaps early twenties, though I could be wrong, age is such a hard thing to define. Her shirt, blouse, looks like it is soft, a silken material that would slide between your fingers. She stares back at the camera, the light from the flash is harsh, shadow cast under the chin and reflecting from the forehead and cheeks. It is warm, the toddler's nakedness, and the reflective sheen from the flash hitting her face allude to this; although the shimmer on her face, the thin film of perspiration, could be fear, I don't see it, not outwardly anyway. There is a judgemental quality, a criminal element to the photograph. The walls of a cell, the staged front on-shot, flat strong light and, most telling of all, the number pinned on her blouse. No 320. A white square with neatly stencilled lettering. No 320 fastened on her chest with a baby's nappy pin. She stares back, neutral, bland, expressionless; the slight giveaway of emotion shown by her hunched shoulders. Drained, protective, self-conscious. Toddlers, babies, detect fear, worry, apprehension. Her child, lying on a cloth, a blanket scrunched up as a pillow, seems*



*oblivious to what is going on. Legs open, his uncircumcised penis visible, one arm to the side, the other across his chest, fingers curled inwards. He stares at the ceiling. The flash just catching him, an after-thought. Do I or don't I? Embedded in the corner but still coded, still framed. A very faint pinpoint from the flash illuminates the catch-light in his eye. He is staring at the ceiling. Is he watching crickets, ants, dots on the roof? Or is he just bored, waiting, unknowing. The nakedness, the untouched penis, the legs apart, his age come across as natural. I code it as normal, age appropriate and dare I say it, he looks innocent. Innocent, it is such a loaded word. Once it is uttered it implies that there is an opposite. Guilty. In the photograph of the baby and his mother, No 320, there is a hesitation, the exclusion or inclusion. Guilty or innocent, or could it be guilty and innocent?*

### **The Children Photographs of Tuol Sleng**

A selection of the Tuol Sleng, S-21 photographs of men, women and children were published in the 1996 Twin Palm book *The Killing Fields*, a casebound limited edition of 3 000 copies. Here the publishers follow an art format, page after page of photographs, one per side, black and white, devoid of text. At the end, like an afterthought, some commentary about the prints, victims, perpetrators and survivors, a format the publishers would adopt again in the book, *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*. Susie Linfield in *The Cruel Radiance* uses one of the photographs from *The Killing Fields* on the cover of her book (see Figure 4.2). She comments:

But most stunning are the many children, photographed on their own, who would be tortured and killed as counterrevolutionary enemies or as the soiled descendents of such. *The Killing Fields* opens, after several pitch black pages, with the serene picture of a girl who looks to be about seven. She wears a neat, button-down gray shirt with a slightly wrinkled, gracefully rounded collar – an innocent child's collar; her eyes are clear, her eyebrows slightly full, her jet-black hair is cut off just below her ears, with one side flipping upward. She looks reserved, dignified, and remarkably poised. But to stare at her as she stares at us is to enter the abyss.

As if in a grotesque parody of a children's parade, she is followed by many others. Number 1 looks to be about seven, he has a full, high head of hair and

thick lips; there is a chain around his neck. Number 186 is a skinny, wild looking boy of perhaps nine whose face has been beaten and whose body is twisted by the adult to whom he is chained. (Linfield 2010, 57)

Figure 4.2. Front cover of *The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence*.  
Linfield, Susie. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2010.

The photograph Linfield uses for the cover of her book is ‘the serene picture of a girl who looks about seven’ (Linfield 2010, 57). I understand why; it ticks all the boxes, ‘gracefully’, ‘neat’, ‘innocent’, ‘clear’, ‘full’, ‘dignified’ and ‘poised’ (Linfield 2010, 57). In one paragraph it sums up much of what we have come to believe about children. There are much darker photographs in *The Killing Fields*. Many show the aftermath of beatings; frightened people covered with the marks of extreme violence. As the negatives lay around for several years before they were used, some prints show the ravages of time, as if the negatives had to go through a process of pain to survive. Some are slashed and ripped, others have large black splotches and stain marks that affect the final prints. They look more fitting to illustrate the death of thousands of people at the hands of Pol Pot. Linfield, and for that matter, Twin Palms, have by choosing to lead with ‘the serene picture’ made it more palatable, easier on the eye, and by doing so more acceptable to a wider audience. There is something about the process and the posing of the photographs that puts them in the category of criminality, judicial process and its associated concept of guilt. The photographs of the children prior to execution were taken by a team of photographers, young children themselves, controlled and orchestrated by another child, Nhem Ein.

### **Using Photography to Dehumanise the Victims**

Ein was born in 1959 and was recruited by the Khmer Rouge at ten years old, eventually being sent to China to be trained as a photographer, a role that saw him arrive at Tuol Sleng prison in 1976 where he became chief photographer at the age of sixteen. Ein’s recruitment at a young age was a form of indoctrination that worked particularly well on boys. The use of photographs to dehumanise and the indoctrination of young boys became part of the intricate process needed to justify the execution of thousands of people.

This point is made by filmmaker Rithy Panh in his interview with Joshua Oppenheimer about his 2003 film *S21: The Khmer Rouge Death Machine*.

The photographs are very important, because the moment that the photograph is taken is the first step towards putting the person to death. And as soon as that photograph is taken, that person is replaced by a number, and he has lost his or her identity. To have an effective genocide machine, it’s very difficult

to kill a human being. But if you take away the identity of that human being, it's much easier for that machine to work effectively.

The Nazis in World War 11 were out to exterminate the Jews. Even if it was a Jew in Siberia, they would find that person and execute him, because that person was Jewish. The Khmer Rouge were killing 'the enemy' so you had to make a dossier, to take a photograph, to prove that person as being an enemy. So you then can prove you act in destroying the enemy. It's not only a question of de-humanising the victim, but also of de-humanising the torturer, the guard. It's for this reason that they took very young boys to be indoctrinated. And that's something which is very prevalent in communist regimes, which is to rewrite, endlessly, the autobiographical confession. So [in] each version of the confession, they have been submitted to torture. And after so much torture the prisoner begins to lie. And to denounce others. So very quickly your friends become in the end your enemies. So what has been your group of friends suddenly becomes a network, a CIA network, or KGB. And it's not finished because then it's important that you accept and believe. And once you've accepted that, and believed that, you can be killed. It's for that reason that I describe the crime in Cambodia as a crime of genocide. (Oppenheimer 2013, 249)

Thierry De Duve, in the article "Art in the Face of Radical Evil", says in regard to Ein's photographs, 'It belongs to the definition of genocide that the people it exterminates are annihilated in their humanity even before they are actually killed' (De Duve 2008, 23). The photographic process in regard to criminality reduces people to a number and crime. Philip Short, in the book *Pol Pot: The History of a Nightmare*, also discusses the desensitising process of the guards comparing the French soldiers in Algeria and the Khmer Rouge.

Both were told in the Khmer phrase, to 'cut off your heart' – an injunction which, to a greater or lesser extent, applies to soldiers everywhere. Both were under pressure from peers. The French conscripts faced court-martial if they refused to carry out orders; the S-21 guards faced torture and death. (Short 2004, 364)

Ein and his team were involved in the dehumanising process that allowed for the torture and confessions necessary to condemn the prisoners. Short says, ‘The role of S-21 was not to kill but to extract confessions. Death was the finality, but it was almost incidental’ (Short 2004, 364). Cambodia adopted the French torture technique called ‘stuffing prisoners with water’, a practise now known as ‘waterboarding’ that is still used today to attempt to extract confessions (Short 2004, 365).

Ein photographs the captives from both front and side profiles, shots that signify criminality. In the book *The Killing Fields* a neck brace is shown in one side shot, rigid steel, part-medical, part scientific in appearance (Riley and Niven 1996, fig 10 – pages are not numbered throughout the photographic section of the publication). This invention was used in very early photographs, particularly daguerreotypes that required long exposures. With the person’s head clamped, the exposure could be made without the subject moving. Clamping of the head, often photographed against a white screen, a number pinned to their chest with side and front views, added to the dehumanising of the subjects. The brace alludes to the methodology and usage from the birth of photography: criminality, guilt and pseudo-science (Sekula 1986, 13-14). Ein numbers and photographs the prisoners, he is part of a process that leads to the next stage. The guard, at the next stage, sees the number not the person, following what they code from the past: the prisoner is not human, they are a number. The number signifies criminality, guilt.

### **The Origin of Criminal Photography**

The use of photographs as a means to identify criminals dates back to the U.S. civil war photographer Mathew Brady who was commissioned to photograph inmates of prisons to accompany Marmaduke Sampson’s 1846 publication *Rationale of Crime*. The daguerreotypes taken by Brady were converted to engravings and published to illustrate the alleged criminality of individuals based on the pseudo-scientific theory of phrenology (see Figure 4.3). The inmates, men, women and children, were photographed in upper body shots, face and side views accompanied by descriptive text to try and prove a correlation between criminality and readings of head shapes via the defunct theory of phrenology.

Figure 4.3. From *Rationale of Crime, and its Appropriate Treatment; Being a Treatise on Criminal Jurisprudence Considered in Relation to Cerebral Organization*, Sampson, Marmaduke. New York: D.Appleton and Company. 1846.

B.M is an inmate of the Long Island Farms; is distinguished for a reckless, stubborn, selfish disposition; is regardless of consequences; cares nothing of the opinions of others; seeks his own gratification without reference to the comforts or rights of any one, and is altogether perverse and selfish in the extreme.

The head indicates this character very strongly. Nearly the whole development is in the basilar region. The intellectual is small, particularly in the superior portion, and the whole coronal region is extremely defective. Such a child, left to the ordinary chances and influences of a public charity, has almost as little prospect of growing up an honest and happy member of society, as one born with deformed limbs has of becoming an accomplished pedestrian. (Sampson 1846, 169)

The purpose of the analysis of the daguerreotypes was shown in the introductory preface of Sampson's book, where the matron of the Mount Pleasant State Prison Eliza Farnham writes:

But many individuals are so constituted that while all the cerebral organs are in healthy condition, their predominant tendencies are continually to wrong.

These tendencies reign with different degrees of power over different minds. In some their supremacy seems to be undisputed by any higher influences in the same mind. In others, again, reason and the higher sentiments struggle with them for the mastery, and sometimes obtain it. In still another class the balance is so much in favour of these latter faculties that the propensities act without their consent only on rare occasions, when they are very powerfully addressed by external causes, and thus excited to their highest and most intense action. It is a fundamental truth, which society and legislators have failed to recognize, that all these individuals act in obedience to the operation of physical causes in themselves. The ignorant, who constitutes by far the larger class of criminals in all countries, are seldom responsible for the strength with which these causes operate at any period of their lives. (Farnham 1846, xvi)

According to Sampson,

The argument of Sir William Ellis, if received without the limitation which I have named, would lead us to presume, that, if a man who has during his whole life been a model of integrity, should suddenly exhibit an uncontrollable propensity for thieving, he should be allowed the plea of insanity; but that, if a man is tried for theft who has exhibited that propensity from the first moment when he was capable of action, he should, on the contrary, be considered responsible, and be severely punished.

In one case, a sudden and morbid action of the brain produces the effect, and in the other it is produced by malformation of that organ from birth. It is the duty of Justice and Benevolence to adopt means for the cure of both. To speak of punishment, in either case, is erroneous; because as regards the question of social responsibility, there can be no real distinction between the two states: yet, if we could imagine it to be necessary, it would most assuredly seem fair to punish the man who, having originally possessed a comparatively healthy organization, had contrived to impair it, than to inflict it upon one who never possessed, from his very birth, a tendency different from that which he has exhibited. (Sampson 1846, 9-11)

Both Farnham and Sampson look towards popular scientific theories of the time to try and prove a link to a biological or genetic cause of crime. While photographs were

used to illustrate the *Rationale of Crime*, the purpose was to show that the ‘criminal’ was not responsible for their action and should not be subject to harsh corporal punishment or the death penalty. Nicole Rafter, in *Criminals and their Scientists: The History of Criminology in International Perspective*, comments that the photographs used to illustrate it are promoting a particular viewpoint of criminal anthropology, ‘that criminality is a form of sickness, that there is something significant about the criminal’s brain, that biology mirrors morality, and that crime can be addressed through science’ (Rafter 2006, 161). According to Allan Sekula in the article “The Body and the Archive”, Sampson and Farnham subscribed,

to a variant of phrenology that argued for the possibility of therapeutic modification or enhancement of organically predetermined characteristics.

By marking children less in racial and ethnic terms, Farnham avoided stigmatizing them. Thus children in general were presented as more malleable figures than adults. Children were also presented as less weighted down by criminal biographies or by the habitual exercise of their worst faculties. Despite the fact that some of these boys were explicitly described as incorrigibles, children provided Farnham with a general figure of moral renewal. (Sekula 1986, 13-14)

While phrenology as a science is no longer subscribed too, ‘scientific racism’ including the belief of superior intelligence based on race and the practice of photographing criminals has continued right through to today. The methods and style are so ingrained that now when we see a photograph taken in frontal style, with numbering and side views, we not only assign criminality to the subject, we also run the risk of assigning guilt. They after all must have done something wrong to be photographed in this pose; hence they must be guilty of some wrongdoing against the state. Ein followed the format set by Brady and photographed frontal and side views, and like Brady, he assigned criminality to the children he photographed.

The photograph 320 (see Figure 4.1) shows a deviation in this process: instead of cropping into the woman alone, Ein also includes in the far corner her young toddler. This is not accidental, as in other photographs throughout *The Killing Fields*, we see women holding their babies. Likewise in the case of toddlers, the woman numbered as 73 has a toddler standing next to her at the edge of the print. Photographed, coded



and condemned by way of genetic association, but not by way of their own guilt. Perhaps they could be adopted, saved at such a young age; this does not apply to those individuals posed by themselves and thus assigned criminality. In Ein's photographs, starting from around the age of seven they are numbered and photographed alone. This is not unusual; the assigning of criminality, culpability and responsibility, hence the need for punishment, has in many countries a very young starting age.

### **United Nations and the Age of Criminality**

The United Nations has for several decades tried to get countries to agree to a minimum age of criminal responsibility in an attempt to protect the rights of children. UNICEF, under the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Article 1, "defines a 'child' as a person below the age of 18" (UNICEF 1989, 2) and, in Article 38 specified that the age for direct participation in an armed conflict should be 18 (UNICEF 1989, 5). While these rights are noted, it is also of note that there are provisos on both of these; in Article 1 the proviso is added 'unless the laws of a particular country set the legal age for adulthood younger' (UNICEF 1989, 2), and in Article 38 one sentence reads: 'Children under 15 should not be forced or recruited to take part in a war or join the armed forces' (UNICEF 1989, 11). If this recommendation had been followed, Ein and many more children, would not have been made to take part in the Cambodian genocide. More problematic from the United Nations' viewpoint on the rights of the child is the age of criminal responsibility. In 2007 the United Nations addressed this in "Children's Rights in Juvenile Justice" concluding:

that a minimum age of criminal responsibility [MACR] below the age of 12 years is considered by the Committee not to be internationally acceptable. State parties are encouraged to increase their lower MACR to the age of 12 as the absolute minimum age and to continue to increase it to a higher age level. (UNICEF 2007, 11)

This question of age was emphasised again in the next paragraph:

The Committee urges State parties not to lower their MACR to the age of 12. A higher MACR, for instance 14 or 16 years of age, contributes to a juvenile system which, in accordance with article 40 (3) (b) of CRC, deals with children in conflict with the law without resorting to judicial proceedings, providing

that the child's human rights and legal safeguards are fully respected.  
(UNICEF 2007, 11)

Some ten years earlier in the UNICEF report, "Special Protections Progress and Disparity: Old enough to be a Criminal?" Lisbet Palme notes that in the U.S. some states have a criminal responsibility age as low as six:

The wide variation in age of criminal responsibility reflects a lack of international consensus, and the number of countries with low ages indicates that many juvenile justice systems do not adequately consider the child's best interests. (Palme 1997, 1)

Today we still have dilemmas over the age of criminal responsibility where countries such as U.S., Bangladesh, Nigeria, Thailand, to name a few, still go as low as seven. The U.K., for example, after the Bulger case where a three year old was murdered by two ten year old boys, were reluctant to change the age of criminality closer to the United Nations' recommendations. Likewise in the U.S., where the age of responsible criminality is very low, there is a reluctance to change it. Andrea Tortora writing for the *Cincinnati Enquirer* in the year 2000 about a child killing another child, reiterates the stance of the U.S.:

It is common law in the United States that children under 7 are not held accountable for crimes. Between the ages of 6 and 8, experts say, there are critical changes in the way children think.

As children get older, they understand the concept of rules. They develop a sense of fair play. They understand the consequences of their actions, Dr. Brush said.

"A set of rules gets written on them inside, like the Ten Commandments on stone," he said. (Tortora 2000)

Despite the United Nations' assessment that child criminality should be at a much higher age that would allow for a judicial system that has the best interest of children in mind, this has not been done. Ein in singling out young children around seven (see *The Killing Fields* no 438, no1, no5) to be photographed standing on their own mirrors

the opinions of many countries, both third world and first. The age of childhood criminality and responsibility is extremely low in these countries, seemingly agreeing with the view that a 'critical change in the way children think' occurs between the ages of 6 to 8 (Tortora 2000). In Ein's photographs he also includes several adults with toddlers or babies, often appearing on the peripheral of the prints. Coded as guilty, but, not as guilty as those that stand alone; as can be seen in the innocently naked toddler in 320 (see Figure 4.1) who is unashamedly, unaware of the codes of convention around the display of nakedness.

### **Naked and Innocent?**

While the naked toddler may be unaware of the conventions and judgements of nakedness, viewers of the naked child are aware of the codes embedded in the photograph, including judgement of his uncircumcised penis. Cleanliness, guilt, innocence, poverty, salvation and religion are encoded in the 'smooth, moist epithelial tissues' that make up the prepuce that is removed at circumcision, a procedure this baby has not had to endure (Gollaher 2000, 121). The removal of such tissues, circumcision, is a long held ritual for religious reasons in Judaism and Islam where 'the consensus is overwhelming that an un-cut man is a second-class citizen' (Gollaher 2000, 46).

David Gollaher in *Circumcision: The History of the World's Most Controversial Surgery* devotes a chapter to the change in views of circumcision documenting its widespread acceptance in America. Here he outlines the ideology of the 1800s and 1900s that many diseases were linked to men not being circumcised; add to that the concern with cleanliness and the abhorrence of masturbation leading parents to opt for surgical removal of the prepuce.

Learning of its advantages in the privacy of their physicians' offices, Americans found circumcision appealing not only on medical grounds, but also for its connotations of science, health and cleanliness – newly important class distinctions.

So it came about that the foreskin, viewed as dangerous by the medical profession, commonly came to indicate ignorance, neglect and poverty. As white middle-class Gentiles adopted circumcision, those left behind were

recent immigrants, people of color, the poor, and others at the margin of respectable society. These were the groups imagined to have filthy, malodorous bodies: people who lacked culture, manners, intelligence, and, in a word, civilization. (Gollaher 2000, 108)

The body of a new born child is inscribed by codes and frameworks that can be viewed as signifying inferiority including skin colour, racial types, intelligence, even the possession of a few millimetres of skin that has not been surgically removed. We code nakedness as natural and a form of innocence. The ritualistic removal of the foreskin has a long history of iconography in paintings, where the infant sits, innocently, no tears shed, angelic, surrounded by a group of observers as he is circumcised. The nakedness of a toddler is rarely viewed as immoral or immodest but this changes, and the shamefulness of nakedness, or rather the inappropriateness of nakedness, seems to align with the United Nations' remarks on some countries minimum age of criminality. Philippe Ariès in the article, "From Immodesty to Innocence", discusses the diary in which Henri IV's physician details the liberties taken with Louis XIII during his first years of life where his nakedness, his penis, often the source of jokes was never thought of as unnatural.

After 1608 this kind of joke disappeared: he had become a little man – attaining the fateful age of seven – and at this age he had to be taught decency in language and behaviour. The boy of ten was forced to behave with a modesty which nobody had thought of expecting from a boy of five. Education scarcely began before the age of seven; moreover, these tardy scruples of decency are to be attributed to the beginnings of a reformation of manners, a sign of the religious and moral restoration which took place in the seventeenth century. (Ariès 1998, 43)

'The fateful age of seven' (Ariès 1998, 43), as Linfield noted, 'the serene girl' and 'Number 1' with 'a full, high head of hair and thick lips' with 'a chain around his neck' all look to be around seven (Linfield 2010, 57), the age when, in some countries, they can be held accountable for crimes. The ideal world of the United Nations age of criminality does not seem evident in the Cambodian photographs, and even today it does not appear relevant in many countries. Perhaps Ein in his photographs got the essence of the debate. We code nakedness as natural and a form of innocence, but this

innocence, naturalness, lasts for a very short time. If you are old enough to go to school, if you are old enough to be embarrassed, ashamed of your nakedness, you are old enough to be a criminal. Six to eight and a critical change occurs in your thinking (Tortora 2000). Under seven (perhaps I should say six) and one cannot be held accountable for one's actions – above that and one has entered the age of criminality. If something switches inside and one understands the concepts, rules and consequences of one's actions it must have a basis in the way one has been raised and what one has have been exposed too.

When is a person responsible, reprehensible, and capable of being judged? Is the age set so young to avoid the possibility of that one in a million child that possesses the knowledge, the understanding beyond any doubt of their criminality? Judging from afar is easy, and in the case of Ein, the horror of Khmer Rouge, S-21 and the execution photographs add to and form a dossier, an indictment. In the blog on Iconic Photos Alex Selwyn-Holmes notes when discussing Ein, 'As Arendt said of Eichmann, it was banality of evil personified, and like Eichmann, Nhem Ein has since retreated into bureaucratic doublespeak that he merely did what was asked of him' (Selwyn-Holmes 2011).

Eichmann! It seems a huge leap to compare Ein and his 'bureaucratic doublespeak' (Selwyn-Holmes 2011) to the convicted and executed war criminal who oversaw the transportation and execution of so many Jewish people during the holocaust, especially considering his involvement with the Khmer Rouge as a child under the age of ten. This view of Ein as 'like Eichmann' becomes even more problematic when the events surrounding the recruitment process in Cambodia are examined.

### **Ein: Childhood and Teenage Years in the Khmer Rouge**

During the Vietnam War the border of Cambodia was often used by Vietnamese Communists and was the target of a sustained bombing campaign by the United States. According to Taylor Owen and Ben Kiernan in the article "Bombs Over Cambodia":

The data released by Clinton shows the total payload dropped during these years to be nearly five times greater than the generally accepted figure. To put the revised total of 2,756,941 tons into perspective, the Allies dropped just over

2 million tons of bombs during all of World War II, including the bombs that struck Hiroshima and Nagasaki: 15,000 and 20,000 tons, respectively. Cambodia may well be the most heavily bombed country in history.

The Cambodian bombing campaign had two unintended side effects that ultimately combined to produce the very domino effect that the Vietnam War was supposed to prevent. First, the bombing forced the Vietnamese Communists deeper and deeper into Cambodia, bringing them into greater contact with Khmer Rouge insurgents. Second, the bombs drove ordinary Cambodians into the arms of the Khmer Rouge. (Owen and Kiernan 2006, 67)

At the time of these bombings the Khmer Rouge had ‘fewer than five thousand’ guerrillas, but by showing the people the effects of the bombing, ‘they kept on co-operating with the Khmer Rouge’ which included ‘sending their children off to go with them’ (Owen and Kiernan 2006, 68).

Owen and Kiernan note that the bombings of Cambodia started in 1965 and escalated into carpet bombing under the reign of Nixon in 1969 (Owen and Kiernan 2006, 67). Ein was recruited into the Khmer Rouge during the bombing phase that continued until 1973, when Congress:

angered by the destruction the campaign had caused and the systematic deception that had masked it, legislated a halt to the bombing of Cambodia. By then, the damage was already done. Having grown to more than two hundred thousand troops and militia forces by 1973, the Khmer Rouge captured Phnom Penh two years later. (Owen and Kiernan 2006, 68)

The recruitment of Ein at a young impressionable age was also the time when the strict regimented system of the Khmer Rouge was gaining ground.

Short observes:

The one thing that really did set Khmer communism apart at the end of the 1960s was its monastic stress on discipline. It was behaviour more appropriate to a religious sect than a political movement. In retrospect, it contained the

germs of the systematic destruction of the individual that would later become a hallmark of Khmer communist ideology. (Short 2004, 193)

Ein's recruitment, his indoctrination, would have included this type of 'systematic destruction of the individual' (Short 2004, 193). Doug Niven and Thy Phu in "A Portrait of S-21 Photographer Nhem Ein" allow 'this notorious photographer', (Niven and Phu 2013) to speak in his own words:

When I first arrived at Tuol Sleng I was hesitant (*kreak chet*), so scared, but because this was an assignment I had to take it. Later on I got used to it, like feeling numb.

What made me really scared was when I saw the trucks loaded with people and they shoved people off the trucks, and were pushed when they hit the ground. I was still young and it scared me. Those people were blindfolded and their hands were tied up.

When I was first at Tuol Sleng I was scared, but after seeing the same thing every day I got used to it. It became normal.

I rarely made mistakes in mixing the processing chemicals, because all these negatives were for record keeping. If I made a mistake, I would have a serious problem. If I had made one or two mistakes that would be it.

Sometimes when we were bored and had nothing to do we tickled each other and played around.

While I was working at Tuol Sleng I saw one of my cousin (sic) but I couldn't say anything or help. I had to pay attention to myself – rather than worry about another person [*kbal neak na sok neak nung*]. (Niven and Phu 2013)

While Ein was a photographer in charge of several apprentices, his participation in these events needs to be understood against the contexts of his age, the spectre of death, and the Cambodian methodology of guilt by association. Like many other young boys, he is indoctrinated and trained inside the Khmer Rouge; any straying, deliberate or perceived, could involve a dossier and his eventual execution as a

‘criminal’. By the time he is appointed as the photographer, he is a cog in the machine: photograph, record, develop, print, and deliver; anything else, the torture, beatings, confession and execution, he is not part of. In doing his job, in accordance with his own indoctrination, he can assign child criminality to the people he photographs.

In the Pol Pot regime, which was performing a genocidal extermination under the guise of punishing criminality, Ein was in a dangerous position. If he did not perform his job he faced the same fate as everyone else.

While adults may join organizations by choice, children indoctrinated at an early age live and believe because that is often all they know. If you are told you are no good, if you are told your birth means nothing, if you cannot celebrate special occasions unless told to by the hierarchy that is what you do. Trapped in the ‘monastic stress on discipline’ (Short 2004, 193) of the Khmer Rouge you have to conform to a condemnation of self, or face the consequences of your rebellion. In Ein’s case that would be death. Just how close Ein came to death can be seen in Seth Mydans’ article, ‘Faces From Beyond the Grave’:

Mr. Nhem Ein was a perfectionist, and that may have saved his life. He photographed hundreds of people a day, processing his film overnight to be attached to individual dossiers, and he said he never spoiled a picture.

In 1977 when Pol Pot paid a visit to China, Mr. Nhem Ein was ordered to process film from the trip. One of the negatives was damaged and there were spots on the eyes of the leader. The photographer was accused of lese-majeste, interrogated and sent to a prison farm. Only when he convinced his superiors that the film had been damaged before it reached him was he spared the fate of the thousands of people whose portraits he had taken. (Mydans 1997)

In the days prior to Photoshop, prior to digital, in a film based era, spots were inevitable with developing, fixing, enlarging and printing. Spots occurred primarily due to minute dust particles in the enlarging lens that showed up as white dots on the prints. You would sit with a microscopic scope, an ultra-thin brush and a set of inks and test paper until you got the colour right then you would spot out the mark. Steady hand and years of practice. If you could spot the print, and not see any signs of where



you had worked, you knew it was perfect. ‘Ein was a perfectionist’ (Mydans 1997). Nothing is said of his interrogation, verbal or physical, suffice to say being demoted and put on a prison farm showed how close he was to death.

To those who judge Ein, I am talking of his actions back then: what choice did he have? Run away? Refuse to photograph people? Try to hide his cousin? Acknowledge and fight for his cousin’s life? Admirable indeed. That’s what we would have viewed as courageous, principled, and right. If he was beaten and executed it would have been a noble death. But Ein, in the words of Susan Sontag in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, was ‘the lackey behind the camera’ (Sontag 2004, 55). The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines lackey as, ‘a person who acts like a weak servant of someone powerful’ an apt description indeed. However, what Ein did by being a weak servant was allow himself to survive. What is also important to remember, in the view of Ein as a photographer, is how the original context, the frame within which we should be viewing this work has changed. This is vital in any argument in relation to photographs; change the context and the meaning, the reading of the photographs will be different, as can be seen in the S-21 photographs.

### **Ethics in the Framework of Viewing and Presentation**

According to Judith Butler in *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* when viewing war photographs we need:

to consider what forms of social and state power are “embedded” in the frame, including state and military regulatory regimes. Rarely does this operation of mandatory and dramaturgical “framing” become part of what is seen, much less what is told. But when it does, we are led to interpret the interpretation that has been imposed upon us, developing our analysis into a social critique of regulatory and censorious power. (Butler 2009, 72)

In context, the Ein photographs were taken under a military regime that was fanatical in the way it recruited and punished people. Damaging a photograph of the leader even by mistake could lead to punishment and death. This is the regime a young boy and his associates were working in, be it as photographer, or guard. Likewise, the Pol Pot regime, the Khmer Rouge, were also operating in a particular framework, a climate of

fear, caused by the blanket bombing instigated by the U.S. To understand the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of Ein’s actions I also have to take into account not only the actions of the Khmer Rouge but also the U.S. Perhaps what I want is a break, a plea to accept another, or the ‘other’, who often have darker skins and different beliefs. Sontag observes the difference between the American sentiments (dare I say Western?) in *Regarding the Pain of Others* when she comments:

The acknowledgement of the American use of disproportionate firepower in war (in violation of one of the cardinal laws of war) is very much not a national project. (Sontag 2004, 84)

As discussed earlier, the years of carpet bombing by the U.S. would have added to the fear and paranoia that fuelled the genocidal activities of the Khmer Rouge. Ariella Azoulay in the book *The Civil Contract of Photography* says:

The civil contract of photography shifts the focus away from the ethics of seeing or viewing to an ethics of the spectator, an ethics that begins to sketch the contours of the spectator’s responsibility toward what is visible. (Azoulay [2008] 2014, 130)

This puts the onus back on the viewer, the spectator, that in viewing the photograph you too have a responsibility, a contract if you will, to engage. The problem with photographs, as is evident when we look at Ein’s Cambodian photographs, is there are multiple ways to view them; some that should leave us feeling very uneasy as spectators, especially if we assume that we have a ‘responsibility toward what is visible’ (Azoulay [2008] 2014, 130). In the case of Ein’s photographs, a choice has been made by the publishers of *The Killing Fields* and Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) to enlarge them and present them as objects of dark aesthetic beauty. According to Stéphanie Benzaquen in “Remediating Genocidal Images into Artworks: The Case of the Tuol Sleng Mug Shots”, ‘the mug shots have been circulated in various media and settings, from book covers to tourists’ blogs and even a Thai horror movie’ (Benzaquen 2012, 208).

This is a problem for an uninformed viewer as the photographic framework has become one of horrific beauty rather than of a photograph representing a judgement.

Ein's original works were printed small, criminal profile shots, often with a front and a side view. The original photographs stood as a documented record of 'alleged' criminality and read and viewed in this manner they are far different than an art print judged on its aesthetics of beauty. This, of course does not mean the victims that Ein photographed are guilty of any criminality, it just means the original prints were not designed to be viewed as quasi-art pieces. Medium-format cameras, such as the one Ein used, delivered a larger negative surface that produced a finer, less grainy image than 35mm film, hence it had a sharper, more professional look, especially when enlarged.

The contemporary genre of mugshots, in contrast, have a flatness about them, washed out colour, isolated, one dimensional; think unflattering authoritarianism, the passport photograph, the driver's license, the front-on no-smile 'is that really me?' It is a category of photograph, a particular style that world-wide we associate with governmental control. The size, the angle of the chin, the straight-on controlled blandness, expressionless, click, this is the me I don't like: the boring, the plain, the unadorned, the identifiable. Take something from several decades ago, using a different film, a stronger, more contrasting light, a confusing array of people, some tortured, some old, some young, some very young, put some against a white projector screen (the isolated screen of government authority), others against walls, some coded with messages, some numbered, some not – and above all professionally print and change the size and presentation, and you will cause confusion. And black and white, of course, the mysticism of photography: black and white equates to art. Our minds are fixed on what we have seen year in year out as washed out governmental record photographs, not the photographs produced by a teenager under extreme pressure in what could easily turn into a life or death situation.

By being presented as a horrific, yet hauntingly beautiful artwork, it distances itself from what it was. Presented in the original format, while differing from the bland washed out, colour and flatness of modern day mugshots, the image would still have retained enough similarities to the latter to be seen as representative of alleged criminality – judgemental in style and in a clearly defined genre. By presenting it as the other, the foreigner, the genocidal (hence providing condemnation and justification

for our military actions past or present) we can avoid asking questions that make us uncomfortable. Or, as Sontag so succinctly states in *Regarding the Pain of Others*,

Americans prefer to picture the evil that was *there*, and from which the United States – a unique nation, one without any certifiably wicked leaders throughout its entire history – is exempt. (Sontag 2004, 79)

Ein, at the Khmer Rouge's bidding, revealed the young age at which criminality can be assigned to a child. It is no different in the U.S. The Khmer Rouge used torture to extract confessions; so has the U.S. Guilt can be assigned by association and race, in the Khmer Rouge's case their view of the Chinese; likewise, the U.S. routinely profiles and judges according to a racial criteria (An excellent expose of modern day racism in the U.S. can be found in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander). In the art book or gallery context, presenting Ein's subjects as the other, his work as so profoundly different than the modern day criminal mugshot, means that U.S. audiences and their allies do not have to address one of the major causes of the chaos in the Indochina region: the blanket bombing, death, maiming and years of sustained fear. The Cambodian countryside is littered with unexploded ordinances which still require millions of dollars and decades of work to remove. The Cambodian Mine Action and Victim Assistance Authority (CMAA) lists its donors as Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), Austria, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), and the U.K. Department for International Development (DFID), Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) and UNICEF. This work and huge financial burden on an impoverished country is the direct result of the U.S. indiscriminate bombing blitz.

### **Changing Execution Photographs to Genocidal Art**

The problem with Nhem Ein which is addressed at length in Thierry de Duve's article 'Art in the Face of Radical Evil', is in the labelling of the photographs as art and, by default, viewing Ein as an artist.

Benzaquen noted that the usage of Ein's photographs has become so extensive: 'It is this administrative record of extermination, the very symbol of Khmer Rouge's absolute power, which has become the icon of the Cambodian Genocide' (Benzaquen

2012, 208). So it has to be asked how did Ein, the ‘notorious photographer’ (Niven and Phu 2013), ‘the lackey,’ (Sontag 2004, 55) with ‘Eichmann’ like ‘bureaucratic doublespeak’ (Shelwyn-Holmes 2011), get to be in the position where his work became ‘the icon of the Cambodian Genocide?’ (Benzaquen 2012, 208). What level of self-promotion did he engage in to profit from such a genocidal tragedy? It is here that we need to look to see how crucial the framework changes are in our understanding of the Ein photographs.

David Chandler in *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot’s Secret Prison* follows the transitional usage of Ein’s photographs from when they were first discovered by the Vietnamese forces that overthrew Cambodia in 1979. The prison compound carried no identification on its exterior, but inside the Vietnamese found bodies, prison and torture implements along with thousands of documents and photographs. These documents designated the area by the code name S-21, the S stood for *Sala* (hall) while ‘21’ stood for the compound Khmer term *santebal* [security police] (Chandler 2000, 3). ‘Sensing the historical importance and the propaganda value of their discovery, the Vietnamese closed off the site, cleaned it up, and began, with Cambodian help, to examine its voluminous archive’ (Chandler 2000, 4). The task of archiving and examining the documents was given to a Vietnamese colonel, Mai Lam, ‘who was fluent in Khmer and had extensive experience in legal studies and museology’ (Chandler 2000, 4). For close to eighteen months only foreigners were permitted to enter the area as it was converted to a museum. In the first four months after the ban on Cambodians was lifted, over three hundred thousand people viewed the compound, in particular the ‘hundreds of enlarged mug shots of prisoners on view on the ground floor’ (Chandler 2000, 8). This implies that to the Cambodian people it was vitally important to find photographs of their loved ones, even if this only meant that they had proof that their loved ones had been executed by the Khmer Rouge. Here the photographs performed a different function, one of identification and loss, a form of horrific closure.

Documenting another change in the framework for Ein’s photographs Rachel Hughes, in the article, “The Abject Artefacts of Memory: Photographs from Cambodia’s Genocide” says permission was granted to Cornell University to preserve documents and microfiche copy archives, a project that lasted for two years (Hughes 2003, 27).

It was then that two U.S. photojournalists, Douglas Niven and Christopher Riley, proposed a project which eventually became a not-for-profit organisation, the Photo Archive Group set-up for ‘cleaning, cataloguing and printing of the S-21 photographs’ (Hughes 2003, 29).

The work of cleaning, indexing and printing some 6000 original photographic negatives, commenced in 1994; 100 of the 6000 negatives involved in the project were finally selected to be reproduced in six editions. (Hughes 2003, 29)

What Riley and Niven were able to achieve, what they negotiated for, was the ownership of the copyright to these hundred photographs, effectively allowing them to use the images in any way they saw fit. While the project may have had noble intentions, not-for-profit, does not mean it cannot make income, rather, it means that the money is not distributed to shareholders as a profit dividend. Making the photographs into an edition, thus limiting availability, increased their value, in some respects making them an artwork. In ‘art’ photography as in other art forms, limited editions are made to create profit. Typically, a photograph marketed as an ‘open edition’ can be printed many times so that its value lies in what someone is prepared to pay for the aesthetics of a print. By making a print a limited edition, especially in very low numbers, the photographer had added to the aesthetics and desirability of the print by introducing rarity. Knowing for example, that there are only going to be six prints, say printed on 16” x 20” 308 smooth fine art photo rag, confers more value and increases potential value if the print sells out. Seventy eight of the photographs were selected to appear in the 1996 Twin Palms Limited Edition book *The Killing Fields* and in 1997 twenty two of the portraits were displayed at the Museum of Modern Art [MoMA] (Hughes 2003, 34).

‘Rescued’ by foreign forces, they are presented as if no-one in their homeland of Cambodia cared, stark portraits without identity or life histories, a commodity to be viewed, reflected on and dismissed. In trying to reconcile with these depictions several artists have come up with ways they feel can deliver greater compassion to the memory of the Cambodian victims. Benzaquen discusses several artists who have used the ‘Tuol Sleng Mug Shots’ in what she calls ‘a gesture of respect towards the victims, their memory’ (Benzaquen 2012, 210). Brazilian artist Alice Miceli in her artwork 88

out of 14 000 used ‘the portraits of inmates for whom the dates of both arrest and execution were available: 88 people’ (Benzaquen 2012, 214). Miceli projected the portraits onto a black space with falling sand with a kilogram of sand representing one day of life, which, Benzaquen says ‘becomes a means of rescue as the artist injects life (the life of the prisoner) into the document’ (Benzaquen 2012, 215). Greek artist Despina Meimaroglou does a dual installation, one with stage designer Lorie Marks entitled *Discovering the Other: Tuol Sleng – After All Who Rewrites History Better Than You*, and the other entitled *Me Instead of Them*. The first part reconstructs the cell Meimaroglou visited in Tuol Sleng Museum ‘to force the viewer to enter the room, to feel as uneasy and distressed as she felt’ (Benzaquen 2012, 216). Once in the room, the second part of the installation consists of five portraits of Meimaroglou with a paper bag over her head, each printed with one of the images of the ‘Tuol Sleng Mug Shots’. The installation is designed to encourage the viewer ‘to think about the feelings of the inmates at the moment they were photographed’ (Benzaquen 2012, 217). Execution photographs, represented as nameless, voiceless art, reclaimed by artists to be re-interpreted by and interact with viewers. As Benzaquen says, ‘Genocidal images are thus reconfigured through a long chain and remediation and transformation, integrated with within multiple social realms of remembrance, resounding in other contexts, signifying differently, sometimes at the expense of their original meaning’ (Benzaquen 2012, 221).

Genocidal images, genocidal art, reproduced ‘sometimes at the expense of their original meaning’ (Benzaquen 2012, 221). What I have noted in the previous chapter and this one is the use of graphic images of lynching and execution photographs in art books. In the case of *The Killing Fields*, or rather in the case of the Photo Archive Group, this representation at the ‘expense of their original meaning’ (Benzaquen 2012, 221) did not have to be the case. In *Beyond Biopolitics: Theory, Violence, and Horror in World Politics* Francois Debrix and Alexander D. Barber discuss the work of theorists Judith Butler and Susan Sontag in regard to war, violence and the photographic image:

Short of any accompanying narrative, a photograph remains fragmentary in relation to meaning and understanding. The bits and pieces of “real life” situations photography provides the viewer with lack (sic) the narrative

coherence and constancy Sontag believes is necessary for proper representation and realization.

Butler counters Sontag's perspective by claiming that, on the contrary, the photographic frame itself already contains and enables certain interpretations. (Debrix and Barber 2012, 2)

In black and white photography there is a zonal system. A print can run the full gamut from pitch black to pure white with graduated zones of grey in between. Situating ourselves as either in the pitch black or pure white zone blinds us to the array of other options. It is in the grey areas that we can find hidden truths (is there such a thing?) and nuances. In the print I have been analysing we can see Asian ethnicity, a hint of authority in the appearance of the number 320, the use of certain photographic techniques, clothing styles, perhaps slight despair on the mother's face, and, although slightly problematically, coded religious and cultural differences via the uncircumcised penis. Other than these we need outside narratives to add what is really going on, it can only become interpreted as an atrocity photograph, an execution photograph by the addition of narrative and text. Using the execution photographs in art books, selling them to museum collections, limiting editions to a certain number and putting minimal descriptive text may gain more viewers in certain markets but it fractures the truth and allows for misrepresentation.

Before the Photo Archive Group embarked on their project there had already been several years' worth of work done on documents, and, as noted by Sarah Munro in *Exhibiting Atrocity: A Preliminary Exhibition Proposal for the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre's State Identification Card Portrait Collection*, although MoMA knew the names of five of the victims whose images they exhibited, they chose not to list their names in the display (Munro 2009, 49). This seems to add to the dehumanising of the victims, in contrast to the original identification and lamentation experienced by many of the Khmer people who had visited the centre after the Vietnamese opened it up. Recently, 1200 passport size images, containing handwritten notes on the back of the photographs from the victims, have been donated to the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-CAM) to add to their book that lists the names of over a million victims of the genocide (AFP 2012). This wealth of information from the start of the bombing of Cambodia could be used to stop the



‘dehumanising’ usage of the atrocity photographs. The prolonged bombing and death of people including children and the subsequent uprising and genocidal behaviour of the Khmer Rouge brings to mind Adriana Cavarero’s observation in *Horrorism: Making Contemporary Violence*:

the slaughter of innocents becomes a criterion that justifies, indeed demands, the slaughter of other innocents. Nor is the reference to children to be understood here and elsewhere, as rhetorical artifice or pathetic exaggeration. Far from killing them by mistake, horrorism actually prefers children, because in them it finds the perfect victims. (Cavarero 2009, 105)

Why change? If you have nameless, beautifully photographed images of genocide sufferers, you have the perfect victims. They lend themselves to be constantly recirculated in magazines, books, art and museum exhibitions all the way maintaining their nameless ambiguity. The DC-CAM with its lofty goals of promoting an objective history of the Khmer Rouge and accountability for abuses lists five partners, Ministry of Education, Rutgers University-Newark and the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum. The other two partners are the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts and Ministry of Tourism, suggesting that there is money to be made in promoting genocide tourism. This has not been lost on Nhem Ein who as Benzaquen comments tried to make money by attempting to sell his photographic equipment along with Pol Pot’s sandals (Benzaquen 221). Or as de Duve says, Ein upon learning of the Arles exhibition ‘declared himself proud to be the “star” of a photo festival in France, and virtually thanked the organisers for the nearly bestowed title of artist’ (De Duve 2008, 16). Much more recently in his role as a district deputy governor in Anlong Veng, a former Khmer Rouge stronghold, Ein tried to set up a private museum ‘to display his treasures’ (Fitzpatrick 2012). Already visitors come to see the grave of cremated Pol Pot and the house of former Brother Number Five, Ta Mok known as the ‘Butcher’. According to Ein, if the museum was built, he would display the camera used to photograph the victims of genocide: ‘This camera, if I put it in a museum, I would call it the killing camera’ (Fitzpatrick 2012).

## Artistic Fraud in Photography

The presentation of Ein's photographs have led to much discussion for several decades among media and academic circles, and in Cambodia. He was not an artist. He is not an artist. He was a young boy, recruited under the spectre of torture and death, who did his work in trying circumstances. Someone who was not given the opportunity to develop his own set of beliefs and morals. Someone who at times when it was quiet, tickled the boys he worked with; childlike behaviour indeed. Ein stayed with the Khmer Rouge, in hiding for decades, his indoctrinated beliefs would have coloured his views of the world. When his work was hailed as significant, it gave him credence that something he did was of value. After several decades in this strict regime it would be extremely difficult for Ein to face the prospect that his life was served for the wrong cause – just as it would be extremely difficult for the U.S. to assume responsibility for its actions both past and present.

The original intention of the photographs is far removed from art, collector's items, tourist attractions, or re-interpreted reflective art works. They mirrored criminality-style photographs which can be traced back to Brady's early usage of the photograph to record individuals who did not conform to what the government at the time expected of them. Part of the confusion with regard to Ein's photographs is the association with art, or professional photography, because of the use of medium-format cameras and white backgrounds. Gus Macdonald in *Camera Victorian Eyewitness: A History of Photography: 1826-1913*, looks at the work of Thomas Barnardo in London in the 1870s, in which homeless children are photographed for his charity using before and after shots to show the progress they made after they had been picked up and looked after by his institution (see also Introduction). The problem was that the poses, the occupations and the clothes that had had extra rips made in them were all fabrications:

The court judged him guilty of 'artistic fiction', public faith in his probity was shaken, and from then on Barnardo's studio stuck to stark mug shots for the records. More than 50,000 were taken, and today this desolating catalogue of staring children has a power to move which the 'artistic fictions' cannot match. (McDonald 1979, 112)

In my view the mug shots against white background are just as fake, making Barnardo guilty of two fabrications, although, like the Tuol Sleng photographs ‘this desolating catalogue of staring children has a power to move’ (MacDonald 1979, 112).

The ‘power to move’ (MacDonald 1979, 112). Or as Ariella Azoulay writes, ‘Photography appeared as a new tribunal, a universal and impartial judge that could do justice to the past, present and future’ (Azoulay [2008] 2014, 121).

But photography is not so honest, the photograph is always taken for a particular reason and can be read and re-read multiple times – it may parade as truth but that parade has to be supported by evidence. In the case of the S-21 photographs they need to be read in the right context, not as art.







## Chapter Four

### The Forensic Witness: Srebrenica and Vukovar 1996

Figure 5.1. Page 63 from *The Graves: Srebrenica and Vukovar*, Gilles Peress. 1996.

*Gilles Peress' photograph is a photograph of a photograph; a memory of a memory. There is always something disturbing about photographing a photograph. It would be easy to take the photograph, scan, copy and hence memorialise it. Photographing it changes our interpretation of the image. It signals to us that this is unusual, this is different, this is recording a wrong. Gilles Peress does it well. He did it in the genocide in Rwanda and he does it in documenting the genocidal war crimes of the former Yugoslavia. Interspersed in the book *The Graves: Srebrenica and Vukovar* are pictures of the living and the dead, the investigated and the investigators, clothing and skeletons, children's pictures and melted photographs. Page 60: 'Fall 1996, Kalesija, Make-shift morgue' – stark white type on mid tone grey. It acts as a warning: what will follow has been photographed inside a morgue. Dead objects from dead people. Page 61: a multi-composed shot of clothes – LZ2-88. Page 62: a*

*photograph before the photograph. Page 67: a child's picture – Christmas, the triangular tree, the presents and a happy boy and girl running towards their treats. I think it has been done in pencil, the tree lovingly crafted in time-consuming patterns, a pine tree's needles intricately drawn. The tree stands on what looks like a cloth, a slight differing from tradition. I wonder, too, whether this drawing commemorates a Julian calendar Christmas on January 7<sup>th</sup> to mark a difference in the traditions and religions of a people that once lived easily together and now do not. The girl standing transfixed, balloon in hand, arms spread, eyes wide, excited at the gifts in front of her. The boy, late to the scene, running, ear to ear grin, with high waisted pants and boots, perennially late; boys, always busy with other things. In the top right, very faded, worn, a man, Santa Claus with a sack of presents, weary of bringing peace and cheer to a world devoid of it. The picture, the child's picture, reveals all this festivity – now that cheerful scene, a distant past – is also in the morgue.*

*The book is constructed well in a story-telling, documentary mode. The adult clothes, the photographic memory, doubled up, and the child's picture of festive celebration. Page 63: the photograph. The photograph is degraded and damaged, a large jagged tear, an episiotomy, dragging children from a womb-like comfort to a living hell. The plastic resin emulsion has melted into most of the photograph and intriguing swirls and shapes etch into the print. It is this melt that draws you into the photograph and its image; two children, a boy and a girl, surrounded, but alone – plastic, fragile, paper survivors.*

*Teasingly we see fragments of two grown women defined by clothes and body shape but faceless, no longer able to see or protect the two children visible in the print. One woman's dress is dark, sombre, the folds and layers hit the ground, a weariness descending as if she is too tired to hoist the dress those last few inches to avoid the inevitable drag. It looks like she has boots on, or at least dark working shoes – she stands close to the children, but not intimately so, as if she belongs to another time, another era, where convention dictated that you did not openly show affection. The other woman stands behind the two children, her dress, rather skirt, looks more youthful, patterned, tucked in at the waist where the blouse balloons slightly, soft looking material, hanging into full length sleeves with a tight cuff. Her hand droops, open, softly by her side behind the boy and the girl. Her face, like the other woman's,*



*is obliterated, melted into a plastic blob, a veil of emulsified resin that tells us everything, and nothing, at the same time. Who are they? Did they too perish in the mass grave in a fury of genocidal anger? Were they, as women, subjected to the horrors of the newly formed rape camps, further humiliated, impregnated in a bizarre form of ethnic extermination? They may have survived, they may still live. The photograph may have been in possession of a man, boy, to remind him of his family, clutching onto paper memorabilia, a memory as important as life. The children, a boy and a girl, maybe 4 and 8, who knows, stand awkward, they do not smile; a slight grimace perhaps, the 'Oh, no! not another photograph'. The pose, the look, is amateurish, not professional – now a charred emblem of mass murder, a genocidal blemish to finish the century off, going with it the rapidly endangered film-based technology used to photograph the images in **The Graves: Srebrenica and Vukovar.***

### **Black and White in 35mm**

Gilles Peress is a member of Magnum photographs, whose books *Telex Iran*, *Rwanda: The Silence*, *Farewell to Bosnia* and *The Graves: Srebrenica and Vukovar* often document atrocities (Stover and Peress 1998, back cover). *The Graves: Srebrenica and Vukovar* was published by Scalo Publishers, and in sharp contrast to the books *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* and *The Killing Fields*, it successfully avoids the art market look. It is a thick hard-cover, some 300 plus pages long, of A5 size, with uncaptioned black and white photographs. The uncaptioned photographs are frustrating; but perhaps, too, writing about and photographing genocide is also frustrating. A story without an answer, a story without an end. The text is written by Eric Stover, an Executive Director of Physicians for Human Rights between 1992-1995. Scalo Publishers, which went bankrupt in the early part of this century (Johnson 2008), do an excellent job of presenting sombre material in a thought-provoking way while avoiding the aura of a coffee table photo book. A defunct publisher and an almost defunct photographic technique. The technology used by Peress at the end of the last century is fast becoming obsolete. Increasingly digital technology, non- film based, has taken over. A contact sheet from pages 14 and 15 of *The Graves: Srebrenica and Vukovar* reveals that Peress used Kodak 5063TX film, a 400ASA rated black and white film.

Figure 5.2. Webpage. Kodak Professional TRI-X Film.

Kodak's advertising blurb pitches the film as 'ALWAYS STRIKINGLY HONEST' adding a 'level of realism as dramatic and profound as each subject'. On the right side it shows a medium-format, posed shot, photographed by none other than Sebastio Salgado. But no film by itself is 'strikingly honest' and its 'level of realism' is only revealed by what the photographer allows us to see and any words that accompany it. Even then, we bring to the table our prejudices, our understanding, our readings, hidden, subversive, perhaps a glimmer of truth. Iconic, archaic, black and white film, 35mm film, with a battered M series Leica the rugged photojournalist tradition, rangefinder, street style photography, covert and unobtrusive, small hand held weapon of choice. Peress shoots with a Leica (Leica 2011) and 'strikingly honest' Tri-X film. Black and white film has the gritty tradition of being honest, true; dare I say, artistic.

I look at the photographs in *The Graves: Srebrenica and Vukovar* and find that the choice of film fits the genre. It is dark, foreboding and grey, burial sites with the shreds

of humanity strewn amongst thickly caked mud. Page 216: white type on mid-tone grey – Spring 1996 Vukovar – I barely see the words as I look at the close-up of someone on Page 217. It is the face, or rather the remnants of the face, that haunts – just a skull buried in mud, scraped away enough to reveal a set of teeth parted in an eerie grimace of death. It may be the spring of 1996 in Vukovar, but this scene surpasses the darkest day in any winter. It must smell. The smell must leach and stain your body as they are still in the throes of decomposing; fresh war crimes, fresh genocide. Page 220: a white coloured sneaker, complete with sock and the decomposed remains of a leg revealing an intact tibia and fibula bent at the knee. The shoe looks youthful, lace undone, wide format, like a skating shoe. I think he is, rather *was*, young. Young and dead. The opposing Page 221 is reminiscent of a horror scene from Pompeii: arms splayed by the side, finger eviscerated, revealing intact delicately fine hand bones, and again, it is the face that reveals everything – the agony of a painful death – teeth ajar, an unsuppressed final scream.

The team's leader spoke softly into a small tape recorder in his right hand: "Body 142 is an adult male, partially decomposed ... left arm bandaged ... sweatshirt, light blue in color; with horizontal red stripes ... brown trousers and black belt." He paused and slipped his right hand into one of the pockets of the pants. "A set of keys are in the right trouser pocket," he said into the tape recorder. When he finished, his colleagues placed the body in a white bag and wrote "Ovčara 142" on its side. They then carried it up the ramp and deposited it in the refrigeration container. (Stover and Peress 1998, 254)

### **The Keys of Ovčara**

Ovc – 142 #2 Keys (3) @ Front Pocket 10-27-96 (Stover and Peress 1998, 225). A body, adult male, reduced to a set of three key: two of them fairly modern, one ancient, the thicker farmyard, country style lock, of a bygone era (see Figure 5.3). The world has changed, 'small tape recorder', it sounds ancient, primitive, yet, it was only two decades ago; wounds, survivors, still fresh and smarting in pain.

Figure 5.3. From *The Graves: Srebrenica and Vukovar*. Gilles Peress, 1996.

I have an illusion, a spine-tingling thought, that in the pages of the book I have read they have identified the man through the use of the keys – after all, this is just as much as about giving people the chance to grieve properly, as it is about bringing the perpetrators to trial.

They went through what was left of the pockets in the body's clothing looking for something that might identify it. All they found was a set of keys. The deputy sheriff had a hunch, though, that the body might belong to a fellow in Silver City, a regular hunter; who had disappeared a couple of years before. Snow and his father went with the deputy sheriff who drove straight to the hunter's house in town. The deputy walked up to the front door and knocked. No one answered, so he tried one of the keys they'd found. It fit the lock perfectly. (Stover and Peress 1998, 164)

I am wrong. The event described happened in the 1940s, another country, another continent, a simpler, less complex case: a hunter, a heart attack, a house, a set of keys; Silver City, New Mexico. Vukovar is no Silver City. The keys with the writing are duly photographed by Peress, transformed from landscape to portrait style to adorn the front cover of *The Graves: Srebrenica and Vukovar*. Enter if you dare. Turn the key to Hades, hell on earth. The keys on the front cover are important as they signal the entry, the start of the conflict, not located at Srebrenica but at Vukovar, not in 1995, but in 1991, under attack and bombardment from Serbian forces. In the book

*Burn This House: The Making and Unmaking of Yugoslavia*, Ejub Štitkovic, in the chapter, “Croatia: The First War”, locates the districts of Vukovar and Ovčara, the farmyard slaughter field together.

Numerous defenders of Vukovar were executed after the town fell. About two hundred men were separated from the rest and, in groups of sixty, were loaded on YPA buses, which took them to the farm called Ovčara, lying between the towns of Vukovar, Negoslavci, and Sotin. There they were placed into farm-equipment storage rooms and beaten. By nightfall, groups of twenty were loaded on a truck that returned about twenty minutes later for another group of twenty. In 1992, about two kilometres southeast of Ovčara, a mass grave was found with the remains of hundreds of people. Apparently, 320 were shot during the first night alone. (Štitkovic 2000, 165)

This aligns with the version recorded by Stover in *The Graves: Srebrenica and Vukovar* when in October 1992 a soldier named ‘Marko’ claimed he was ‘the survivor of a massacre that had taken place in farmer’s field the year before’ (Stover and Peress 1998, 102).

Figure 5.4. Page 62 from *The Graves: Srebrenica and Vukovar*. Gilles Peress, 1996

## **Dating Photographs**

Now I stare at the cover again. Welcome to hell, perhaps it is more like purgatory, the in-between land, surely hell was before. Definitely it is welcome to humanity (or more accurately inhumanity), because this is what it has become; or rather always was, the ‘other’, the maligned, the animal. Page 63 again (see Figure 5.1). The resin swirls black inky on white, oil colour on water. I wish it was shot in colour. Arty, photo-journalistic black and white may suit the death tones, the decayed, the dying, but I want to see the colour of their clothes, the dresses, the faces. I don’t think the original was taken in black and white, I have a suspicion it is colour – the bleed of the print goes edge to edge – the format of the print I suspect it is 6x4” or if the ratio of conversion is accurate and it is true to size, 6 x 4.5”, it reminds me of the era of the mass print, 1970s to 80s. This contrasts against Page 62, with this photograph having a different shape, different feel and border, older, clothes more dated (see Figure 5.4). The format of the finished film, the square photograph and the white border of the print on page 62 date further back into a different era than the one on page 63. Page 63 is tantalisingly close to the time period, perhaps the children are still children, or teenagers, alive or dead. On Page 62 the photograph looks aged and I suspect the children are now adults, relics of a bygone age. It is gut feel, not facts. Black and white does not reveal too much truth in this circumstance. I de-code what I think and know and try to research some more via The National Archives of Australia guide to “Preserving Photographs”:

### **Prints**

Traditional fibre-based photographic prints were based on high quality, pure cellulose papers and are considered to be an archival format. From the 1960s resin-coated paper (RC) prints were introduced because they could be quickly processed by hand or machine, but are not regarded as archival.

### **Preservation and Storage**

Colour images change colour balances as they age. This is because one or more of the dyes that form the colour become colourless. For example, colour images from the 1970s often appear orange, because the blue dye is starting to disappear. ([naa.gov.au](http://naa.gov.au))

If I could see in colour perhaps I would be able to date and age the print on Page 63, maybe the blue dye, the life force of the print, is leaching out into paper oblivion. I suspect it may be not leaching, indicating it is even more recent, but all I can see is two children staring back at me against the skirts of women, in a swirl of melted resin coated paper. They look like country people, terminology is so difficult, call them peasants, gypsies, or people leading simple lives, and you start to go down the path of coding via groups, and then you run the risk of judging them accordingly. I imagine a country kitchen filled with laughter, beer, a huge iron cauldron, hearty stew, soup on the stove. What do I know, I know nothing. Imagination is not reality.

### **Islamic Phobia (Animal Life)**

The comments of Biljana Plavšić, the only woman convicted of war crimes in Bosnia, are disturbingly real, as shown by Michael A. Sells in the article “The Contemplation of Islam in Serbian Religious Mythology and its Consequences”:

In 1994 Biljana Plavšić, a genetic biologist and former director of The Academy of Natural Sciences in Sarajevo, explained why she and the other leaders of the Bosnian “Serb Republic” (Reuplika Srpska) were unable to negotiate with the Muslims. The problem, Plavšić explained, was genetic.

It was genetically deformed material that embraced Islam. And now, of course, with each successive generation it simply becomes concentrated. It gets worse and worse. It simply expresses itself and dictates their style of thinking, which is rooted in their genes. And through the centuries, the genes degraded even further.

Plavšić had been an atheist and biologist, the former dean of the Faculty of Natural Science and Mathematics in Sarajevo. Yet in 1994 she was interpreting Muslim religious affiliation as both a mark of genetic deficiency and a determinant in genetic deformity. (Sells 2002, 58)

Sells connects other statements from theologian Jacques Ellul and Giselle Litmann (Daughter of the Nile) who ‘developed a theory that Islam is, by essence, a religion of violent aggression (jihad) and parasitic absorption (dhimmitude)’ (Sells 2002, 58).

Worse, as Sells continues, the view of ‘killing one another out of age-old hatreds’ (Sells 2002, 59) was voiced by U.S. President Clinton, Secretary of State Eagleburger

and adopted by the UN. (Sells 2002, 61). While race is often linked to the colour of a person's skin, or country of origin, it also can be linked to lineage and a common history. Here race is defined by the embrace of Islam. Francois Debrix and Alexander D Barber relate back to other philosophers in their book *Beyond Biopolitics: Theory, Violence and Horror in World Politics*:

The power to preserve life at all costs is inevitably coupled with the need to determine what must die. They may present themselves as positive and productive exercises of maximization of a population's or a species' life capacities and potentials. Yet, they cannot invest life and living beings and produce revitalizing and regenerative effects throughout modernity without a power to mobilize death, one that indeed condemns lives to be erased and eradicated. Biopolitics, then, is inevitably also a necropolitics or a thanatopolitics. (Debrix and Barber 2012, 11)

This Islamophobia coupled with the perceived righteousness of so-called Christians and linking it with 'violent aggression' and 'parasitic absorption' (Sells 2002, 58) leads to the genocide of the Bosnian Muslims. To get finally to genocide – mass murder – required a further crucial step as outlined by Achille Mbembe in "Necropolitics":

That colonies might be ruled over in absolute lawlessness stems from the racial denial of any common bond between the conqueror and the native. In the eyes of the conqueror, *savage life* is just another form of *animal life*, a horrifying experience, something alien beyond imagination or comprehension. (Mbembe 2003, 24)

Islam/Muslim equals savage, savage equals animal, animal equals a right to kill, and in doing so, the conqueror resolves the conflict by putting the victim in the non-human category, animal.

According to John Fine in his chapter on "The Various Faiths in the History of Bosnia: Middle Ages to the Present", the concept of ethnicity was introduced in the nineteenth century when Christian Bosnians adopted the terms Croat for Catholic and Serb for Orthodox (Fine 2002, 9).

Those of Muslim background, who on the whole still did not see themselves as Muslim Serbs or Muslim Croats, realized they needed to form an ethnic



group and proceeded to do so, becoming an officially recognized nation in 1968 under the label of “Muslim”. Since that time, the term “Muslim” has had a double meaning, denoting a religious community and also an ethnic one – the same twin aspects that characterize the term “Jew” in America. (Fine 2002, 9)

What happened to the Jews has now happened to the Bosnian Muslims, a genocide; a genocide whose aftermath is documented by a team of forensic experts and recorded on the camera of Gilles Peress. I am looking again at the photograph on Page 63 wondering why I am drawn and more connected to this one than the older one on Page 62. At first I thought it was because I sensed that the people in the older photograph have moved on from the scene, got older, perhaps no longer lived in the area, or, in the case of the woman, died of old age, natural causes. But now I think it is the look. In the photo on Page 62, although it is posed as is evident by the woman crouching, looking and engaging with the camera, the children do not engage. One is being held and the other stands looking at the ground, there seems to be no connection. On Page 63 the children engage, their expressions are forlorn and desolate, and the separated plastic resin of the picture – isolates them even more. Not only are they void of the protection of any parental figures, mother, father and extended family, uncles or aunts and even grandparents, they are also void from the protective film of the print – exposing them symbolically to the elements.

### **The Assault of the Living Dead**

Who knows if they lived or died? In genocide children and women are never exempt. This is clear from the article “Rape, Genocide, and Women’s Human Rights” where Catharine MacKinnon writes:

In this genocide thousands of Muslim and Croatian girls were raped and made forcibly pregnant. These atrocities also give an urgency, if any was needed, to the project of reenvisioning human rights so that violations of humanity include what happens to women. (MacKinnon 1994, 7)

This seems an added horror of war and these recent genocides, that men on both sides, and especially on the side of the victor, the perpetrator, feel that rape, beating, abuse, assault of women and girls is a legitimate spoil of war. In this genocide it seems the women were subject to an added horrific abuse, the rape camp, leading to a life that is

always going to be marked by these events. Membe in “Necropolitics” links this to Georges Bataille’s use of excrement, in an article written about the literary work of De Sade, and to sexual violence.

Bataille establishes a correlation among death, sovereignty, and sexuality. Sexuality is inextricably linked to violence and to the dissolution of the boundaries of the body and self by way of orgiastic and excremental impulses. As such, sexuality concerns two major forms of polarized human impulses – excretion and appropriation. (Membe 2003, 15)

This ability to have two heterogeneous elements, orgasm and an excrement at the same time shows the duality of the rape of women in war – it is on the one hand an orgasmic release, on the other hand, leaving behind excrement on a person viewed as not living, the living dead, worthy of being treated less than an animal.

I mention the treatment of women to show the degree of suffering and horror, the specificity of the suffering they faced during the genocide; however, it has to be noted that overwhelmingly the ones that were targeted and earmarked for death were men and young teenage boys. The two different treatments fulfil the aims of genocide, ethnic cleansing: kill the men and impregnate the women. While Peress also photographed the horrific genocidal atrocities of Rwanda there seems to be a difference in the methodology of the perpetrators and the manner of death and torture. Unlike the Rwandan genocide, something about the Bosnian genocide seems chillingly cold and calculated, in the organised establishment of its rape camps. Rape the women and march the men out to be executed. It is not a fury of hate, rather, it is a systematic annihilation. This part of the genocide, the targeting of men (and boys), is borne out by the statistical assessment of Helge Brunborg, Torkild Hovde Lyngstad and Henrik Urdal in the article “Accounting for Genocide: How Many Were Killed in Srebrenica?” Here in Table 2 of the 7481 presumed missing in Srebrenica, 48 were women with 2 under the age of 16, the other 7433 all were men, with 76 under the age of 16 (Brunborg et al. 2003, 239).

The rate is highest for middle-aged men 40-60 years, with about 50 percent missing. This may seem surprising, since middle-aged men should be less likely to be suspected of being soldiers and singled out for execution. A main explanation may be that the middle-aged men were less likely to leave

Srebrenica because they had families in the enclave. (Brunborg et al. 2003, 241)

The men and boys knew they were being targeted and this is documented by Selma Leydesdorff in her book of interviews with women survivors of the genocide in Bosnia, *Surviving the Bosnian Genocide: The Women of Srebrenica Speak*:

But her son was noticed, even though he had only just turned 14. He had to put his backpack on a pile and walk away: “But I grabbed his hand and repeated, ‘He was born in 1981, what you want with him? What are you going to do with him?’ I begged, I pleaded his case. I asked them why they were taking him; he had been born in 1981. But they repeated the command. I held him tightly, but they took him.” Her son was dragged away. His backpack was still on that pile. He asked his mother to take care of it. “My other child wouldn’t stop screaming. He yelled and screamed, ‘Mommy, they took my brother away. They have my brother.’” That child was inconsolable. (Leydesdorff 2011, 146)

Brunborg, Hovde and Urdal list the probability of going missing for Muslim men between 1991 to 1995 as over 30% for all males aged 16 to 65 ‘including about 50 percent of all middle aged men (41 to 60 years of age)’ ( Brunborg et al. 2003, 245). While the men died physically, the women died internally and the children suffered the duality of loss a dead parent and a living dead parent. Peress, by photographing the everyday detritus, imbues it with a new meaning – a discarded photograph, a child’s drawing, a watch, a set of keys and old clothes become an added testimony to the genocidal atrocity.

Eyewitness testimony is often viewed suspiciously as Morris Holbrook says in the article “Customer Value and Autoethnography: Subjective Personal Introspection and the Meanings of a Photograph Collection”:

Because such memories are inherently suspect, they gain enhanced trustworthiness if they can be supported by relevant historical materials – memoirs, memorabilia, and mementos of various kinds. The need for such support elevates the importance of photographs and other archival artefacts

that bear on the topics, themes, ideas, and issues of interest. (Holbrook 2005, 45)

### **Un-named Photographs and Unidentified Dead**

These photographs and drawings are important. It is through the small things these allegedly simple peasant people are remembered. The neatly folded children's drawing of Christmas and a happy boy and girl running towards presents is juxtaposed with the sombre faces in the photograph staring back at the camera foreboding ill. Both of the photographs and the picture are printed on pages devoid of text; just like the pictures themselves they are devoid of an important element – men. The photograph contains two women and a girl and a boy, the picture, just a young girl and boy. The men are not in them and this again attests to the goals of the Bosnian genocide – the absence of male survivors. In *The Graves: Srebrenica and Vukovar*, they only survive as faces of contorted terror, a pile of bones and scrap material – reduced to a number and a stench of western neglect. The sickening work of exhuming and identifying bodies has an important significance to the women of Bosnia.

Funerals express the emotional links of the living to the dead, be they respect or grief. Bosnian Muslims view bereavement as an experience to be shared, strengthening the solidarity of family and community. For the women of Srebrenica, the absence of the bodies (Kundera's "the terrifying material being") was robbing them not only of funerary ritual but of the visual cues that would help them to acknowledge the death of their loved ones and to pass through states of mourning and grief. (Stover and Peress 1998, 197)

This applies as well to those who may not be religious or have abandoned their faith (Stover and Peress 1998, 197):

Without bodies and funerals, many of the women – whether practising Muslims or not – could not visualize the death of their husbands and sons and thus accept it as real. "And so when the women think about moving on with their lives, "Nevenka Kovac commented, "they are often hit with strong feelings of guilt because they think, well, maybe, just maybe, he is still alive". (Stover and Peress 1998, 198)

I wonder, too, how much guilt a child carries, the one who survived watching their brother, aged only 14, being marched to his death. The one, who perhaps has lost one parent and lives with another, wracked with guilt, how can they have a normal childhood and a chance for the future? Of, course they cannot. Page 63. I keep looking at them again and again because it is so common an expression but so compelling in the circumstances. There are no tell-tale shadows of monster lighting, perhaps the sun is behind a cloud, but, despite this they look like they are squinting, their eyes and faces slightly twisted. In amongst the molten mess, welcome to hell, welcome to Kalesija, the make-shift morgue, their expression seems to implore. Implore they should, listen the West should have; but they did not. The West's response is summed up by Jean Baudrillard in "The West's Serbianization":

We suggest our job is done once we have declared the Serbs the "bad guys", but not the enemy. With good reason, since from a world perspective, we Westerners, we Europeans, are fighting exactly the same enemies as the Serbs are: Islam, the Muslims. The short of it is that we will bomb a few Serb positions with smoke-mortars, but we will never really intervene against them, since their work is basically our own. If it were necessary to end the conflict, we would rather break the backs of the victims, since they are far more irritating than the executioners. (Baudrillard 1996, 85)

In amongst all this political, immoral grandstanding, the victims, including children, are made to endure the silent scourge of racial, religious theories of inferiority that marked the maddening years of Nazi Germany. Nicolaus Mills in the book *The New Killing Fields* talks about the language of slaughter in the nineties and how the writing is pared down with 'tautness and candor' (Mills 2002, 14-16). The style of photography employed by Peress seems to mirror this in his tautness and choice of film. In a time period where colour film is popular, Peress uses black and white and a 35mm rangefinder camera – the stock in trade of photographers in the killing fields. Not that I have anything against colour, quite to the contrary, I look at the use of colour by Ron Haviv in the Bosnian conflict in his series of images *Blood and Honey* (Haviv 1992) and feel it reveals a lot of information. The difference is that black and white by

stripping out the colour seems to be more focussed, narrow, as if a further interpretation, or distraction, has been removed.

Black and white is the way we code and see atrocity photographs, gritty, pared down, red blood rendered as black ink, as if colour, especially red blood, contaminates. Black and white screams news, truth. By photographing close-up and focussing on the detritus, Peress also adds another level to the atrocity photograph. The taut writing and photographic style is also echoed in the matter of fact language of survivors of the conflict. Lejla Sabic, a fourteen year old girl at the time, describes her experience as the Serbs known as 'White Eagles' surrounded her house in the early days of the genocide.

They were the worst, they were not like regular soldiers. They walked around the building cursing as they called for us to "come outside!" We waited in the house. I was scared. I moved from window to window. I just wanted a place to hide.

My aunt's husband didn't have a gun, nothing, no weapon. Because there were three of us girls, he said, "If they come inside" – they didn't, thank God – "If they come in, I have only gasoline, and I will use it to burn all three of you." He knew that they would rape us, and he said he don't want to watch them doing that to us. (Sabic 2002, 53)

Sabic's language is matter of fact, she does not emphasise, or dramatise, the horror of what she writes, gasoline or rape, they are what will happen if the Serbs enter the house. Stover and Peress skilfully weld the forensics, the sorrow, the text, and the photographs, without it becoming controversially arty. Captions are lacking at the base of the photographs that occupy full pages with a white bleed. The text complements the photographs even though for the most part it does not discuss individual photographs. The reader is left, to think, interpret, and contemplate the images devoid of colour. I look again at the Christmas drawing. It is thin and worn. Folded into six pieces. The centre eroded and gone. I think it was treasured. You fold something to look after it, keep it neat, stack it, and contain it. I think, because it has been folded six times, and is creased and perishing, it has been in someone's pocket, or wallet. A precious memory of a child's happiness at the festive season. I wonder if any of them

are alive to celebrate Christmas, the shared united Christmas practised by the Bosnian Muslims (Schwartz 2015) and, if they are, I suspect the celebration would be hollow in comparison to the drawing. The photograph on Page 63 has not been folded, or bent. But who does that anyway? Folding, bending, a photograph is the start of a process of damaging it. People don't tend to carry around photographs, unless they are very small, passport, size, wallet size, locket size, not loose in a pocket, but embedded, in a locket or a plastic wallet sleeve. For it to be in the grave would involve a man or a child placing the photograph in a bag, folder, preciously carried out with their few belongings as they either fled to try to escape to the hills, or, were marched to the buildings on the farm where their prolonged beating and eventual death occurred.

### **The Difference in Photographs**

Dealing with forensics, people reduced to bones, teeth and size for identification work seems sad, inhumane. The addition of the photograph into the text puts a human face as we know that they existed and we can more readily identify with facial features of children than flesh stripped bones. Marlene Kadar, Jeanne Perreault and Linda Warley, in the introduction to *Photographs, Histories and Meanings*, comment:

The reclamation of images lost, forgotten, neglected, or undervalued, redeems the object and its history for us, and sometimes offers a necessary, even urgent corrective to a distorted historical record. (Kadar, Perreault and Warley 2009, 5)

The photograph on Page 63 speaks of a duality of history, the image, the original photograph speaks of a family, a record of its members; the photograph of the photograph speaks of a brokenness, a disconnect, a fire, a tragedy as photographs are viewed as a precious memory. Who burns a photograph, unless it is accidental, or a fury of hate, delivered at a partner who has decided to leave? We code the Peress' photograph as a tragedy, placed in a book describing mass graves and genocide we try to put things together and place the people in the photograph as being intimately involved in the tragic events. The photograph codes for us that we have failed to avert a tragedy. Thomas Stubblefield addresses this in the article "Between the Officer and the Artist: Arnold Odermatt's Aesthetic-Forensic Project";

The forensic photographer is not simply late, but too late. His or her images no longer merely reference a tragedy that can no longer be averted but actively mark its conclusion; the forensic photograph somehow finalizes the event by transferring it from the realm of the real to the juridical. (Stubblefield 2009, 176)

While Peress is too late to stop the genocide, his photographs back up the evidence that this atrocity, genocide, occurred earlier than originally thought, the start being in 1991 at Vukovar. I feel far more comfortable looking and writing about the photographs taken by Peress than those taken by Ein and Gilderleeve (See Chapter Two and Three). Perhaps it lies in the role the camera plays as a witness, performing a documentation of what it has alluded to represent all the time – truth. Perhaps it is that the book seems to be written for a purpose; a story of justice and, again, the truth of what happened. As the forensic scientists dig, Peress photographs: it is not the scientists alone, no, the photograph attests, supports and backs up that they are being honest in what they saw and uncovered. The camera cannot lie. Of course this is true. The camera is a mechanical instrument, it does not think, it does not feel, it is inert and useless, unless activated by someone. Perhaps, too, it is the nature, the illusion of photography, that frozen moment of time. When I look at Ein's photographs I see children, frightened adults, wounded, broken skin, it feels real. The photographer has recorded a moment of truth and a lie all at once. The moment moves on, the photograph is fixed, time is not. I look and I am engaged with horror.

Likewise, when I view the images in the pages of *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*, something feels different. Perhaps it is that, again, the people, the white people at least, are alive at the time of the photograph. It makes it seem more real. Perhaps it speaks to my white privilege, that as I look at it I feel shame and embarrassment. Perhaps too, I feel I have, somehow by purchasing this book, joined in, despite whether my intentions were good, or, bad. Truth and lies yet again. As I look, yes! numerous times, I cannot help but wonder how someone went about asking, 'picking' lynching photographs for a 'white' collection. I feel bile rise.

Maybe the answer to my angst (if that is the right word), is the comfortableness in forensic photography. It has a stench of death, but it is all too late, we/they have failed,



let's document for the future, perhaps a trial and indictment, as if some good can come out of the genocidal acts. Maybe this reflects in the way I react to the books, as if *The Graves: Vukovar to Srebrenica*, somehow it is superior in its intent, more righteous, as if because it is too late and they are bones I can excuse myself, forgive myself for doing nothing, white privilege style.

While photographing the remains of the victims of genocide becomes evidence for future genocide trials, the photograph of a photograph has a different function. A photograph is a memory of a memory. Peress' photograph is a photograph of a memory and also a reminder that children also went through the physical and symbolic fire at Vukovar. The burnt photograph, with its preserved stark faces of children is a silent witness that some perished and some survived. The ones who survived have not survived unscathed, they have opened the door to a living hell. Some may survive, none get over the events of genocide. Like the photographs of Peress, children caught up in the violence speak in a matter of fact, pared down language. In the April 1993 article, "From Bosnian Children, Tales of Hunger and Horror", Chuck Sudetic of *The New York Times* documents the words of several children:

It was a surprise shell that caught 12-year-old Samira Zahirovic, as she went out for water behind her home in the village of Hrcici.

"A shell exploded," the thin, blonde-haired girl said. I didn't hear anything before it blew. There was a lot of dirt and dust, and shrapnel flew into the house. I saw how the blood was spilling out of me. But it didn't hurt much."

"They carried me to the hospital in Konjevic valley," she said, referring to a makeshift clinic. "They put me to sleep and took off my leg". (*New York Times* April 2, 1993)

### **The Vermin Codes**

In the article "Vermin Beings: On Pestiferous and Human Game" Clapperton Mavhunga traces the steps from human beings to human game and finally vermin being and poses the question:

In short, *what are the material consequences of relegation from human being to vermin being (a pest or nuisance that must be eliminated)?* (Mavhunga 2011, 152 italics in original)

The consequences can be seen in the genocide in the Balkans; no-one cared. This was vermin and vermin is killed, man, woman and child, or rather in vermin code, male, female and offspring. The Bosnian conflict was particularly cruel as it systematically removed any men and young teenage boys and subjected them to beating and murder. The systematic rape and the deliberate leaving of spermicidal excrement by the rapists was done to add further humiliation and too breed out the Bosnian Muslim. Sperm as an excrement is not pure and clean like water, it congeals, it latches onto the body, possessing it, it is neither solid, nor liquid, but rather viscous. May Douglas in *Purity and Danger* discusses a Sartrean essay on stickiness which while it is on honey it equally applies to semen: 'It is unstable but it does not flow. Its stickiness is a trap, it clings like a leech; it attacks the boundary between myself and it. Stickiness is clinging like a too-possessive dog or mistress' (Douglas [1966] 1976, 38).

Both male and female physiology lend themselves to the analogy with the vessel which must not pour away or dilute its vital fluids. Females are correctly seen as, literally, the entry by which the pure content may be adulterated. Males are treated as pores through which the precious stuff may ooze out and be lost, the whole system being thereby enfeebled. (Douglas [1966] 1976, 126)

No amount of scrubbing will remove this contaminant, this assault. The oozed out sperm, the precursor to the horror of conceiving a child, a child formed by a war-crime, deliberately done to breed out the man and boys in the Bosnian Muslim woman's life. She has to carry this knowledge for nine months physically, and, for a life time emotionally. This has a profound effect on children and mothers. What do you do with the child that is innocent, yet a product of a vile act of warfare? Some were left in orphanages, some adopted, and others kept by their mother, all are a grim reminder of the horrors of war and its innocent victims, the by-product of rape.

The Peress photograph speaks eloquently of the Bosnia of the past and the future, a confused perplexed expression of a simple childhood gone forever. A discarded photograph, a memento that is always viewed as precious, somehow it is lost, charred, melted, burnt and rediscovered around a mass grave of victims of genocide. It warns that things will never be the same; it marks and shows the burning hell of Vukovar

and the end of any chance of a normal childhood for them, their children, if they had any, and the generation to come.







## Chapter Five

### Abu Ykhiel to Guantanamo Bay 2002-2012

Figure 6.1. Omar Khadr Passport Photograph.

#### *For Omar*

*The picture of Omar Khadr has become the face of the Guantanamo child. It shows a young face staring back, smileless, pensive and childlike. The background is white, devoid of any distractions; the lighting is flat, frontal and shadowless. There are no bags under his eyes, or, the tell-tale crow's feet of age. His eyes are wide open, large and clear with deep brown irises. He has a full bottom lip with a very faint curve, as if at any moment he may smile, or burst out in laughter. He looks on the cusp of puberty; a faint growth of hair joining both eyebrows and a slight fuzz above his upper lip suggesting the start of adolescent hair growth, the march to maturity and adulthood. The photograph is in colour and he has a nice dress shirt, open, one button undone at the neck, conservative, neat and conformative. This is not some T-shirt slogan wearing youngster, this is a photograph that shows a respectful teenager, compliant to the request to stand and be photographed. According to the*

*pro-Khadr supporters it was taken when he was fourteen years old. The cropped-in face, with no shoulders showing, set against a clean white background without a smile, suggests a passport photograph. The manner of his dress, the collared neat shirt, freshly trimmed hair, show pride not just on the part of the child Omar Khadr but also on the part of his parents, who have made sure he is presentable for what seems to be an official photograph.*

Figure 6.2. Official U.S photograph of Omar Khadr. Abu Ykhiel, Afghanistan.

*Against Khadr*

*He lays face up, mouth slightly ajar, baring white teeth with his eyes closed. He looks inert, dead perhaps, unconscious maybe. On his left shoulder he has two massive gaping wounds, bright red holes the size of two fists, sinew and blood. His body is covered in dust, dark grey with fresh red stains splattered across his exposed chest. One gaping wound close to his neck looks like it must have shattered his shoulder; the other is extremely close to his heart; the chance of him being alive or surviving look slim. He has no visible chest hair, a boyish, youthful face. One arm is visible at the shoulder the other invisible, perhaps twisted behind his back. No*



*military personnel faces are shown. Tellingly, though, the photograph shows a medic's bag with bandages and medical paraphernalia. The soldier, medic, has his arm, a muscular bicep, bare up to his shoulder, a watch on his wrist and a clenched hand as if he is unwrapping some gauze to stem the blood flow. In the far left another medic, soldier, sits his hand too clenched prepared for action. The child's clothes are torn from his neck to his waist, graphic, confronting and a strange choice for a released photograph of a regime concerned with minimising the flow of controversial images. Remember the napalm girl: the war on terror does not need a picture of another child to sway the public away from the relentless fight.*

### **Truthful Fairy Tales**

According to Sontag in the book *On Photography*, 'In the fairy tale of photography the magic box insures veracity and banishes error, compensates for inexperience and rewards innocence' (Sontag [1977] 2008, 53). Sontag does not believe in fairy tales; and though some believe photography is a true and accurate medium, it has often been cloaked with the counterview that it is false and inaccurate. Photography and photographs are a poor replacement for what we see. At its first conception it seemed to see things different than we do: we see in colour, photography at its birth saw in black and white, in various shades of grey. Shades of grey, alluding to a search for truth, a yearning for accuracy but never quite delivering the purity it is expected to deliver. Frank Hurley recognised its limitations in his war photographs, a single photograph could not convey the full horrors of war, rather, in Hurley's case, an artful combination of several negatives combined into one photograph did (O'Keefe 1986, 6). Likewise, Robert Capa's famous war photograph of a soldier falling at the hands of a sniper has many people suspicious as to whether it is a true rendition, or, just someone falling over. So many photographs, faced with the reality and constraints of the medium are far from candid, truthful snaps, but are rather posed, constructed narratives. An element of truth, an element of theatre and a hint of a lie. Maybe photography doesn't belong on the moral high ground people put it on. Or, as Sontag points out, 'the less doctored, the less patently crafted, the more naïve – the more authoritative the photograph was likely to be' (Sontag [1977] 2008, 52). So while Hurley's multi-negative war photographs are technically and aesthetically brilliant they do not have the power or authority of the candid, documentary war photographs of later generations. Perhaps the greatest of these is the Pulitzer prize winning

photograph taken by Nick Ut in 1972 of Kim Phuc running, screaming, naked, her back scarred from burning napalm. While she runs, oblivious to her full frontal nakedness, the soldiers, South Vietnamese, walk slowly; one to the far right seems to be in the process of casually rolling and lighting a cigarette. While the photograph is raw and seemingly unedited, this is not the case. Like most photographs it too has been doctored (Miller 2012, 147). Despite this, Ut's publicised photograph is recognised as an iconic image that often is used to represent the horrors of war and is also credited with galvanising the anti-war movement that led to the withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam.

Some decades later, wary of anti-war sentiments, the U.S. in the Iraq war uses terminology couched in terms that do not reveal what was truly going on. The 2003 campaign against Baghdad became known as 'shock and awe', dumb bombs used in the first Gulf War, Desert Storm became smart JDAM (Joint Direct Action Muniton) missiles. Smart bombs, missiles with smart prices, each missile costing tens of thousands of dollars some, in the case of the Tomahawk, over a million (Oestergaard 2014). The civilian casualties; 'collateral damage', a shrouded term frequently used during the first Gulf War, belying the cost of human life. No longer would the U.S. allow its image to be tainted by the truth – or as close to the truth as an uncensored photograph can be. Although mentioned in the introduction the description by Schneider seems to fit the analysis of the Khadr' images; a car accident waiting to happen.

Like a car accident, in which, in the last moments before impact, the occupants of each vehicle simply close their eyes and give themselves over to the force of the physics, the explosive event that the camera flash records represents an instant of mechanical collision with the world. Thus, in the same way that in order to speak the "truth" of the crash that was to bring two automobiles and individual worlds into violent contact, we must begin by piecing together the story that preceded proximity in order to get to the "truth" that the photograph synthesizes, we need first ask what came before – a before that necessarily includes not only the person(s) driving the camera to that shape-shifting, earth-shattering, *click* but also the forces that steered the individual(s) to this instant of impact. (Schneider 2012, 211)

## Khadr's Collision

In the wreckage of Omar Khadr's life there are truth and facts that are agreed on by both sides of the argument. He was a fifteen year-old Canadian citizen who was captured after a firefight near the village of Abu Ykhieel, Afghanistan. During the firefight all of the occupants of the compound, except for Khadr, were killed. One member of the U.S. forces, Army Sergeant Christopher Speer, was injured by a grenade and died in hospital ten days later. Khadr was shot in the back, bullets that entered in the shoulder region and exited through his chest. He also suffered several other wounds, including shrapnel damage to his eyes. He was transferred to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in September 2002 and formally charged with offences including murder, in November 2005. The investigations into these charges were to be conducted by a military commission in line with the 2001 Military order issued by U.S. President George W. Bush. 'On 13 October, 2010, Omar Khadr accepted an offer of a pre-trial agreement, a sentence of confinement of eight years in addition to the time already spent in the custody of the United States' (Macklin 2012, 244).

'Thus, the true nature of disgrace is

US-

who dispatch flying squads

of death-bringers,

blindly bombing,

mosque and kindergarten,

and shackling down babies,

in wars we got no guts to declare,

and then sobbing, "Unfair,"

when one of our drones is downed

or one of our heroes gets crowned

by lead fragments or flame.

It is our irreversible damnation

that we deem our injuries

*innocence,*

so that we slaughter innocents

in the name of what might-makes-right

(i.e., our right to feed and fatten on fossil fuels),  
and then shout surprise  
when the survivors among our victims-  
totin their holy books and squawkin their big mouths-  
hasten to strike back and strike down  
our innocents'. (Clarke 2012, 96)

The above verses are an excerpt from George Elliot Clarke's work "Re: That Gunfight at the O.K. Corral", an alternate reading of the War on Terror. Everything, one way or another, is slanted, one way or another it has all been done. I revert back to a framework of what I know: the comfortable analysis of inkjet or laser prints, sprayed colour on paper, photographs, a beautiful ugliness. Truth and lies splattered in ink to make strange patterns I obsess over for hours. Looking for hidden, tell-tale signs of glossed over truths or bland matte lies. I bring to the table the 'mechanical collision', 'piecing together the story', of 'this instant of impact' (Schneider 2012, 211), except it is two moments, two slices of time, not a second but a hundredth of a second. In these moments, approximately two years apart, in a hundredth of a second, the for and against (there is no middle ground) the two sides have two pieces of paper to use and defend their side for the next decade and beyond. I wonder when we look at decisive historical moments since the invention of the camera how much hinges on the multiple split second decision of the photographer. I am not privy to who the photographers are in the Khadr photographs, there is no provenance or credit line. I can't piece together their story, the set of factors that lead them in that split second to angle, light or judge what to do when they photographed Omar Khadr. I think it should be easier, but devoid of someone to fixate on, analyse and understand, I find the task even more daunting. Without a face behind the camera, I have to surmise, judge (perhaps) those split second decisions that lead to their photographs adorning pages, websites and arguments, so, so many arguments. I am well aware that those split seconds, the images that resulted, have been pondered over, scrutinised, edited and overlaid with hours' worth of discussion prior to their release. A war, an opinion, a world view hangs in the balance – for or against.

## Omar Khadr at Fourteen

The photograph of Omar Khadr, passport style, was subject to the restrictive codes of government. In Canada unlike some other countries passport photographs are taken by commercial photographers. This does not mean they are more creative as the long set of criteria banish any form of creativity but encourage a conformation to universal blandness, albeit an identifiable one. No smile as the photograph must be able to be scrutinised by airport facial recognition systems, that ‘prevent fraud by electronically verifying identity based on each person’s unique facial features’ (Government of Canada 2015). The list of requirements include,

- neutral facial expression (**eyes open and clearly visible, mouth closed, no smiling**).
- taken with uniform lighting and **not show** shadows, glare or flash reflections.
- taken straight on, with face and shoulders **centered** and squared to the camera.
- taken in front of a plain white or light-coloured background with a clear difference between your face and the background. Photos must reflect/represent natural skin tones.
- original photos that are **not altered in any way** or taken from an existing photo. (Government of Canada 2015, emphasis in original)

Hair can be down, religious head coverings are acceptable if face can be seen, glasses as well if there is no glare, red-eye and the eyes are clearly visible, and, if you include an explanatory letter, with the proviso that you may require a doctor’s note, **nasal cannula** is also permissible (Government of Canada 2015, emphasis in original).

The long list of requirements includes the all-important handwritten or stamp of the photographer on the verso with the **name and complete address of the photo studio and the date the photo was taken** (Government of Canada 2015, emphasis in original).

This list, by no means exhaustive, means the photographer and the person photographed will conform to the requirements to make sure that the photograph is a true and accurate representation of the individual. However this is not strictly truthful, for example, although colour photography has been around for many decades, the passport photograph in Canada can be in black and white (Government of Canada 2015), a perfect cover for idiopathic craniofacial erythema. The photograph of Omar

Khadr that his supporters use was supplied by his family. In contrast to what some may term normal photographs, ones of children playing, definable backgrounds and happy family groups, the one Khadr's family provided was a bland passport photograph. It is this photograph that is used and at times altered to represent the young teenager, Omar.

How can you find anything of difference in a passport photograph given the long list of inclusions and restrictions? As a photographer I cannot imagine how boring and uncreative the process of taking a passport photograph is. Next please, no smile, head straight, click, next please, I said don't smile. Yet in that process, in the restrictive realm of passport photography, the young Khadr did something important and that is highlighted in the use of the photograph of Omar Khadr by his supporters. Khadr submitted to authority. In the war against terror the U.S. and their alliance relies on the propaganda that these fighters have no respect for authority or life. They constitute not just the other, but another, that is not subject to the normal rules of war or rules of law. They are placed in a category singled out for special treatment outside of normal rules that apply to prisoners of war, child soldiers or enemy combatants. They represent everything the U.S. is fighting against, yet they represent nothing, as they are treated as if they do not exist in the normal paradigms of right, wrong and the law.

By using the passport shot, Omar's supporters show that as a child he was more than willing to submit to authority. As a child he stood there, prim, proper, head straight forward, no smile, hair done with a smart dress shirt unbuttoned at the neck. Omar was compliant and prepared to submit to authority. Not only that, but judging by his appearance, he, or his parents, made sure he was a neat and presentable young person. Its use must irk the authorities as Omar Khadr not only submits to the authority of the Canadian identification regime, but he does so in a manner and with a dress sense that shows pride and care. This is no straggly university identity photograph or the obligatory grumpy look flashed on your driver license renewal; no this was a neat, clean compliance imbued with a sense of pride.

The photograph has become the face of Omar Khadr, the child soldier, the maligned, the victim. While it would seem that this would be the limit of explaining a bland boring passport photograph, there is more that can be gleaned from this photograph. The Canadian passport requirement states 'photos must reflect/represent natural skin

tones' (Government of Canada 2015). In this requirement the photograph of Omar passes despite the fact that it is overexposed, flashed overpowered as can be seen by the patches on his forehead, cheeks, nose and neck. Omar is several shades whiter than his normal skin colour. Arguably, based on decades worth of abuse of coloured people, to be completely the other the U.S. would prefer he was the right shade of brown, or, better still, a darker version of brown. The passport photo used of Omar conforms with the rightness of whiteness. Washed out and whitened, ready to be re-appropriated.

### **The Peace in Khadr**

Figure 6.3. Poster from campaign to bring Khadr back to Canada.

In the poster *Bring Omar Khadr back to Canada* the passport photograph has been converted into a black and white photograph the face washed out, bleached. The page is split into two with one side containing the white background passport photograph the other a black background with the text in white and olive green. The words 'Omar Khadr' in olive green embedded in the white words 'Bring Back to Canada'. These choices all have meaning. The softened yellow-green aptly called olive green in a deliberate choice. According Anne Tooley the colour olive green has the following qualities:

Olive green is the first possibility of new hope in the development of humankind. It is being the feminine archetype of compassion, wisdom,

acceptance and understanding and modeling it to others. It is not power over others, but celebrating each individual for who they are and therefore empowering them. It is standing in someone's shoes so that you may understand more of the human journey toward peace and love. This can only happen when you merge with the heart of another. (Tooley 2013)

This is not conventional science, peer-reviewed and analysed, especially as the conversation ends with spiritual body meanings, along with the recommended olive green crystals, including Elbaite Tourmaline and Green Vesuvianite (Tooley 2013). Despite this proviso we do imbue colours and objects with meaning. Olive green in particular is the symbol of peace, the logo of the olive branch used by the United Nations as an indication of what the organisation holds dear – peace. So when we see this colour as the only colour in the poster Bring 'Omar Khadr' (add olive green) Back to Canada it evokes a memory an association – the traditional colour of peace, the olive branch offered for a favourable resolution without violence.

### **Omar and Christ's Thorns**

Figure 6.4. Omar Khadr cover of briarpatch magazine.



The magazine *briarpatch* dedicates the September/October 2008 issue to the Omar Khadr case and the cover of the magazine uses the passport photograph of Khadr to form a composite artist's interpretation. The main image again is black and white with a barbed wire thorn crown atop Omar's head, the barbs biting into his skin causing blood to flow down his face. The colour used in the cover is bright red, the colour of blood, along with the by-line 'fighting the war on error' also in red. Tellingly, the head of Omar is highlighted in a pure white halo that along with the sacrificial crown of thorns makes for an iconic religious interpretation. The crown of thorns reminiscent of the torture of Christ when the Roman officials placed the twisted branches of the Jujube tree with its one inch long thorns repeatedly thrust into the skin, mocking, teasing. The Jujube tree carries not only a common name but also a scientific name linking it with the thorny crown placed on Jesus' head, Christ's Thorn Jujube aka *Ziziphus spina-christi*. This tree according to Amots Dafni, in the article "The Ethnobotany of Christ's Thorn Jujube (*Ziziphus spina-christi*) in Israel", is 'the only tree species considered "holy" by Muslims' (Dafni, Levy and Lev 2005. 1). Like Christ, the youthful Omar Khadr endures a mocking, torturous hazing at the hands of his U.S guards. The white halo surrounding Khadr on the cover of *briarpatch* symbolizing the iconic image of martyrdom and sacrifice as depicted in numerous art movements. By linking two images of iconography, Omar as Christ and Christ's Thorn Jujube the magazine *briarpatch* presents a positive pro-Khadr interpretation of the passport photograph. While Christian and Muslim's may view Christ in a different light, the Islamic world view Christ with a positive reverence as 'one of the greatest of God's messengers to mankind' (Ibrahim 1997).

## The Menace in Khadr

Figure 6.5. Front cover from *Guantanamo's Child: The Untold Story of Omar Khadr*. Shephard, Michelle, 2008.

Michelle Shephard uses the passport photograph on the cover of her book *Guantanamo's Child: The Untold Story of Omar Khadr* (Shephard 2008). Here again the passport photograph is converted to black and white against some hand-written text. The cover designer Ian Koo has added ambiguity by not only converting the photograph to black and white but also by adding, noise, grain to the image. The cheeks and forehead are still bleached yet, with the addition of noise in the perimeters of the face Khadr does not look as welcoming as other renditions. While Shephard in her introduction says for her 'Omar's age has always been the greatest factor' (Shephard 2008, xv), the book itself is designed for a western audience, and given Shephard's access to the soldiers and their wives it a less flattering portrayal leaning to the more grained, ambiguous nature of the altered cover. The adjustment of the photograph on the cover of Shephard's book is not flattering to Omar Khadr. While

adding grain, noise, to the photograph may look creative it actually adds a more menacing edge to Shephard's cover. The look on the cover is reminiscent of ultra-grainy 3200 asa film, a far cry from conventional films used in normal situations. Grainy film is normally reserved for extreme low light situations when normal film will not give adequate exposure, the trade-off for low light is the ultra-grainy pixelated appearance. Diane Arbus at the start of her career used a 35mm camera to produce grainy images. Her interpretation of the resulting images can be used to make a further reading of the Shephard cover:

In the beginning of photographing I used to make very grainy things. I'd be fascinated by what the grain did because it would make a kind of tapestry of all these little dots and everything would be translated into this medium of dots. Skin would be the same as water would be the same as sky and you were dealing mostly in dark and light, not so much in flesh and blood. (Arbus 2003, 59)

By utilising ultra-grain in the portrait of Khadr he has the appearance of being less human, skin not like flesh and blood. Shephard's leanings can be seen in the use of words in her introduction. Writing about the interview with the dead soldier's Christopher Speer's wife, Shephard taps into her feelings.

I understand the fatigue, and how the public gets tugged in one direction, only to be yanked in another. That happened to me when I met Tabitha Speer in her North Carolina hometown and her story broke my heart. Her soldier husband was an Elvis fan, a romantic who left her love notes around the house and a dad who wanted nothing more than to watch his little daughter and son grow up happy.

In Utah, I was graciously welcomed into the home of Layne and Leisl Morris. Layne had been blinded in one eye by shrapnel from the July 2002 battle, forcing his retirement from the army. He has a beautiful family and four children whose lives would be so different today if he hadn't come home. Scotty Hansen, a Vietnam vet not prone to long emotional discussions talked to me in detail about the battle while sitting on his living-room couch, his granddaughter snuggled on one side and a grey teacup poodle on the other. (Shephard 2008, xiv)

It is understandable that being faced with a grieving wife and mother that this would have caused Shephard to be swayed between the two. The problem with all of this is that the access to the other side is not easy so it is extremely difficult to humanise the ‘enemy’. Describing the deaths of the opposition fighters Shephard is much less emotive.

The bodies of the three men killed in the compound by U.S. Forces were wrapped in garbage bags. They were photographed, their dusty, bloodstained faces recorded with signs over them as KIA (killed in action) 1, 2 and 3. In Bagram, soldiers would try to identify them. (Shephard 2008, 15)

The three men wrapped in garbage bags, who knows whether they loved Elvis, had sons and daughters, wrote romantic notes, left grandchildren or, owned a grey teacup poodle. The U.S. citizen is humanised, the ‘wrapped in garbage bags’ are demonised.

While my opinion on Shephard is based on an interpretation of the cover photograph, activist and spokesperson for the Canadian Free Omar Khadr group, Heather Marsh analyses the words used in describing Khadr.

Of the 24 articles, 16 are by Michelle Shephard, who recently won an award from the Canadian Civil Liberties Association “*to celebrate her contribution to the better knowledge for Canadians on issues about civil liberties, the repercussion of Sept. 11 and Omar Khadr.*” Shephard managed to use ‘*convicted*’ 24 times, ‘*war crime(s)/criminal*’ 30 times, ‘*pleaded guilty/admitted/confessed*’ 32 times, and ‘*murder/killer*’ an amazing 43 times in 16 articles. This feat was made possible by referring to the subject nearly always as some variation of “*convicted war criminal Omar Khadr, who pleaded guilty to five war crimes including murder,*” a more subtle but far more damaging attack than the Sun Media’s “*Killer Khadr*” headings. The word ‘*medic*’ appears 6 times since the trial, always from Michelle Shephard (the special forces fighter Omar is accused of killing was not acting as a medic). In Shephard’s reporting since and during the trial, there is one thoughtful analysis of the case in which the words used are part of a larger balanced view; all the rest of the articles are simply news, and the words are descriptors being applied to factual detail. (Marsh 2012)

While Marsh analyses post-trial commentary, the doctored photograph accompanied the pre-trial publication of *Guantanamo's Child*, published in 2008, thus showing the leaning of Shephard before any decision by the military court.

### **Khadr in Softened Grey**

Figure 6.6 Passport photograph inlaid against Heather Spears' sketch from *Omar Khadr: Oh Canada*. Lines and margin numbers added. Photograph compilation, Chris Lewis. 2015.

In the book *Omar Khadr – Oh Canada* the image of Omar's passport photograph is copied into a pencil drawing by writer and artist Heather Spears. The book, edited by Janice Williamson has over thirty contributors who 'all write with the conviction that Khadr's treatment has been – and continues to be – shameful and unjust' (Williamson 2012, back cover). Spears' interpretation of the passport photograph deviates slightly from the original and reinforces her position as an opponent of Khadr's imprisonment. Pleasingly, unlike the passport photograph with its blown out exposure on cheeks and foreheads, Spears lightly and evenly shades the features a soft grey (Pleasingly, lightly, soft, just like the photographs the words convey your own leanings.) Spears' sketch shows some subtle deviation from the original that makes Khadr look even more

childlike and aesthetically appealing. The face of Khadr in the sketch is rounder, chubbier, the difference in measurements across the face from ear to ear – firstly at the top then at the lobe show less variation than the passport. This rounded face gives the appearance of a more childlike face. Likewise, Spears has avoided including the signs of hair bridging the gap between eyebrows, the definition of the nose rising from nostrils to the corner of the eyes has also been removed. This concentrates attention on a stubbier nose, more childlike, less adolescent. The eyes, in the converted passport photograph from colour to black and white are dark and coal brown. In Spears' interpretation they are much clearer, lighter, even though a sketch is shades of grey, the eyes are not the same darkness as Khadr's. One invokes a lightness, perhaps the legendary Afghan girl green shade. The lips too have been changed. In the passport the upper lip is fully defined and while the ever so hint of a smile is present it does not break open. In the sketch the top lip is ill-defined giving the illusion that it is the hint of the moustache that defines the upper lip – fuller more pleasing. The gap between the two lips has been thickened and darkened with the slight curl of a smile adjusted with a slight upward twist (Spears 2012, xxvi). It is in viewing this rendition that Spears shows herself to be on the side of a child-like Khadr.

How is your health, mother? Don't be sad Allah is with us and every believer.  
Be happy, because after night, there is always a new dawn and a brilliant sun  
for Islam and Muslims. (Khadr 2004)

These words were included in the first letter Omar Khadr wrote to his mother in June 2004 almost three years after the start of his incarceration. The night that Omar thought

was close ending was to go for many more years and like Omar's supporters the U.S. knew how to use and manipulate images for their ideology.

### **Khadr in Dirty Yellow**

Figure 6.7. Sketch of Omar Khadr from *Sketching Guantanamo: Court Sketches of the Military Tribunals, 2006-2013*. Janet Hamlin, Seattle: Fantagraphics. 2013.

Heather Spears' sketches are the opposite of Janet Hamlin's court approved sketches from Guantanamo Bay. While I will talk about the photographs that the U.S. allow to be used in the case of Omar Khadr, the difference in the sketching is telling in the different ideological pursuits of both sides. Softened grey, the child caught in terror; dirty yellow, the unrepentant terrorist. Photographs are not allowed to be taken in any court appearance. Carol Rosenberg in the forward to Hamlin's book *Sketching Guantanamo: Court Sketches of the Military Tribunals 2006-2013* notes that at first 'the Pentagon insisted that the sketch artist draw the accused as eerie, ghost-like, otherworldly people' before eventually relenting as long as Hamlin submitted 'to invasive censorship of her images' (Rosenberg 2013, 8). Neanderthal. I hate the word, but that is the way these court drawings read. Each one of them must have a white sticker of court approval for use – vetted, clean, white (Hamlin 2013). In most of them,

to me anyway, the skull has been flattened and slides backward, primitive, ancient, non-progressive. Facial features suffer the same flattening and hair is emphasised by the technique of slashing coloured pencils in a sweeping motion from the nose to the hair. Hamlin's sketches look like precursors for a Planet of the Apes sequel. The hand-drawn backgrounds are a flecked yellow and brown, reminiscent of sprayed excrement. Khadr is surrounded by a halo, not of purity, but a dirty off yellow multiple slashed halo, faecal yellow, a cowards colour. One shows him looking confused scratching his cheek, another shows him slouched in a chair shoulders raised devoid of any neck, and, in yet another, he glares out in a close-up, the crazed eyes of the deranged. All of them are not flattering and are exceedingly primitive in their portrayal. In another he stands held up by two guards, his suit ill fitting, teeth protrude, chipmunk, his neck non-existent and his hands hang limp, ineffectual, the stereotypical pose of a dandified effeminate man. Neanderthal, and effeminate, in the one picture. Worse the two soldiers one on each side, have one hand on his arm the other resting gently on his forearm, four supporting hands – *we care* – we care we are the United States.

### **The Fabrication of Photographs**

Back at the fire fight, back to the released image discussed at the start of this chapter. The image of two soldiers, hands hovering over Khadr with medical gauzes: *we care*, despite what you do. The flash fills in the shadows, showing the rich metallic, gothic, freshly spilled blood. It reflects back the light and emphasises the extent of the wounds, two huge holes the size of a westernised emblem of consumerism, coke can. The clothes are ripped apart, but, Khadr has some dignity preserved as his genitalia are covered by loose fitting garments. The top cover of his garment pulled back over a shoulder near the exit holes, is saturated with blood, damp, soaked through to the skin. Khadr's body is flecked with large patches of fresh blood, richly red, and some, a combination of dust and blood on his cheek, chin, eyes and abdomen are dull residual splatters from the wounds. His body is pink, his face a dirty grey, perhaps from the dust, perhaps from the internal fight as his body reacts to the blood loss and pain. His hair is not black, but grey, flecked with straw and coloured by the dusty dirt from the collapsed building and firefight. His eyes are closed and his mouth slightly ajar showing the whiteness of his teeth. His appearance is youthful and his body devoid of the tell-tale signs of adulthood, hair.



The bag of medical supplies, gauzes and swabs is strategically located close to the head of Khadr, easy access for vital life-saving treatment. The two soldiers each have hands clenched as if they are unwrapping the sterilised bandages that will staunch the seeping life force of Omar Khadr.

Reading this as an example of humanitarian, caring in a conflict zone is wrought with danger. As Ariella Azoulay cautions in *The Civil Contract of Photography*;

Everyone and everything is liable to become a photograph. However, there are exceptions – military zones, for instance, and other enclosed spaces where rules concerning the use of photography are fabricated by those in charge. (Azoulay [2008] 2014, 146)

Judith Butler likewise warns in *The Frames of War*, ‘perhaps it is our inability to see what we see that is also of critical concern. To learn to see the frame that blinds us to what we see is no easy matter’ (Butler 2009, 100).

So how do we ‘see the frame that blinds us’ (Butler 2009, 100) especially in a military setting ‘where rules concerning the use of photography are fabricated’ (Azoulay [2008] 2014, 146)?

What we see is a graphic photograph of a young person with horrific injuries being treated by medics from the coalition of the willing. The scene, or frame in light of the above, and in nature of the war on terror, must be viewed with scepticism. There are far more photographs taken of this event than this particular one, and they reveal a different sequence and understanding than the official story. The photograph may be truthful, if that is the right word, as in this case where it is a photograph of an event, albeit it in a sequence of events, as discussed in the instance previously analysed by Carrabine (see Introduction). But it is also dishonest, as can be seen by what happened before and after.

### **Sequential Photography**

Khadr was not found face up as shown in the photograph, and the graphic wounds in the front of his chest are not the entry points of the bullets. The entry points of the bullets were in his back and what we see, so graphic and bloodied are in fact the exit wounds. Being shot in the back makes it more difficult to believe the rhetoric that

Khadr was throwing a grenade and was shot in the process. If he was photographed bloodied, face down in rubble as found and shown by recently released photographs it lends support to the defence story that he was not capable of throwing the grenade (Shephard 2009). By showing the frontal wounds this official photograph alludes to a fair fight two combatants facing each other, one a victor one a loser. Shooting in the back, like a sucker punch is seen as an unfair fight, though truth be told it is war, kill or be killed. The photographs preceding the frontal shots show Khadr buried under debris from the building collapsing subsequent to the bombing. This is noted by Michelle Shephard in 2009 article for *The Star*.

Guantanamo detainee Omar Khadr was buried face down under the rubble, blinded by shrapnel and crippled, at the time the Pentagon alleges he threw a grenade that fatally wounded a U.S soldier, according to classified photographs and defence documents obtained by the *Star*.

While the defence's argument that it was physically impossible for Khadr to have thrown the grenade first surfaced at Guantanamo hearing last year, the military judge would not release the photos or declassify the written submissions (Shephard 2009).

Shephard's revelation fits with the documentary, candid, photo-journalistic style of photography. Photography, especially professional photography, is not one shot, pack up the camera, job done. To do that would be to enter the realm of the amateur. The great news photographers, the Magnum photographers, shot sequences as can be seen in the book *Magnum Contact Sheets* that shows the tear, proof sheets of sixty nine photographers most impactful photographs (Lubben [2011] 2014). Here, the photographers, show the inner process of selective posing in camera and the process of selecting images after the photographs have been taken. Shooting sequentially can allow selective editing, as seemed to be the case with the Pentagon failure to release all of the Khadr images, a decision the military judge agreed with.

This is a problematic approach; truth, or untruth. One of my favourite photographs by Diane Arbus shows a young boy holding two grenades with an expression of sheer anger on his face; his hands clutching the grenades so tightly it looks like his blood vessels are going to burst. As I reflected on this photograph I wondered, what made him so angry, I wondered what kind of life he would have in the future with all that

residual hatred. I marvelled at Arbus' ability to capture such an image of malevolent anger. I was wrong. I was duped. Many years, later I purchased the retrospective Arbus work *Revelations* and therein lie the photographic evidence, the contact sheet on page 154 that bursts my bubble. Arbus had shot sequences. The child running. The child smiling. The child laughing. The child by a water fountain. The child holding fake grenades. The child acting. The child made to be angry (Arbus 2013, 154). I was shocked, despite photography being my profession. The sequence revealed the truth: the photograph was a lie, a constructed false reality.

The revelation of Shephard states the obvious, the photographer shot in sequences. As Speer was evacuated to battle for his life in hospital, the gravity of his wounds would have been apparent. Like a crime scene, the event would have been photographed, multiple angles, multiple shots, multiple sequences. The released photograph of Khadr would have been one of many. The released photograph of Khadr would be the one that would show the U.S. in the best light.

### **Documentary Film Revelations**

In the documentary *The U.S. versus Omar Khadr*, Nazim Baksh and Terence McKenna interview the prosecutor, Colonel Lawrence Morris, and one of the soldiers, Damian Corsetti, who interrogated Khadr while he was at the prison hospital in Bagram, Afghanistan. Morris in his responses is measured, calculated, his hair cut short, neat, military uniformed, disciplined. Corsetti is large, bald headed, appearing with a close cropped beard on his chin and a moustache. One looks like a red-neck you would avoid, the other a picture of authority and justice. In their responses the lies the photograph tells become more apparent. The wounds that Khadr suffered are now used to increase his pain during interrogation. According to Corsetti, he was handcuffed into stress positions on the stretcher and was made to sit up causing pain in his gunshot wounds. Corsetti admits it was torture, Morris does not (McKenna 2008).

The documentary *Taxi to the Dark Side*, looks at the death of an Afghan taxi driver, Dilawar, after five days of custody by the U.S. The film focuses on U.S. rendition practices, the practice of sending a foreign criminal or terrorist suspect covertly to be interrogated in a country with less rigorous regulations for the humane treatment of prisoners. In picking interrogators it is acknowledged that one of them, Damian

Corsetti, was picked for his particular bodily features, he looked ‘big, loud and scary’ (Gibney 2007). Yet it is Corsetti who regrets his part in what he has done and wishes that he could have his time again and undo what he participated in. The medics may have patched up the wounds of Khadr only to have those wounds become the target of abuse at Bagram and Guantanamo. The documented abuse included sleep deprivation, sexual threats, water boarding, asphyxiation, food and toilet deprivation and the torture known as ‘common pronial strikes’ (Gibney 2007). ‘Common pronial strikes’ the terminology, like calling people ‘collateral damage’, does not reveal what it entailed. The use of the word ‘common’ signifies it is not something out of the ordinary. Pronial strikes occurred while prisoners were suspended by chains in stress positions and soldiers kneeled the detainees in the thigh repeatedly hitting pressure points. In *Taxi to the Dark Side* it is revealed that this form of torture resulted in the death of the taxi driver Dilawar who died of a pulmonary embolism. The death was ruled as a homicide; so severe was the damage to his legs if he had survived both legs that would have had to be amputated. Dilawar, a young man of small stature, frequently cried out for his mother and was assaulted even more as he loudly begged for help (Gibney 2007). The cries for his mother mirror the recorded interrogation of Omar Khadr by Canadian officials at Guantanamo Bay. In the article “Apostrophe of Empire: Guantanamo Bay” Joseph Pugliese concludes, ‘Enunciated in Khadr’s cry is the psychic toll of torture, isolation and indefinite detention’ (Pugliese 2009, 14).

Central to much of the case of Omar Khadr is that he is only fifteen when captured at the firefight in Abu Ykhel. In the photograph of Khadr it is evident that he is very young; despite this, he is not treated as a child but as an adult enemy combatant. But while his youth may look like a negative for the coalition of the willing, it is not. At some level it fits in with the notion that in the war on terror all of them are guilty, or capable of attacks, men, women and children. Being a child as Khadr was does not signify any need for special treatment despite laws and conventions saying otherwise. To show Khadr’s involvement, a video is released by the U.S. forces that shows him wiring mines for deployment against opposition forces. Mines that kill and maim. The flip side also has to be shown, in the bombing of the compound that Khadr was in the U.S. raked it with machine gun fire, dropped several 500lb bombs along with hellfire missiles. Hellfire missiles come in three different forms including an ‘Anti-Tank, Blast-Fragmentation and Thermobaric’ (Eshel 2007).

The Metal Augmented Charge or MAC (Thermobaric) Hellfire, designated AGM-114N, has completed rapid development cycle in 2002 and was deployed during OIF by US Marines Helicopters in Iraq. The new warhead contains a fluorinated powder that is layered between the warhead casing and the PBXN-112 explosive fill. When the PBXN-112 detonates, the aluminium mixture is dispersed and rapidly burns. The resultant high pressure is extremely effective against enemy personnel and structures. (Eshel 2007)

War is hell. Hellfire missiles, undetected mines, burning, maiming, wounding are all part of the horrors unleashed during conflict.

The jury selected for the military commission trial of Khadr for alleged war crimes were not concerned that he was only fifteen at the time he was captured. Jo Becker, a children's rights advocate, writes about his age and torture in the article "What Can Khadr's Jury tell us about Guantanamo Justice?"

When asked, most said they had no opinions about charging a 15-year old with war crimes. An Air Force Captain said that in his opinion, a child would need to be as young as five or six to avoid adult courts if accused of a homicide. "Where I grew up, as young as seven or eight you knew if you take a gun, you run the risk of killing someone else."

Perhaps equally as disturbing, few had any views about the US treatment of detainees at either Bagram Air Force Base in Afghanistan, where Khadr and hundreds of other detainees were first held, or at Guantanamo. Although allegations of torture in US custody have been widely reported, only two of the fifteen members said they had any views on whether the US was treating detainees at Guantanamo in a humane manner. (Becker 2010)

Again, the release of the photograph, like a pre-emptive warning of an oncoming hellfire missile, helps the U.S. avoid unnecessary scrutiny. The people chosen to judge Khadr's fate already know he was fifteen, they already know he has been tortured, these facts are never going to come into their deliberations. The photograph clearly shows his age. To the U.S., Khadr represented a pawn to get to Osama Bin Laden, through association with his father; to them, Khadr, despite being so young, provided a link to the hidden world of terrorists. In the case of Khadr, despite the torture and

criminality assigned to him some of his interrogators recognise that he is just a boy. The guards talked about football, movies, he was given comic books and as revealed in the documentary *You don't Like the Truth: Four Days Inside Guantanamo*, the interrogators asked whether he would like a pop, a childlike reference to a soft drink (Henriquez and Côté 2010). The photograph used by the U.S. fits neatly with what they consider the most important part of the Khadr case. Note the words of Colonel Morris in *The U.S. versus Omar Khadr* when he is asked about diary entries that show U.S. soldiers walking around shooting the wounded at the compound where Khadr was captured.

These soldiers had had one of their buddies as they understand it murdered by this man who is not a soldier, who is an unlawful combatant, a bandit out there in the desert and they saved his life. That's the most relevant fact. (McKenna 2008)

It is here that the photograph used by the U.S. and the comments of the Colonel blend as one: Khadr is a 'bandit', he 'murdered', he is a 'man', and as shown in the photograph, he is 'saved'. In using such language Morris and the U.S. show their view, their definition of war, war crimes, torture and children.

### **The Evisceration of Omar Khadr**

I am missing something. I can't feel it. I look at photographs of famine and I feel it. I view the photograph of the lynching of Jesse Washington and I feel it. The same applies to the photograph of Khaled Sharrouf's son when he is forced to hold the severed head of the Syrian soldier (See Chapter Six). I feel it. But I don't feel it with Khadr. It disturbs me. It's not that I don't feel anything for the plight of Khadr, I do, I just don't feel anything about this photograph. That disturbs me. I think about it often. It is as if I have seen it somewhere before and I am tainted. Then it occurs to me that I have seen it, numerous times. Road kill. Country roads in Australia are littered with the remains of fresh hits, fresh kills. The eviscerated remains of a once living, breathing, animal strewn across the tarmac, dirty, bloodied, dead. Occasionally someone would come across an animal that was freshly hit, still alive but in the throes of death. At these times, someone would bring out a shovel or find a tree stump to end the misery and suffering, the terminal, certainty of death, hovering but still to descend. Sickeningly, in the case of snakes, most of which are poisonous, individuals

deliberately caused road kill, swerving to hit them, confirming the adage ‘the only good snake is a dead snake.’ Draped over sign posts signifying the distance to the next town the long bodies of King Brown snakes, the gwardar, marked the ghoulish fascination with road kill and the bravery of the car driver who crushed the frantic primitive body of the reptile under the car tyre. The snake has been subject to its own brand of hellfire missiles, sucker punched; left alone it would have done no harm. Mostly, though, the bitumen is covered with death; kangaroos, bloated, leaked bodies, the shattered holes of life once lived. The wounds are not fresh, they are dirty, dried, a life extinguished. At first you stop, then after five, ten, twenty, hundreds, you drive past oblivious to the carnage man has caused.

Road kill that is what I see, not in Omar Khadr, but in the propaganda photograph of the U.S. Suvendrini Perera talks about the space that people like Omar Khadr inhabit in the article “What is a Camp?”

In this hybrid space of exception, a hitherto unperceived gap between the categories of ‘the human’ and ‘the citizen’ is exposed in the figure of the denationalised citizen, such as the Jewish or Gipsy outcast of the Third Reich, or the stateless refugee. Such figures, ‘growing sections of humankind [who] are no longer representable inside the nation-state’ (2000:201) in fact embody the crisis of that formation. (Perera 2002)

This gap, ‘hybrid space of exception’ (Perera 2002) lends itself to further theoretical developments with the concept of the animal, the trophy, the non-human also applying to the detainees of Guantanamo Bay. Pugliese describes Khadr’s treatment at Guantanamo as the ‘embodiment of waste’ (Pugliese 2009, 13).

The practices of torture and ritualised humiliation that Khadr has been forced to endure operate to transmute him into the embodiment of ‘waste’; as such, as I will elaborate below, he is precluded from occupying the sentient and rights-bearing category of the ‘human’. (Pugliese 2009, 13)

Human road kill. The treatment of Khadr and the other detainees at Guantanamo Bay was preceded by the inhumane treatment at Bagram. Yet both Bagram and Guantanamo were not the start of the non-human, the other, the embodiment of human waste. The start of this treatment can be seen at Abu Ykhiel, as revealed in the

propaganda photograph of Khadr used by the U.S. He is not in his original position, rather he has been carried, dragged, dropped away from the original scene. He lies on the crushed road, unwanted, alone. His wounds are uncovered, the blood in places is already dry and crusty. His head is thrown back, grey, death-like, a colour revealing his life is almost done. All that is needed is a bullet, spade or tree to dispatch him from the world of the living. At first glance the photograph may look ambiguous, a photograph that could fit in both sides of the for and against Khadr. After a more detailed examination, looking again with quiet reflection and deeper analysis the photograph only fits in the category of the tortured non-human. If it was a for Khadr photograph, or, if it revealed a kind, compassionate U.S., it would show a different scenario. It would show the wounds being covered with gauze, bandages, it would show the support of a neck brace, or hands touching, not necessarily comforting, but showing a shared humanity despite ideological differences. The Khadr photograph shows nothing of this, he is alone in a death scene. He is human road kill.

‘There is nothing I can do about the past but ... I can do something about the future’.  
(Omar Khadr, *CBC News*, 2015)







## Chapter Six

### Censored Images: Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham 2014

Figure 7.1. Pixelated image of Khaled Sharrouf's son.

*August 2014. A militant extremist group Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) engages in a frightening brand of terror that utilises modern media techniques to show live executions that are broadcast via social media platforms. The sickening footage shocks many as they watch helplessly as someone's life is taken in a show of deliberately provocative power. In amidst this, an Australian citizen, Khaled Sharrouf, sympathetic to the cause of ISIS, immigrates and connects with the self-declared caliphate. He is joined at a later date by his wife and his young family. Via the platform*

of Twitter, Sharrouf posts a photograph of his seven year old son holding what is believed to be the severed head of a Syrian soldier. The boy is dressed in smart, casual dress, the kind a parent would ask them to put on to go to a family outing, the zoo, the park, visiting friends. It shows parents who care about their son's appearance, clothes branded, as is often the case, with the logo of a designer and matched accordingly. His shirt is a deep blue colour, Persian blue - would be fitting for the Middle Eastern connection, but it seems darker, Navy blue, embossed with 'Polo for Kids', although what he has been asked to do is at the opposite extreme of any normal kid activity. His watch, oversized glass face, with blue casing and band blends in nicely with his T-Shirt. Pants, three-quarter length, loose, a summer set, lighter than navy, chequered with sky blue squares and mid-tone blocks of Cerulean blue, a colour in-between Azure and Sky. Cerulean, a Latin word, a derivative of sky, heaven. Blue, the restful colour, heavenly, calming. The blue is interfaced with white squares and bold black strips. He wears open toed sandals, more expensive and protective than flip-flop thongs, the army green sandals firmly held by Velcro strips. His hat matches his sandals, military green, baseball style, but more narrow, more toned down, more conservative than the brash, bright, reverse style American fashion statements. It is matched with a final accessory, a small child's gun holster, weapon-less, a prop for a toy gun in a fake war. But, this war, battle, fight, is not child-like, it is not fake, it is real. So realistic that I am not shown the child's face, or what he is straining to hold in his hand.

His face, in the modern version of censorship, is forbidden for me to see, a mass of pixels. What he has hoisted up in his hands, gripped by a mass of black curly hair is also pixelated; purported to be the head of a soldier, severed, heavy. The background is crucial to connect the hidden, the forbidden, and the censored. The angle of the sun casts long shadows, early morning, late evening. He is posed next to a fence: it looks like steel tubing in a square grid, black. Inside each grid are four right angle white pieces, placed in corners to produce a star-like image inside the square. Strong grid fencing for a park, public open space, semi-cared for, semi-not, patchy green grass, slightly rampant with side growth. Next to him, but cropped out from most pictures, avoiding attention, a needless distraction to the main scene, is another child, thin boned, slightly taller, perhaps slightly older, green T-Shirt and skinny arms. Another guest at the zoo of horrors.

Then dust blows out of fresh open graves, and the orange peels go grey, sink, wither, rot away. Sooner or later every murder becomes quaint. (William T Vollmann, *Rising Up and Rising Down: Some Thoughts on Violence, Freedom and Urgent Means*. 2005, 124)

### **Pixelated Truth**

At first the tweeted photograph was available online with the soldier's head and the face of the child I will refer to only as Sharrouf's son, both visible. Later, subsequent photographs, both online and in print do not reveal either the face of the child or the decapitated head of the soldier. A search on the internet reveals numerous photographs with either square pixilation or blocked out areas of black over the head and over Sharrouf's son's eyes. All the newspapers, magazines and websites have taken to obliterating the major identifying marks of both of the victims in the photographs.

At first I wanted to see his face, as if looking into his eyes, observing the curl of his lips, his posture as a whole, his demeanour, would reveal something about his personality, his angst, his feelings. I wanted to free the 'condemned' from a curse bought upon him by his father. The mark of Cain; the stain of inheritance. A reverse image search leads me back to the start, but even then the image had already been tampered with. Ringing newspaper offices bought the response that they did not take the photograph, so did not own copyright and could not forward it on; although they felt comfortable enough in a legal and moral sense to use the image and share it across multiple media platforms. Emails to an Arabic news source and the ABC documentary programme Four Corners which had shown a special episode on how Khaled Sharrouf became engaged in terrorism, went unanswered. The University's library became involved in the quest, with the librarian becoming conscious of implications for data storage and loss of archival material when she realised the wider ramifications of the new paradigm of transmission and deletion. The search revealed nothing. Despite this lack of evidence, and despite having to discuss a severely doctored image, I have chosen to examine and critique, read if you prefer, the pixelated image of Khaled Sharrouf's son. Something about this reeks. Those privileged (surely the incorrect word, there is nothing nice to see) to see, those denied the opportunity to see.

As I will discuss later, some of those who view the image of Khaleed Sharrouf's son deny its authenticity; others do not. Without seeing the whole image it is more difficult

to formulate an opinion, a truth about its authenticity, and how the young Sharrouf appears, frightened, happy or apprehensive. I have already been told quite strongly that the image should never be seen, or shown, as sick people (men I assume, and me), may get some warped pleasure in viewing such images of violence. I am told by another person in a confidential undertone, and assured that the person telling me is breaking protocol in doing so, that there is a website called [bestgore.com](http://bestgore.com) where I will surely find such a sickening image. I am warned though that on [bestgore.com](http://bestgore.com) I will see websites advertising sexual services and pornography. Great, perhaps there is more to this violence and sexual connection than I care to admit.

How can you judge in a split second image what a child is thinking, processing, dealing with, or, inevitably, what they will become? He is seven. He has been contaminated. How can you not be if you are exposed to this low level of humanity? Contaminated maybe, guilty no, contamination does not mean, or rather it should not mean, condemnation and guilt. So now I, too, write from a contaminated image, it is a photograph, a computer-generated image, and a set of dots all in one. Welcome to the new media, the new way of seeing.

### **The Performance of Trophy Photographs**

The Sharrouf photograph belongs to a specific type, or genre of photograph, the trophy image, taken deliberately and expressly as a gloating spoil of war. I view the earlier photograph I discussed, the lynching of the black teenage Jesse Washington taken in Waco, in 1916, as both an atrocity photograph and a trophy photograph (see Chapter 3). The photographer, Gildersleeve, was told in advance of the lynching, allowed to take the photograph, and, was more than happy to print it multiple times for the white people who crowded his shop entrance to buy a studio branded print. That is a trophy photograph, taken explicitly for others to share and gloat over their combined, complicit partnership in the death of a ‘beast’. While the original intent of the photograph as a trophy does not change, by changing the framework it also becomes an atrocity photograph; re-possessed by anti-lynching supporters to show in all its horror the treatment of black people at the hands of whites. The trophy photograph of Jesse Washington’s lynching, passed around and shared with supporters, now reaches a different audience, an audience aghast and angry at this torture, hence the duality, trophy and atrocity, dependant on meaning and reason for viewing.

Sharrouf's photograph has all the hallmarks of a trophy photograph. This was not taken as a memoir of a visit to the park; this was taken to further Sharrouf and his agenda as a member of ISIS, to terrorise and celebrate his trophy spoils of horror. The accompanying tweet and subsequent messages, thumbing his nose at his enemies, shows his contempt for them and his use of his son as a pawn. He sent the photograph out accompanied by the tweet 'That's my boy', to his Twitter followers. As a grotesque trophy photograph it may be argued that blurring out of the child's head and the dead man's features is the right thing to do. The original tweeted photograph was not edited. Perhaps the blurring of the image of the dead man thwarts Sharrouf's gloating pride at parading the severed head of a soldier to a shocked world. Blurring the image also protects the identity of his son from being shown, named and shamed, tarred with the same brush of evil of his father. All this would seem logical and correct – and faced with no visible image to discuss, ISIS and Sharrouf would die a natural, or, unnatural death. However this has not occurred, and the use of the image and subsequent events show how much controversy can develop around one image and its doctored clones.

A father's pride for his son. The technological changes are exciting and frightening at the same time. There is a calculated posturing, a dog urinating on a pole approach by Sharrouf. His friends, mates, followers, respond positively to the image and eventually he has the response of the world via the social media machines.

According to Perera there is a relationship between 'the "performativity" of atrocity and the "media of its representation and transmission" '(Perera 2002). In Perera's example, there was a performativity to the atrocities as shown in the film *Sri Lanka's Killing Fields*, where the imagery of women being raped, tortured and mocked, even after death, could be shared with anyone who has a mobile phone and could be replayed for sexual gratification. Reposting the images to fellow soldiers could have led to a competitiveness to get more victims, rape more women and engage in even more atrocity, while terrorising the losers in the war (Macrae 2011). The images, like the one of Jesse Washington, cross two categories dependant on use, while the original intent and usage was as trophy photographs, they also are used as evidence, illustrative of atrocities. Sharrouf's trophy photograph relies on a social media platform that allows it to be played out, assimilated, and used, to cause the maximum effect. This differs greatly from what happened in the past. In the past most images that are

distributed to the public would have to get past censors before they were printed in a newspaper, or, shown in a magazine, or, on a website. Now, however via social media, Sharrouf was able to put out an unedited photograph with the caption, ‘That’s my Boy’, without being censored. This is a major change that digital technology has allowed. Sharrouf was well aware of this and his trophy, which includes the severed head and the innocent pawn, his son, are proudly displayed to the world. A trophy is a possession, a spoil of war or a hunt, and in this case the severed head and the son, both are possessions of Sharrouf’s, spoils of the Caliphate against the West. The son at seven year of age carries the burden of his father and that of the severed head of the soldier.

The display of Sharrouf’s two trophies, his son and the severed head of the Syrian soldier, are not only symbols of ISIS power, but also signifiers of Sharrouf’s masculinity. The first trophy shows his fertility, virility, in being able to produce a son, a treasured link to carry on his lineage, a son who, due to his age, is complicit and submissive to his father. The second trophy, the head of the soldier, a dead man’s body parts, is a symbol of a practise that is a hallmark of warfare. Joan E Cashin in the article, “Trophies of War: Material Culture in the Civil War Era”, characterises the taking of body parts as a means to ‘demonstrate military prowess, dehumanize the enemy, prove their masculinity, and show hatred for the enemy’ (Cashin 2011, 352). Sharrouf goes one step further, as he takes a photograph of the trophy, thus making another trophy of a trophy. Matthew Brower discusses the connection between the camera and shooting and killing game in the late 1800s in “Trophy Shots: Early North American Photographs of Nonhuman Animals and the Display of Masculine Prowess”. It is here that Brower links wildlife photography back to the original concept of ‘camera hunting’ and even to the invention of a ‘camera gun’ explicitly tying the practise of photography into an analogy of the literal gun (Brower 2005, 17). This is alluded to by Sontag and in the language of photography terms such as; *going on a shoot, trigger, release and capture* all equally at home in applying to a gun and camera (Sontag [1977] 2008, 14). Sharrouf chooses the camera as a means to record a trophy; the physical head of the soldier is subject to decay, and his son will grow up and no longer be so subordinate to his father: by photographing both together he preserves the dual trophy forever, reinforcing the claims of ‘the camera hunters’ that



photographs were superior as trophies because they lasted longer than animal bodies (Brower 2005, 27).

### **The West's Nullified Trophies**

New technology has allowed Sharrouf and other ISIS members to immediately record and assimilate a trophy image that boasts of the atrocities they have committed, and to thumb their nose at the Western alliance they fight against. The response of newspapers, websites, in pixelating the image on one level nullified the image, deadening of the power of the original trophy proudly displayed by Sharrouf. Yet, on another level, as I will discuss, this amplified and increased the power and usage of the image. The image in its current form is of limited use to Sharrouf and ISIS as it reveals nothing of the horror and smugness it formerly conveyed. In this context, the argument is that the response in censoring the image was the correct one, thus stopping an avenue of disseminating a violent trophy photograph. Atrocity photographs, well most of them, are graphic and horrific designed to show the horror of an event and bring about awareness and change. The trophy photograph is taken as a brag, the owner showing a sense of pride, a record of his participation in terrorising, killing, rape, or some other crime. By suspending and deleting his account, the response by the company Twitter, who Sharrouf used originally to tweet his image, seems to be an appropriate measure. The image was taken, it was shown, it caused a huge uproar, it was deemed inappropriate, and it was removed. It happened, it was dealt with, time to move on – trophy nullified – end of story. Except, the image, albeit it the Westernised pixelated version, is still continually used across media, including papers and websites. It is this image in its pixelated form that I now wish to discuss.

Removing the image and showing only its obliterated version lends itself to questionable interpretations, for example as highlighted in *The Daily Telegraph* article “Why I Fear the Severed Heads are Fake” (Lay 2014). Here Duncan Lay asserts ‘I have been able to see the un-pixelated images and they just don’t look right’. He then goes to list several reasons with the highlighted caption that makes it sound like a sick fisherman’s story about the one that got away –

- 5) Too light. The boy’s forearms are showing little strain. Turn to our fishing page and you’ll see kids having more difficulty holding up a 2kg fish than he’s

showing holding an adult head. And he's holding it by the hair. Unless he's the world's strongest kid, it's not possible.

6) Too much fun. Kids can't fake facial expressions and he thinks what he is doing is hilarious. But if it was a real head, oozy, stinking and bloody, he wouldn't be cuddling it so close. (Lay 2014)

This counter view is then picked up by *The Workers Weekly Guardian for the Communist Party of Australia* in the August 20, 2014 editorial, "Gutter Politics, Gutter Media":

So on August 11, Murdoch's *Australian* sunk to new depths in gutter politics, deflecting attention from [then Attorney-general] Brandis by running with the gruesome image of a young boy appearing to be holding a decapitated head. The authors Paul Maley and Greg Bearup using a child as a political pawn, did their best to justify the need for a more repressive legislation. Not surprisingly there was an angry response to the image, which brought those who published it down to the level of those who posted it.

Duncan Lay, in an article titled, "Why I fear the severed heads are fake" in *The Sunday Telegraph* (17-08-2014) puts forward very plausible arguments as to why the images of severed heads are fake. He says after looking at un-pixelated (nothing hidden) images. If they are fake it is yet one more example of fabricated media stories to support what a government is about to do. Who would be surprised. (Pearson 2014)

The problem with this smug, privileged-to-see stance can be found in Lay's article where he approaches it in a jocular way, 'the world's strongest kid' – 'too much fun' – 'cuddling it so close': the seriousness of the image, its impact, has been lost (Lay 2014). Likewise with *The Worker's Weekly Guardian* piece, following the same line of reasoning that the head is fake, means the impact of the image has changed. Worse, we are now left with no way of knowing, or viewing ourselves, to make any kind of informed opinion. The puffed-up style of Lay conveyed in the text and his use of language shows a disregard for humanity.

As mentioned earlier, another reason for pixelating the image would be to protect the identity of a minor, Sharrouf's son. After all, he is a young child and innocent of guilt,

although being exposed at a young age to horror and extremist fundamentalism is surely going to have a damaging effect. The evidence in the Sharrouf case does not support this line of reasoning. The people who make the decisions for the websites and newspapers have already seen the image, likewise numerous websites and newspapers have already featured subsequent photographs of the children of Sharrouf holding guns. News Corp ran an article on August 12<sup>th</sup>, 2014 with the headline, “Government Warned Over Using Image of Khaled Sharrouf Son Holding Severed Syrian Head to Defend New Laws”. The front cover shows the blacked out eyes and pixelated face of the soldier, but on page 5 Sharrouf and his three sons are shown brandishing various kinds of weaponry with none of the children’s faces blurred out (McPhedran and Rajca 2014). So the obscuring of the face has very little to do with protecting a child, if in the same article their faces are covered on one page and uncovered on another.

### **The Quaintness of Pixelation**

‘Sooner or later every murder becomes quaint’ (Vollmann 2005, 124). All this tampering starts to become a quaintness, a game, dot to dot, not with a pencil, but with pixels, pixel to pixel. Take the image that has been doctored by *The Huffington Post* on what a child should be doing at the age of Sharrouf’s son. The image is placed side by side one with the blacked-out eyes and blacked-out head and the gun holster shoulder. The second photo-shopped image now shows a student’s carry bag in place of the gun holster, plastic wide, kid-like, joke-like, sunglasses and a small puppy hoisted by the scruff of the neck in place of the head. The puppy looks like it hangs in space, inert, alive or dead, who knows. The glasses make for a comical look. Without seeing the eyes, without being an expert in reading smiles, I cannot tell in the original if the child, is smiling or grimacing, I cannot tell if it is false or true. Perhaps if I could see his eyes I could read it better – but I am not afforded that option. However, with the juxtaposed image and the addition of crazy glasses and the puppy dog the scene becomes more jovial, more fun and I am led to believe that, yes, he is smiling. Maintain the illusion. A terrifying image of a severed head becomes a quaint puppy. A child exposed to graphic violence becomes a hip, sunglass-wearing, cool kid.

The problem is highlighted in the article “Khaled Sharrouf: a Monster of Our Own Creation” by Sam de Brito published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

It's hard not to scream and head butt a wall when media outlets ask this about a 33-year-old, schizophrenic, disabled pensioner whose greatest criminal effort prior to fleeing Syria was getting caught stealing six alarm clocks and 140 batteries from a Big W store.

Even Sharrouf, whom the judge who jailed him describes as “a highly unintelligent man who has no perception of himself”, could probably tell you who burnished his image and promoted it to the world: the Australian media.

After writing about the image and saying how we may feel it is sick and it may encourage others he concludes with the following sentences:

The reality of war, however, is never what the majority of recruits expect it to be and I wonder if the media's sanitising of the images coming out of this conflict actually does Islamic State a favour.

See enough pictures of brutalised or dead children, and men and women screaming as a killer saws through their neck with a knife, and even a disillusioned young man looking for adventure is going to question how “meaningful” this sort of life is. (De Brito 2014)

The image De Brito paints of Sharrouf seems like an aged person suffering the delusions of mental health who inadvertently gets caught up in petty stealing at a discount store. The reality is somewhat different – Sharrouf in stealing the items, six alarm clocks and 140 batteries was planning terrorist activity. Likewise, too, evoking mental illness, schizophrenia, lends itself so well to scenarios of the other. ‘She/he was standing on a street corner brandishing a knife and the police feared for their lives so they shot her/him dead’ – ‘Oh, she/he had a mental illness’ – ‘Alright then shooting her/him is fine’ – delusional mental illness equals justifiable homicide. Or, as Riley Olstead says in the article “Contesting the Text: Canadian Media Depictions of the Conflation of Mental Illness and Criminality”:

The press reports about mentally ill people were explicit in their articulation of a polarised Ideological framework that supported a division between Us (the world) and Them (the mentally ill). The fundamental distinction between Us and Them rested upon the determination that They are mentally ill and We are not. (Olstead 2002, 629)

What is telling in De Brito's piece is the conclusion that for both sides showing pixelated, hence false images, may lend itself into sanitising war. Granted it has been done for decades, given that any killing by the American military, or the coalition of the willing is never, or rarely, shown to us. When a drone, armed with missiles rains down in some hidden villa in Pakistan, be assured that the collateral damage will involve innocents, it will involve children, women, and bystanders. While these are not shown to us, (we don't get the privilege of seeing the dirty work of our governments) be assured that the images of dead and dying children will be shown in recruitment drives, online and otherwise, to get people to join ISIS.

### **Affording Pixelated Protection**

Today it is easier to fake, change, and manipulate photographs via digital technologies than it was in the past. At least with film there is a point of creation, a moment, dare I say, of truth: or to quote Barthes in *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, 'the Photograph is indifferent to all intermediaries: it does not invent; it is authentication itself' (Barthes [1980] 1982, 87). Yet, while the camera seemingly may authenticate, i.e., *this was there*, what was really there can be endlessly discussed. Morris does this well in the book *Believing is Seeing: Observations on the Mysteries of Photography*, when he analyses whether moving cow skulls or reposing people in a dust storm, as Arthur Rothstein did in the 1930s, is honest or dishonest (Morris 2011, 171). Even not moving an object, but waiting, changing angles, exposure, speed, all can alter what would, again arguably, be viewed as truth. Now, in a digital world, more and more people, such as Lay, question the authenticity of photographs.

Despite sceptics, given there are so many videos, televised executions and photographs, it is probably hard not to accept the authenticity of these images. Some of the victims, the captured, the executed, the burnt, were known to exist; their pleas, tortures and harrowing deaths recorded for all to see over weeks, months and years. Not everything is fake. Why go find a fake prosthetic head for propaganda purposes – not just one but several? In a war, if that is what it is, or a Caliphate, why not just lop off the head of a soldier, after all, footage has been shown of dozens being executed. Sharrouf is made out to be a mental simpleton then assigned an elaborate hoax involving fake heads in a war zone; it doesn't add up.

As I write this chapter, Khaled Sharrouf is killed via hellfire missile in an unmanned drone attack (Welch 2015). Or is he? This too becomes yet another theory that he has staged his death to repatriate his children back to Australia. His partner in caliphate crime, Mohamed Elomar, has been confirmed dead, and as for Sharrouf, who knows? The Twitter world lights up, the newspapers and on-line articles pounce. The names start to metamorphose, it is no longer about Sharrouf, it is now about the Nettletons, the wife of Khaleed Sharrouf, Tara Nettleton, and her mother, the distraught grandmother of the children, Karen Nettleton. Images start to proliferate again, some blotched out with familiar pixilation, and numerous others that are not subject to editing. It seems that to back up the need for the children to be returned to Australia, the grandmother has tried to enlist the help of the government agencies as well as the media. The newspapers, keen to run with the stories, secure pictures from Neddleton and the children are yet again splashed on page after page of newspapers. Some edited, some not. In the *Daily Mail Australia* the article written by Sarah Dean “Living Next Door to the Devil: The Red-Brick Home of the Aussie Jihadist who Raised his Boy to Hold up Severed Heads - and the Kindly Old Neighbour who Remembers the Terrorist Getting Home at 3am” contains three photographs of a woman called Joyce (no last name given), the elderly neighbour of Sharrouf and Nettleton, walking with a Zimmerframe, sitting knitting in a 1930s style armchair. They are quaint images, but faceless, her pixelated remains etch out her face. I am left staring at the withered hand of the aged or the large wound ball of yarn (Dean 2014). Next to her, the face of Khaled Sharrouf appears in all its grisly bearded glory, and the now obligatory image of the son of Sharrouf, struggling with the head – now just a blocked out black box (Dean 2014). The photographs of Joyce, with one of the longest newspaper headlines, make little sense; her identity is protected, yet, Sharrouf, and any close associates would know his address and Joyce’s address as well. The pixelation infers that the danger is so real her identity must be concealed from other would-be terrorists. Sharrouf is conspicuously visible, the crazed jihadist terrorist.

In 2013 the boxer Mike Tyson comes out to speak in Australia, and via the boxing fraternity which Mohamed Elomar was a part of, photographs surface of everyone clambering to be in the picture with Tyson. The resulting images in the media are, as seems to be more and more the practice, edited of identification marks. Most of the whites (bar George Alex aka, the fixer) have their identities protected. Sharrouf, Tyson

and two other Muslims are not afforded the privilege (Gridneff 2013). Tyson is the other, the black face of violence complete with the tattooed face of horror and a conviction on a rape charge in the United States. Sharrouf and Tyson, terrorist and rapist, together. In other news outlets, the same photograph is appropriated all the other faces are obliterated into Photoshop oblivion or cropped, and the jihadist in the making stands alone with a boxing great who will be forever remembered for a rape conviction. Black and brown skin, rape and violence, terror on terror. The whites, just as capable of terror, just as capable of white crimes of hate, are afforded protection: their identities remain hidden, concealed behind a softened, squared mash of pinkish greys.

What is also concerning about the obliteration, tampering, pixelating of the photograph of Sharrouf's son is that it garners no sympathy for a child in an abusive relationship. After all, forcing your child to hold the severed head of a once-living person is an extreme form of child abuse. Denied seeing the face of the son, we are left to surmise that he is, in the minds of some people, enjoying the perversity of the scene. He is seven. Grade two, just learning to read and write. Subjected to horror in a foreign land by an abusive father, his life is far from normal. We are left with a pixelated fakeness – who cares if there is a child behind the dots – like father like son. His abuse is something that most people avoid talking about. Rather, they talk about not wanting their children to associate with Sharrouf's children, fearful that the contamination will flow through into their children, or worse some act of terror perpetrated by young offenders will come home to roost.

Our children are resilient, they are exposed continually in the school environment to children who may have a parent with a criminal past, criminal future or criminal present – rapists, murderers, thieves; or lesser criminality, tax avoidance, speeding fines, who knows, yet we never question the sense of sending our children to school. Now the demonised son of Sharrouf, and all the other sons and daughters of Sharrouf, are forever condemned due to the action of the father. The picture, far from helping, hinders: we do not see a child, and we do not see an innocent pawn in the jihadist, caliphate game of Khaled Sharrouf. We see nothing but a computer aberration. It is dots on dots, pixels on pixels, it is not human, it is not child, it is one perpetual lie of deception.

## **Guilty Despite Sexual Assault**

Karen Nettleton, the grandmother, attempts to show a more compassionate side. But now we see too late. Almost a year into the young children's ostracism and indoctrination in Syria, we see images of normal looking, laughing, children posing on the staircase for their grandmother. Now some news outlets obliterate the faces again, some run with them. The photograph was taken a few years ago and now these children's lives have forever changed. The oldest girl, a former child bride to Mohamed Elomar, has endured his death and the confusion of being a child and an adult at the same time.

Hello Nana, how are you? My husband got hit by a drone yesterday and got killed... When I found out I was so happy for him to get what he wanted and to go to paradise but at the same time I was devastated because I loved him so much and I knew I was never gonna see him again in this life. (Duff 2015)

One would think that the plight of a thirteen-year-old girl who was gifted to her father's friend as a child bride would garner sympathy, but this does not seem to be the case. As these events continue to unfold she turns fourteen, a fact that has not been missed by a rampant media craving for terror related jihadist caliphate content.

"Pregnant Widow, 14, of Slain Australian Jihadi Mohamed Elomar Faces Jail on Return", writes Ashlee Mullany for The Daily Telegraph:

After turning 14, this week Z@&#\* (name removed) Sharrouf, daughter of IS butcher Khaled Sharrouf, could face criminal charges for remaining in Islamic State strongholds in Syria or Iraq, legal experts say.

The charge carries a 10-year sentence.

"A child could commit an offence even if they are merely accompanying a parent to one of these no go zones," national security expert Professor George Williams said. "Even if they have not engaged in fighting or assisted IS, they can be charged if they have entered regions declared no-go zones by the government."

Under Australian law, those under 10 have no criminal responsibility, while for those aged between 10 and 14 there's a presumption against criminal responsibility. Z@&#\* (name removed) turned 14 on Monday meaning she



can be held responsible for criminal acts. (Mullany 2015, name in original removed by author)

It has been a big year for this girl, from a teen who dreamt of a life in Australia to a daughter of one of the most reviled jihadist, to an arranged marriage at thirteen, the death of that person, becoming pregnant, now, a day after turning fourteen, talk of a charge carrying a ten year term of imprisonment.

Nothing in relation to the discussion of this story shows any glimmer of sympathy towards a child, who if this had happened to in Australia would have been whisked away to foster parents, while the man who had intercourse with her could have been charged with aggravated statutory rape. Each state in Australia differs somewhat in the age definitions of statutory rape article: if the offence had occurred in Mohamed Elomar's city of Sydney in New South Wales the Crimes Act 1900 – Sect 66C would apply:

Child between 10 and 14 Any person who has sexual intercourse with another person who is of or above the age of 10 years and under the age of 14 years is liable to imprisonment for 16 years. (*New South Wales Consolidated Acts* 2015, 66c)

This seems to matter little for a public and government caught up in the wave of hysteria against the threat to Australian security. She is portrayed as a jihadist widow, not a child that has been subject to a criminal act that could have got the perpetrator sixteen years jail. Regardless of her posts about her husband and being in love etc, the law is in place to protect young minds from falling victim, as she has, to the power and control of an older man, a sexual predator. The sins of the father are the sins of the children, or as the most liked comment from Stephen in *The Daily Telegraph* sums it up: 'Nettleton and her brood, they left for their Islamic nirvana – they have it, little jihadists in the making' (*The Daily Telegraph*, June 29, 2015). The voices in the Australian media seem death mute on this point of child sex abuse. The commentator Amanda Blair put her hand up for them to be bought back to Australia, the mother to face whatever charges the law decided, 'But her five Australian children who were just 12, 11, 8,7, and 2 when they were removed from this country are not to blame' (Blair 2015). The abuse, as Blair expected, was long and prolonged, punctuated by swear words, bad spelling and more swear words (Blair 2015). In the more carefully

measured non-committal attitude of the politicians Opposition Leader Bill Shorten commented I would not like them in the same school yard with my children (Whigham 2015). Damaged goods, terrorists in the making, the insanity continues.

What is worse in the case of the 13 year old victim of child sexual assault is she suddenly has a name. Her name is now used openly, as is her last name Sharrouf linking her explicitly to her jihadist father – likewise the headings reflect not her abuse, but her guilt: the pregnant widow.

### **Truth in Pixelated Nothingness**

So, I want to go back to the picture to the image we all see, the pixelated nothingness of the lemmings who edited the twitter image. Faceless, nameless. Far from protecting the child, the treatment of the image has done the opposite and condemned the child to be tied to the sins of the father. If we could see, we would see the face and eyes of a child. His supposed smile could be read better if it is associated with his eyes. What if he smiled? Does that then condemn him? I think not, judging a smile's genuineness is difficult. Likewise even if a smile is genuine, judging or deciphering the motive behind the smile is impossible (See Chapter One). Was he smiling in smug righteousness at being a part of removing some infidel's head? Or, is he smiling at his father, looking for the nod of approval from the person who asked him to hold the head up high, higher, a little higher son, good onya? Who knows? He is still a child. Face visible, the photo would garner more sympathy, more moral outrage, than a pixelated image, and yes, it may result in some individuals still condemning and judging the child as having some guilt. However, with face invisible, pixelated, we are not looking at a child, a fellow human being, with dreams, fears and sleepless nights. We are looking at a nothingness, a mass of pink, grey and brown squares apportioned and darkened at the whim of a Photoshop whip. There is an agenda embedded into this nothingness. Angi Buettner says in "Media Representation of Catastrophe, Holocaust Imagery, and the Politics of Seeing": 'The politics of seeing is the dynamic interplay between seeing and not-seeing, looking and not looking. But the politics of seeing is also the policing of what we can see...' (Buettner 2008, 8). Welcome to the new media, the new breed of censorship, the new way of seeing without actually seeing. Photographs have an intrinsic value and message, even in the calculated mess of censorship that is now occurring: they are still put in the paper. The frontline image of

‘That’s my Boy’, even though it is pixelated and edited garner response. People supplemented the pixels with what they saw behind the image. Yet again, without his being visible the image conveys a vagueness, a judgement behind the pixelation.

War, terrorism, is fast becoming faceless. A video game of fakery. Except it is real. Left behind after a drone has delivered a hellfire missile with its dripping heat are the charred remains of women and children. War, terror has a face. Photographing victims who die or live has served ISIS well, the horror of the true images prompts, cajoles and enables young, disenfranchised people to join the fight. Perhaps if we saw as well, not only the terror they inflict, that is the head of the soldier and the face of the young child fathered by Sharrouf: if we also saw the terror inflicted by unmanned drones with their multi-thousand dollar warheads, maybe we would pause and reflect about the rightness, or wrongness, of actions the governments take for us.

If war and terror are becoming faceless, a video game of reality paraded as fakery, then photography is fast becoming associated with it. Now via mobile devices people, can take and upload images and send in multiple ways on multiple formats. Catchphrases of Westernised technologies YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and their little brands, posting, tweeting, hash tagging, blogging, all mark a changing sphere of communication. Photographs tag along, tweeting merrily amongst hashtags blasting for recognition, look at me, look at me. No sooner is something sent out, someone else grabs hold of it and it is retweeted and the meaning associated changes yet again. Herein does lie a problem. Never before has so much material been so accessible and in the changing nature of media, so questionable. The Sri Lankan government questioned the veracity of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) footage thus avoiding further investigation. (Truth be told with LTTE banned and branded as a terrorist organisation, the western world has little stomach for quest for truth). The documentary reveals how different the modern world is when it is able to look at embedded metadata and conclude that execution footage was filmed, untampered with on 15<sup>th</sup> May, 2009 (*Sri Lanka’s Killing Fields* 2011). A damning tick in the corruption column.

This is not lost on governments and terrorists. While words have been used, photographs, too, have been used for truth and lies. Embedded in modern photographs are often truths – i.e., this is the location, the time and date. This can lead to the person

who took the photograph, this can help verify the truth of the material. So yet again there can be a duality – the photographs accompanying the torture of members of the LTTE are used and retweeted for some extremely amoral people to relish in their perversions, yet, at a later date, others access that embedded data to pinpoint the time period of the atrocity giving it a hallmark of authenticity. This has never been the case on paper printed material. Of course, too, this material and even more dangerous material embedded in these multi-functional camera (aka, mobiles) can be used to hurt and harm, for example by revealing locations and destroying people.

What, though, of the unreadable image of ‘That’s my Boy?’ Even in its pixelated form it does allow us a glimpse of understanding. Firstly, the background in the photograph reveals that it is the same as the background in the photographs that appear in *catholic.org* showing numerous unedited pictures of severed heads. The heads are spread out on the pavement and then subsequently impaled on rebar, the heads on the pavement stained with dried blood look authentic; the pain, the splatters, the frozen expressions, some lips apart, some contusions, hematomas, the blood trickling through nostrils. These same heads appear impaled on the wall where ISIS faithful pose proudly with the one finger raised salute. The fence with its distinctive squared metal and white metal/plastic inserts is clearly visible (Catholic Online 2014) in the individual pictures of spiked heads and in the background of the picture of Sharrouf’s son. It is this shared background that leads one to the belief that the picture is truthful. The images of severed heads look realistic and it beggars imagination that in the centre of this eerie death scene, a collection of fake heads exist. There is enough evidence, footage shown world-wide, that shows removal of heads and horrific murder scenes as fairly commonplace occurrences in the violent ISIS uprising.

Something else needs to be said, about the strength of this young boy. His posture indicates that he is straining. While carrying a slippery fish (Lay 2014) is obviously going to involve discomfort, (I mean do you hold it in the gills?), holding a severed head is also going to involve discomfort. According to Danny Yee from the Department of Anatomy and Histology, ‘An adult human cadaver head cut off around vertebra C3, with no hair, weighs somewhere between 4.5 and 5 kg, constituting around 8% of the whole body mass’ (Yee 2006).

Given this weight I think a child could lift a severed head. The photograph reveals that the child is straining with this task. Firstly, his fingers, hands are showing strain clasped tightly together, obviously clutching on the man's hair to get a grip. His weight is balanced between his firmly parted legs, spine slightly curved and the head is somewhat away from his body, as if he does not want to get too close, avoiding getting the gore, dried or otherwise, onto his clothes.

### **The Performance in Photographs**

The problem with the doctored image of Sharrouf is it starts to lose the definition of a photograph, or rather what a photograph is. According to Kathrin Yacavone in the book *Benjamin, Barthes and the Singularity of Photography*, 'the viewer's overwhelming curiosity about the sitter is bound to the photograph's particular coalescence of indexicality and iconicity' (Yacavone 2012, 49).

For Benjamin, the portrait photograph, unlike the painting, testifies to a new phenomenon that has hitherto escaped visual representation: it both preserves and guards something of the life of the represented subject in a way that calls out for that life to be known and understood. (Yacavone 2012, 49)

How then can we view the doctored image of Sharrouf's son as it no longer 'preserves and guards something of the life of the represented subject' (Yacavone 2012, 49)? Jacques Derrida developed an argument about the changing nature of modern photography in the book *Copy, Archive, Signature: A Conversation on Photography*.

If one can erase images, since the imprint is no longer supported by a "support", at least not the support of a stable paper substance, this means we no longer have to do, one might say, with the recording of the image, even though one is recording something: *recording* an image would become inseparable from *producing* an image and would therefore lose the reference to an external and unique referent. As was perhaps always the case without our realizing it, we would be dealing with photographic performativity, a notion that some might find scandalous and that singularly complicates – without dissolving it – the problem of reference and truth: the problem of truth to be *made*, as Saint Augustine would have said, no less than revealed, unveiled, explicated, clarified, exposed, developed. (Derrida 2010, 5)

Derrida hits at the crux of the problem with photography that we have always been dealing with ‘photographic performativity’ (Derrida 2010, 5). Photography and photographers in presenting an image as the ‘truth’ present their version of the truth, in essence a photographic performance. Derrida references Augustine of Hippo (Derrida 2010, 5), a man who lived two very different lives, one hedonistic and pleasure seeking and later a final conversion to a religious life. Augustine’s life and the search for meaning and truth are ultimately his own version of what is truth. Just as all our lives are. It seems that by starting to talk about issues of truth, or ‘truth to be made’, alluding to the notion that truth isn’t found but rather created as in the photographic phrases ‘exposed, developed’ (Derrida 2010, 5), I run the risk of proving Victor Burgin correct.

It seems to be extensively believed by photographers that meanings are to be found in the world much in the way rabbits are found on the downs, and that all is required is the talent to spot them and the skill to shoot them. (Burgin [1982] 1987, 40)

Yet another gun analogy. Photography and violence. The meaning of life as plentiful and easily accessible as a rabid burrow of babbling rabbits. Burgin continues:

A certain *je ne sais quoi*, which may be recognized but never predicted, may produce art out of the exercise. But those moments of truth for which the photographic opportunist waits, finger on the button, are a great a mystification as the notion of autonomous creativity. (Burgin [1982] 1987, 40)

Burgin’s analysis is not mean, unfair, or cruel, but rather reveals a telling (again, dare I say, truthful?) point about photography. The point is: the basis of any ‘mood’ or ‘feeling’ these pictures might produce, as much as any overt ‘message’ they might be thought to transmit, depends not on something individual and mysterious but rather on our common knowledge of the typical representation of prevailing social facts and values: that is to say, on our knowledge of the way objects transmit and transform ideology, and the way in which photographs in their turn transform these. To appreciate such operations we must first lose any illusion about the neutrality of objects before the camera (Burgin [1982] 1987, 41).

## The Code of Recognition

The crux of photography, while it may claim, or rather want to claim, a truthful higher ground, is always read or understood from what we know. Or to put it into a critical perspective as Umberto Eco does in “Critique of the Image”:

There is a principle of economy both in the recollection of perceived things and in the recognition of familiar objects, and it is based on what I shall call *codes of recognition*. These codes list certain features of the object as the most meaningful for purposes of recollection or future communication: for example, I recognise a zebra from a distance without noting the exact shape of the head or the relation between legs and body. It is enough that I recognise two pertinent characteristics – four-leggedness and stripes. (Eco [1982] 1987, 33)

So back yet again to a final look at the image of ‘That’s my Boy’, not in its original format, but rather in the format of its current world-wide notoriety. The image now appears not just on news sites, but anti-Islam sites, evolution, anti-creation sites and so-termed Christian religion sites. Every time it appears, there is an embedded meaning and reason for its appearance in that particular location. The original image has long gone. In losing the image, as Sharrouf has been deleted, obliterated from Twitter, before his alleged actual demise, we lose the referent. This kind of censorship, appropriation and misappropriation of images is the new paradigm of photography in the digital world. It is from a historian’s or conservator’s point of view a sobering thought. An image created last year could be lost due to modern practises (of course, perhaps, those who downloaded the original may have saved it and still have it on file, who knows?).

What I want to end with is summed up in Umberto Eco’s ‘*codes of recognition*’ (Eco [1982] 1987, 33). I look again for a final time at the image, not trying to see what I want to see, not trying to decipher the background, and not trying to discuss whether it is real, true or false. I look not trying to pass a judgement on right or wrong but from a viewpoint of *what do I see from the past and present that makes this image recognisable and in doing so what is the message I am getting?* Call a spade a spade, a zebra a zebra. The image is telling me and you something and that message is quite chilling and clear: the image is taboo, it is wrong, it is forbidden. We cannot look, even if we want to, we are not allowed to look – it imbues in the image not just censorship

but a deep sense of judgement and wrongness *to even be perceived to look* at such images. If we see a zebra coded as four legs and stripes, coded in pixilation we see the forbidden.

All adults know the forbidden if they have access to a TV or internet. The TV show 'Dating Naked' in its Australian version shown at 8.30 an adult time slot, but not too adult, blurs out the naked contestants' breasts and genitalia, but shows their faces. The taboo is in the genitals not the face. Japanese pornography movies show the heaving and thrusting bodies, faces visible but genitals blurred. The Venezuelan news anchor women of some bizarre naked news show vow to strip and go naked every time their football team passes a group stage – the girl leading the talking represents the Westernised dream of bloneness and bountiful bosoms, but they too are censored around the genitalia and nipples, these have been coloured black and white like a soccer ball. This is the code of recognition, the dirty, the taboo, and the forbidden.

In the *Sri Lankan Killing Fields* the taboo on genitalia is again shown with the genitals of men and women blurred out even though we are privy to graphic scenes of violence, execution and torture. The words, transcribed in English show the nature of warfare and the inhumanity that marked this conflict and other conflicts around the globe where rape goes hand in hand with the spoils of war.

Hey cunt. Don't be wimp.

Hey pose with the bodies.

She's moaning now.

This one has the best figure.

If no-one was around I'd cut her tits off. (Macrae 2011)

What lends itself to the shocking truth and authenticity of the documentary is the openness of the soldiers filming and photographing on their mobile phones and the uncensored images of the victims of this atrocity. The young woman Isaipriya who read news bulletins for the LTTE becomes the face of raped atrocity as the Channel 4 documentary begins with her image, and in the concluding graphic footage we see her dead, bloodied face, and, her blurred genitalia. There is no mistaking that it is the same woman in life and in death. It is the non-edited, non-pixelated imagery that clearly



identifies her as a victim of an alleged war crime. We can code both the forbidden, the blurred genitalia and the revealed, the bloodied death face, in the same image (Macrae 2011).

In pixelating the face of the child, 'That's my Boy', he too becomes the forbidden, the dirty, and the wrong-doer. Our instant code, tells us so, and relates us back to the taboo, back to the shameful, back to what we should not be seeing. Our code also instantly recognises and equates it to what we viewed in the past and should have not have viewed. I write about Japanese porn knowing that in doing so I have seen the forbidden with all its connotations of smut, dirtiness and perversion. We, when we see the pixels, instantly connect with this as perversion. His face pixelated out is the same dirtiness associated with pixelated genitalia.

It was never done to protect young Sharrouf. If, as is hoped for by so many people, he stays in ISIS Neverland he could well have the same fate as his older sister and once he hits the dreaded age of fourteen; we will know his name, tabbed next to the pixelated image of him holding aloft a pixelated head. His pixelated face is the dirty, genital smut of the forbidden. He is not cared for, he is not wanted, and he is not pitied. While it may be going too far to say that people are glad the image surfaced, they are more than glad to use the image to support their pre-conceptions of the barbaric and savage. The forbidden, the tabooed, the reason Sharrouf and 'his brood' do not deserve any forgiveness.

In the case of 'That's my Boy' he was abused by his father. He is abused by the media, he is abused by the politicians and every time his picture is shown again in its pixelated form we are reminded of smut, pornography and perversion, he is abused yet again. Abuse on abuse on abuse – it will never end. And while I write and re-edit I discover that we do not have to wait until till he is fourteen the dreaded age of criminality, the name of the seven year old victim, the son, is already known and has been used by the media (Levy 2015). The son is A, the daughter Z, linking him and her, and all the letters in-between, as the 'dirty other.'







## Conclusion

### Refugee Drownings: Mediterranean Sea 2015

Figure 8.1. Aylan Kurdi. Nilüfer Demir, 2015.

*The photograph is printed vertically, a small boy in the slumber and posture of sleep. He wears a small pair of shoes, dark blue shorts and a red T-shirt separated at the middle, revealing the slight tubbiness of a well-nourished toddler. His hair is short, black, and his skin seems so white, pure, angelic perhaps. He looks as if he has just got so tired, exhausted after a day full of activity and fallen asleep, his body collapsed, unable to move a muscle, or find a more comfortable sleeping position. But he is not inhabiting the contented, peaceful, world of sleep; no, he is dead. His clothes are wet, his body imprinted on the sandy beach with the water from the ocean gently lapping around his face. The coldness of the water he does not feel, the pain and fear of drowning no longer wracks his prostrate body. He has gone; joining hundreds, thousands who have lost their lives as their families risk life, limb and money, and face ridicule and fear as they try to achieve peace, safety; a life away from the uncertainty*

*of war and death. The world has reacted slowly with control; the Westernised have deemed these risk takers, boat people, destined often for camps to be interned, oppressed and not granted asylum.*

*His name, the toddler's name, Aylan Kurdi, becomes known. But it is the image, just seen, just released, that hits a chord, a note, that stirs a lethargic humanity, where people on the cusp, those that care, but have done little, suddenly seem to care somewhat more; while politicians, prompted, prodded and fearful of a public backwash, implement some policy changes. The image is deemed iconic – ironic really, as so many have been shown, so many children have died their deaths, their images viewed without the impact, the visceral horror, aroused by that of Kurdi. There is no safety for Kurdi or all the others that died, that day, that week, that month, that year. The world reacts and country after country starts to open their doors, committing to allow some of the maligned fleeing the Syrian war to enter. The power, the impact of the image wins again. The photograph in its cropped vertical format shows a gentleness, softness, as if it was a delicate, calm death. The image, photograph, the vertical one just of Aylan Kurdi's body alone, achieves what others have failed to do. The truth, that ambiguous lie that dogs photography, whether it matters or not, is somewhat different, like so many others, honest and dishonest all in one.*

Death by drowning is not unusual, almost a million people world-wide, and between 35 to 40,000 in Europe alone, drown each year (Wilkens and Stöhr 2013). I say this not to minimise the death of Kurdi, but rather to emphasise the power of an image that records an event that happens regularly. Of course, most of these drownings are not of refugees, or young children, seeking refuge from war. The year 2014 saw the greatest number (as of mid-2015) of aspiring migrants ever drown at sea with the Mediterranean sea claiming 3072 lives with at least 22 400 dying since the year 2000 (Brian and Laczko 2014, 20). It is a sad, but frequent, occurrence. The fact that so many risk their lives, going on a journey when they cannot even swim shows the extent of their desperation.

In an irritating way, the Kurdi image sums up what is best and worse about photography, its ability to make change and its propensity to manipulation. I alluded to an open wound at the start of this thesis, as if, as a photographer, I am personally

hurt by the comments and critics, especially those of Sontag about photography and the perversion of the photographer. If I am going to get relief, a soothing ointment for those smarts and slights, one might think it lies in this Kurdi image, an image that seems to have inspired change, a shared humanity. Alas, as with any wound, salt water is going to sting and hurt as I examine the photograph and its surrounds. I start to discern, again, the good and the bad, right and the wrong. Perhaps photography is just a reflection of being human or, as in the case of so many photographs of death and violence, inhumane. The word inhumane is an oxymoron, non-human; it is a word that makes no sense, because anything inhumane is perpetrated by the human. To distance ourselves and brand our other, as inhumane, is to deny humanity the rights and wrongs of people, some extremely evil, some righteously indignant, but the by far the most are just everyday people, not good, not bad, clones of reproduction. Photography reflects, mirrors us. It is a gateway between an image and an audience, read it one way or the other. Maybe Sontag is right and Linfield as well, no conclusion, just opinions, with facts, skewered, viewed through their prism, a kaleidoscope of colour distorted by a slight twist of the hand to take on a completely different meaning. Photography and its interpretation are a strangely twisted kaleidoscope, a truth and a lie, push the button and distort.

In the reporting on Aylan Kurdi, the media frequently use a gentle term, ‘washed up’ (see Terzon 2015, Withnall 2015), deposited by the tide, past its peak of greatness and cleansed by the water. It feels so soft, life was a struggle and you can no longer fight, you give in, drift: you are, they are, he is, ‘washed up.’ His little body makes me think about life and the struggle to let go, to know that the end is close and you can no longer fight to survive. We feel that is the case, yet, life is so precious, we cling to it with every fibre of our being. I wonder in the maelstrom of the Mediterranean Sea how long little Kurdi survived before the ocean swallowed another victim.

*Death by drowning, a toddler, the silent scream. I think it happened quickly. A short second after he is dragged from his father’s grasp the sea claims another victim. We are warned continually that for children it takes so little time to drown, a bucket, a bath, a swimming pool, or an ocean, three centimeters is all it takes. I watched it happen once. A small toddler, a boy, same size, age as little Aylan, two maybe three, he runs from his father and mother towards some ducks, he passes me, over the side of the lake into about 60cm of water. There is no sound, no scream, no struggle. He is*

*on his back, he sinks to the bottom, arms apart, legs apart. His mouth is already full of water. I cannot believe the speed, the finality. Not even a whimper, not even a hint of resistance just a sinking acceptance. I grab his arm, yank him out, a huge gulp, splutter, water cascades out and he screams. The parents yell at me. Drowning, is quick and silent, but they think I am overreacting. They were there, nothing would have happened. Now they comfort the screaming wetness, and I walk away, chastised, but happy. Silent death averted.*

The parents got it wrong, the little boy sinking to the bottom without a struggle is opposite to what they perceived drowning to be. Something in the Kurdi image also seems incorrect, too perfect, what we see is not Derrida's 'whole truth'. Although, as I continue to suggest, photography is not a particularly truthful medium: although perhaps it is more truthful than the written word, where little nuances and tricks change the reading to be a little white lie, that may do little hurt, especially if it is emphasising the iconic and miraculous.

Consider the comments about the photographer, Nilüfer Demir, who photographed Aylan Kurdi on the beach at Bodrum. Demir is said to have 'stumbled upon the boy' (Katz 2015) as if it was a chance occurrence, or, as described by CNN reporter Brandon Griggs:

Nilufer Demir was crossing a beach in Bodrum, Turkey, on Wednesday when she saw him: a small boy in a red T-shirt, blue pants and black shoes, lying face-down in the sand.

Waves lapped at his lifeless face.

She froze. (Griggs 2015).

And later:

She and her DHA colleagues found Aylan's body first. Soon after, a short distance down the beach, they came across the body of his brother Galip, 4.

Farther down the beach, they found a third body: that of an 11-year-old boy who was not related to the two brothers. Like the others, he was not wearing a life vest. (Griggs 2015)



Perhaps a little more controlled is Joel Gunter's report: 'Nilufer Demir, a Turkish press photographer, was snapping a group of Pakistani migrants by the coast when she noticed the lifeless body of Alan Kurdi at the water's edge' (Gunter 2015).

In the previous chapters I have examined photographers, such as Hooper and Ein, who have been criticised for their seeming lack of humanity. In the case of Nilüfer Demir, it seems that commentators are going to some length to show that she did have feelings and empathy towards Kurdi. Nicholas D Mirzoeff writes in *The Conversation*:

The photograph has the sharp focus, depth of field, wide angle and saturation that says "news". It was taken by Nilufer Demir of Dogan Agency, after she made sure that there was nothing that could be done for the child. Demir felt she had a responsibility to make sure the "silent scream" of the body was heard through her images. (Mirzoeff 2015)

This is the heroic aura that surrounds photography: ground-breaking, truthful, a lone photographer fighting against what ails the world, creating an image that will change history. You too can do this if you own a Leica, oh wait, she owned a Nikon. Yes, this too is photographed, and she stands posed with her 'camera/ gun' (Sontag [1977] 2008, 14) with a solemn expression, one with the camera hanging low, straps around each side of her body, the other with the 'camera/ gun' at eye level pointing towards its target with her head turned towards yet another camera (see Asian Tribune 2015, Doğan News Agency 2015).

'When we are afraid, we shoot' (Sontag [1977] 2008, 15). The language of the reports revolves around this theme of the lone wolf, albeit not a figure of terror, but of the righteous protagonist, stalking, shooting. 'She raised her camera and began shooting' (Griggs 2015). 'Ms Demir reacted as any photographer would – she clicked her shutter' (Gunter 2015). 'Photo-reporter Nilüfer Demir explained the moment she shot the heart-wrecking picture' (Doğan News Agency 2015). But something in this gentle and genuinely heart wrenching scene does not feel right, and the elevation of Demir to heroic status reinforces the 'truthfulness' we wrongly ascribe to photography, albeit critics say this is a problem that photography/photographers themselves created.

When you consider Sontag's reflections and her response, these are the kind of doubts she foregrounds. Photography is an illusion of truth. Photography may purport to be a

truth, but, it is not the truth. It never has been. In case after case, this has been proven. This is the nature of photography and can you trust the person behind the camera completely? I think not, all photographers are liars, it is the depth of the lie that varies; after all you are working with a mechanism which by its very nature can never tell the whole truth.

*I have lied. Haven't we all. On more than one occasion. A photographic view of a cityscape from a double-storey house alcove. Night-time. The lights in the distant city office buildings sparkle, but not as many to make it memorable. I add some in. Perhaps on a particular night it would sparkle as good as my additions, but for now my fabrication will do. Minor. Maybe, maybe not. I think now it is illegal to add these little fabrications. I wonder at night-time if the purchasers sat perplexed and wait for the city to sparkle like the photograph. I think not – too busy working to pay for the view.*

*Minor lies in major truths.*

*Maybe every time I pick up the camera I lie. The best angle for a double chin. The convenient crop to remove some unwanted background. The burning and dodging in black and white. Or the warm slight oversaturation of colour that I liked to give a more healthy glow, a slight tan.*

The photographic scene of Aylan Kurdi is a lie. Well I think it is a lie, unless my version of truth is something different, or, I am deceived by another lie. I blame no-one. The lie told has resulted in a greater good. I cannot condemn Nilüfer Demir, she photographed what she saw, the hype and hyperbole surrounding the image were later additions. I cannot fault the Turkish officials faced with such a sombre, sickening task, from what I see I think they tried to perform their roles with dignity, care and respect. Despite the exaggerations, and the fight for news supremacy, I don't want to pick on them in their quest to get a scoop.

So I want to unpack the images to see what they really show; what is in the frame, outside of the frame, cropped and concealed. Demir walking across the beach, finding Kurdi and his siblings along with Mirzoeff's claim, 'she made sure that there was nothing that could be done for the child' (Mirzoeff 2015), seems far too convenient. Griggs, who writes the line, 'Nilufer Demir was crossing a beach in Bodrum', alluding to the 'lone wolf' photographer finding the bodies, also writes in the same article:

Based in Bodrum, she responded to reports of activity at the beach and discovered that several bodies had washed up on shore.

Once she grew close, “we saw that they were dead children's bodies,” she said.

She and her DHA colleagues found Aylan’s body first. (Griggs 2015)

Figure 8.2 Aylan Kurdi. Nilüfer Demir, 2015

So Demir was with colleagues and ‘responded to reports of activity’ on the beach. Dead bodies do not make ‘activity’, people do. Rather than Demir being actively involved in finding Aylan, or making sure that nothing more could be done for him, she just photographed the activity as a reporter. Given that most of us defer to authority, the full frame photograph seem to hold much more truth than the carefully edited written versions I refer to, the cropped down vertical version of Aylan Kurdi, face down and alone on the edge of the water. The full frame photograph shows an official with a clipboard (or similar device) and another official with a camera recording what happened before the body of Kurdi was picked up from the water. This image fits also with the formalities governments and individuals have to enact before

they remove a dead body as evidence of the scene. The full frame photograph, while seeming to negate the power of Demir's image, is included to show what I believe is a more accurate, perhaps more truthful, version than that of the media reports. Demir did do something worthy of reporting but she is not the lone protagonist fighting against the world, a scenario that is so ingrained in the myth of photography and photographer.

Something else is not right in this photograph as well: something already reported, although largely ignored in the quest to support the mythic power of the sleeping, angelic image of poor Aylan Kurdi. Around the same time as Kurdi's image was found, the artist Khaled Barakeh posted graphic images of children being washed ashore in the Mediterranean on Facebook, and these were considered so distressing that they were temporarily removed (Mirzoeff 2015). These images show children in the surf, white washed in various postures that show the finality and distortedness of death in the ocean. Most have the look of having being pounded in and out of the surf and do not have the collapsed peaceful finality of the figure of Aylan Kurdi. Despite the illusion of peacefulness the photograph of Aylan Kurdi displays, the truth would be no different from that of the images posted by Barakeh: Kurdi's body would be similar to those of all the other children who died in the ocean and were battered and thrown around in the surf (see Barakeh 2015).

What Demir's photograph does not do, as it is beyond the frame she is restricted to, is tell the truth about how Aylan Kurdi came to rest in a fake peace on the Turkish shore. Before the photograph, before the stooped bent body of the gendarme gingerly carries Aylan Kurdi from the tide, he was found and placed on the beach. The body of Kurdi was spotted by an eighteen-year-old Turkish barman, Adil Demirtas and his friend as they set up the Woxxie hotel in the morning near Bodrum (Roberts and Atlin 2015). While the newspaper account says Demirtas pulled the bodies from the surf, the language he employs in the interview – 'Their eyes were open, I closed them softly' – speaks of tenderness. Faced with a young dead child, after softly closing the open eyes of death, he placed the body on the beach and went to inform the authorities (Roberts and Atlin 2015). What appeals to so many (if that is the correct term) is the way the body looks: so peaceful, so gentle, as if Kurdi is asleep and will soon awake. Yet, the body did not wash up like this, it was placed in position by a young man

distressed by what he saw. Demirtas positioned the body, gently and caringly, in a way that he felt garnered the most respect for such a small child who lost his life so young. The image made by Nilüfer Demir, who works as a photo-reporter for Doğan News Agency in Turkey records the aftermath of Demirtas' intervention, after he reported his find to the authorities and their subsequent investigation. This makes sense in the context of the full frame photograph that was subsequently cropped to form the isolated image of despair. In the larger photograph one man stands with a clipboard/record keeping device and writes down notes, while another, photographs what is occurring for official purposes. Demir in turn photographs them. It makes the photograph somewhat more clinical and more constructed. The edited version, the illusion of a vertical shot, water gently lapping, and the peaceful sleep of death garners sympathy, a response. Who really wants to know that little Aylan Kurdi was placed in the position of sleep, his little eyes closed so we do not see the glazed haze of death? And, who wants to know that as he lay dead, the first thing done was to make sure some ritualistic protocol of asylum death recording was adhered to?

What we want is the myth. The Sontag one will do:

The photographer is an armed version of the solitary walker reconnoitering, stalking, cruising the urban inferno, the voyeuristic stroller who discovers the city as a landscape of voluptuous extremes. (Sontag [1977] 2008, 55)

It seems that in the case of Demir everyone is happy to perpetuate this myth. Likewise too, the clinical aspect to Kurdi's death is buried. Why make the world a more truthful, icier, colder version of fractured humanity? If Kurdi was photographed as he was originally found, eyes open and glazed in death, arms, legs a little a skewed in the white wash of surf, the image may never have been published. The sickening images on Khaled Barakeh's Facebook page, also discussed by Mirzoeff, bear this out. All of them, except for one, look like little rag dolls, legs and arms flung about in the surf. The other photo is of a little girl, her eyes are open. It is one of the more horrifically confronting photographs of this humanitarian crisis (Mirzoeff 2015).

I wonder does all this matter? I like Demir's image of Kurdi and it seems to have struck a chord. So many suddenly see and relate to this little boy. The dehumanised has become human. The animalised other has become one of us. We like the image

that lies, the photograph that facilitates this lie. Can a little lie hurt if it produces a greater good?

This is the paradox that photography poses, it is paraded as truth but it is also a lie. When this new technology emerged on the scene the world was changing as it always seems to be. Religion was being replaced by evolution, illusion by truth. But today we still believe in an array of things – God, evolution, heaven, hell, racial superiority, there is nothing that is truthful in its entirety. We just have sets of beliefs, no matter how strong they may well be, most of them are not provable, except for the eventuality of death. So why should photography be paraded as anything else?

The photograph cannot stand alone as a truth. It stands, supported, propped up by everything in the frame, and out of the frame, by histories, through captions and by the accumulation of understanding and knowledge, not only in the minds and prejudices of the photographer but also the spectator. Yet, we, and I include myself in this collective ‘we’, continue to expect something more from photography. Photography and photographers live in the grey zone, neither white nor black, neither pure nor heartless. While I have discussed the layers of manipulation and intervention embedded in the photographic image of Aylan Kurdi and conclude that what it reveals is a concealed truth, I do know there is another scenario that would have gained much ire and notoriety, one that would demonstrate that we do expect more from photography. We are happy to congratulate the humanity and caring of the young barman, Demirtas, but if it had been the photographer Demir who placed the body in the restful pose of sleep and closed his eyes to obtain a more saleable, and acceptable, photographic image, her actions would have caused an uproar and widespread condemnation. The ethics embedded in photography fight against this contrived fakeness. As long as we believe the image is real and approximates truth, we can accept it – tamper with it too much and it becomes ethically wrong. Hence the grey zone, hovering between light and dark, truth and lies, love and hate.

It is this dance with truth and lies, lightness and darkness, in which I, too, engage. To me the photograph is something to engage with analyse and use as a force of change. There is a need for caution; hidden in the image are embedded lies and truths, but without this medium the world would be a worse place.

For Azoulay the image in a photograph is the ‘object’s own reflected light’, its aura:

the photograph – testifies to what “was there” while nonetheless claiming that its framing is culturally dependent. Indeed, this agreement is only ever a partial version of what appears to the spectator. What “was there” certainly existed, but not necessarily in any finally determined way, and no determination of it (sic) significance has exhausted the possibility of other such determinations. Instead the spectator must construct what was there from both what is visible and what is not immediately manifest, but what can – in principle – *become* visible in the exact same photograph. (Azoulay [2008] 2014, 159)

Throughout this thesis, the examination of photographs and discussion testifies to what was there while still acknowledging that it is framed by the photographer, either knowingly or unknowingly. These factors ultimately influence what is seen in the image. What the chapters have attempted to do is to make certain features discussed ‘*become* visible’. Now, after detailed observations, certain aspects of what is embedded in these photographs are very clear. In the case of Kurdi’s image, it is quite evident that his final resting place on the beach is not natural, this would not be visible if a detailed examination of the photograph had not occurred. Likewise, too, the analogy of road kill in the case of Khadr would not have arisen without further looking. As Butler says ‘we cannot understand the field of representability simply by examining its explicit contents, since it is constituted fundamentally by what is left out’ (Butler 2009, 73).

What is left out often is the very thing that helps us understand and realise what the image is saying, be it the professional aspect of the lynching photographs, the forbidden smut of the pixelated Sharrouf photograph or the washed up half-truth of the Kurdi photograph. It is the looking, examination and thinking that adds more to the understanding of the photograph.

This thesis examined the illusions photography has created, be it by the photographers, camera manufacturers, news editors, or, the public, us, me and you. We buy into the illusion, the candidness, the ‘this just happened and the camera was there’, and fight against the controlled inhumane truth told in so many photographs. The photographs which reveal the side of humanity we would prefer did not exist is contained in the images dominating so many of these chapters. The other, the condemned and the photographic documentation of them so obviously controlled by a photographer. The

condemnation, the anger is directed particularly at those photographers that control the settings, showing their professional status in the documenting of children, suffering. We want the other illusion. Photography is more than happy to portray this. The illusion that this just happened and the camera, the photographer, was just there. You too can achieve this. And you could. Perhaps once, twice maybe. However, more than that it is not a coincidence and the surrounds, the framework and other photographs you may take start to reveal the truth. Photography, candid photography, the ‘snap that just happened’ is an illusion. We want to believe that this is not the world, the humanity we inhabit, we want to believe that children are precious and valued. Yet, in so, so many cases they are the other, the unwanted and the photographer recorded what humanity has caused. Not just once, the elevated world changing snap, but multiple times in the same, minute, hour, day, month and year. The illusion repeats and repeats and it is sold over and over again. This is the true illusion of photography.

Throughout this thesis I have often referred to the grey zone, this in itself is reference to a photographic technique used in the past to make sure you get an accurate exposure. When confronted with a scene that is too light, or, on the other hand, too dark, a photographer would use a neutral balanced grey card that is exposed to the same light, take a reading and adjust the exposure to avoid needlessly over or under exposing the scene. This method, while not necessarily rendering the scene completely accurately, allowed the photographer to obtain an image that can be exposed and printed in the most neutral way possible. Throughout this work I too, have tried to present some vestige of neutrality in dealing with images that are controversial and emotive.

I subscribe to the view expressed by Georges Didi-Huberman in his book *Images in Spite of All* that in regard to certain photographs we need to imagine them to the very end:

‘We must contemplate them, take them on, and try to comprehend them. *Images in spite of all*: in spite of our own inability to look at them as they deserve; in spite of our own world, full, almost choked, with imaginary commodities’ (Didi-Huberman [2003] 2008, 3).

While Didi-Huberman was referencing Auschwitz photographs that are horrific on a grand scale, the images of children I have discussed and dealt with are just as horrific and, *in spite of all* the arguments against looking, I feel the need to engage and view



the resulting photographic images. I hope in this work of detailed analysis of individual photographs I have achieved what Jacques Rancière outlines in the book *The Future of the Image*:

Between what is visible and what is intelligible there is a missing link, a specific type of interest capable of ensuring a suitable relationship between the seen and the unseen, the known and the unknown, the expected and the unexpected (Rancière 2007, 112).

This methodology is evident in the case of the Willoughby Hooper photograph of the Madras famine. When I first viewed it I thought it was a callous and cruel photograph that showed a lack of compassion. The more I viewed and researched the more I started to understand that while what happened to these people, and specifically the children, was callous and cruel, what Hooper did was help me to understand the problems and ethics of that time. In particular his posing of the people in foetal positions demonstrated that he wanted to document a unique feature of starvation, and, with breasts exposed, the seat of nurturing, I was influenced to start to thinking he was more compassionate than what the picture first reveals. I could be wrong, that is the grey card, the grey zone. I feel there is evidence to suggest he was more humane than he is given credit for. A surface look, and this has been argued with me several times, is he should have fed them. This too perhaps illustrates the simplistic views of our armchair judgement and solutions. If he had given them a full and substantial meal, with my new understanding of the nature of starvation, it could have killed them; as surviving extreme starvation requires an approach of gentle introduction and a careful regiment of nutrition.

With each chapter giving a full and extended analysis I have followed the view that I cannot have direct knowledge but have to use quasi observation.

This quasi observation, both lacunary and fragile in itself, will become *interpretation*, or “reading” in Walter Benjamin’s sense, when all the elements of knowledge susceptible of being assembled by historical *imagination* — written documents, contemporary testimonies, other visual sources — are convoked in a kind of montage or puzzle that Freud might describe as “construction in the analysis” (Didi-Huberman [2003] 2008, 113).

While I understand the need for some people to put an artistic interpretation on atrocities by using image of self or other people to convey their message of solidarity and concern I find myself feeling uncomfortable with this approach. While each chapter has an interpretative photograph, I have chosen to not use human subjects. In my mind I keep ‘insisting on the absolute importance of the original image and its histories made up of practices of production and consumption’ (Angi Buettner, pers.comm. 2016).

I feel I have, in the words of Azoulay, engaged in the ‘ethics of the spectator’ (Azoulay [2008] 2014, 130). This for me, means this protracted reading of individual photographs has enabled me to have a deeper understanding of the world we live in. I like Sontag’s explanation:

The camera doesn’t rape, or even possess, though it may presume, intrude, trespass, distort, exploit, and at the farthest reach of metaphor, assassinate – all activities that, unlike the sexual push and shove, can be conducted from a distance, and with some detachment. (Sontag [1977] 2008, 13)

All those things do not take away from photography, rather they make it a beautiful, frustrating and challenging medium, a blend of truth and lies. The photographs and photographers I have discussed show the flawed nature of people and images, they are negative and positive. Forces for good and forces for evil. They can be close to pure white, heavenly, and close to pitch black, hell. To me photography is summed up in the image that I began with in the Introduction. It was born in darkness, and so many assigned it a huge task. As it moved towards the brightness of light it began to dim into reality and become what it is today. It is not truth, not lies, not dark, not light, but in my view, by our engaging with it makes the world a slightly better place.

Figure 8.3. Chris Lewis, Digital Print, 2014.

## Appendix to Chapter One

I don't like appendices. Every non-fiction book I read has the best bits in the notes section in the back. We are so busy, get to the crux of the story we don't flesh it out. So of course I add an appendix, long winded, but necessary. If you want to judge, condemn, laugh at wooden expressions, staged photographs you need to understand the process, wet plates in the 1880s. I find it fascinating and also difficult to edit so I have enclosed part of Chapter five, 'The Wet Plate', from Jack Cato's *The Story of the Camera in Australia*.

These millions of little C. de V's now being turned out in all parts of the world, were printed from Wet Plates, sometimes called the Collodion Process; and before we can understand and appreciate the great difficulties of working it, a short and simple explanation of its chemistry is necessary.

It was an extension of Fox Talbot's process which consisted of sensitising a sheet of paper in nitrate of silver, exposing it in the camera, and then developing up a negative image. From this paper negative any number of prints could be made. Paper is, however, only partly transparent, and when printing through it, some of the opaque grain and fibre and structure of the paper is printed on to the picture, giving a rather coarse and mottled print.

After a century of Impressionism in Art, these old Talbotypes are now considered very charming, but in their day they were thought to be crude. So there was prolonged research to find a method of sensitising some completely transparent substance that would give a clear negative from which perfectly detailed pictures could be printed.

Glass was the obvious medium if it could be coated with a transparent film that would absorb and hold the liquid solution of silver. Eventually it was discovered, by a pupil of Faraday's that a film of collodion was adequate for the purpose. Collodion is also known as gun-cotton, and is highly explosive.

In practice it was usually made by dissolving cotton-wool or wadding in nitric and sulphuric acids to form a thick creamy emulsion.

This emulsion was easily coated on to a glass plate to which it adhered like paint. It was as transparent as the glass itself, and it was not affected by any of the acids or chemicals used in the subsequent processes of developing and fixing and washing; nor would it swell, stretch or perish.

In these early days every photographer was his own manufacturer. He purchased sheet glass from the ironmonger, cut it to size and polished it. He made up his own collodion, coated it on his plates, and set them in racks to dry. When he was ready to take a picture, he threw a few crystals of nitrate of silver into a dish, dissolved them with a cupful of water, placed one of the collodion-coated plates in this sensitising solution for a few seconds, then inserted the plate in its carrier, took it to the camera, exposed it on his subject for five seconds – *and returned it to the dark-room and developed it immediately while it was wet*; for this sensitised plate that was used for practically all the photography done in the world between 1855 and 1880 (whether in a studio or away from it), had an effective life of only two or three minutes. It had to be used while it was wet. The moment it dried it was useless. Here is a simple explanation of the cause of the trouble-

To make his nitrate of silver, a photographer dissolved lumps of metallic silver in a jar of nitric acid over a slow flame. When the metal was entirely dissolved, the solution was allowed to simmer for several hours to drive off the acid and at last leave the silver in a mass of crystals, rather like flat clear batch salts, at the bottom of the jar.

These were now pure crystals of nitrate of silver. They were then bottled and they kept indefinitely. It was these crystals, dissolved in water that composed the sensitising solution in which the collodion-coated plate was immersed. And it was at this point that the photographer came up against a tantalising law of nature.

He had dissolved crystals in water, and when the plate dried, or in other words when the water was withdrawn, the crystals returned to their original state. As

the plate dried it became covered with a crystalline pattern rather like that formed by hoar-frost on a window-pane. This entirely destroyed the picture, and that is why the plate had to be wet.

Thousands of photographers and many scientists struggled with this problem for a quarter of a century before they solved it.

Throughout this long period of the Wet Plate, the camera was chained to the dark-room. When a photographer left his studio for an assignment around the corner, or on a distant mountain peak, he had to take a dark-room and all his chemicals and equipment with him. (Cato 1979, 29-30)

The confines of early photographic practices make for fascinating reading. When we look at an exposure time of five seconds, the heavy glass plates, cutting, polishing, explosive material and the wet plate technique we start to understand the difficulties for both Hooper and his subjects. For Hooper to be successful in producing a clear picture he had to keep the plate in one constant state. If the wet plate became dry it ruined his work and it became like hoar-frost on a window. The hoar-frost was Hooper's membrane. When we approach things with a fixed view, without a full understanding of the facts we become surrounded by a protective membrane that stops us exploring further, it is as if we see things through a window covered in hoar-frost.



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