

**Re-tracing representations and identities in Twentieth Century South  
African and African photography: Joseph Denfield, regimes of seeing and  
alternative visual histories**

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I, Phindezwa Elizabeth Mnyaka, acknowledge that ‘Re-tracing representations and identities in Twentieth Century South African and African photography: Joseph Denfield, regimes of seeing and alternative visual histories’ is my own work and that all the resources I have used or quoted have been acknowledged by means of complete reference. This work has never been submitted by anyone at any university for a degree.

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## **Abstract**

The thesis examines the photographic collection of Joseph Denfield, an archivist and historian who experimented with photography over a twenty-year period. The study is located within the field of critical visual studies that focuses on historical photography in its depiction of identities and groups in the context of social change. The thesis pays attention to the manner and extent to which Denfield participated in regional visual economies at various moments during his photographic career in order to establish his contribution towards a visual history in Africa and more broadly Southern Africa. It follows Denfield's career trajectory chronologically. It begins with a study of his photographic work in Nigeria which was oriented around so-called 'pagan tribes' and which was framed within the discourse of ethnography. It then pays attention to his growth as an artist in photography that resulted from years of exhibiting in salons. I read these photographs and texts in relation to his earlier work in Nigeria given the extent to which he drew on anthropological discourses. It is through his involvement with photographic art circles that Denfield developed as a historian as a result of his research into the history of photography and regional visual histories. This took the form of both unearthing historical photographs as well as photographing historical sites to construct the past in particular ways through the visual. At each stage he translated these histories into public forms of representation and power thus he figures among a small group of 'colonial' photographers that shaped the visual economy of Southern Africa. Through a detailed study of his work, the thesis thus aims to re-think through new dimensions of visual culture.

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# **Re-tracing representations and identities in Twentieth Century South African and African photography: Joseph Denfield, regimes of seeing and alternative visual histories**

## **Introduction**

On the first floor of the East London Municipal Library there is the Denfield Africana Library. It was the brain-child of Margy Van Deventer, a former director of the library who, in her plans for the reconstruction of new premises for the library in 1964, chose to include an Africana room “to house approximately 5000 books and a nearly complete fill of the *Daily Dispatch*, together with maps, photographs and pamphlets of local interest”<sup>1</sup>. Although the construction of the new site began only in 1968, by August 1967 Van Deventer had already decided to name the Africana room the Denfield Africana Library after Joseph Denfield, following his death in July of that year<sup>2</sup>. Only a week before his death, Denfield donated “the most comprehensive collection of historical material on East London”<sup>3</sup> to the library. According to a media report, this included survey maps dating to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, programmes for early concerts, a complete set of ‘redbooks’ for East London and large historical photographs of the city.

The Africana room houses all material the library has collected and continues to collect that relate to Africana. The collection extends beyond Denfield’s donation. Here one can peruse numerous volumes on a myriad of topics about the African continent ranging from travel books of explorers towards the end of the nineteenth century, to leather-bound dissertations published only a few years ago. It is in this room that one also finds an archival collection of a few regional newspapers on microfilm, several photo albums donated by individuals and countless documents all pertaining to the city. Over the past four years I have focused largely on one section of the Africana Library, that is, the set of texts and images that relate to Joseph Denfield in the room. Located in a few cabinets, I refer to this as the ‘Denfield Collection’. This is material that relates specifically to Denfield’s career in photography and speaks to his experimentation with the medium both in and outside East London. These range from

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<sup>1</sup> M.H. Van Deventer, Draft building programme for the central library, East London. Denfield Collection, East London Municipal Library, 1964 [henceforth DC].

<sup>2</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 16 August 1967.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



speeches and articles he wrote in connection with his photography, to newspaper clips that librarians collected about Denfield posthumously. The bulk consists of material relating to East London history: both images and texts Denfield collected and wrote about the city, as well as numerous letters to individuals and organisations relating to the history of photography.

The documents have been filed haphazardly around his projects in different regions, that is, his photography in Nigeria in the mid-1940s, photographic exhibitions, photographic societies, the history of East London and the history of photography<sup>4</sup>. The Denfield Collection remains little-known to the public (and to some extent the librarians as well) and has received few visitors since its establishment<sup>5</sup>. Thus my investigation did not begin with any particularly focused question but with a burgeoning curiosity as to the kinds of queries the collection would potentially yield.

Centrally, the thesis explores various moments in the African and more broadly South African photographic visual economy through the work of Denfield to figure out the ways in which these moments feed into events, meanings and identities that characterised Africa at certain points. While it may be argued that the pictorial turn in historical studies is relatively recent and that the regional visual economy remains under-researched, especially with regards to twentieth-century southern Africa, there is a growing scholarship that pays attention to historical photography in its depiction of identities and groups in the context of social change. Recently, Patricia Hayes provided ‘A short history of South African photography’<sup>6</sup> which draws together key concepts in the practice of photography in relation to South Africa’s past. Hayes divides her account along three modalities: power, secrecy and proximity. Under the first modality which covers the period roughly from the end of the nineteenth century to late 1940s, the account makes mention of a myriad of photographic practices, from daguerreotypists, to ethnographic practices, prison photography, salons and pictorialism. These she relates in varying degrees to the processes of colonisation, knowledge production and captivity.

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<sup>4</sup> Denfield did not donate his photographs taken in Nigeria and Lesotho. To access these I have had to re-photograph images that appeared in newspapers and journals, as well as download those available on the British Museum website.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with librarian, 26 August 2009.

<sup>6</sup> P. Hayes, ‘Power, secrecy, proximity: a short history of South African Photography’, *Kronos: Southern African Histories*, November, 33 (2007), 139-162.

In the second phase she focuses on the cohort of documentary photographers from the 1950 to the 1980 that exposed the effects of apartheid including explicitly anti-apartheid photographers. She notes the concealment of such practices in the period of state repression. Lastly, she draws attention to post-apartheid photographic practice, noting the professionalization of former struggle photographers, the complexity of social distance existing between the photographers and photographed, issues around photographing 'one's community' and the emergence of woman-centred photography with a feminist agenda.

Hayes' three modalities are useful in accounting for the politics of photographic practice, both as an effect of historical context and in turn reproducing certain effects. She moves away from a focus on individuals moulding the practice to the wider networks of which they are a part. These modalities, as well as the nuances of photographic practice, can be explored further through the Denfield Collection. At different points, power, proximity and secrecy (albeit to a lesser extent), characterised the manner in which his photographs were produced. Through a study of his engagement with subjects in Nigeria and his 'native assistants' in Basutoland, for example, relations of power can be discerned. Moreover, his proximity to subjects under study mediated the kinds of images he produced. However, in her account of South African photography, Hayes refers to proximity only in relation to post-apartheid practices. A study of Denfield's work over a twenty-year period challenges such a characterisation as it suggests that distance between Denfield and his subject matter remained a constant attribute that mediated the kinds of images he produced. Moreover, other photographic concerns she raises as post-apartheid concerns, including shifts in different modes of representation from, for example, documentary to art, can be problematised through the Denfield Collection in that they appear to have a much longer history. That is to say, the Collection disrupts her periodisation of specific practices and issues.

As a 'short history', Hayes' account is not intended as an all-inclusive or highly-detailed description. As a result, she condenses issues around photography into specific periods and contexts. Thus, for example, ethnographic and salon photography emerge as early colonial practices, documentary photography as anti-apartheid and explorations of identity through photography as post-apartheid phenomena. However, Denfield's body of work suggests there are limits to this implicit categorisation. Denfield began working with photographs in colonial Nigeria from the late 1940s up to the late 1960s in apartheid South Africa. At each point, a few of the concepts Hayes raises emerge though they do not always correspond with the periods and social contexts to which she refers. Moreover, they do not always appear in

the form she writes about. For example, while she collapses pictorialism with early practices before the 1940s, I explore Denfield's pictorial work in the 1950s in relation to the politics of the representation of the 'black subject' that appears in ethnographic practices as well. On the other hand the representation of such a subject dominated the documentary genre under apartheid. Moreover, while she addresses identity matters around whiteness in self-reflexive modes, I point to the ways in which Denfield's photographs offer a way to read whiteness through the construction of settler histories and subjectivities. In short, while not functioning strictly as a response to Hayes' account, the thesis explores these nuances in photographic history which are raised in Hayes' article.

Other scholars have looked at the collections of individual photographers in Southern Africa. Michael Godby has engaged with the photography of Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin who created a vast repository of images of 'natives' in different regions in Southern Africa<sup>7</sup>. From approximately 1919 until his death in 1954, Duggan-Cronin's work was widely published and exhibited. Godby's analyses move away from a fixed reading of the collection and instead point out the varied reactions the images continue to evoke, from pride in seeing the collection as an invaluable source about the past, to embarrassment about Duggan-Cronin's own ethnographic framework. Marijke du Toit, has paid attention to photographs taken by the social anthropologist Ellen Hellman as part of her research in Johannesburg's urban slum-yards and black townships from 1933 to 1938<sup>8</sup>.

Du Toit's study contributes towards a movement that pays attention to the documentary impulse in South African photography, which includes 'struggle' photographers such as those of Afrapix in the 1980s<sup>9</sup> and more widely press photographers, particularly those associated with *Drum* magazine in its earlier decades (1950s to 1970s)<sup>10</sup>. This literature focuses largely on consciously or explicitly political photographic practice. In their work on the photographic collection of Leon Levson from the 1940s to the 1950s, Minkley and Rassool interrogate the description of his photographic collections as 'social documentary' and argue for the ways in which such characterisation of Levson's work is partly linked to the practices of archiving,

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<sup>7</sup> M. Godby, 'Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin's Photographs for the Bantu Tribes of South Africa: The construction of an Ambiguous Idylly (1928-1954)', *Kronos: Southern African Histories*, November, 36 (2010), 54-83.

<sup>8</sup> M. du Toit, 'The General View and Beyond: From Slum-yard to Township in Ellen Hellman's Photographs of Women and the African Familial in the 1930's' in P. Hayes, ed., *Gender and History: Special Issue Gender and Visuality*, 17(3), 2005, 593-626.

<sup>9</sup> D. Kantz, 'Politics and Photography in apartheid South Africa', *History of Photography*, 32(4), 2008, 290-300.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, S. Lotter, 'Gopal Naransamy : A Photographer without Photographs', *Kronos: Southern African Histories*, 33, Nov (2007), 163-180.

cataloguing and representation<sup>11</sup>. Like Denfield, Levson conducted what he termed ‘native studies’ in this period, yet the authors argue that the shift in the meaning of his collection from the paradigm of native studies to that of representing black resistance to apartheid needs to be situated in the rise of the resistance archive in South Africa<sup>12</sup>.

Minkley and Rassool’s work on Levson contributes to the current debates in South Africa on how ‘documentary’ photography is constituted. This was exemplified, for example, in the 2010 *Bonani Africa Festival of Photography* which took place in Cape Town. Photographers were invited to submit work that documents how they view South Africa and the continent. Alongside the exhibition a conference took place under the rubric ‘Beyond the Racial Lens’. This alludes to the manner in which race has dominated the subject matter of documentary photography in South Africa. Photographers have tended to focus on the lives of black South Africans, and it is perhaps also partly in this context that photographs (such as Levson’s) have been characterised as documentary given their emphasis on black subjects on the margins. Denfield’s work feeds into such debates through firstly how he constructs the ‘black subject’ and secondly through how what is termed documentary is constituted. Through his work on East London’s ruins, for example, Denfield sits awkwardly alongside ‘progressive’ photographers in a manner that challenges us to broaden our configuration of the genre.

Apart from those who have looked at documentary photography, there is also a growing scholarship that revisits photographic collections of an earlier period in southern African history. These are visual images that relate to regional histories of exploration and incarceration such as Dietrich and Bank’s edited volume of Gustav Fritsch’s photography, *An Eloquent Picture Gallery*, where they trace the photographer’s travels through various stops in South Africa in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to capture images of the ‘black races’<sup>13</sup>. One of the best examples of this scholarship is the edited and richly visual volume *The Colonising Camera*, in which the authors carefully traffic through archives of historical photographs in colonial Namibia. Of particular relevance to Denfield are the two essays that explore the photographic collections of colonial officers in South West Africa, C.H.L. (‘Cocky’) Hahn

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<sup>11</sup>G. Minkley, & C. Rassool, C. ‘Photography with a difference: Leon Levson’s camera studies and photographic exhibitions of native life in South Africa, 1947-1950’, *Kronos: Southern African Histories*, November, 31 (2005), 184-213.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid p 213.

<sup>13</sup> K. Dietrich & A. Bank, *An eloquent picture gallery: The South African portrait photographs of Gustav Theodor Fritsch, 1863-1865* (Auckland Park: Jacaranda Media, 2008).

and Rene Dickman (1886–1955)<sup>14</sup>. Like Hahn and Dickman, Denfield can be anchored in what Rizzo, in relation to her work on Heinz Roth who took photographs of colonial Namibia in the 1930s, calls a genealogical line of male photographers that appropriated aspects of the colonial contexts in which they worked through visual symbols<sup>15</sup>.

Paying attention to the figure of Joseph Denfield as a focal point is particularly useful in that no empirical studies have been conducted up to date regarding his work. This is significant in that in East London he is regarded as a major contributor to Africana as indicated by the Denfield Africana Library that was built in his memory. Yet, this work has thus far not received critical consideration and, much like the Denfield Collection currently locked away in the municipal library, Denfield remains an invisible archivist and photographer, the effect of his work in contributing towards various ‘histories’ left intact and not placed under a critical lens.

Born in England in 1911, Joseph Denfield entered the Charing Cross Medical School in 1936. He graduated in April 1941 with a B.Sc. and M.B<sup>16</sup>. He practised medicine at various appointments in London, but enlisted in the Royal Army Medical Corps in September 1942 at the height of the Second World War. While in uniform, Denfield was sent to Northern Nigeria, then part of the British Empire<sup>17</sup>. It was in Nigeria that his photographic career started in the years from 1944 to 1946. He began by taking ethnographic images of various ‘pagan tribes’ and compiling ethnographic data. These were circulated in British and South African media. They were framed within the discourse of ethnography. A few, however, he sent to photographic circuits in which they were displayed as examples of pictorial work. Yet, Hayes warns against an oversimplification in our understandings of such ‘typologising’ projects and challenges us to take more seriously the context of the production of such images, the processes of archiving through which they are subjected (and are in turn then

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<sup>14</sup> See W. Hartmann, J. Silvester & P. Hayes, eds., *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History* (Cape Town/Windhoek/Athens/: University of Cape Town/Out of Africa/Ohio University Press, 1998), especially W.Hartmann, ‘Performing Gender, Staging Colonialism: Camping It Up/Acting It Out in Ovamboland’, pp. 156-163; P. Hayes, ‘Northern Exposures: The Photography of C.L Hahn, Native Commissioner of Ovamboland’, pp. 171-187.

<sup>15</sup> L. Rizzo, ‘A Glance into the Camera: Gendered Visions of Historical Photographs in Kaoko (North-Western Namibia)’, *Gender and History*, 17, 3 (2005), 682-713.

<sup>16</sup> M. Bull & J. Denfield, *Secure the Shadow: the Story of Cape Photography from its beginnings to the end of 1870* (CapeTown: Terence McNally, 1970).

<sup>17</sup> DC, Denfield, ‘The Story behind the Pictures’, 1953.

constituted as ethnographic) as well as the powerful messages which photographs themselves often imprint<sup>18</sup>.

Denfield relocated to South Africa in 1947 and settled in East London<sup>19</sup>. While in South Africa he established a career for himself as a pictorial photographer to such an extent that he received 321 International Salon acceptances of his pictorial photographs. For this he relied largely on his studies on Basutoland<sup>20</sup> which he characterised as ‘native photography’. In 1959 he was made a Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society and an honorary member of the Border Salon (encompassing East London, King William’s Town and Queenstown). Around this time, Denfield had started researching the regional history of photographic practice. As part of this process he ‘discovered’ historical photographs and glass negatives of East London taken at the turn of the twentieth century. These he cleaned, restored and had reprinted. Such images were widely circulated in the city in exhibitions at the East London Museum and in the local newspaper, the *Daily Dispatch*. Eventually he collected and had published a select few in *Pioneer Port: The Illustrated History of East London*.

Denfield’s work with these images was not simply another moment of experimentation with the medium but was perhaps *the* key moment in his career that established him as a public intellectual. These ‘discovered’ images which were not strictly his, eventually became known not only as Denfield’s but defined (and continue to define) East London visually. They hold in place particular notions about the ‘Border’, ‘frontier’ and ‘settlers’ that resonate with understandings about these concepts in South Africa. In other words, they do not only construct East London’s past through a particular lens but such constructions feed into broader concerns around the constitution of settler and colonial identities and pasts. Thus the archive figures the national landscape and East London’s position within it.

In addition to publishing the photographs in the newspaper, Denfield also wrote regular articles that were brief histories of the town, which focused on ‘pioneering’ figures and moments, such as early clerks, sports clubs, schools and mayors. He also took an interest in photographing delapidated sites and buildings, although these images were never circulated in public form. His interest in the history of photography did not fade, as his collaborative study with Marjorie Bull of the South African Library in Cape Town based on intensive

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<sup>18</sup> P. Hayes, ‘Visual History in Photographs’, *The Journal of African History*, 39, 1 (1998), 168-170.

<sup>19</sup> J. Denfield, *Pioneer Port* (Cape Town: Timmins, 1965).

<sup>20</sup> Throughout the thesis I use the term ‘Basutoland’ rather than Lesotho in that at the time Denfield practiced photography the region was still a British Protectorate and was then called Basutoland. It was renamed Lesotho after gaining independence from the United Kingdom in 1966.

archival work was published posthumously in 1970, providing an empirical history of early Cape photographers, and establishing Denfield's reputation not only as a photographer but as a notable historian of photography in colonial South Africa.

As the starting point, then, it is important to recognize that Denfield more widely was both historically, one of the 'founding fathers' of defining photographic practices and genres in and for Africa and South Africa, but also one of the major figures in translating these histories and images into public forms of power and representation. As such, he figures amongst a small group of immensely powerful 'colonial' photographers that shaped the visual economies of South Africa, Southern Africa, and Africa more generally. Through a detailed reading of his work, photographs and archive the thesis aims to rethink through new dimensions of visual culture (through the photographic) in relation to history and representation from a critical point of view.

### **History and Photography**

The relationship between history and photography is an intimate and long one. Edwards argues that if the fragmentary nature of photography represents theoretical problems, at an evidential level the problem has a certain familiarity to historians in that all history, much like a photograph, is constructed of selected fragments, a process which starts with registration and is constituted with continual retrospective assessment and re-working<sup>21</sup>. She invites us to note the correlation between the photograph as a material object and history as a discipline, an invitation that also draws attention to the openness and dynamic potential in both. Via Kracauer, Edwards argues that both photographs and historical endeavour constitute a composite of fragmented, selective, exclusive, tentative, illustrative and suggestive relations, rather than a sustained argument<sup>22</sup>. Although both attempt to arrest time, in both disciplines, certainty becomes elusive. Yet, she points out that in some ways, being disconnected from the time it was extracted, photography also functions to deny history<sup>23</sup>. However, through that extraction from that flow, through the arresting of time, it allows the viewer to linger and imagine or analyse in a way that would not be possible in the natural flow of time<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> E. Edwards, 'Introduction', in E Edwards, eds., *Anthropology and Photography: 1860-1920* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

<sup>22</sup> E. Edwards, *Raw Histories: Photography, Anthropology and Museums* (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid p 8.

<sup>24</sup> Edwards, 'Introduction', p. 7

This analogy between history and photography can be further noted when thinking about framing. In the same way that history places borders around the past to produce coherent and plausible narratives, the frame implies boundaries are placed around particular localities. Gordon argues that photographs and frames conspire to persuade us to see the visible part as standing for the whole, to see it at once as part of pre-existing reality that stretches on and on, coherently and comprehensively<sup>25</sup>. Historically, there have been different conventions in framing, each creating its own effect. Rectangular pictures, for example, can be used to emphasise the idea of the photograph as a window to the past<sup>26</sup>. According to Gordon, frame heightens and produces a fracture that creates awareness of what lies beyond, hence a dialectic between boundary and endlessness, between the framed or edged and the uncontainable<sup>27</sup>.

A key process by which history and photography have converged is in the construction of the former based on visuality. Hoffman argues that while serving as agencies in historical transformation of culture, reproductive media have also reinvented history as visual, as a genre of representation that has in its turn acted to obscure the visibility of the historical process at work<sup>28</sup>. This is similar to what Pinney, via Trachtenberg, describes, as historicism-by-photographs, the notion that “historical knowledge declares its true value by its photographability”<sup>29</sup>. Photographs in such a view gain value to historical enquiry as evidential material about the past. Edwards argues, for example, that in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, photographs became integral in attempts to order the world’s diversity. Scientific forms of conceptualisation and the equivalences they produced became a dominant visualising cultural force of the period. In the process, photographs and their evidential value were complex historical outcomes emanating from these specific social practices and, in turn, created certain ways of seeing<sup>30</sup>. In this manner, therefore, photographs participated in historical processes as they produced particular ways of seeing. Hence, there is difficulty in separating photography from the flow of time, as the two constituted one another, resulting in an entangled relation.

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<sup>25</sup> R.J. Gordon, ‘Backdrops and Bushmen: an expeditious comment’, in W. Hartmann, J. Silvester & P. Hayes, eds., *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History* (Cape Town/Windhoek/Athens/: University of Cape Town/Out of Africa/Ohio University Press, 1998).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid p 115.

<sup>27</sup> Edwards, *Raw Histories*, p 18.

<sup>28</sup> A. Hoffman, ‘Introduction’, in A. Hoffman, ed., *What we see: reconsidering anthropometrical collections from Southern Africa: images, Voices and Versioning* (Basler Africa Bibliographien, 2009).

<sup>29</sup> C. Pinney, *Camera Indica: The social life of Indian Photographs*, (London: Reaktion Books, 1997).

<sup>30</sup> Edwards, *Raw Histories*, p 55.



Edwards outlines three widely referenced approaches that have articulated the relationship between history and photography: Foucault and the panoptican gaze, Tagg and the ideological context of photography production, and Walter Benjamin's conception of setting the past 'in focus'. As is now widely cited, Foucault has linked photography and seeing to the instrumental power of the state and its apparatus through the concept of the panoptican gaze<sup>31</sup>. This manifests as an ordering of knowledge that was itself premised on a privileging of vision in which photography was both constitutive and constituted<sup>32</sup>. Foucault's reading has resulted in a multitude of scholarly work from different schools of thought, from post-colonial to feminist, that place in the centre of analyses the notion of the gaze and its power in making sense of the mediational role of visual media in relations of power. An example is Hirsch's work on the reproduction of the genocidal Nazi gaze. Hirsch focuses on the globalised reproduction of Holocaust images in a post-Holocaust time period. She takes the example of the universalized image of the boy with hands in the air in front of a Nazi soldier<sup>33</sup>. She argues that the identity of the photographer, whether perpetrator, victim, bystander or liberator, is indeed a determinative if often unacknowledged element in the photograph's production and that as a result, it engenders distinctive ways of seeing and a distinctive textuality. For example, perpetrator photos are ruled by a Nazi gaze that deeply shatters the visual field and profoundly re-orientates the basic structures of photographic looking.

Another study that uses the notion of the gaze as a key analytic tool includes Erichsen's study on photographic images in the Namibian Liberation/Bush war for example, which looks at the role of photography in public media in the creation of the different ways in which the war was experienced, perceived and is now remembered<sup>34</sup>. It places the notion of the 'apartheid gaze' at the centre of analysis by noting the extent to which images were deliberately arranged and created to mould perceptions in a propagandist war. The author argues, for example, that the Palgrave album, one of the sources of the study, offered politicians in the Cape and London a series of images showing potentially co-operative indigenous leaders, posed with self-contained dignity and intriguing landscapes criss-crossed by wagon trails<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the birth of the prison* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979).

<sup>32</sup> Edwards, *Raw Histories*, p 11.

<sup>33</sup> M. Hirsch, 'Nazi Photographs in Post-Holocaust Art: Gender as an Idiom of Memorialization', in A Hughes & A Noble, eds., *Phototextualities: Intersections of Photography and Narrative* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003).

<sup>34</sup> C. Erichsen, 'Shoot to kill': Photographic images in the Namibian Liberation/Bush war', *Kronos: Southern African Histories*, November, 27 (2001), 158-182.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid* p164.

Werichsen concludes that photographs reveal less than they conceal, and by offering viewers easily consumed bona fide 'evidence' the camera can create victims, villains and heroes on a piece of photographic paper and the mind of the viewer<sup>36</sup>. Implicit in Werichsen's view is the notion that the photograph can construct and reproduce relations of domination. The camera operates in this context as the panopticon in its power to shape particular kinds of truth-regimes about the subjects under the lens.

In a similar study, Mhute looks at a series of photographs taken of colonial Zimbabwean mines by white colonial officials in the 1890s to early 1900s<sup>37</sup>. The article attempts to situate the photographs by locating their moments of production within the broader context of the emergence of colonial power within the then newly envisaged mining landscape both socially and physically. For the author, the mine compound became the place for the ordering and disciplining of bodies not only through the use of the sjambok but also through photography. In an analysis of one particular photo, he writes that in close examination it reveals clothes strewn onto the ground and a large group of people presented as naked. The effect is an 'undressing' of the Africans, and propagating such images is suggestive of ethnographic representations through the capitalist gaze. He continues that the African landscape in the process was being reconstituted in a manner that was meant to conform to 19<sup>th</sup> century perceptions of the disciplining and training of bodies for the advancement of capitalist ideals<sup>38</sup>. Like Werichsen, he argues that historical photographs are products and constitutive of colonial domination. In such a view, photographs are then used as signature images for a discipline or practice<sup>39</sup>. Subjects involved in photographic production are potentially seen simply in terms of victimhood or powerful victors.

Beyond conceptualising seeing and its effect in terms of the gaze, various analyses of the relationship between photography and historical process have also followed John Tagg's theoretical formulations on the relationship between photography and ideological contexts. Tagg has argued for the need to see photographs as the result of specific and significant distortions which render its relation to any prior reality problematic<sup>40</sup>. For Tagg, photography is a material product of material apparatuses set to work in specific contexts. It

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid p 175.

<sup>37</sup> J. R. Mhute, 'Downcast: mining men and the camera in colonial Zimbabwe', *Kronos: Southern African Histories*, November, 27 (2001), 114-132.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid p 118.

<sup>39</sup> Edwards, *Raw Histories*, p 12.

<sup>40</sup> J. Tagg, *The burden of representation: essays on photographs and histories* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1988).

requires thus a history. He then proposes paying attention to the conscious and unconscious processes, practices and institutions, through which the photograph can incite phantasy, take on meaning and exercise effect. This means taking into account the changing discursive systems of which the images are part. For example, Hight and Sampson's edited volume *Colonialist Photography* analyses the ways in which photographs operated as complex discursive objects of colonial power and culture<sup>41</sup>. It contains essays that reconstruct the manner in which cultural attitudes, including racial and ethnic prejudices, were embedded in selected photographs through the photographers' subjective strategies of imagining the choice of subject, framing, focus, viewpoint, etc. The editors argue that the ideological underpinnings of such material can be assessed in relation to the contexts of the creation of the photographs. A key element in the text is the way in which photographers are seen as agents of colonial culture who viewed their colonial subjects as objects of both racial inferiority and fascination<sup>42</sup>.

One example includes Falconer's essay that revisits the publication of the ethnographic volume *The People of India* compiled between 1868 and 1875<sup>43</sup>. The eight volumes contained 480 photographic portraits of Indian 'races', 'castes' and 'tribes' alongside descriptive and historical texts. For Falconer, whether the volumes are viewed as straightforward contributions to ethnology, as an illustration of the 19<sup>th</sup> century ethos of classifying and dividing people in the world to generate certain kinds of knowledge or as an example of a scientific project for political ends in the colonial era, for modern scholars the volumes can be a fertile source for examining some of the ways in which the Victorian mind attempted to accumulate, organise, and use ethnological information in ways which justified and reinforced notions of dominance<sup>44</sup>.

The analyses of institutional and ideological contexts in which photographic practices take place have widened the historical, political and cultural lens through which both photography's subjects and the practice itself are understood. Such a framework has opened up a space that regards the photographs themselves as actors that intervene in the construction

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<sup>41</sup> E.M. Hight, & G.D. Sampson, *Colonialist Photography: Imag(in)ing Race and Place* (Routledge: London & New York, 2002).

<sup>42</sup> E.M. Hight, & G.D. Sampson, 'Introduction: Photography, 'race', and postcolonial theory', in E.M Hight & G.D. Sampson, eds., *Colonialist Photography: Imag(in)ing Race and Place* (Routledge: London & New York, 2002), pp 1-20.

<sup>43</sup> J. Falconer, "'A pure labour of love': a publishing history of *The People of India*", in E.M Hight & G.D. Sampson, eds., *Colonialist Photography: Imag(in)ing Race and Place* (Routledge: London & New York, 2002), pp51-83.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid* p 53.

of knowledge beyond the moment of capture. However, Edwards argues that Tagg's position on the identification of photographs with ideological perspectives or the institutional uses in which they are active fails to move towards a consideration of inscription, the problematic of context and the subjectivities of photographic effect, which are directly related to the medium<sup>45</sup>.

The third framework that Edwards refers to on the relationship between history and photography comes from Walter Benjamin. Walter Benjamin conceived of history in the language of photography in that he argued both the photographer and historian had the task to 'set in focus' both the fragment and materiality of the past as manifestations of unique experience<sup>46</sup>. This is similar to Edwards's formulation of history as operating much like a photograph materially. In such a framework, photographs and other visual media operate as a means of 'retrieving' the past that has yet to be documented. This is comparable to Barthes' notion that the photograph proves the 'having been there' of its subject, its past, and the viewer situates herself in the two presents: the moment of looking and the moment when the picture was taken<sup>47</sup>. In a similar vein Hirsch argues that the negotiation between life and death is fundamental to the very temporality of the photographic look. The power of the photograph in her view derives from the effort in looking at the subjects depicted to reanimate the past by undoing the finality of the photographic take<sup>48</sup>. Therefore by looking at photographic images we partly hope to undo the progress of time. Implicitly, in such a view working with visual media, and photographs in particular, is a means of negotiating that tension between death and the present, constructing a thicker description of the past, perhaps revising history and in some cases perhaps even completely eradicating notions of pastness, and constructing alternative ones in the process.

Such a framework can be noted in the treatment of the museum and exhibitionary space as a vehicle to engage a past of trauma, and eventually bring some form of catharsis in the process. Newbury's study on the role of photography at the Apartheid Museum and Hector Peterson Museum is one example<sup>49</sup>. The author points out that both museums draw extensively on the kind of photojournalism and documentary photography that developed in an international context during the 1930s and 1940s. Based on these genres, aspects of the

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<sup>45</sup> Edwards, *Raw Histories*, p.12

<sup>46</sup> Ibid p 11.

<sup>47</sup> R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida: reflections on photography* (London: Fontana Press, 1984).

<sup>48</sup> Hirsch, 'Nazi photographs'.

<sup>49</sup> D. Newbury, 'Lest we forget: photography and the presentation of history at the Apartheid Museum, Gold Reef City and the Hector Peterson Museum, Soweto', *Visual Communication*, 4, 3 (2005), 259-295.

museum displays implicitly place faith in photography as a means of telling the truth about society, the emotional and moral appeal to the viewer and the idea of the photographer as witness. In the museum contexts a faith in the revelatory power of photography informs their use, and linked to this their potential in facilitating reconciliation<sup>50</sup>. However, when photographs are used this way it is assumed they will automatically be read in one manner. Little attention is given to different forms of engagement as well as the photographs' own effects outside curatorial planning. Moreover, the photographs are displayed with the specific agenda of inciting a particular reaction. Such an objective, however, cannot be divorced from post-apartheid discourses of reconciliation which themselves have emerged in a particular historical context of non-racialism.

### **'Raw histories'**

While approaches that pay attention to the gaze, or the ideological and institutional contexts may be useful in articulating the ways in which photographs can be complicit in reproducing certain kinds of power relations, such approaches can remain heavily focused on the context of image production. The photograph is treated as the end-product of historical processes. Photographs, arguably, come to represent death or finality. For Edwards, this overlooks the possibilities of multiple histories that may be embedded in photographs, possibilities that treat photographs as potentially 'new' at all moments of their biography. On the other hand, approaches that attempt to set the past 'in focus' through photography are heavily invested in the search for an 'authentic' past which the photograph is seen to be capable for yielding, thus the camera remains a truth-telling device. This is a methodology that characterises particularly Denfield's later work when he attempts to reconstruct the past of East London through images themselves and through disputing popular versions.

For Edwards, the combination of the historical moment of the photographic production and the concentration of the photograph as an inscription provides the photographic medium with a particular intensity<sup>51</sup>. The camera presents singular events as concrete displays, thereby forcing them into visibility, and subsequently giving prominence to the unnoticed and creating energy around the edge. Christopher Pinney, too, points out that the lens of the camera can never be closed because something extraneous will always enter into it<sup>52</sup>. It is this

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid p 260.

<sup>51</sup> Edwards, *Raw Histories*, p 18.

<sup>52</sup> C. Pinney, 'Introduction: 'How the other half'', in C Pinney & N. Peterson, eds., *Photography's other histories* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, (2003), pp 1-16.

inability to discriminate that will ensure “a substrate or margin of excess, a subversive code present in every photographic image that makes it open and available to other readings and uses”<sup>53</sup>. Pinney thus suggests that rather than treat photography’s indexicality as a sign of closure, we treat the photograph as providing the opportunity to look past. Similarly, Martin Jay argues that however much images are created through cultural encoding, they are deflected by the magnetic field of that culture, that is, they remain in excess of it. He invites us to interrogate the ways in which images are able to resist being entirely subsumed under the protocols of specific cultures. He points out that cultural systems contain their own moments of blindness, their own internal transcendences which break through their borders and disturb their self sufficiency, thereby undermining any analyses that reduce the visual to cultural effects<sup>54</sup>. Likewise, in a response to the now widely cited Visual Culture Questionnaire in *October* (1996) on the state of visual studies, Susan Buck-Morss argues that critical analyses of the visual need to provide a socio-historical and biographical story of origins that estranges the object from us and shows us that its truth is not immediately accessible (the object’s prehistory), and a story of deferred action (its afterhistory) that comes to terms with the potency of the object<sup>55</sup>.

It is in this logic that Edwards configures photographs as ‘raw histories’ in the sense of both being unprocessed and painful. They are painful sometimes in the content depicted but also “in truth-telling, their performance of histories, their reality has a painfulness-rawness”<sup>56</sup>. They are unprocessed through their randomness, their minute indexicality and through offering interruptions and vertical samplings of time. The trivial and significant are intertwined in photographs and shift places<sup>57</sup>. For Edwards it is the photograph’s fracture that creates a space for significant possibilities for re-interpretation, moving beyond models based on the politics of representation. Methodologically, this entails extending our observations beyond assumptions imposed on photographs and starting with photographs themselves: that is, starting with exploring their histories and significations by paying attention to both the possible closure of meaning and open spaces for articulation<sup>58</sup>.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid p 6.

<sup>54</sup> M. Jay, ‘Visual Culture and its Vicissitudes’ *October*, 77, Summer, (1996), 25-70.

<sup>55</sup> S. Buck-Morss, ‘Visual Culture Questionnaire’ *October*, 77, Summer, (1996), 25-70.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid p 6.

<sup>57</sup> Edwards, *Raw Histories*, p 5.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid p 2.

Similarly, Mitchell proposes that as a way of going beyond seeing images as either instruments of power and as autonomous sources with their own purposes and meanings, we treat the visual as “go-betweens in social transactions, as a repertoire of screen images or templates that structure our encounters with other human beings”<sup>59</sup>. For Mitchell, such an approach entails treating the visual as subaltern entities “whose bodies are marked with stigmata of difference, and who function as scapegoats in the social field of human visuality”<sup>60</sup>. The subaltern model of pictures opens up dialectics of power in our relation to pictures. Thus Mitchell proposes shifting our focus from questions of the power of images to the question of desire by interrogating what pictures want, thereby drawing attention to our relation to the work into question, making the relationality of image and beholder the focus of investigation<sup>61</sup>. In other words, this means moving away from banal analyses of what the visual ‘represents’ to analyses that engage the intense encounters between the image and the viewer. Echoing Elizabeth Edwards this opens up a space for paying attention to the ways in which the visual in various contexts, whether in archival drawers, in exhibitions, in print media, in family albums, etc through our process of looking, that is, taking the image seriously, creates a force field or ‘rawness’ that allows us to go beyond reducing the visual to social processes. It is in this vein that Mitchell thus argues that the task of visual studies is to interrogate not only the social construction of the visual, but the visual construction of the social field in that we see the way we do, not only because we are social, but that social processes also take place in particular ways because we are seeing animals<sup>62</sup>.

Certainly, given its location within critical visual studies, the thesis does take into account the social conditions surrounding Denfield’s images<sup>63</sup>. It analyses what Hayes describes as the trafficking of images, that is, the mobility of visuals through reproducibility, transportability and circulation. These relate to how pictures or visual motifs are set in motion- how they become unfixed- and lead to wider reaction, which often translates into further interpretations within the genre or medium, more pictures in different media, texts that describe the pictorial, and in some cases actions that are highly visible<sup>64</sup>. Trafficking of the said visuals by Denfield can be analyzed on several planes: his own movements through different regions to

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid p 175.

<sup>60</sup> WTJ, Mitchell, *What do pictures want: the loves and lives of images* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid p 46.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid p 171.

<sup>63</sup> G. Rose, *Visual methodologies. An introduction to interpreting visual object* (London: Sage Publications, 2001).

<sup>64</sup> P. Hayes, ‘Introduction: Visual Genders’, *Gender & History*, 17, 3 (2005), 519-537.

collect images, trafficking through archives and literature to compile notes and tracing the different spaces in which his work has appeared (and to a lesser extent continues to appear). Yet, despite the importance of the social biography of the images throughout the thesis I remain committed to providing detailed readings of various images in relation to questions around the construction of pastness through them.

In *Photos of the Gods*, Pinney poses the question of whether pictures have a different story to tell, a story told in part on their own terms<sup>65</sup>. Pinney operates with the impulse of the treatment of the ‘photos of the Gods’ or Bhaguan in India, in which the photos are judged not simply in terms of formal aesthetic criteria but also by their ability to intervene in the world. In the book, Pinney pays attention to visual culture as a key arena for thinking about politics and religion in modern India. Rather than treat visuality as an end-product of events outside representation, he presents it as “an experimental zone where new possibilities and identities are forged”<sup>66</sup>. Such a line of reasoning thus creates the prospect of imagining and writing about visual spaces as living spaces in which realities are formed, reinforced, concretized, challenged, etc and in turn can have physical transformations.

Analyses that reduce photographs and visual media to ideological products fail to take into account the ways in which visually intense encounters can create their own force fields. In *Photos of the Gods*, Pinney pays attention to the ways in which photographic practices in India have done more than mirror historical processes but “form part of an aesthetic, figural domain that can constitute history and... exist in a temporality that is not necessarily coterminous with more conventional temporalities”<sup>67</sup>. Therefore, he outlines the ways in which history can be articulated through the images by drawing out what text based versions of history leave out such as restoring a vein of popular messianism that has been ignored in popular historiography<sup>68</sup>.

What is suggested are the ways in which social struggle can take place at the level of the visual, where the visual does not simply become a reflection of power differentials but a space for engaging, toying and negotiating power and conflict. An example of such includes the use of a utopian landscape as a metaphor for the struggle for freedom in relation to the

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<sup>65</sup> C. Pinney, *Photos of the Gods: the printed image and political struggle in India*. (New Dehli, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>66</sup> Ibid p 8.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid p 205.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid p 202.



colonial state<sup>69</sup>. In the Indian context Pinney describes, it is the viewer's embodied engagement with the visual that partly contributes to the value of the image. "Instead of an exegesis, instead of an outpouring of language, there is a poetics of materiality and corporeality around the images"<sup>70</sup>. The images within such a framework are neither simple abstract representations nor just end products of hidden ideological forces but *through their materiality* create force fields through the act of looking. In Edwards's sense, through their materiality and through the viewer's embodied relation to them, photographs can be seen as 'raw'.

Implicit in Pinney's study of photographic practice is the importance of the very materiality of the photographs in mediating people's embodied encounters with the images. Rather than dissociate the images from their physical context, the material component is itself constitutive of particular meanings. As Edwards has argued, the material forms of photographs, enhanced by representational forms, are central to the function of photographs as socially salient objects and that these material forms exist in dialogue with the image itself to make meaning<sup>71</sup>. Visual experiences are mediated through the material nature and material performances in the formats and presentations of visual images<sup>72</sup>. For Edwards, materiality takes two interrelated forms. The first is the plasticity of the image itself, as images mounted on a multitude of different sized, shaped, coloured and decorated cards, as framed images, in albums etc<sup>73</sup>. The second form of materiality is linked to social biography. That is, photographs are to be understood as belonging in a continuing process of meaning, production, exchange and usage. Thus as objects photographs are enmeshed in social relations and are not merely passive entities in these processes<sup>74</sup>.

Interrogating the materiality of photographs thus leads to questioning how photographs are used as objects in social space, how they are acquired and accumulated, by who, how they are displayed, which are hidden, how they connect with the performative material culture with which photographs are linked such as albums and frames, etc.<sup>75</sup>. In their study of museum representational practices, Edwards and Hart explore the ways in which photographs operate

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid p 116.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid p 197.

<sup>71</sup> E. Edwards, 'Material beings: objecthood and ethnographic photographs', *Visual Studies*, 17, 1 (2002), pp.67-75.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid p 68.

<sup>73</sup> E. Edwards, 'Introduction: Photographs as objects', in E Edwards and J Hart, eds., *Photographs, objects, histories: on the materiality of images* (London: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>74</sup> Edwards, 'Material beings', p 68.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid p 70.

as visual objects within discursive practices of anthropology and anthropological museums<sup>76</sup>. The authors argue that by enclosing specific photographs in conjunction to one another, materiality becomes integral to the meanings of images. With regard to the grouping of photographs into a collection, for example, the authors argue that each space through which the photographs move and the various ways in which they come together within collection history, both deconstruct a set of classificatory meanings and reclassify them within a new space in accordance with evolving strategies and values<sup>77</sup>. In short, material forms create different embodied experiences of images in very different affective tones or “theatres of consumption”<sup>78</sup>.

In turn, a focus on ‘excesses’ in photographs as well as their material forms resonates with the three sites Rose outlines as key in meaning making. These include the site of the production of the images, the site(s) of the images themselves and the sites at which images are seen by audience<sup>79</sup>. Moreover, three modalities to each process are said to contribute to a critical understanding of images. The first is the technological aspect which includes the forms of apparatus designed either to be looked at or to enhance images. The second modality is the compositional aspect of images. This involves paying attention to formal strategies such as content, colour and spatial organization. The third modality relates to the social life of the images where one would thus pay attention to the range of economic, social and political relations, institutions and practices that surround an image and through which it is seen and used.

### **Pulling it all together**

Through the Denfield Collection, the thesis interrogates the notion of seeing itself. While taking into account the social biography and the context of the production of images, it also expresses ‘a commitment to look’<sup>80</sup>, that is, taking seriously an image’s own effects. Such a framework helps to avoid banal analyses that can reduce Denfield’s collection to descriptions such as simply that of ‘colonial’ photography. Certainly, his work can be characterised in such a manner but a focus on the photographs themselves also helps to deepen

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<sup>76</sup> E. Edwards & J. Hart, ‘Mixed box: the cultural biography of a box of ‘ethnographic’ photographs’, in E. Edwards and J. Hart, eds., *Photographs, objects, histories: on the materiality of images*. (London: Routledge, 2004), pp 47-61.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid p 59.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid p 68.

<sup>79</sup> Rose, *Visual methodologies*, p 32.

<sup>80</sup> M. Bal, ‘The commitment to look’, *Journal of Visual Culture*, 4, 2 (2005), 145-162.

understandings around the constitution of colonial photographic practice. Moreover, it challenges established photographic classifications such as ‘ethnographic’, ‘documentary’ and ‘art’. A reading of Denfield’s photographs as a collection reveals the ways in which such characterisations, while useful at times, are porous when the images circulate in different contexts. While to some extent the thesis has been structured in a manner that relates to each of these genres, through a reading of the collections alongside one another I focus less on the manner in which Denfield conforms to the requirements of each genre and more on the effects of the images through my engagement with them in relation to concerns around identity and representations. What I hope to illustrate is that as Denfield moved from one form of photography to another, certain representational strategies re-appeared in different context even amongst images that bore little resemblance to one another.

To accomplish this I follow Denfield’s trajectory as a photographer chronologically. I begin by tracing his emergence as a photographer through dabbling with ethnographic modes of representation. His photographs in Nigeria consisted largely of his ‘pagan studies’ whose mode I argue, was foundational in providing a particular visual grammar throughout his career through mapping and locating his subject within temporal frameworks (Chapter 1). I then follow Denfield to Basutoland where he shifted away from a purely anthropological focus towards pictorialism while remaining committed to the ‘native scene’. Over two parts, I read his photographs with his earlier anthropological collection in mind and argue that his work in Basutoland can be understood in turn as imaging the very discourse of anthropology. I begin with a key concept of the discipline, fieldwork, and through his written documents and photographs, explore the colonial relations with various actors on his field expeditions and the manner in which such relations mediated the kind of images he produced (Chapter 2).

Following his expeditions, Denfield circulated his photographs in salons. These institutions in turn provided specific guidelines for amateur photographers who wanted to establish themselves in art circles. In a manner reminiscent of Leon Levson, he also described his photographs as distinctly ‘native photography’ that can be practiced following certain guidelines and acquisition of knowledge. Such a development, however, also needs to be understood in the context of salon photography with its technical and detail-oriented ethos and in turn both expressed particular concepts, ideas and values that resonate with anthropology (Chapter 3).

Towards the end of his exhibiting career Denfield shifted towards the history of photography which led to a project that constructed a past of East London through historical photographs. In circulating the images in local media and the museum, Denfield constructed a narrative that can be read as a settler history which attempted to negate questions of race but which implicitly constructed a version of the past based on white ‘fathers’ of the city (Chapter 4). To appreciate this inclination fully, it is also necessary to unpack his involvement with the Border Historical Society which, through various published texts, created an intellectual space that asserted a settler identity (Chapter 5).

The publication of a book on East London and the establishment of a permanent gallery was the culmination of his work with the historical images of the city. Throughout, Denfield had remained committed to an empiricist paradigm in an attempt to salvage ‘facts’ about the city. His treatment of the photographs as East London’s past allows for a reflection on the ways in which his methodology can be read as a performance of empiricist History (Chapter 6). By this stage he had fully evolved into a historian whose authorial voice was expressed in various publications centred on the history of photography (Chapter 7). But he never completely neglected the practice of photography nor the discursive frames of his earlier projects. Twenty years after his pagan studies, his camera had moved from gazing upon ‘disappearing tribes’ to architectural sites in East London that spoke of a British heritage that was ‘disappearing’. This is a collection of photographs that depicts historical public sites in ruin. It is as if the images protest against the destruction brought by social change taking place nationally which East London could do little to evade (Chapter 8).

## Chapter 1: Pagan Sanctuary

### Introduction

During the war I was posted to Nigeria and being interested in anthropology and photography, I seized the magnificent opportunity of improving my knowledge of primitive races at first hand, at the same time making a permanent record with my camera of one of the most fascinating and interesting people<sup>81</sup>.

Denfield's photographic career began essentially in 1944 in northern Nigeria when he was stationed as medical practitioner at the British Military Hospital in Kaduna. It coalesced with three convergent practices with which the Victorian British had become well acquainted in varying degrees: travel writing, anthropology and visual representation of colonial subjects of Empire. Denfield entered Kaduna at a time when the northern, south east and south west protectorates of Nigeria had been fully amalgamated as a British colony. Thus after war had broken out in 1939 Nigeria was eventually subsumed in the global conflict along with other colonies which brought various infrastructural changes and social services to marshal resources for the war effort<sup>82</sup>. Denfield arrived in such a context when military hospitals were built to treat soldiers from around the empire as troopships often docked in Nigeria en route to or from battle zones<sup>83</sup>. He thus arrived as subject of empire. During his three year stay in Kaduna, he amassed a series of images that captured 'primitive tribes' in Nigeria's northern parts while collecting corresponding descriptive notes. In form, content and circulation, this body of material, both images and text, can be located within a much longer tradition of (visually) classifying (often subjugated) persons seen as 'unusual' or 'different' from the European in the west. Rather than simply describe his encounters with the 'pagan tribes' both his photographs and texts reveal an impulse to map this territory of empire through its subjects.

### 'A little army pamphlet'

When describing his arrival at the Kaduna Military Hospital where he was stationed, Denfield referred to "a little army pamphlet in the mess [of various items given to each officer]", the

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<sup>81</sup>DC, Denfield, Unititled manuscript.

<sup>82</sup>D. Killingray, 'African Civilians in the Era of the Second World War, c. 1935-1950', in J. Laband, ed., *Daily Lives of Civilians in Wartime Africa: From Slavery Days to Rwandan Genocide* (Westport Conn: Greenwood Press, 2007), pp 139-161.

<sup>83</sup> T. Falola & M.M. Heaton, *A History of Nigeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p 143.

object of which was “to give the average officer and N.C.O on his arrival in Nigeria some idea of what he might expect from the country and its people”.<sup>84</sup> Such a pamphlet included briefly information about the ‘pagan tribes’ including details about their characteristic languages, cultures, modes of dress, customs and physical appearance. He wrote in his notes that this was the motivation he needed to document such people. As I will illustrate throughout, not only did such a pamphlet profoundly shape his views of would-be subjects but framed discursively the photographic mode that characterised his pictures. After all, he eventually produced images that were consistent with the particular categories of such a pamphlet, pre-occupied with various details through which the pagan tribes would be constituted photographically.

Implicit in the pamphlet was the notion that ‘tribes’<sup>85</sup> were ‘knowable’ through ‘mapping’ all aspects of life. In this regard they were akin to ‘unchartered territories’ in their unfamiliarity to the western gazer. For one thing Denfield described his aim in the photographic exercise in Nigeria as an attempt “to record as artistically as possible a civilisation which, under approaching modern influence, must one day inevitably end”<sup>86</sup>. Denfield criticised what he saw as Europe’s ‘patronising air’ towards African subjects<sup>87</sup> and thus operated within a largely imperialist ethnographic framework that was suspicious of European modernising projects and instead attempted to ‘preserve’ the ‘primitive dying cultures’. In many ways, the northern regions of Nigeria were perhaps more easily exploitable for such a project than the south in that by the 1940s the north remained relatively isolated from other protectorates and their European educated populations. The north was also culturally distinct, claiming a population that was predominantly Muslim, whereas the south was increasingly

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<sup>84</sup> DC, Denfield, ‘The Story behind the Pictures’.

<sup>85</sup> Throughout the thesis, my use of the terms ‘tribe’ and ‘pagan’ takes into account the discursive connotations of these terms particularly within the colonial context and thus treats them as social constructs. While keeping in mind Denfield’s naturalisation of these terms, I remain cognisant of ways in which the terms have been used by the west in reference to colonised subjects in ways that place all subjects within a temporal frame, with the latter seen as representing an earlier period in relation to the west and thus containing traits of ‘backwardness’. See for example F. Cooper & A. Stoler, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a bourgeois world* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1997); A. Campbell, ‘Ethical Ethnicity: A critique’, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 35,1, (1997), 53-79; K. Crehan, “‘Tribes’ and the People Who Read Books’ *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 23, 2, (1997), 203-218; L.L .Layne, “‘Tribalism’: National Representation of Tribal Life in Jordan”, *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development*, 16, 2 (1987),183-203; M. Hall, ‘The Burden of Tribalism: The social context of Southern African Iron Age studies’, *American Antiquity*, 49, 3, (1984),455-467; M. Hall, ‘Tribes, Traditions and Numbers: The American Model in Southern African Iron Age Ceramic Studies’, *The South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 38, 138, (1983), 51-57.

<sup>86</sup> Denfield, ‘Recording Life in Nigeria’, *Photography*, Nov.-Dec. (1946), 19-23.

<sup>87</sup> Denfield, ‘Pagan Sanctuary’, *Today: Photo World*, Autumn (1947), 53-56 .

Christianised. Consequently, the north could offer the British imagination a perceived sense of ‘backwardness’ that fascinated Denfield.

Nevertheless, the little army pamphlet too, did not exist in a vacuum but was related to discourses in the literary tradition of publications of travel writers and explorers. Some of these publications that chronicle what Mary Louis Pratt has described as the ‘contact zone’<sup>88</sup> in colonial encounters form part of the Denfield Africana Library. Here, one can peruse volumes that record the journeys of various writers who navigated different parts of the continent from about 1870. Even though such texts were written much earlier than Denfield’s, they existed in proximity to the latter in the 1940s because the north was still seen to be isolated. For example, in *Thrice through the Dark Continent*, South African theology professor Du Plessis provided an account of his observations in different locations in Nigeria where he encountered the Egba in southern Nigeria where “men and women dress very decently in flowing cotton garments, Grecian style” in contrast to children where “the girls sometimes [wear] a string of blue pearls round the waist, or a row of what looked to me like black beetles, though as a matter of fact I was too shy to institute a closer scrutiny”<sup>89</sup>. Similarly, on the northern plateaus, he came across some groups “entirely pagan” who “discard every vestige cloth, and garb themselves in leaves” such as “the Burum tribe...still in the Adamite stage of development”<sup>90</sup>. Of course, it is more than dress that Du Plessis accounted for. Instead he traversed different concerns, from the unbearable humidity, to market places in Lagos, witchcraft and ceremonial dances and constructed a peculiar world that was distinct and far removed from the western reader’s.

Similarly, the *Stanford’s Compendium of Geography and Travel*, published as early as 1878, provides a description of the African races and ethnic groups encountered based on such categories<sup>91</sup>. The reader ‘learns’ of the Hausa nation (spread across the greater northern Nigeria) as “distinguished for its vivacity, intelligence, friendliness, industry and social qualities” whose language, Hausa, “is the noblest, the most harmonious, the richest and most animated in the whole of Nigritia”<sup>92</sup>. One also ‘learns’ of variations in intelligence, physical

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<sup>88</sup> In her now-widely cited text, Pratt uses the term to refer to the space of colonial encounters in which people that are historically and geographically separated establish relations that involve conditions of coercion and inequality. See M.L Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>89</sup> J. Du Plessis, *Thrice Through the Dark Continent: a record of journeying across Africa during the years 1913-16* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1917), p 52.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid* p 56.

<sup>91</sup> K. Johnston, *Stanford’s Compendium of Geography and Travel: Africa* (London: Edward Stanford, 1878).

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid* p 165.

characteristics, dress and custom among different tribes. For example, he noted that women of Bossebango in the north-west regions “are of short stature, of unsymmetrical figure and adorn their neck and ears with strings of pearl, but do not wear nose-rings”<sup>93</sup>. Similarly, one reads that the lower classes of the Lamorde in the same region “disfigure their features by gashing their cheeks”<sup>94</sup>.

These observations are comparable to Mockler-Ferryman’s publication *British Nigeria*, where he too, drew attention to the apparent superior intelligence of the Fulani in the northern regions<sup>95</sup>. He wrote of the Nupe (in these same parts) in a similar fashion that is “pagans [of] a magnificent race, both physically and mentally” who are also distinct in “their cheerfulness under the most adverse circumstances”<sup>96</sup>. This description parallels Kingsley’s in her essay *Life in West Africa* where she constructed the African races not only in terms of labour but as a *natural* labour force. She described them as “the most magnificent mass of labour material in the world and...one of the most generous, kindly, good-tempered races of men on earth”<sup>97</sup>.

Like his contemporaries, Mockler-Ferryman wrote about various aspects of social life of the villagers. One reads, for example, of distinctive housing forms where he noted “within hardened mud walls and ditch which encircle the place is the usual Fulah arrangement of walled and mat-enclosed compounds, Hausa huts, patches of cultivation, and labyrinth lanes, with here and there a swamp or a rocky mount”<sup>98</sup>. After a few pages, the writer turned his attention to the market-places where he wrote that with regards to Hausa regions “probably in no part of Africa does one see a stranger gathering of people or a more heterogeneous selection of merchandise than here”<sup>99</sup>. Mockler-Ferryman’s fascination with the market place was hardly novel in that as early as 1823, Hough Clapperton wrote about the site in his travels (published much later in Johnston’s *Pioneers in West Africa* in 1912<sup>100</sup>). Clapperton’s fascination with the market places of West African can be discerned in the vivid descriptions he provided about the goods and people that frequented them. Clapperton noted that “the different wares were arranged each in its particular quarter: knives, scissors, beads, silken

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid p 168.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid p 169.

<sup>95</sup> A.F. Mockler-Ferryman, *British Nigeria: A geographical and historical description of the British Possessions and Adjacent to the Niger River, West Africa* (London: Cassell and Company Ltd, 1902).

<sup>96</sup> Ibid p 184.

<sup>97</sup> M. Kingsley, ‘Life in West Africa’, *In British Africa*. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench Trubner & Co Ltd, 1899) p 37.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid p 164.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid p 168.

<sup>100</sup> H. Johnston, *Pioneers in West Africa* (London: Blackie and Son Ltd., 1912).



cords and pieces of silk...men's robes, and women's dresses; beef, mutton and fowls..."<sup>101</sup>  
where one could come across "a pretty Fellata (Fulani) girl going to market with milk and  
butter, neat and spruce in her attire as a Chesire dairymaid"<sup>102</sup>.

Other publications with a classificatory impulse include Partridge's *Cross River Natives* in 1905, whose author was Assistant District Commissioner in Southern Nigeria and a fellow of the of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland<sup>103</sup>. The publication was a study of whom Partridge regarded as the primitive pagans in the Oburura district in Southern Nigeria. One comes across different categories through which the subjects were constituted including race and language, anatomical and physiological differences, diet, medication, law and domesticity. With regards to racial classification in a manner that resonates with Denfield's 'little army pamphlet', Partridge wrote that "the natives of Oburura Hill district are divided into many tribes which, though having certain points in common, differ among themselves in dialect, religion and social custom"<sup>104</sup>. The author then moved to anatomical observations where he declared, for example, that "The Ikwes are a tall, well-shaped tribe, strong and active, with no abnormal muscular development". He added that "the muscles of the chest and arms generally show greater development than those of the legs, so that a negro with quite ordinary legs is often herculean above the waist"<sup>105</sup>. Moreover, he wrote that "the colour of their skin is a dark chocolate, which they sometimes decorate with geometrical patterns in black paint"<sup>106</sup>. In the study, mention is also made of "a well-shaped head with small ears set closely to the head, good forehead, short straight nose, curved lips not too thick, short upper lip, beautiful teeth and finely-curved eyelashes"<sup>107</sup>. Of physiological observations, he wrote that "Everything is carried on the head...a boy will march all day long with such a load on his head and will continue it for a fortnight without complaint"<sup>108</sup>. Each description is provided in a totalising manner that draws conclusions for those who have encountered natives on the continent. In other words, race is constructed based on such stereotypes.

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid p 238.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid p 24.1

<sup>103</sup> C. Partridge, *Cross River Natives: being some notes on the primitive pagans of Oburura District Southern Nigeria* (London: Paternoster, 1905).

<sup>104</sup> Ibid p 144.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid p 145.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid p 147.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid p 148.

This can be noted in Keane's *Africa and Its Inhabitants* (published in 1887) that provided a 'map' of each region according to specific criteria namely natural surroundings, flora and fauna, inhabitants and topography<sup>109</sup>. Characteristically, in the chapter on Hausaland the author pointed to the existence of a myriad of tribes "among the pretended Fulahs of Sokoto...who belong to the conquering race only through social and political alliance of long standing". Keane thus stated "such are the Sisilbe or Sillebawa, descendants of the Wakore or eastern Mandingans...such also but of inferior caste, are the Lahobe of Senegal, and the Soghorans or Jawambes of Sokoto"<sup>110</sup>. Similarly in his essay on *The Native Races of the British West African Colonies* that was published in 1924, Maxwell too marked distinctions between different groupings, drawing attention to, for example "the most primitive tribes now existing in the British West African colonies...some of the pagan tribes of the northern provinces of Nigeria"<sup>111</sup>.

In a manner that was somewhat customary, the author wrote about various aspects of physical, social and political life from distinctive anatomical features, to variations in dress and nudity to the roles of chiefs in each region. He placed emphasis on "diversity in character, customs and beliefs". The reader 'learns', for example, that among the tribes in the region "some are cheerful, others morose, some courageous, others cowardly, some trustworthy and truthful, others treacherous and deceitful, some honest, others the reverse". Additionally, Maxwell stated that "amongst the most primitive are to be found cannibalism, murder of twins, human sacrifice, the right of private vengeance marriage by capture or exchange, ancestor worship and primitive animistic beliefs"<sup>112</sup>.

As one can imagine, this small collection to which I have alluded cannot account for the whole of the Denfield Africana Library and it is far from comprehensive as an account of the very tradition of describing and representing African subjects. Yet, the placement of such literature as part of the Denfield Collection is pertinent when one unpacks the ideas that informed Denfield's photography in Nigeria. That is to say, each of the categories through which Africans were constituted in the literature, from dress, to custom, housing, political systems, material culture, the body, etc. emerged as guiding concerns through which Denfield construed the pagan tribes visually. In other words the subjects were rendered knowable as

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<sup>109</sup> A.H. Keane, *Africa and Its Inhabitants* (London: Hurtof and Company, Ltd., 1887).

<sup>110</sup> Ibid p 310.

<sup>111</sup> J.C. Maxwell, 'The Native races of the British West African Colonies', in G. Lagden, ed., *The Native Races of the British Empire* (London: W. Collins Sons & Co. Ltd, 1924), pp.131-164.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid p 162.

‘unchartered’ territory to the imperial reader through such means. It is perhaps unsurprising that each of the publications above includes maps of the region that had been visited. Thus as one read about each particular native group the writer encountered one could easily study the map of that region as though he or she was also a traveller. Arguably, through the maps the continent was rendered more accessible, open to penetration, echoing the very nature of conquest that had characterised Empire’s relationship with parts of the continent.

## Maps and the ethnographic photographer

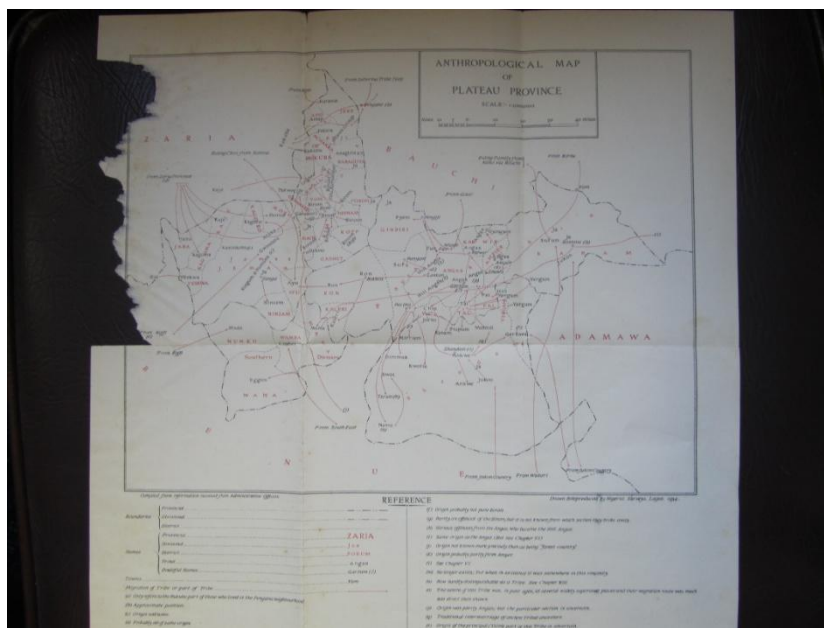


Fig. 1

The Denfield Collection also contains maps that had been in Denfield’s possession and use. This suggests that along with whatever textual sources he may have had, he used these additionally to guide his photographic work, particularly his grouping of subjects into various ‘tribes’. The two anthropological maps, dated 1928 and 1934, provide an overview of Nigeria according to its tribal divisions and various locations (Fig. 1), while the five military maps, dating from 1930 to 1942, provide a bird’s eye view of provincial and divisional locales, public sites in Kaduna such as churches, missions, court houses, farm huts, markets and landing ground for planes (see Fig. 2 for a sectional view of one military map). Given the extent to which he travelled over the greater Hausa region, there is little doubt that the maps were instrumental both practically and discursively in informing his methodology. He indicated, for instance, that he took at least 400 photographs in Northern Nigeria which he

divided amongst various ethnic groupings including the Rukuba, Jerawa, Biron, Irigwe, Tal, Chip, Sura, Ron, Kaleri, or else groups associated with places as in the ‘groups around Kafanchan’, ‘Rock pagans’, or groups in ‘Gotire country’ and ‘Jos plateau’<sup>113</sup>. These correspond to the categories and descriptions included in the anthropological maps. Subjects were depicted thus as representations of culturally distinct groups and localities.

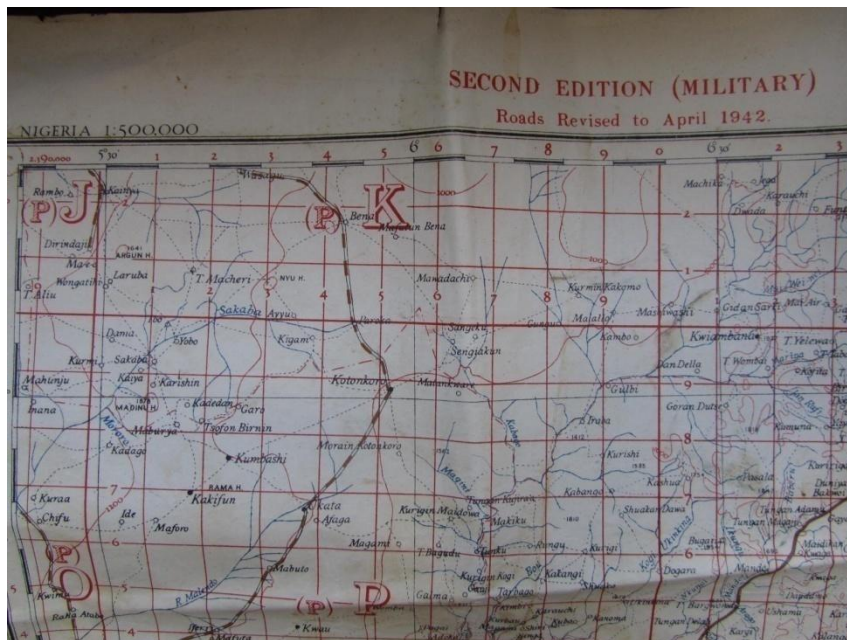


Fig. 2

Centrally, the categorisation of subjects photographically based on ethnicity is a continuation of a longer convention of racial typing. The emergence of photography in Victorian England coalesced with rising British colonial power and the ascendancy of scientifically informed studies of race and culture. Described by Martin Jay as constituting empires of visualisation<sup>114</sup>, the impulse in such studies was to classify people and nature into types based on the assumption that a classificatory scheme must be capable of being indexed by visible signs of difference<sup>115</sup>. Officially sponsored expeditions were one avenue through which such data was collected. In the Southern African context, well-known travel expeditions include

<sup>113</sup> This is indicated in a text where he outlines possible chapter headings for a proposed pictorial book on Nigerian tribes.

<sup>114</sup> M. Jay, ‘Scopic Regimes of Modernity’, in H. Foster, ed., *Visions and Visibility: Discussions in Contemporary Culture* (New York: Dia Art Foundation and Bay Press, 1989).

<sup>115</sup> P. Landau, ‘Empires of the visual: photography and colonial administration in Africa’, in P. Landau & D. Kaspin, *Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p 144.

those of photographer James Chapman and painter Thomas Baines in South West Africa from 1861 to 1862<sup>116</sup>. Chapman and Baines recorded the appearance of the people through whose land they passed under Livingstone's instructions. Both men aimed to collect information visually that would extend scientific knowledge and prepare the way for commercial exploitation<sup>117</sup>. For the purpose of ethnology, the explorers exerted much control over the visual field carefully arranging various forms of material culture. At the same time, in order to appeal to both commercial and scientific interests, they also created idealised images in the well-cited noble savage tradition<sup>118</sup>.

According to Bank, although 'racial type' was established as a 'genre' in photography during the 1860s and 1870s, methodological precedents include an ideological precursor in the form of Physionotrace, a technique invented in 1786 for tracing profiles on glass with an engraving tool, which could generate images that were reproducible<sup>119</sup>. He argues however that it was the more systematic projects of the Societe d'Ethnographie in Paris and the St Petersburg Academy of Sciences to photograph the 'races' of the Russian Empire, both launched in the 1860s, that can be said to have marked out a new visual field. Similarly institutions such as the Royal Anthropological Institute in Britain in the 1870s, in the context of an emerging discipline, attempted to identify and systematise anthropological facts by subjecting photographic subjects to disciplinary poses that included a full face and a three quarter profile, thereby positioning them within an objectifying intellectual frame<sup>120</sup>.

As early as the 1850s and 1860s Victorian photographic type studies of Ottoman male-types in Istanbul were appearing in newspapers such as the *Illustrated London News* and widely read travel accounts<sup>121</sup>. Ergodu argues that photographic type studies were distinguished from counterparts in traditional media by their ability to combine picturesque signifiers with highly detailed apparently candid views of the physiognomy and costumes of non-western peoples<sup>122</sup>. Victorian photography manuals would often advise operators on to how to

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<sup>116</sup> M. Godby, 'The interdependence of photography and painting on the South West Africa expedition of James Chapman and Thomas Baines, 1861-1862', *Kronos: Southern African Histories*, 27 (2001), 30-42.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid p 31.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid p 39.

<sup>119</sup> A. Bank, 'Anthropology and portrait photography: Gustav Fritsch's 'Natives of South Africa' 1863-1872', *Kronos: Southern African Histories*, 27, Nov (2001), 43-76.

<sup>120</sup> R. Poignant, 'Surveying the field of view: the making of the RAI Photographic collection', In E. Edwards, ed., *Anthropology and Photography: 1860-1920*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp 42-73.

<sup>121</sup> A. Ergodu, 'Picturing alterity: representational strategies in Victorian type photographs of Ottoman' in E.M. Hight, & G.D. Sampson, *Colonialist Photography: Imagining Race and place* (London: Routledge, 2002) pp.107-125.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid p 117.

capitalise on lighting to bring out a subject's character based on aesthetic preferences of the period<sup>123</sup>. As Erdogu points out, the picturesque was accepted in the Victorian period as the appropriate aesthetic vocabulary for articulating the racial, political and economic difference of peripheral peoples from the normative English audience.

In South Africa, perhaps one of the best known photographers who operated within the discursive framework of 'typing' in this period is German doctor Gustav Fritsch who came from Berlin to South Africa in 1863 and over a three year period collected numerous portraits of South Africa's 'indigenous' population based on comparative anatomy and anthropology<sup>124</sup>. Fritsch's photography was deeply intertwined with his travels as he trekked through different locations from Robben Island through different parts along the coast, moving inland and through the edges of the South African border northwards. In each stop he collected portrait and profile images that would characterize ethnic groups anatomically. As Hayes has argued, in the nineteenth century in Southern Africa, photography intersected with exploration, colonization, knowledge production and captivity<sup>125</sup>.

Racial typing needs to be understood as a predecessor to more ethnographic photographic studies that were to follow and flourish in the first half of the twentieth century. For one thing, as early as the 1880s (if not earlier), there were pockets of photographers who deviated from the overtly dehumanising and objectifying conventions of their contemporaries. There are the likes of Everard Thurm, a botanist who became a district magistrate in British Guiana from 1881 to 1897, whose photographs of natives demonstrate sympathy with the subjects according to Tyler<sup>126</sup>. He argues that Thurm attempted to 'record culture' as he saw it without staging typical of anthropological photography of the day<sup>127</sup>. While Thurm may perhaps be accused of a paternalistic ethos in his work, his aim towards cultural relativism and acceptance did in some way mark a move away from established anthropological categorisation and type studies of the time. This may be related to the aforementioned Victorian preferences for marking difference through pictorial means. This means even as photographers conducted studies, the 'native' would be viewed through an aesthetic lens.

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<sup>123</sup> Arguably, the influence of such technical manuals trickled down to the 1940s in that it is apparent when Denfield writes about the 'tensions' that come with photographic dark skins and the necessary 'solutions' for such. I discuss this in Chapter 3.

<sup>124</sup> K. Dietrich, K. & A. Bank, *An eloquent picture gallery: The South African portrait photographs of Gustav Theodor Fritsch, 1863-1864* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2008).

<sup>125</sup> Hayes, 'A short history', p140.

<sup>126</sup> D. Tyler, 'Very lovable human beings': The Photography of Everard Thurm' in E. Edwards, ed., *Anthropology and Photography 1860-1920* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp.187-192.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid* p 192.

Stevenson and Graham-Stewart's volume *Surviving the Lens*, provides another clue with regards to the popular depiction of Africans in Britain at the turn of the twentieth century. In the book the authors have selected 50 photographs taken by both amateurs and professionals in Eastern and Southern Africa between 1870 and 1920 and eventually sold in the United Kingdom<sup>128</sup>. The authors argue that the travellers, traders and tourists, often in the service of predominantly British colonialism -who passed through the east and southern African ports of Mombasa, Dar es Salaam, Zanzibar, Durban, Port Elizabeth and Cape Town, and in towns in the interior such as Johannesburg, Kimberley and Bulawayo- usually wished to take away with them some reminder of people and places<sup>129</sup>. As a result, studios developed in these areas offering for sale 'varieties of native studies'<sup>130</sup>. The images in the volume suggest that inasmuch as anthropology and ethnography had a significant influence in the kinds of images produced, particularly by institutionalised photographers, the pictorial conventions and art aesthetics of the period also had a pronounced effect on photographic portraiture<sup>131</sup>, and arguably, in ways that undercut the scientific disciplinary ethos.

According to Stevenson and Graham-Stewart, the pictorial conventions that informed these photographic images in south and east Africa relate to the manner in which black people were depicted in European painting. At the time when these photographs were taken, an approach in fine art was still heavily influenced by the concept of the 'noble savage' which originated in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment view of the nonwestern world. More generally, photographers adopted the aesthetic practices of portrait painters, especially in studio work. Careful consideration was given to modes of lighting, spatial arrangements, perspective and the construction of various planes. The conventions of classical sculpture are also commonly self evident in the formal pose, poise and drapery of the subjects<sup>132</sup>.

Such practices register the now-widely cited distinction Allen Sekula has made between honorific compositions of portraiture that provide "for the ceremonial representation of the bourgeois self" and repressive functions that drew from the imperatives of medical and anatomical illustrations<sup>133</sup>. According to Sekula, in the nineteenth century photography welded the two functions together whereby "the private moment of sentimental individuation,

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<sup>128</sup> M. Stevenson & M. Graham-Stewart, *Surviving the Lens: photographic studies of south and east African people, 1870-1920*, (Vlaeberg: Fernwood Press, 2001).

<sup>129</sup> Ibid p 17.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid p 18.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid p 23.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> A. Sekula, 'The body and the archive', *October*, 39, Winter (1986), 3-64.

the look at the frozen gaze-of-the-loved-one, was shadowed by two other more public looks: a look up, at one's 'betters,' and a look down, at one's 'inferiors'"<sup>134</sup>. In this said collection, the subjects have each been photographed to represent a collective in terms of difference from the western viewer. Each portrait thus heightens the 'exotic nature' of the subject through directing his or her gaze directly towards the viewer.

One can note a continuation of such a paradigm in media produced in the Congo by the Belgian government between 1924 and 1940. According to Geary imagery popularised King Leopold's vision and agenda and appealed to the Belgian entrepreneurial spirit to invest in the Congo Free State<sup>135</sup>. Magazines such as *Le Congo Illustre: Voyages et Traveaux des Belges dans l'Etat Independent du Congo (Congo Illustrated: Travels and works of Belgians in the Congo Free State)* became important mechanisms for picture distribution<sup>136</sup>. Several early features of the magazine in the 1920s, for example, would carry textual and photo essays on scarification, highlighting 'mythic' people such as the Kuba, Mangbety and Tutsi of Rwanda. Apart from human subjects, these publications also included picturesque landscapes, particularly waterfalls and river scenes<sup>137</sup>. Geary points out that while the magazine shifted in the 1930s and 1940s to include more essays on burgeoning Belgian life in the colonial cities and the metamorphosis of Africans into a 'civilised' colonial workforce, alongside this imagery there still continued the tradition of visually classifying the African people and documenting aspects of material culture, architecture, arts and rituals, constructing a strong sense of the exotic and nostalgia for the primitive. For Geary, this juxtaposition can be understood as a reflection of the agency's mission to "faithfully reveal to the public the startling oppositions played by the new face of the Congo"<sup>138</sup>.

Lastly, colonial exhibitions were another important area that participated in particular visual regimes about Africans, combining image and performance. In the 1930s, events such as the British and French Colonial Exhibitions respectively were highly popular attractions, offering an additional form of entertainers such as dancer and musicians<sup>139</sup>. Such events would feature, for example, constructed villages of 'native' African village life, with 'primitives'

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid p 10.

<sup>135</sup> C.M Geary, *In and Out of Focus: Images from Central Africa, 1885-1960*. (London: Phillip Wilson Publishers, 2002).

<sup>136</sup> Ibid p 32.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid p 45.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid p 52.

<sup>139</sup> C. Hodeir, 'Decentering the gaze at the French Colonial Exhibition', In P.S.Landau & D. Kaspin, eds., *Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) pp 232-253.



fenced inside imagined scenarios wearing animal skins and loin cloths. The performers would often be made to repeat recognisable gestures continuously that were at once specific, unambivalent and yet continually evolving, such as fishermen showing ‘native technique’ or women pounding millet with mortar and pestle, cooking a meal on an open fire several times a day, as well as crafts related to weaving, leather work, blacksmithing and goldsmithing<sup>140</sup>. According to Hodeir, the French Colonial Exhibitions may be entangled discursively with French Anthropological circles that operated with discourses of the backwardness of certain race, thus journalists, tourists and photographers would view the natives as being in their natural habitat and as a representative of a former stage of human development<sup>141</sup>. In this sense the events combined entertainment with pedagogy<sup>142</sup>.

Such exhibitions were important in promoting particular images of Africans in print. According to Hodeir, because photographing the exhibitions was an important part of them, conservatives and radical socialists alike could get access to them in popular print media and through postcards<sup>143</sup>. As De Roo points out, between the turn of the century and World War 1, postcards became mass media of communication and collectible objects for the first time in French history, with Algeria constituting a major bulk of the images<sup>144</sup>. While the French government funded studios in Algeria that produced views of major cities they also produced images of ‘types and costumes’ of Algerian people. The postcard form itself and the ethnographic labels that accompanied them emphasised authenticity and concealed the staging of the scenes<sup>145</sup>.

Similarly, Vokes’s essay on the postcards produced in early colonial Uganda between 1904 and 1928 explores the manner in which images of the postcards drew on the representational strategies of racial and ethnic differentiation<sup>146</sup>. Though produced in photographic studios, the collection was a product of the Colonial Office’s Visual Instruction Committee (COVIC). One member of the Committee, Harold Mackinder, was also integral in promoting the images for use in visual lectures in England “with the aim of instilling a sense of the visual

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid 234

<sup>141</sup> Ibid

<sup>142</sup> B. Street, ‘British Popular Anthropology: exhibition and photographing the other’, in E. Edwards, ed., *Anthropology and Photography 1860-1920*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) pp122-131

<sup>143</sup> Hodeir, ‘Decentering the gaze’, p.237

<sup>144</sup> R.J. De Roo, ‘Colonial collecting: French women and Algerian cartes postales’, in E.M. Hight, & G.D. Sampson, *Colonialist Photography: Imagining Race and place* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp.159-171

<sup>145</sup> Ibid 165

<sup>146</sup> R. Vokes, ‘Reflections on a complex (and cosmopolitan) archive: postcards and photography in Early Colonial Uganda’, *History and Anthropology*, 21, 4, (2010), 375-409.

geography of the colonies among the British public ‘back home’<sup>147</sup>. Thus, Vokes argues, such postcards “went on to play a crucial role in the establishment of a colonial regime of seeing, one which was intimately bound up with the establishment of new colonial institutions” (in this case this includes COVIC)<sup>148</sup>.

As the century progressed, these particular representations of Africa -and colonised subjects more broadly- would find expression in different media and portals. One such that has continued to shape the western view of the ‘non-western natives’ perhaps more profoundly than others is the American magazine *National Geographic*. In their detailed study of the magazine, including its history and forms of representation, Lutz and Collins argue that several themes run through all the magazine’s renderings of the non-Euramerican world, that is, subjects are portrayed as exotic, they are idealised, naturalised and are sexualised<sup>149</sup>. The authors argue that the magazine has typically represented the non-European as a figure without history and given his/her location within the natural rather than cultural realm, he/she is in turn made to have morphology rather than a trajectory<sup>150</sup>. In a manner that intersects with the above-mentioned forms of representations, the magazine has too relied on particular modes through which third world subjects have been construed including dress, ritual, and with the ‘naked black woman’ as a defining feature in depictions of such regions<sup>151</sup>.

As can be seen, by the time Denfield began trekking through the northern parts of Nigeria to document its ‘disappearing tribes’, a particular mode of representation, both textual and visual, had concretised in western Europe through which Africans came to be framed. It is important to note that not all European travellers/photographers framed Africans in the same mode but I have drawn attention to the dominant discursive frames through which colonial subjects were constituted. I now turn to Denfield’s own collection that constructed the pagan subject of the Nigerian plateaus. I have looked primarily at the photographs of Nigeria that are available in the British Museum which Denfield donated, given that the East London Library has few of these. The British Museum has archived the photographs as part of its collection of objects along with other collections from ‘Africa, Oceania and the Americas’<sup>152</sup>. The photographs thus function not simply as images but as material objects. However, they have also been digitized and made available on the Museum’s website. Here, one can view

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid p 383.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid p 379.

<sup>149</sup> C. Lutz, & J. Collins, *Reading National Geographic*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

<sup>150</sup> Ibid p 108.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid p 115.

<sup>152</sup> See [http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search\\_the\\_collection\\_database.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database.aspx).

each image as well as a few details about each. These include the printing format the photographer used, the region where the photograph was taken, the size of the print, ethnographic descriptions which Denfield provided as well as the curator's comments which are largely based on the descriptions of the photograph. Thus in each instance I refer to each of these photographs based on the descriptions/captions which Denfield used.

### **Trekking through northern Nigeria**

With a patronizing air the European speaks of the African as 'uncivilized'. He believes that he has reached the peak of civilization: for by pressing a button, he can blast a city to shreds, or spread propaganda through 3000 miles of space. That, he trumpets, is progress. He boasts of living in a highly civilized community, when nothing could be less communal than life in a great city, where no man knows or cares about his neighbor, and the code of life is every man for himself. Is this civilization? Those who know the isolated African tribes doubt it. For the natives, branded as uncivilized, have developed what those who know them and have studied their way of life consider to be a far more genuine civilization. It is little realized that in many British Colonies there are still to be found primitive communities, upon which the coming of the European brand of civilization has had but little effect<sup>153</sup>.

In these words, Denfield announced his stance on the impact of westernisation he observed occurring in the British colony. Perhaps reflecting the trauma of the war in which he is a part, Denfield denounced this prized modernisation seeing it as a step towards inevitable human destruction instead. When Denfield arrived in these parts of the northern territories, he saw the anticipated subjects for his photography as relatively untouched by modernisation, a view that profoundly shaped the ways in which the subjects under study were framed. Yet, the fact that the first High Commissioner of the Northern Protectorate, Lugard in 1903, and his followers adhered to the notion of 'preserving disappearing tribes' and effectively minimised western contact suggests the northern areas, rather than free from western influence, were inevitably drawn into the colonial project<sup>154</sup>.

As Edwards points out the notion of capturing images of 'disappearing tribes' was a stock motif in the discourse of the salvage anthropology of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries<sup>155</sup>. Correspondingly, the passage above reveals Denfield's impulse to arrest this particular period in the life of the 'pagans'. Inevitably, the 'backwardness' or 'primitiveness'

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<sup>153</sup> Denfield, 'Pagan Sanctuary', *Today*, Autumn (1947), 53-56.

<sup>154</sup> Falola, & Heaton, 'A history of Nigeria', p 93.

<sup>155</sup> E. Edwards, ed., *Anthropology and Photography, 1860-1920* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992).

of the societies under gaze was a key factor in his photographs. In his depiction of their dress, housing and various social rituals, subjects were in turn arrested in time, placed in an earlier period than their European counterparts in the ideology of progress. In other words they were turned into photographs, not simply as subjects *on* an image, but ‘historical’ images themselves *in* the field. Similarly Timothy Mitchell argues that the problem for the photographer or writer visiting the Middle East in the nineteenth century was not just to make an accurate picture of the East but to set up the East as a picture in that one can copy or represent only what appears already to exist representationally- as a picture<sup>156</sup>.

Yet how did Denfield manage to trek through the different parts of the plateau? Firstly, he prepared himself by learning Hausa, the lingua franca of the northern areas. He relied on the help of local residents who taught him for four hours daily for several weeks. Armed with a second-hand Thornton Pickard reflex camera that took photographs of 2¼” x 3 ¼”, he also managed to get assistance from two local residents, one of whom he referred to as Henry. One would act as interpreter and the other carried his equipment. In describing his method of gaining access to the villages Denfield wrote:

My usual approach was to contact the local village chief and make a tour of the village with him, distributing small presents to the inhabitants and speaking to them through an interpreter, inviting them to look at each other through the reflex view finder of my camera. This manoeuvre helped to demonstrate the innocuous character of my Thornton Pickard reflex. I usually put up at the local mud rest house for a couple of days, by which time the camera and myself were familiar objects, and not only could I then wander among the compounds and record the village life as it really was, but I was able to pose them... Once they had agreed to have their photographs taken, I found them perfect models. They would remain completely still exactly where I placed them for any length of time and being accustomed to the glare of the sun, they were able to look almost directly into its rays without suffering any discomfort<sup>157</sup>.

I read in this excerpt a display of power through not only the act of persuading his would-be subjects to look through the camera (something that was a novelty) but also through associating himself with the chiefs. Elsewhere he wrote, for example, “I made certain that I would be unmolested by enlisting the aid of the market chief, who accompanied me on my round. His word was law. Not only did he scare off any followers but prevailed on many of the shy subjects to pose for me”<sup>158</sup>. Through tours of the villages with the chief, he acquired geographical, socio-political and cultural knowledge. More importantly, he made a point of

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<sup>156</sup>T. Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press 1991).

<sup>157</sup>DC, Denfield, ‘Photographing Northern Nigeria’, n.d.

<sup>158</sup>J. Denfield, ‘In Northern Nigeria’, *Amateur Photography: The journal for everybody with a camera*, 97, 3 (1947), 395-397.

becoming a familiar figure himself by distributing gifts. Thus while on the one hand he could take advantage of the power of the chiefs in persuading people to be posed, he also had to convince individuals through material means. This suggests his subjects did not necessarily avail themselves to the camera easily. His demonstration of the camera resonates with the images that would appear in publications like the *National Geographic* after World War Two that depict westerners gazing through cameras and into mirrors of the western traveller. According to Lutz and Collins, this image echoes the western viewer's perception of the non-western native as somewhat childlike and cognitively premature particularly as he/she marvels at his own sight. Moreover, the authors argue it implies the non-western native is without consciousness and thus without a history<sup>159</sup>. Therefore the western traveller is construed as the bringer of self-awareness and has in such a sense helped the natives 'discover' themselves. This reflects the sense of the non-western 'native' world as uncharted territory.

When looking at his photographs of Nigeria as a collective, one is struck by the resonances in content and form to the image world of Africa that was constructed through the travel literature and earlier forms of visual representation. For one thing, like his predecessors and contemporaries, Denfield was drawn to the market place as a resource for photographic work. Arguably, the market place lent itself to categorisation (through displaying a variety of goods) thereby allowing Denfield an instance where he could 'map' the people of the northern territories. This is suggested in his notes when he stated:

Visits to the market place were amply rewarded. From many miles around distances that sometimes necessitated all night travelling on foot, native of all races gather here on market-day not only to sell or barter their goods but to meet and discuss topical events. It is a great social occasion and all the native finery is worn. There is a great profusion of goods, all laid out individually on the ground, like small school children playing at 'shops'...I revisited these market places as often as I could, and it was here that I obtained some of my best studies of native life. The blind beggars, the quaint barbers, the haggling traders, the basket weavers, the native-medicine dealers, the local arts and crafts, and even the vultures all provided scenes that my camera recorded greedily<sup>160</sup>.

The market place, it is suggested, had great ethnographic appeal because it was already constructed like an exhibition, offering its own scenarios that could be charted easily with the camera. Like an exhibition, the market place was demarcated from the rest of the village, thus lent itself to a visual mapping, offering itself to onlookers as though it were a picture. It is

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<sup>159</sup> Lutz & Collins, *Reading National Geographic*, p 208.

<sup>160</sup> Denfield, 'In northern Nigeria', p 396.

thus unsurprising that the market place was the first place where he took photographs. In his photograph with the inscription ‘Kaje woman in Kafachan market’ we see an example of this display of ‘native finery’. The photograph features a young woman wearing an array of bodily adornments on her head, wrist, and waist, while she is seated on a plank on the ground with a basket of bananas in front of her (Fig. 3). Close to her are other subjects seated at the market scene, but whose frames recede in the background. . Her face is turned towards the photographer, who, by virtue of his distance from the scene, becomes an outsider. This is accentuated by the fact that Denfield photographed largely from the backside of the subject. Thus, rather than constitute her as though she offers her body for view (as is the case with photographs taken frontally), the photograph inhibits our access to the market and positions us too as non-participating observers. She has literally turned her back to us and only nominally acknowledges the photographer with her face turned. Yet such a simple gesture points to her occupation of two places at once, the market and the space outside that which Denfield occupies to which she grants us little access. Subsequently this unfreezes the ethnographic frame as we are reminded that she can transcend the space to which the photographer has confined her.



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

Another example of a depiction of a market scene is in the photograph ‘Picture of a woman and two small girls at the market’ (Fig. 4). It features centrally an adult female who smiles while two children lean defensively against her legs, while looking nervously outside the frame. In the background one can make out people dealing with goods in baskets, although they are depicted obscurely. The trio that forms the centre of the photograph is visually separated from the market scene, thereby again limiting our own access to the area of trade. We are made to stand apart from the scene and observe it instead.

Not only do these images correspond with the aforementioned travel writing on the market in the ‘native’ village, but they in turn construct a particular idea of ‘the market’ in terms of distinct visual markers. Denfield regarded the market place as his chief ‘hunting ground’ for his photography at this stage<sup>161</sup>, a description which again speaks to the literary work I have described above. Yet his construal of it in a manner comparable to an exhibition also points to the ways in which it can be thought of as mediating the production of knowledge through signs and symbols. While the abovementioned travelers viewed the market place as a source of the ‘real’ in native life, its organization as a place of display in turn speaks to the constructed-ness of the image-world of Africa’s black inhabitants through the techniques of display.

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

Like the market place, chiefs are another familiar motif through which Denfield framed the pagan subjects. Chiefs appeared in both his texts and photographs. One might recall Denfield's reliance on chiefs in order to take photographs. When writing about gaining entry he stated:

You stopped and sent one of your carriers to find the chief or the local headman. He always found him, and then you went into his hut for a palaver. You exchanged greetings for about ten minutes. You asked after his health and health of his wives, how were the rains, how were the goats and so on...and every now and then you would interject with a 'Ranka shi didi': Your life may it increase. You then invited the chief to come along to the rest house when you were settled in...When he did come along a little later he came in state with his councillors bringing with him gifts of welcome, such as eggs, beer, chickens and sometimes a sheep. Although these offers are made as presents in token of friendship, the donor expects a gift in return, which in my case was invariably money, as I carried no live stock with me, but it must be definitely understood that this was not a sale or barter but two distinct practical expressions of friendship<sup>162</sup>.

In turn, Denfield included in his studies a few images of chiefs. One is 'Nigeria frontal full length portrait of adult male "chief"'. Denfield identified in the description the subject to be the 'chief of the Chip Tribe', who, in the photograph, is seated and facing the photographer, while draped in a richly layered white robe that covers his whole frame. His hands are placed at the front carefully and deliberately, conveying grace and dignity. The latter is accentuated is the large leopard skin that hangs behind him on a wall, forming the background. I imagine Denfield crouching in order to match his subject's eye level, imaging this sense of exchange which he wrote of. Coupled with placing him in the centre of the image, the centre of gravity falls on the chief's frame, planting him firmly in his location as though he is unmovable, an effect that is emphasized by his equally firm expression. He is therefore a solid presence in the photograph, a sturdiness that also suggests permanence (Fig. 5).

At the same time, the inclusion of the leopard skin contributes towards the construction of the subjects as exotic and pagan, as though they are closer to nature and animals than their western counterparts. This effect is notable as well in 'Nigeria, three quarter length portrait of Hill Anga adult male "chief of Garram"'. The subject, who stands in front of a building, dominates the photograph while holding a whip on the left hand smoking a pipe with his right hand. Standing upright with a jaguar hide across his one shoulder, the chief is an imposing figure who also gazes back at the photographer with a stern look (Fig. 6). On close inspection, he is only simulating smoking a pipe, as though performing such a role reflects his authority. The subject in fact displays objects of material culture. Yet, his performance of

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<sup>162</sup> DC, Denfield, 'The Story behind the Pictures', sheet 3.



smoking draws attention to this particular moment in the photographic field, reminding us it is a fleeting one.



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

While the market place may have been Denfield's 'chief hunting ground' the collection reveals an inclination towards moving through different spaces as if in an attempt to capture the plateaus in their totality. One example is the photograph with the caption 'three Eggon adult males crossing river on stepping stones'. On closer inspection there are four adult males crossing, as one is close to the river-side. Denfield possibly stood or sat on a rock nearby as the photograph was taken from the sides of the bodies, showing their full length. The river is photographed to give a sense of perspective and thus extends to the unknown invisible distance. The river may also function to suggest some depth that is unknown in quantity. On either side of the river, on the river-banks, are trees and bushes in their density, echoing this sense of mystery, of density as well as of barriers. The river is open, but it can only be crossed carefully by stepping over the rocks. The subjects are in the process of crossing from the right side (our and photographer's perspective) to the left, carrying goods on their heads. Rivers enable connection, creating both a barrier and a means of transportation at the same time. The subjects are positioned along the same route and line, but at varying distances from the other side. One has nearly completed the crossing, while another has just begun. This mimics Denfield's own movement at the scene, engaging the distance between himself and

his subjects, moving closer and closer with some difficulty and skill, carefully, in a zone he did not necessarily occupy every day (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

A sense of expansiveness is also created in the photograph with the inscription 'Hill Jarawa country. The Share Hills' (Fig. 8). In the image a male subject stands on rocks looking towards an expanse that dominates the frame. He forms a sinuous figure against the large rocks that surround him, the hills at a distance and the clouds forming above him. He is placed on the left of the frame, thus as we gaze upon the landscape our gaze follows his from the left towards the right of the frame. The photograph points towards the simplicity of the

region. This is accentuated by the sole figure that simply stands and gazes at the field. In photographs of landscapes, Denfield drew attention to those aspects that may be unusual to the westernized urban eye. Here he highlighted the ‘untouched’ and ‘raw’ land, which, much like his ‘pagan’ subjects appeared little touched by industry or modernity. Yet by placing the subject on the left frame we are invited to look from his perspective, to see and experience the panorama like him. In the process, his ‘foreignness’ is undercut as we share this experience. Like him, we too gaze at the landscape from the left where he is positioned.

The spatiality (and so-called primitiveness) of the plateau is also construed in the two photographs called ‘Ascending and descending Miya rock’ (Fig. 9& 10). In one photograph, a group of men slide down a steep rock coming from the huts situated at the top of the hill. In the second photography they are running back to the top. While the exercise may seem too arbitrary to allow the reader to make any definite statements about the villagers, we have the benefit of Denfield’s own recollection on the circumstances under which he produced the images:

During the tour of one Native village situated at the top of a smooth rocky incline, I expressed a desire to the chief that I would like to see the people who lived in the huts on the top. He passed on the message to one of his attendants who just roared at the top of his voice. In a few moments they all came out of the huts and before I could realise what was happening, they were all sliding down the steep smooth incline at the bottom to meet me. I made them do it again and I photographed them<sup>163</sup>.



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

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<sup>163</sup> DC, Denfield, ‘The Story Behind the Pictures’, sheet four.

The extraordinary sense of power Denfield could command over the subjects is made clear in his ability to make them repeat certain actions. The passage expresses the limited power chiefs had under the policies of indirect rule in that through a few requests, as a subject of empire Denfield could ensure that his desires materialised. For Denfield, sliding down the slope was yet another illustration of the villagers' peculiarity and simplicity which he could capture on his camera. The subjects were asked to perform that which was familiar to them. Denfield turned it into a spectacle through his request for repetition, a repetition that was extended to the photographs. In both photographs, Denfield had captured the scenes from the bottom of the hill, while the running took place towards his left. On close inspection, though, in the photograph where subjects run uphill, the photographer had moved uphill a bit as well in that his lens covered a wider view of the huts and a narrower one of the hill.

When viewing the British Museum collection holistically, the photographs of men sliding down appears prior to its counterpart, wherein the latter is placed adjacently. This organisation constructs the photographer as a non-intrusive force in the scene by creating the impression that subjects first slid down before coming up, as logical reasoning would suggest. In other words, this positions the photographer as a detached observer who simply arrested a fleeting moment without mediating it. However, given that Denfield requested a repetition of the sliding down, the photograph of subjects running up was likely taken first. Yet, such an arrangement in the collection points towards Denfield's mediation more explicitly. As Edwards argues, the past is projected actively into the present by the nature of the photographs itself and the act of looking<sup>164</sup>. Therefore, in looking at the particular placement of these photographs we are given a familiar ethnographic narrative whereby the subjects, it is suggested, are a primitive people. After all, the subjects appear animal-like as they slide down. They move as a collective as though they are a herd. At another glance, they appear child-like as though lacking the rationality and self-control of adults. Sliding down appears as a form of play rather than a practical means of travel. Moreover, attention is drawn to the lack of modern technology for transportation. This too, constructs the villagers as an isolated and backward group.

Like his predecessors, Denfield turned his attention towards various aspects of socio-cultural life of the groups under study from which the sense of backwardness would be ascertained. In a manner reminiscent of Mockeler-Ferryman's characterization of Fulani housing structure,

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<sup>164</sup> E. Edwards, 'Photography and the performance of History', *Kronos: Southern African Histories*, 27, Special Issue Visual History (2001), p 18.

Denfield too characterized the pagan tribes partly in relation to this aspect. He was struck firstly by the densely built huts when he wrote:

The need for protection against invaders has undoubtedly been the primary consideration in the choosing of a site for a pagan village, and positions which are easily defended are those selected. Most of them I found situated on tops of hills on the rock face of the escarpment or on the upper surface of gigantic jutting rocks, whose sides were precipitous, that there existed but one possible approach. Where villages were situated in forest clearings, and thus more vulnerable to attack, defensive circular walls of mud or stone had been built. Everywhere dense hedges of cactus line the village approaches and give additional protection... At first glance the number of huts in their villages appear surprisingly excessive but very few of them are used for sleeping purposes, and as the pagan has to be 'self-contained' the majority serve as stores for household utensils, ashes and beer containers, other being used as kitchens, for corn pounding, for housing all their live stock and for recreational purposes<sup>165</sup>.



Fig. 11



Fig. 12

These observations translated to visual depiction. This can be noted in his two photographs both titled 'Nigeria, elevated view of Miya village with circular thatched-roof buildings'. Both are photographs of the exact same visual field of huts in close proximity and densely constructed (Fig. 11 & 12). These two images also point towards Denfield's movements albeit in different terms. Both are photographs of the exact same visual field. They are taken from an elevated angle on top of a hill, creating a panoramic view of the village. There are, however, slight variations in focal length as one shows a closer proximity to the huts, while another, more distant, includes an adult male sitting on a rock on the hill in the foreground looking at the valley of huts. I imagine Denfield moved a few steps to incorporate the subject who becomes part of the landscape of rocks, huts and trees. Yet his position on the rocks is suggestive of Denfield's own occupation on the hill as he too stood back and gazed upon the

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<sup>165</sup>J. Denfield, 'The practical pagan', *The Geographical Magazine*, 1, 3 (1947), 74-79.

village. While he did not include himself in the frame, perhaps this unknown subject's position can be read tentatively as a projection of Denfield's own experiences as an outsider standing detached from village life. Moreover, the density of huts create a mystical effect, a sense of the unknown within the village in its pathways and within its huts that Denfield was not part of. This is suggestive of the 'dense hedges of cactus line' that he wrote about. Moreover, even though Denfield perhaps shifted physical positions to contain the village in his frame more effectively, the photographs themselves suggest an expansiveness of the village that is greater than the frame suggests. In both photographs parts of the landscape are cut off, pointing towards a sense of unrestraint.

When creating other images he situated himself within the compound to provide an 'internal' view. One example is the photograph titled 'Nigeria, inside a Gwari compound' (Fig. 13). The image depicts the interior of a compound of huts, focusing on two huts and the passageway between them. The photograph has an almost gothic effect, as the centre of the photograph is almost completely dark, while on either side are the two huts, whose sides have been cut off from the camera lens, and whose large and solid presence in the image contrast with the dark nebulous interior that is suggestively devoid of solid matter. We can map out the passageway in the centre between the huts indicating perspective and extending towards the background. On the left side of the hut in the foreground are stones that create an illusion of a pathway, extending towards the centre and thus adding perspectival depth. We can therefore imagine beyond this space is another hut or compound, but these are suggested rather than clearly depicted.



Fig. 13

The dark centre of the image is also a contrast to the clearly visible white marks in the foreground, demarcating graves, which in turn add weight to the photograph. It is as though death is a solid presence that can be visibly demarcated. That is to say, the white marks mark the distinction where death resides, the boundaries of where the deceased reside from the rest of the living space. Death is perhaps the ultimate form of a boundary. Yet the inclusion of the white marks of death alongside lived spaces minimizes this, suggesting a more porous boundary between life and death. In the frame, while the white marks stand out, they are also naturalized in the foreground as they are depicted as part of the compound landscape by being contained in the same frame. Marked on the flat plane on the ground, they represent finality, a reality that can be contained on the ground, whilst the dark living space in the centre is not so easily contained as Denfield did not point his camera towards it.

As with the photograph above of men crossing a river, parts of the objects depicted in the image are cut off from the frame. Arguably, a complete inclusion of objects in the frame suggests a stronger sense of containment, much like colonial exhibitions whereby 'native' subjects had to perform particular stereotypical racial identities literally within the confines of specific places. Similarly, in this image, the attention is drawn towards particular objects without completely isolating them from the surrounding invisible context of which they are part. We see in the image a patch of grass on the left not clearly demarcated and in the background are tree tops against the sky backdrop. However, the 'pre-existing' reality implicit in the image is perhaps not always so clearly delineable in that one can not necessarily imagine with certainty what lies outside the confines of the frame. Much like the dark centre there are various possibilities. Moreover, some parts of the print remain hazy, perhaps partly due to the printing process. In the foreground parts of the markings on the grave and grass look obscure, an effect that arguably undercuts a rigid anthropological enterprise.

Another photograph that depicts a glimpse into the compounds is the photograph described as 'Nigeria, scene inside Tal compound' which is a depiction of a group of youth who lean against one hut (Fig 14). Through positioning himself on one side of the compound Denfield was able to capture them as a constituting part of the compound and thus presented the scene as 'typical', that is, as one that an outsider could expect to be unchanging. Here the viewer is taken inside the compound where the largely nude bodies are not isolated from their surroundings but are framed as part of the rural setting. With their minimal bodily adornments they resemble the simple architecture of the huts, particularly as they sit against

one hut, while facing another, thus forming not only a part of the ‘compound scene’ but in some ways become like the compound itself. By depicting the subjects in three quarter length, Denfield maintained his distance from the scene, as though to offer an unmediated vista. We are led to start looking at the foreground where the greatest light is, and where the presence of bodies is most concentrated, and then move to the background where both the exposure of bodies and light recedes to such an extent that one child’s face is indiscernible.



Fig. 14

Such perspectival depth reinforces the notion of the scene as cipher or representation of ‘something else’ that lies outside the frame as the image extends in the foreground to a space we have no access to. Instead we imagine what else constitutes the compound based on the selected fragments. This depth is accentuated by the hole in the wall of the hut which the subjects face. This is an indistinct hole in that the contents of hut are also, like the child’s face, indiscernible. If we pay attention to the subjects individually, we are once again confronted with limits of the kind of knowledge that can be discerned if we view the scene as typical of Tal village life. For one thing, the woman on the left whose frame is most dominant looks solemnly outside the frame, with hands carefully placed between her thighs, suggesting an awareness of Denfield’s presence. The subject next to her has her hands placed on her chin with one arm across her torso in contemplation. Another towards the back also gazes outside the frame while she leans stiffly against the hut. On close inspection, one notices a pair of legs protruding towards the back, although the subject to whom they belong are shielded, not unlike the subject on the extreme left whose torso is hidden by the bulging rock in the foreground, thereby revealing only her face and legs. We are thus limited about the kinds of



conclusions we can draw despite the depth of perspective provided. Instead the image itself asks us to re-insert the photographer's presence back in the frame, as part of that very 'scene in Tal compound'.

A sense of 'primitiveness' in relation to the compounds is probably most effectively reinforced in two similar photographs with descriptions 'Nigeria, adult male crawling out of small entrance/exit in low, circular thatched-roof building. Wearing hat, strap across shoulders' (Fig. 15) and 'Nigeria, adult male crawling out of small entrance/exit in low, circular thatched-roof building. Wearing head-band'. Both are images of male subjects crawling out of a hut on knees, possibly modeled by Denfield for the 'unusualness' of the scenario. Denfield zoomed in on a particular corner as he photographed from the right angle capturing the subjects' whole body in close proximity. I imagine, for one thing, that Denfield and his two subjects occupied different planes: the photographs were taken from an elevated viewpoint, thus Denfield likely stood some short distance away, while the subjects paused in anticipation on the ground by the door. Moreover, Denfield had more room to move while the subjects crawled out in an animal fashion on their knees, echoing colonial discourses that locate 'natives' in nature. In this sense, they are comparable to the men from the Miya village that slid down rocks for Denfield. And as had been the case with the latter, these two photographs point to the 'lack' in western forms of technology thereby reinforcing their 'primitive' status.



Fig. 15



Fig. 16

The photographs simultaneously point to movement away from the small tight entrance that frames the subjects as well as being framed by the camera as the photographer shoots. Yet, both subjects are in the process of *crawling* out, hinting at movement even as they remain still enough for Denfield. This suggests the possibility of moving away from confines of

either frames which they are part of. The barriers imposed by the photographer are accentuated also by the tight framing of the photograph. Denfield zoomed in on a particular corner as he photographed from the right angle capturing the subjects' whole bodies in close proximity. Moreover, a significant portion of huts in both images is not included in the frame, thereby tightening it and creating a sense of confinement.

A similar effect is notable in the photograph with the description 'Nigeria, head and shoulders of Kadara adult male emerging from hole in ground, an "underground room"' (Fig. 16). Like the two photographs above, this too is a tightly framed photograph that captures the head and shoulders of the male subject as he peers out of a hole from the ground. The tightening of the frame is reinforced by the elevated position from which the scenario was captured, that is, in close proximity to the subject thereby framing him in a similar fashion to the tight hole. Arguably, this accentuates the sense in which the scenario is unusual or exotic in ways that place the native in nature, as the subject has become part of the ground. In his notes, Denfield did compile brief information about such holes stating that during dry seasons the dust-laden wind, the Harmattan, blows across the plateau and prevents any straw industry from being carried out in the open thus "To overcome this difficulty, the people of the Kadara tribe build themselves underground rooms. Sufficient light enters from above, and they are able to carry on with the labour undisturbed"<sup>166</sup>.

Notably, Denfield provided such a description with an authorial voice that legitimized his observations. Yet, when one re-looks at the image, this is partly undercut. For one thing, the subject's face in Fig. 16 has an intense expression that points towards an encroachment of such a space. Arguably Denfield imposed his presence by literally standing above the subject and thus placing the latter in a more vulnerable position. This may relate to Denfield's relationship with his photographic subjects. He occupied a public role as a British military doctor who, as a photographer, also made public various aspects of everyday life of groups invisible to the west. Though he remained an outsider in such a context, he was able to exercise power in varying degrees.

Like his predecessors, Denfield also turned to rituals in a manner that exoticised the subjects under study. According to Lutz and Collins, the emphasis on rituals in the ethnographic tradition of images of the non-western world reflects the generation of the anthropologist Boas that argued that "ritual contained distilled history and cultural wisdom, that it was the

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<sup>166</sup> Denfield, 'The Practical Pagan', p 77.

most conservative and thus the most meaningful remnant of culture”<sup>167</sup>. For Denfield these remnants of culture could be discerned in dance when he narrated:

I asked the chief of the Kaleri whether he would be so kind as to put on a war dance for me. He did, and it was the most breathtaking affair. He went into his ju-ju hut and beat tribal drums. Immediately the rhythm was repeated on other drums in the district and all the women left what they were doing and took their shelter in their huts. They didn’t even stop to collect their children. Then a group of men appeared with their long antelope horns and called the warriors to assemble for the dance. You could hear them coming from all parts of the hills, the same chant becoming louder and louder, warriors all dressed in their war paint, with throwing clubs, daggers and poison tipped arrows provided me with one of the most thrilling spectacles I shall always remember (sic.)<sup>168</sup>.



Fig. 17

One photograph that resulted from the myriad of sights that Denfield ‘witnessed’ is ‘Nigeria, frontal half-length portrait of Kaleri adult male at war dance’. In the photograph the male subject holds a stick in one hand and feathers in another, with the intention of displaying them while he looks away from the camera to his left side (Fig. 17). It is a clearly staged photograph, reminiscent of Pinney’s study of Sergeant William Crooke’s photographic studies of caste in late 19<sup>th</sup> century India<sup>169</sup>. In his photographs, his subjects hold up objects identified with particular groupings. Yet in the act of holding up, Pinney argues, they are destabilising certainty that they can be easily recognised as that grouping through their

<sup>167</sup> Lutz & Collins, ‘*Reading National Geographic*’, p 91.

<sup>168</sup> DC, Denfield, ‘The story behind the pictures’, sheet 5.

<sup>169</sup> C. Pinney, ‘Underneath the Banyan Tree: William Crooke and Photographic Depictions of Caste’, in E. Edwards, ed., *Anthropology and Photography 1860-1920*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 165-173.

bodies<sup>170</sup>. In Denfield's photograph, the subject looks away from the camera, suggesting a distancing from the exercise. He is simply providing what the photographer wants, that is, performing a particular role that would render him a representation of a particular cultural act: the war dance. In other photographs, however, Denfield attempted to arrest the performance itself. He wrote:

Nothing is more exciting to witness than their animated dances, in which they all delight. Recording these was a thrill I shall never forget. Here they would dress up in their gaudy and sometimes terrifying costumes, produce their weapons of warfare and many of their weird objects of fetish, and perform the most rhythmical, intricate and perfectly timed steps to the accompaniment of all manner of drums of varying pitch. Unfortunately, like the majority of their ceremonies these took place towards sunset, which occurs with extraordinary rapidity, so that I had to take as many scenes as I could in a very short time. It was on these occasions that I found high speed film indispensable for the fast-fading light<sup>171</sup>.

Seemingly 'native dances' offered a theatricality and exhibitionism at a greater degree than any other scenario. Their correlation to colonial discourse perhaps can be read partly in the nature of dance itself. Dance marks a departure from the ordinary flow of time but in its own rhythm it also complements time, as dancers move in particular circular and fluid patterns that both resemble ordinary mobility and transcend it. In other words through capturing dance scenes, the photographer can mark the ethnic groupings as intensely exotic but still a part of the human race. Two examples of a dance scene include the photographs 'Nigeria, large group of adult females dancing outdoors' and 'Nigeria, small group of adult females dancing outdoors'. The two photographs depict the same dance scenario but from different angles and were selected by Denfield to represent the 'Kaleri tribe'. One portrays a density of bodies to which Denfield moved close as though he was part of the performance, while the other was taken further away distanced from the performers. As in the case of previous photographs, Denfield presented here selected aspects of the dance spectacle which were to be read metonymically for ethnographic purposes (Fig. 18 & 19). Yet the variation of angles of the same performance also hints at the difficulty of capturing the scene comprehensively.

Denfield did note these technical difficulties stating:

During the dance I wanted to roll a large piece of rock to a more advantageous position for me to stand on and get a better angle. But I just couldn't move it. One warrior with enormous biceps realizing what I was trying to do, just lifted it up this rock, which must

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid p 168.

<sup>171</sup> DC, Denfield, 'Photographing Northern Nigeria', p 2.

have weighed about three hundredweights and put it down where required (sic.). Then he lifted me up and put me on the rock<sup>172</sup>.



Fig. 18



Fig. 19

This suggests that while the chief temptation when looking at a single photograph may be to read it in terms of its representivity, looking at the collection as a whole hints at the impossibility of being able to do this.

In addition to dance, visual markers of religion are also included in the collection to image rituals. This is illustrated in three of his photographs respectively described as ‘Nigeria, full length portrait of two adult males (?) wearing masquerade costumes’ (Fig.20) , ‘Nigeria frontal full-length portrait of adult male wearing fringed masquerade costume for “war dance”’ (Fig. 22) and ‘Nigeria front head and shoulders portrait of adult male wearing fringed costume for “war dance”’ (Fig. 21). All three photographs are said to be representations of members of the Dodo. In the first, subjects are depicted while walking, with heads bowed, displaying the full regalia. The last two are photographs of the same subject taken from different positions, as one is a full length while in another Denfield is in closer proximity to display the upper body and details of the costume. The ‘Dodo sect’ was one of the aspects of social life which fascinated Denfield, and which he attempted to document. In his notes he gathered only this brief description:

Among the pagan tribes there exists a Dodo cult. Here men dress up in fearsome fashion to represent ancestral deity. The Dodo not only plays an important part in the initiation rites and other tribal ceremonies but is used in maintaining the discipline of the women and children who are taught to fear him. At night, disguising his voice, the Dodo knocks on the wall of the house of any female wrong-doer warning her of her sins, and threatening

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<sup>172</sup> DC, Denfield, ‘The story behind the pictures’, sheet 5.

punishment should they not cease. In such a manner the good behavior of the women folk is ensured<sup>173</sup>.



Fig. 20



Fig. 21



Fig. 22

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<sup>173</sup> Denfield, 'The Practical Pagan', p 78.

This passage suggests that Denfield saw the Dodo sect in terms of its reason and functionality in relation to the control of women. He appeared to disregard the male performers as necessarily 'spiritual' beings, seeing them as men who simply 'disguise' their voices at night. Seemingly, he distanced himself from its mythological associations by regarding it as 'their' (that is, pagan) religion. Denfield's positioning of himself as logical is notable in his disregard of the Dodo as particularly mythical. In other words, he insisted on an empirical perspective. Similarly in the treatment of his photographic subjects, he attempted to capture, from different angles, the 'real' about them. One sees this in the second and third photographs of the same subject, captured from different angles as though to fully contain the scenario. Similarly, in the first photograph, the viewer can gaze at the subjects as they move from a detached angle towards the left. Arguably, this points towards applying a realist paradigm mediated by technology as a means of generating empirical knowledge about that which is unfamiliar to the western viewer, a paradigm that defies the 'irrational' Dodo practice.

Despite directing his gaze towards various socio-cultural aspects, it is the body that emerges as probably the most significant marker of difference in the collection. Arguably, Denfield's medical background influenced his photographic work in his selection of the body as the central marker of primitiveness, as well as in his microscopic empirically detailed approach to representing his subjects. This is indicated in these two accounts of photographing the 'African body':

In recording the detail of dark-skinned subjects, Panchromatic film is essential. The chief temptation is to give too short an exposure. In taking portraits, the almost overhead sun could on occasions give extremely pleasing results, but the subjects had to be chosen very carefully. Those with very prominent foreheads were unsuitable, as the shades' cast tended to occlude all the details of the eyes. It was better in these cases to wait till the late afternoon, when the sun was lower in the sky and the resulting shadows less intense. Most of my portraits were taken from a slightly low view point against the sky to avoid all distracting features. The mud walls of their huts served as an ideal background for this purpose<sup>174</sup>.

Elsewhere he wrote:

From a photographic point of view the paucity of manufactured clothing among the primitive races is an advantage, for among the Muslim tribes the men wear loosely fitting white gowns- a most sensible attire in these latitudes, but the exposure necessary to bring out the features of their black skins produces negatives which are excessively dense in the highlights. To minimize such resulting contrast, I endeavored where possible to choose

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<sup>174</sup> DC, Denfield, 'Photographing Northern Nigeria'.

subjects whose white gowns were heavily striped with darker colours, or richly embroidered with red and green silk. Fortunately the women among them rarely wore white; their cotton coverings were of darker shades, usually deep blue<sup>175</sup>.

These descriptions resonate strongly with those of nineteenth and early twentieth century travel writers. Frizot has argued that there is a close relationship between photography and ethnography because the body is seen to reveal something. It is simultaneously the last resort and the last obstacle, ‘the point where a rupture is always possible in the search for knowledge, [and] the barrier at which looking generally stops’.<sup>176</sup>

One of the various ways through which the body was deployed as a marker of difference in the collections was through his studies of women made to represent different tribes. The deployment of the black female body (and more widely the non Euramerican female) as a marker of culture or difference in colonial and post-colonial visual culture has been well documented<sup>177</sup>. In the context of ethnography Hayes points out that women were especially marked out for photography because their bodily adornment, particularly hairstyles, carried more markers of culture and ‘tribal’ differentiation, which assisted colonials to classify and stabilise groups. Contrary to their absence in documentary archives, this is where women are given high-profile visibility and are visually marked as bearers of the culture<sup>178</sup>. Lutz and Collins argue that the image of the naked black woman plays a central role in allowing the *art* of photography to exist silently beneath a scientific agenda, and thus promotes one’s project of studying pagans as one of both beauty and truth<sup>179</sup>. One might recall, after all, that Denfield aimed to combine anthropology with aesthetic practice. The authors also note that these depictions become another means through which black women are construed as backward in that it is assumed white women have acquired modesty along with other characteristics of civilisation thus “black women remain backward on this scale, not

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<sup>175</sup> DC, Denfield, ‘In Northern Nigeria’, p 397.

<sup>176</sup> M Frizot, ‘Body of evidence: the ethnography of difference’, in M. Frizot, ed., *A New History of Photography* (Köln: Konemann, 1998), p 271.

<sup>177</sup> See for example L. Rizzo, ‘A Glance into the Camera: Gendered Visions of Historical Photographs in Kaoko (North-Western Namibia)’ *Gender and History*, 17, 3 (2005), 682-713; R.J. De Roo, ‘Colonial collecting: French women and Algerian cartes postales’, in E.M. Hight & G.D. Sampson, *Colonial Photography: Imagining Race and Placem*, (London, Routledge, 2002), pp.159-171; E.M Hight, ‘The many lives of Beato’s ‘beauties’, in E.M. Hight & G.D. Sampson, *Colonial Photography: Imagining Race and Placem*, (London, Routledge, 2002).

<sup>178</sup> Hayes, ‘Northern Exposures’, p 178.

<sup>179</sup> Lutz & Collins, *Reading National Geographic*, p116.



conscious of the embarrassment they should feel at their nakedness” and are in other words, stigmatised because of this ease<sup>180</sup>.

Yet, a close reading of Denfield’s photographs also offers a framework beyond seeing them as simple abstract representations typical in a particular visual economy or products of hidden ideological forces in which Denfield was a part. The photograph titled ‘Nigeria half length portrait of Tal adult female, frontal with head turned to side’ (sic.) helps to illustrate this. The woman in the photograph shows one side to the camera perhaps at the instruction of the photographer in order to display ‘scarification’ of her whole upper body- with the light falling on this part of the body, drawing attention to it. She has been photographed in a way that makes her body available for display and subsequent ethnographic readings. Her form reveals the scarification to be orderly, delicate and impressive thereby conflating femininity with the exotic. The orderly pattern of the scars to which our gaze is directed, also heightens tension in the frame and is reminiscent of Denfield’s control in the field (Fig. 23). Yet her expression of vulnerability (linked to evidence of her knees) also invites us to interrogate the experience of being photographed, thereby partly undercutting the photographic subjects’ atemporal representation. This instead draws our attention to that very moment in which the photograph was created.



Fig. 23

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid p 172.

Perhaps more so than any other photographic studies he undertook, Denfield's collection of nude females operated implicitly with a notion of depth similar to that articulated by Christopher Pinney, that is, with a sense that the surface of the photograph and in some ways, the subject, is a mirror to their internal selves<sup>181</sup>. That is, the female subjects were photographed to point out markers of primitiveness through the bare clothing and 'outdated' modes of marking 'tribal identity'. In this sense, scarification within ethnographic discourse is incredibly seductive as the scar patterns suggest order and readability or mapping as though they were a text that can illuminate hidden truths about the subjects.

However, if the body in the west marks the last frontier in the search for knowledge, these photographs point to simultaneously distancing oneself and searching for intimacy. As Mitchell argues, when the European visited the Middle East in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, he experienced a contradiction between the need to separate oneself from the (foreign) world and render it up as an object of representation, and the desire to lose oneself within this object-world and experience it directly. The European thus occupied a double-position as participant observer; and as though one were at an exhibition, that is, separate 'himself' from the object-world and observe it from a position that is invisible and set apart<sup>182</sup>. Mapping on the body allowed for this exhibitionary dynamic in that Denfield maintained his distance while impinging on that most intimate space.

Similar in effect is the photograph titled 'Nigeria, profile half-length portrait of Ron adult female with hand placed against tree or building'. The photograph is an example of an explicit form of modelling of the subject whose hand is placed on the tree carefully and deliberately, forming a contrast to the child on her back that sleeps 'naturally', less controlled and unaware of the exercise. The tree suggests structure and strength in its size, a contrast to her softer and feminine body. Visually, the subject forms a barrier between the tree and the child on her back. She is holding something that is difficult to discern, suggesting a high degree of control and perhaps tension. She does not look at any particular object, and instead her face indicates concentration and awareness of the photographer. The gestures of both hands are dramatic and temporary, as one imagines a release after being photographed. This

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<sup>181</sup> C. Pinney, 'Notes from the Surface of the Image: Photography, Post-colonialism and Vernacular Modernism' in C. Pinney and N. Peterson, eds., *Photography's Other Histories* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 202-220.

<sup>182</sup> T. Mitchell, 'Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order', in N. Dirks, ed., *Colonialism and Culture* (University of Michigan Press, 1992), pp 289-318.

gives the photograph a heightened energy that is accentuated by the contrary child whose own gesture of sleep indicates passivity (Fig. 24).



Fig. 24

This mapping of difference on the body is also indicated in Denfield's own compiled notes on scarification. In accounting for the 'practical' component of scarification he stated:

Most of the pagan tribes scarify their faces and sometimes their bodies. Many reasons have been assigned for this custom but whatever else may be the case at present day, its origin was not merely to beautify the body. It had many practical applications. As a form of tribal recognition it prevented the loss of identity among its members who were sold into or escaped from slavery. It also strengthened tribal bondage. Certain marks and designs indicated a tribal status...Thus the unsightly discs inserted in the lips of the women of the Zeranda and Zul tribes are relics of the days when, by such disfigurement, they sought to discourage their war-like neighbours from swooping down and carrying them off<sup>183</sup>.

Denfield translated this ethnographic account to the photographic medium. An example is the photograph with inscription 'Tribes of the Plateau (Pankshin Division)...Sura women'. It is a three-quarter portrait of a young woman taken from a low angle, with the sky and some vegetation forming a hazy background. Her body is turned to the left, while she looks forward, thereby allowing the photographer to effectively display her body, particularly the scarification across her chest and shoulders, her neck and arm bracelets and the bare minimum cloth around her hips. This particular angle has the effect of representing the

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<sup>183</sup> DC, Denfield, 'The Practical Pagan', p 5.

subject as though on display or stage as our view is literally averted from our eye level, turning upwards, thereby constituting the subject as a spectacle (Fig. 25). This is also achieved in the photograph ‘Nigeria, profile torso portrait of adult female with short hair style’ (Fig. 26). Once again Denfield’s subject, displaying her unclothed torso, is turned to the left while posing motionless with a pot on her head.



Fig. 25



Fig. 26

Like scarification, Denfield saw this exercise as intrinsically African and thus useful to document photographically. Such an attitude is indicated in his own compiled notes:

Every tribe has its own method of carrying loads. Nearly all African tribes are head carriers, and I remember my own personal boy bringing me a small bottle of ink balanced on his head...The Kikuyu women of East Africa have loads suspended on their backs by a broad leather band passing over the front of their foreheads, and it is extraordinary, these people will not carry loads in any other but their own traditional manner...I remember a little story about a European who felt very sorry for a Native and gave him a wheel barrow to relieve the heavy burden carried on his head. It was accepted with many thanks, but you can imagine the surprise of [the] European when next he saw the Native, he was negotiating a rocky path, with his goods inside the wheelbarrow and the whole balancing on his head!<sup>184</sup>

Note again the naturalisation of African labour as well as the construction of such a task as an object of anthropological inquiry. The inclusion of the above photograph thus fit with the

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<sup>184</sup> DC, Denfield, ‘The Story behind the Pictures’, sheet no.2.

ethnographic framework by which Denfield operated, displaying aspects of material culture while employing the familiar trope of the nude black female. As with the 'Sura woman' we view from her from a reclined perspective, constructing her as an object of difference to gazed. Moreover, the hazy sky drop features again in the background, averting our gaze from intrusive elements and instead zooming in on the central figure in the frame, the female subject. In the latter photograph, while the pot may be a prop for ethnographic effect, this act is also a dramatic, temporary exercise, which, when coupled with the subject's stillness and deliberation, gives the photograph a heightened energy. It also accentuates the manner in which the subject is made to perform a particular racial and ethnic role. Yet, perhaps the photograph also simultaneously points towards the ways in which such roles are carefully rehearsed and performative in that balancing the pot does, as Denfield himself noted, require control and extensive skill. The effect is similar with the representation of the scarification of the 'Sura woman'. The orderly pattern of the scars to which our gaze is directed, also heightens tension in the frame and is reminiscent of Denfield's control in the field.

Another example is the photograph 'three quarter length of pregnant Kaleri young woman'. The image is of a young woman at the centre of the photograph, whose body is slightly turned to one side thus displaying her naked frame up to her calves as well as her neck, waist and head adornment (Fig. 27). In his account of photographing in Northern Nigeria, Denfield explained his fascination with those identified as Kaleri stating:

One of the most primitive, interesting and virile tribes I visited were the Kaleri. Owing to the tempestuous and warlike nature of the Kaleri their country had until recently been closed to Europeans. They were all completely naked, and of savage appearance, with amazing physique and supple skins<sup>185</sup>.

The inclusion of this particular subject in his photographic studies was to thus deliberately display these signs of primitiveness. The background is decontextualized as the grass and trees are hazy, thereby drawing much attention to her physique. In his use of light, Denfield managed to let her skin shine brilliantly. With the body slightly turned, we are given a realistic or objective perspective of her body as this gesture allows for a multi-dimensional view. This is effective for Denfield's overall objective of providing a glimpse into the 'pagan village' for the (largely) European audience. The photograph depicts the body, in other words, as though it is available to be looked at. This availability is accentuated by the left arm

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<sup>185</sup> DC, Denfield, 'The Story Behind the Pictures', sheet 5.

tucked at the back of the body, as though to avoid concealing the frame, in a fashion reminiscent of the subject in 'Ron adult female' who too, places her hands carefully at her back to display the scarification on her torso effectively. The realism is also partly created by her looking away from the camera, as though the viewer has stumbled or 'discovered' the scene, thereby downplaying the photographer's involvement in the construction of the scene.



Fig. 27

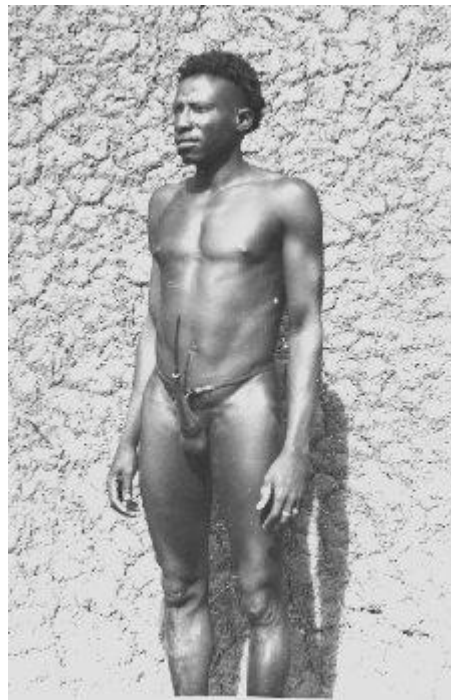


Fig. 28

Though it is largely women's bodies that dominate the collection, some attention is also drawn to the nudity of males. The photograph Denfield captioned 'Nigeria,  $\frac{3}{4}$  profile,  $\frac{1}{2}$  length portrait of Kaleri adult male wearing penis cover' is but one example. In the photograph the male subject stands against a flat mud wall background looking away from the camera, thus drawing our attention to his body. According to Lutz and Collins photographs whose surroundings are not clearly discernable force attention to the lines, shapes and colour of the bodies themselves, rather than providing the context in which the bodies appear<sup>186</sup>. Likewise, in this particular photograph, our attention is easily drawn to every contour of his body, from his barely covered groin to his face that is tight in expression as though pausing for the photographer to take the shot (Fig. 28).

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<sup>186</sup> Lutz & Collins, *Reading National Geographic*, p 163.

Looking at this collection that emphasises the body, I am reminded of the exhibitionary mode of the market-place as articulated by Denfield. Each subject, including the above male subject standing against the mud wall, has been posed in a manner that suggests availability. One's body has been earmarked by the photographer for consumption by the western reader visually in a manner that is comparable to the description of the market-place as a place with "a great profusion of goods, all laid out individually on the ground"<sup>187</sup>. The market place is of course, a place of exchange of goods and a reading of these images registers this tension of give-and-take between the photographer and subject and also the viewer. It also, then, interestingly, moves the image into the visual economy and the circulation and natural realness of these images in the world. It also constructs the image as existing within a market – but because it is 'real' (in terms of being seen as representational/ indexical of life) - it serves to naturalise/ or make real, the market as a natural, invisible mechanism for change and progress.

One might recall Denfield's attempts to negotiate access by making his would-be subjects look through the view-finder or the ceremonious encounters with chiefs for permission and even paying individuals to be posed. Underpinning these accounts were also the colonial relations of which the parties are a part, thus Denfield may have had to address the chief as a noble subject but he (Denfield) was ultimately a citizen of Empire who was able to command men to slide down and run up a hill or be granted requests for the staging of dances. Likewise the tension discernible in many of the subjects in the photographs suggests an even greater exchange of visual repression between the photographer and subjects than Denfield's notes would suggest. Thus as one uncomfortably peruses the myriad of images of nude 'pagan' bodies that predominate, one is challenged to note homologies with the market-place and consider the ways that its visual exchanges and materialities, too, invite an interrogation on the ways they have functioned as mediators in the construction of knowledge about race and 'primitiveness'.

## **Conclusion**

In 1946 Denfield left Nigeria and went back to England. His stay, however, would be short-lived in that by 1947 he immigrated to South Africa and settled in East London where his career in photography would flourish in divergent but related ways. During his brief return to England, Denfield quickly circulated his photographs in popular press including the

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<sup>187</sup> Denfield, 'In Northern Nigeria', p 395.

*Illustrated London Times* and *Pictorial Education* thus making his ‘discovery’ known to the west<sup>188</sup>. Moreover, he donated 147 of his photographs to the British Museum thereby concretising his contribution and in some ways, fulfilling more effectively his desire to ‘salvage’ the pagans through the camera. After all, the collection continues to be available in the Museum. In his arrival in Nigeria, Denfield conformed to what Krautwurst, via Lohmeyer, describes as a European tradition at the beginning of the twentieth that compelled travellers to feel morally obligated to buy a camera and learn its operations whenever one travelled to Africa<sup>189</sup>. This obligation seemed to be tied to a convention of recording one’s personal history by focusing on that which the photographer deemed extraordinary and picturesque. Yet, it is more than simply the convention of photographing to which Denfield adhered but the particular modes through which Africans had been represented in both image and word. His photographs speak to a longer tradition of mapping colonised subjects through various anatomical and socio-cultural aspects, a tradition that trickled right down to the ‘little army pamphlet’.

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<sup>188</sup> *The Illustrated London News*, 10 January 1948; *Pictorial Education*, September 1947; *Pictorial Education*, January 1948.

<sup>189</sup> U. Krautwurst, ‘The Joy of looking: early German anthropology, photography and audience formation’. In A. Hoffman, *What we see: reconsidering an anthropometric collection from Southern Africa: Images, Voices, Versioning* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2009).



## Chapter 2: Photography of Anthropology

### Introduction

When Denfield arrived in South Africa in 1947 he continued his medical career while simultaneously pointing his camera towards the ‘native scene’. No longer located in an environment with ‘pagans’ who were seemingly removed from modernity, he did however, continue to construct the ‘African native’ photographically. Although he was located in East London, he did much of such work in Basutoland which remained a British Protectorate and ‘native reserve’ at the time. However, he moved away from concerns about preserving ‘disappearing tribes’ towards constructing picturesque scenarios that celebrated the ‘simplicity’ and ‘beauty’ of the native reserve. Therefore, he no longer practiced photography as an anthropologist that necessarily produced instructive texts but as an ‘artist’ that ‘celebrated’ the splendour of the natural surroundings. Yet I argue in the chapter that the shift -from anthropological work to celebratory picturesque work- marked a shift from performing *as* an anthropologist to constructing photographs that in turn *image* Anthropology through his reliance on the various aspects of ‘native life’ and representing them pictorially. That is to say, while not offering strictly anthropological ‘data’, through the picturesque one can read some of the discipline’s ‘essences’. This is a shift in other words, that marks an emergence of photography *of* Anthropology. I begin by paying attention to a key component that has marked the discipline’s distinction: fieldwork. While the bulk of the chapter focuses on the photography he undertook while located in South Africa, that is, through Basutoland, I begin by revisiting the field expeditions through Nigeria. I then proceed to his ‘pilgrimages’ in Basutoland, paying attention to the intersection between the written accounts of the field and his photographs.

### Expeditions through Nigeria

In one of Denfield’s earliest articles titled ‘Recording Life in Nigeria’ published in *Photography* is a photograph of Denfield placed on the right corner of the first page<sup>190</sup> (Fig. 29). It contains no caption except for an announcement of Denfield’s arrival back in England and exhibition of photographs taken in Nigeria. While in the rest of the article Denfield narrated his experiences of recording life in northern Nigeria and provided a spread of eight

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<sup>190</sup> J. Denfield, ‘Recording Life in Nigeria’, *Photography*, November/December (1946), 21-23.

photographs to supplement his account<sup>191</sup>, we are not to read this particular photograph as an ethnographic image but rather as a portrait of a prolific British citizen-subject. In the half-length image Denfield stands next to an unnamed figure. Both are shirtless: a fact that can be accounted for by the temperature of the tropics. The latter points to something outside the frame as they both gaze intently at something that occupies them. While the unnamed figure holds a stick with his left hand in a relaxed gesture, Denfield has both hands in his pockets, relaxed but also suggesting reservation as well as authority as though he does not need to gesture. The former performs the role of the knowledgeable dweller in his gesture of pointing, that is, one who is familiar with this environment to the foreign traveller who remains a curious but detached observer. As Denfield poses with the unnamed subject, the photograph also suggests a now-familiar scenario of anthropological fieldwork and its adjunct 'native guides'. It resonates with more widely known photographs that have come to image anthropological fieldwork such as one of Margaret Mead leaning intently towards a Balinese mother and baby during her research in the late 1930s, or the earlier image of Malinowski's tent pitched in the midst of a Trobriand village in the second decade of the twentieth century<sup>192</sup>. While the rest of the article centres on the fruits of Denfield's labour in the field, this photograph is the only one that explicitly alludes to his presence in the field.



Fig. 29

Between 1915 and 1918 Bronislaw Malinowski set off for the Trobriand Islands after which he published *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* while located at the London School of

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<sup>191</sup> The photographs depict various aspects of life including housing structures, river sites, mountain views, tropical sunsets, female scarification .

<sup>192</sup> J.Clifford, *Routes: Travel and translation in the late twentieth century*, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997), p 54. It is worth noting, however, that while the two figures both prized fieldwork, Mead's studies on the Pacific Islands on adolescence and sexuality did mark a departure from Malinowski's more functionalist method. See for example, C.P. Kottak, *Anthropology: The exploration of human diversity* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991).

Economics. The book was a study on various aspects of social life of the Trobrianders from political leadership, to kinship, domestic arrangements and economics. Through the study, Malinowski advocated the methodology of fieldwork particularly the notion of participant observation. For Malinowski “it was essential to stay long enough in the field to become thoroughly acquainted with the local way of life and to be able to use the local vernacular of one’s working language”<sup>193</sup>. Thus by the 1930s, a new standard for ethnographic research had been set whereby the ethnographer would take part in the form of life of the collective under study “and without restricting attention to particular parts of the scene”<sup>194</sup>. Fieldwork became integral to the discipline to such an extent that Clifford argues “it continues to function as a rite of passage and marker of professionalism”<sup>195</sup>.

Positioned at the top of the article, the abovementioned photograph of Denfield and the unnamed figure highlights the centrality of the field in Denfield’s journeys through Nigeria through their gestures. Yet, as Michael de Certeau reminds us, space, and thus the ‘field’, is never ontologically given but rather discursively mapped and practiced corporeally<sup>196</sup>. To be constituted as a field, a particular locality needs to “be worked, turned into a discrete social space, by embodied practices of interactive travel”<sup>197</sup>. In Denfield’s voyages, the presence of ‘native guides’ was an integral part of this constitution. Arguably, the article’s overall layout, with its great emphasis on the final product of the ethnographic photographs and little attention to the process of production, is a microcosm of the treatment of the field and its various constituencies when Denfield’s work reached the public sphere. Here it is only Denfield’s agency that is taken into account and subsequently the various laborious tasks that form part and parcel of the photography expeditions are naturalised.

The use of ‘native assistants’ is a stock motif historically in field expeditions although their role has largely been marginalised while being referenced as field-hands, assistants or usually ‘boys’<sup>198</sup>. According to Shepherd, these habits of elision of effacement of labour are well-established in colonial archaeology in that “when the hand that holds the trowel is black, it is as though holes dig themselves and artefacts are removed, labelled and transported without

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<sup>193</sup> T. H. Eriksen, & F.S. Nielsen, *A history of anthropology* (Pluto Press: London, 2001), p 42.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid* p 43.

<sup>195</sup> Clifford, *Routes*, p 61.

<sup>196</sup> M. de Certeau, *The practice of Everyday Life* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1984).

<sup>197</sup> Clifford, *Routes*, p 54.

<sup>198</sup> N. Shepherd, “When the hand that touches the trowel is black’: Disciplinary practices of self-representation and the issue of ‘native’ labour in archaeology’, *Journal of Social Archaeology*, 3, 3 (2003), p 335.

human agency”<sup>199</sup>. He points out that by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the fusion of racist thoughts and ideas about ‘native’ labour was well underway, as Victorian society viewed Africans as a natural labouring class, suited to the dirty work of civilisation. This is evident in the aforementioned travel literature in the Denfield Library. Afterwards, with the decline of a completely subordinate proletariat at home, imperialism turned outwards for a pliable class<sup>200</sup>. In his study of John Goodwin’s archaeological expeditions on the continent in the 1930s and 1940, Shepherd points out that the detail in Goodwin’s letters speak of colonial relations at work, where, for example, he expresses concern regarding payment of his ‘boys’, theft, sharing a tooth glass with them, possible cannibalism, etc<sup>201</sup>. This translates to, amongst other things, a breezy paternalism towards his assistants as well as the recording of the expedition in an indirect manner in order for the leading figure to assert his authority.

However, more recent literature has attempted to ‘redeem’ field intermediaries by widening the scope of knowledge produced in the field. For example, in his study of German anthropologist Gustav Fritsch who took photographs of ‘natives’ of South Africa between 1863 and 1866, Bank highlights Fritsch’s dependence on various intermediaries during his expedition<sup>202</sup>. He points out that missionaries were significant facilitators given their close contact with Africans and knowledge of African culture. This is a theme that resurfaces in Denfield’s own travels wherein both photographers were often well received by missionaries in their locations, who offered not only knowledge and guidance but hospitality as well. Yet, even though the importance of intermediaries emerges in Fritsch’s photographic project, Bank also points out that he chose to efface it by adopting the more authoritative voice of the scientist in his anthropological study of 1872.

Elsewhere in his studies of anthropologists Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd, Bank challenges the notion that the interactions produced between the anthropologist and their Xam informants in their Mowbray home is “directly transmitted from the informants’ memories via the hands of the researchers onto the pages of notebooks, and encountered today simply as ‘voices from the past’”<sup>203</sup>. In piecing together a vivid sense of the texture of encounters between the researchers and their informants, Bank begins by taking account of the popular

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid p 340.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid p 347.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid p 343.

<sup>202</sup> A. Bank, ‘Anthropology and portrait photography: Gustav Fritsch’s Natives of South Africa’, *Kronos: Southern African Histories*, 27, Nov. (2001), pp 43-76.

<sup>203</sup> A. Bank, ‘From pictures to performance: early learning at the Hill’, *Kronos: Southern African Histories*, 28, Nov. (2002), p 71.

myth that the Xam informants lived in the garden of the home of the anthropologists. For Bank this myth is significant as it functions as a metaphor to separate conceptually the world of the house, site of the colonial culture of Bleek and Lloyd, and the natural world, site of huts and traditional stories<sup>204</sup>. However he argues that once we confront that the Xam informants did live in the same house as the researchers and shared in the same domestic arrangements, we can begin to appreciate the researchers' texts were produced "as a record of 'situated discourse', of complex changing communicative events"<sup>205</sup>. In other words, the researchers' body of work can be read against the context of everyday encounters that make up relationships between people sharing the same place. Bank points out how, for example, encounters between the researchers and their informants sometimes involved misunderstanding and, most of the time, negotiating and grappling, an image which challenges the notion of the texts produced as having a fixed aura<sup>206</sup>.

Sanjek challenges the notion of a fixed anthropologist-intermediary relationship by mapping the unfolding of the relationship<sup>207</sup>. Sanjek suggests six possible categories that outline the role of intermediaries in various stages and regions in anthropology: the 'informant', the 'native's point of view', 'the assistant', 'collaboration', 'decolonisation' and 'collaboration'. Each category loosely describes the nature of the relationship between the assistant and the anthropologist. Under Sanjek's characterisation Denfield's intermediaries would be termed 'assistants'. He is comparable to anthropologists from the 1930s who were influenced by Malinowski style of anthropology in his work whereby for the ethnographer it was numbers of persons in daily and ceremonial activities who became objects of observation and partners in conversation. Moreover, it became common to enlist and pay one local cultural guide as a member of the ethnographic team. This person might translate, introduce, negotiate, gather facts, and even conduct interviews and write field notes to facilitate the work of the professional ethnographer<sup>208</sup>.

Likewise, in her studies through Pondoland in the Eastern Cape in the early 1930s, Monica Wilson (herself a student of Malinowski) relied on various intermediaries for her doctoral thesis and publication of *Reaction to Conquest* in 1936. Bank notes the degrees of silences

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid p 71.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid .

<sup>206</sup> Ibid p 83.

<sup>207</sup>R. Sanjek, 'Anthropology's hidden colonialism: assistants and their ethnographers', *Anthropology Today*, 9, 2 (1993), pp.13-18.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid p 14.

regarding her dependence on black assistants<sup>209</sup>. For Bank, these silences in her published material generated a fiction of the author's 'ethnographic authority' in that in a context of the discipline in which cross-cultural negotiation was always complex and contingent, bolstering a sense of ethnographic authority often meant smoothing over complexity and suppressing one's sense of vulnerability or confusion. As he notes, in this era of Malinowski the authority of anthropological writers was premised on thorough immersion in an exotic culture and presupposed linguistic fluency. Thus, the native intermediary would be given little, if any, textual authority.

Notwithstanding the importance of such literature in broadening the scope of fieldwork relations, there is, arguably, the danger of overstating the power shared between the fieldworker and intermediaries as well as the extent to which the latter shaped the texts that were produced from such expedition, while also overlooking the degree to which the relationships between researcher and intermediaries were instrumental. My concern, on the other hand, is on the extent to which the fieldwork interactions mediated the kinds of images Denfield produced and the manner in which they in turn *visualise* anthropological discourse.

If one goes back to the aforementioned photograph, one banal but important point is that it is a photograph *of* Denfield rather than *by* Denfield. In the same article Denfield expressed his dependence on a fellow photographer in the tropics, Norman Hunter stating:

Film was difficult to obtain but I was most fortunate in making the acquaintance of a sympathetic photographer, Mr Norman Hunter, of the Sudan Interior Mission, to whom I shall always be deeply indebted for his assistance in supplying my needs and giving me invaluable information regarding the plateau<sup>210</sup>.

Norman Hunter likely took this particular photograph<sup>211</sup>. Elsewhere Denfield wrote about 'Mac' in a similar fashion:

I read all the available books about some of these tribes, and then I was determined to start a systematic record of their mode of life. But how...and then I met Mac. Mac, as I called him, was a young missionary, and was the only European in charge of a small mission station situated on the southern tip of the plateau. Every now and then he would [do] a little tour, about 100-150 miles on foot, visiting these tucked away tribes, making himself known, and putting out feelers. Here obviously was the very man I needed. Someone who

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<sup>209</sup>A. Bank, 'The 'intimate politics' of fieldwork: Monica Hunter and her African Assistants, Pondoland and Eastern Cape, 1931-1932', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 34, 3 (2008), 557-574.

<sup>210</sup> Denfield, 'Recording Life in Nigeria', p 21.

<sup>211</sup> There is nowhere else I have come across where Denfield mentions a fellow photographer in his expedition in Nigeria.

could teach me the ropes, instruct me on equipment and how to get things organised, and in order to get some experience in the ‘gentle art of trekking’ (sic.). I arranged to accompany him on one of these little tours. His mission station was at a place called Pankshin, and just off a dry season road, and so I had no difficulty in arriving there by a Jeep<sup>212</sup>.

Although there is some difficulty in establishing this, it is possible that Mac was in fact Norman Hunter (both figures, after all, were missionaries), and thus the photographer behind the above photograph. More importantly, Mac, the only European Denfield referred to in his texts on Nigeria, is the only intermediary to whom Denfield indicated his dependence. In the words above Mac was treated as an equal in the field, even a superior to an extent, by virtue of his greater familiarity with the villagers. Mac thus took on the role of a settler who guided the new arrival with whom he was affiliated by empire.

Mac’s occupation is perhaps worthy of reflection. Firstly, as a missionary worker he moved from village to village with the objective of converting residents. Denfield, in his expedition, imitated trekking as a *modus operandi* to capture ‘tucked away tribes’. The importance of trekking later emerged in his photographic work in Basutoland. It is worth recalling at this stage not only given its relevance to his expeditions in Nigeria but in its perpetuation of distance between the photographer and his subjects:

People have often asked ‘Where did you manage to see all this in South Africa- how did you manage to stumble across this peculiar scene or this unusual ceremony’. The answer is very simple. ‘I walked’. It’s amazing what one sees when one walks. There seems to be a great reluctance to walk more than what is absolutely necessary nowadays and some people become positively horrified on my suggesting that they leave the car and go for a walk. Some of the most beautiful and interesting parts of the Union are off the main road. Perhaps this is why they are so beautiful! It’s no use pretending that you can see the country if you stick to the main roads and you certainly won’t see anything of the picturesque Native life. I suggest too that besides walking you buy a camera, or if you have one take it with you when you’re walking. It’s amazing what you will see to photograph<sup>213</sup>.

The ‘walk’ was not only a practical form of travel through bush paths along the plateau but also arguably, perpetuated a form of photography oriented towards that which was distant, foreign and different. Although I pay attention to the exhibition of photographs taken in Basutoland in the following chapter, it is worthwhile noting the importance attached to trekking when the catalogue for the exhibition reads:

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<sup>212</sup> DC, Denfield, ‘The Story Behind the Pictures’, sheet no 2.

<sup>213</sup> DC, Denfield, untitled manuscript.

Basutoland is a small country. The only roads there are along a portion of its perimeter: no road traverses the territory from end to end. Four-fifths of the country fall within the mountains and so wild and rugged are these areas that travelling from one part of the country to another efficiently has to be done on horseback...Dr Joseph Denfield set to photograph the country and its people. He made three special visits to Basutoland during the last three years in order to trek into the interior. In his photographic travels he has ridden more than 4000 miles on horseback on narrow winding bridle paths in search of his pictures. He has roamed the high hills and mountains, journeyed through the river valleys and climbed down steep gorges in quest of beauty. He has visited places rarely seen by the European and has recorded the majestic scenery of the remote interior<sup>214</sup>.

Those 'natives' who are most remote from urban European spaces (or whites in South Africa), it was suggested, offered a hidden beauty, ready-made images waiting to be transformed into a photograph. Denfield encouraged would-be photographers to literally venture off the beaten path and to find that which lies outside one's everyday visual plane to photograph. For Denfield this was what was deemed photographable. Yet this excluded the urban areas on the periphery of the Union, that is, townships and ghettos. For Denfield, 'Native' life that lent itself to photography was construed specifically as a rural phenomenon. In this sense the 'trek' was significant also in the construction of 'Native photography' which I discuss in the following chapter. Let me return to his intermediaries in Nigeria.

Secondly, Mac's overall aim was to introduce Christianity and western modernity as a way of life to the 'pagan tribes' and challenge those aspects of social life considered un-Christian. Similarly, Denfield moved through the pagan tribes and turned them into objects of exhibition for the western world. However, this is not to argue that Denfield had similar intention of bringing about modernity in the area. Instead, Denfield operated with the ethos of preserving 'disappearing cultures'. In critiquing the west's 'patronising air' towards the 'primitive communities' he argued:

These primitive communities are able to preserve their existing tribal organisation and traditions, and indirectly maintain tribal unity. Today they are perfectly content, each helping the other and delighting in the simple things of life. What does the future hold for these carefree people? Living as they today, they are unified and unambitious. But if they take full advantage of the amenities that modern conditions have to offer them, it appears inevitable that the small tribes will be absorbed or become extinct<sup>215</sup>.

In his romanticisation of the villages as a 'pagan sanctuary' was an implicit critique of the modernising project of the west of which missionary work was a part. Thus, while Denfield

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<sup>214</sup> DC, Denfield, 'The Beauty of Basutoland', *East London Association of Arts*, January 1953.

<sup>215</sup> Denfield, 'Pagan Sanctuary', p 56.



himself spoke patronisingly of his would-be subjects in the plateau he was also equally fascinated by their difference. This brings us to the unnamed subject in the photograph above. Unlike the rest of the Nigerian subjects in Denfield's collection, this figure is depicted wearing European-style pants and hat. Denfield was careful about depicting the black body and cultural life in the plateau as primordial and untouched by modernity, and thus did not include aspects that point to westernisation. The figure was neither named nor referred to in the article which, given the ambiguity of the photograph, makes it challenging to work out his role in relation to Denfield. One possibility is that it was Denfield's 'native cook boy' Henry, whom he referred to in his notes. When describing Henry's role, Denfield wrote:

I am always asked 'How did you manage about food'. In fact it was very simple. All that was necessary to take with us was tea, powdered milk, sugar, pepper, salt and sufficient water in our water bottles for the day. We could always obtain chickens, eggs, yams, maize, millet, water and fire-wood at the pagan villages we stopped at and our native cook boy was an amazing scrounger. His name was Henry and was employed at the mission. He could always be relied upon to produce a cup of tea at a moment's notice. He spoke delightful pidgin English. Whenever tea was ready he would shout 'Tea be done finish, make you come now'<sup>216</sup>.

As an employee at the mission, Henry was likely more westernised than the villagers they photographed. However, it is also possible that Denfield would simply bypass those who appeared to have 'assimilated' and thus not in keeping with his photographic project. Thus the identity of the figure in the photograph remains ambivalent. More significant, perhaps, is Denfield's paternalistic attitude towards Henry. His position as an inferior suited to the 'dirty business of civilisation' was reinforced in Denfield's description of him as inarticulate and somewhat greedy. Moreover, his servitude was naturalised in his ability to 'produce a cup of tea at a moment's notice'. While Norman Hunter was praised above for his role in orienting Denfield in the field, Henry's basic and essential role of securing food from villagers they met was undercut. Instead he represented Henry in his notes in animalistic terms with his 'broken' English and his ability to secure food reduced to a reflection of internal deviance. Elsewhere in his texts, Henry was written about as a marginal figure in the expeditions as indicated in the following account:

Fierce gusts of wind, which we knew heralded an impending storm, greeted us on our return to the rest-house. The coolness was most welcome. Stripped to the waists we stood on the clearing outside the rest-house refreshing our bodies from the heat of the day. The storm's clouds passed over us and released their torrents of rain across the valley, higher up

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<sup>216</sup> DC, Denfield, 'The Story Behind the Pictures', sheet 3.

on the plateau, so that while awaiting our supper we were entertained by an amazing spectacle of fork and sheet lightning. Henry's cry of 'Abanci ya yi' food is ready, brought us hurriedly in<sup>217</sup>.

In the anecdote Denfield and his expedition crew had just returned from a trip through the village Kwabzak<sup>218</sup>. Henry was positioned as an outsider in the narrative in Denfield's use of 'we' to refer to himself and Mac (and throughout his texts). That is to say, the two Europeans constituted the significant or 'legitimate' part of the photographic exercise, thereby casting Henry and others on the periphery. Moreover, this account offers a crude and familiar scenario of the master-servant dynamic in that Denfield and Mac cooled and amused themselves to unwind from the day's activities in anticipation of their meal while Henry laboured in the background until he announced that food was ready.

Denfield described Henry as merely his 'cook boy' however there are indications Henry was utilised in various 'messy' tasks on the expeditions. In one anecdote Denfield referred to the possibility of Henry carrying a sheep he and Mac had received as a gift from a chief at Kwabzak. Elsewhere Denfield hinted at the possibility of being carried across a river stream on Henry's back. He also assisted in translating and possibly was a mediator in some instances. Denfield's paternalistic (or more crudely racist) attitude extended to the rest of the labourers on his various expeditions. Significant figures in this regard were the head-carriers, that is, men who carried camera and camp equipment. In Nigeria, this did not constitute a single constant group of men in that Denfield would enlist the help of different carriers as he walked from village to village. The following narrative by Denfield gives us a glimpse into their role in the field:

The camp equipment was carried by Native carriers on their heads. These head carriers were remarkable fellows, their stamina was unbelievable. The loads they carried varied between fifty and sixty pounds and they could carry that load for hours on end. These carriers would never venture further afield than the next neighbouring tribe, so that new carriers would have to be enlisted at every new tribal settlement. As you would expect they were all barefooted, and with their prehensile feet they would grip the bare rocks and lever themselves up with the aid of a long stick which they always carried. They always helped each other lift the loads on their heads when starting, and after adjusting it so that it was centrally balanced, they would pick up their sticks from off the ground with their feet and off they went. Walking on the level and climbing the hills was relatively easy for them, but as you can understand when carrying a load on your head you have to look almost straight in front of you, you can't look down at your feet, and so when attempting to descend these rocky hills these carriers had to feel their footholds without seeing them. Steadying their

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<sup>217</sup> DC, Denfield, undated manuscript.

<sup>218</sup> Kwabzak is one of the various stops in Denfield's travels through the northern parts of Nigeria.

loads with one hand and themselves with their long sticks, each descending step would be hesitant and tentative until it was proved firm by carefully transferring their weight on the other foot. The loads would sway with each step, but they always reached the bottom safely. And when a rest was called, each of these carriers would seek a low forked branch of a tree and manoeuvre his head so that his load remained resting on the forked branches, and his head in between the V. He would then step out, and be ready to reload at a moment's notice. These magnificent fellows would carry their loads twenty to thirty miles, unload, and after being paid, they would turn around and make for their homes without hardly any intervening rest<sup>219</sup>.

I have quoted the excerpt in great length in that it offers a glimpse into the colonial culture that emerged in Denfield's expeditions in Nigeria and its entanglement with the photographs. Firstly, one notes Denfield's naturalisation of the carriers' labour performance and work ethic. He praised them for their ability to work elegantly with little rest, constructing their service as a reflection of an intrinsic affinity to intense physical labour. They were even capable of performing in bare feet. The result is a representation of the labourers in robotic or mechanistic terms, whose bodies, in a somewhat militaristic manner, had become docile and routinised but were much suited, it was suggested, to the harsh environment they passed through. Yet, Denfield romanticised this docility with regard to the workers' capable bodies and rapport amongst themselves which one was to read as a reflection of a 'communal spirit' that Denfield often extolled. Arguably, this romanticisation is partly in keeping with the discourses of preserving disappearing tribe, that is, regarding the pagans as containing self-sustaining values that threaten to demolish with encroaching westernisation. It also perpetuates the naturalisation of African labour.

Significantly, inasmuch as the pagan subjects were an integral part of colonialism, in this account they were positioned as lying outside colonialism. That is to say, although the issue of native labour runs as a thread throughout Africa's colonial history<sup>220</sup>, in this passage Denfield was careful to circumvent the power differentials that characterised his expeditions by drawing attention instead to the swift and elegant manner by which the carriers performed. One was to read carrying as a uniquely African craft or skill, rather than work. It is, therefore, partly in this context that one can read his photographic studies of head-carrying in his collection. One example is the photograph 'Nigeria, three-quarter profile, three quarter length portrait of adult female'. It is a depiction of an adult female carrying a child on her back on a sling, while she holds a stick with her left hand and balances the cape made of grass on her head with her right hand. Her body is turned to the left in the frame to fully display fragments

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<sup>219</sup> DC, Denfield, 'The Story behind the pictures', sheet 2.

<sup>220</sup> Shepherd, 'When the hand', p 347.

of material culture such as her neck and waist ornaments (Fig. 30). Along with other studies (amongst several others) such as ‘Nigeria frontal head and torso portrait of Chip adult female’ which features a young woman carrying a large pot on her shoulders (Fig. 31), and ‘Nigeria three-quarter profile, head and shoulders portrait of Gwari adult female’ where the subject too carries a basket full of sticks on her shoulders (Fig. 32), this photograph frames the act of carrying ethnographically. Head-carrying is represented as a cultural phenomenon or symbol, and thereby diverts attention away from seeing carrying as an industrial act, whereby the subjects participate in a colonial economy. In a manner that has perhaps haunted anthropology since its early days, the photographs point to the constitution of otherness through an exoticisation of rituals<sup>221</sup>. That is to say, these photographs reflect or visualise that very discourse centred on rituals. One might recall, for one thing, the emphasis on ritual that informed both the travel writing and photographs I spoke of in the previous chapter.



Fig. 30



Fig. 31



Fig. 32

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<sup>221</sup> J. Fabian, *Time and the Other*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

This is related to a second point one may note regarding Denfield's passage above. Unlike Henry, whose manual labour assumed a peripheral place in the texts, Denfield regarded the head-carrying as an object of enquiry, a cultural phenomenon onto which he asserted an ethnographic gaze. While Henry continuously appeared and disappeared in the notes as part of the expeditions, Denfield paused to gaze intently on the carriers' physique, manner of handling equipment and even the labour relations amongst them. In this sense, the trek became an extension of the photographic work not only as a means through which photographs were obtained but as a performative space where particular ethnographic roles were taken up. Observing the carriers as 'cultural' subjects was an opportunity in the search for authenticity which was constantly challenged by his proximity to them.

Moreover, these two diverging relationships Denfield had with Henry and the head-carriers point to another tension anthropologists have negotiated, that is, between observation of action and reliance on oral accounts in a study of 'others'. In a publication geared towards would-be anthropologists in 1964 by John Beattie and foreworded by Edmund Leach, Beattie stressed the importance of observing activity from which the ethnographer could draw conclusions about the other culture under study "to understand what people really think and how they really act, which are not always the same as what they say they think and how they say they act, when they are asked"<sup>222</sup>. Beattie's claim expresses a mistrust of the native's ability in making meaningful utterances thus his or her body is further objectified as 'source'. One might recall that although in Denfield's written accounts Henry was rendered largely mute, we are reminded of his 'pidgin' English in contrast to the head-carriers about whom Denfield was content to draw conclusions based simply on his observation as they moved from village to village. Thus when these particular photographs of head-carrying are read as ethnographic evidence, they too image what Fabian describes as the denial of coevalness with people under study in the discipline<sup>223</sup>.

Landau argues that by the turn of the century, the colonial traveller had to make an effort to get behind the scenes, off the tourists' path; yet once he reached the hoped for setting, his own intercourse began at once to transform it and dispel its aura. The establishment of genuine intimacy erased all authenticity and the search for authentic primitives can and could

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<sup>222</sup> J. Beattie, *Other Cultures: Aims, Methods and Achievements in Social Anthropology*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd: London, 1964), p 87.

<sup>223</sup> Fabian, *Time*, p 31.

never be fulfilled<sup>224</sup>. It is perhaps partly also in this vein that one can understand the disregard of Henry as a cultural representative. The carriers, it must be remembered, were an ever-changing group of men whose participation in the expedition would end upon entering a new village. On the other hand, Henry was a constant participant who shared food and living space with Denfield, and was thus able to enter that more 'intimate' zone with him. At the same time such intercourse did arguably, threaten to dispel the 'pagan' myth. Throughout the expeditions, in his exchanges with different figures, from would-be subjects to chiefs, to head-carriers and Henry alongside him constantly, Denfield experienced shifts in confidences. These ranged from the ceremonial exchanges with chiefs, to Mac with whom he was able to share fears and vulnerability in the unfamiliar territory, Henry, a constant 'companion' who shared the most intimate space with him but was perpetually positioned as servant, to the changing head-carriers whom in his accounts he rendered distant and mute. The following account of being carried across a heavy river by the head-carrier illustrates a possible dissolution to these set boundaries:

Last night's storm had created many new streams over which we were carried pickaback fashion by Henry. The fording of the river of the rivers presented greater difficulties. They were swollen and their currents swift. We felt that Henry's burden would be considerably eased if we were taken across by the carriers, but here we met with surprising prejudice. They stubbornly refused to give this suggestion any consideration and no amount of cajolery or menace could dissuade them from their inexorable decision. Henry, who could speak Angas and so understand a few words of Tal, interpreted what they so heatedly were trying to convey. They only carried loads on their heads and would not under any circumstances invoke evil spirits by carrying in any other but their traditional manner. They had no personal antipathy, on the contrary, they wished to help us; if we insisted on being borne across by them it would have to be in their own particular fashion. Their heads did not seem so staunch or secure as Henry's own back so we chose the latter. First across went the carriers, steadying their loads with one hand, and themselves with their long sticks, they entered the water. Each step was hesitant and tentative until it had been proved firm by carefully transferring the weight. Now it was my turn. The water had come up to the carriers' waists, which meant that I had to sit astride Henry's shoulders with my hands tucked under his chin for support. The swift moving current and the rocky river bed made things difficult for him. Childlike in his manner he thought it a huge joke each time he almost missed his footing, and his deep chuckle drowned any protest I made... I was able to appreciate more fully the humor of the situation while watching the expression of anxiety on Mac's face, when he was being brought across the same precarious perch, and this time I was able to join in with Henry's laughter<sup>225</sup>.

The scene took place in one of Denfield's earlier expeditions alongside Mac. Once again Denfield's use of 'we' alluded to his affiliation with Mac and the positioning of Henry and

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<sup>224</sup> Landau, 'Empires', p 152.

<sup>225</sup> DC, Denfield, 'The Tal Tribe of Kwabzak', n.d.

the carriers as superfluous actors in the mission. This distinction, nevertheless, was potentially undermined by the rocky river bed that revealed Denfield and Mac's vulnerability and inherent but unspoken reliance on Henry and the carriers. Nonetheless in his description Denfield continued to naturalise the latter groups' servant position in for example, his surprise at the refusal of the carriers to carry them across, thus implying it is something he expected or was accustomed to. Moreover, stating offhandedly that 'Henry's burden would be considerably eased if we were taken across by the carriers' too implies that this was yet another of Henry's taken for granted duties. Denfield and Mac's refusal to cross the river themselves is not clear. However, in their refusal they were presented with an opportunity to traverse the carrier's intimate bodily space by being carried on their heads and shoulders. Whereas in the previous passage Denfield maintained distance in his intense observation of the head carriers, in this context the reader is presented with a scene with the potential for a more intimate engagement. However, Denfield and Mac dismissed the opportunity.

On the one hand this can be read as the greater comfort and safety that Henry's back offered. It was a refusal to have their safety placed in the seemingly more precarious position of the carriers' heads. On the other hand, it can also be read as an attempt to maintain particular relational boundaries established in the field between Denfield and his carriers. By agreeing to be carried on the backs of the carriers, the latter would be doing what Denfield was already accustomed to with Henry. Yet, by agreeing to conform to their preferences this would imply a loosening of some control in the field and possibly a reversal (albeit temporary) of power, particularly since being carried on the head for Denfield would mean being at a greater risk. Agreeing to being carried by Henry with whom they had established a relationship, implied a continuation of existing relations. Note, for example, that despite his dependence on Henry to carry him across, Denfield described Henry's experience paternalistically, regarding his laughter as a sign of being 'childlike in his manner'. Denfield was then able to assert his authority in the field. It is only when Denfield was in a precarious position that Henry's laughter was legitimized, yet even then Denfield maintained an air of dignity by instead transferring the absurdity to the anxious Mac.

While the river scene challenged potentially the established relational boundaries, Denfield nevertheless reinforced them in his paternalistic and breezy regard of the carriers. On the one hand, Denfield admired the carriers' swift performance and turned it into an object of enquiry. On the other hand he constructed them as primitive and backward, as illustrated in this account of trekking through Kwabzak:

It was late when the carriers turned up that morning. Arrangements had been made to leave after an early breakfast, but not a sign did we see of them until well after nine a.m. We were most annoyed. It meant that we would be trekking in the fierce heat of the mid-day sun, not a pleasant incentive. To rebuke the carriers was pointless, they would be carrying the loads. These natives have no conception of time. Their economic life is governed by moons, seasons and years; they have no need for the arbitrary divisions of their day into twenty four hours and certainly no cause exists in their social organization that demands such exacting punctuality. They understand what is implied by the broad divisions of the day. Dawn, noon, sunset or night is something tangible to them, but the interim periods are vague and indefinite, any particular time of the day being reckoned by the height of the sun in the sky and expressed by raising of the outstretched arm to a certain angle with the horizontal. If times of the day are represented by indefinite angles can we wonder at these carriers being a few degrees late in their appointment?<sup>226</sup>

Denfield asserted the carriers' otherness by framing their tardiness anthropologically, as yet another illustration of cultural difference while he indirectly acknowledged his own westernized knowledge system. Yet, in the passage the native is positioned still as a simplistic figure closer to nature in his relationship with the environment, who is dependent on the sun and moon 'something tangible to them' and thus lacking in abstract thought required in using a watch. Inasmuch as their manner of head-carrying was treated as an object of inquiry in the earlier passage, such a gaze was extended once again to their relationship with time. In other words, Denfield's search for authenticity continued beyond the moments when he stopped and produced his camera to construct a timeless sanctuary, to those moments that made up the trek itself. In this sense the encounters amongst those in the expeditions and the photographs he produced co-constructed one another as the field became a performative space for the pagan myth of backwardness and primitiveness.

### **Basutoland and the construction of an idyll**

There is so much more I would have like to have told you, but perhaps with permission I would like to finish on a philosophical note...During the first trek with my missionary friend we walked in that short tour about 2500 miles. I trekked on my own and covered another 5-600 odd miles and I learnt many lessons. I realised that primitive people possess something which we have forgotten. That spirit to help each other. In this highly civilised community no man knows or cares about his neighbour and the code of life is every man for himself. How different it is these savage communities where everyman strives for prosperity of his own family group and indirectly for the betterment of his people as a whole. I learnt other lessons too. Wandering among the wonderful mountain beautiful country of the plateau and even here in South Africa I realised that the secret of happiness resides in Nature, and happy is the man who not only finds comfort in his intellectual strength, but has time to enjoy the more permanent things of life, things that are there for

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<sup>226</sup> DC, Denfield, untitled manuscript.



everyone, and will remain so after we have blown ourselves off the face of his earth, and when the whole of Africa reverts to its rightful owners, the ants<sup>227</sup>.

Denfield expressed these sentiments to his South African viewers and audience when reflecting on his experiences of photography in northern Nigeria. Such an appraisal of pagan life in terms of ‘communitarianism’ revealed a modern western nostalgia for an imagined archaic community that mourns the loss the fraternity<sup>228</sup>. According to Chaturvedi this can translate- as it will be apparent in Denfield’s photography of Basutoland- to the romance of the rural idyll<sup>229</sup>. In this passage Denfield constructed a dichotomy between individualist west and the communitarian pagans where the ‘I’ dissolves into ‘we’<sup>230</sup>, through affective ties established through rituals, customs and collective action. In the statements above, Denfield revealed the extent of his fascination with those sites that stood apart from modernity, thereby constructing his photographic field as a romantic idyll. The field became even more pertinent in his work in Basutoland both as a photographic subject and in his relationship to the site. As Shepherd has argued, colonialism gave rise to a fantasy where labour is done by Africans. It also gave rise to a range of practices now familiar to the South African imaginary that have to do with the effacement of labour such as “the maid’s room tucked around the back of the house, the township thrust beyond the city limits, the glaze which crosses the madam’s eye as the tea tray is set down and the dirty dishes removed”<sup>231</sup>.

Throughout Denfield’s career in photography, this dynamic was perhaps most effectively illustrated in his photographic expeditions in Basutoland. Reading through Denfield’s texts of his experiences through Basutoland one is struck by two parallel narratives that emerge. The first is a conscious construction of an idealised landscape informed by a visual grammar of ‘authentic African-ness’. The second, more sub-textually, is an intensified relegation of his black intermediaries. But first, a note on sources needs to be made. Much of the notes relating to his intermediaries in Nigeria are sourced from texts prepared for publications, that is, with a readership in mind, such as the draft chapter for a book that was never published as well as speeches. To some extent, I have gleaned information about intermediaries in Basutoland from similar texts he wrote about his experiences as well as more private diary entries which

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<sup>227</sup> DC, Denfield, ‘The Story Behind the Pictures’, sheet five.

<sup>228</sup> R. Chaturvedi, ‘Community Beyond Communion? Some reflections via Party and Partition Violence in India’. Presented at ‘Developing the Common’ Conference. University of the Western Cape, 4-6 October, 2011.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid p 24.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid p 34.

<sup>231</sup> Shepherd, ‘When the hand’, p 348.

were not necessarily written for publication<sup>232</sup>. The latter, however, contain entries of expeditions in 1956, 1957 and 1958 only. There is therefore in some instances a shift in manner of writing about his expeditions where the latter contains more succinct notes, thus rendering his intermediaries somewhat more peripheral. I now turn to his shift from the studies of pagan tribes of Nigeria to his photography in Basutoland that coincided with his immigration to South Africa.

As I noted previously, Denfield left Nigeria in 1946 for a brief return to England. In 1947 he boarded a ship at the Southampton and left England to come to South Africa. He ended up settling in East London.<sup>233</sup> This was characteristic of the period after World War 2, as South Africa had the largest settler population of English speakers in the British Empire and seemed to offer more stability than war-ridden Britain. The following year his wife Lea, an actress, joined him. Although not immediately, Denfield's move to South Africa in large part coincided with a shift towards pictorial techniques in his photography and a move away from ethnographic photography. Yet, as we shall see, his move towards pictorialism was still strongly informed by the 'native scene'. Denfield's early images of Nigeria can thus usefully be seen as not only a trajectory through which he developed the more sophisticated and careful techniques required in salon circles but also foundational in putting forward a particular visual grammar based on the construction of the rural native space<sup>234</sup>. In salons photographs were judged not necessarily on their representational value but on aesthetics, technical composition, lines, shading, tonality, etc<sup>235</sup>. In pictorialism the emphasis was on effective composition and developing images that are pleasing to the eye. This marked a shift in the depiction of African as representations of particular tribes to framing them within the picturesque. In a speech delivered in 1952 Denfield explained:

Pictorial photography is not just recording what you see; it is interpreting what you feel. It is a function of the mind. A camera is of secondary importance. The subject matter photographed does not have to be beautiful. One can produce beautiful photographs of such sordid material as slums, poverty and even death. The object of the photographer is to exercise his creative ability so as to arouse emotion through the selective arrangement of his subject matter<sup>236</sup>.

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<sup>232</sup> This is not to say, however, that Denfield, even in the writing of his diary, was not involved in a process of self-archiving.

<sup>233</sup> United Kingdom National Archives online, 'Outgoing passenger list, 1890-1960'.  
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/looking-for-person/passengers.htm>

<sup>234</sup> Salons were essentially photographic exhibitions where the photographs were selected on the basis of careful attention to composition and aesthetic appeal.

<sup>235</sup> J. Wright, 'Choice of Subjects for Salons', *S.A Photography*, 4, 6 (1953), 1-3.

<sup>236</sup> DC, Denfield, 'Recording Basutoland on Horseback', 1952.

This marked a subtle but important shift from seeing the image as something to be found or ‘captured’ to regarding it as something one could consciously create or where one could exercise a great deal of agency. This expresses what Susan Sontag has described as the ‘heroism of vision’ brought on by photography where each person can “display a certain unique, avid sensibility”<sup>237</sup>. Sontag thus writes that photographers would set on voyages in search of striking images. Yet, these images are not assumed to necessarily exist ontologically but are a result of ‘photographic seeing’ that is, “looking at reality as an array of potential photographs”<sup>238</sup> where even the ugly is seen in terms of its potential photographic beauty. Similarly, whereas in his earlier career in northern Nigeria Denfield treated his subject matter as objects of discovery, this passage suggests a shift whereby one could ‘exercise his creative ability’. Thus the photograph was no longer necessarily something out there waiting to be discovered but ‘a function of the mind’, a more internal project. The field had now become a laboratory limited only by one’s imaginations and fantasies. In other words, this passage suggests a photographer no longer driven by an anthropological impulse to capture disappearing tribes but to recreate the photographic subject as an idyll.

This shift in his own relationship with the ‘field’ from northern Nigeria to Basutoland also perhaps resonates with the anthropologist’s changing attitudes once in the locality of the exotic other. In a description that demonstrates the discipline’s heritage of the construction of otherness, Beattie noted that when the social anthropologist first arrives in the middle of the ‘unfamiliar culture’ he sees people doing things, conversing in an unfamiliar tongue and “at first all is seeming confusion”. The period gradually passes and having lived “in a hut or tent within a village, the anthropologist gradually begins to understand what is happening around him” to a point where he begins to feel at home and at that point “he has now the breakthrough into another culture: as a field anthropologist, he has arrived”<sup>239</sup>. Arguably, Denfield’s photographic trajectory from pagan studies to the romanticised picturesque in turn visualised the anthropologist’s experience Beattie speaks of. His photographs register a shift from depicting subjects as strange objects of curiosity in Nigeria to a depiction of the native that draws on iconography familiar to anthropologists and the west at large. It is as if at that point he had had the ethnographer’s ‘breakthrough’ that would allow him to identify with Basutoland to some extent. Certainly, Basutoland would have presented a different ‘field’

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<sup>237</sup>S. Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1977), p 69.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid* p 75.

<sup>239</sup> Beattie, *Other Cultures*, p 82.

altogether yet the control he exerted over the field relative to his stay in northern Nigeria suggests a figure with more confident claims to knowledge about the native, claims that allowed a certain degree of romanticism to emerge.

The urge for innocence and romance can be noted in Denfield's brief description of his experiences in Basutoland when he declared:

This story of Basutoland is a very simple one. It is a story of mountains, river valleys and hidden waterfalls. It is a story of simple picturesque hardworking Natives, of scattered trading stations and of an over enthusiastic photographer who was determined to photograph the country merely because other photographers were not crazy enough to attempt it<sup>240</sup>

It is suggested, therefore, that photography in Basutoland was a largely individualistic endeavour driven more by personal desire than a scientific enterprise. On the one hand, it pointed to Denfield's growing identity and confidence as a photographer. On the other, it was perhaps also a clue to his changing personal politics at this stage, which I elaborate on later. Denfield was after all at this stage, no longer a British citizen but an English immigrant in a country with a growing Afrikaner nationalism. Interestingly, in the manuscript, Denfield crossed out the word 'Natives' and wrote 'people' instead. It is tempting to read this as a sign of a changing racial attitude but Denfield continued to use the term throughout his career to the point of wanting to promote 'native photography' as a particular photographic aesthetic.

Denfield first set out to photograph Basutoland around 1949. Writing about his first outing he stated:

I left my car at a trading station on the south bank of the Orange River and my means of a mirror news of my arrival was flashed to another trading station on the escarpment on the other side, so that when I crossed the river by the trading station boat horses were waiting for me to take me and my equipment up the mountain paths to this new trading station four miles away. Now this was my first experience of riding a Basuto pony and of riding on these narrow winding paths as they zig zag their way up the steep sides of the escarpment. The pony had an unfortunate habit of keeping as near as possible to the edge of the path and every time I looked down I thought my leave was coming to a sudden end, especially whenever he kicked up a loose stone. The Basuto who accompanied me and had gone on in front turned round from time to time to see I was getting on. He was greeted on each occasion with a very sickly smile. I can laugh at it now but it wasn't funny at the time<sup>241</sup>.

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<sup>240</sup> DC, Denfield, 'The Story Behind the pictures', January 1953.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

In this passage Denfield introduces us to three key figures that constitute his photographic work: the trading store keepers, horses and the Basuto guides. The store keepers became strategic figures in supplying him with various provisions, including horses. The horses were not only a practical and necessary means for the trek but were key features in the photographs. Likewise, the Basuto guides or 'boys' as he called them once again served as interpreters, guides and carriers of his photographic equipment but also acted as models when he took photographs. The trading stores, run by 'Europeans' as Denfield indicated and whom he later warmly referred to as 'friends', were scattered over the country. During his expedition through various regions of the country Denfield would be received by the traders who supplied him with the guides, food and at times horses. Denfield also indicates that he was 'always welcome and the traders did all they could to help me'<sup>242</sup>. While the white traders were stationed within villages, there is some indication of being partially separated from the black residents as indicated in Denfield's observation:

These traders are a hardy breed of men. They remain in their isolated stations for months on end and some only leaving them for their annual leave. Their living quarters on the stations are remarkable, especially when you remember that every item, every chair, table, cup and saucer has to be brought by donkey or pack oxen across the mountains and rivers, or even by head carriers. The journey taking days (sic.). So that when you encounter a five roomed housed right in the heart of nowhere, equipped with electric light, comfortable furniture, tiled bathrooms, refrigerator and glasses on verandas you can realise how efficient this primitive mountain transport really is. Many of these traders live in their stations with their wives and families. One trader, with whom I stayed, had his small twins living with him. I asked him whether the twins were born at the station. He told me that his wife left the station a couple of months before the twins were due, and when the twins were about six weeks old each one was put in a soap box and carried on the head of a Native girl over the mountains back to the station accompanied by their mother who rode on horses. The journey took them four days...An interesting point was this, that whenever they went on their annual leave they invariably took their two dogs with them and in order to prevent footsore in these animals who were not accustomed as the Native dogs to the long arduous journey across the mountains they fitted them with little shoes made of sheep skin, lined with grease<sup>243</sup>.

This passage points out the dualism in the rural context that characterised the relations between the white and the black Basuto. It is suggested that even in the 'heart of nowhere' the traders were able to maintain a middle class European lifestyle that may have been a far cry from their rural surroundings. Even their dogs were distinct from the dogs of the blacks, the former being less hardy and in need of additional provisions. Note how Denfield described these stops as 'isolated stations'. This is presumably in reference to minimal or lack

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<sup>242</sup>DC, Denfield, 'The Story Behind the Picture', January 1953, p 2.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid p 2.

of contact with other whites in the region, thereby disregarding relationships with the ‘natives’. This is contradicted by the allusion to the ‘native girl’ who carried the traders’ twins on her head as this does point to contact or relationship, albeit possibly limited in nature.

Moreover, Denfield indicated elsewhere that for photography the trading store and its immediate vicinity were his chief hunting ground where “everyone congregated not only to buy and exchange goods to but discuss the topics of the day and learn all the local scandal”<sup>244</sup>. There are some parallels here in his ‘hunt’ for photographs in Nigeria, where he also initially visited the market place to search for photographic subjects. The practical implications of the market place as a chief hunting ground are imaginable in that large numbers congregated there regularly. However, the re-appearance of the market place both in Denfield’s photography and in the travel literature on ‘native’ locations through the continent suggests the location can be read through a discursive lens as well. It is as if for such writers and photographers, the market place was a space where modernity stood in sharpest contrast to signs of rurality. One might recall Denfield’s description of the market places in Nigeria as a place to view “all the native finery”. Interestingly, this points to the ways in which, through its ‘signs’ and ‘symbols’, native representations could be consumed. This relates to another point: the market place also speaks to the sense of *exchange* of images and ideas that has taken place in the west with regards to representations of the native other. In this context, the economic exchanges taking place in the market intersected with Denfield’s own participation in a visual economy about Africans.

The separation of the white and black worlds is reflected in Denfield’s photographs in that nowhere did he include aspects related to the traders. Thus they did not form part of the ‘field’ photographically. This relates partly to the manner in which the constitution of the anthropological ‘field’ relies on exoticising discourses with regards to race. Thus even as permanent residents in the region who did interact with black natives, Denfield regarded the white residents as ‘isolated’ to effectively legitimise the construction of the rural village of the black natives as ‘field’. The second dualism is with regards to the dual lives that the traders presumably maintained. They remained ‘isolated’, we are told, until they took on their annual leave, which, it is implicitly indicated, was their only opportunity to make contact with other whites. This is comparable to Denfield’s method which involved taking leave from

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<sup>244</sup>DC, Denfield, ‘Recording Basutoland on Horseback’, Speech to Rotary Club, May 1952, p 3.

his medical work in East London to visit Basutoland. Subsequently he ‘isolated’ himself from white South African society while the traders on the other hand, did the reverse. This suggests their lives were compartmentalised between the trading stations in the rural regions and elsewhere, whereby they occupied different roles at different times of the year in different contexts. Thus with regards to Denfield, even in the context of travelling to create aesthetically pleasing photographs rather than ethnographic data, such a task was informed by the anthropological impulse of “leaving home to travel in and out of some distinctly different setting”<sup>245</sup>.

In 1952 Denfield enlisted the help of an unnamed government inspector of bridle paths during one of his journeys:

Trekking with him was comparatively easy. He was completely equipped with the tents, provisions, pack mules, horses and boys. Altogether, there were about 24 animals in the convoy and during the days trekking we covered about 300 miles of the most wonderful mountain scenery. It was February at the time and all the bridle paths in the valley were lined with peach trees bearing luscious fruit...They were so plentiful that the boys used them as missiles to ward off stray cattle and horses who were dangerously near out tents...This government inspector of bridle paths...when I was trekking had been in the service for many years and had covered many thousands of miles on horseback. He had many stories to tell of thieves, ritual murders of recent, famine tales of the old traders and a host of personal experiences<sup>246</sup>.

Once again, the ‘boys’ appeared and disappeared in the narrative discreetly, thereby implicitly naturalising their position as labourers. Conversely, the inspector performed the role of the settler who was equipped not only with the practical equipment and ‘boys’ (note again, the implicit construal of the ‘boys’ as part of the expedition *apparatus*) but also a myriad of stories that made Denfield privy to the lives of other whites in the region. This is reminiscent of Monica Wilson’s accounts with a key intermediary Michael Geza in Eastern Pondoland in 1932. In *Reaction to Conquest* Wilson acknowledges Geza as her clerk. However, Bank also points out that in her doctoral thesis Wilson writes of spending long days in the saddle with Geza, which were conducive to conversation. In the thesis Geza is given a far more active role in the production of anthropological knowledge, whereby she acknowledges him as not only a bodyguard but attributes much new-found knowledge of Pondo men’s matters to him<sup>247</sup>. Although Denfield’s objective in taking photographs in Basutoland was not primarily anthropological, one imagines that having spent a greater time

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<sup>245</sup> Clifford, *Routes*, p 58.

<sup>246</sup> DC, Denfield, ‘The Story Behind the Pictures’, January 1953.

<sup>247</sup> A. Bank, ‘Intimate politics’, p 569.

in the regions, amongst the myriad of stories ‘of thieves [and] ritual murders’, the inspector would perform the role of a cultural authority to the newly arriving Denfield or at the very least, Denfield would gain some sense of his outlook on Basutoland.

Most likely, Denfield gleaned a greater sense of this ‘local knowledge’ from his encounters with another group of intermediaries: the Basuto horsemen, guides and interpreters or his ‘boys’. One of the earliest guides was Tindale, with whom he must have worked sometime between 1949 and 1952<sup>248</sup>. In his speech to the Rotary Club in 1952 Denfield wrote about Tindale as a constant guide stating “Whenever I went in Basutoland I was accompanied by my interpreter. His name was Tindale”<sup>249</sup>. However, this was corrected in his notes dated 1953 when he wrote instead:

Whenever I went in Basutoland I was accompanied by *a Native guide and interpreter*. I’ve had many of these during my travels in Basutoland but the one which left the greatest impression on my mind answered to the name of Tindale<sup>250</sup> (my italics).

To his Rotary Club audience in East London, a private institution that drew together the town’s middle to upper middle class white residents, his account of Tindale created a fiction of a stable relationship. Tindale was positioned as a good, reliable servant, a place which in apartheid South Africa was a normalised one for blacks. Note also Denfield’s subtly possessive tone in use of the possessive noun ‘my interpreter’. On the other hand, the clarification in his 1953 notes correctly positioned Tindale as one of several guides Denfield encountered, but one who was most memorable. The ‘Story Behind the Pictures’ was clearly a speech to an unnamed audience<sup>251</sup>. Given that it is dated January 1953, it is likely Denfield’s preparatory talk for the exhibition he held at the East London Museum that took place in January 1953 titled ‘Beauty of Basutoland’. Interestingly, while Tindale may no longer have been positioned as a loyal servant, in the later account Denfield created a fiction of himself as an individualist traveller whose guides played a peripheral role in his expeditions in allusion to his ‘many [guides] during my travels’. Like Monica Wilson who downplayed the role of her intermediaries in her published book, Denfield was able to assert his authority and genius by normalising the role played by the guides. This is particularly

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<sup>248</sup> This is indicated in Denfield’s speech to the Rotary Club in 1952, to which he refers to Tindale. He does not indicate the specific year.

<sup>249</sup> DC, Denfield, ‘Recording Basutoland on Horseback’, 1952.

<sup>250</sup> DC, Denfield, ‘The Story Behind the Pictures’, January 1953.

<sup>251</sup> He writes in the text ‘I can’t tell you how glad I am to have this opportunity of speaking to you about Basutoland’ thereby indicating this was a speech.



significant in the context of the solo exhibition in the museum where Denfield would instead emphasise not only his photographic genius but the breadth of his own knowledge about Basutoland.

Nevertheless, what for Denfield was memorable about Tindale? We are given a clue in his anecdote:

He had a most remarkable command of the English language. He told me when I first engaged him that he hadn't passed standard six. What he forgot to tell me was that he hadn't passed standard five either. I didn't ask about standard four. When I was once photographing a little native girl in the doorway of her hut she suddenly burst out crying. "Tindale" I said "Why is she crying" "Moreno" he answered "It's because she has never seen a coloured person before". On another occasion I was taking some cine pictures of some storks who were resting near some wheat field. I asked Tindale "Do you know why storks go about in pairs?" He answered with a great pride "Certainly Moreno, one is feminine and the other is muscular" His greatest delight was setting up my tripod. It made him feel as though he was contributing something towards my photography. One day I told him to prepare himself for a photograph. He was soon sprucing himself up and even produced a pair of sun spectacles which I supposed enhanced his status in the eyes of his fellow countrymen but he cut a very sorrowful figure when I turned his back to the camera and used him as a foreground!<sup>252</sup>

The breezy paternalism that characterised Denfield's description of his guide Henry, in Nigeria, resurfaced once more in his account of Tindale. He painted a picture of a comical and a somewhat child-like character with a playful and buoyant spirit, thereby rendering Denfield a rational and intellectual figure. His 'remarkable command of English' was presumably in comparison to Henry's 'pidgin English'. By using Tindale as a decorative element in the photograph, it is tempting to read this gesture as metonymic of the manner in which 'native labour' had been placed on the margins throughout his expedition, although it was highly constitutive of the journeys.

Nonetheless, it is also suggestive of anthropology's impulse to speak for the other despite producing knowledge that reflects the anthropologist's perspective. In such a context, the distinction between Denfield's ethnographic pedagogical accounts of pagans and the constructed idylls of Basutoland is porous. Like the anthropologist who gives subjective accounts of the field and presents this as 'knowledge' Denfield was able to carve out imagined landscapes that speak to his own impulses. In other words, his photographs *image* those anthropological fictions. For Argyrou, part of what allows the anthropologist to make such a move is the claim to knowledge about Others to which the Others are oblivious. This

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<sup>252</sup> DC, Denfield, 'The Story Behind the Pictures', January 1953, p 2.

is a form of ‘cultural unconsciousness’<sup>253</sup>. In the making of the photograph above, Denfield’s premeditated image overrode Tindale’s. This resonates with Argyrou’s observation that “whether they require magico-religious symbols to reproduce the social structure or a cultural order of significance and meaning”, in other words, regardless of whatever paradigm informs the anthropologist, “all major twentieth century ethnological paradigms have portrayed the native to be oblivious to the true and real content of their lives”<sup>254</sup>. By disregarding Tindale’s self-fashioning, it is as if Denfield was intent on constructing a ‘truer’ representation of Basutoland. In wanting to include Tindale in the photograph, Denfield reflected comically on his desire to look fashionable and modern but the orchestration of the scene is comparable to what Pinney describes as ‘depth’ photography characteristic of colonial practices in which particular representation put forward are to be read as mirrors of the society under study<sup>255</sup>.

On the other hand, Tindale’s self fashioning draws attention to ‘surface’ aesthetics that say little about stable identities. The tension between surface aesthetics and colonial depth practices arose, however, when Denfield negated this surface and used him instead to construct a stereotypical rural image, free of modern accessories, that would allow the viewer to ‘read’ the Basutoland landscape and its people on the photograph. Ultimately, in a manner that speaks to anthropological discourse, we are to read the landscape in relation to the observer’s perspective. Again, this expresses the sense of Denfield’s own ‘insight’ that mistrusts the native voice. Thus as Tindale faces the mountain side, he has turned his back to us and we are unable to engage him directly but only through our trust in the photographer’s perspective, thereby imaging this construction of knowledge based on the field. The following excerpt is Denfield’s own detailed recollections on the circumstances under which he produced an image much like the one he intended to with Tindale:

I had been trekking in Basutoland. The rain had been exceptionally heavy and I was forced to pitch the tents at the top of the pass...But the tents were drying and the pack horses were being girthed in readiness...My horse was already saddled with my Native guide I set out to look at the valley below us (sic.). At the moment it was completely shrouded in mist, but as soon as the warmth of the sun’s rays would strike this blanket of white foam it would rise, and the land itself would then be aroused from its slumber to receive the light of day. The mist was rising. I dismounted and left my horse with my guide and instructed him to ride down a little along the bridle path. There, facing the approaching dawn, he waited. The mist was getting higher and soon the last layer would be leaving its temporary abode;

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<sup>253</sup> V. Argyrou, *Anthropology and the Will to Meaning: a postcolonial critique* ( Pluto Press: London, 2002), p 60.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid p 74.

<sup>255</sup> Pinney, ‘Notes from the Surface’, p 203.

however I had to wait until the main mist had gone and then the smaller clusters would emerge from their deep hollows. The sun could just be seen and now a new layer of mist was released from its earthly home. I maneuvered into position: the sun was now striking the tops of the hills and the light was not striking the tops of the hills and the light on the mist layer was being reflected on the valley below. A little more maneuvering and the horseman was outlined against this light. Another picture was made. I called it 'The Valley Awakens'<sup>256</sup>.



Fig. 33

With such a description, one has an even greater sense of the repertoire of creating subjective fictions about the field which involve negotiating the tension between what one saw, agency and what one had little control over. The sentimentality and poetic sensibility that characterizes Denfield's account above is striking. It is suggested that the process of creating the photograph, or being in the field at that particular moment, was as momentous as the final photograph itself. The preparation of this photograph evidently required extreme care and attention to detail and environmental changes. However, his recollections speak to a submission to natural forces. The photographer had to yield to the movements of the mist and the sun. He had to position himself effectively to be successful, but also to wait for change. Control over this visual field meant yielding to environmental forces. At the centre of the image is a man on horseback with another horse alongside him in the foreground (Fig. 33). They pause and gaze upon the sunrise over a mountain landscape which dominates the frame. In its depiction of a breaking sunset, the photograph draws attention to the field itself, the

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<sup>256</sup> Denfield, 'My Favourite Print', *Camera News*, Dec. (1955), 272-273.

being-there-ness. In the landscape devoid of other subject, the horse rider and his horses have travelled some distance to reach that point.

The photograph is thus not a vertical sampling of *frozen* time but is suggestive of the movement of time, and of the photographer's relentless effort to construct an idealized landscape. Like the morning that does eventually break into day, these pictorial idylls are elusive and needed to be worked and reworked throughout the expeditions. Denfield accounted for another example, 'Riders on the horizon':

Many of the photographs are planned months before I get to Basutoland and I have a little note book which I jot down all the ideas I think of and try and put them into execution when the time comes. One photograph in particular did not materialize until my third trek. It was a simple idea of horsemen on a hilltop ridge silhouetted against a shaft of white cloud. I could easily organize the horsemen but I didn't know who to approach for the clouds and so I had to wait until conditions were right and I waited for three years, and it was only on my last trek that I managed to make the picture I had in mind. It's named 'Riders on the horizon' and when this picture won a major award at an international Salon I felt it was well worth waiting for<sup>257</sup>.



Fig. 34

It is a photograph of three men on horses portrayed against a cloudy sky backdrop. They appear on the horizon on a hilltop which appears only partially (Fig 34). The cloudy backdrop dominates the frame and placed towards the right corner, the horsemen are a small albeit, key, element in the picture. The photograph is thus a picture of space and place rather than

<sup>257</sup> DC, Denfield, 'The Story Behind the Pictures', January 1953, p 3.

individuals. One imagines the riders had come from the far eastern part of the landscape and were headed southwards. The place remains ambiguous and could thus be anywhere. The only indications are the blankets the riders wear, a now-familiar visual trope of Basutoland/Lesotho. In other words, rather than direct the viewer towards identification of a place, the photograph invites the viewer to rather imagine. Likewise, the riders are unidentifiable and nebulous figures that are difficult to identify.

This is in contrast to the pagan subjects Denfield portrayed, whose faces and bodies the viewer was to read as expressions of pagan life. In a manner reminiscent of ‘Tropical Silhouette’ taken in Northern Nigeria which portrays treetops and shades against a cloudy sky, less attention can thus be given to its ethnographic value and more towards the opportunity it offers to imagine other worlds (Fig. 35). Much like Denfield who imagined this scenario before creating it in a picture, the photograph equally invites the viewer to dream. It is tempting to equate the blank sky drop as a blank slate onto which fantasies can be projected. Like ‘The Valley Awakens’, in both the description of its making and in its content, the photograph is a haunting reminder of the photographer’s construction of fictions.



Fig. 35

The horizontal line formed by the hilltop against the clouds in ‘Riders on the Horizon’ creates an imagined division between where the riders have come from and where they are possibly going. Following the photographer’s instruction, they pause at the top of the hill as if in anticipation of something, and thus have a panoramic view of the landscape. The horizon intersects between the tangible earth and the obscure sky above. With this in mind I read the photograph, additionally, as an expression of a shift in Denfield’s photography from a

debilitating ethnographic technique towards a romantic cerebral aesthetic. Like the riders who pause at the hilltop on their (imagined) expedition, this photograph suggests a move in Denfield's career from regarding the foreign space less as a space of discovery but as a place of possibilities, no longer necessarily where one was confronted with difference and was left vulnerable but a laboratory when one could experiment with familiar visual tropes. What is then imaged is the 'heroisation of thinking subject'<sup>258</sup> whereby the ethnographer emerged as an autonomous being. As a pictorial photographer, he was also heroic for having seen the familiar in a fresh way<sup>259</sup>. As the riders pause on top of the hill, they image the very performance of thought and reflection that grounds ethnographic work, that is, as partially detached observation that discerns the hidden meanings inaccessible to the native. Denfield's experimentation in creating scenarios or 'ethnographic fictions' is further noted in this explanation of his method:

A good photograph has to be carefully planned. Very few photographs taken on the spur of the moment have any pictorial value at all. Many of my photographs have not only been planned in advance but rehearsed beforehand. I would ask the headman of the village to arrange to have a few horsemen or some boys on oxen or some women carrying loads of firewood or even sheep to be placed at my disposal, and having surveyed the territory, noted the varying lighting conditions I would then decide the best vantage point. I would then perhaps let the horseman practice coming into the picture, explaining how I wanted them paced, the direction they were to take and the speed they were to travel. I might make it three or four times beforehand and when I thought the lighting conditions and everything else just right, I would let them come in for the final shot and when they were in what appeared to be optimum position my shutter would click. The secret is in knowing when to click the shutter<sup>260</sup>.

Not only does this excerpt highlight the extent to which Denfield exerted control over the visual field, but also his determination in constructing consciously an idealised landscape informed by a visual grammar of 'authentic African-ness'. Unsurprisingly then, various motifs featured prominently in his photographs such as mountains, blankets, sunrises, the calabash, etc. In his composition of the scene, we are reminded of the continual reconstitution of the 'field' that is informed by the photographer's own stereotypes.

This can be illustrated with reference to the photograph he titled 'Mother and Child' (Fig. 36). The photograph features a woman posed in front of a hut entrance with child in arms. The adult female is draped in a blanket and 'traditional' dress headgear. Both subjects look

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<sup>258</sup> Argyrou, *Will to Meaning*, p 82.

<sup>259</sup> Sontag, *On Photography*, p 69.

<sup>260</sup> DC, Denfield, 'On Horseback through Basutoland', n.d.

away from the photographer, but the stiff gestures seem to indicate a heightened awareness of the presence of the photographer. The tautness of the adult female highlights this constructedness of the setting, especially when contrasted to the more 'unruly' child, but this also undermines the sense of 'authenticity' Denfield tried to create. This image invokes the motherhood iconography with the subjects located in the context of domestic space. Denfield used the generic universalized or Christianised title and image of 'Mother and Child', an allusion to the Madonna and Child especially wherein both female figures hold the 'child' in arms tenderly. The Basotho hut frames the subjects, but the interior of the hut is dark and its contents not shown, thereby creating the impression of lack, as opposed to providing evidence of everyday life and domesticity. Denfield was playing on notions of cultural purity, of the sense of a space untouched by modernity. When looking at the photograph it is interesting to contrast his preparation of photographs in cases involving human subjects moving through the landscape, to the earlier account on creating 'The Valley Awakens'. With the former, photographs were so carefully rehearsed as his human props were made to perform and repeat their performances before he 'click[ed] the shutter'.



Fig. 36

The shift towards pictorialism is explicitly stated in the speech to the East London

Photographic Society:

We photographers do not claim to be painters. We are not concerned whether photography is thought of as an abortive science or an adulterated art. We are only concerned in making pictures which express our own artistic feeling and also exercise our creative ability. We aim to make pictures which convey to others the emotion which we ourselves experienced and prompted us to make the picture. It is said the camera doesn't lie but I assure you that these pictures around us are very far from the truth<sup>261</sup>.

Evidence of this form of preparation is provided in a photograph that appeared in a 1957 publication of *Camera News: Official Journal of the Photographic Society of Southern Africa*. In the article by Jack Robinson entitled 'Through Basutoland with Doc.', the author included a photograph captioned 'posing the subject'<sup>262</sup>. It is a photograph of Denfield who carries a camera bag on his person, leaning over an unnamed subject who sits while holding a woven basket. Denfield clearly manoeuvres the subject gently tilting her head to one side while he holds a camera with his left hand. He is undoubtedly exerting control over the process paying attention to minute details to create whatever vision he has in mind. In its transparency of displaying Denfield's control over the visual field, the photograph is a rare glimpse into the productive process in the field (Fig. 37).

Like the photograph with Denfield standing topless with an unnamed figure, this photograph again images Denfield in the field. Its inclusion is a far cry from his photographic spreads of pagan tribes in media such as the *Illustrated London News* in which the photographer's presence and subjective role was negated. While the inclusion of the photograph may appear to undermine the notion of 'Basuto-authenticity' that the photographer operated in, its inclusion in the publication firstly marked the photographer's commitment towards pictorialism and the necessary attention to fine detail. Secondly, given that it appeared in a publication oriented around photography for photography's sake without the pedagogical inclination of *Pictorial Education* and *Illustrated London News*, this photograph asserted Denfield's augmentation as a *photographer*, and in particular, as an *artistic* photographer, and is an expression of his growing engagement with other photographic communities.

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<sup>261</sup> DC, Denfield, 'Speech at the East London Photographic Society Annual Dinner', August 1954.

<sup>262</sup> J. Robinson, 'Through Basutoland with Doc', *Camera News*, 1, 6 (1957), 49-52.





Fig. 37

This brings us to another set of intermediaries that appear sporadically in his notes: Jacob in 1956, Morero, Tsestete, Ishamel and fellow photographer Jack Robinson in 1957 and Menassah in 1958. While Denfield used his ‘boys’ to feature in his images, Jack Robinson did not feature in this way in any of his photographs. Instead he appeared as a colleague and peer. It is Robinson, after all, who took the above-mentioned photograph of Denfield posing a subject and in the article he provided a lengthy account of his expedition through various trading stores, missionaries, rocky roads and mountains in Basutoland with Denfield in February 1957. In a manner reminiscent of Denfield’s method of gaining entry in Nigeria, Robinson provided an account with chiefs:

...The following morning at 10:15 we once again re-crossed the Sinqunyale River: this time the water had dropped sufficiently for us to wade through on horse-back and we continued up this valley to Mokhalimetso. The journey was up-hill all the way. What marvellous horses these are- they climb the mountains like goats, and are wonderfully sure-footed. Sometimes our paths were almost vertical. Our camp which we reached at about 3 o clock

that day was just over the top of the mountains and was very beautiful. Soon after our arrival we were visited by the Chief who asked the usual questions ‘Where are you from’ ‘where are you going?’ and ‘why did you come?’ etc and we asked about his family and his crops and finally borrowed a couple of chairs and had a bucket of water brought us<sup>263</sup>.

The transition in the field, from strangers to familiar figures, emerged in Robinson’s encounter again. Robinson shared Denfield’s appreciation of the Basutoland landscape in its potential for pictorial expression. In the same account he also declared that “Quachas Nek itself is quite picturesque and I feel that a little time spent there would be interesting from a photographic point of view”<sup>264</sup>. As a fellow photographer, Denfield’s invitation to Robinson to share the journey with him was perhaps a reflection of the growing influence in his career of a more institutionalised form of photography in salon circles. In his account, it is interesting to contrast Robinson’s appreciation of the ‘sure-footed’ horses with his callous reference to the ‘native boys’. Similarly, in Denfield’s diary of his expeditions from 1956 to 1958, the Basuto guides remained indistinct figures who appeared sporadically and problematically, as suggested in these excerpts:

9<sup>th</sup> February Thursday. Taban Lifolu.

Nice weather in the morning. Took pictures from camp site, trouble with Medalist counter. Hope it is alright. Left at 10 am. Going very hard. Jacob fell off horse. Camped at 1 am at Tabana Lifolu. Nice spot. Peas in pot weighed 20 lbs for the natives’ dinner. Tent site good. Boys slept outside. Good night.

10<sup>th</sup> February. Friday. Semongkong.

Pictures at Tabana lifolu. Angry with boys who want to stay behind and eat food from Native woman. Next time they take rations with them and no money for food. Left 9 30 am. Lovely trek over mountain. Saw Rheeback on journey. Arrived falls at 12 10 am. Mr and Mrs Collett were there saying their final goodbyes to the local Native chiefs. Also Mr Buschoff A.D.O. Mohales Hook. Cynthia had new pets. Little Willy is a young swallow. Jolly boy is a hare. Uncle Sam is a Field mouse. Story of the Raven Swanepoel.

11<sup>th</sup> February. Saturday. Falls

Photos of Canyon with flash. Words with Jacob over food question. Nearly fired him. Walked to Mission and saw Father Cote and Brother Picard. Took pictures of burnt out church at Mission. Pictures of Jolly boy and Little Willy. Rain in p.m. Promised Cynthia Dexidrine and Salmon.

16<sup>th</sup> February. Thursday. To Nohannes.

Awoke at 4 am. Rain now ceased. Pictures at neighbouring village. Started at 9 40 am from Ketani and after hard ride arrived at Nohannes at 3.10 pm. The pack saddles were torn by jutting rocks on the way. Leonard Whittel now in Nohanna. Had a lovely bath and walk in the garden. Natalie, from Tsius (1955) was in shop. He was delighted with his pictures that I gave him. Saw Simon, Umtwedi etc. Jacob is most truculent.

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<sup>263</sup> Robinson, ‘Through Basutoland’, p 50.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid p 49.

21<sup>st</sup>. February. Tuesday. Sekakes.

Good weather. No horses. Jacob protested against wages of 4 (pounds). Arrived at Sekakes at 3.30. pm. Very tired. Letters from home<sup>265</sup>.

Underpinning these excerpts is the sense of the division between Denfield's world and the world of the 'other' in a manner reminiscent of the traders, who, despite their location, appeared partly removed from the black Basuto. Denfield's Basuto guide, Jacob, is an interesting contrast to the earlier figure, Tindale, whom Denfield remembered affectionately. The latter was often represented as a cheerful and respectful servant who seemingly never failed to address Denfield as 'Morena' (my lord). On the other hand we are given an image of Jacob as ill-mannered, greedy and unruly figure who threatened to ruin the journey for his 'boss'. In Denfield's accounts Tindale conformed to his servitude role almost unquestioningly, while Jacob threatened to disrupt this arrangement by expressing his unhappiness with his wage and desire to stay behind for extra food. Almost inevitably his subversion was criminalised as Denfield threatened to fire him, and his character consequently considered deviant or 'most truculent'. These are descriptions that resonate with those of travel writers venturing into the continent for the first time (see previous chapter). Amongst the swirl of activities, characters and interactions in the field, these minuscule details of Denfield's interactions with his 'boys' were thus an expression of colonial relations at work. The names of Morero, Tsestete, Ishamel and Menassah were casually dropped in his account, where they were referred to simply as 'guides' with no contextual information.

It is worthwhile to read this representation in the diary against Denfield's account of Basuto people in his above-mentioned speech to the Rotary Club:

And now what of the Basuto people themselves? They are picturesque and hard-working. Wherever I went I found them helpful and honest. As my boy Tindale remarked with his profound philosophy 'There are no Tsotsis in the mountains' and how true this is (sic.). There is nothing there to disturb one's peace. I have now spent three leaves there and have ridden almost 1500 miles on its bridle paths photographing the country. I have taken many pictures. People have asked me which one do I like best (sic.). I can't answer that I like them all. Each one means something to me. I hope towards the end of this year to be able to give people an opportunity of seeing them. I often look through some of them and realise even in this atomic age there are places where one can find peace of mind and thankfulness in one's heart. This last picture which is symbolic of Basutoland I dedicate to my boy Tindale who in his profound wisdom has said 'There are no tsotsis in the mountains'<sup>266</sup>.

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<sup>265</sup> DC, Denfield, 'Around Nkaus. Alone.', p 1956.

<sup>266</sup> DC, Denfield, 'Speech to Rotary Club', p 1952.

The tensions one encounters embedded in his interaction with Jacob and other guides in the diaries is a contrast to the simplified romanticisation of the Basuto as a (homogenous) people. It echoes ethnological discourse in the transition from the experience of fieldwork to written ethnographic accounts. According to Argyrou, the former is unruly where fieldworkers find themselves in circumstances not of their own choosing in contrast to ethnographic texts that tell a story “in which ethnographers appear to have been in control throughout their fieldwork encounters, to have known exactly what they were doing and why, to have had unlimited patience with, and understanding for the natives”<sup>267</sup>. The abovementioned account is also arguably, a manifestation of the colonial settler fantasy that emerges once again where the black Africans perform work, obediently and diligently as a natural labouring class. Parallel to the construction of the idyll was a re-enactment of colonial subject positions. Jacob threatened to disrupt this fantasy. Possibly, even Tindale had attempted to do so by wearing sunglasses for the camera. However, Denfield negated both attempts by placing both subjects and other guides in roles that would conform to his imagined idealised African landscape, on horses and in harmony with nature, far from the trappings of modernity.

‘The Earth is the Lord’s’, for example, depicts a mountainous landscape with a male subject in the foreground pulling a horse and with his back to the photographer (Fig. 38). The mountain creates a sense of the motion of waves, as though the man is about to enter the ocean that beckons. The river running in the centre of the image accentuates this, as it moves towards infinity, an infinity that is also suggested by the mountains as they recede far into the background.

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<sup>267</sup> Argyrou, *Will to Meaning*, p16.



Fig. 38

This is also illustrated effectively in the photograph ‘Song of Basutoland’ (Fig. 39). It portrays a naked child walking with an adult male. The latter is fully clothed and covered with a blanket while carrying a stick. The child tugs casually at the blanket while they walk with their backs to the photographer. The adult male assumes a protective and familiar role to the child, who, in his youth, cuts an innocent figure. Denfield also captured the sun’s rays in the background that appear to embrace the subjects, nearly covering them in a blanket of warmth. The boy’s body is twisted slightly, almost playfully, as though he is unaware of the photographer. They walk towards the countryside as the sun shines brightly on the mountains and valleys. The two subjects are nebulous figures who cannot be identified easily, thus representing any subject one imagines. In turn this marks the emergence of anthropology’s notion of methodological collectivism whereby society is seen as more fundamental than that of the individual<sup>268</sup>. The two subjects are thus to be read as ‘typical’ thereby representing a whole collective. Moreover, by having their backs to us there is even less of an opportunity to engage with them as individuals.

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<sup>268</sup>T. Eriksen & F. Nielsen, *A history of Anthropology*, (London: Pluto Press, 2001), p 14.



Fig. 39

Like the ‘Riders on the horizon’ we cannot work out where they have come from or where they are going. The photograph invites us instead to envisage the possibilities offered by the unoccupied vast mountain in front of them. With an absence of objects the photograph is highly nostalgic with regards to the representation of landscape and ‘rurality’ or ‘pastoralism’. While the child’s nudity is a contrast to the adult male’s layers of clothing, both have been modeled to construct a fiction of a pre-industrial space.

It is ironic though, that Denfield pointed out that an exhibition of such photographs in England led to a discovery by one viewer that his company manufactured the blankets. Yet, this irony did not necessarily need a resolution in Denfield’s project given the creative license afforded to pictorial photography. Interestingly though, despite the liberty he took to create such a picture, Denfield remained a distant figure. Even as he created an image of intimacy and at-one-ment with the landscape, he remained an observer of this very idyll. He stood at some distance from the subjects who turned their back on him. Similarly, in ‘The Valley Awakens’ as the horseman paused with his horse and gazed upon the breaking morning, he stood remote from the valley of mountains, observing the swiftly moving clouds above. Not unlike the photographer, the horseman stands on the periphery of the frame. Thus even as the photographer created images of intimacy, the idyll remained evasive: seemingly within reach but as elusive as a dream.

These representations resonate with what Beattie described as ‘stranger value’ in fieldwork, that is, the sense that the anthropologist “can never quite become one with and indistinguishable from the people he is studying”, a condition which Beattie regarded as valuable to allow the subjects under study to engage freely with the investigator<sup>269</sup>. Beattie’s own view expresses the manner in which anthropology has continued to maintain distance between the west and the other<sup>270</sup>. For Beattie, it was essential that the anthropologist tries to understand the Other’s point of view “while still retaining a foothold in our own world”<sup>271</sup>. Thus in our observation of ‘The Valley Awakens’ and ‘The Earth is the Lords’ we can assume the ‘native’s’ perspective, seeing the kinds of sights in front of him, yet, like the photographer that distance between ‘us’ and ‘them’ is sustained.

Denfield’s use of mountains as a motif in his photographs is significant both symbolically and personally when we unpack Basutoland’s history and relationship with South Africa. After gaining the ‘protection’ of the British Empire in 1868 and avoiding incorporation into the Boer-led Free State, Basutoland became a British protectorate under the authority of the British High Commissioner.<sup>272</sup> However, with the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, the possibility of incorporation into South Africa re-emerged and again in the 1930s during the premiership of Hertzog as well as during the period of the establishment of the system of self-governing homelands under apartheid during the 1950s<sup>273</sup>.

According to Rosenberg, one response to this threat of incorporation was the emergence of a national identity that drew heavily on the mountain fortress of Thaba-Bosiu and its connection to Chief Moshoeshoe, who in the Lesotho origin myth, is said to be the founder of the ‘Basotho’ as a people.<sup>274</sup> In popular myth, it is said that the sides of the mountains would rise up at night to protect Moshoeshoe and his followers from invaders and eventually became the political centre of the nation. From about 1917 until Basutoland gained independence in 1966, the symbolic value of the mountain was harnessed and incorporated into resistance discourse, and became an increasingly important venue for meetings as it was integrated within heritage discourse. The symbolic value of Thaba-Bosiu extended to the idea of a pilgrimage to the mountains, whereby individuals would make a point of going to visit

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<sup>269</sup> Beattie, *Other Cultures*, p 87.

<sup>270</sup> Fabian, *Time and the Other*, p 31.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid* p 77.

<sup>272</sup> K. Shillington, *History in Southern Africa* (Essex: Longman, 1987).

<sup>273</sup> Shillington, *History in Southern Africa*, p 167.

<sup>274</sup> S. Rosenberg, ‘Monuments, Holidays and Remembering Moshoeshoe: The Emergence of National Identity in Lesotho, 1902-1966’, *Africa Today*, 46, 1 (1999), 49-72.

the mountain in times of crisis, to pray and find hope.<sup>275</sup> While he may not have appropriated the mountain motif with nationalist sentiments, Denfield employed familiar idioms of an intensely personal and transformative journey in his representations of the mountain. For Denfield, Basutoland represented an escape, perhaps a transcendental zone from change where he could invent or conjure up idealized landscapes. In part, then, Denfield is part of a colonial construction of Lesotho as the mountain, into which he both asserts, but also produces for later nationalist appropriations.

There are interesting parallels here with the photography of the Native Commissioner of Ovamboland ‘Cocky’ Hahn in the 1930s and 1940s. Patricia Hayes argues that Hahn romanticised colonial northern Namibia in a way that presented a set of homologies between nature and natives. She argues that towards the end of his career as native commissioner, Hahn and his colleagues used photographs of tribalism as mementos of an ‘untamed’ Africa, signifiers of the region’s wildness, openness and lack of modernity. Like Denfield’s Basutoland, the northern territories of South West Africa were deployed visually as spaces ‘where men still dream’.<sup>276</sup> Hayes points out that such a representational framework was the visual antithesis of industrialisation and modernity of Southern Africa. Basutoland was being deployed in a similar way by Denfield. His images can be understood as a yearning for a space away from change, a premodern space to which he could retreat. His use of the mountainous landscape as a motif might be read as visual expressions of a man not fully identifying with South African politics and in particular with Afrikaner nationalism, but one caught between change and a British imperialist heritage. Basutoland offered him possibilities for imagining other worlds. For one thing, he expressed to his audience in his solo exhibition in East London that:

The trouble is that we are becoming mechanized- not only of body but of mind. We are paying a penalty for our civilization. We are becoming over ambitious and discontent. The strain of life is increasing and the tendency to various neuroses, we are manufacturing them ourselves, but above all we are losing the art of finding our pleasures in the simple things of life<sup>277</sup>.

This sense of retreat or refuge in the premodern through images has parallels with the literary oeuvre of Laurens van der Post. Wilmsen argues that van der Post romanticised ‘Bushmen’ as Jungian archetypes of authentic humanity in reaction to the conflictual politics of the Cold

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<sup>275</sup> Rosenberg, ‘Monuments, Holidays and Remembering Moshoeshoe’, p 51.

<sup>276</sup> Hayes, ‘Northern Exposures’, p172.

<sup>277</sup> DC, Denfield, ‘Speech at ‘Beauty of Basutoland’ exhibition’, East London Museum, 1953.



War<sup>278</sup>. For ethnographers and writers like van der Post, an anxiety growing from the ashes of the Second World War focused on the apparent threat of modernity “with its perceived undermining, perhaps extinction, of essential humanity and the resulting alienation of individuals from society”<sup>279</sup>. The result was a re-excavation of the ‘primitive man’ and a construction of a ‘natural society’. Similarly, for Denfield Basutoland not only offered potential for picturesque photography, but it had become a place of retreat from modernity. This is best expressed in his account for ‘The Valley Awakens’ as his favourite print:

It is not just the wanderlust that seems to draw me there year after year. What then is the secret of Basutoland? Perhaps I want to be on my horse again and feel the cool splash of water on my face as I cross a stream. Perhaps I want to ride through those valleys eating the peaches that grow in the little villages and hear the inhabitants call ‘Here comes Ra le Tsoantso’ (Father of the pictures). It may be that I want to be again on that mountain ridge where I can watch the mist break beneath me revealing a panorama of hundreds of summits. I have travelled many miles on Basutoland’s bridle paths and have taken many pictures but ‘The Valley Awakens’ *awakens* something in me. It makes me realise that even in this atomic age there are still places where one can find peace of mind and where there is thankfulness in one’s heart. Perhaps this is the secret of Basutoland?<sup>280</sup>

According to Gautrand, after the 1950s in European and American photographic practices the need to celebrate and rediscover human dignity was acute after five years of a horrific war. Added to this was a desire to forget recent events. This would then translate photographically into images where “time vanishes in favour of a timelessness which encourages contemplation and the transformation of reality into poetry”<sup>281</sup>. Denfield’s sentiments expressed this desire to look away from the annihilation that was inevitable with the ‘atomic age’ as he searched for sights that spoke to his poetic sensibility. In turn, such an account also resonates with the experience of the anthropologist who ‘discovers’ himself while busy observing the Other.

## Conclusion

By the 1940s, anthropology had become a well-established discipline in Europe. According to Eriksen and Nielsen, 1946 saw the formation of the Association of Social Anthropologists, for example, and “although anthropology branched off in many directions in the decades

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<sup>278</sup> See E.N Wilmsen, ‘Primitive Politics in Sanctified Landscapes: The Ethnographic Fictions of Laurens van der Post’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 21, 2 (1995), 201-223.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid p 23.

<sup>280</sup> Denfield, ‘My Favourite Print’, p 272.

<sup>281</sup> J. Gautrand, ‘Looking at others: humanism and neo-realism’, In M. Frizot, ed., *A new history of photography*, p 631.

following the war, it also became more tightly integrated than before, thanks to the continuation – and internationalisation- of core debates”<sup>282</sup>. Yet, Denfield never took part formally in any of those conversations and never received formal training in anthropology. This suggests that while these debates may have taken place strictly within academia, anthropological discourse continued to spread beyond institutional walls. One might keep in mind that through his pilgrimages in Basutoland he dwelled in pictorialism as an amateur photographer, a position that arguably, speaks to the sense of his ‘naïve’ understanding of anthropology which, nevertheless, draws on some of the discipline’s ‘essences’. In Nigeria, Denfield had expressed his interest in anthropology through the photographic medium, capturing images of ‘disappearing tribes’. His move towards pictorialism became less concerned with preservation but with constructing picturesque images of the native scene. However, by paying attention to a core concept in anthropology that is, fieldwork, and by paying attention to the colonial relations that emerged through his encounters with various intermediaries, I have argued that his photography in Basutoland, while not functioning necessarily ethnographically/pedagogically, does in turn image the very discourse that underpins anthropology.

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<sup>282</sup> Eriksen & Nielsen, *A history of anthropology*, p. 77

### Chapter 3: From Salons to the Native Reserve



Fig. 40



Fig. 41

#### Introduction

In the early to mid 1950s, Denfield displayed the photograph 'His Silver Goblet' in different international exhibitions<sup>283</sup>, a close up portrait of an elderly subject drinking from a cup (Fig. 41). This formed part of his series of Basutoland photographs. The photograph is striking in its depiction of layers of textures: the blanket around him, his wrinkled face and hand, the cloth wrapped around his head and the rope around the cup that extends to his shoulder. The photograph is a depiction of the simple gesture of drinking: its pleasure and simplicity, whereby the subject's gesture mimics the viewer's own of looking. The reference to the metal cup as a goblet is of course ironic given the term's Eucharistic associations. Its allusion to such brings into sharp relief the subject's apparent poverty that is suggested by his humble tin. The photograph is also remarkable in its compositional similarity to a photograph Denfield took of a Nigerian subject, which appeared in *Pictorial Education* in 1947<sup>284</sup>. In this image an elderly male is photographed drinking from a calabash (Fig. 40). At first glance the subjects seem identical in being elderly with protruding cheekbones. When the two photographs are placed next to each other, the subjects nearly mirror each other. While the simple gesture of drinking in one context was to be read as an example of a local practice, in the other context it was included to reflect Denfield's artistic skill. The photograph in the *Pictorial Education* article was used to illustrate a particular aspect of

<sup>283</sup> The print was accepted by salons in San Jose (1955); Western (1955); Vancouver (1956); Tokyo International Salon (1952); 11<sup>th</sup> Louisville International Exhibition of Photography (1955); 8<sup>th</sup> Salon Internacionale de Fotografia De San Sebastian Societal Fotografia de Guipuzcoa (1955).

<sup>284</sup> Denfield, 'Scenes among the Hausa people of Northern Nigeria', *Pictorial Education*, 21, 9 (1947), p 16.

Hausa cultural life. The article indicated, for example that “The gourd, or calabash, is culturally cultivated for the dry shell of the fruit. No one article is put to more uses than the gourd, and although it occurs in different forms naturally, its shape is sometimes artificially altered during growth to suit its final purpose”<sup>285</sup>. In contrast ‘His Silver Goblet’ appeared in salons devoid of such an exegesis. Here the photograph was to speak for itself and was included in exhibitions for its affective components. The photograph is a meditation and celebration of rurality and its potential to yield a particular aesthetic form.

Seemingly, Denfield borrowed from ethnographic idioms that characterised his earlier work to construct a pictorial effect. Yet, an important difference between ‘His Silver Goblet’ and its counterpart is the distance between the subject and the photographer. Constructing an anthropological description, the latter is a half-length depiction while the former is close enough to reveal the details of the subject’s skin. Like the ‘goblet’ which he embraces closely on his lips, the viewer is given access to the subject as though one can also taste what comes out of it. The photograph is an invitation to tap into one’s senses of seeing, touching and tasting but for such an effect the photographer relied on ethnographic forms of representation. In other words, when the two photographs are placed next to each other, the ‘picturesque’ depiction of ‘His Silver Goblet’ mirrors the very discourse that constituted the making of its counterpart. In the previous chapter I paid attention to the ways in which Denfield’s photography of Basutoland images the discourses of anthropology when looking at the context of the field. In this chapter I build on this formulation by paying attention to two interrelated ventures in-between his pilgrimages: his increased participation in salons and his intellectualization of ‘Native photography’. I explore the ways in which the vocabulary of the discipline complemented discursively the demands of the salon. Resultantly, the images produced as well as the method of conducting Native photography echoed various discursive repertoires of anthropology.

### ***Pagan Life on the Nigerian Plateau***

Although Denfield was most active in exhibiting his work between 1951 and 1958 with his collection of Basutoland photographs, he had already experimented with exhibiting his photographs taken in Nigeria as both ethnographic and pictorial work, albeit briefly. Denfield

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

held a solo exhibition at the galleries of the print company Illford Ltd. in London in early February, 1947. It was titled *Pagan Life on the Nigerian Plateau*. The visitor was provided with the following contextualisation in the exhibition pamphlet as a guide in viewing the display:

The rugged hills of this slightly undulating highland have proved a sanctuary for many primitive peoples, and here various pagan tribes have been forced to make their homes. They all abound in tribal fetishes and superstitions. They cling to their ancient traditions and weird customs, and are merely onlookers at the approach of civilisation. A few of the tribes are recorded here, but details have, of necessity, been drastically condensed<sup>286</sup>.

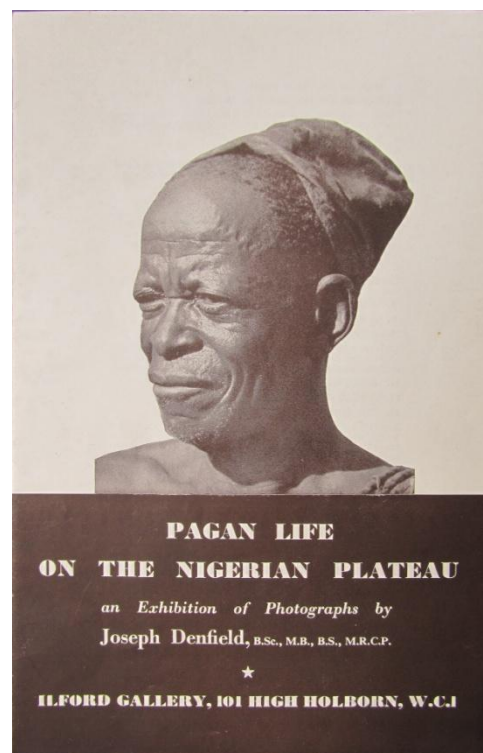


Fig. 42

Such a description relates to the kinds of images that I discussed in the previous chapter which Denfield produced premised on notions of primitiveness and difference. The rest of the pamphlet waxed lyrical about Denfield's endeavour in the task noting "through the fortunes of war, Dr. Denfield found himself posted in Northern Nigeria. Being interested in anthropology and photography he grasped the magnificent opportunities that this country had to offer" as well as pointing to his determination to learn more about the tribes in his locality. What was highlighted was also the arduous task of travelling through the plateau where it was noted that accumulating knowledge "necessitated many miles of trekking and was

<sup>286</sup> DC, 'Pagan Life on the Nigerian Plateau', exhibition pamphlet, Illford Galleries, 1947.

accomplished with the help of missionaries, who were most kind in giving him valuable information”<sup>287</sup> (Note the effacement of various other intermediaries in the field).

On the cover of the pamphlet is a portrait of an unnamed elderly subject. The backdrop of the photograph has been removed, thereby placing only his frame on the plain white page of the pamphlet. His placement on the cover presumably prefigures the exhibition. The viewer does not meet his gaze as he is rotated slightly to the left, which, when viewed in addition to the plain backdrop is constituted as other-worldly and thus an object of gaze. Therefore, this necessitates a further distancing between the subject and viewer. Through such a placement, the image speaks to the perpetuation of distance between the anthropologist and other in the discipline’s heritage (Fig. 42). As Fabian argues, the conceptualisation of time has been an integral part of anthropology where terms such as ‘primitive’ and ‘pagan’ are explicit distancing devices with the result that the discipline has persistently placed “the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse”<sup>288</sup>.

Fifty one prints were selected for the exhibition. The captions indicate that 37 of these depicted individual subjects or small groups (such as ‘Man of the Buji Tribe; A Hill Jarawa Woman; a Dodo Man), while the rest were images of landscapes (including Village of Siri, A Pagan Compound; the Village of Zagun), and to smaller extent images of ceremonies (such as ‘A Fulani Flogging Ceremony’ or ‘Female Tribal Dance’). The majority of the people-oriented photographs were studies of women, where he deployed familiar gendered tropes such as ‘A Pagan mother and child’ and ‘Ron mother and child’, as well as depictions of women in conventionally feminised spaces or rituals such as ‘Hair-dressing scene’ or ‘A Sura woman grinding corn’. As the viewer moved from the first photograph ‘Man of the Buji Tribe’ to the last in the sequence ‘An itinerant’ he or she travelled through various stops along the plateau, in a manner comparable to Denfield’s own journeys, but within the confines of the exhibition space. We might imagine Denfield commenting on a guided tour supplying additional contextual information and reinforcing his position as authority on the subject matter. This would supplement the captions and brief descriptions attached to the photographs. For example, with regards to the photograph ‘Female Tribal Dance’ the viewer was given the (now-familiar) description:

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Fabian, *Time and the Other*, p 31.

The Kaleri are a most warlike tribe. They are all completely naked and of very savage appearance. Most of the men wear the hair in long coils impregnated with red clay. Their mud huts have two storeys, the upper one being approached from the outside by the ladder. They delight in animated dances. No woman is allowed to witness the male war dance, and the 'Dodo' man, dressed to represent an ancestral deity, which disguises his features, terrifies the women into seclusion.

Similarly, the following information was supplied with regards to 'A Rukuba Child':

This mushroom-like village is typical of most pagan tribes. The huts are built as closely together as possible for protection against unfriendly neighbour. Hedges of cactus act as further obstacles. Among the women of the Rukuba tribe the hair is dressed into a skull-like shape with the aid of red earth. Strings are worn tightly around the neck in a belief that it will prevent goitre, which is very common in these hill districts.

Both descriptions express the seemingly seamless transition I drew attention to in the previous chapter, that is, from the 'messy' fieldwork experience on the part of the ethnographer to producing texts that "exclude meticulously whatever is likely to undermine their authority and legitimacy"<sup>289</sup>. In the above captions what can be discerned is Denfield's "presence at the event described, his perceptual ability, his 'disinterested' perspective, his objectivity and his sincerity"<sup>290</sup>. In the description the subjects, though forming the punctum of the photographs, were positioned discursively in the broader landscape that constituted the villages as pagan and backward. While an intimate engagement of the photographs allows for readings that go beyond a classificatory impulse, in the exhibition, the photographs were instead accompanied by an exegesis that directed the viewer towards particular meanings. Susan Buck-Morss's notions of anaesthetics may be useful here in conceptualising this exhibitionary space<sup>291</sup>. For Buck-Morss, anaesthetic implies a deadening of the senses, which she connects to the shock of industrialisation and modernising processes. For Pinney this form of aesthetics that is predicated on the absence or distance of the body, marks an inversion of an earlier form of aesthetics which he calls 'corporetics' that mobilises all senses simultaneously<sup>292</sup>.

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<sup>289</sup> Argyrou, *Will to Meaning*, p 16.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid* p 17.

<sup>291</sup> S. Buck-Morss, 'Aesthetics and Anesthetic: Walter Benjamin's Artworks Essay Reconsidered', *October*, 62 (1992), 3-41.

<sup>292</sup> Pinney, *Photos of the Gods*, p 8.

Denfield was able to establish himself as both skilled photographer and ethnographer in the single exhibition. This is indicated in the press releases following the exhibition that asserted the importance of the project:

Demobilized from the R.A.M.C a short time ago, 35 year old Dr Denfield posted for two years in Northern Nigeria, had to overcome difficulties to get his pictures... The people were naturally timid, they abounded in superstitions, but not only their fear of the unknown in the shape of a camera, and the presence of a white man, made them difficult subjects, but the high temperatures played havoc with the photographic materials<sup>293</sup>.

Dr Denfield's photographs were a contribution towards bringing home to the British public a knowledge of the Colonial Empire for which it was responsible<sup>294</sup>.

This 'anesthetic' effect of the exhibition thus re-constituted the photographs as part of the broader imperial project, whereby Denfield took on the (white) burden of exploring 'unknown' worlds. Implicitly his military duty was then bound up with his photographic project. Denfield's exhibition at Illford Galleries was followed by greater exposure in photography-oriented magazines including *Photography*, *Amateur Photography: The Journal for Everybody with a Camera*, *Today: Photo World* and *Courier*. It is not clear whether this was a result of exhibition but it does suggest it had an impact in the British press. For one thing, the editor of *Amateur Photographer* explained the inclusion of Denfield's photographs in the issue was based on the 'unusual' exhibition Denfield held at the Illford galleries earlier that year and subsequently the photographer was asked to provide both images and an account of his experiences<sup>295</sup>. Although both *Illustrated London News* and *Pictorial Education* told stories partly through images, the visual was used primarily evidentially in that the objective was to inform and in the latter to educate. Photographs were then reconstituted partly as reportage.

On one level Denfield's photographs appear to have been used in a similar fashion in the publications *Amateur Photography*, *Photography* and *Today* in that all three placed his images alongside descriptive ethnographic texts. In *Photography* Denfield reported, for example, "In this slightly undulating highland are to be found many pagan tribes who have been driven there by their more powerful neighbours or have migrated there on their own accord to find asylum and protection among its rugged hills"<sup>296</sup>. *Amateur Photography* provided ethnographic detail stating, for example, "Facial scarification is common and these

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<sup>293</sup> *Durant's Press Cuttings*, 13 February 1947.

<sup>294</sup> *Durant's Press Cutting*, 15 February 1947.

<sup>295</sup> A.L. Sowerby, 'The Camera in Africa', *Amateur Photography*, 97, 3058 (1947), p 394.

<sup>296</sup> Denfield, 'Recording Life in Nigeria', *Photography*, Nov-Dec 1946.



designs are sometimes most elaborate. Other personal adornments are seen in the use of ear, nose and lip plugs, and the filing and dyeing of teeth in the cause of beauty”<sup>297</sup>. Likewise, the *Today* magazine included numerous details about various aspects of socio-cultural life noting kinship dynamics by stating, for example “The pagan as an individual is of little importance, except as a member of this family group to which he belongs... The members work on co-operative lines, and everything is done to strengthen solidarity”<sup>298</sup>.

Notwithstanding the discursive continuity with the earlier publications, the circulation of his images in these particular publications did mark a shift in his career as a photographer<sup>299</sup>. Firstly, these journals featured only photographs as part of the standard layout while the *Illustrated London News* and *Pictorial Education* combined other forms of visual media such as drawings. Secondly the photographic journals were essentially *about* photography and photographers and actively promoted amateur photography, while the former largely *deployed* images to teach and narrate events. *Amateur Photography*, for example, contained articles about the technical aspects of photographs such speed, film and development of prints. *Photography* included reviews and announcement about amateur salon exhibitions while *Today* featured photographic spreads on sport, public figures, various cities, etc.

Denfield’s article ‘Pagan Sanctuary’ that appeared in *Today* was listed under the subsection ‘The Empire’ in the contents page, suggesting the visual task was reconstituted as essentially a British imperial project. This is perhaps unsurprising given that the magazine was a British publication. Such a classification in the magazine reveals the explicit intersection of the photographic series with territorialism tied to the Empire, that is, how the circulation of the images in Britain constructed and perpetuated a particular image-world of its colony tied to relations of domination and subordination. Moreover, we are told Denfield traversed ‘remote’ areas under British rule bringing home knowledge about its empire. Denfield in turn was positioned as an empire builder that is, “an adventurer, a hero, a self-less labourer for others’ well being”<sup>300</sup>. One might recall his characterisation in the British press following his exhibition as one of a relentless and industrious seeker of knowledge. In this regard, Sontag’s ‘heroism of vision’ to which I alluded in the previous chapter was intertwined with the ‘heroism’ that constituted empire building.

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<sup>297</sup> Denfield, ‘In Northern Nigeria’, *Amateur Photography*, 97, 3058 (1947), p 306.

<sup>298</sup> Denfield, ‘Pagan Sanctuary’, *Today*, 8, 7 (1947), 53-56.

<sup>300</sup> S. Howe, *Empire: A very short introduction*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p 10.

As an account of the Nigerian plateau as a colony, Denfield's photographs in the article thus functioned simultaneously as a report on one of the British colonies and an illustration of his photographic skill. Photographs that represent various aspects of social life such as dancing, food, architecture, scarification and family were selected to illustrate pagan distinctiveness parallel to the text. Citing the now-familiar concerns that captured the attention of earlier travellers, for example, the reader was told of details regarding 'unchanging' practices such as scarification<sup>301</sup>. Correspondingly, the article then included two photographs of subjects with scarified faces. Both are cropped portraits depicting only their faces. Both subjects' heads are rotated to the left to effectively display the marks on the faces. The photographs are taken from a low angle, with the backdrop indistinct in the cropping process drawing attention to anatomical form (Fig. 43 & 44). In this context the portraits function more in Allan Sekula's notion of repressive portrait photographs. In tracing the shift from the 'honorific' tradition of portraiture derived from painting to more brutal forms he argues:

Photographic portraiture began to perform a role no painted portrait could have performed in the same thorough and rigorous fashion. This role derived, not from any honorific portrait tradition, but from the imperatives of medical and anatomical illustration. Thus photography came to establish and delimit the terrain of the other, to define both the generalised look- the typology- and the contingent instance of deviance and social pathology<sup>302</sup>.

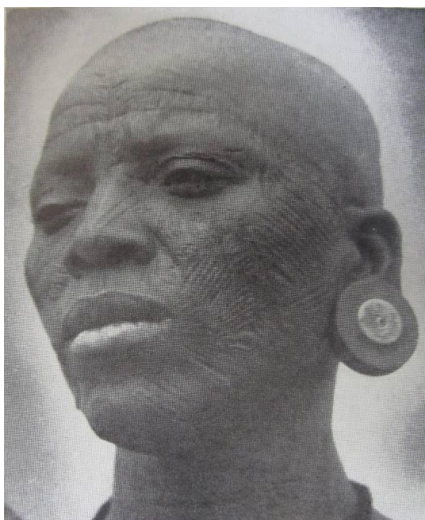


Fig. 43



Fig. 44

Consequently, a particular imperial gaze was constructed for the viewer through the photographs. Moreover, Denfield was no longer positioned as a curious amateur

<sup>301</sup> Denfield, 'Pagan Sanctuary', p 56.

<sup>302</sup> Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive', p 345.

photographer but as a British subject whose eye had gazed in the colony for the sake of the empire's European subjects. This was reinforced towards the end of the article when Denfield commented on the future prospects of the colony:

What does the future hold for these carefree people? Living as they are today, they are unified and unambitious. But if they take full advantage of the amenities that modern conditions have to offer, it appears inevitable that the smaller tribes will be absorbed or become extinct. When British rule finally gives way to self-government by native populations, will the same sympathetic consideration be given to them as today? That remains to be seen. One thing is certain: at present they are living in a communal civilisation which might well be the envy of the disdainful European. They may not have the dubious benefits of radio, telephone or atomic energy- but they have discovered how to live contentedly at peace<sup>303</sup>.

As a 'voice' of empire, Denfield drew upon the discourses around decolonisation with regards to what the end of empire would mean for the colonised<sup>304</sup>. He asserted his paternalistic position on Britain's relationship with the colony on the basis of him being physically there, unlike the ignorant reader, it is suggested, who was content to frown upon the pagan village as a substandard way of life. Arguably, the destruction of the war enabled by its industrialisation did impact his regard of the village as a sanctuary protected from the shortfalls of modernity. Nevertheless, in the article his photographs were used to construct the villagers as culturally distinct and distant from the European.

The use of Denfield's images in an article in the *Cape Times Magazine* titled 'Among the Pagan tribes of Nigeria'<sup>305</sup> was possibly also a result of the impact of the exhibition. Published in January 1948 approximately several months after Denfield's arrival in East London, this South African magazine featured a spread of six photographs. As with the two British publications, the *Illustrated London News* and *Pictorial Education*, the article had a pedagogical ethos in providing an informative description of the 'tribes' and using the photographs as anthropological data that was accompanied by captions. For example, a photograph of huts was captioned 'The village of Sha. Very few of the huts are used for sleeping purposes, the majority being for stores, kitchens and beer making or to house the goats, chickens and corn of the Eggon tribesmen'. However, unlike the former publications which highlighted Denfield's endeavour in trekking through the villages and thus constructing him as an explorer/discoverer, here the only mention of Denfield was in

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<sup>303</sup> Denfield, 'Pagan Sanctuary', p 56.

<sup>304</sup> Cooper, F. 'The Dialectics of Decolonisation' in F. Cooper & A. Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1997), p 406.

<sup>305</sup> *Cape Times Magazine*, 10 January 1948.

parenthesis underneath the brief article ‘Photos by Joseph Denfield’. This is illustrative of what happens when photographs circulate in differing contexts. The article asserted the authority and empirical validity of the content more crudely. The isolation, primitive cultural life and essential difference of the subjects under study were stated more objectively as unquestionable fact. This is perhaps unsurprising given the advent of the National Party at this stage coming into power with its stringent separatist development policies. These photographs can be read thus in the context of the history of racial segregation. Although it focused on Nigeria, the article reinforced the naturalisation of racial and ethnic difference.

### **Exhibiting in Salons**

Denfield was most prolific as an exhibitor between 1951 and 1958 in displaying his Basutoland images. As with his exhibition at the Illford Galleries, the ‘native scene’ was the basis of his work. This is most remarkable in his solo exhibition titled *‘The Beauty of Basutoland’: an exhibition of pictorial photography held at the East London Museum and Maseru in 1953*. Unlike his London exhibition, this was primarily a demonstration of pictorial work through the ethnographic lens, as opposed to an essentially ethnographic production. Sponsored by the East London Association of Arts and with assistance from the Museum director, Marjorie Courteney-Latimer<sup>306</sup>, the exhibition included a selection of 51 prints. Exhibiting at the Museum allowed Denfield to combine effectively his accumulated anthropological knowledge and his growing artistic skill. Furthermore, it helped to legitimise his work as both authoritative and significant in contributing towards knowledge. For example, in the exhibition catalogue the visitor would have read:

The Basuto are a picturesque, honest and hard-working race. Living in surroundings of surpassing beauty, their mode of life, reminiscent of biblical times, lends itself to artistic presentation....On the pictorial merit of his Basutoland work, Dr Denfield was admitted to the Associateship of the Royal Photographic Society. He is well known for his original studies of Native life and is one of the few photographers in South Africa who has promoted pictorial interest in Native scenes<sup>307</sup>.

This description, of course, resonated with Denfield’s own public account of Basutoland in various speeches. Echoing Denfield’s own sentiments on Basutoland as a sanctuary, the exhibition was unequivocal in constructing a utopian image of the region, a pre-industrial, depoliticised space ‘reminiscent of bible times’. In a speech Denfield pointed out that “it is

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<sup>306</sup> In the untitled speech Denfield shares gratitude to Courteney-Latimer for her ‘interest’ and ‘practical help’.

<sup>307</sup> DC, ‘Beauty of Basutoland’ exhibition catalogue, East London Association of Arts, January 1953.

true that the less advanced races have not the dubious benefits of radio and television, but they have learnt how to live contentedly which one must admit in this atomic age is more refreshing” and noted to his audience that “these photographs that you see all around you are photographs of people who are happier than you or I will ever be”. He also warned despairingly that “remember that one day they may too develop nervous breakdowns”<sup>308</sup>.

In image and text, the ‘native scene’ and hence ‘native question’ became pictorial in its formulation. Needless to say, this de-politicised the very orchestration of the notion of the native reserve. Moreover, as I will elaborate at a later stage, pictorialism centred on technological control and manipulation, placing form above content. When the native question was framed within such terms it was then reduced to a more technicist and less sociological formulation where arguably, its administration became easily constituted in the language of pragmatism and logistics. It is also tempting to note the parallels between the photographer’s control over the visual field and the control that was exercised administratively, over the black labour force. In this sense, pictorialism complemented such technologisation of the native question.

Writing about people in Basutoland in the same manner as the pagan subjects in Northern Nigeria, Denfield revealed his photographic work to be closely related to a more personal project of mitigating the anxieties surrounding Afrikaner nationalist republican modernity. His suspicions of impending social change were perhaps not unfounded in that in its colour policy for the 1948 election, the National Party stated clearly its plan for the development of separate areas for different racial groups<sup>309</sup>. According to Ashforth, in the context of a massive movement of black Africans to urban areas in the 1940s and a decline of the ‘carrying capacity’ of the Reserves “the task of putting substance into the slogans of Apartheid was no small task”<sup>310</sup>. Thus it was partly within such a context that the Tomlinson Commission was devised “to conduct an exhaustive inquiry into and to report upon a comprehensive scheme for the rehabilitation of the Native areas with a view to developing within a social structure in keeping with the culture of the Native and based on effective socio-economic planning”<sup>311</sup>.

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<sup>308</sup> DC, Denfield, ‘Beauty of Basutoland’ exhibition speech, January 1953.

<sup>309</sup> It is worthwhile pointing out as a reminder that this did not include Basutoland, but as a then-resident in South Africa Denfield was of course affected directly by such policies.

<sup>310</sup> A. Ashforth, *The politics of official discourse in twentieth century South Africa*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p 150.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid* p 150.

Yet, while the policies of separate development and stringent laws of the apartheid government increased instability by pushing black South Africans further to the rural periphery, Denfield romanticised the rural space (both the South African reserves and Basutoland) as a sanctuary free of power struggles. This was more pronounced when he circulated his images in photographic salons locally and globally. In such contexts photographs were judged not necessarily on their representational value but on aesthetics, technical composition, lines, shading, tonality, etc<sup>312</sup>. As I have noted, in pictorialism the emphasis was on effective composition and developing images that were pleasing to the eye. This marked a shift in the depiction of Africans or ‘native subjects’ as representations of particular tribes to framing them within the picturesque.

Hayes notes that from the turn of the twentieth century pictorialism was established in South Africa with regular salons that reflected European trends. Largely a domain of white South Africans, salon images showed little awareness of the growing urban presence of black South Africa<sup>313</sup>. On the other hand, in Denfield’s photographs the rural became a key feature of display and was thus reconfigured as pictorially significant. While salons offered amateur photographers an opportunity to not only display their work but to compete amongst themselves, the photographic societies and institutions organising the salons would provide guidelines for acceptable prints, thus constructing a very particular visual grammar for photographers to utilise. When writing about the judging system, for example, Gliha noted that the essential features of the system of awarding points to photographs that judges pay attention to include “the content, the composition and general impressions (including the technical execution)”<sup>314</sup>.

In *South African Photography*, Wright provided a guide for photographers regarding suitable choices of content to increase one’s acceptance in a salon. He listed landscape images, portraits, children’s pictures, animal, flowers, still life, genre photographs, nudes and humorous photographs as solid choices. With regards to landscape, for example, he pointed out that “One rule is to have a well-established centre of interest. Too many landscape photographs show merely a broad sweep of countryside without anything definite as a centre of interest...The eye wants to be led to some object worth looking at”. Furthermore he suggested that “Another thing many landscape pictures require is the presence of one or more

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<sup>312</sup> J. Wright, ‘Choice of Subjects for Salons’, *S.A Photography*, 4, 6 (1953), 1-3.

<sup>313</sup> Hayes, ‘A short history’, p 140.

<sup>314</sup> M. Gliha, ‘Our system of points applied to appraising qualities of photographs’, *Almana Med narodne Fotografije: 6<sup>th</sup> international Exhibitions in Ljubljana, 1956*.

human figures....many scenes are definitely and greatly improved by the inclusion of human beings”<sup>315</sup>. Similarly, in guiding photographers interested in genre photographs he noted those that show children or adults at work or play or in conversations found ready acceptances in salons, though not easy to obtain in that “First of all the people themselves must at least be moderately interesting in appearance... The surroundings must be interesting and appropriate. Finally the figures in the picture must be pleasingly arranged”<sup>316</sup>. Likewise, in resolving the dilemma of subject-matter for photography, Yates provided these suggestions:

As I write there lies before me a whole collection of pipes and a couple of ash trays. The shapes of the pipes are varied and the highlights, texture of the wood and their present accidental positions offer untold possibilities and yet when you think it over, how often have you seen a good photograph of pipes. Just think of the possibilities in the way of titles alone. You could display character by implication- a battered pipe, scattered ash and an elegant ash. Thus of subjects, good subjects, there is no lack...The arrangement of one or two articles of kitchenware...a teapot- coffee jug- anything in that line offers untold opportunities for originality and initiative and also in the development of sound technique<sup>317</sup>.

Yates and Wright’s pointers were significant in not only suggesting the extent to which salon and photographic institutions ‘trained’ amateur photographs to see the world in particular ways or construct particular forms of visuality but they also illustrated pictorialism as a form distinct from ethnographic work in consciously creating images ‘by implication’ or suggestion. The photographs were not to be read as texts mirroring or representing social life ‘as is’ directly but as circumlocutory impressions from which the viewer would exercise his or her imagination. An example is ‘The Blue Vase’ by John B. Montgomery, which appeared at the Photographic Society of America’s International Photographic Exhibition at St. Louis in 1957<sup>318</sup>. The photograph celebrates the aesthetics of domestic objects and their arrangement. It can thus be read, amongst other ways, as an inner reflection or meditation of modern or bourgeois living. I will elaborate at a later stage on the importance of the notion of creating images ‘by implication’ or suggestion when addressing the importance attached to symbolism in anthropology and how this is then imaged in the photographs.

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<sup>315</sup> Wright, ‘Choice of Subjects for Salons’, p 1.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid p 2.

<sup>317</sup> J. H. Yates, ‘What Can I take?’, *SA Photography* 4, 6 (1953), p 11.

<sup>318</sup> DC, ‘International Photographic Exhibition: Photographic Society of America, St Louis’, 1957.

Apart from choice of subject, photographers would also be given guidelines on how to improve their images. With regards to portraits for example, it would be suggested:

Watch the hands and arms. Keep them as much in the same plane as the face as possible. Give the head plenty of space, especially if the sitter is looking out of the picture. Don't clutter up the background with incongruous items, simplicity is one of the keynotes to success. Backgrounds are important. They should rarely be an overall black or white. Try and arrange that the high lights come against a darker tone. Remember that a head, like a landscape, has three dimensions. Try to arrange your lighting to portray these three and so get solidity. Watch the eyes particularly- see that they are well lighted and have good catch lights. Also try to arrange that they are not above the line of the top third. Also remember that a face is not pure white. There must be gradation to show shape and interesting contours<sup>319</sup>.

Elsewhere, the amateur photographer was told that with regards to expressions in portraits "A portrait must be able to tell you all about the person it depicts. The likeness to the sitter should be obvious. It should tell you all you want to know about the shape of face, age, appearance, and dress". Moreover, attention needed to be paid to personal mannerisms as part of facial expressions in that "these mannerisms may have their source in the way he uses his hands and if this is so- use them in your picture". The photographer had to be a keen observer of minutiae that characterizes the subject and to "watch for facial expressions as he talks- making a mental notes of the subject that brought on that momentary expression which you are going to try to capture, because it is that one expression which will assist you to give that vital something to your depiction of his character"<sup>320</sup>.

In-as-much the pictorial photographer was encouraged to exercise his or her creative ability and imagination, he or she had to take particular care in creating images deemed acceptable for salons. Photography became simultaneously a technical and fantastical craft. Inevitably, photographers were also provided with tips on improving the quality of their prints where it was suggested, for example, that should one's prints lack sparkle "Check against this list: clean lenses in both camera and enlarger. Coated lenses help a lot, as they minimise internal reflections". With regards to film, it would be suggested "The grain of the film is to be as fine as possible". With regards to choice of subject and the direction from which to expose the photographer was told "A picture of a group or a forest of dark trees against the sky is never likely to have 'snap' ...Under conditions of artificial light, let the lighting be even and soft

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<sup>319</sup> J. H. Yates, 'Portrait Points', *South African Photography*, July/August, 4, 9 (1953), p 2.

<sup>320</sup> Anonymous, 'Expression in Portraits', *South African Photography*, 4, 6 (1953), p 11.



rather than hard. Light and dark areas should follow a certain relationship in strength and light...”<sup>321</sup>.

Arguably, nowhere was this ordering of photography more pronounced than in the columns of print criticism and exhibition reviews. For example, in his review of the photograph ‘The approaching storm’, a landscape photograph by M.C. Margette, Fred Harris wrote:

Firstly I think it will be generally agreed that he has been singularly fortunate in securing an excellent sky and a good landscape, but I am frankly worried about the placing of the farmhouse. It is almost exactly in the middle and I don’t like it there. I know it can be said that it must be regarded as such but a part of the light area which is placed as a whole in a very good position, but I am not so sure that that argument can be supported in this case. A house of any kind denotes human habitation and when it is of a pleasing shape and is strongly lit, as in this case, it obtains an importance and an individuality which cannot be merged into a patch of moderately bright middle distance<sup>322</sup>.

Similarly, in a review of a still-life study ‘Onion’s by Andrew Goldie, Harris wrote:

One of the most important things about this type of composition is that it must look natural, however carefully we may *know* the various articles have been placed. Two of these onions, however, do appear somewhat unnatural. The upper one of those which are second from the left is one of the culprits. Its perimeter is just touching the onions below and on its right giving it an appearance of being balanced, whereas a slight overlap would have been helpful. The uppermost one in the basket is also slightly suspect. Small points these but they are the things which count in a subject in which everything is under control<sup>323</sup>.

Correspondingly, in writing a review of a salon in Pretoria Harris focused on the minute technical details of prints selected, from the types of subjects to the composition in each. When describing ‘Dying Swan’ by Jack Le Roux he observed that “The placing is beautifully done but it fails to be a masterpiece owing to a few minor faults. Firstly, the position of the left leg is exceptionally ungainly, especially with its brilliant lighting”. Likewise, when commenting on ‘Poet’s Corner’ by photographer Sherlock Holmes he noted that it “has been very well conceived and executed, though I wonder whether very slightly more light on the roles would not have helped...”<sup>324</sup>. These excerpts do not only suggest the extent to which photographic institutions and salons ordered the production of pictorial work but the amount of control photographers would in turn exercise over their own visual fields. In-as-much as any space, as Harris suggested above, offered unlimited possibilities to produce noteworthy

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<sup>321</sup> Anonymous, ‘Sparkle in your Pictures’, *South African Photography*, 4, 6 (1953), p 17.

<sup>322</sup> F. Harris, ‘Print Criticism’, *Camera News*, December, (1955), p 261.

<sup>323</sup> F. Harris, ‘Print Criticism’, *Camera News*, May (1957), p 46.

<sup>324</sup> F. Harris, ‘Review’, *Camera News*, December (1955), p 289.

images, for the images to be pleasing to the eye the photographer had the rigid task of being aware of all objects and sights in one's field and place them accordingly.

This brings us to the next tension experienced by photographers: striking a balance between taking the liberty to envisage an image and creating a fiction of reality or believability. This is akin to what Sontag describes as the tension between beautification of the world and truth-telling in the history of photography<sup>325</sup>. Arguably, Denfield resolved this tension by employing his anthropological lens (to suggest reality) while creating fictitious scenarios that rendered him a creative artist. His methodology is comparable to the construction of dioramas in ethnographic exhibits in museums where they are set up as quotidian display. According to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, the quotidian representation of the diorama, "by virtue of its taken-for-granted-ness, presents itself as given, natural, just there, unnoticed because assumed"<sup>326</sup>. When looking at 'Mother and Child' (see Chapter 2), for example, the viewer could regard the blankets, hut and familial relationship between the adult female and the child as aspects of Basotho life. At the same time, the explicit control exercised by the photographer in the field did not necessarily undermine him as a photographer but was to be read as an indication of an awareness of elements that work in an image. In this sense the photographs resonated with what Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes as 'in situ' exhibits that are realist in appeal whereby scenarios are recreated to be as realistic as possible to reinforce their authenticity in representation<sup>327</sup>. Lastly, Harris's comments implicitly drew attention to the experience of seeing as an integral part in salons. Throughout, his comments were centred on the pleasure (or discomfort) of seeing. Therefore, salons were crucial in constructing the significance of visuality.

A study of Denfield's photographs accepted in salons over the eight year period of his career reveals the extent to which his work was gradually shaped by such institutions. An account of his participation dated 1956 indicates a score of 321 acceptances of 75 prints globally<sup>328</sup>. Given that he exhibited until 1958 this number is an inaccurate reflection of overall acceptance but is a clear indication of Denfield's success in salons. The following account of

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<sup>325</sup> Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 66. According to Sontag, truth-telling in photography is a legacy of both the sciences and moralised ideals of truth-telling adapted from 19<sup>th</sup> century literary models and the then new profession of independent journalism.

<sup>326</sup> B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 'Objects of Ethnography', in I. Karp & S.D. Lavine, eds., *Exhibiting Cultures: The poetics and politics of Museum Display*, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), p 408.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid* p 389.

<sup>328</sup> DC, Anonymous, 'Acceptance of new prints', 1956.

his participation in salons is only a reflection of information archived in the Denfield Collection and is thus far from comprehensive.

The first noted exhibition in the archive is the 35<sup>th</sup> Scottish Salon of Photography in 1951 where three of Denfield's prints were accepted: 'Basutoland', 'The Banks of the Orange River' and 'Pondoland'<sup>329</sup>. Entrants were grouped based on the continent they represented, thus along with Roderick Holliday, Roland Sidoway and Sara Buyskes, Denfield was placed under 'Africa' in the category of 'Portraits, Landscape and General' on the basis that "since it is possible that culture and thought are affected by the accident of position on the world's surface it may be that trends in the interpretation of life by photography are similarly influenced"<sup>330</sup>. Interestingly, while operating as an 'art' institution, the salon space in this context views the participants with an anthropological lens that presupposes cultural difference!

In the same year, Denfield also exhibited 'Old Deborah' in the Port Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Salon of Photography<sup>331</sup> as well as 'The Waterfall' in the South African Salon of Photography hosted by the Johannesburg Photographic and Cine Society, a print that was also accepted at Salons in Bath (1953) and Bergen (1954)<sup>332</sup>. The South African Salon of Photography is significant for being the first Salon Denfield participated in and echoing the instructions of pictorialists Denfield noted when accounting for the 'The Waterfall':

Basutoland can well be proud of its waterfalls. These are to my mind some of the almost unknown wonders of Africa...The Maletsunyane falls to my mind was the most difficult consignment I had undertaken, I viewed the falls from all angles but there was no picture there (sic.). I decided that the only place to photograph the falls was at the bottom of the gorge itself. But it's no use climbing down to the bottom and then wishing you had some human interest to put into the picture. The human interest has to be taken down with you and so I managed to get a little native girl to climb down with me...without that figure placed as you see there in the photograph the picture would lose a great deal of its appeal. But how many people realise when looking at this picture that I had to climb over 700 feet down into the gorge to get it and then climb out again. Not to mention the two shillings I gave to the Native girl (sic.). Was it worth it? I think so<sup>333</sup>.

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<sup>329</sup> DC, 35<sup>th</sup> Scottish Salon of Photography, 1951.

<sup>330</sup> DC, Anonymous, 35th Scottish Salon of Photography, p 5.

<sup>331</sup> DC, Port Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Salon of Photography, 1951.

<sup>332</sup> DC, Anonymous, 'Acceptance of new prints', 1954.

<sup>333</sup> DC, Denfield, 'Recording Basutoland on horseback'.

The attention to composition required by salons can be readily discerned. Every detail, from lighting, to the use of human interest was attended to. Denfield's choice of the waterfall as subject was again successful with the circulation of the photograph 'Where the Waterfall ends'<sup>334</sup>. Devoid of human subjects, the photograph formed part of his landscape studies (Fig. 45). The photograph depicts a gentle waterfall at the edge of a river stream in the background, with its punctum the waterfall against moving mist. The river flows in a valley between hills. Denfield captured the light in the foreground to expose the waterfall effectively. The image thus relies on the photographer's apt timing and careful attention to various natural elements as much as in 'The Valley Awakens'. As with the latter print, Denfield teasingly noted the amount of luck needed to create 'Where the waterfall ends' stating "No control during enlarging or any after work necessary. Just as it comes off the negative (sic.). Such an eventuality is a rarity and is the only straight Salon print I have from nearly a hundred"<sup>335</sup>. One might imagine Denfield anticipating and preparing such a photograph much like he did for 'Riders on the horizon' whereby he waited for the desired environmental conditions. This suggests growth as a pictorial photographer and salon exhibitor with his eye becoming more sensitive to detail. Unlike in the making of 'The Valley Awakens' the photographer was here much closer to the central focus of the photograph. I imagine him treading carefully over rocks to capture the sunlight. The landscape is depicted in close proximity and is tightly framed, thus portraying the valley as an object of discovery.

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<sup>334</sup> This gained acceptance in salons in Scotland (1955), Edinburgh (1955), London Salon of Photography (1955), Singapore (1956), Eastern Cape (1956), Milwaukee (1956) and the 18<sup>th</sup> South African Salon of Photography in 1954 where it received a silver plaque.

<sup>335</sup> DC, Denfield, 'Notes on accompanying photographs', n.d.



Fig. 45

How is one to situate these depictions of ‘nature’ alongside the peopled images based on the ‘native scene’? Certainly, they contain a strong patina of pictorialism and aesthetic appeal required in the salons, hinting at subjective reflection. However, like their counterparts that are centred on human subjects, they too speak to discourses of anthropology. By the 1950s, there had been a decided turn to ‘symbolism’ in the search for meaning in anthropology. For example, in Britain, Victor Turner developed ideas on symbols and social cohesion with his focus on rituals. Similarly, in her study of the Lele of Kasai in then Belgian Congo in the 1950s, Mary Douglas produced a comparative study of symbolic boundaries and classification<sup>336</sup>. According to Argyrou, part of the quest for symbolic meaning in anthropology has to do with the assertion that natives remain unconscious of the dynamics that shape their lives thus she argues that “ethnographers are happy to declare that native lives are symbolic, but for their own beliefs and practices, they adopt an attitude that recognises nothing other than the facts of the empirical world”<sup>337</sup>.

This insistence on the symbolism in native life is well illustrated in Beattie’s instruction to ethnographers to be sensitised to such symbols “for there is usually some reason why a particular symbol should be appropriate in a particular case...an underlying rationale which is at least ideally discoverable, even though it....may even be quite unknown to the persons who

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<sup>336</sup> Eriksen & Nielsen, *A history of anthropology*, pp 98-99.

<sup>337</sup> Argyrou, *Will to Meaning*, p 79.

use it”<sup>338</sup>. Beattie was at pains to promote an understanding of symbols as a result of the “poetical, analogical character of much primitive thinking”<sup>339</sup>. And it is with such a formulation that Denfield’s photographs of waterfalls image the discipline. Like the rest of the peopled collection, the photographs function through suggestion and unspoken affect. In their quotidian representation, it is as if the scenes are photographed metonymically. As Beattie pointed out, “symbolism is essentially expressive; it is a way of saying something important, something which it is impossible or impracticable to say directly”<sup>340</sup>.

This sense of meaningfulness expressed through indirect communication permeates through all the photographs including ‘Calm is the Morn’, which, alongside ‘This is our land’, ‘Riders on the horizon’ and ‘The man from the hills’ was exhibited in 1952 in the Festival of Photography in Salisbury. The festival was organised by the Mashonaland Photographic Society and the Rhodesian Institute of Allied Arts. Reminiscent of ‘The Valley Awakens’ his most widely exhibited photograph and ‘Riders on the horizon’, ‘Calm is the Morn’<sup>341</sup> is a landscape study that features a rider on a horse in the foreground. He pauses with the horse on the edge of the gently moving river while the horse drinks. The edge is filled with rocks extending to the edge of the frame towards the right where the rider is placed, and the rocks form a visual contrast to the gentler body of water. In the background is a view of mountains which dominate the frame. In contrast the rider and his horse constitute small figure within the valley of mountains. It is as though the photographer expresses a sense of awe of the surrounding mountain and river (Fig. 46).

As such the photograph becomes a study not of natural surroundings but of the rider’s presence and experience in the valley. It could also be said to image anthropology’s concept of ‘ethnographic presence’, that is, giving accounts of other cultures and societies in the present tense. Fabian reminds us, however, that such a notion freezes the society to the time of observation and potentially “contains assumptions about repetitiveness, predictability and conservatism of primitives”<sup>342</sup>. As the photograph circulated in various salons, I imagine viewers looking at it alongside its caption which conveys serenity, a pre-industrial landscape devoid of clutter. Horse riders are a recurring motif in Denfield’s images, which may partly relate to the dependence on horses for transportation in the location. At the same time, the

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<sup>338</sup> Beattie, *Other Cultures*, p 69.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid p 68.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid p 71.

<sup>341</sup> This was accepted also in salons in Birkenhead, Windlesham, Runcorn and Handworth in 1956.

<sup>342</sup> Fabian, *Time and the Other*, p 81.

horse rider is a striking image of a human subject elevated from his surroundings while immersed in it. He views the surroundings from a distance, perhaps echoing the tensions between immersing oneself in the beauty of Basutoland Denfield noted while remaining a detached observer.



Fig. 46

The demonstration of a trek or pilgrimage is suggested effectively in the print ‘The Road to the Mountains’ which was exhibited at the Internationale Volstilling of Billedmaessing Fotograki in 1954 in Denmark. Photographed at a great focal distance, it includes two young men walking on a long neat gravel road that appears to lead to the mountains in the background (Fig. 47). Much like the human subjects in ‘The Earth is the Lord’s’ and ‘Song of Basutoland’ the two subjects are small in comparison to the trees on one side of the road and the towering mountains. The photograph is reminiscent of the idea of a pilgrimage to the mountains, depicting the vast distance and travel on Denfield’s part. The smooth road is a contrast to the depiction of rocky paths that Denfield often noted. The smooth road points to human labour, a contrast to the ‘virginal’ natural elements Denfield depicted in ‘Where the waterfall ends’ and ‘Riders on the horizon’.

The photograph is comparable to ‘Fruhling-Pomland’ by Frelih Ivo from Yougoslavia, which was exhibited in the same salon. The said photograph includes a field of grass contrasted by

small bushes on either side of the frame. Like Denfield's image one is struck by the linearity of the neatly cut grass extending across the frame. It suggests control that is reinforced by the tight framing of the image. Correspondingly to his other above mentioned images, Denfield represented this space ambiguously, that is, without specifying which region in Basutoland it is thereby allowing the viewer's imagination to literally wander much like the horse riders in his images, or the naked child and adult figure in 'Song of Basutoland'. Yet unlike these said images, 'The road to the mountains', in both caption and image, suggests a particular destination. The linear perspective created by the road leads the eye from left to right towards the mountain whose path is mapped by the road. Given that the subjects may be unaware of the photographer's presence, their 'actual' destination is obscure. The photograph is therefore, in line with pictorial requirements, an exercise of Denfield's imagination, that is, a projection of Denfield's own desires. It is thus fitting to include it in a pictorial exhibition where prints were accepted on the basis of, amongst other things, how well the photographer exercised his or her imagination or his or her ability to perceive awe in the mundane.



Fig. 47



A recurring motif in the collection is the depiction of subjects from their backs. In the context of colonial photography, it is tempting to read this as the photographer denying their subjectivity and reflecting his use of them as models, another form of labour. However, in the previous chapter I drew attention to the ways in which this images the anthropological concern to see from the native's point of view. By having their backs to us, we automatically assume the same visual field they have. This marks a break from the bulk of his photographs taken in Nigeria where the subjects often engage with the photographer directly. These images of Basutoland invite the viewer to see not only as the photographer sees but as models and subjects do. Functioning less as an opportunity to gaze upon the distant other, the photographs become a meditation on visibility, on seeing itself.

Hayes makes a distinction between visibility and visibility. Visibility implies that one can be seen, that there is an empirical presence. In particular Hayes notes that the terms on which subjects move between visibility and invisibility relate not only to mobility, but to power, where double possibilities of fixing and unfixing exist. As such making things visible can have immobilising effects. As opposed to visibility, then, which is often used in an empirical sense, visibility carries more discursive and rhetorical connotations and is helpful in 'peeling away' the self-evidentiary language of seeing<sup>343</sup>. In his images of Nigeria, Denfield attempted to make the pagan tribes visible to the western world, thus constructing concrete and debilitating identities. While he did the same to some extent in Basutoland, in this context there was greater conscious experimentation with the notion of seeing itself, where images were created not out of a sense of invisibility to the public but out of the photographer's own desired effect.

However, more than draw attention to the act of seeing, the photographs resonate with anthropology's construction of the Other on the basis of 'sameness', that is, the sense that the subjects under study are the 'same as us'. This is the basic belief that others can be studied, even from a distance, as beings with cultural and social institutions. According to Argyrou "Sameness understood as human unity has always been the ethnological a priori...the axiomatic proposition that demarcated epistemological space within which it became possible to study Others"<sup>344</sup>. This invokes Edward Burnett Tylor's formulation of the 'psychic unity of mankind' based on a sense of universal laws of the mind, which, when combined with

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<sup>343</sup> Hayes, 'Introduction: Visual Genders', p 522.

<sup>344</sup> Argyrou, *Will to Meaning*, p 23.

similarities in life circumstances produce similar human institutions<sup>345</sup>. Arguably, this concern with sameness manifests also in the discipline's concerns with boundaries between races, cultures and culture and nature<sup>346</sup>. The basic tenet of sameness can manifest in various forms such as locating the manifestation of the Self in Other societies "in an effort to mediate the opposition and to show that Others are far more similar to the West than it may first appear" and locating traits of 'otherness' in the West such as forms of irrationality<sup>347</sup>. Much like the horserider in 'The Earth is the Lords' who basks in the splendour of the mountain in front of him, the viewer shares the walker's path and view in 'The Road to the Mountains'. Similarly, in 'The Valley Awakens' and 'Calm is the Morn' the viewer assumes the same perspective as the subjects, seeing the landscape ahead in a gesture that images sameness.

1954 also saw the circulation of the photograph 'Sheltered by the Hills'<sup>348</sup>, a photograph striking in its compositional similarity to 'Song of Basutoland'. The photograph includes a child held in arms by a female older figure. They form a miniature pair against the towering hills on the right (Fig. 48). As in 'Song in Basutoland' the photograph relies on the contrast between the towering landscape and much smaller human interest for dramatic effect. Such a placement draws attention to the power of the hill, a contrast to the human interest that is mobile and exposed. The adult female holds the infant protectively, a gesture that is visually mimicked by the hills that appear to 'shelter' the subjects in turn. As it appeared in the listed salons, the photograph was a celebration of rurality. Ironically in this period of the 1950s in South Africa, these visual modes of representation Denfield employed were equally problematic in the contexts of removal of black presence in urban spaces towards peripheral rural and semi-rural spaces. However, amongst the myriad of global images in the salons these images effectively depoliticised the very political creation of black rurality. Much like 'Song of Basutoland', the photograph draws on the idiom of kinship in its depiction of rurality.

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<sup>345</sup>G. W. Stocking, *After Tylor: British Social Anthropology 1881-1951*, (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995).

<sup>346</sup>Fabian, *Time and the Other*, p 117.

<sup>347</sup>Argyrou, *Will to Meaning*, p 30.

<sup>348</sup>Exhibited at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Salon Internationale de Fotografia in Rosario, Argentina 1954; 11<sup>th</sup> International Exhibition of Photography in Yugoslavia 1955; 3<sup>rd</sup> Meduradna Izložba Fotografiske, Umetnosti 1956; salons in Louisville, salon in Belgrade.



Fig. 48

This is notable again in ‘Mother Pride’ which was exhibited locally and globally<sup>349</sup>. A photograph which Denfield regarded as his ‘best mother and child study’<sup>350</sup>, it depicts a young woman holding an infant on her lap, seated on the ground with legs tucked underneath in a feminine fashion. It is a clearly posed photograph betrayed by the stiffness of the gesture, clutching the child’s leg firmly while her face remains still as though she is paying attention to the photographer’s direction. The pictorial quality of the image is enhanced by the vague background that draws attention to the layers of fabric in the image, and reinforced by the infant’s nudity. The image is a reiteration of not only the Christian image of Madonna and Child but of Africanised domesticity (Fig. 49).

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<sup>349</sup> Exhibited at Autumn Pictorial Exhibition of the Royal Photographic Society 1955; Photographic Society of America International Exhibition of Photography 1955; 20<sup>th</sup> Rochester International Salon of Photography 1956; South African Salon of Photography 1956; Forehingen for Billermaessig Fotografie, Denmark 1957; Eastern Cape International Salon of Photography 1958.

<sup>350</sup> DC, Denfield, ‘Notes accompanying photographs’.



Fig. 49

Equally, Denfield made use of the familial motif in the photograph ‘Grandma Dines’<sup>351</sup>. A portrayal of an elderly woman carrying a baby on her back while she eats from a bowl, the photograph makes use of dualities for pictorial effect: the youth of the infant with its round smooth cheeks is contrasted to the wrinkled skin of the ‘grandma’ with pronounced cheekbones. The infant also lies passively in contrast to the grandma who appears to be not only in motion but actively dining. In making use of these dualities Denfield recreated a romantic vision of innocence, dependence, familiarity and nourishment. While the elderly subject feeds herself, she simultaneously nurtures the infant on her back (Fig. 50). It is interesting to compare the photograph to ‘Verge of Life’ by S. Fazlay Hossain who exhibited alongside Denfield’s image in the Autumn Pictorial Exhibition of the Royal Photographic Society in 1955. ‘Verge of life’ is a portrait of an elderly woman that reveals the details of layers of skin and wrinkles in close proximity. The image is a character study that displays affect and subjectivity, loss and weariness. In contrast, in Denfield’s print one views the

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<sup>351</sup> Exhibited at Autumn Pictorial Exhibition of the Royal Photographic Society 1955; 3<sup>rd</sup> Salon International d’Art Photographique de Perigueux 1955; Pretoria Centenary International Salon of Photography 1955; International Photographic Salon of Japan 1956; 20<sup>th</sup> South African Salon of Photography 1956; 3<sup>rd</sup> Eastern Cape International Salon of Photography 1957.

subjects from a lower angle appearing at some distance from the viewer and carrying the young one on her back. Rather than point to loss or ending, it suggests instead the continuity of life, rebirth, and contentment rather than gloomy contemplation.

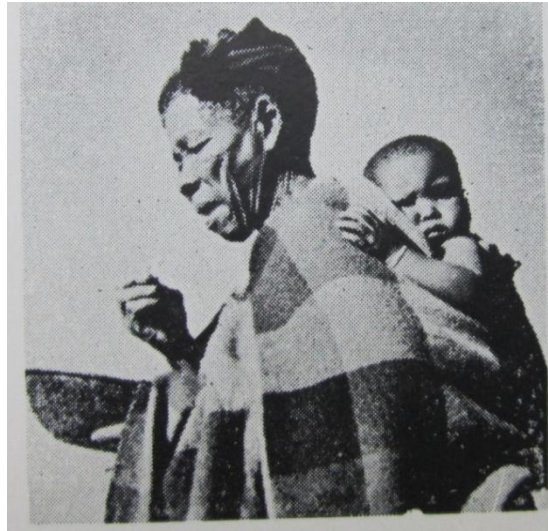


Fig. 50

‘Grandma Dines’, ‘Sheltered by the Hills’ as well as ‘Song of Basutoland’ suggest a specific familiar relationship between the subjects: warmth and sympathy between the ‘grandchild’ and ‘grandparent’. It is tempting to overlook the apparent neutrality of such a pairing but when unpacking anthropology’s history one can locate it within particular concerns in the discipline. By the 1930s and 1940s, ‘kinshipology’ was forming into a concrete characteristic of British anthropology. An example is that of Meyer Fortes, a South African who became a student of Malinowski’s. In the 1930s, Fortes began major work on the Ashanti and Tallensi in Ghana<sup>352</sup>. In the 1940s in Oxford University, Radcliffe-Brown, Fortes and Gluckman all did structural-functionalist work that took seriously kinship as an engine that drives primitive societies<sup>353</sup>. Similarly, Beattie also constructed primitiveness on the basis on kinship by declaring that such relations are less significant in interpersonal relations in the western world while “in many smaller-scale societies kinship’s social importance is paramount” and is to be regarded as “the idiom for many different kinds of social relationships”<sup>354</sup>. In each of the three photographs one has the visualisation of what became a taken-for-granted idiom of the grandchild-grandparent relationship.

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<sup>352</sup> Eriksen & Nielsen, *A history of anthropology*, p 69.

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid* p 70.

<sup>354</sup> Beattie, *Other Cultures*, p 95.

Moreover, Fabian argues that kinship is too, fraught with temporal connotations in that it connotes primordial ties. He argues thus that those societies that are defined in terms of kinship ties are placed at an earlier period<sup>355</sup>. Thus Beattie could write with some degree of authority, for example, that “In many Bantu- and other – societies a man and his grandfather may refer to each other reciprocally as ‘brother’; and in some a man may jokingly refer to his grandmother as his ‘wife’ and so address her”<sup>356</sup>. In other words, kinship became part of a repertoire of idioms through which so-called primitives were characterised in the discipline. Denfield’s photographs register this concern.

### **Native Photography**

I am very surprised at the very small number of people who are active Native photographers. I think they are conspicuous by their absence. I myself would like to see a few more enthusiasts in this direction, because I feel that they are missing a great deal. Perhaps after my little talk this evening some of you may be sufficiently stimulated to try your hand at Native photography but before you so learn something about the Native. There are lots of books in the library about them and you’ll be amazed how much there is to know about them. In conclusion I would like to add that if any time you would like to have more information about photographing Natives, and I’m sure there are lots of points I’ve omitted, I would be only too pleased to help you<sup>357</sup>.

Denfield uttered these words to a South African audience of photography enthusiasts in promoting what he commonly referred to as Native photography. This is one of the earliest instances where Denfield employed such a phrase (with a capital N) to construe such photography as a legitimate pictorial genre. In conjunction with exhibiting his images of Basutoland in salons in the 1950s, Denfield made a point of advancing his images as a particular kind of photography which not only fit into well-established categories such as portraits and landscape, or the overarching arena of pictorialism, but as a distinct form of an Africanised aesthetic. For this he relied on the vocabulary of both salons and anthropology. The concept of ‘Native photography’ appears most frequently in the period of his growth in pictorial work in salons. As I have indicated, for Denfield the concept of photographing ‘natives’ and ‘native life’ was hardly novel in the 1950s. Furthermore, in his production of images of Basutoland he relied on similar ethnographic visual idioms he had employed in Northern Nigeria. The significant difference, however, is that photographs of the latter remained in pedagogical contexts while the former circulated as art. Thus in the 1950s while

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<sup>355</sup> Fabian, *Time and the Other*, p 76.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid p 11.

<sup>357</sup> DC, Denfield, ‘Lecture to the East London Photographic Society’, 1950.

he moved away to some degree from a purely anthropological focus in his work, paradoxically it seems, this is the period when he was most articulate in advancing the native reserve as rich in potential for the amateur photographer. Arguably, he relied on the vocabulary and methods of the salon in this regard (a method that was partly congruent with the anthropological work at the time).

To appreciate Denfield's formulation of such a genre, it is worthwhile unpacking the intellectual climate arising from the anthropology literature based on the very same native reserves. 1936 saw the publication of Monica Hunter's (later Wilson) seminal book *Reaction to Conquest*, a comprehensive ethnographic study on the impact of contact with Europeans on the life of the colonised in Pondoland and East Bank. Bank notes the reception of the book as "truly something of a media event" receiving favourable reviews in South African newspapers and the British press<sup>358</sup>. These included the *Times Literary Supplement*, the *Spectator* and the *Illustrated London News* which included lavish visuals selected from the book<sup>359</sup>. With social change a central theme in the book, its images provided a visual sequence of change in Pondoland from its initial geographical formation, to transformation arising out of contact with Europeans<sup>360</sup>. Denfield, then a young student in his first year at Charing Cross Medical School, is likely to have come across such a promotion of the book and its depiction of amaXhosa in the age of conquest. Eleven years later when he emigrated to the Eastern Cape, having had his first taste of documenting groups whose own lives appeared little touched by impending European modernity, I imagine Denfield revisiting *Reaction to Conquest*, a book recognised then and today as an unmatched pioneering study of African societies<sup>361</sup>.

Though published a few decades later, (but contemporaneous to Denfield's own work and presence in East London), Phillip and Iona Meyer's *Townsmen and Tribesmen* (1961) too, became highly influential in the field of urban anthropology in its ethnographic study of Xhosa migrants in urban East London from their villages. The Mayers demonstrated how the organisation of life within the African residential locations was shaped in large part by the residents' connections to the countryside<sup>362</sup>. For the preparation of the ethnographic study

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<sup>358</sup> Bank, 'The intimate politics of fieldwork', p 571.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid.

<sup>360</sup> R. Assubuki, 'Anthropology and Fieldwork Photography: Monica Hunter Wilson's photographs in Pondoland and BuNyakyusa, 1931-1938', Unpublished MA Thesis (2010), University of Western Cape.

<sup>361</sup> Bank, 'The intimate politics of fieldwork', p 557.

<sup>362</sup> P. Mayer, *Townsmen and Tribesmen: Conservatism and the Process of Urbanisation in a South African city*, (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1961).

they spent some time in rural locations in different parts of the Eastern Cape. Unlike Hunter's ethnography, the Mayers' text was published subsequent to Denfield's invocation of Native photography in the 1950s (although this is not necessarily an interest he abandoned) and while there is nowhere explicitly indicated that Denfield referenced the texts, there are personal and implicit indications in not only promoting interest in the lives of African societies but in the methodology of ethnography when he spoke of Native photography.

At its most basic, Denfield described Native photography in the following terms:

Native photography consists of recording as artistically as possible the whole Native way of life and ranges from portraits and village scenes to pictures depicting their economic life and material culture. Photographing your houseboy in the garden does not constitute Native photography and Native studies in the Studio can in no way depict the Native scene. There is only one place to photograph the native and that is in his own territory, the Native reserve<sup>363</sup>.

It its deceptive simplicity, such a definition revealed the impulse to construe romantic and legitimised images of rurality and pastoralism in an age of rapid black urbanisation. The image of the houseboy working in his employer's garden with its crude overtones of the politics of racialised labour, would not suffice, however, placing that same subject in his 'own territory' and with the correct objects, would allow the photographer to construct a pictorial idyll. Native photography, it was suggested, was partly a matter of remoteness from the white middle class space. In a manner reminiscent of Monica Hunter's methodology, Denfield narrated the means of access to the reserves through trekking:

Obviously the best place to photograph the Native is in his own territory that is the Native reserve, and for this you must obtain permission from the local magistrate, and I must admit that I found all the magistrates most helpful. Not only did they indicate the *most primitive areas* I should visit but many of them supplied large scale tribal maps, suggested various routes and trading stores in the Native reserve where I would obtain more information and even wrote letters of introduction to the Europeans in charge of them. These traders would only be too pleased to put you up for a couple of days, and the trading story itself is these days a great social centre, and it is there that one can learn of impending meat feasts, beer parties, ceremonies, court cases and in fact all the local gossip of the village. But in every case, one has to obtain the permission of the Native head man or District chief, in whose area you wished to photograph, and you always have to give practical expression to your appreciation of this permission, and if you take my advice, give it before the permission is granted. The district headman is responsible for the conduct of the members of his tribal area, and he would often accompany you, or send his representative in a tour of the village. Without this permission you are regarded as an intruder, and your presence would be resented, just as much we would resent any stranger coming into our home without permission (own italics)<sup>364</sup>.

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<sup>363</sup> DC, Denfield, 'Lecture to Photographic Congress', Durban, July 1954.

<sup>364</sup> DC, Denfield, 'Lecture to the East London Photographic Society'.



Bank argues that after spending three months in Auckland village for her initial fieldwork in 1931, Monica Hunter felt that “the community was already too culturally and racially mixed for her to acquire a clear enough sense of the process of culture contact”<sup>365</sup>. As a result, she headed for the Pondo reserves, regarding them as ‘unripe cheese’ that would offer her rich data about African traditional life<sup>366</sup>. Likewise, in his trek through the Native reserves Denfield was insistent on hunting for the most ‘remote’ communities, what he regarded to be the most primitive areas for his photography. As I pointed out in the previous chapter, this resonates with anthropology’s concern with studying the Other, with those that seem to represent the greatest difference from the Self. Moreover, this otherness, as in anthropology, needs to be constructed through distinct locations. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues, that which is deemed to be ethnographic “becomes ethnographic by virtue of being defined, segmented, detached, and carried away by ethnographers”<sup>367</sup>.

Furthermore, like Hunter, and as I have indicated in his work in Basutoland, Denfield also relied on the hospitality and assistance of trading stores keepers. Again, Bank notes the centrality of the trading store in Hunter’s field work which she regarded as the social club of the village, and a site where she not only would reside in her fieldwork but crucial in observations of various aspects of socio-cultural life. Elsewhere Denfield shared such sentiments about the trading store as a strategic anthropological location regarding it as vicinity where “one can watch the Native world go by and obtain some of the best studies of Native life”<sup>368</sup>. Interestingly, while the photographer was policed in his movements across the reserve, this practice of native photography was also a crude expression of the freedom afforded to the photographer who was relatively free to roam in different parts of the country while the ‘native’ remained more restricted in his or her movements and choice of place of residence.

Nevertheless, which native reserves did Denfield allude to? Although Denfield did most of his native photography in Basutoland<sup>369</sup>, he did indicate having spent time in the Ciskei, Transkei and Zulu villages<sup>370</sup>. An undated and untitled document in the collection provides a list of 103 titles and descriptions of images, minus the images. Fifty of these allude to sites in northern Nigeria such as ‘Compound scene at Tof’, ‘The village of Siri’, ‘Chief of the Chip

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<sup>365</sup> Bank, ‘The intimate politics of fieldwork’, p 561.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid

<sup>367</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, ‘Objects of ethnography’, p 387.

<sup>368</sup> DC, Denfield, ‘Recording the Native Scene’, n.d.

<sup>369</sup> DC, ‘Lecture to Photographic Congress’, Durban, July 1954.

<sup>370</sup> Unfortunately I have yet to come across a single photograph depicting these regions

tribe', Hair stylists of Zaranda' etc. The rest are images taken in the Eastern Cape and (Kwazulu)-Natal. Examples include:

Tribal discord

Bad feeling have occurred among the Zembeni and Dumise tribes, and here a mother with her child return after the night's disturbances to find the home burned and her simple possessions destroyed

A girl of Eastern Pondoland. Near Tabankulu

Her hair is held in position by strands of wire and ornamented with rows of safety pins. A chin strap of beads and coils of clay attached to her hair complete her make-up

Zulu mother and child.

This is one of the many hair-styles that are to be found among the Zulu. Note the large wooden discs inserted in the lobes of her ears

A girl of Mgwayana. Western Pondoland

Until marriage these girls are more or less carefree. As a young bride, however her behaviour is strictly controlled (ukuhlonipha). She must avoid the courtyard (inkundla) and the men's side of the hut. She never approaches the cattle kraal, or mention the personal names of her husband's elder relatives or of her husband himself. She is expected to do all the hard work in the household, but is not allowed to eat meat or drink milk at her husband's home<sup>371</sup>.

Not only do these excerpts point to photographic activity within the different rural regions of South Africa but they also parallel, albeit to a lesser degree, Monica Hunter Wilson's own choice of location, specifically Eastern and Western Pondoland, to gather data about African life. These are areas which she regarded as most useful in yielding information about cultural contact due to being most 'unripe'. Hunter's influence is also noted in the anthropological detail Denfield provided alongside the images, in a manner reminiscent of his earlier work among the 'pagan tribe's in Northern Nigeria. Denfield noted the abundance of books about 'native life' available in libraries (see excerpt above), indicating his reliance on already-existing literature on the subject matter. For Denfield, gathering such anthropological information at this stage was not simply a matter of curiosity but a necessary step in one's career as a Native photographer noting that "without some knowledge of their laws and customs you may find yourself becoming unpopular, and trading in deep water". Thus he made the following suggestions:

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<sup>371</sup>DC, Denfield, 'list of photographs', n.d. The named photographs are all numbered as if they are to be included in an exhibition or publication however I have not come across evidence of either endeavor.

For example, among the tribes of the Ciskei and Transkei, the huts are divided off into a man's side and a woman's side. It may be divided off into a left and right side, or in other tribes into a front and rear portion and the women respect the men's side of the hut and avoid it. And you can only photograph the women against the mud wall of the hut of their side, although the men's side is sunnier. You must not try and persuade the women to be photographed there. Also the courtyard, that is, the space between the huts and the cattle kraal, is avoided by the young married women, as it is the cattle kraal, and it's useless posing there or asking them to follow you through this courtyard to another spot. You won't know what's happened. You may think they're becoming rebellious. Again you may offer hospitality in the form of beer, sour milk, or roasted mielies and although you may refuse them on hygienic or gastronomical grounds, be sure that you at least taste the soured milk, because milk or its products are only eaten in a household by visitors who have no designs on the women there<sup>372</sup>.

What is revealed in the passage is what Fabian describes as the inherently, but negated, autobiographic nature of anthropological discourse<sup>373</sup>. Denfield's account points to having been there and suggests that he was writing from apparent personal experience (one imagines, for example, that he may have actually experienced the posing). Yet, the very experience is constituted as science thereby echoing Fabian's argument that "the anthropologist makes the peculiar claim that certain experiences or events in his past constitute facts not fiction"<sup>374</sup>. Note, for one thing, that Denfield's text achieved this by avoiding the personal pronoun 'I' and writing in second and third person. His native photography could then freely oscillate between art (based on his careful technique) and science, thereby allowing him to exhibit in the East London Museum within the framing of academic work.

This passage is significant in demonstrating Denfield's reliance on anthropological knowledge to not only frame the kinds of images he envisaged before entering the reserve but also in offering a methodology in dealing with 'the native'. Moreover, in this talk Denfield too performed an important meditational role to the keen photographer drawing on his own experiences. His suggestions are striking in similarity to the likes of John Beattie who too, offered particular guidelines for young anthropologists entering the field for the first time. Beattie stressed, for example "The ideal social anthropological fieldworker is adaptable, tactful, good-humoured, and possessed of a sense of proportion...and he must show the same respect and courtesy to his hosts as he expects to receive from them"<sup>375</sup>. Similarly Denfield wrote that "It is going to be a waste of time attempting to photograph the relatively raw

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<sup>372</sup> DC, Denfield, 'Lecture to the East London Photographic Society', sheet two.

<sup>373</sup> Fabian, *Time and the Other*, p 87.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid 88.

<sup>375</sup> Beattie, *Other Cultures*, p 88.

native unless you know something about him and you're going to be very disappointed and very disheartened unless you go about it the right way"<sup>376</sup>. Thus even as a genre in pictorialism, Denfield's 'native photography' continually drew from anthropology's repertoires. What was suggested was that it was a matter of pictorial content as much as it was a matter of epistemology as suggested again in the following passage:

If you wished to photograph them in their ceremonial dress with their full complement of with doctors, herbalists, or if you were keen to photograph any of their dances, it was only through the chief that these could be laid for you. I remember arranging a ceremonial gathering with one chief of the Bhaca tribe for a particular day but was very disappointed at the attendance. Hardly anyone turned up. All the outlying kraals sent messages they were unable to attend because of the famine. I did not realise at the time the full significance of this remark but the chief tactfully told me that I had not provided any food for the gathering, they expected a beast to be killed, and quite rightly I had to supply it. A beast costs anything from five to ten pounds, so arranging a dance isn't a cheap item<sup>377</sup>.

Amidst the breezy haughtiness underpinning this account, as a relatively inexperienced salon photographer at this stage, Denfield imagined the scenarios he wished to create with his camera. In the context of arranging a ceremonial gathering, I imagine him relying not only on literature to guide him but conceptually on his previous work in northern Nigeria where he had also requested a dance performance in one occasion. Such re-enactment resonated with Monica Hunter Wilson's own images of re-enactment of 'traditional' scenes or sites, following the work of Malinowski who advocated such a method to demonstrate past cultural action<sup>378</sup>. It is these scenes which, for Denfield, constituted a particular Africanised aesthetic. In reference to re-enactment in anthropological photographs in the Pacific, Edwards argues that "performance within the image is in its most concentrated form in re-enactment, a photographic statement of reality constructed outside real time experience"<sup>379</sup>.

This brings me to the next item Denfield highlights on Native photography: the public and external rather than private realm in the native reserve. With regards to the emphasis on the outdoors Denfield wrote:

...the great beauty of Native photography lies in the recording of their outdoor life. Most of these native tribes live off the beaten track. There are few roads there and the only practical method of reaching them is on foot or on horseback. The keen photographer of Native life will see more of this fair land of ours than many other people do. He will roam the high

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<sup>376</sup> DC, 'Lecture to the East London Photographic Society', sheet one.

<sup>377</sup> DC, Denfield, 'Lecture to the Photographic Society', Sheet two.

<sup>378</sup> Assubuki, 'Anthropology and Fieldwork', p 26.

<sup>379</sup> Edwards, *Raw Histories*, p 20.

hills and mountains, journey through the river valleys and find fresh beauty at every turn. What better scenes could he wish for than Pondo children bringing home the ripened mielies in their home-made sledge drawn by straining oxen as they climb the hill to the little group of huts on the ridge, or the weather beaten Basuto, proudly mounted on horse, driving his wool-laden donkeys over the rugged mountain paths to the trading store many miles away, or the simplicity of the young Zulu girl quenching her thirst at a little stream by drinking water from its with her cupped hands? The possibilities of artistic expression and creative ability in Native photography are immense<sup>380</sup>.

These words echo the stance of pictorialists who placed great emphasis on creating images by implication or suggestion. An image created from the scenario of the Zulu girl drinking water from her cupped hands would invite the viewer to fill in the blanks and construe a narrative around it, a narrative which the photographer would *imply* through his composition. The encouragement to photographers to take photographs of outdoor life reflected Denfield's own photographs in Nigeria which were taken in the outdoors and landscapes in Basutoland. More than this, however, being outside would also allow the photographer to maintain his distance from that which he portrayed, a necessary distance when creating images of harmony and contentment in a context of the converse. And in this regard, the photographs mirrored the anthropological notion of 'stranger value' where the fieldworker remains perpetually an outsider despite participating in the village life of the subject<sup>381</sup>. Moreover, photographs of the interior space and the intimacy that would follow would possibly disrupt the photographer's carefully composed idyll. Thus revisiting the reserves and constructing images depicting particular forms of public African life became an extension of salon exhibitions and vice versa. He noted, for example, the effort entailed in making landscape more 'salon worthy':

In the mountainous regions of Basutoland where I do most of my photography there are very few trees and one has to arrange suitable foregrounds of Native interest to introduce into one's pictures. These all have to be planned beforehand and can be easily arranged with the headman of the village, who will for a small consideration arrange for you to have at your disposal anything from a few women carrying loads of firewood to a flock of sheep<sup>382</sup>.

The effort to carve out such idealised landscapes was not only as an exercise in borrowing from familiar ethnographic idioms but a direct influence of the salons. Elsewhere Denfield noted the pressure in salons to submit prints depicting something unusual or a subject which

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<sup>380</sup> DC, Denfield, 'Recording the Native Scene', p 3.

<sup>381</sup> Beattie, *Other Cultures*, p 87.

<sup>382</sup> DC, Denfield, 'Lecture to the Photographic Congress'.

has been given an original<sup>383</sup>. He pointed out that judges often rejected prints not because of poor photographic skill but because of the excessive production of the same themes.

Therefore Denfield's choice of subject needs to be understood as also a reflection of his growth as an institutionalised photographer. It is also partly in this context that one can make sense of his employment of the anthropological method of concentrated and purposeful observation in the field when he stated:

Difficulty arises when photographing Natives in introducing natural groupings and positioning. You have to observe very carefully how a Native girl leans against a hut, or sits on the ground, and it is important to incorporate these natural poses into your pictures so a great deal of your time will be spent not in photographing the Native but in watching him, and it is ridiculous photographing the Native in non Native poses, because it is you who has to put him into these poses. Very often when visiting a native settlement I would pick out about six or seven different types, such as an old man, a younger one with his wife and baby, a couple of young girls, and one or two you men, and separate them from the others, or else march them off for a little walk, telling them to take their time and do exactly what they wished, while I followed behind and just watched them. While they were resting and thought it a grand way of earning a little money doing nothing, the mother with her baby on her back got up and started to pick some wild spinach. This made a lovely photograph. Then a young girl went to a little nearby stream and quenched her thirst by drinking water out of it with her cupped hands. This photograph to my mind was worth an afternoon's outing. Then the men started to smoke and laugh and these made more photographs<sup>384</sup>.

This passage is a rich expression of the delicate entanglement of anthropological method and re-enactment of fantasy. In keeping with the anthropological impulse of recording various aspects of distinct 'native' life the photographer had to be at pains to observe gestures in order to reproduce images that rightfully and 'authentically' mirrored cultural life in the reserves. In other words one had forms of 'staged authenticity' comparable to the construction of dioramas where "people, their regalia and their activities are mounted in a hermetic aesthetic space- fenced off in a zoological garden, raised up on a platform in a gallery, placed on a stage, or ensconced in a reconstructed village on the lawn of the exhibition grounds"<sup>385</sup>. In this context, the distinction between 'staged' and 'unstaged' photographs is porous as the former were represented as quotidian examples from the flow of life. And arguably, by drawing on forms of representation that have characterised anthropological work, namely the means by which the natives have been constituted in anthropological discourse, Denfield could reiterate such idioms and present them as both his creative expressions *and* representations of the real. His construction of Native photography

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<sup>383</sup> DC, Denfield, 'Lecture to the East London Photographic Society'.

<sup>384</sup> DC, Denfield, 'Lecture to the East London Photographic Society', 1950. Sheet three.

<sup>385</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 'Objects of ethnography', p 408.

registered this exhibitionary dynamic by offering a methodology on how to construe aesthetic images while deliberately offering them as representations of the real.

Interestingly the distinction Denfield makes between native and non-native poses suggests a distinct and identifiable set of gestures although he did not articulate the distinction. Presumably, the photographer would ‘naturally’ recognise these differences. Even as he attempted to create pictorial worlds he intended to lend it empirical legitimacy by grounding it in science. However, this became complicated when he persuaded his subjects to perform circuitously. Denfield delicately *led* his subjects *towards* re-enactment of their own everyday gestures. While the performance of the mother with the baby on her back picking wild spinach or the young girl drinking water with cupped hands may not have been re-enactments out of Denfield’s instruction, they emerged partly out of the instruction to ‘march off for a walk’ and do as one pleased. From such ‘unprocessed’ performances Denfield selected scenarios with both an ethnographic (to see difference) and pictorial eye (to create fantastical images). Yet in this context the distinction between the two is blurred in that Denfield relied on such notable ‘difference’ to create pictorial images. To put in it another way, his images of native gestures qualified as pictorial *because* they depicted difference. Elsewhere he stated, for example:

These people carry things on their heads and shoulders, they carry water in beautifully curvedpitchers, they drink out of large round receptacles and natural calabashes, their babies are carried high on their backs, they all smoke long pipes fashioned in the most picturesque styles, they play unusual musical instruments, they dance holding rattles or whisks in their hands, and in all these phases their arms are employed away from their faces and heads. A native posed to throw an assegai is far more graceful than a European firing a rifle. There is more artistry in drinking out of a long bottle calabash than there is in drinking out of a glass of water, and it is in these studies that the beauty of Native photography dwells. I am not a prude but I don’t like nude studies in the European. To me they appear unnatural and artificial and I would like to add unnecessary, but in the Native this is part of their normal and natural existence and one associates with it their mode of life<sup>386</sup>.

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<sup>386</sup>DC, Denfield, ‘Lecture to the Photographic Society’, 1950, Sheet three.



Fig. 51

In Native photography images from the native reserve were thus not simply ethnographic images executed skilfully but ethnographic difference was reconstituted as aesthetically pleasing. One example that drew from the kinds of performative gestures that Denfield regarded as ethnographic is the photograph ‘Daughter of Basutoland’<sup>387</sup> (Fig. 51). The photograph is reminiscent of the Nigerian photograph ‘Nigeria, frontal head and torso portrait of Chip adult female’ (see Fig. 31) as both feature young woman carrying pots against a sky drop as a background and from a low angle. Denfield thus reiterated a particular gesture which in his earlier project on pagan tribes, had been construed as ethnographic. I imagine Denfield crouching to create the honorific portraits. The Nigerian subject is photographed to display various cultural aspects including scarification on her torso, lack of clothing and the large pot as a distinct object of the rural location. Similarly in ‘Daughter of Basutoland’

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<sup>387</sup> Exhibited at the 39<sup>th</sup> Scottish Salon of Photography 1955; 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Exhibition of Photography, Singapore 1956; 48<sup>th</sup> Annual Exhibition of the London Salon of Photography 1957; 19<sup>th</sup> South African Salon of Photography 1955; salons in Edinburgh; Singapore; Eastern Cape Salon of Photography 1956.



Denfield relied on various objects of material culture such as the blanket, arm bracelet and pot which the subject carries carefully. It is significant to note Denfield's awareness of such props for a pictorial effect in making this image:

One of my tricks in hand is to ensure that a light coloured bangle is worn on the photographed arm to relieve any tendency to monotony. The blanket folds are all arranged. The low angle gives a feeling of stateliness and pride in the subject. The clouds were waited for and used to good advantage to outline and make the head more prominent<sup>388</sup>.

The emphasis on various 'props' to create a particular effect again speaks to anthropology's attention to particular objects that are then reconstituted as cultural. As Beattie pointed out "anthropologists have generally found that to give a rounded picture of the social and cultural life of the people they study they have had to say something about such things as...pottery, clothing, house-building, and many other matters not usually regarded as social"<sup>389</sup>. For Beattie, this was a distinctive task for the anthropologist of the primitive society in that "in many advanced societies many such topics are matters for specialists, and this is true also of such more central concerns of social anthropology as economic relations, political organisations..."<sup>390</sup>. In other words, material objects are reconstituted as 'data' from which the anthropologist can 'know' the society under study. Thus 'Daughter of Basutoland' speaks directly to this construal of the native that is knowable through her material objects.

Appearing in various salons, 'Daughter of Basutoland' with its suggestive caption functioned explicitly as a narrative about place. Unlike its Nigerian counterpart with the inscription 'A woman of the Chip tribe' where the image was to be read as an anthropological study, both the image and caption suggest a narrative of belonging, rootedness, where the 'daughter' is a symbol of Basutoland and its virtues. As feminist scholarship has highlighted, the deployment of women as symbol of a nation or tribe's virtues is prevalent<sup>391</sup>. Placed in the context of salons, such images were possibly more pertinent than the Nigerian images in

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<sup>388</sup> DC, Denfield, 'Notes on the accompanying photographs'.

<sup>389</sup> Beattie, *Other Cultures*, p 80.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid

<sup>391</sup> See for example A. McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, (London: Routledge, 1995); J. Chadya, 'Mother Politics: anti-colonial nationalism and the woman question in Africa', *Journal of Women's History*, 15, 3 (2003), 153-157; S. Hassim, 'Voices, Hierarchies and Spaces: Reconfiguring the Women's Movement in Democratic South Africa', *Politikon* 32, 2 (2005), 175-193; A. Jafar, 'Women, Islam and the State in Pakistan. *Gender Issues*', 22, 1 (2005), 35-55. ; N.R. Hunt, T.P. Liu, & J. Quataert, J. *Gendered colonialisms in African history*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997); P. Hayes "'Cocky' Hahn and the Black 'Venus': The making of a Native Commissioner in South West Africa, 1915-46", in N.R. Hunt, T.P. Liu, & J. Quataert, J. *Gendered colonialisms in African history*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997); N. Yuval-Davis, *Gender and nation*, (London: Sage, 1997).

constructing the perceived particularity of Basutoland along gendered lines. In this sense the Basutoland images in their romantic overtones were arguably, more debilitating. As noted earlier, those photographed do not engage with the viewer directly, thus there is little opportunity for the viewer to engage them as subjects but as symbols and props used by the photographer to satisfy his imaginary.

This effect would be exacerbated by the exhibitionary component which invited the viewer to regard the images as art and thus to judge them in terms of their composition rather than their truth-telling quality. While his exhibition of pagan subjects was potentially debilitating in its manner of concretising identities, the 'truth' in the salons was peripheral thus giving the photographer more reign over the construction of fictitious scenarios. Subsequently the salon context acted as an anaesthetic that championed the photographer's genius by promoting depoliticised images that created fictions of harmony. This entanglement of anthropology and pictorialism was perhaps most pronounced in his evocation of the native body in photography where he drew on the discourse of physical anthropology:

When making portraits of Europeans one tries to avoid too many highlights and concentrates more on pleasing shadows, but in the Native one must pay particular attention to these highlights. There will be very little modelling in the shadows of dark skinned subjects. It is also important to realise that the Native facial bone structure is entirely different from that of the European. His skull is long and narrow, the eyebrow ridges negligible, the nose flat and the nostrils wide. In addition the cheeks are wide prominent and high in position, and there is a gentle curve of the forehead right up to the crown of the head, and because of all these features it is [useful] to employ overhead lighting with the most pleasing effect without waiting for the evening sun. Normally there is little danger of obscuring the eyes by the shadows of the eyebrow ridges, and the flat nose doesn't cast much shadow over the upper lip. One can obtain dramatic photographs from this overhead lighting<sup>392</sup>.

While different schools of thought have developed under its umbrella, physical anthropology continues to be concerned with the evolution of humankind. In such a context, the anatomy becomes the final frontier of enquiry and represents the greatest resource for evidence<sup>393</sup>.

Thus every detail is nitpicked, every contour of the body and skull, and from such socio-cultural aspects of change are accounted for. As early as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the widely-cited

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<sup>392</sup> DC, Denfield, 'Lecture to Photographic Congress'.

<sup>393</sup> See for example, R. Linton, *The Study of Man*, (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts Inc, 1936); P. Whitten, & M. Nickels, 'Our Forebear's forebears', in D.E. Hunter & P. Whitten, eds., *Anthropology: Contemporary Perspectives, 4<sup>th</sup> edition*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1985), pp.15-18; R. Solecki, 'Neanderthal is Not an Epithet but a worthy ancestor', in D.E. Hunter & P. Whitten, eds., *Anthropology: Contemporary Perspectives, 4<sup>th</sup> edition*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1985), pp. 19-22.

*Notes and Queries on Anthropology* contained guidelines for discerning physical aspects of different social groups including the minutiae of the face, skull measurements and limb calculations<sup>394</sup>. According to Coombes, in this same period British Museums were also displaying photographs based on such physical characteristics. Moreover, Oxford University had by the turn of the century, a lecture series devoted to bodies of colonised subjects where each part was pulled apart for scrutiny<sup>395</sup>.

Outside Britain, other photographers also drew on the methodology of physical anthropology to document 'non-European natives'. Faris's study on photographs taken of Navajo at the turn of the century by the likes of George Pepper and Ales Hrdlicka points to the ways in which such figures drew from physical anthropological typologies<sup>396</sup>. Inevitably, such an examination became intertwined with interrogations on origin, mobility and place. Moreover, in certain contexts the discussions have remained only a degree away from discussions about 'primitive man' that exists today. Thus in 1980 Rensberger could claim that the Border Cave Homo, discovered in the 1940s in the Border Caves in South Africa "comes closest to resembling today's so-called Hottentots, a South African ethnic group similar to the Bushmen (or San) but rather distinct from the African Negroes"<sup>397</sup>.

Denfield's own similar anthropometric estimates were on the one hand, a crude revelation of his racism. However, that conclusion alone closes off the implication of such statements when thinking about Denfield's career as a salon photographer. These observations resonate with his earlier writing on describing photographing Northern Nigeria. In this context Denfield used them to draw more general impressions for the keen photographer of the native. The vocabulary of physical anthropology, with its meticulous detail is striking in similarity to that of the salon exhibition experts with their thorough analyses of images and attention to technological detail. Such writers would pay close attention to lighting, shading, tonality, printing, composition, etc and scrutinise the salon value of the image largely based on such technical detail. Denfield gazed at the native with a similar microscopic lens paying attention to the effect of light and shadows on various parts of the body. The result was not only an intensified objectification of the native body but suggests an entanglement of the

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<sup>394</sup> A. Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994).

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid* p 244.

<sup>396</sup> C. Faris, *Navajo and Photography: A critical history of the representation of American People*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).

<sup>397</sup> B. Rensberger, 'The emergence of Homo Sapiens', in D.E. Hunter & P. Whitten, eds., *Anthropology: Contemporary Perspectives*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1985), p 27.

salon space with debilitating racial discourse. In other words, the salon, with its emphasis on technical detail, lent itself to a further concretisation of identities by allowing the photographer who was well versed in colonial discourse, to observe with the eye of the physical anthropologists. Thus as Denfield moved from a largely ethnographic to a pictorial photographic career, the salon not only accommodated such a shift but nurtured it. It is partly in this context that Denfield was able to intellectualise Native photography as a distinct paradigm.

### **Conclusion**

At first glance, when one maps out Denfield's career trajectory from his pagan studies to his Basutoland studies, one can discern obvious shifts in technique, representation and destination of the images. His relocation to South Africa coincided with a move towards more cerebral forms of representation that were concerned with pictorial techniques rather than simply pedagogical value. Yet what remained was the 'native' as key subject matter. His participation in salons, particularly in the form of exhibiting under by pictorialism, implied his photography would be shaped by the requirements of the photographic art enthusiasts, where form at time surpassed content, or at the very least, was taken equally seriously. I have argued, however, that rather than represent a different genre in his work, such a shift in his practice instead speaks to the very anthropological discourses that had informed his earlier pagan studies. To understand how he was able to construe a genre and methodology under the rubric of 'Native photography' one needs to unpack the influence of the salon and its detail-oriented approach to photography that sought absolute technical control over the visual field while producing images that appeared as samplings of real time. As I have argued, Denfield's Native photography registered the task of creating interest in the world by new visual decisions, in other words, representing the 'real' in a fresh way<sup>398</sup>. Depicting the native reserve through the technical lens of pictorialism in turn rephrased the 'native question' through this same framework and thus constructed the reserve as an object of an equally technicist inquiry.

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<sup>398</sup> Sontag, *On photography*, p 69.

## Betwixt and between

Now that the P.S.S.A. [The Photographic Society of South Africa]<sup>399</sup> has come into being it should not be too difficult a task to delve into the history of South African Photography and Photographers and produce, perhaps in book form, an account of Photography in this country ... When and where was the first photographic studio set up in this country? Who were the first press photographers and when did a newspaper reproduce its first news photograph. When was the South African prints first accepted at the Royal?<sup>400</sup>

Thus wrote Denfield in his monthly contribution as chairperson of Portfolios Committee of the Photographic Society of South Africa in January of 1957. It marked a moment of transition in Denfield's career from amateur photographer to amateur historian. Denfield's expressed interest did eventually materialise in the book *Secure the Shadow: The Story of Cape Photography from its Beginning to the End of 1879*. Between the end of his salon career in approximately 1958 and his death in 1967, Denfield expanded the kind of work he did with photographs. By the late 1960s he had established himself as a public intellectual and 'Border' historian. This transition from amateur photographer who draws from an anthropological frame to a historian interested in the practice of the craft is not fortuitous but can be attributed in part, I argue, to his participation in photographic institutions.

According to Alexander, in Europe and North America photographic institutions began to gradually develop from the end of the Second World War until the 1960s. The explosion of photography was particularly rapid in the United States. Moreover, in the post-war period art photography programs began to appear in university curricula which resulted in not only a burgeoning group of practitioners and teachers but also an audience trained in appreciating creative photography<sup>401</sup>. It was particularly among the 'baby-boom' generation of the 1960s that photography experienced an enormous wave of popular interest<sup>402</sup>. Although photographic societies had existed soon after the discovery of the daguerreotype in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is from the 1950s that their role in advancing amateur work intensified. These included two globally influential organizations which Denfield became a

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<sup>399</sup> The Photographic Society of South Africa was formed in 1954. One of its earliest duties was to organize print collections from abroad and make them available to smaller clubs in South Africa.

<sup>400</sup> DC, Denfield, 'Portfolios, Print Collections and Exhibits Committee Notes', January 1957.

<sup>401</sup> S. Alexander, 'Photographic Institutions and practices', in M. Frizot, ed., *A new history of photography*, (Konemann, 1998), pp. 695-707.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid p 696.

part of such as the Photographic Society of America and the Royal Photographic Society in Great Britain

By the late 1950s, Denfield had obtained membership in these organisations. Having applied for associate-ship in 1950, in Denfield was awarded Associate-ship of the British-based Royal Photographic Society (RPS) in 1951<sup>403</sup>. The RPS was founded in 1853 and organised salon exhibitions which aimed to ‘exhibit only that class of work in Pictorial Photography in which there is distinct evidence of personal artistic feeling and execution’<sup>404</sup>. To be awarded the distinction of Associateship, a photographer should have demonstrated a high level of technical competence and “provide evidence of creative ability and the development of a personal style”<sup>405</sup>. Characteristically, photographers also needed to show control over technical aspects necessary for the kind of image they wished to produce.

In 1956 he was also elected associate of the Photographic Society of America (PSA) which was founded in 1934. This was a society which claimed to be ‘the world’s largest photographic organisation’<sup>406</sup> in the mid 1950s. For this he received recognition for ‘his diversified work in the field of photography and for his services to photography in general in the South African area’<sup>407</sup>. Nevertheless, his greatest achievement in the field of pictorial exhibitions came in being admitted to the Fellowship of the RPS in 1959 towards the end of his exhibiting career<sup>408</sup>, the highest distinction in the RPS. To receive such a distinction, a photographer needed to show not only a high level of expertise but also evidence of pushing boundaries in photography, a mark of personal style and evidence of a highly engaged photographer<sup>409</sup>. Moreover, in 1961 the East London Photographic Society (ELPS) granted him an honorary membership of the Society. The ELPS was founded in July 1948 and was soon affiliated with the RPS in September of that same year. Alongside fellow pictorialists, Rhodes Tremmer and Dr AD Bensusan, Denfield was one of the judges of its first Salon in 1958, the Border International Salon of Photography.

This growth in stature is also reflected in acting as judge in several South Africa-based salons including the Pictorial Centenary International Salon of Photography held in Pretoria in 1955, the 4<sup>th</sup> Eastern Cape International Salon of Photography in Uitenhage in 1958 and in the

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<sup>403</sup> DC, ‘Certification of notification’, Royal Photographic Society, 10 December 1951.

<sup>404</sup> DC, ‘Centenary Pictorial Exhibition’, The Royal Photographic Society, November 1953.

<sup>405</sup> Royal Photographic Society Distinctions Handbook, 4, September, (2010), p.14 Online [www.rps.org](http://www.rps.org)

<sup>406</sup> DC, C. Turner, Letter of notification from Chairman of Honors Committee, 14 August 1956.

<sup>407</sup> DC, ‘Award Certificate’, Photographic Society of America, 1956.

<sup>408</sup> DC, Letter of notification, Royal Photographic Society, 16 December 1959.

<sup>409</sup> Royal Photographic Society Distinctions Handbook, 4, September (2010), p 20.

Border Salon of Photography since its inception in 1958 until 1967 amongst others. It is also reflected in invitations to present talks, lectures and speeches in various photographic circles such the East London Photographic Society Annual Dinners (1954-55), the East London Rotary Club (1952), opening the Queenstown International Salon of Photography (1955), the first meeting of the Matatiele Photographic Society (1956), speaking at the Kimberly Camera Club and giving a lecture to the Photographic Congress in Durban (1954)<sup>410</sup>. His voice as a noted photographer was probably most widely heard in his involvement with the Photographic Society of South Africa (PSSA), where he sat on its board of directors by 1955. The PSSA was an umbrella society for various smaller clubs and societies in South Africa. Between 1955 and 1957 he wrote monthly newsletters as Chairman of the Portfolios, Print Collections and Exhibits Committee for the PSSA's official monthly journal *Camera News*. Representing this leg of the PSSA, his columns focused primarily on the organization of exhibitions and photographic collections within South Africa and in such a space he was influential in the South African context in promoting certain ideals for photographers.

According to Alexander, such institutions have tended to be conservative in nature and reflect the character of the individuals that constitute them. Functioning in such closed worlds, the institutions often produced individuals who were not only caught up in only what concerns their institutional world but also produced work that often looked alike<sup>411</sup>. For example, Denfield's Print Collection committee defined parameters and provided a structure for the production of images, thereby formalising photographic practice. This is illustrated in the practice of the Portfolio Exchange which Denfield described below:

The Anglo/S. African Portfolio Exchange has completed its first round. One would imagine that a simple matter such as 'Print Exchange' would run smoothly and without any hold-ups, but it was with a great sigh of relief that I ultimately received the box of prints. Altogether there are ten members of the S. African team, and all they have to do when they receive the box of prints is to write a small critique of a couple of lines on each of the enclosed ten British prints [and add] a new picture of their own in the set and send it on the next member of the list. They are also requested to inform the circle secretary, by post-card provided in the box, of the dates of the receipt and dispatch of the portfolio. All these instructions are displayed on the inside lid of the box, where it is stated that 'It is absolutely essential for the success of these portfolios that they are not delayed for more than two weeks by any one member'<sup>412</sup>.

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<sup>410</sup> This list only reflects that which has been kept in the Denfield Collection and is thus not a comprehensive view of Denfield's talks during his career.

<sup>411</sup> Alexander, 'Photographic Institutions', p 697.

<sup>412</sup>DC, Denfield, 'Portfolios, Print Collections and Exhibits Committee Notes', October, 1955.

This exercise in exchanging photographs and respective critiques is an illustration in not only the disciplining measures of the associations but also points to the wider networks that connected those South African photographers who wished for careers in salons. Elsewhere he emphasised the “importance of all clubs abiding very strictly to the necessity of giving their requests for print collections as soon as possible after the announcement of these collections being available” and stressed that “they must not keep these collections over their specified period” in that “If the circuit distribution is to work smoothly then all clubs must co-operate”<sup>413</sup>. Amidst the enthusiasm for the growth of photography was a mildly belligerent tone towards the reader that revealed a writer fully committed to establishing strict parameters for photographic practice in the country. These excerpts also express Denfield’s own attachment to the process of circulation of images, wherein ideally the trafficking of collection took place mechanistically. On the one hand, this level of command over photographic practices was a contradiction to the pictorial optimistic urge to exercise one’s imagination and convey one’s experienced emotion. On the other, it also suggested a desire to control the nature of that creative expression. It is thus partly in relation to his institutional involvement that one can begin to understand his announcement to delve into the history of photography in 1957 when he announced:

Anyone keen in this aspect of photographic research would find much romantic material that would appeal to photographer and non-photographer alike. I am certain that all readers of *Camera News* would readily supply any information they have to enable the ‘History of South African Photography’ to be written. I wonder if it will ever be written? My own personal knowledge of South African Photography only goes back to 1950 but I have met photographers who were practising photography in the Border before the beginning of the century and have recently acquired sets of negatives taken over 50 years ago. So far no stereoscopic photograph, print or transparency, has found its way to any overseas International Salon and Photographic history is still to be made in this branch of Photography. Who is to be the first South African to have a Stereoscopic acceptance at the Royal?<sup>414</sup>

Alexander points out amidst the conservatism of institutions lurks the ‘danger’ of academicism whereby members’ photography ends up being more about photography than anything else or they become interested in photographic practice for its own sake<sup>415</sup>. This is evident in Denfield’s statements above made at the height of his exhibiting career. His expressed interest in the history of photography marked a transitional point in his career from producing images to generating texts, from participating as an artist in the domain to

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<sup>413</sup>DC, Denfield, ‘Portfolios, Print Collections and Exhibits Committee Notes’, December 1955.

<sup>414</sup> DC, Denfield, ‘Portfolios, Print Collections and Exhibits Committee Notes’, January 1957.

<sup>415</sup> Alexander, ‘Photographic Institutions’, p.697



contributing as an intellectual. This shift, nevertheless, had a much longer trajectory in that his pagan studies were intended as public knowledge. As a culmination, perhaps, there is evidence that Denfield had intended to produce a photography-based ethnographic book based on his travels there. This is in the form of two texts in the Denfield Collection, where one has been titled 'Chapter 9: The Tal tribe of Kwabzak', while another is a page which lists the rest of the titles for the book.

One important difference between this earlier phase of photography (the 1940s) and his photography in the 1950s is his immersion in the institutional circles of photography. By this period Denfield's authorial voice in photography was well established in not only taking photographs but writing about photography to other photographers. Given his growing standing in the field, I imagine Denfield saw himself continuing in the historical line of figures that had spearheaded salons in the country, exhibiting in the Royal, etc. This would mark a shift from his anthropology-oriented practice of taking photography to a history-oriented paradigm in which he would concern himself with questions around origin. Moreover, there are resonances with his involvement in salons and the PSSA and the methodology that framed his historical project. For one thing, photographic institutions implied a formalization of photography into a structured discipline as I have pointed out. Secondly, salons placed great emphasis on the regionalization of photography, both in the sense of identifying photographers with their countries and regarding photographers as ambassadors of their countries. Additionally, institutions promoted the trafficking of images, an exercise that would prove crucial in the latter part of Denfield's career.

In the context of conducting archival work on the history of photography, Denfield digressed when he came across photographic material in the form of glass negatives taken by individuals who had lived in East London in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This turned into a project of its own that took place parallel to the research into the history of photography. This dominated his career for the majority of the 1960s until his death in 1967. On the other hand, a book on the history of photography was published posthumously. Thus, at this point, I continue to follow Denfield's career trajectory chronologically, and pay attention to the phenomenon of the glass negatives that concretely shaped his status into that of a 'Border historian'.

## Chapter 4: ‘Unearthing East London’s treasures’: reconstructing public history from the private album

### Introduction

In the late 1950s Denfield began an intensive project of tracing families of old ‘Border’ photographers. He requested their biographies and portraits. He recounted that while collecting one biography, someone sent him old glass negatives which had hitherto been gathering dust in a sideboard drawer. These were images of East London at the turn of the century<sup>416</sup>. For Denfield they represented more than examples of a particular photographer’s work, but also ‘invaluable historical documents, which could tell the story of East London far more authentically than the written word’.<sup>417</sup> He now began to search for information not only about the photographers, but also for old photographs and old negatives relating to the history of the city. He also extended his search to the Cape Archives and the South African Public Library, and began to show an interest in accumulating written sources of information about its establishment and earlier years along with these visual sources. In this chapter I track the journey of such negatives beginning with Denfield’s early encounters to his subsequent exhibition in 1962. Noting an early reconstruction of a settler history that negates the native question that was prominent in political discourse in this period, I argue that Denfield’s project with the old images maps the move of the empiricist historian in the overlapping projects of restoring the faded images and constructing a textual history.

### Encounters with glass negatives

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of September in 1962 there appeared in the East London-based newspaper the *Daily Dispatch* an article with the headline ‘Priceless negatives being destroyed’. It contained a large photograph of the East London harbour titled *East London’s photographic restoration period* and with the caption:

Dr Joseph Denfield, the well-known East London amateur photographer, is busy restoring old glass negatives of East London historical interest and plans to hold an exhibition in December. This print, produced from an old glass negative found ‘buried’ in a garage, depicts the scene in Buffalo harbour when the Relief of Mafikeng was being celebrated<sup>418</sup>.

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<sup>416</sup> *Sunday Chronicle*, 27 December 1964.

<sup>417</sup> Denfield, *Pioneer Port*, p 5.

<sup>418</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 28 September 1962.



Fig. 52

The photograph was included as an illustration of an innovative project undertaken by the photographer: providing a previously unseen visual past of East London (Fig. 52). Based on an interview with Denfield, the article was intended as both a preamble to residents and an invitation to participate in the project. It reported that “All over East London...irreplaceable negatives are lying in box rooms, attics, garages and rubbish heaps” noting that Denfield “has found some used as broken glass for the top of a garden wall. Others have been used to glass in a greenhouse and others have been cleaned off and put into windows”. Denfield protested “If only these people knew what they are destroying...Properly handled, these old negatives can be transformed into large, sparkling salon-quality prints up to 20 in. wide”. Mention was also made that “Now he has dedicated himself to unearthing East London’s treasures and he is devoting every spare moment to the task”<sup>419</sup>.

The title of the article and the interview were both a prelude to the epistemological framework that would shape the project profoundly, that is, the commitment to salvaging the truth about the town’s past. The assurance to turn the indistinct negative into a more impressive image of clarity is perhaps a microcosm of such a framework. This is comparable to what Jenkins and Munslow describe as the framework in doing history that is “characterised by an undiluted belief in the power of empiricism to access the past (defined

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<sup>419</sup> Ibid.

according to its individual events) as it actually was<sup>420</sup>. For Denfield this meant finding ‘sources’ through which he would generate previously-unknown yet objective historical narrative. After all, part of the empiricist reconstructionist method involves identifying various objects as sources, thus Denfield lamented what he regarded as the blatant disregard and ignorance of the historical value of such negatives. Yet, for such a restorative project to be accomplished the ‘unearthed treasures’ needed to be firstly discursively reconstituted as historical evidence as I will argue later.

The technology of making negatives on glass is attributed to the Englishman Frederick Scott Archer in 1851, whose system presented an alternative to Gustave Le Gray’s method of making negatives on paper by thickening the paper with wax before sensitising it<sup>421</sup>. Archer’s process, called the wet-plate system, involved suspending sensitive salts into a watery colloid comprised of guncotton and alcohol. It required the glass plate to be coated, sensitised, exposed and processed before the colloid had begun to dry. It produced clear negatives from which one could have multiple prints<sup>422</sup>.

While the wet-plate system produced sharp negatives with relatively short exposures, its use had some drawbacks that influenced the kinds of photography that one could practice. For one thing the preparation and development of the wet plate had to be performed quickly in relative darkness which meant the photographer had to travel with his or her darkroom equipment. The photographer would have to manufacture the plate, expose it and process it on site. Thus such a technology demanded planning in advance and did not necessarily accommodate spontaneity.

According to Szarkowski, the introduction of the wet-plate system created a fundamental change in the practice of photography in Europe. Before its development, the daguerreotype had been the standardised form of producing portraits for professional photographers while other forms of photography would be in the hands of artists, scientists and amateurs. With the advent of the system, paper prints replaced the daguerreotype. Thus, it became the standard professional method that apprentices learned. The result was a movement towards photographing public sites such as ancient monuments for libraries and scholars or scenic

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<sup>420</sup> K. Jenkins & A. Munslow, ‘Introduction’, in K. Jenkins & A. Munslow, eds., *The Nature of History Reader* (London: Routledge), p 7.

<sup>421</sup> J. Szarkowski, *Photography Until Now*, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1989).

<sup>422</sup> *Ibid* p 69.

views for tourists. Moreover, the photographers also played a role in other commercial industries by photographing works of industry and engineering<sup>423</sup>.

The wet-plate process was thus central in perpetuating certain forms of representation that included the public aspects of everyday life for the polity. Interestingly, Szarkowski also points out that the glass-plate craft lost some credibility as a pictorial endeavour in the transparency of the images it produced. Its images were regarded as less like objects of art and more like windows into an unedited reality. This was in contrast to the calotype which produced softer and fuzzier images that were held in high esteem as visually rewarding<sup>424</sup>. While Denfield's encounter with images of such a particular medium was partly incidental, its history also suggests that the content of the images also needs to be read with the particular materiality of the medium in mind. Thus as Denfield displayed the images as a revelation of history, the fact that many were of glass negatives already provides a clue into the kind of past they would construct. That is to say, what Denfield regarded as source was already tainted by the historical context that perpetuated particular photographic tropes, which Denfield, nevertheless, read as windows into the past.

Yet, how did Denfield encounter such images? He described it in the introduction to his book *Pioneer Port* where he published some of the material. In the publication he wrote that developed an interest in old Cape photographers, particularly those from the Border and began tracing their families. He would request their biographies and portraits. This continued until at some point during his investigation he was sent old glass negatives of East London by a descendant of a photographer who claimed the negatives were simply "cluttering up the sideboard drawer" until:

...on examining them I found that they were scenes of East London taken in the last century...It was also clear to me that this batch of negatives wasn't just an isolated event, and there must be hundreds and hundreds of these original glass negatives, taken by different photographer at various times of old East London, scattered throughout the country... And so, whenever I wrote again asking for particular of a photographic biography, I would add a little postscript; "Have you by any chance any old negatives of East London?" Every now and then I would strike a little oil. Yes, they had some, but they had given them to Uncle George, who apparently was the only member of the family keen on keeping these old things. So I wrote to Uncle George and with a bit of luck he would find them and make arrangements to have them collected, knowing that they wouldn't be destroyed and would serve a useful purpose<sup>425</sup>.

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<sup>423</sup> Ibid p 71.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid p 107.

<sup>425</sup> Denfield, *Pioneer Port*, p 5.

The image of the negatives piling out of the sideboard drawer itself can be likened to the sight of the archival drawer that bustles with dated documents in anticipation of the keen historian who would find in them- as Denfield did with the images- some 'useful purpose'. In its verbosity, the passage clearly indicates the centrality of the circulation of such images in their social biography. Arguably, part of their 'aura' lay not only in the content they depicted but the various journeys they had taken across historical periods, generations, across regions, moving from private albums and drawers to boxes that would be thrown away as rubbish, and across technological manipulation. After all, when they landed in Denfield's mail they would be covered "with deposits of chemical and other matter. But all this can be cleaned off with various solvents, the negatives hardened and intensified, and scratches, abrasions and discolorations repaired"<sup>426</sup>.

Denfield took upon himself the laborious task of cleaning images chemically and reproducing them through re-photographing. The microscopic approach of representation that had characterised his approach to the pagan subjects emerged once more. Working with the glass negatives and re-photographing old faded prints meant applying a scientific method to the material objects with the intention of reproducing them as not only aesthetically pleasing but as concrete evidence of a particular history. This resonates with his methodical approach to Native photography where he instructed photographers to pay attention to the particular materiality of the black body as distinct from the European body in order to represent it effectively on camera. In both instances, Denfield applied an objectifying gaze that would produce knowledge as suggested in the following anecdote:

Some time ago I called upon a friend of mine in connection with a photograph of an old East London studio, that of Osborne Morley...then he asked me whether I was interested in seeing an old picture of upper Oxford Street taken in 1878...I asked 'How do you know it's 1878?'. He replied 'The person who gave it to me wrote that date on the back and if you look carefully you'll see that the city Hall isn't there'. Since the City Hall was completed in 1899 I wouldn't expect it to be there. Anyway I did look carefully, with a hand lens. He was perfectly right, there was no City Hall there but there was a shop on the other side of the road and I was unable to read the name of the proprietor. It was an Indian shop and the name 'Ranosamy' on it. How interesting. Then I looked over more carefully with my hand on the lens and I was able to discern a telephone pole in lower Oxford Street. As telephones were only introduced in East London in 1887 it was obvious that this photograph as an example of Oxford Street in 1878 had little historic value. Some months later I encountered the same photograph published by a Port Elizabeth firm with the date 1898 printed on it. It belonged to an elderly lady who asked me what I thought of it. I replied 'If you'll look

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<sup>426</sup> Ibid p 5.

carefully you'll notice that the City Hall isn't there'. She looked at the photograph again carefully and then said 'you're quite right' she said 'You know I hadn't noticed'<sup>427</sup>.

The photograph-owner's hasty engagement with the image was a contrast to Denfield's laborious detail-oriented task. The use of the hand lens should not be regarded only pragmatically as merely a seeing tool but speaks to the kinds of seeing Denfield entailed, that is, seeing with the pursuit of truth. With such a commitment to realism and common sense, his reliance on the lens revealed a mistrust of the impressionist seeing to which the owner of the photographer had adhered. This would help him avoid what Jenkins and Munslow cite as the greatest error historians can apparently make that is "the fall from objectivity into relativism"<sup>428</sup>.

Resultantly, he outlined some aspects of the town's development. The elderly acquaintance's shift from a 'failure' to notice to the exclamation of Denfield's aptness is telling. Her exclamation "I hadn't noticed" signals metonymically Denfield's authoritative task of unearthing hidden truths. Moreover, it was through this form of seeing that the *historical value* of images was determined. Denfield legitimised the restorative potential of the dated images by supplementing them with equally intensive archival research. Interestingly, both Native photography and restoring glass negatives involved manipulation of the subjects wherein the subjects would be posed and dressed, while the negatives were subjected to chemical processing. However, while for the Denfield Native photography was a task to be done in the reserve remote from the white photographer's suburb, the glass negatives were said to reside in one's most private space: in the home, the family album, the drawers, etc. They were also exchanged between family members, between the Uncle George and his nephews and nieces.

Unlike his atemporal framing of tribes in Nigeria, these images of East London represented a specific period in history. However, in the passage and in the Dispatch interview, Denfield draws on the discursive repertoire of exploration and discovery as he salvaged the past through the photographic medium. This resonates with his earlier photographic project in Northern Nigeria where he too 'discovered' the hidden pagans on the periphery of a changing society, a situation comparable to what Taylor regards as the banal scenario of the 'discovery

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<sup>427</sup> DC, Denfield, 'Lecture to the Border Historical Society', 22 February 1962.

<sup>428</sup> Jenkins & Munslow, 'Introduction', p 8.

of savage natives'<sup>429</sup>. According to Taylor the scenario makes visible what is already there in the form of images and stereotypes that structure our understanding. It is a replay of scenes in social dramas that may be familiar to many. Thus the notion of 'discovering primitive people' is one that has pervaded western discourse about the 'other'. An important difference in Denfield's work, however, was that the 'past' he 'discovered' through the photographs affirmed his viewers' sense of belonging rather than distance from the subject matter. I elaborate on this point in this and subsequent chapters.

The glass negatives, like the pagan subjects, were read as authentic objects that were living segments of the past. In both scenarios, in the context of social change, the photographer employed the visual to redirect his viewer to a different temporality. Yet, by designating specific periods in history, the glass negatives functioned more gravely as truth formations. For this Denfield relied on their materiality. Elizabeth Edwards' notion of materiality in the sense of both the plasticity of objects and their social biography is useful here<sup>430</sup>. Not only did the negatives and old prints contain a particular historical aura for Denfield because they were both representations and artefacts from the past, but when they became his possessions they also transformed in their very materiality, moving from the negative to a positive print, to newspaper articles, to exhibitions and to an archive and in each they were performative in different ways.

Denfield also invited residents of the Border to re-imagine their own private photographs as public history by appealing to them to share with him images of old East London they had. This is indicated in a letter appearing in *The Mercury*, a community newspaper based in King William's Town. He made a plea similar to that in the above *Daily Dispatch* interview stating "If you have old photographs or glass negatives which depict scenes of any kind connected with East London's past DON'T THROW THEM AWAY!". The article stated "Any pictures sent to Dr Denfield and which are good enough to be copied and featured will be acknowledged, and the donor's name will be associated with them 'for posterity'". Moreover, Denfield added "'Remember to mention old family albums as valuable sources of the kind of thing I am looking for..and this includes all social scenes, like picnics and other group pictures'"<sup>431</sup>.

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<sup>429</sup> D. Taylor, *The archive and the repertoire: performing cultural memory in the Americas*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), p 28.

<sup>430</sup> E. Edwards, 'Introduction: Photographs as object', in E Edwards and J Hart, eds., *Photographs, objects, histories: on the materiality of images*, (London: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>431</sup> *The Mercury*, 22 November 1963.



By associating the owners of the photographs with posterity (expressing the importance attached to factuality), Denfield reconstituted such individuals as authors in their own right. Moreover, the photographers behind the images were to be elevated story-tellers. Denfield explained his outreach to the King William's Town area on the basis that at the turn of the twentieth century photographers from King William's Town historically had played in photographing noteworthy events including those in East London due to its close proximity to the town and the fact that for a while East London had had no photographers<sup>432</sup>. In its invitation to residents to participate in Denfield's restorative project, the article construed such a task as a patriotic duty that involved one's own personal history, where the private collection would be reproduced as public history. In other words, although Denfield constructed the project in intellectual terms, underpinning it was a political tone that suggested a struggle for historical legitimacy at the level of the visual.

The collection of letters addressed to Denfield in the Library Collection from various individuals indicates that Denfield's plea was indeed heard, although few pertain to the donation of negatives and prints of old East London<sup>433</sup>. A miscellaneous note in the collection indicates the receipt of an old box plate camera from Joseph Tom in Aliwal North. The rest of the letters express interest in assisting Denfield, some as a response to the newspaper articles and others to Denfield's direct communication with various family members. The following are some examples:

I have some old photographs of scenes of and connected with East London which you might care to have. I saw your appeal in the King William's Town 'Mercury' weeks ago. These photographs are in an old album belonging to my late father's late brother, Ross Brownlee, who was employed in the Customs in East London towards the end of the last and early this century...The photographs: some are on the backs of others that I should like returned, so if there are any which you're interested in retaining would it be possible to remove those you want and return the others?<sup>434</sup>

I was born in East London and lived there for 38 years before coming to Cape Town to live and have some very happy memories of that time. I am enclosing some photographic negatives which I made from old 3 ¼ "x3 ¼" slides which my late father made prior to his death in 1910...I am also enclosing two old postcards of views which were taken around 1912<sup>435</sup>.

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<sup>432</sup> Ibid.

<sup>433</sup> Seemingly, Denfield did not donate these earlier letters to the Municipal Library. Although the Library houses a large collection of letters addressed to Denfield regarding different aspects of his photographic work, few specifically relate to the collection of faded prints and glass negatives of East London.

<sup>434</sup> DC, F. McCallum (born Brownlee), Letter to Denfield, 22 November 1963.

<sup>435</sup> DC, E. Laverwick, Letter to Denfield, 30 June 1962.

I must apologise for not having the photographs sooner. I had a letter from Nola today and one from my mother both reminding me about them. I am afraid I have no negatives. The ones of the beach front and Currie Street are just before 1914 judging by their position in my father's album. There are three of Tug 'Penguin' two in 1924 and one pre-war. The other of the tug is, I think, the 'Stork'<sup>436</sup>.

We were glad to know that the plates were of use to you...For some years I have been wondering what to do with these photos. I am so pleased this has come about as if anything happened to us, they would probably have landed in the dust bin<sup>437</sup>.

These letters suggest the extent to which the project of restoring old East London visually became a collective endeavour amongst a particular sector in the Cape Province. With Denfield spearheading the project, the early task of going through one's album was arguably, the first phase in creating an imagined community linked by a shared visual index. In his media appeal, Denfield reconfigured personal belongings as historically significant, empirical and civic objects that designated one's relationship to a particular locality. One would thus not simply view a past photograph of a family picnic scene as a personal or individual memoir but also as a signifier of a time gone by.

A recurring aspect of the biography of the photographs relates to their familial entanglement. Although various texts indicate Denfield contacted public institutions and organisations for research apart from the Cape Archives<sup>438</sup>, for the bulk of the photographs on East London he relied on the help of descendants of early photographers. It is instructive to contrast Denfield's appeal to readers to search their homes for such images, to his earlier suggestion to amateur photographers to take a walk off the beaten path in order to find that which is worth photographing. After all, both his representations of pagan subjects and his pictorial depictions of Basutoland relied on this. While the images of old East London represented the greatest temporal difference in his career, they were simultaneously the ones closest to his viewers. That is to say, his photographs taken in Nigeria and Basutoland depicted 'difference' to his audience while he represented the images of East London in terms of his viewers' heritage or their 'own' history.

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<sup>436</sup> DC, Keith, Letter to Denfield, 31 January 1962.

<sup>437</sup> DC, DG Russell, Letter to Denfield, 20 February 1962.

<sup>438</sup> These include the Simons' Town Historical Society, the British Kaffrarian Museum, The Graaf-Reinet Monument in 1965, Rhodes University Cory Library, Deeds Office (King William's Town), South African Railways, South African Philatelist Federation, Lesotho Evangelical Society, Greyville Presbyterian Church, South African Jewish Board of Directors, Scientific South Africa, Durban Museum and Art Gallery, Port Elizabeth Municipal Library and abroad he contacted the London Missionary Society, Royal Commonwealth Society (London), Royal Astronomical Society (London), National Central Library (London), National Maritime Library (London) and the British Museum Newspaper Library.

Denfield's methodology in collecting old East London images has some parallels with the material or physical aspects of the production of images in his travels through Basutoland. Not only did collecting such images entail 'trafficking' in the form of literally travelling through different parts of the Border to find them and in the circulation of the images, but in both contexts he relied on the assistance of various actors who were in close proximity to the site of the photographs. To reconstruct East London's past he relied on individuals' willingness to exchange their images. Deborah Poole's widely-cited concept of a visual economy is perhaps useful here to describe the complex systems of interconnection and exchange within which photographs operate<sup>439</sup>. One may recall Denfield's reliance on traders for horses and native guides, for example, or his imbursement of little 'native boys and girls' in exchange for posing for him. Likewise, in exchange for faded negatives or prints, Denfield would provide the sender with a touched-up positive print. The construction of his image-worlds thus took place alongside a network of relationships that constituted those very image-worlds significantly.

Notably, by virtue of the system of interconnection in which the images entered, in some instances they transformed the original sender in return. For one thing, there are instances in which Denfield's work led to a deeper appreciation and understanding of one's family. For example, Katherine Turner wrote to Denfield stating "First of all thank you so very much for the most interesting book...The picture of Grandfather is very good indeed and I mean to put it in the room with the Family picture gallery"<sup>440</sup>. Similarly Mrs Rabone expressed her gratitude stating "My father Mr S Rabone to whom you have addressed your letter in photography has asked me to let you know that he is at present in hospital...He says you do know a lot more about his family than he did!"<sup>441</sup>. Arguably, while Denfield may have regarded the negatives and faded prints as tangible and fixed evidence of history, once the negatives had been cleaned and returned to owners in print form, they took on another dimension in the family context in their materiality, reconfiguring the photographers behind the images as *documentary* workers who contributed to the city's heritage in capturing notable sites and events. This transformative potential of the images was even more pronounced when they reached another leg of their journey: in the regular publication of the images in the Daily Dispatch preceding their formal exhibition.

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<sup>439</sup> D. Poole, *Vision, Race and Modernity: a Visual Economy of the Andean Image-World*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

<sup>440</sup> DC, K. Turner, Letter to Denfield, 12 April 1967. This is in reference to a picture of Col Fred Kisch. Denfield sent a restored print to his family .

<sup>441</sup> DC, Mrs Rabone, Letter to Denfield, 2 June 1964.

### **‘Do you remember?’**

Throughout his project of restoring East London’s past through the photographs, Denfield’s effacement of the ‘native question’ is notable, particularly when considering that during this particular period questions around governance along different racial lines became central in politics and governance in the city. Although East London was racially segregated from the beginning of its history as a colonial outpost, with the first ‘African’ settlement having been founded on the west bank of the Buffalo River in 1849, it was only in 1895 that city authorities officially created separate ‘African locations’ on the west and east banks of the Buffalo River.<sup>442</sup> In the early 1960’s, the city experienced another significant phase of re-shaping. The Group Areas Act had been passed in 1950. The Minister of Native Affairs Dr H.F. Verwoerd visited East London in 1957 to investigate the housing situation. He was unequivocal in his vision for the future and insisted that all new African residential development take place ‘outside the city’. Verwoerd’s plan was to situate new ‘dormitory townships’ thirty kilometres outside East London, close to the borders of the Ciskei homeland. The East London City Council approved the creation of the new location at Mdantsane the following year. In 1959 municipal planners began to draft a master plan providing for the erection of 15,000 houses to shelter 125,000 people. By the early 1960’s definitive steps had been taken to start demolishing the old location of Duncan Village (or Gompotown) and relocating its inhabitants to Mdantsane<sup>443</sup>.

While these two historical periods cannot be isolated from other potentially momentous occasions that re-shaped the city, they are significant and affixed in Denfield’s career trajectory. Firstly both were important periods in the geographic mapping of East London through removals and the displacement of persons and families. At the turn of the twentieth century, residents witnessed the effect of institutionalized segregationist policies whereby black people were being relocated from the city centre. The Group Areas Act widened and intensified the racial segregation. Yet, despite a sixty year gap between these periods, they were coalesced visually in 1962 with the publication of images of East London in the *Daily Dispatch* taken at the turn of the century.

From the 26<sup>th</sup> of November 1962 until the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1963, the *Daily Dispatch* published a series of daily photographs from negatives restored by Denfield with the intention of carrying

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<sup>442</sup> L. Bank & L. Maqashu, ‘West Bank Land and Restitution Claim: Social History Report’, East London: Institute of Social and Economic Research, Rhodes University (1999).

<sup>443</sup> Ibid.

“memories back to the good old days in East London”. The series was a build-up to a subsequent exhibition of the same images in December 1962. The reproduction of such images in the newspaper was an example of the ‘mechanical reproduction of art’ as expressed by Walter Benjamin<sup>444</sup>. The ‘original’ photographs were of course not ‘art objects’ in the conventional sense but contained an aura of ‘authenticity’. However, unlike the latter, Denfield’s photographs also contained textual information that supplemented each photograph and in this sense the technical reproduction “put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself”<sup>445</sup>. In some ways, this relates to how Denfield had used the photographs from different private archives to compile a public history, that is, through constituting the images as evidence for a particular version of the past.

Accompanying each photograph in the newspaper was the heading ‘Do you remember?’ It is notable that although for many residents the photographs were taken within living memory, between 1881 and 1914, for the much younger readership they would not have been. The question, therefore, mediated the reader’s memory in imagining a particular image of the past following the event presented in the image. The newspaper implicitly alluded to the older residents as custodians of historical memory. In other words, the reproduction of such images enabled the “original to meet the beholder halfway”<sup>446</sup> in this instance through giving the viewers access to another historical period. In engaging with the historical images and subsequent texts, they were invited to participate in the reconstruction of East London’s past. Each photograph would also include a brief description of the historical events pertaining to the photograph in order configure the images as documents of the past.

When engaging the public about the photographs, Denfield was rigorous about preserving historical accuracy. In a lecture to the Border Historical Society, for example, he insisted “To be of any historic value these pictures must be correctly identified and scenes of East London...must be *authentically dated* and we must have at our disposal certain *unassailable facts* so that these valuable photographs of East London during its formative years can be shown with *authority*”. He also stressed that “When viewing an old photograph we mustn’t

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<sup>444</sup> W. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968).

<sup>445</sup> Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p 2.

<sup>446</sup> *Ibid.*

allow ourselves to be carried away by our emotions...Above all we must avoid this so-called unquestioning of authority”<sup>447</sup>(own italics).

The commitment to historical accuracy and the search for ‘unassailable facts’ revealed a suspicion of subjective reflection and affect in which the latter was seen as disruptive and wholly unnecessary. Here we have an illustration of the reconstructionist belief that “historical method is about empiricism first, last and always”<sup>448</sup> It is useful to contrast his scrupulous method in engaging with the images of old East London to his earlier technique in photographs of Basutoland where he created picturesque scenarios in the visual plane that he first imagined. While the latter phase was an opportunity to exercise his sensibility, in working with the East London images he apparently suspended such faculties in the search for truth. The photograph had become a battle-site to ascertain historical validity and knowledge. Not only did such a shift indicate Denfield’s augmentation as a public intellectual but perhaps reveals at another level a struggle about belonging and rootedness in the city.



Fig. 53

Almost inevitably, the photographs portrayed civic aspects of social life. Given that Denfield claimed to have accumulated hundreds of such images, some were snapshots of more intimate moments as well. However, the former were unquestionably more effective in

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<sup>447</sup> DC, Denfield, ‘Lecture to the Border Historical Society’.

<sup>448</sup> Jenkins & Munslow, ‘Introduction’, p 9.

providing a narrative along communal lines. Despite the stubborn effacement of race in the public presentation of the collection, one can read race (and gender) in the collection. This can be noted in one of the first photographs that appeared. The photograph was taken by H. Dersley in 1889 and depicts a group of young oarsmen resting at a landing stage in Green Point close to the Buffalo River<sup>449</sup> (Fig. 53). The young men are dressed in conventional garb. One is struck immediately by one oarsman who anchors the photograph on the right by standing with legs wide open inside one boat while lifting his right hand holding an indiscernible object triumphantly (perhaps something caught in the river). He appears completely relaxed in such a gesture. In a similar fashion another subject at the back also holds the same object in the air with a pipe in his mouth. The image is reminiscent of the trophy/hunting genre of photographs where subjects would be photographed with their captured game on the foreground. These young men hold their objects in a celebratory manner, displaying conquest over nature. One of the subjects holds a rifle in the air yet lacks the indomitable spirit of the subject on the right.

This landing stage appears to have been a homosocial space where young adult white males asserted their masculinity away from the urbanising town. The rest of the subjects, some with hands in their pockets and another in the foreground with feet in the water nonchalantly, are relaxed and express belonging and a familiarity with the social space. I am reminded of Hayes' analysis of a photograph of Cocky Hahn leaping over a tower of bricks in Ovamboland. According to Hayes the photograph is revelatory of the subculture of white officers in the interwar years which advocated activity to stop the mind from brooding. She thus reads it as ethnography of male whiteness which celebrates physicality and power<sup>450</sup>. As the young subjects pose patiently on boats for the photographer in this East London image dressed in uniform, they hint at an emergent subculture of white male elitism that would be expressed in boys' clubs and male-dominated societies.

The male homosociality that is part of the visual index of old East London is notable as well in the photograph taken by Charles Street on the 18<sup>th</sup> of September in 1895. It portrays a group of much older men whom Denfield described breezily as "mostly responsible for the building of East London"<sup>451</sup>. They are identified as W.R. Crabtree, N.W. Thompson, C.K. Humphrey, Colonel Rays Price, T. Dalrymple, R. MacLean, H.B. Briscoe, Seely, T. Tilney,

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<sup>449</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 31 December 1962.

<sup>450</sup> Hayes, 'Northern Exposures', p 175.

<sup>451</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 1 January 1963.

Tibbet, J. Patterson, J. Georgeson, Alfred Webb, Major Carroll, W. Gordon Dunn, H. Hebbes, C. Malcomess, Captain L.A. Munn, J. Dircks, John Gately, David Rees, Geo. Venn, J. Laing, T. Price and Major Webb (Fig. 54). They were caught on camera at Green Point at a luncheon given for J Laing, a member of the Legislative Assembly. Included in the series as a representation of the foundation of East London, the subjects in the photograph are much older in age and seniority that those in the previous image. Its inclusion also suggests a paternalism that underpinned the project with the figures regarded as ‘founding fathers’ of the city. For readers in 1962, these names would have been meaningful as part of the city’s heritage in that they had already become embedded in the city’s structure. For one thing, Rees Street was named after David Rees, one of East London’s early mayors. Similarly Gately Street, one of the town’s most strategic connecting routes, was named after John Gately whom Denfield later regarded as the ‘father of East London’<sup>452</sup>. The photograph suggests a foundation of the city based on white masculinity. As the subjects pose in a stately manner, with legs crossed and arms folded carefully, they are represented as the custodians of the city’s legacy, the fathers to whom the birth of city’s establishment must be credited. It is perhaps fitting that this was one of the last images to be included in the series. Having been privy to various aspects of the town’s past, the photograph would leave the reader with a sense of contentment and belonging by virtue of the men to whom the roots of the town were attributed (Fig. 54).



Fig. 54

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<sup>452</sup> Additionally in 1964 Gately’s home was preserved into a monument.



When looking at the collection of images that appeared in the Dispatch, various motifs emerge. Amongst this is a recurring depiction of public events. These are images of rare occasions that were captured on camera. One example is a photograph taken by Charles Street in June 1897 (Fig. 55). It portrays a large crowd of East Londoners waiting at Station Square for Lord Milner during Queen Victoria's Jubilee celebration of the city<sup>453</sup>. One might recall the fixed site as a preferred choice of subject for the photographer using the wet-plate system in that it required careful preparation. Events such as the visits of high profile figures would be known well in advance and thus suitable for photographers in the region who could camp at the site of the spectacle. In the photograph, the group is comprised of spectators of different ages ranging from very young girls who stand in a line in the foreground adorning formal attire with starched hats. Several people in the crowd carry umbrellas in anticipation of Lord Milner's arrival. One military figure walks closely by the crowd as though he polices them. Four others sit on the roof of a station building surveying from a distance. One imagines the period to have been a defining moment for residents, that is, when the town's importance and residents' identities were asserted with the endorsement of ambassadors of the Empire. Children thus stood carefully in the front in order to not miss such a momentous event. As residents witnessed the spectacle sixty five years later in the newspaper, they were reminded once again of the town's European antecedents.



Fig. 55

Similar in representation is the photograph taken by John Knibbs in 1925. East Londoners have gathered in droves in front of the City Hall to welcome the Prince of Wales in May. A

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<sup>453</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 14 December 1962.

large banner is affixed across the Hall with the words ‘A hearty welcome to our beloved Prince’<sup>454</sup> (Fig. 56). Given the dating of the event many more readers- who had lived in East London for longer- would have had living memory of the event compared to the arrival of Lord Milner. In order to capture the crowd effectively, the photographer positioned himself at an elevated angle behind the spectators, and thus obtained a panoramic sweeping view of the event. This is effective in reconfiguring the event as a spectacle and appealing to a viewer’s sensibility. As the *Dispatch* reader studied the image that was placed in between current news, he or she would be transported to a different temporality and would take up his or her place among the spectators.

More effective as a patriotic display, perhaps, was the photograph of a military parade in 1906<sup>455</sup>. The photographer was unnamed in the *Daily Dispatch*. The parade took place in the town’s Market Square, while the photographer is said to have positioned him/herself from the old Lloyd’s Building. Lloyd’s Building is a significant site in the town, which former town clerk H. H. Driffield in 1958 regarded as “one of the City’s well known landmarks and most beautiful edifices”<sup>456</sup>. The civic exercise drew a significant crowd that stood on the sidelines surrounding the performers who are in the centre of the Market Square (Fig. 57). As s/he stood in Lloyd’s Building, the photographer captured the scene at an elevated angle. Unlike the two photographs above which portray the spectacular events as though they had captured the town in its entirety, the photographer of the military parade captured the event panoramically and included unceremonious incidents as well, such as two figures strolling at a pavement on the left casually and various spectators who stand away from the crowd. Therefore, unlike the photograph of Prince Alfred’s visit which engaged the viewer as part of the crowd him/herself, the military parade depiction allowed the viewer to witness as a detached observer. Interestingly, in the above photograph of Lord Milner’s visit, the soldiers policed the expectant crowd, while in this context they were under the civilian crowd’s gaze, performing obedience, self-control and discipline.

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<sup>454</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 25 December 1962.

<sup>455</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 27 December 1962.

<sup>456</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 23 July 1958



Fig.56



Fig. 57

Some spectacles in the series of photographs were of tragic events, such as the photograph of sunken vessels taken by G. French in June 1902<sup>457</sup>. The *Dispatch* reported that in June 1902 three sailing ships sunk on the shores of the Eastern Beach as a result of a terrific gale. The photograph displays a crowd at the beach watching salvaging efforts of the vessels. Several stevedores attempt to pull them out of the water. Evidence of the wreckage is all over the beach. The viewer of the photographer witnesses both the rescuing attempts and the spectator's engagement (Fig. 58). The crowd waits in anticipation at a safe distance from the ocean. It is instructive to compare the publication of this series of images in 1962 with the tragedy itself. Like the stevedores Denfield was attempting to salvage and assert the town's history through the visual medium. His laborious task of cleaning and re-photographing is both metaphoric and metonymic. In developing the glass negatives into positives, it is as though Denfield wanted to cleanse and 'correct' historical memory.



Fig. 58

<sup>457</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 10 December 1962.

The communal or public space also occurred as a motif in the series. These photographs portrayed sites that continued to exist at the time of the publication of the images in the newspaper<sup>458</sup>. Even those readers who had no living memory of the scenes in the photographs would identify the sites and reconstruct it as part of a by-gone era. When looking at images of public sites, for example, one could easily note parallels in one's own period. Such a comparison also constructed the city as a visual spectacle whose change was signified by visual change in the public space. This is illustrated in John Knibb's photograph of the Quanza Pools in 1907. It portrays East Londoners gathered around the pool to witness its official opening<sup>459</sup>. The bystanders offered a marked contrast to later generations as women are covered in full long skirts and men wear blazers in the photograph. Denfield noted the strict code of the period regarding public dress as well as the separation of the sexes on the beaches in that separate pools were created for women and children, and another for men<sup>460</sup>. Fittingly, men stand on the left side of the pool by rocks while women in the foreground stand by, some with children, and shield themselves with umbrellas. Seemingly this is the men's pool in that only men are in the pool (Fig. 59).



Fig. 59

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<sup>458</sup> Some sites continue to exist in present day East London and were granted monument status. Interestingly, post-apartheid heritage practice continues to recognize such sites as part of the city's heritage.

<sup>459</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 20 December 1962.

<sup>460</sup> *Ibid* .

As a depiction of a recreational space, the photograph offered a contrast to Dersley's image of young oarsmen in Green Point in that it configured the pool as a congregational space for East Londoners rather than an exclusive arena. At the same time Knibb's image is a study in shifts to the residents' relationship with the recreational site as it circulated in 1962. Under apartheid, recreational spaces became highly contested politicised spaces that signified exclusion and white supremacy. One can read such an image alongside press photographer Daniel Morolong's photograph of his mother and two sisters seated on rocks by an East London beach taken in the early 1960s. Noting that the photograph was taken on the eve of forced removals that would restrict access to such a space, Hayes argues that as they sit on the rocks next to the waves "they are on the verge of being pushed out of their homes and out of urban visibility in apartheid South Africa"<sup>461</sup>. In Knibb's photograph men stand inside the newly constructed pool as though to take up their place in the modernising town. In retrospect, the circulation of Knibb's photograph in the 1960s is a haunting reminder of white conquest over the recreational space.

In this same period, Morolong took photographs for *African Edition*, a *Daily Dispatch* supplement that was created for East London's black readership between 1960 and 1966<sup>462</sup>. While the two series of photographs served two different functions for two distinct groups of readers, they both deployed the visual in media to provide a narrative of East London. Moreover, they were both studies in modernity. Morolong's images, however, concentrated on the town's peripheral townships of Mdantsane and Duncan Village, and in the manner characteristic of the cohort of *Drum* photographers in the 1950s, documented the everyday spaces of recreation of the township from beauty pageants to boxing matches, church groups to trendsetters on the street. Morolong's photographs thus also recreated a miniature world of a designated area of the town. Read against one another, one notes striking contrast of the two collections. Tightly framed and more densely populated, Morolong's photographs were a contrast to the panoramic views that emphasised engineering feats. They seemed to fight shy of revealing the township world's entangled and unequal relationship with the white world of the town, portraying a limited sense of belonging to clubs and associations set apart from the world of Denfield's display (see Fig. 60, 61 & 62)

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<sup>461</sup> Hayes, 'Introduction: Visual Genders', p 534.

<sup>462</sup> C. McNulty, Personal Communication, 18 May 2011.



Fig. 60



Fig. 61

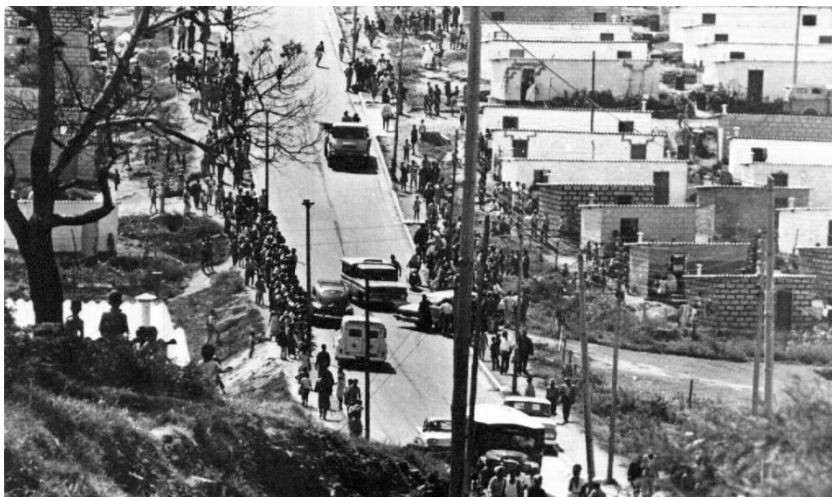


Fig. 62

Another recreational space included in the ‘Do you remember?’ series was Park Avenue, “where the elite of the town used to gather on Sunday afternoons”<sup>463</sup>. Simkins’ photograph which was taken in 1895 shows a crowd on such an occasion (Fig. 63). Men and women stroll in the area casually. Some travel by horse and carriage while others are on bicycles on a

<sup>463</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 3 December 1962.

sunny afternoon. It is a scene of leisure and contentment where residents convene in pairs and groups. Others wander aimlessly alone. Denfield noted that Park Avenue was the fashion centre of East London in this period<sup>464</sup>, thus one imagines the elite gathering there while being aware of their peers' scrutiny. Far from being a space of idleness, Park Avenue was a performative space of class and supremacy. The photograph introduced nobility into East London's history, constituting it as a Europeanised space. Fittingly, in the background the steeple of the Lutheran Church peers through the tree tops almost as a reminder of the town's colonial history.



Fig. 63

Part of East London's history included the appropriation of the transportation space as a site of protest and social change. Included in the *Dispatch* series was a photograph of the East London Railway Station that was taken by Osborne Morley in 1882. Displaying a building that was built in 1880, the station had changed little by 1962<sup>465</sup>. Arguably, while a city's landmarks may mark its distinctiveness, sites of public transportation were effective in marking its borders from other regions as passengers travelled from town to town, and from region to another. As the policy of homelands was implemented it created differentiated travel routes along racial lines. Thus as one moved from Mdantsane to Zwelitsha on the periphery of King William's Town, he or she would move along the demarcated road that fell within the Ciskei homeland. Morley is noted to have taken the photograph from the top of the Magistrate Court's building. By providing an expansive view of the station with railway fire engines and engine sheds, the photograph is a glimpse into the concealed mechanisms that

<sup>464</sup> Ibid.

<sup>465</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 12 December 1962.

kept the station going (Fig. 64). Likewise, as part of the city's administration, public transportation became an integral, albeit faceless, part of the system of institutionalised racism.



Fig. 64

The establishment of public transportation also marked a point of transition in the city as it became more industrialised and mechanised. An emergent theme in the series was the portrayal of East London as a modernising town and a growing municipality. This is illustrated by the photograph taken by Fred Stacey in 1908 (Fig. 65). It shows Dr E.C. Nangle, president of the Automobile Club, posed on a vehicle on the day he took delivery of his model outside a shed<sup>466</sup>. These were the years when cars were arriving for the first time in East London thus the sale of a car was a fairly significant event in itself. I imagine Stacey received prior notification and prepared his equipment in advance in anticipation the car's arrival. Nangle poses stiffly while simulating driving. With his upright posture he appears a little daunted by the large gadget while the dog, presumably his companion, appears to be almost in anticipation of being photographed. While the photograph depicted technological development in the city readers would of course regard it as a throwback to earlier unsophisticated technology. Yet, as Nangle sits rigidly in his new possession it echoes nervous anticipation of change.

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<sup>466</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 8 December 1962.





Fig. 65



Fig. 66

Inasmuch as Denfield's project provided a history of the town based on visual evidence, images of a modernising East London simultaneously alerted one to how change was itself an integral part of the town's history. An illustration is the photograph of St George's Presbyterian Church by G. French<sup>467</sup>. It stands apart from the series in that it shows a site under construction in 1900 (Fig. 66). As with the photographs above, capturing the site was likely planned in advance. However the photograph included a female pedestrian seemingly by accident. Her appearance is a contrast to the subjects on the construction site, occupying a different plane. Her presence is ghostly, in contrast to the imposing site under construction. She walks close to the site, unlike French who must have stood at a distance somewhere between Oxford Street and Park Avenue. The photographer remained a detached observer while the pedestrian was unavoidably included as part of the documentation of the construction. Her blurry inclusion is perhaps a testament to the prearranged method of photography required for the wet-plate method. Again, as a depiction of a site under construction, the photograph is comparable to Denfield's restorative project of the foundation of East London, resonating with his own attempts at building a visually oriented archive, which, in turn, reconfigured history as a visual enterprise.

Chas Street's photograph of the Merryweather, a fire engine, is another example that portrayed a modernising town. Taken in 1904, it is a full length display of the machine against the industrial backdrop of the harbour (Fig. 67). The photographer's angle draws attention to the machine's power. This is reinforced by its placement in the centre of the

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<sup>467</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 29 November 1962.

frame. In the *Dispatch* series, the photograph configured a history of a town in the process of equipping itself and developing along mechanical lines.

Denfield notes that Chas Street took photographs of the harbour frequently between 1890 and 1920. Such a collection suggests the existence of a documentary impulse on the part of the photographer that aimed to develop a distinctly ‘industrial’ aesthetic only decades into the development of photography. The photograph is more tightly framed than other glass prints, where photographs often provided sweeping views that promote contemplation. As the photographer positioned himself to face the machine, the undeviating angle suggests functionality rather than reflection, realism above meditation. Such an angle perhaps also mirrors back the photographer’s own machine in a period in which there gradually developed a cohort of photographers whose craft too was incorporated into the commerce of the town.

This contrasts with the photograph of the first bridge over the Buffalo River that linked East and West Bank. The photograph was taken by an unnamed photographer shortly after the 1914-1918 war<sup>468</sup> (Fig. 68). Photographed from an elevated angle, it provides a panoramic view of the bridge “built of jarrah wood...and the piles were sheathed with copper”<sup>469</sup>. While Street’s image of the Merryweather provides a linear horizontal view that suggests a sober and imposing realism, the photographer has drawn attention to the curve of the bridge, which, combined with the wide view that incorporates the Buffalo River on either side, reconfigures the industrial area into a place of leisure. Additionally, such a wide view is a visual reminder of the expansion of the city both industrially and spatially.

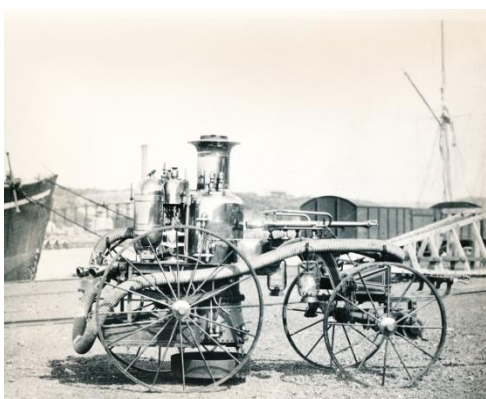


Fig. 67



Fig. 68

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<sup>468</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 21 December 1962.

<sup>469</sup> *Ibid.*

## ‘Early Days’

While the series of images in the Dispatch would name the individual photographers who had captured particular vistas, one name was the common denominator throughout the series wherein each article would end with the words “The photograph has been restored by the well-known amateur photographer Dr Joseph Denfield”. This was one phrase which not only made Denfield the custodian of the city’s past through the visual but also helped to cement his status as a historian. The second phase in the circulation of the photographs included the exhibition of the same photographs. This project of restoring and displaying old images was the turning point in establishing Denfield as expert on the history of East London. Situated between his earlier projects on regional representations of Africans framed within an atemporal framework and the later publication of what would be a treatise on the history of photography in the Cape, it indicated Denfield’s concern with preserving the past through the photography in the period of rapid urban change.

Denfield held an exhibition at the East London Museum called *East London’s Early Days: a photographic salon of the rise and progress of the city of East London* which lasted for six weeks<sup>470</sup>. The characterisation of the exhibition as a salon is evocative of his earlier exhibitions of Basutoland photographs in salons. Yet, the objectives differed in the two contexts in that in the Early Days exhibition Denfield intended to provide a ‘true’ story of East London’s past. It is instructive to note the contrast to the claim he had made in the 1950s that the pictures that were displayed in salons were “far from the truth”<sup>471</sup>. Of course, Denfield made such declarations in the context of ‘art’ photography which emphasised photographic skill. Thus, when the photographs of old East London were displayed after they had been re-worked, ‘cleansed’ and ‘restored’ by Denfield, they too, drew attention to Denfield’s proficiency in not only the technology of taking photographs but also in their production and thus in determining their potential truthfulness. Linked to his exhibition of the technologies of photographic vision displayed, were these technologies and his artistic and craft skill determined the photographs’ value.

The exhibition featured 100 reprinted photographs, all dating from 1880 to 1914 as well as older cameras that Denfield had collected. Exhibitions provide particular, concrete occasions and means through which people experience and engage with public institutions concerned

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<sup>470</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 18 Dec. 1962.

<sup>471</sup> DC, Denfield, ‘Speech at the East London Photographic Society Annual Dinner’, August 1954.

with knowledge, aesthetics, and cultural values (such as museums, libraries or universities)<sup>472</sup>. According to Kratz, as an event, object and interactive process at the same time, it becomes an occasion and a medium through which people carry on social relations and through which they formulate particular cultural and political positions and understandings<sup>473</sup>. Perhaps more effectively than the small images that had been printed in the newspaper, the glossy and enlarged photographs would transport viewers to a different period.

According to Skotnes in an exhibition the relationship between the genuine and the imaginary creates a powerful space where meaning and significance can be created by the viewer<sup>474</sup>. This is particularly significant in the context of *Early Days* as it took place in the same city that was depicted in the images. Unlike visitors of *Pagan Life on the Nigerian Plateau* in London who viewed images of remote subjects, the former created an image-world that mirrored visitors' own worlds, thereby reducing such distance. As Kratz argues a dynamic of assimilating and exoticising constitutes the exhibitionary space<sup>475</sup>. Visitors would simultaneously view the town both from a 'new perspective' and as descendants of the past that it constructed. The images were exhibited as a mirror of the visitors' heritage of an earlier modernising town. After all, engineering feats and town development cannot be divorced from their colonial context. The title of the exhibition was itself provocative, suggesting conquest, boundaries and change. It echoed a territorial impulse which spoke of a struggle for the town taking place in the exhibition space.

The exhibition had been publicized months in advance in the series of old East London images in the *Daily Dispatch*. On the eve of the exhibition the newspaper included Denfield's image alongside an article that waxed lyrical about his effort in preserving the town's history<sup>476</sup>. Having garnered support from the photo company Agfa Photo that supplied printing paper<sup>477</sup>, the exhibition was opened by the Mayor, Councillor Leo Laden who found the exhibition significant enough to exist permanently in the museum<sup>478</sup>. While the choice of

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<sup>472</sup> C. Kratz, *The ones that are wanted: Communication and the politics of representation in a photographic exhibition*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

<sup>473</sup> Ibid p 91.

<sup>474</sup> P. Skotnes, 'The politics of Bushman Representation', in P.S. Landau & D.Kaspin, eds., *Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press), p 270.

<sup>475</sup> Kratz *The ones that are wanted*, p 132.

<sup>476</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 17 December 1962.

<sup>477</sup> DC, Agfa Photo Manager's letter to Denfield, 24<sup>th</sup> October 1962.

<sup>478</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 19 December 1962.

venue is unsurprising given the Museum's role as a repository of historical knowledge, the exhibition was also held in fact partly in aid of a new Historical Gallery which the East London Museum hoped to build. Denfield had also received aegis from the Border Historical Society<sup>479</sup>.

The use of the Museum as an exhibitionary space, however, can also be understood in relation to the transitional moment of museums in South Africa in the 1960s, that is, the shift from natural to cultural history museums. According to Witz, in such spaces history was constructed through the lens of a settler past where material objects, particularly household artefacts, were assembled to create a memory of settlement<sup>480</sup>. In turn, this invoked "recognition and uniqueness for people who were being constituted as members of a racially exclusive South African nation"<sup>481</sup>. In a manner comparable to Denfield's empiricist reconfiguration of the glass negatives, Witz argues that such artefacts were endowed with factuality through which a narrative of the past could be construed. History, in turn, was framed through an empiricist framework that concerned itself with 'evidence' and 'verifying accuracy'<sup>482</sup>. In other words, the exhibition of images from the glass negatives in the Museum can be located within a broader intellectual/political moment of the assertion of a settler past (I explore this further in the following chapter).

Kratz argues that visitors vote with their feet by selecting those exhibitions whose perspectives and values they find congenial, interesting or challenging, the latter which, in turn are grounded in historical experience and specific political economies<sup>483</sup>. The said exhibition was reported to have been opened to a select gathering<sup>484</sup>. One guest included 83 year old Miss J. Gately, sole surviving daughter of East London's first mayor John Gately. A newspaper photograph shows the elderly guest next to Denfield looking at an old camera. A cheerful Denfield appears to be talking while she looks on in amazement. I imagine him performing an authoritative role explaining the nature and history of the model (Fig. 69). Other names reported to have attended the opening are Mr and Barbour, Mrs and Mr Barraud, Miss Moorshead and Mr Noel Bruton. Denfield's correspondence letters indicate that he also

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<sup>479</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 19 December 1962. In the following chapter I elaborate further on Denfield's relationship with the Border Historical Society and the particular epistemological framework that framed both his work and the texts of the Society profoundly.

<sup>480</sup> L. Witz, 'Towards a history of post-apartheid pasts in South African museums', (forthcoming).

<sup>481</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>482</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>483</sup> Kratz, *The ones that are wanted*, p 92.

<sup>484</sup> *Ibid.*

extended an invitation to those individuals who had sent him old photographs and negatives. Inevitably a cohort of historians would also constitute the audience.



Fig. 69

In the process of the exhibition Denfield also took his own photographs of the evening. One of the effects this small collection has is that it makes concrete Denfield's authority as a storyteller<sup>485</sup>. Clearly Denfield was aware of the evidential power of archives, having spent much time in archives in East London and Cape Town. Moreover, he was aware of the particularly powerful evidential aura attached to photographs in this period. It was not enough to simply tell a story about photographers in an earlier period of East London's history. He had to enter the imagined archive by compiling his own story visually. This would help establish his own credentials as an historian and as a storyteller. This required that he stand back from the exhibition and photograph it with all of its elements.

These photographs allow one to observe the viewer in the process of observing. They 'show seeing'. The photographs are glimpse into the other constitutive elements of an exhibition beyond images. It is perhaps this set of photographs that caution to any kind of detached unreflexive viewing of the photographs, that is, our own complicity in making sense of the pictures. It is also a suggestion, perhaps, of the ways in which a photograph need not necessarily have a conclusive or fixed meaning. Moreover, it is both a warning and reminder of a photograph's tendency to shift. While Denfield took these photographs to document the

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<sup>485</sup> In the process of completing the dissertation, most of these photographs were stolen from my possession although I had already compiled notes about them. Unfortunately I was unable to reproduce them.

event, this small collection, perhaps more effectively than any set, draws attention to the centrality of the visual in constituting and constructing meanings, explanations and subjects in and of public culture and history (see Fig. 70).



Fig. 70

One photograph is of his attempt to document his history-in-the-making. Here the visitors have their backs turned to the camera in a manner that resembles his photographs taken in Basutoland. We can watch them witnessing the fruits of his labour. The cameras placed at the centre of the room are evidently the focal point and unifying link in the exhibition. Like the photographers they too, contain exhibition labels that inevitably not only guide the visitor towards a particular way of seeing but also legitimize the exhibition as an empirically derived exercise<sup>486</sup>. We might imagine Denfield commenting in a guided tour on the power of this technology and the various types of mechanical reproductions. In that space they almost take on the role of sculptures in an art display placed under the observer's eye (Fig. 71). This is reminiscent of his exercise of getting would-be subjects to look at their peers through the view-finder of the camera in northern Nigeria. In the museum, Denfield once again displayed his talent of reproducibility. This moment powerfully invoked the connection between visual representations and story-telling. In this context, the dated images were used to talk about an East London of the past, a past that emerged in the present via the technologies of cameras through the ages.

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<sup>486</sup> Each label provides a brief description and dating of the cameras and technologies associated with the history of photography.

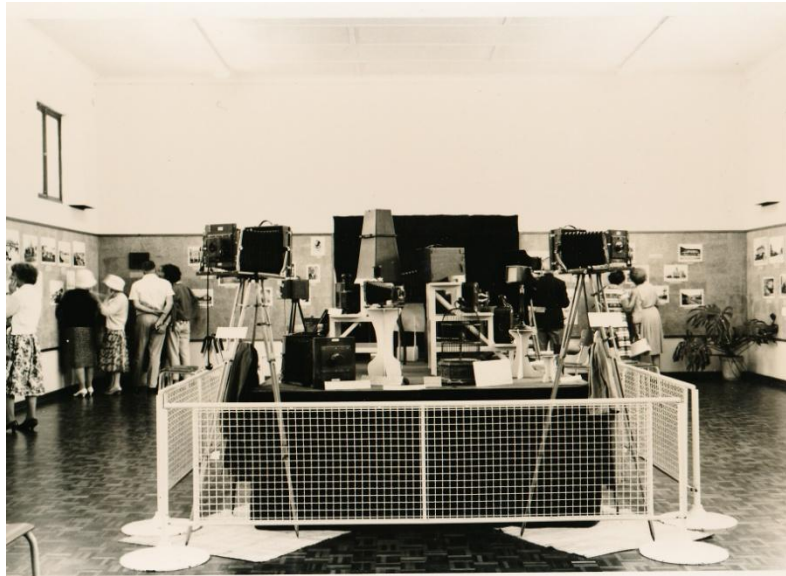


Fig. 71

In looking at this particular photograph that depicts the visitors looking at the dated images, with the cameras placed in the middle and foreground, the latter took on an almost sacred status, placed on an elevated table covered by a black cloth and protected by metal bars that formed a fence around the table. In this sense, the ‘reproducing machines’ became ritual objects or relics that visitors could engage only through sight rather than by touch. As Edwards argues, via Maynard, display functions not only to make the thing itself visible but to make it more visible in certain ways to function as statements of both locality and alterity<sup>487</sup>. In their inclusion and placement at the centre of the exhibition, Denfield endowed the camera with a particular aura or other-worldly power. The visitor was to regard them as that which birthed the images on the walls. Perhaps more effectively than the photographs, their inclusion speaks of the power one has when pointing and shooting at various scenes: the power to create and reproduce but also his role in enabling this, and thus supplanting himself over the photographers as the creator of the images.

One can witness the visitors performing various exhibitionary rituals in moving from picture to picture, gazing closely, pointing, moving along, gazing at a distance, viewing images with peers, individually, hands on hips, purses on arms, etc. We can only imagine several comments about places that no longer existed, how things had changed, degenerated or improved. There is also the very strong possibility that some recollect memories based on lived experience given that some images were taken in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>487</sup> Edwards, ‘Material beings’, p 72.



After all, one can only speculate that quite a number of the visitors were elderly by looking at the eleven pictures. In one photograph, an elderly visitor goes as far as to touch one photograph as if in recognition of the site, while the visitor on his right leans over to also look carefully. As if to draw attention to the centrality of close engagement, two photographs show the same female subject looking at a specific set of photograph. One is taken from afar displaying her in full, while another is taken more closely while she looks intently at a photograph of a Park Avenue scene of strollers. One gets a sense of a shift in degrees in engagement taking place, from detached disinterest to intimate engagement. It also speaks of Denfield's own engagement with the exhibition as one imagines him moving from one point to another in an attempt to document the event fully.

Part of what makes this small collection of the exhibition remarkable is that the few pictures of people at the exhibition that were taken are pictures of mostly the same individuals moving from point to point. This allows us to move with them as they move from one point to another. Visitors thus often appear blurred in the prints thereby configuring the gallery as a dynamic space. This is illustrated in three photographs that show a group of visitors comprised of three elderly visitors and one young girl. In one photograph they are looking at a photograph of an old vehicle, while in another, they gaze at a section closely at a photograph of the ship the *The Orient*.

At this point, one imagines a few minutes later, another gentleman, most likely not part of this group, is standing behind them trying to peer over to look at this same section, with hands behind his back, as though touching and pointing would somehow taint the images. The young girl, perhaps a grandchild, who had at some point stood directly behind them and clearly unable to look, peers through a curtain as if she is restless or uninterested. There is difficulty discerning what lies behind the curtain but it helps to distinguish the exhibition from the outside world. While looking at the girl I am reminded again of the tale Timothy Mitchell recites of two Egyptians who travel to 19<sup>th</sup> century Paris and enter an exhibition and when attempting to leave they discover it is a labyrinth without an exit: that the whole of Paris is in fact an exhibition<sup>488</sup>. In her departure from *Early Days*, the little girl does in fact find an exit and Denfield in addition included a photograph of the entrance of the Museum outside with a board alerting the passerby. These two photographs, of an entrance and exit, delineate the boundaries of the exhibition from the outside world. Yet, as photographs they

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<sup>488</sup> Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt*, p 10.

are too, little more than representations. I read the exhibition as a scramble for the real East London. It attempted to provide an entrance and exit point from a labyrinth of existing meanings and images about the town that led to a tangible reality. Yet in the tale, Mitchell alerts one to the extent to which the western world had become “organised as a system of commodities, values and meanings, and representations, forming signs that reflect one another in a labyrinth with exits”<sup>489</sup>. Thus even as the girl peered through the curtain as if she was trying to find out what was outside, she would find this same world organised as a system of visual order, much like the world inside the Museum.

### **Conclusion**

While Denfield continued spearheading the restorative project of glass negatives and faded images, various individuals continued to provide Denfield with more material to work with. This was partly a result of his continued pleas in the media and to some extent the impact of the exhibition and series in the *Dispatch*. This endowed the private album with more power as it entered the public domain and participated in a search for the truth about the town. Both the *Dispatch* series and the exhibition had effectively reconfigured the past as photographic, as that whose legitimacy and validity was grounded on the visual.

In her reading of Cocky Hahn’s hunting, ethnographic and administrative photography, Hayes asks what happens when those very categories are dissolved and photographs are read against one another<sup>490</sup>. Throughout his career, Denfield both worked within and outside photographic categories, albeit in varying degrees and with varying degrees of success. He circulated his photographs of pagan tribes simultaneously in pedagogic and pictorial contexts. Conversely, with his pictorial work in Basutoland, he borrowed from ethnographic idioms. Yet, in the context of salvage anthropology, ethnographic work becomes a historical endeavour that constructs its subjects as belonging to an earlier period in human history. Nevertheless, the complexity of categories is arguably most pronounced in his work with images of old East London. Some photographs were possibly taken as personal memoirs, which, nevertheless, Denfield reconstituted as documents of the past. Photographers such as Chas Street, G. French and Osborne among others, photographed different aspects of the town in its early period of industrialisation. In his recirculation of the images, Denfield reconfigured this collection for his own effort at constructing a past of the town thereby

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<sup>489</sup> Ibid

<sup>490</sup> Hayes, ‘Northern Exposures’, p 186.

representing these figures as documentary workers. However, in my reading, in their re-circulation in the early 1960s, these same photographs provide in turn ethnography of whiteness in the context of shifts in the distribution of power in the city that was predicated on the search for a tangible historicity.

By the time the doors of the East London Museum opened for the exhibition that promised to be a window to the city's past, Denfield had reconstructed a visual narrative whose legitimacy he asserted. For Denfield, such a narrative was "simply the vehicle for the truth of the past because the image in the narrative refers...to the reality of the past"<sup>491</sup>. Yet, I have also argued that such narratives became "the medium through which both [description and analysis] are created"<sup>492</sup>. Instead, narratives on recreational spaces, public transport, harbour development, etc, became "merely a link between description and analysis"<sup>493</sup> resulting from the author's painstaking and dedicated investigation. These stories were glossed with an aura of neutrality and unwavering objectivity. However, they also fight shy of the 'native question' that characterised both the period represented in the photographs and the 1960s in their re-circulation. Subsequently, by providing a 'neutral' history devoid of the subjective reflection which Denfield consistently disregarded, the historical narratives in 'Do you remember?' and 'Early Days' negated the racial politics embedded in the town's past and instead aspects of (male) whiteness were reconstituted as the dogged untainted truth about its past.

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<sup>491</sup> Jenkins & Munslow, 'Introduction', p 7.

<sup>492</sup> Ibid.

<sup>493</sup> Ibid.

## **Chapter 5: A Border History**

### **Introduction**

From 1963 Denfield delved more deeply into archival sources about East London's past from which he generated stories that placed less emphasis on the image and more on historical detail, accuracy and revision of existing historical accounts. While this may suggest a methodological departure, in order to generate such histories he relied on the self-evidentiary language of seeing. Indeed, this underpinned the intellectual paradigm of the Border Historical Society of which he became a part during this period. Along with fellow public intellectuals such as Marjorie Courteney-Latimer, D.J. Pretorius and Hilton Driffield, he promoted a distinctive rhetoric, a Border History, which was premised on concerns about loss, conquest, pioneer-ism and insisting on fact over myth. In the previous chapter I looked at the ways in which the early projects on the glass negatives and faded prints constructed the city's past through the simultaneous techniques of effacing race and asserting whiteness visually as its past. This past was represented as factual. Denfield's work on glass negatives coincided with his involvement in the Society which was comprised of fellow public intellectuals who too, generated various texts about the city's past. Read against these texts, Denfield's reconstructive project did not exist in an intellectual vacuum in the city but corresponded with the Society's inclination towards constructing a settler history. Through its emphasis on different components of East London's public past, the Border Historical Society constructed a history that continuously asserted a settler identity.

### **The Border Historical Society**

Parallel to the growing reconfiguration of Denfield as a historian was his own shift towards a more text-based paradigm. Images alone did not suffice as source. Consequently, he attached greater importance to archives in the project of reconstructing East London's past. Although his work with glass negatives placed the image at the centre of the historical narrative, Denfield always made a point of supplementing it with historical detail that would endow it with a positivist quality to effectively seal it from further interpretations. This drive for certainty, for restoring order in public knowledge, is notable in a few letters and comments sent to the newspapers:

Commenting on claims that a forthcoming opera by amateurs will be the first production of its kind in East London, Dr. Joseph Denfield says he believes there have been a number of amateur operatic presentations here in the past. “Certainly the first to be staged in the City Hall was *Maritana* presented on December 7 and 10, 1900” he says. “There were 50 performers all told, and the principals were Mrs Ries, Mrs Newcombe, Miss Logan, Mr T Rodger, Mr H.G. Chevens, Mr J.H Smith, Mr P L Pewris and Mr D J Griffiths<sup>494</sup> .

One of the Border’s leading historians, Dr Joseph Denfield, records that as far back as 1873, this newspaper (the *Daily Dispatch*) was continually calling the East London City Council of the day- the Municipal Commissioners- to task and “mildly impressing upon them that a little more earnestness was necessary if they did not desire the municipal work to come to a deadlock”<sup>495</sup> .

Sir- Adam Brand’s article on the East London 1d token is, I am afraid, inaccurate and should be corrected. The true story is well documented in the reports of the Municipal meetings and in the newspapers of that time. The suggestion that East London ran out of pennies is incorrect. In 1880 there existed two ferries and a pontoon. These ferries were established in September 1875 and August 1879 respectively. The charge for the crossing of the river was, at that time, a 1d ferry ticket, which had to be obtained at various recognised centres: failure to produce a ticket resulted in the passenger having to pay 3d. In February 1880, it was decided in council that, for the convenience of all the ferry 1d token be introduced. This, like the ferry ticket, was merely an expedient to keep a check on the municipal takings at the ferries<sup>496</sup> .

These few excerpts provide a glimpse into the revisionist and detail-oriented ethos that characterised Denfield’s historiography at this point in his career. The emphasis was on precision and the accuracy of minute detail. In the same manner that the images had created a visual repository that ‘fenced’ the town’s past, the textual detail was employed in a similar manner, that is, as means of ensuring protection from ‘contaminating’ versions. This is illustrated well in the last excerpt above regarding accuracy about the ferry charges.

Denfield’s letter was a response to Brand’s article published in the *Evening Post* about the establishment of ferry rides in East London. In turn Brand later retorted that he had obtained his information from a “well known Africana collector and published historian”<sup>497</sup> . Such a debate was about more than turning the medium into a battlefield for truth but also signified an impulse to fence out myth from fact through irrefutable detail. Edwards’ comparison of the photograph to history is useful here when one considers Denfield’s attempts to place borders around pastness through laborious effort and painstaking detail.

There are several ways in which one could make sense of this concern about seemingly trivial aspects of the town’s past and the concern with ‘protecting’ its truth. One could perhaps

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<sup>494</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 15 July 1963.

<sup>495</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 31 March 1964.

<sup>496</sup> *Evening Post*, 21 December 1963.

<sup>497</sup> *Ibid.*

easily disregard it as an inconsequential debate between two intellectuals each wanting to assert their authorial voice. However, one could also interrogate the urgency in the letters and the anxieties around accuracy with regard to their attempt at governing subjectivities. Through a reading of 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial archives of the Netherlands Indies, Stoler traces epistemic anxieties, uncertainties and hesitations regarding various aspects of colonial governance among the producers of the archival documents. By reading these colonial texts *along* the grain, she notes the ways in which “in tone and temper they convey the rough interior ridges of governance and disruptions to the deceptive clarity of its mandates”<sup>498</sup>. For Stoler, to read along the grain is to pay attention to the archive’s “granular rather than seamless texture, to the rough surface that mottles its hue and shapes its form”<sup>499</sup>. Such a line of thought allows for a consideration of, amongst other things, affect and banality in the texts to consider the ways they operate as “judgements, assessments, and interpretations of the social and political world”<sup>500</sup>. In this light, the Border Historical Society generated texts whose sentimentality and constant management of truth can be understood in the context of efforts to assert a settler past.

Dirks has argued for the centrality of the production of colonial knowledge as both a product of conquest and its enabler<sup>501</sup>. For example, he points to the reconstruction and transformation of cultural forms in newly classified traditional societies by technologies of conquest, which in turn created new categories and oppositions, between coloniser and colonised, European and Asian, modern and traditional, West and East, male and female<sup>502</sup>. Similarly in his volume on British colonialism in India, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*, Cohn highlights the entanglement of exercises of power and accumulation of knowledge<sup>503</sup>. Paying attention to language, law, museumification of objects and clothes in India, he explores how each became an arena to construct codified knowledge forms about this unfamiliar world. This translated to, for example, the generation of a set of teaching aids, dictionaries and grammar rules about the languages of India, to be made available to the British ruling class in India<sup>504</sup>. In coming to India, the British had “unknowingly and

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<sup>498</sup> A. Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, (Princeton University Press: Princeton, Oxford, 2009), p 2.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid p 53.

<sup>500</sup> Ibid p 40.

<sup>501</sup> N.B. Dirks, ‘Introduction: Colonialism and Culture’, in N.B Dirks, ed., *Colonialism and Culture*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), pp 1-27.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid p 3.

<sup>503</sup> B.S Cohn, *Colonialism and its forms of knowledge*, (Princeton University Press: New Jersey, 1996).

<sup>504</sup> N.B. Dirks, ‘Foreword’, in B.S Cohn, ed., *Colonialism and its forms of knowledge*, (Princeton University Press: New Jersey, 1996), p 13.

unwittingly invaded and conquered not only a territory but an epistemological space”<sup>505</sup>. The central thesis in each of these studies of colonialism is the production of forms of knowledge in a colonial context. Although the Border Historical Society did not operate as a state-driven entity, its existence was premised on the production of knowledge in which themes of conquest were embedded. As Cohn argues history for the British in India, had an ontological power in providing assumptions about how the real social and natural worlds are constituted<sup>506</sup>.

Marjorie Courteney-Latimer, a founding member of the Border Historical Society, provided a detailed account of the establishment in the Society’s journal, the *Coelacanth* and it is from her notes that I too, ‘reconstruct’ a version of the Society’s establishment<sup>507</sup>. She dated the seeds to have been planted in a conversation in 1959 with G.G. Smith, chairman of the Board of Trustees, on whom she initially impressed the idea of salvaging the Gately House<sup>508</sup> under the guise of the East London Museum. Courtney-Latimer had been appointed director of the Museum at this stage. She and Smith approached the Mayor, W.P. Osmond, in November of 1959 who alerted them about Tom Bowker, from the Simon van der Stel Foundation, who was interested in forming a regional historical committee in all centres<sup>509</sup>. Eventually a public meeting was called for later that month where Bowker addressed the gathered on the need for preservation of old historic buildings, as well as showing a film about old buildings restored by the Simon van der Stel Foundation in Cape Town. Although the Society explored areas beyond sites, such a focus did arguably, set a thematic inclination that characterised the Society in its development.

In that same meeting Courtney-Latimer overtly expressed a need for a historical society in East London. Bowker’s suggestion was the establishment of such an entity that would function with separate funding from the Simon Van der Stel Foundation but in affiliation with it. Members would be able to obtain a lifetime membership of the Foundation at the cost of R20. In a subsequent meeting held at the Museum, Courtney-Latimer volunteered to start the work of organising a Society with the help of the Mayor who was prepared to use his administrative staff for assistance<sup>510</sup>. The first Society meeting took place on the 24<sup>th</sup> of

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<sup>505</sup> Ibid 4

<sup>506</sup> Cohn, *Colonialism and its forms of knowledge*, p 5.

<sup>507</sup> M. Courteney-Latimer, ‘A true history of the formation of the historical society, East London’, *The Coelacanth*, 7, 2 (1969), pp. 23-30.

<sup>508</sup> The Gately House was property of John Gately, East London’s first mayor when it became a municipality

<sup>509</sup> Courteney-Latimer, ‘A true history’, p 24.

<sup>510</sup> Ibid p 25.

November in 1959 at the Municipal Council room. This was attended by Mr and Mrs Bowker, Mr and Mrs Lawford, Mr Hutton, Mrs Ferguson, Mr C.V Hougard, Miss Bertram, Mr.T. Scorbie, Dr A.J. Ballantine, Courtney-Latimer and Mrs N Gibson. Courtney-Latimer was eventually elected as Chairperson of the Society, whose first duty included taking suggestions from members. She also suggested a weekly Tuesday meeting in the Municipal council room to avoid dampening the enthusiasm of the Society<sup>511</sup>.

Members held their second meeting on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 1959, where Denfield's presence was noted for the first time. Courtney-Latimer introduced another dimension that would constitute the Society: outings to places of historical interest<sup>512</sup>. In a 1967 publication of the *Coelacanth*, Coetzee from the Queenstown Museum Historical Gallery provided an account of one such outing with the Society:

The rendezvous was at the East London Museum, the time 10 am...Our destination was a little known place named 'Bell' and the German Legionaries were involved...It was here that we had to meet up with Mr Donald...He had made a study of the German Legionaries and German Settlers' history of these parts. He was to be the guide of the expedition...These places had been points at which the German Legionaries had been stationed, when they landed at the Buffalo Harbour in 1857...As all this took place in 1857 the country must have been wild and frightening, though I guess in those days before man had spoilt it, very beautiful and this part of the country was inhabited by that nation of Bantu known as the 'friendly Fingoes'...We were taken to see the small Lutheran Church...We were actually taken to see the last authentic German Settler's house, the only one left in its vicinity. It was in a very good state of repair, considering its age, and was inhabited by a very white-haired old Native man...Even though I was a complete stranger to the Border Historical Society group, I had been one of the crowd, with a deep interest to the movements of these people; for they too played their part in civilising South African; they too had faced up to the difficulties, privations, hardships and danger, eking out a living for themselves and their families by the very sweat of their brows...But with their industrious behaviour, they showed themselves worthy of taking their place with other earlier Settlers in making South Africa the lovely land of today<sup>513</sup>.

Courtney-Latimer's breezy reference to places of 'historical interest' disguised the fact that such places were sites that pertained to European immigration to the Border, such as Bell Village which the writer above referred to. Coetzee imagined a site of an untamed Africa turned into order by the arriving Legions. Moreover, she presented the occupation of the land as a seamless transaction between the latter and black Africans who seemingly, in her account, accommodated the arriving settlers peacefully. Her identification with the settlers is striking, regarding them as brave men who, along with earlier European immigrants, became

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<sup>511</sup> Ibid p 26.

<sup>512</sup> This is a practice that continues to date in the Border Historical Society.

<sup>513</sup> N. Coetzee, 'A day spent with the Border Historical Society', *The Coelacanth* (1967), 27-30.



instrumental in shaping a 'lovely land'. Coetzee's narrative provides a small clue regarding what concerned the early-forming Society.

The "trek" emerged as an important aspect of constructing history for the Society, echoing the discourses of the 'Great Trek' that became significant in the construction of an Afrikaner identity under the apartheid regime. Her account of encountering the Lutheran Church and German settler's house is comparable to Denfield's treatment of the glass negatives as remnants of the past: both were concerned with salvaging the past through a configuration of 'authentic' objects. Denfield relied on the materiality of the negatives as much as Coetzee did on the architecture. Interestingly, social transformation was apparent. She noted that the church came to be used by the Anglican Church of South Africa jointly, while the German settler's house was eventually occupied by a 'native man'. However, both indicators of change were temporarily displaced away from the present. They were regarded as an insignificant part of an authentic history and thus peripheral in her account. Instead the site was to be read as a signifier of the bravery and courage of those settlers, whose ghost the Society could unearth.

Apart from outings, involvement in the restoration of old sites emerged as another duty for the Society members. Courtney-Latimer noted that in its second meeting Hilton Dredge drew attention to the restoration of soldiers' graves at Fort Pato and others worthy of investigation<sup>514</sup>. Again, these 'others' referred implicitly to the graves of white soldiers that had taken part in battles that ultimately secured the South African landscape for its white residents. Like Denfield, in such a statement Dredge effaced race and asserted the past of the city along its settler lines. This restoration of course complemented the Museum's concerns around preserving the home of John Gately before the founding of the Society, a concern which, nevertheless, became a Society priority. In its first publication, the Society's journal noted that:

The battle for Gately House continues and it is hoped it will end successfully with the acquisition of this house as East London's Town House. Mr J. Gately was East London's first mayor and it is very fitting that his home, furnished now as it was in his day, should be the home of East London's historical records<sup>515</sup>.

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<sup>514</sup> Courtney-Latimer, 'A true history', p 26.

<sup>515</sup> S. Dickie, 'Battle of Gately House', *The Coelacanth*, 1,1 (1963) p 3.

By 1964 the Municipality did in fact allow for the preservation of Gately House as a Town House regarding it as a historical memoir along with its material interior<sup>516</sup>. Denfield published an article in the *Dispatch* with regards to such a decision providing a historical account of the house. Noting Gately's occupation of the house in 1878, Denfield wrote that "this glorious link with our past has been saved from demolition and will serve as a monument to East London's greatest civic figure, John Gately, the 'father of East London'"<sup>517</sup>. Correspondingly, it was also during the Society's initial meetings in 1959 that Denfield is noted to have appealed to the Society for assistance on his photographic work of old East London.

By 1960 the Society's Chairperson was already restless, out of frustration with the Society's inactivity. Eventually, a delegation was selected from present members consisting of Courtney-Latimer, Samson and Ballantine, to see the Mayor about calling a public meeting to form a Border Historical Society affiliated with the Simon van der Stel Foundation. The public meeting eventually took place on the 28<sup>th</sup> of July 1960. The historian Mark Taylor replaced Courtney-Latimer as chairperson as she felt burdened by other responsibilities. She assumed a vice-chairman role. Egan Hutton was elected as secretary.

Denfield had encountered Mark Taylor as early as 1948 when Taylor wrote the storyline for the East London Centenary Pageant in 1948 soon after he arrived in the city. Taylor described the pageant called 'Time and the River' as a celebration of the "outstanding achievement of our founders"<sup>518</sup>. 1948 marked the centenary of East London's founding according to Taylor's historiography. The pageant had been an initiative of the town's municipality, which garnered support from the Department of Education, Provincial Administration, historians such as A.W Burton from King William's Town as well as private corporations. It also drew together those in theatrical circles in the town, including Denfield's wife, Lea, who played a part a small part as one of the 'Kennaway girls'. Courtney-Latimer participated as a committee member. A photograph in the pageant book features Lea Denfield and Courtney-Latimer posing together, as though to foreshadow Denfield's subsequent relationship with the Museum.

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<sup>516</sup> In addition to preserving the town's sites, the Society also planned to contact its older citizens and record their early experiences. It was hoped this would simultaneously garner greater interest in the Society among the public. Contact was also made with municipal librarians who were interested in the historic events of the town. Courtney-Latimer also intended to make a wider appeal through the Mayor.

<sup>517</sup> *Daily Dispatch* 14 March 1964.

<sup>518</sup> M. Taylor, 'Time and the River', East London's Centenary Pageant Book, (1948), p 7.

Denfield's role in the pageant was to take photographs of scenes of 'tribesmen'. In the pageant book there are three photographs of his included depicting scenes of the Xhosa chiefs Sandile (Fig. 72), Makana (Fig. 73) and a 'witch doctor' respectively (Fig. 74). This is perhaps unsurprising given Denfield's recent work at this stage in northern Nigeria in that these photographs resonated with his studies of pagan tribes drawing on the visual modes of ethnography. Although it is unclear how Denfield became involved in the pageant, he did arrive in East London in 1947 with a 'portfolio' of ethnographic work that had received some attention in the media. The character of Sandile, for example, was photographed on a horse dressed in animal skin holding a spear in the air with a de-contextualised background. Although Denfield's role at this stage was only photography, his inclusion was perhaps also an early initiation into a particular language about the city's history.



Fig. 72



Fig. 73



Fig. 74

The pageant took place on the grounds of the Border Rugby Union and was open to the public (although it is unclear whether this included residents on the periphery of the city). It told the past of East London in eleven episodes, all but the last, characterised by struggle as a subtext. A close reading of the pageant reveals striking performative and discursive similarities to the script written for the 1952 pageant celebration of the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the landing of Jan Van Riebeeck that took place in Cape Town. Noting the tensions and negotiations that went into hosting the festival to construct an ‘acceptable’ settler history, Witz indicates that the Van Riebeeck script emphasised “European settlement, focusing on specific events that were determined as signifying aspects of English and Afrikaner pasts, including tensions between these two, and ending with a coming together in a white settler nation”<sup>519</sup>. According to Witz, the festival had been designed in such a manner as to “commemorate a commonality of all people who were in the process of being racially classified as white” (the Population Registration Act had been implemented in 1950 and required that all inhabitants had to be identified as belonging to one of the following racial categories: white, Bantu, coloured or Asiatic) thereby constructing a past of the nation derived out of Europe and Van Riebeeck<sup>520</sup>. The Van Riebeeck festival and pageant was thus integral in mediating white settler identities and historicity.

In Taylor’s script of East London’s past, the tale began with the arrival of Europeans in dark Africa. It opened with an encounter between ‘Bushmen’ and ship-wrecked mariners on the Buffalo Mouth from a ship of the Dutch East India Company in 1688. Taylor wrote that this rescue “is presented against a background essentially primitive and barbaric”<sup>521</sup>. This was followed by performance of a series of African native songs by a massed African choir upon a native kraal singing Sikana’s composition ‘Sikana’s Bell’. During the performance the historic figure Makana appeared to his tribesmen, who listened to him preaching about driving the enemy away. The scene alluded to the period of early to mid nineteenth century, when, in Taylor’s account, Makana preached to his tribesmen at Cove Rock that he had been sent by a great spirit to avenge their wrongs and save them: that their ancestor had instructed if they follow him they and their cattle would inherit eternal life. Hopes were eventually dispelled when expectations were not met, resulting in suffering of Makana’s followers.

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<sup>519</sup> L. Witz, *Apartheid’s Festivals: Contesting South Africa’s National Pasts*, (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, Indiana, 2003), p 112.

<sup>520</sup> Ibid 5.

<sup>521</sup> Taylor, ‘Time and the River’, p 8.

The subsequent scene told the story of the proclamation of Buffalo Mouth as Port Rex and as a port for Great Britain. In the account Colonel Harry Smith and Captain John Bailie visited the Buffalo Mouth with an escort of troops to investigate its potential. After taking the positive survey, the brig Knysna sailed for the Buffalo Mouth with a cargo of food and ammunition. Captain Andries Stockenstrom, Lieutenant Governor of the Eastern Province, named it Port Rex in honour of George Rex, the owner of the Knysna. Taylor wrote that Bailie arrived at Buffalo Mouth with a military wagon for transporting Knysna's cargo to King William's Town before the Knysna arrived. While waiting, he mounted the east of Buffalo Mouth, Signal Hill, and planted a Union Jack on its summit<sup>522</sup>.

Soon after the proclamation, Queen Adelaide was restored to the native tribes, Taylor wrote, thus Port Rex sank into obscurity until the outbreak of the War of the Axe, depicted in the fourth episode of the pageant. In 1846 Maitland transferred his military stores and landing troops from Fish River to Buffalo Mouth where Fort Buffalo was constructed. Earlier in 1844 he had ordered the construction of forts along the frontier. In Taylor's account the laying of forts increased Sandile's resentment and suspicion, particularly when Fort Hare was constructed on native land. This climaxed when a band of tribesmen rescued a comrade accused of having stolen an axe from a Fort Beaufort store, a crime committed on Colonial territory. War broke out between colonial troops and Sandile's tribesmen, with Pottinger, who had replaced Maitland, using the mouth of the Buffalo as a base for his advanced posts. In 1847, newly appointed as governor, Harry Smith visited the port and initiated the construction of Fort Glamorgan and the laying of a township on the West Bank, as well as the construction of temporary forts Fort Grey, Fort Pato and Need's Camp linking Fort Glamorgan and King William's Town. In 1848, he annexed the Buffalo mouth to the Cape Colony naming it East London with Queen Victorian's approval. In this fifth episode, Lady Juana arrived and was joined by Harry Smith who reads the Proclamation. Drums sounded a roll while the Union Jack was hoisted on a flag pole, followed by a band playing the national anthem.

The sixth episode told the story of the arrival of German Legions in 1856. Governor of the Cape Colony from 1854, George Grey, operated on the principle of different levels of civilisation among the two races, natives and Europeans, and thus felt the only way to ensure peace was to europeanise the natives. He reduced the power of chiefs and encouraged

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<sup>522</sup> Ibid 7.

missionaries to promote western values and schooling. European farmers were offered land among the tribes with the intent of employing tribesmen as labourers. Taylor also wrote that it was with the object of obtaining a suitable living of Europeans to serve as neighbours to the tribes that Grey arranged for the British-German Legion to come to British Kaffraria. Men who arrived grossly outnumbered women, however. Episode seven tells the story of the arrival of female settlers who would make suitable wives for frontiersmen as part of Grey's scheme. They arrived on the ship 'Lady Kennaway'.

The eighth and ninth episodes were about East London's development as a municipality and introduced the audience to key figures such as John Gately as well as the elevations of the status of the town to a 'city' by the Provincial Council. The audience also witnessed the coming of the railway with the development of the Witwatersrand goldfields. In the tenth episode attention was drawn to the city's churches and portrayed a Sunday morning scene. It was included as a microcosm of the growth of churches in the Eastern Province and the part they had played in its growth historically. In the last scene of pageant Taylor exercised his creative licence by constructing a ball-room scene with all the leading characters into a lighted area.

Four years after the pageant had been performed, the play was re-staged as part of the 1952 Van Riebeeck celebrations. According to Witz, in order to make the 'founding' story of South Africa spatially national, the organisers opted to move beyond the limits of Cape Town and include white inhabitants of various locales. East London was one such locale, whereby the grounds of the Border Rugby Union were occupied again by the pageant celebrating East London's founding where Lt Col John Bailie is noted to have played the part of his grandfather in hoisting the British flag on Signal Hill<sup>523</sup>. Witz further argues that in the constant construction and reconstruction of these spatial identities in the different locales through which the festival moved, "the makings of histories becomes crucial as they seek to fix time, locating the individual in the present of a particular place that has a defined past and a future"<sup>524</sup>.

The East London pageant provides a glimpse into the paradigm that informed Taylor's approach to East London history: a masculine narrative that championed the experiences and

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<sup>523</sup> Witz, *Apartheid's Festivals*, p 217. Witz notes, however, that the past which the East London City Council presented was at odds with the national history that the organizer of the Van Riebeeck envisioned in its assertion of colonial history as part of national history in that the latter was intended to highlight founding and settlement, with little attention paid to entangled lives of the settlers and native Africans.

<sup>524</sup> Ibid 219.

decisions of men in the past in establishing East London, including mayors, governors, soldiers, travellers, chiefs, etc. These men were regarded as pioneers in some sense. Though it was scripted prior to the Van Riebeeck festival, it reflected the themes the Festival organisers set out for the production of local histories in relation to white settlement including founding and early history, development of local government, commercial and cultural development and narratives of heroes and inventors who became well known<sup>525</sup>. The pageant, therefore, expressed the urgency in the early years of the apartheid government, to assert a white settler identity with European origins. These are concerns that would eventually characterise the Border Historical Society.

The Border Historical Society never became affiliated with the Simon van der Stel Foundation as intended. It did however choose the East London Museum as its headquarters, most likely due to Courteney-Latimer's directorship of the Museum. The Society also grew in numbers and activities. One of the most significant activities included the founding of its journal the 'Coelacanth' which was first published in March 1963. The journal was published quarterly in March, June, September and December. D. Pretorius was elected editor, but it also included Miss Sylvia Dickie and Margy Van Deventer as part of the editorial figure, the latter being the director of the East London Municipal Library. Unpacking the name of the journals helps to not only bring more awareness about the Society founder, Courteney-Latimer, but the particular school of thinking that was to characterise historical work under the guise of the Society. Mark Taylor explained the choice of this name for the journal:

The name of our magazine may sound out of the ordinary for an historical bulletin. But the explanation is very simple. Since the East London Museum has been chose as headquarters of the Border Historical Society and all our meetings are held there with the fullest co-operation and interest of the chairman of the Museum Board of Trust, Mr G.G. Smith, and the Director of the Museum...it was felt that somehow the Museum should be linked with the dissemination of historical notes. As the chief exhibit in the Museum is the pre-historic Fish, the Coelacanth, through which the East London Museum has gained world renown...the Society felt that no more apt title could be carried by a magazine purporting to convey knowledge of the past to the present, than the name of 'Old Four Legs' - the famous Coelacanth<sup>526</sup>.

The founding of the Coelacanth did in fact become, and up to today remains, synonymous with Courteney-Latimer. At a Rhodes University graduation ceremony, in which she was awarded an honorary doctorate, the association between her involvement in the founding of the fish and her background was emphasised. It was mentioned that she was raised in

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<sup>525</sup> Ibid 223.

<sup>526</sup> M. Taylor, 'Introduction', *The Coelacanth*, 1,1(1963), 1-2.

different parts of the country owing to her father's transfers from one railway station to another. She grew up a collector of shells, plants, animals, birds, reptiles and insects to such a degree that at the age of ten "the well-known Eastern Cape naturalists, Dr. J Brownlee and Rev. Godfrey, were astonished at the quality of her collection of birds' eggs and depth of knowledge"<sup>527</sup>.

Courtney-Latimer joined the East London Museum in 1931 initially as a curator. The Museum had been established as recently as 1921 and was more fully developed between 1926 and 1930, its foundation stone laid in 1931<sup>528</sup>. Thus when Courtney-Latimer was appointed a curator she came to an institution that had little developed. She was soon appointed Director of the Museum on the 24<sup>th</sup> August 1931. In the Museum she organised and conducted lectures with school children where they took part in nature tests to instil in them her own love of nature. She spent much of her time searching for collections of animal life for exhibition as well as archaeological and historical material. She published widely in scientific journals and co-authored books on Flowers and the Birds of the Tsitsikanna Coastal National Park. She also served on committees dealing with museum, wild life and history.

At the recommendation of Sir Henry Meirs, she spent time studying at the Durban Museum where she learnt the craft of reconstructing specimens under the mentorship of Mr Chubb<sup>529</sup>. The skills acquired in such studies were soon put to the test. One of her noted achievements is the identification of a fossil bone of an extinct reptile in Tarkastad in 1935. Named *Kannemeyria Wilsonii* by Robert Broom in honour of Eric Wilson, the specimen was eventually put on display in the museum. This put the Museum on the map for having the most complete dicynodont skeleton in any museum in the world<sup>530</sup>.

Courtney-Latimer's notoriety, however, was to be concretised with the discovery of the Coelacanth. She had spent some time in November and December of 1936 in Bird Island where she gathered a large collection of seabirds with seaweeds, gorgonia and a marine collection. In her account of the Museum's early development, she did acknowledge the assistance of men on the fishing trawlers in bringing the specimens to East London and in continuing to bring to her anything they found of interest<sup>531</sup>. She also mentioned that "it was through this bond of assistance that on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1938 the Coelacanth was trawled,

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<sup>527</sup> Anonymous, 'Rhodes University Graduation citation', *The Coelacanth*, 9, 2(1971), 8-10.

<sup>528</sup> M. Courtney-Latimer, 'Story of the East London Museum', *The Coelacanth*, 1,1 (1963), 9-13.

<sup>529</sup> Ibid p 10.

<sup>530</sup> Anonymous, 'Graduation citation', p 9.

<sup>531</sup> Courtney-Latimer, 'Story of the East London Museum', p 10.



and brought to the scientific glory it later received”<sup>532</sup>. In her account, Courtney-Latimer wrote that once the unusual fish arrived at the museum, the challenge was identifying it. However, she had no literature to assist and thus called on Rhodes University scholar on matters ichthyology, Dr J.B. Smith “who...decided that it could only be a coelacanth, a member of an order of fishes which had been believed extinct for more than sixty million years”<sup>533</sup>. He named the genus *Latimeria* “in my honour on account of the difficulty I had in saving it for science”<sup>534</sup> wrote Courtney-Latimer.

It is useful to note parallels in Courtney-Latimer’s work with identifying specimens and Denfield’s own work with glass negatives. The importance placed on seeing and microscopic observation and identification of genealogy emerged in both. In a similar manner, Denfield had treated the images archaeologically, drawing attention to the importance of accurate identification of sites in order to compile a larger narrative on the city’s history. For both intellectuals, there was power afforded to *seeing* and *naming*. Moreover, in both, the specimens were displaced away from their location while Courteney-Latimer and Denfield became the reference points about their respective subjects.

While it can be argued that Courteney-Latimer gained most prominence in the Border Historical Society subsequent to the founding to the Coelacanth, other public intellectuals are worthy of mention given the strong resonance between their writings on history and Denfield’s work following his work on glass negatives. One example is the *Coelacanth*’s own editor, D.J.J. Pretorius. One can gather a sense of his historical framework from the article he published in the *Dispatch* titled ‘Walls that housed many now a pile of rubbish’<sup>535</sup>. The article bemoaned the inevitable destruction of the Beach House hotel in the 1960s. The building was constructed at the turn of the twentieth century. He wrote that “The demolition of a building which for 70 years has lent grace and charm to the history of hotels in East London will stir nostalgic memories in the hearts of many old East Londoners”<sup>536</sup>. In lamenting the loss of the site, Pretorius stated:

The Beach Hotel has been aptly described as a place where testimony could be found of thousands of deliberations, moments of joys and sadness, dreams and desires of countless people...On the spacious lawns families sat around and chatted while the younger set walked round and round the stand, greeting each other and making new friends. Here many

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<sup>532</sup> Ibid.

<sup>533</sup> Anonymous, ‘Graduation citation’, p 9.

<sup>534</sup> Courteney-Latimer, ‘Story of the East London Museum’, p 11.

<sup>535</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 2 July 1964.

<sup>536</sup> Ibid.

couples met for the first time, and many happy courtships were started which ended with weddings...It had an uninterrupted view of the Esplanade, the Marine Park and the roadstead. This was real ‘honeymoon material’ for memories, for it was in East London’s Marine Park, during Christmas season, adjacent as it was to the Beach Hotel, where the merry thousands milled around the gorgeously multi-coloured lighted ‘bandstands’ while the Municipal Band dispensed classic and popular music. I have personal knowledge of these baths (by the hotel) as I think have many of the older inhabitants. My family came to East London in 1913 and I well remember how, as a boy, I played on the dry sand inside the old baths<sup>537</sup>.

Through displacing it away from the realm of public governance, Pretorius re-created the Hotel and beach as an intensely personal and intimate place for ‘honeymoon material’, a place of youthful innocence in his memoirs ‘as a boy’ where ‘many happy courtships were started’. The destruction of the Hotel was thus experienced as a *personal* loss and stripped of the ‘messy’ business of politics. What is unstated in the account is the manner in which the city controlled along racial lines who could actually ‘greet each other and make new friends’ at the beachside. The past of romance and loss was supplemented with the use of two images of the beach front, one taken in the 1960s and another depicting the same scene in the late 1880s. The latter is part of the collection of old images Denfield had accumulated and allowed for retrospective witnessing of a scene of a familiar site.

The twin themes of loss and destruction are notable again in the writing of Hilton Driffield in the early 1960s. Driffield had been appointed as East London’s town clerk until 1956. By 1963 he had become a member of the Border Historical Society who wrote history-oriented pieces for the *Daily Dispatch*. One piece resonated with Pretorius’s own article in that it accounted for the history of Lloyd’s Building which was about to be demolished. He lamented the loss by stating “to many residents of East London who have known Lloyd’s building from the time of their youth this must doubtless fill them with a tinge of regret”<sup>538</sup>. In the newspaper article Driffield represented the site as one tied to residents’ identification with place. It is important to note, however, that Lloyd’s building was the site of municipal governance, where black people were routinely administered, passes and permits were issued, fines paid, and determinations of arrests for racialised offences were instrumentalised<sup>539</sup>. Thus alongside the past that Driffield presented, was another layer of the history of institutionalised racism which Driffield effaced. To be an East Londoner was to love the

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<sup>537</sup> Ibid.

<sup>538</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 23 July 1958.

<sup>539</sup> G. Mikley, ‘Border Dialogues: Race, Class and space in the industrialization of East London, c1902-1963’. Doctoral Thesis, (1994), University of Cape Town.

building and to lose the building was to compromise one's identification with the city. Moreover, like Pretorius' account, it resonated with the salvage paradigm that had Denfield's earlier work on pagan tribes. Like Pretorius, Driffield selected civic aspects in his writing. Elsewhere he wrote of the history behind some street names in town and history of the bathing pools, for example. It is interesting to compare his account of the Queen's Park garden, East London's botanical gardens, with Denfield's pictorial work of Basutoland when he states:

Here is beauty and charm in endless variety of shade and colour. Verdure and vegetation, stately indigenous trees and luxuriant foliage of virgin bush which characterised the site before man set foot in this beautiful part of Southern Africa. Well kept walks; velvety lawns; ornamental lake and fauna in their natural environment. Truly Queen's Park is a shrine of shrines for nature worship, a nature lover's Mecca. In the Queen's Park, in addition to numerous flower beds, there is what no other park in our country has by way of natural woodland beauty, sheltered walks and sylvan scenes

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In the same manner that Denfield configured the Basuto people and landscape as untouched picturesque phenomena despite exercising his creative licence in the photographs, Driffield reconfigured the highly constructed space of the botanical garden as an example of nature's untouched bounty. Despite their careful design and deliberate establishment for pedagogical purposes, Driffield naturalised the space, regarding it as a necessary organ for the city's functioning. Much like Pretorius's Beach Hotel, Driffield's naturalisation of the Park displaced it away from municipal governance by reconfiguring it as a phenomenon that predated human intervention<sup>541</sup>.

Ironically, botanical gardens with their carefully planned walks and arrangement of vegetation and placed in the middle of city, are crafted because of the industrial culture of the city, offering an escapist, transcendental space much like Denfield's Basutoland. The focus on the town's vegetation may seem to be a departure from the rest of Driffield's writing (although in the rest of the article he did provide a history of the garden). However, this can be partly explained by Courteney-Latimer's own overt aspiration early in the formation of the

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<sup>540</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 14 July 1964.

<sup>541</sup> For an exploration of how botanical gardens were intimately linked with scientific pursuits that became part of early settler culture in the Cape see S. Dubow, *A commonwealth of knowledge*, p 53.

Border Historical Society for the Society “to see something done to protect and save trees in East London and its surroundings”<sup>542</sup>.

Nevertheless, Driffield’s stories that were characterised by the twin themes of romance and tragedy appear to have been more frequently published, particularly those dealing with shipwrecks. Parallel to Mark Taylor’s account of East London’s past, Driffield too drew attention to shipwrecks as part of the town’s past. In these stories, attention was drawn to the qualities of courage and competence that emerged in those men who were involved in restoring order to the chaos noting how “the port captain and harbour staff concerned acted with commendable promptitude and efficiency”<sup>543</sup>.

Shipwrecks were ultimately reconfigured as a tale of masculine heroism. Inevitably, the ship was too given feminine qualities, portrayed as a powerful, yet unruly and ultimately tragic figure. He noted that “the pilot tug Mary, with pilots on board, was very quickly despatched to the stricken ship being followed by the powerful tug W. H. Fuller” and that “the W.H. Fuller very soon had a tow rope placed aboard the Stuart Star and began the first of the strenuous attempts to tow her stern first, off the submerged reef. After an effort of sometime the strain proved too great for the towing rope and it broke”<sup>544</sup>. Arguably, shipwreck narratives are also metaphoric for the themes that emerged from the stories of the Border historians as well as Denfield’s re-circulation of images from glass negatives in the media. They arrested time and engaged bystanders, much like spectators observing the effects of a shipwreck. The images presented a particular historicity that was at once familiar and novel. This reinforced a particular image-world of East London and challenged others, much like the wrecks that subtly transformed the coastline. Like Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* where characters and relationships are transformed as a result of the ship’s deviation and demolition resulting in a new social order the re-emergence of the dated images allowed East Londoners to pause and retrospectively witness the past.

Courteney-Latimer, Pretorius and Driffield are but a few members of the cohort of historians and intellectuals that constituted the Border Historical Society of the 1960s. As Denfield developed an interest in the history of photography towards the end of his exhibiting career, the Society cultivated the impulse to historicise events premised on the twin concepts of origin and pioneering. In turn he reconfigured historicism as visuality and seeing. The

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<sup>542</sup> Courteney-Latimer, ‘A true history’, p 26.

<sup>543</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 28 August 1962.

<sup>544</sup> *Ibid.*

influence of the Society was more noticeable in his writing from 1964 that were textually-driven. The microscopic and positivist lens with which he viewed the images, he conveyed to the archive. The archive quite literally became a set of images as he photographed all relevant notes and compiled them into microfilm. The final product was a set of histories of the town which he called 'The Saga of East London'.

### **The Saga of East London**

By the early 1960s Denfield had substituted his pilgrimages to Basutoland with frequent visits to the Cape Archives and South African library declaring "In my search for the truth about East London's beginnings I have been to many strange and scattered places...from out of the way places to that wonderful 'Treasure House' the South African Public Library"<sup>545</sup>. Following his 'Early Days' exhibition between December 1962 and the end of January in 1963, he spent approximately a month from October to November 1963 doing intensive archival work in the Western Cape searching for detailed information on various civic aspects of East London history from which he could tell "many wonderful stories...of East London, stories of achievement and disaster, of aspiration and disappointment, of humour and heartache". It is from these notes that the series of 'The Saga of East London' appeared in the *Dispatch* from 1964 whereby Denfield insisted that "only official primary sources of information have been copied, many of which have been micro-filmed, so that the facts can be written with some proven authority"<sup>546</sup>. Each article presented a brief history of a public aspect of the town. Originally, the articles were to appear every fortnight but appeared on average every six weeks.

Denfield's history of East London emphasised its commercial development, its founding fathers and many of its 'firsts'. Almost inevitably, the motif of 'fathers of East London' emerged continuously over the 14-part series. To a large extent, the Saga series read partly as biographies of men whom Denfield regarded as the foundational figures in modern East London. In the first instalment, for example, one learnt of the development of East London into a municipality through the efforts of various male figures. Denfield described a town in the 1870s without streets, water, sanitation, market, cattle and pigs roaming the streets, etc,

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<sup>545</sup> DC, Denfield, 'Introduction to the Saga of East London', 1964.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid.

that is, all those features that would render it modern<sup>547</sup>. This remained the case until the *Dispatch* wrote of the need for a market and a municipality in 1872. A public meeting was organised which sent a memorial to the governor of the Colony requesting the establishment of a market.

This set the wheels for the formation of a municipality in motion in that the Colonial Secretary responded suggesting the establishment of a municipality instead. After convening in the courtroom in West Bank, various householders adopted Municipal Regulations for the villages of East London and Panmure. In subsequent meetings a committee was elected to draw Municipal Regulations and included Major Lee a retired officer, J.P. Messrs a shipping agent James Coutts a shipping agent, W. Bompas also a shipping agent, Captain George Walker a harbour master, John Arnold who owned a house in Smith Street, Frederick Lucas an estate agent and secretary to the Divisional Council, P. Krohn a general merchant whose store was a frequent venue for official banquets and John Gately then newly arriving as a shipping agent. The municipal regulations were eventually approved and published as a proclamation in the *Government Gazette* dated 29 April 1873. They defined and fixed the limits of the Municipality and divided it into two wards, one on the western bank of the river, the other on the eastern side together with the land apportioned as the village of Panmure.

The second instalment in the series was dedicated to the appointment of Major Lee as the first municipal chairman, a retired officer who had helped establish schooling, the library and churches, we are told<sup>548</sup>. Mention was also made of another figure, harbour master George Walker. Denfield waxed lyrical about his valour describing him as a “shy and retiring by nature and as a young man who became extraordinarily powerful”. The reader was told of Walker’s relentless efforts during the ‘Kaffir War’ of 1851 in “braving the perils of the sea and ensuring the safe landing of supplies for the troops at a time of great need, through a surf which few men would have dared to venture”. Denfield also alerted the reader to how Walker’s “gallant services were repeatedly praised by all authorities” and pointing out in a matter-of-fact manner that “it was chiefly through his fearless efforts and untiring energy that the troops in British Kaffraria were so well supplied”<sup>549</sup>.

In the same manner that Denfield effaced race in his earlier ‘Early Days’ and ‘Do you remember’ series, in the construction of Walker’s biography, he disentangled Walker’s

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<sup>547</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 19 March 1964.

<sup>548</sup> *Daily Dispatch* 30 March 1964.

<sup>549</sup> *Daily Dispatch* 29 June 1964.

military efforts from the history of struggle over land between the Xhosa and British of which he was a part by emphasising individual character. Instead, the Kaffir War was treated as one more event that displayed Walker's impressive credentials. Denfield wrote that Walker's greatest deeds related to those lives he saved in various sea disasters. Again, he painted a picture of a man trying to bring order to an unruly (feminised) ships and boats at the risk of his life. Interestingly, Denfield's published article spurred the *Daily Dispatch* to advocate for the memorialisation of Walker in some form in the city, such as renaming the beach front George Walker Way<sup>550</sup>. In the spirit of the resurrection of Walker's name the *Dispatch* simultaneously advocated for "honouring other brave men of East London, not least among them those who have won the supreme award for gallantry in war"<sup>551</sup>. It was felt in the *Dispatch* that this should of course be the task of the City Council and the Border Historical Society.

While neither the City Council nor the Border Historical Society took subsequent action following this call, Denfield did continue drawing attention to other male figures that he regarded as foundational in different ways. An example is Alfred Henry Wilshere whom Denfield described as "the father of East London cricket"<sup>552</sup>. He was a keen cricketer who encouraged the game and arranged a match between civilian and military team on the west bank in 1873. Denfield also included these details to dispute popular claims that rowing is the oldest organised sport in the city.

Other foundational figures Denfield drew attention to are early photographers. This included Augustus Zeidler, a professional photographer from Germany who set up a simple studio in the form of a plain backdrop outside and a piece of linoleum covering the stony ground in the 1880s<sup>553</sup>. It was Osborne Morley, however, whom Denfield referred to as 'East London's father of photography'. He is noted to have recorded many phases of East London public life including buildings, harbour development, street scenes, historic gatherings, etc, and made images available for sale. Denfield described him as "an enterprising, successful and popular photographer and he more than any other man was responsible for recording systematically the changing face of East London during the last century"<sup>554</sup>.

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<sup>550</sup> *Daily Dispatch* 2 July 1964.

<sup>551</sup> Ibid.

<sup>552</sup> *Daily Dispatch* 16 July 1964.

<sup>553</sup> *Daily Dispatch* 7 April 1965.

<sup>554</sup> Ibid.

The history of East London's foundational fathers is also embedded in street names. Denfield highlighted individuals after whom several streets had been named. Several (male) figures were eventually memorialised in the city's streets<sup>555</sup>. Denfield wrote that by the end of 1849 East London's first streets had already been named: Strand Street, Smith Street, Jet Street and Toby Street. Smith Street was named in honour of Sir Henry Smith, the Governor of the Cape at the time. Toby Street was named after J Toby, master of the town's first jetty. Denfield also points out that new street names of 1877 reflected the social conditions and economic progress of the day. For example, on the West Bank a new road appeared as a result of harbour development. It was named Lester's Road after William Lester the harbour engineer who came out in 1872 to supervise the harbour construction. Fitzpatrick road was named after Judge Fitzpatrick in 1877, who bought part of a non-municipal land in the beach area. Hanover and Berlin Streets received their names because of the German settlers who were living there. During World War 1 these names were changed however to Gladstone and Buxton Street. Other streets that memorialise historic male figures include Currie Street named after Sir Donald Currie of the Castle Mail Packet Company and Porter Street, named after William Porter who had been Attorney-General of the Cape in the 1880s.

In a manner comparable to Driffield's, Denfield also featured the theatre of the ocean and rivers in his Saga series. Ships were endowed with the same heroic characteristics as the foundational fathers in these accounts. The reader was alerted to the saga of the anchor boat Annie, for example, which Denfield regarded as a pioneer in its own right<sup>556</sup>. Through narratives of salvation, Annie was once again personified. As a salvage vessel her description is comparable to George Walker's when Denfield wrote for example "on May 13 1873, anchor-boat Annie manned by the Port-boat crew, crossed the bar and commenced her duties. That same day she recovered a 22 cwt anchor with cable"<sup>557</sup>. However, Annie was earmarked as a tragic hero. The reader was told she eventually met her sad fate in the end when the barque 'James Gibson', laden with derelict anchors and about to return to port, ran afoul of her and stove her in. The boat was sent staggering for some distance and then heeled over keel uppermost.

Like Mark Taylor, Denfield dedicated part of his research of the town's history into the saga of the 'Lady Kennaway' and 'Kennaway girls', a two-part instalment that was the last in the

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<sup>555</sup> *Daily Dispatch* 4 December 1964.

<sup>556</sup> *Daily Dispatch* 14 April 1964.

<sup>557</sup> *Ibid.*



series. At the time of the publication of the article, East London's newest hotel at the time had just been named the Hotel Kennaway to commemorate that episode of the port's history<sup>558</sup>. Denfield wrote that out of Governor Grey's instruction 2300 soldiers of the German Legion had landed in the colony but only 330 females accompanied them. The Secretary of the State of Colonies, Henry Labouchere, complained of the potentially disastrous nature of such gross imbalance stating the soldiers "will roam over the whole country in search of females, and will probably be frequently murdered by the native population"<sup>559</sup>. To obviate this, Grey recommended the sending out of one thousand heads of families, with their wives and children from Germany with free passage to the country. However, Labouchere felt this project would be costly and that the problem would be met by sending out 'respectable single females'. He also pointed out the difficulty of securing a large number of willing females from England and Scotland but noted that many more would be willing to emigrate from Ireland.

The 'Lady Kennaway', a teak ship named after the wife of the Charlotte Kennaway, wife of the first baronet Sir John Kennaway (1785-1836), was prepared for the endeavour. The ship left Plymouth in September 1857 and arrived in East London on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November with 153 Irish women on board. Denfield further investigated whether the women all married soldiers as intended or not. He pointed out that only two had married in East London. In King William's Town five had been married and only 15 were reported to have been engaged to "respectable and well-to-do young men"<sup>560</sup>. Though never stated explicitly in the series, the tale of the Kennaway girls was a glimpse into the entanglement of sexuality, race and politics at a given period in the town's history. The women had been brought for largely the purpose of the white male population, with the intent of procreating. Grey's vision was one of increased Europeanisation and whiteness in the colony. Although the women boarding the ship did not all procreate with soldiers as planned, their arrival expressed the Cape governor's aggressive politics.

## **Conclusion**

Minkely and Wiz have noted that with regards to the Van Riebeeck festival:

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<sup>558</sup> *Daily Dispatch* 12 November 1965.

<sup>559</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>560</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 22 December 1965.

The 6<sup>th</sup> of April 1952 did not complete the job, it did not bring to birth the whole of the Settler nation at once. But it did leave behind an altered locality, an altered memory and identity to the past as Settlers. The land of the racial frontier was changing to ‘Settler Country’ and the archivists started discovering ‘the contribution of British immigrants to the development of South Africa’. They ‘built’, ‘brought’, ‘salvaged’, ‘linked’, ‘put up’, ‘freed’, ‘pioneered’, ‘applied’, ‘spread’, ‘improved’ and ‘produced’ South Africa<sup>561</sup>.

When the Border Historical Society formed seven years later, it emerged in an ideological context of a concretising white Settler identity and historiography. While East London’s contribution to the 1952 celebration did not always adhere strictly to the linear narrative of a nation’s modernity based on the ‘racial unity’ of the British and the Boers, it did provide a local history that adhered to the national narrative by constructing a history that championed white civilisation of the nation. These themes re-emerged in the texts of the Border Historical Society. Much as had been done in the Van Riebeeck celebrations, the Border historians drew attention to the “many men who lived here” thereby representing them as “Great South Africans”<sup>562</sup>. In Denfield’s Saga series, the figure of Jan Van Riebeeck as the founder of a civilised South Africa was in turn replaced by a tableaux of individual white men where each was written about in terms of how he too ‘salvaged’, ‘pioneered’, ‘produced’ East London.

By 1964 Denfield’s reputation as a historian had grown substantially. In 1964 he was invited to write biographies of South African personalities that he felt worthy of mention in the *Dictionary of South African Biography*<sup>563</sup>. He was also invited to write an article about East London’s history for the *Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa* (at the suggestion of East London’s town clerk)<sup>564</sup>. The *Moth Magazine* (Memorable Order of Tin Hats) also invited him to write an article on the presentation of the Victoria Cross in King William’s Town in 1858 to a Crimea hero<sup>565</sup>. This is no doubt due to both his textual series on aspects of East London as well as his work on glass negatives. To appreciate the direction he took in his work on East London’s past towards the end of his exhibition career it is useful to pay attention to the Border Historical Society which accommodated his framework. By the early 1960, Denfield and his colleagues in the Society had developed a distinctive paradigm and methodology of doing history. His ‘Saga of East London’ series, did not however, signal a

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<sup>561</sup>G. Minkley & L. Witz, ‘Sir Harry Smith and his imbondi: local and national identities in the Eastern Cape, 1952’, History Workshop, University of Witwatersrand, 1994, p 28.

<sup>562</sup>Ibid 11.

<sup>563</sup>DC, W.J. De Kock, Letter to Denfield, 15 June 1965.

<sup>564</sup>DC, P.C. Du Plessis, Letter to Denfield, 2 November 1966.

<sup>565</sup>DC, C. Shackleton, Letter to Denfield, 8 December 1965.

complete break from a visual orientation. Instead it can be more usefully understood as an opportunity to concretise the evidential aura attached to photographs. This culminated in *Pioneer Port*.

## Chapter 6: Practices of History

### Introduction

Eighteen years after his arrival in the port city, Denfield published a pictorial history of East London: *Pioneer Port: the Illustrated History of East London*. A culmination of some six or seven years of work on photographic and written histories, *Pioneer Port* offered a concise history of East London through text and image. The images formed the basis of Denfield's archival research and offered "Stories of achievement and disaster, of aspiration and disappointment, of humour and heartache. Stories of pioneers, whose courage and determination overcame the many obstacles with which they were confronted". For Denfield the publication of the book was a long overdue endeavour to East Londoners in that he declared "much of the early romance and interesting sidelights of East London have never been told"<sup>566</sup>. Although his Saga series largely excluded this visual collection, it supplemented his broader investigation into the history of the town and thus needs to be understood not as a deviation from his paradigm but an extension of an epistemology where images were endowed with evidential power. The publication of the book was soon followed by the construction of a permanent gallery of prints from the glass negatives in the East London Museum in 1967. However, the images did not stop circulating in that more than forty years after the first exhibition of this collection, the images continue to re-appear in different public contexts around the city indicating their functioning as a canonical archive. In the previous chapters I drew attention to the empiricist framework that informed the project of reconstructing East London's past using images. I also highlighted the broader paradigm within which Denfield worked that constructed a settler history. In this chapter I build on these earlier claims noting the ways that the publication of the book and the construction of the permanent exhibition allow for a reflection on the practices of an empiricist History.

### 'A real piece of Africana'

After attempting unsuccessfully to publish in book form his images of pagan tribes in northern Nigeria and pictorial Basutoland, the publication of the book on East London's history was to be the first successful attempt. While Denfield drew much attention in the city because of his re-circulation of the glass images in the early 1960s, he was still keen to make a name for himself with his Basutoland images. Letters of correspondence with the publisher

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<sup>566</sup> Denfield, *Pioneer Port*, p 6.

Howard Timmins indicate proposals of publishing books on Basutoland and East London<sup>567</sup>. Timmins wrote thus to Denfield in relation to a suggestion of a book on Basutoland that after speaking to various booksellers and showing them the photographs, few were interested in purchasing such a book. A keen enthusiast of such images, Timmins indicated that “I have been reminded by the trade that a similar book, not of Basutoland but of wonderful pictures of native life and confined to black and white pictures produced a few years ago was a complete failure”. As a form of compensation, he did, however, agree to publish a book on East London in that “I feel this at least will command a sale in the Eastern Province and may sell in other parts of the country”<sup>568</sup>.

Timmins’ response is unsurprising, given his interest in Africana<sup>569</sup>. Denfield’s interest in publishing a book on Basutoland was perhaps also to be expected given that he was still involved in salon circles in the early 1960s, albeit as judge rather than exhibitor. However, in addition to Timmins’ own survey on the interest in the book, correspondence from London wholesalers and retail merchants, *Fraser’s Limited*, also showed lack of enthusiasm for such a book<sup>570</sup>. Nonetheless, in this same period Denfield was seeking backing from the Council of East London regarding the publication of a book on the history of East London. This too was rejected on the basis of lack of provision in Revenue Estimates for such a proposal<sup>571</sup>.

Timmins regarded such an attitude from the Council as ‘deplorable’ and partly as compensation to Denfield, agreed to publish a pictorial book on East London but with the use of only black and white pictures in order to curtail costs<sup>572</sup>. Thus preparation for the book was underway by mid-1964 with Timmins’ guarantee of receiving an excellent review from at least one reputable reviewer<sup>573</sup>.

Prior to publishing, Denfield garnered greater attention in the media when he was invited to speak about his work on collecting old glass negatives on an ‘Africana Magazine’ radio programme in September 1964<sup>574</sup>. By December that year he had completed at least its first draft, entering into a formal publishing agreement with Timmins which stated the clear terms of payment and copyright<sup>575</sup>. Denfield was insistent on the historical accuracy of his research

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<sup>567</sup> DC, H.B. Timmins, ‘Letter to Denfield’, 24 March 1964.

<sup>568</sup> DC, Timmings, Letter to Denfield, 29 April 1964.

<sup>569</sup> DC, Denfield, Letter to Howard Timmins, 13 September 1964.

<sup>570</sup> DC, F.R. Nolan, Letter to Howard Timmins, 13 May 1964.

<sup>571</sup> DC, East London Town Clerk, Letter to Howard Timmins, 13 May 1964.

<sup>572</sup> DC, Timmins, Letter to Denfield, 26 May 1964.

<sup>573</sup> DC, Timmins, Letter to Denfield. 24 March 1964.

<sup>574</sup> DC, Denfield, Letter to Howard Timmins, 13 September 1964.

<sup>575</sup> DC, ‘Publishing Agreement between Joseph Denfield and Howard Timmins Publisher’, 4 December 1964.

to Timmins stating “As for the historical material, I assure you that all of this is based on original research among primary sources of reference. I have completely ignored what has been previously written. The information contained therein is for the most part new” and insisting that the book “revises and replaces many new contemporary accounts of past events in East London, because these accounts are not original research, but have been based on inaccurate versions of earlier statements”<sup>576</sup>.

In the end, a hard-cover edition was published limited to 1500 copies and had been prepared, at least as stated in the text, “for those who love East London”<sup>577</sup>. The publisher had suggested that Denfield dedicate the book to his wife, a proposal he ignored<sup>578</sup>. This suggests Denfield wanted to frame his research as a public rather than personal endeavour. A civic party was held in the East London town hall on the 17<sup>th</sup> of June 1965 in celebration of the publication of the book. The Mayor, de Lange, regarded the party as an expression of gratitude to Denfield “for all he had done for East London”<sup>579</sup>. The Mayor officially accepted the book on behalf of the city, while chief librarian of the East London Library and member of the Border Historical Society, Margy Van Deventer, was given the title of official custodian of the book<sup>580</sup>. The latter had also played an earlier editorial role - alongside a local harbour engineer - by reading earlier scripts and examining pictures. Present at the party were also members of the Border Historical Society Driffield, Taylor and Brian Watson, as well as daughter of John Gately, Margaret Gately, whose home had recently been donated to the East London Museum for preservation.

Denfield described the book as a labour of love that had resulted in him making many new friends over the age of 80 and waxed lyrical about the arduous task it entailed. He spoke about how “old family records and deed boxes were opened for me- people trusted me with their treasures”. He added that he had visited families all over the Republic “cleaning their attics for them and relieving them of ancient negatives and other material, and if this book does nothing else but to make East Londoners and others a little more conscious of our heritage then it has all been worthwhile”<sup>581</sup>.

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<sup>576</sup> DC, Denfield, Letter to Howard Timmins, 8 November 1964.

<sup>577</sup> Denfield, *Pioneer Port*, p 9.

<sup>578</sup> DC, Timmins, Letter to Denfield, 4 December 1964.

<sup>579</sup> *Evening Post* 21 June 1965.

<sup>580</sup> *Daily Dispatch* 19 June 1965.

<sup>581</sup> DC, Denfield, ‘Speech at Pioneer Port book launch’, 17 June 1965.

Edwards argues, via Ankersmit, that “all of historical writing...is situated in the space enclosed by the complementary movements of the discovery (loss) and recovery of the past (love) that together constitute the realm of historical experience”<sup>582</sup>. Denfield’s regard of the project as arising out of ‘love’ indicated a personal connection to the place under study in the images. He was not operating as a detached detective but invested energy into ‘uncovering’ the past that he now identified as his own. The heritage the book alluded to had become ‘ours. That is to say, he included himself amongst its recipients. It is as if through the process of searching for the images, Denfield ‘discovered’ his own ‘lost’ past which he aimed to recover. This suggests that indeed, he regarded himself as a ‘settled’ subject with claims to a settler history.

Denfield chose a front cover picture of the harbour, drawing attention to the centrality of the port in the historiography. At Timmins’s suggestion, the opening pages also contained the East London coat of arms<sup>583</sup>. One can immediately note the homologies in the book and in the symbolism of the images. The arms, noted to follow an earlier image adopted by the Town Council in 1892, consist of the shield depicting the cross of Saint George, with sheaves and trussed sheep denoting agriculture and commerce. Above is the rising sun, signifying the East and the below lie the aloes, noted to be indigenous to the Eastern Province. Its crest shows two crossed anchors, symbolic of the seaport, with supporting buffaloes on either side as a reference to the Buffalo River (Fig. 75). Its motto is ‘animo et fide’ (by courage and faith)<sup>584</sup>.



Fig. 75

<sup>582</sup> E. Edwards, ‘Photography and the material performance of the past’, *History and Theory*, Theme Issue, 48 (2009), 130-150.

<sup>583</sup> DC, Timmins ‘Letter to Denfield’, 4 December 1964.

<sup>584</sup> DC, ‘Armorial Bearings of the City of East London’, 15 December 1959.

Parallel to the ‘love’ that went into the production of the book, was an equally firm commitment to searching for truth. In his account of the history of History as discipline in colonial India, Chakrabarty brings to attention the construction of the notion of ‘researched knowledge’ by locating it in the context of European administrators’ enthusiasm for discovering ‘Indian’ history and the cultural nationalism of Indian intellectuals who subscribed to ideas of Empire<sup>585</sup>. Denfield’s spirit of inquiry could not be missed when he gazed intensely at the faded images and negatives to capture such ‘researched knowledge’. In turn, to reproduce them as enlarged and decipherable images expressed this commitment to producing knowledge. Such a commitment was also apparent when reminded his readers that “there has been comparatively little written about East London, and it was obvious that if I were to write about events depicted in these photographs I would have to refer to primary sources of reference”. Once again, to retrieve such information he searched “documents and newspapers of East London’s beginnings in those wonderful treasure houses the Cape Archives and the South African Public Library”<sup>586</sup>.

The significance of archival work is notable in the book not only in the content the author included but in its overall organisation. The book is divided into 55 brief chapters, each approximately two pages long, where each section deals with a particular historic site or engineering feat. Inevitably, several chapters were reproductions of narratives and images that had already been circulated in the *Daily Dispatch*, such as those about the Beach Hotel, East London’s first photographers, the railway station etc. The overall layout includes a page-long textual description of each site on the left page and accompanying dated images of the site on the right page with descriptive captions. The reader accustomed to moving the eye from left to right is thus presented with a concise summary of archival notes wherein the corresponding images perform an evidential role. In its deceptive simplicity this organisation suggests the centrality of text over image, a shift from the re-circulation of the images in the *Dispatch* and in the *Early Days* exhibition. In the book, the images are surrounded by exegeses that dominate the page. A careful reading of the descriptions, in fact, reveals that the author moved away from the direct contents of each image, by providing instead a circumlocutory description of events to which the images are related. This is because Denfield relied heavily on municipal notes to reconstruct a historical narrative. For example, when accounting for the history of the town’s Market Square he wrote:

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<sup>585</sup> D. Chakrabarty, ‘The public life of history: an argument out of India’, *Postcolonial Studies*, 11,2 (2008), 169-190.

<sup>586</sup> Denfield, *Pioneer Port*, p 6.



The name of C.J. Gray may mean little to many of us, but he was the architect of the original East London on the West Bank. By March 1849 he had surveyed the area and planned the layout of the streets; this included a Market Place...In 1873, after much public agitation, the newly elected Commissioners agreed to establish an official Municipal market. It was to be a morning one and held on Prince Alfred Square (West Bank) thrice weekly, commencing at seven o'clock in the morning. Tuesday, September 30, 1873, was to have witnessed its formal inauguration and John L. Venn, the recently appointed 'first town clerk and market master' was punctually at his post at 7 am- but no produce arrived for sale. Thursday was no better, but on Saturday some potatoes were sold and '£6.30 was offered for a bull stag but refused'...The marketmaster saw no point in getting up early for an empty market so the hours were altered from seven o'clock to half past eight<sup>587</sup>.



Fig. 76



Fig. 77

On the one hand, the narrative was then bound up with the history of administration. On the other hand, the description in the book is accompanied by two photographs of the market square taken in 1906 and 1920 respectively. They both portray a bustling market square with residents in the midst of bartering, vegetables laid on the ground neatly, horses pulling wagons and crowds moving from one market point to another (Fig. 76 & 77). Presumably, the images had been donated to Denfield from private collections, given that they suggest a personal point of view of the market in their depiction of 'typical' scenes of the site. However, even in viewing the image the author arrested one's interpretation by providing additional historical detail about aspects in the image. He wrote in the caption of the 1920 photograph that "in front of Mosenthal's warehouse on the left is the Wallace Reid memorial drinking fountain which was removed to make way for a modern bioscope theatre"<sup>588</sup>. Thus even the image-based second half of the chapter was cloaked in textuality. As the reader turned each page from left to right, he or she would be left with the impression of a textual

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<sup>587</sup> Ibid 44.

<sup>588</sup> Ibid 45.

historiography legitimised by images. This is in fact a misnomer in that Denfield had used his collection of faded prints and glass negatives as a basis to investigate the history of the town.

This layout arguably, is a reflection of the paradigm that had characterised Denfield's and Border Historical Society's epistemology. The objective of history research was to produce an empirically-oriented history that prized certainty above sentiment. This was a historiography that was seemingly untainted by personal and racial politics and appeared to provide accounts of civic life of the town unquestionably. Images were a crucial part of this search for knowledge, yet once obtained, would be relegated to an evidential status. In turn the texts attached to each image in the book "marked historical significance, constraining the photograph in both time and space, giving a sense of exactness and of specificity and legitimacy as a historical statement..."<sup>589</sup>.

It is also partly in this context that one can understand Denfield's appropriation of the images as his collection, rather than the work of past photographers. One might recall that when Denfield initially appealed to newspaper readers in the early 1960s for old negatives, he indicated that photographers and contributors would be acknowledged. However, in the culminated published book, photographers' names are noticeably absent, placing Denfield at the centre of the visual archive. By highlighting the textuality surrounding the images, the latter are then effectively reconfigured in positivist terms. Moreover, by implicitly making Denfield the author of such a visual archive, the space for alternative interpretations of the images is reduced. Instead one is to read them as a history of the town in visual form, rather than a visual history. 'Visual history' implies an explicit interpretation or a hermeneutic endeavour inclusive of one's subjectivity. A historical narrative told through the pictures points to structured analyses that are based on a solid foundation.

This is a methodology that was entangled with the choice of subject matter in the book. After all, the book emphasised building sites, suggesting structure, permanence, security. This doubtless relates partly to Denfield's own identification as a now long-time settler in East London. There was something mystical, intangible about the Basutoland mountains that he photographed in the early-mid 1950s. His images of East London buildings, by contrast, offered a materiality, a physical presence that might suggest a man more fully anchored in his locality and white South African identity. Devoid of the context through which the images had circulated, that is, the drawers, the albums, the garbage bins, and the 'original'

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<sup>589</sup> Edwards, 'Photography and material performance', p. 44.

photographers, the book positioned Denfield as the authorial voice of the settler history, no longer a temporary resident that captured fleeting images but a long-time settler with personal claims to East London's (and the Union's) past.

In the end, Denfield produced a book that offered not only a historical narrative but one that expressed the practice of History through reconstructing images into historical accounts. He had begun by operating with the glass negatives as 'sources' and reconfiguring them as 'truth' and evidence. Through his supplementation of the images with intensive archival work he had effectively moulded the images into 'primary data' to serve in turn as a source for future endeavours. The material practice of refurbishing the faded photographs and negatives is itself telling of the practice of history. This is the notion of locating the story of the past that is believed to correspond to the reality of the past.

With this in mind, one can perhaps begin to think about the chosen title of the book. Denfield did not explain publicly the choice of title but it is on one level a clear allusion to the port city, a city that has developed largely because of its harbour. He had originally titled the book the clear-cut 'Graphic History of East London' but the publisher suggested the final savvy title, doubtlessly noting its greater market appeal<sup>590</sup>. On the one hand, the photographers to whom the images are to be credited are pioneers in the sense of being amongst the first to document the town in the context of change when photography was still a relatively new technology. On other hand, Denfield can perhaps be regarded as pioneering in the manner in which he re-circulated the images as a *historical collection* in the public domain. The notion of pioneering re-emerges when paying closer attention to the content of the book. In a manner resonant with his *Saga* series, Denfield drew attention to the town's firsts, from schools to municipal developments, which were a result of the individual (largely male) efforts to shift the town towards a modern orientation. These individuals and events pioneered, the book suggests, in the establishment of the city. Perhaps to draw attention to its visual orientation, the book started in fact with a history of those whom Denfield regarded as East London's first photographers, as he had written about them in his *Saga* series:

It is a matter of some regret that East London was one of the last centres in the Eastern Cape to boast of a resident photographer; indeed being 'off the map', few photographers troubled to visit the Port with the result that very early photographic records do not exist...for practical purposes East London's photographic history did not begin until 1875, when G.R. Hobson set up East London's first photographic studio on the West Bank. When Prime Minister Mr J.C. (Sir John) Molteno, inaugurated the Railway and the South

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<sup>590</sup> DC, Denfield, 'Letter to Howard Timmins', 8 November 1964.

Breakwater in August 1873, the Dispatch appealed to a visiting photographer to record this momentous event, but no one was prepared to make the journey to East London<sup>591</sup>.



Fig. 78



Fig. 79

Beginning the book with early photographers again helped to ground the highly textual book as in fact a book about photographs, although this point may be somewhat indirect. The beginnings of East London in this historiography were implicitly intertwined with early photographic practice. In other words, although the book relied on text for legitimacy, visuality in the form of early photographic practice became the starting point to think about the past. One might recall that Denfield's investigation had after all begun with a few photographs from which he developed a narrative. Alongside the above excerpt in the book were three photographs relating to early days of photography. One is a photograph of Morley's studio at the corner of Hanover (now Gladstone) street taken in 1893. The photographer taking the image is unnamed but the image includes Morley himself standing outside the door with a pipe in hand and his brother in law, fellow photographer George Dersely whose studio was based in King William's Town. Correspondence letters in the Denfield Collection strongly indicate that Denfield relied heavily on the assistance of the descendants of Dersely and Morley that he had traced to obtain biographical information as well as some of their photographs.

In the chapter was also included a photograph of Simpkin's studio situated at the corner of Park Avenue and Oxford in 1890 (Fig. 78), as well as a photograph of the 'Camera Club', East London's first amateur photographic society on an outing in December 1910 consisting

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<sup>591</sup> Denfield, *Pioneer Port*, p 10.

of twelve men<sup>592</sup> (Fig. 79). The latter is of course reminiscent of Denfield's own participation in such societies. His regard of the amateur photographers as pioneers partly reflected his own affiliation. Interestingly, in the photograph several photographers hold their cameras for the (unnamed) photographer to capture in a manner comparable to the genre of trophy photography. Some equipment is on the ground in the foreground, while one photographer places his arm on the camera on a tripod in display. The now widely-cited analogy of shooting and hunting comes to mind<sup>593</sup> (again corresponding to Denfield's own attempts at the control over and intense aims of capturing the past), particularly as the men are photographed on an outing at Bat's cave -a largely naturalistic surrounding - to capture picturesque scenes as one would imagine.

This literature notes the connection between the violence of gun-shooting, and the exercise of power in capturing subjects. Can one read in this photograph an attempt to capture East London simultaneously in the camera and politically? 1910 is of course an important year in the history of South Africa, the year that marked the formation of the Union of South Africa which was an amalgamation of former British and Boer provinces and the intensification of early institutionalised removal of land from black 'natives'. The subjects of the Camera Club may of course have been far removed from the heart of the political administration, but as white members of the Union they remained an integral part of it. A reading of their outing in Bat's Cave as a political act may be ambitious, but perhaps has some value when considering the act as echoing the political administrator's own at capturing the land. At the same time, Denfield was committed to capturing the 'truth' of East London's past thus the photograph images him not only in the context of fellow amateur photographers but also in the discursive connotation of 'capturing'.

In reading about the early photographers and the role of the railway in promoting photography in the excerpt above, one can also appreciate the inclusion of such technology in the book about pioneering. They too were included amongst the town's firsts. Denfield had in fact published a detailed article in the *Coelacanth* about the construction of the East London-Queenstown railway<sup>594</sup>, and in *Pioneer Port* included a brief description of the event based

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<sup>592</sup> Ibid p 11.

<sup>593</sup> See for example, P. Landau, 'Empires of the Visual: Photography and Colonial Administration in Africa' in P. L. Landau & D. Kaspin, eds., *Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) pp141-171; D. Killingray, 'An outline History of Photography in Africa ca.1940', *History in Africa*, 19 (1989), 197-208; P. Hayes, 'Vision and Violence: Photographies of War in Southern Angola and Northern Namibia', *Kronos: Southern African Histories*, November, 27 (2001), 133-157

<sup>594</sup>J. Denfield, 'The East London and Queenstown railway', *The Coelacanth*, 1,4 (1963),15-21.

on this earlier paper. Denfield wrote that the East London and Queenstown Railway had been undertaken by A.E. Schmid in 1873, until the first locomotive was run for the first time in 1875. The line between East London and Breidbach (a former German settlement) was opened “in a very unpretentious and ordinary manner” in 1876 and then followed by the opening of the King William’s Town line in 1877 and Queenstown route in 1880. As the reader perused the chapter on the railway construction, he or she would also be looking at the photograph of the recently constructed shed which housed the railway fire engine, a photograph that had appeared in the ‘Do you remember’ newspaper series and in the *Early Days* exhibition (see Fig. 51).

The literature on colonial conquest has drawn much attention to the significant role played by the steamship in enabling conquest. Similarly, the introduction of the railway in the town was doubtless tied to the expansion of the town under the Colony, a railway that connected what would eventually form the Border region of the Eastern Province. It also meant a burgeoning of a cohort of visiting photographers that documented the town in the midst of change as Denfield noted. Thus while such photographers may have operated independently of the Colony, their work not only reflected but was entangled with colonial expansion. As Foster argues, “notwithstanding the central role they played in precipitating and guiding the course of the South African war, the railways exemplified the material benefits of imperialism and helped forge the idea of a unified nation”<sup>595</sup>.

The railway station perhaps functions as a heterotopic space, functioning fully when people are in a break from their traditional time but still constituting their lived realities<sup>596</sup>. The station connected East London to the rest of the colony but simultaneously constructed a subjectivity of East London belonging. In his account of the role played by railways in forging that ‘unified nation’ Foster is of course referring to the newly formed Union following the war, thus a period that preceded the construction of the East London-Queenstown route. However, he points out to how the railway networks “altered the subjective experience of geographical space...having a profound impact on how its citizens encountered the ‘imaginary territory’ of the nation, as corporeal subjects travelling through

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<sup>595</sup> J. Foster, ‘“Land of contrasts” or “home we have always known”? the SAR & H and the Imaginary Geography of White South African Nationhood, 1910-1930’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 29, 3 (2003), 675-680.

<sup>596</sup> M. Foucault, M. & J. Miskowiec, ‘Of Other Spaces’, *Diacritics*. 16, 1 (1986), 22-27.

material landscapes”<sup>597</sup> and thus, he argues, the railway mediated the development of a white South African nationhood.

Arguably, other forms of transportation or communication such as roads and telephones played a similar function. Like the railway, they too helped to cement the boundaries of the town in their apparent connectivity to places outside it. Denfield wrote that the first private use of a telephone in town took place on the 30<sup>th</sup> of October, 1878, a private line from the Harbour Works. Three years later private lines were made available for civilian purposes with C.E. Nicholls as the first subscriber. He noted that “private lines continued until 1887, when it announced in June that a telephone exchange in town would shortly be an accomplished fact”<sup>598</sup>.



Fig. 80



Fig. 81

The chapter included a photograph of the interior of the telephone exchange. This had appeared in the *Daily Dispatch* in 1963 acknowledging Gilbert Russell to have been the photographer behind the camera in 1907 (although no mention is made in the book). Posed in front of the switchboard, the five men in the photograph reflect the narrative of the ‘(white) fathers of the city’ who have been instrumental in bringing about modernity to the town (Fig. 80). The photograph was placed next to a photograph of an equally masculine space, the buildings of the Magistrate Court and the Post Office in which the telephone exchange was housed at different periods (Fig. 81).

Like telephone communication, streets offer both connectivity and separation. Drawing from his *Saga* series, Denfield included chapters on street naming in East London, paying special attention to the two busiest and most significant connecting streets, Oxford and Buffalo

<sup>597</sup> Foster, ‘Land of contrasts’, p 664.

<sup>598</sup> Denfield, *Pioneer Port*, p 24.

Street. The chapter on Oxford Street consisted of two photographs of the street, dated 1890 and 1900 respectively, thus illustrating the significant changes that had taken place in the town in less than ten years. The older of the image portrays a rocky wide road with few buildings while the newer shows a slowly bustling town with taller buildings and greater flow of human and mobile traffic<sup>599</sup> (Fig. 82 & 83). Denfield described the early foundation of Oxford and Buffalo Streets respectively, the former named by Anthony Trollope on his visit to East London in 1877:

The original road from East London to King William's Town was situated on the west side of the Buffalo River, but in 1856 the construction of a new road, which shortened the distance by ten miles, was begun on the East Bank. The new road 'The Great Northern Road', was declared open to traffic on February 1 1858, and became the main postal road. In later years its first portion blossomed into Oxford Street<sup>600</sup>.

When the Eastern and Western Street Committees of the Municipal Council submitted their list of proposed names for the unnamed streets on both sides of the river in April 1877, 'Buffalo Street' was one of the names put forward. The reason for this choice was that at the end of the road there was broad zigzag path down the slope to the Buffalo River<sup>601</sup>.



Fig. 82



Fig. 83

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<sup>599</sup> Ibid p 41.

<sup>600</sup> Ibidp 40.

<sup>601</sup> Ibid p 86.





Fig. 84



Fig. 85

Two photographs were included that provide panoramic views of Buffalo Street in 1894 (Fig. 84 & 85). Streets mark demarcations and boundaries, but also create impression or illusion of open-endedness or infinity. These two images of Buffalo Street also create an impression of expansiveness, in that the photos are taken from particular angles of the road where the foreground is larger, allowing the eye to travel to an unknown destination in the receding background. Roads, like photographs, are tied to how we imagine boundaries. Yet, they are open-ended, suggesting other possibilities in what may ‘emerge’ from the picture, that which is outside the frame. Likewise, history operates in the same manner in that it creates boundaries while at the same time these are rendered fragile in that other possibilities can be imagined outside these boundaries in terms of how we imagine the past. With this in mind, we can imagine the significance of the emphasis on roads, railways and the telephone in the book, both the images and text, in that the book was in fact about creating historical boundaries around East London’s past.

The politics of inclusion and exclusion are noticeable in the recurring visual motif of events depicted with residents’ backs to the camera. This doubtless relates partly to the photographic technology at the time that allowed little zooming when in close proximity to the targeted site, particularly in the context of public events where the photographer would want to document an overarching view. Photographers would then have to be situated at a significant distance. One example is a photograph of the laying of the foundation stone of the town hall in 1897 by the Mayor David Rees, where the viewer watches the spectators in a spirited demonstration with the flags of the Union Jack flying above the dense crowd<sup>602</sup> (Fig. 86). Similarly, a photograph showing the celebration of Sir Henry Loch’s visit in 1890 was taken

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<sup>602</sup> Ibid p 12.

from a distance, showing Loch's carriage being driven down a street. On either side is an expectant crowd<sup>603</sup> (Fig. 87).

Starl writes that by choosing the city as their subjects, these early photographers (in Britain and France at least) were indicating that they were at the centre of public life, at the point from which all progress emanated, that is, at the hub of modernity<sup>604</sup>. This distance of the photographer also highlights ideas of relating to the public space in a detached manner. In this sense because of the photographer's distance the subjects in the photographs become part of the public space. They configure it as a public space, and are then in turn constituted as citizens who participate in public life. This is significant when one considers that citizenship is partly about exclusion and inclusion in various aspects of public life.



Fig. 86



Fig. 87

The emphasis placed on 'events' in the book resonated with the empiricist impulse that characterised it. Hayden White reminds us that the 'historical event' has been conceived traditionally as an event that was not only observable but also observed<sup>605</sup>. The photographs of events were presented as evidence of the occurrence of occasions and by reconstituting the photographers as documentary workers (as I have argued previously) the book thus represented them as observers of such historical moments. Subsequently, the past inscribed in the photographs could then effectively be presented as History.

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<sup>603</sup> Ibid p 81.

<sup>604</sup> T. Starl, 'A new world of pictures: the use and spread of the daguerreotype process', in M. Frizot, ed., *A new history of photography*, (Köln: Konemann, 1998), p 36.

<sup>605</sup> H. White, *Figure Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999).

Nevertheless, the most significant expression of the creation of boundaries in the book is through images of the ocean, rivers and harbour. These, of course, resonate with the title of the book. Taussig writes that “as the ships sailed home into oblivion across the snotgreen sea sometime after World War Two, so the beach became increasingly popular in the affluent West, and the sea underwent a phantasmatic recovery by virtue of a new structure of feeling”<sup>606</sup>. Although the photographs and narratives surrounding the ocean in the book pertained to the pre-World War era, published in the 1960s, they suggest an importance that was attached to the beach in the construction of the past. Out of the 55 short chapters, 23 are dedicated to stories surrounding the ocean and harbour, from the construction of bath pools, to harbour engineering feats, from shipping disasters to the construction of bridges over rivers.

Arguably, this partly results from the nature of the images he had in his possession. As mentioned in previous chapters, these early photographers whose images Denfield collected were oriented in public spaces and sought to capture the changing cityscape. In turn, Denfield relied on archival documents relating to civic life in his research. One example is a chapter on the development of beaches where he pointed out that by 1877 “certain portions of the Beach for bathing purposes had been set apart for different sexes, and specific hours had been fixed during which bathing was permitted”. Not only did residents fail to strictly adhere to the regulations but concerns would be raised about dress in that “the type of bathing garb ‘varied’ and often offended the susceptibility of many visitors who complained that they could not walk along the Beach at certain hours ‘on the score of propriety’” until it was made “compulsory that all bathers should wear a proper costume”<sup>607</sup>.

Denfield included the photograph of the beachfront taken in 1907 showing residents strolling close to the Beach Hotel that had previously circulated in the *Daily Dispatch*<sup>608</sup>. Read against the above-mentioned attempts at beach control, the photograph re-emerges less as a depiction of frivolity on a sunny weekend, but as a glimpse into the self-policing that had characterised East Londoners. Fuller’s statements drew an image of a town in the process of developing a colonial identity founded on Victorian mores. Thus matters of bathing garb and beach conduct became entangled with political control (Fig. 88). This is illustrated in addition in the photograph of the ‘camptown’ by the Eastern Beach taken in 1897. Denfield noted that in

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<sup>606</sup> M. Taussig, ‘The Beach (A Fantasy)’, *Critical Inquiry*, 26, 2 (2000), 248-278.

<sup>607</sup> Denfield, *Pioneer Port*, p 114.

<sup>608</sup> *Ibid* p 115.

1897 the town Council decided to experiment with organising camping on the beach by providing campers with water, sanitary conveniences, postal and telegraphic services and police control. Taken from a distance from the campers, the photograph is an illustration of control over the beachfront with a myriad of camps along the coast (Fig. 89).



Fig 88



Fig. 89



Fig. 90



Fig. 91

Another glimpse into leisure activities of East Londoners at the turn of the twentieth century is in images of boating on the Buffalo River. One photograph in the chapter is of three women by a riverside on a resting place amongst dense bushes taken in 1899 (Fig. 90). The photograph was most likely taken on a leisurely outing and came from one's private album. It appears less carefully composed than those images of public sites that characterised the archive. In the collection, it is a rare glimpse into female homosociality in a civic space. Yet, as one studies the subjects who gaze back at the photographer cautiously, one gets the sense

that the photographer has intruded in a discreet space. They appear hidden from view amongst the bushes.

This is a contrast to the photograph above of several young men leaving the house boat at Green Point, taken in 1900 (Fig. 91). Unlike the tightly framed photograph of the three women by the river, this photograph of men leaving the boat was taken in full view of spectators. The image suggests a less-controlled use of a recreational place, where subjects can claim their privileges of leisure. Far from being a place of unbridled pleasure, the boating house appears to also be a place when one polices one's conduct. The men leave the house boat in a controlled manner, walking carefully along the landing stage that leads to dry land. Civilian control and the utilisation of space are noticeable again in the photographs of spectators of bandstands by the beaches. Denfield wrote that East London once had three bandstands where crowds would mingle while being entertained by music:

The most popular bandstand of all was that in the Marine Park; an octagonal affair, it was erected before the Christmas Holidays in 1906, with band performances given twice daily by two Military Bands especially engaged for that purposes. The Marine Park and its bandstands were brilliantly and tastefully illuminated, and every now and then the powerful searchlights from visiting naval craft would enhance the multi-coloured fairy-like scene<sup>609</sup>.



Fig. 92

One photograph in the chapter, taken in 1907, shows a bandstand in Marine Park with a

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<sup>609</sup> Ibid p 100.

crowd of spectators in their best dress (Fig. 92). Others picnic on the grass lazily covered in umbrellas, while military flags roam above them. Military displays and leisure converge in one frame, suggesting this space was too, like the bathing pools or beaches, a place of policing. The photograph expresses Taussig's regard of the beach as "the ultimate fantasy space where nature and carnival blend as prehistory in the dialectical image of modernity"<sup>610</sup>.

While photographs of the beach provided a glimpse into the social relations that characterised East London at this period, images and narratives around the harbour dominated the book. Construction work around the harbour emerges as the single most dominant motif in the historical account. One example of harbour development was the construction of the pontoon, which connected the different sides of the Buffalo River. Far from being an organic development, the construction of such a site was linked to the expansion and increasing control of the colony over the city by enabling traffic in that following the building of more roads between East London and King William's Town, the laying of East Bank and the arrival of the British German Legions in 1857 "a more permanent means of communication between the town sides of the river had to be established"<sup>611</sup>.

This sense of expansion can be discerned in the photograph of a scene of the Buffalo Harbour in 1900 where the pontoon is being pulled across<sup>612</sup>. It is a panoramic view that suggests spatiality (Fig. 93). Nevertheless, Denfield wrote that the Pontoon served East London only temporarily until a bridge was built in 1907. The chapter on the development of the patent slip again attests to the emphasis on harbour development<sup>613</sup>. The first photograph taken of its construction in 1896 draws attention to the actual concrete and physicality of the land and machinery (Fig. 94). I am reminded of Denfield's own effort of a gradual 'construction' of history through the archival process of compiling this book, a process that involved manipulating the materiality of photographs.

The second photograph was taken in 1897 at the official opening of the Victorian Slip by Sir Alfred Milner. It is a contrast to the previous showing officials sitting demurely (Fig. 95). The third photograph at the bottom shows a dredger being drawn up the slipway, indicating a completion of a project at the opening of the slip (Fig. 96). Again the order of the photographs mimics Denfield's own effort of archival research, collecting textual and

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<sup>610</sup> Taussig, 'The beach', p 258.

<sup>611</sup> Denfield, *Pioneer Port*, p 20.

<sup>612</sup> Ibid p 21.

<sup>613</sup> Ibid p 91.

photographic data about East London's past, and cleaning and restoring and collecting negatives about the past.



Fig. 93

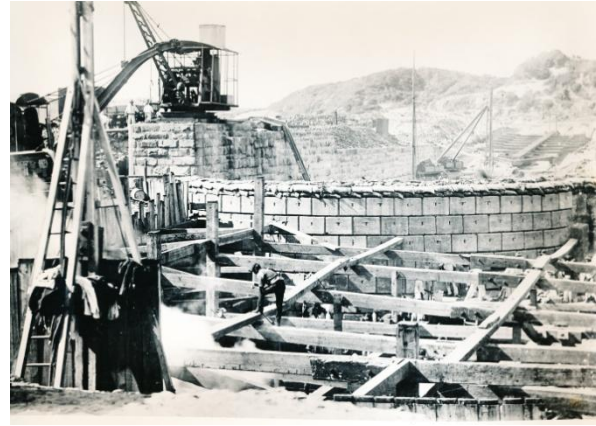


Fig. 94



Fig. 95



Fig. 96

Apart from the harbour, the book also contained several stories of shipping disasters. One example is the 'paraffin wreck' of 1908 that resulted from a sinking ship that had been carrying a cargo of 40 000 cases of paraffin. Hundreds of cases of tins of paraffin from the ship piled up on shore, turning the sea into a mass of glistening tins<sup>614</sup>. However, the most memorable shipping disaster by Denfield's estimates was that of the *Orient*. The steel ship came to grief in 1907 while being towed into the river by a tug. The hawser parted while the *Orient* drifted onto the part of the beach after which it was named while carrying a cargo of wheat:

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<sup>614</sup> Ibid p 96.

The following morning 400 tons of cargos were jettisoned by gangs of Natives ripping the sacks of what open and throwing them overboard. She was moved 100 ft but grounded again. The Rocket Brigade appeared on the scene, and at 10.20 pm the first man was ‘dragged ashore literally through water’ by the breeches buoy; seven others followed but the Captain and a dozen of the crew remained aboard...Salvage operation by means of aerial gear was slow at first, but speeded up when cables with running pulley blocks were employed and the cargo conveyed ashore by means of a donkey engine. A temporary railway line was laid from the sliding to the beach<sup>615</sup>.

The wreck drew further attention to East Londoners in that a large amount of wheat remained and fermented in the holds, giving off an offensive smell to such an extent that the *Dispatch* appealed to the town Council to intervene, regarding it as a health matter of the community. The shipwreck accounts point to another emergent theme underpinning the account of East London’s past: struggle and tragedy. Rather than create nostalgic memoirs, in both the published book and in his Saga series, Denfield drew attention to the ways in which tragedy and struggle characterised the town’s past. Sadness emerged as a subtext resulting in some cases from unavoidable natural disasters and in other cases as a result of irrational decisions made by various individuals. Some examples are the great fires that broke out in 1902.

The chapter on the East London’s first school also points out the ways in which conflict characterised this early period. Denfield wrote that the Panmure Public School was housed in premises of the Lutheran Church but the lease expired in 1878. The Church was prepared to renew the lease on the basis that the School Committee would purchase the property. However, since pieces of land had already been assented by the government for school purposes, and a provisional site for the new school had been selected, the guarantors were not prepared to consider the purchase:

The Rev. Mr H. Muller, headmaster of the Panmure Public School, found himself in an invidious position owing to his connection with the Lutheran Church, and was compelled to decline the proffered post of the headmaster. As a result East London’s ‘First-Class Udenominational School’ was without premises and without teachers while Mr Fuller set up his own Panmure Grammar School in the Lutheran Church building<sup>616</sup>.

For several months school children went on a forced holiday until April of 1879 when temporary accommodation was arranged. In its place the new public school, College Street School, was built. As can be seen, in *Pioneer Port* Denfield narrated the context of each photograph in relation to the city’s establishment. Many of these were stories of destruction,

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<sup>615</sup> Ibid p 30.

<sup>616</sup> Ibid p 54.



loss and tragedy as shown in photographs of shipwrecks, burnt buildings, etc. The book drew an image of an urban past characterised by catastrophe and disorder, from which a more 'functional' municipality emerged. It constructed the past to have been dangerous and arguably, the publication of the book signalled a placement of borders around the terrors of the past in a manner comparable to Denfield's attempt to construct a coherent narrative from what he regarded as invalid histories about East London.

With the emphasis on shipping disasters, the book reconfigured the coast as a frontier characterised by struggle. This was reinforced by the representations of such spaces as largely masculine spaces where men both suffered and salvaged the city. Such a project, arguably, implicitly alluded towards a conquest of space in a context when (as we have seen) space was being contested along racial and class lines. Sadness after all, feeds into narratives of triumph given that after those various disasters order was eventually established and by the 1960s those sites had already been formed as integral parts of the city's governance.

*Pioneer Port* received impressive reviews in the media immediately after its publication, no doubt partly due to Timmin's own zealous and unwavering enthusiasm for the book. The *Daily Dispatch* described it as "a splendid piece of work" in that "years of painstaking research have gone into its creation and the result is a literary gem that will surely have its place on the top shelf of Africana"<sup>617</sup>. The newspaper also praised Denfield's personal touch stating "Dr Denfield imparts his information with a dry sense of humour and supports his statements with quotations from early newspapers in the quaint phraseology of the time"<sup>618</sup>. The *Diamond Field Advertiser*, which described the book as a welcome addition to pictorial Africana, compared the work to Arthur Elliot's collection of South African scenes housed in the Cape Archives stating "what Elliot did for the Western Province and Cape Town, Denfield has now done for East London" and that "as the years go by Denfield's book...will increase in value"<sup>619</sup>. Similarly *The Daily Representative* described Denfield as "a John Aubrey into the craft [of photography]. He loves to turn bygone prints and fit them into a more permanent position"<sup>620</sup>.

The women's lifestyle magazine *Femina* described it as "a real piece of Africana, in the sense of that much abused work that it breathes the spirit of progress, at not a very heady pace, of

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<sup>617</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 2 June 1965.

<sup>618</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>619</sup> *The Diamond Field Advertiser*, 22 June 1965.

<sup>620</sup> *The Daily Representative*, 17 July 1965.

one of our foremost cities during a period of its history which has hitherto gone unrecorded”<sup>621</sup>. The *Sunday Tribune* praised it for its pictorial worth stating its value lay “in the many rare and exceptionally good photographs which in themselves, offer a pictorial history of that charming port city” and “which reveal the early history of the port city in a manner no less eloquent than words”<sup>622</sup>. Ironically Denfield had originally intended to produce a lengthier text-based historiography where the images would simply serve as illustrations<sup>623</sup>. The *Cape Times*, however, critiqued the emphasis on buildings, appealing for a greater concentration on people instead. The reviewer, a self-proclaiming ex-patriate of East London who had her own collection of photographs of the town argued:

Joseph Denfield has not caught the spirit because he has concentrated on buildings, rather than on people. The first Post Office, convent, hotel, etc. of a frontier town are unlikely to be markedly different from that of any other frontier town. Thus the overall impression left by this book, albeit the author has put it together with the best possible intention, is one of ramshackle wood and iron buildings on sandy hills overlooking a dreary port<sup>624</sup>.

Unsurprisingly, Timmins was quick to dismiss the stringent criticism, regarding it as an expression of an ambitious reviewer who wants to appear clever<sup>625</sup>. Nevertheless, the review usefully highlighted the exceptionalism of the town implicit in the book by implying that the development of the city as accounted for in the book was a mirror of a much larger urban development project at the turn of the century. While it may have not been intended necessarily, the critique was a stark reminder of the embeddedness of the port city to a larger colonial project along the Cape coast.

Almost inevitably, the media waxed lyrical about Denfield’s laborious effort in reconstructing a visual and textual history. The discourses of hunting and salvaging emerged. *Pretoria News* recalled the now familiar tale of Denfield’s accidental find of glass negatives while searching for information on old Border photographers. It wrote of his “undeniable zeal” in “rescuing old photographs of East London from all over South Africa” as well as the amount of time and skill devoted to “getting something recognisable and printable from an old negative”<sup>626</sup>. The *Diamond Field Advertiser* praised him for his “clear style and his gathering of little known facts” and pointed out that the various sites under study “will mean

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<sup>621</sup> *Femina*, July 1965.

<sup>622</sup> *The Sunday Tribune*, 11 July 1965.

<sup>623</sup> DC, Denfield, ‘Toast at Pioneer Port book launch’, 17 June 1965.

<sup>624</sup> *The Cape Times Magazine*, 25 July 1965.

<sup>625</sup> DC, H. Timmins, ‘Letter to Denfield’, 22 July 1965.

<sup>626</sup> *Pretoria News*, July 1965.

more to thousands of people as a result of the pictures saved from destruction by Denfield”<sup>627</sup>. It is instructive to compare this heroic configuration of Denfield with figures he had written about such as harbour master George Walker in his *Saga* series, and the heroic deeds of those involved in shipwrecks in *Pioneer Port*.

Seemingly, the book was heralded in the media as a model for fellow intellectuals in reconstructing similar histories of other towns. The *Natal Witness* wrote that “what Joseph Denfield has done for his home front, some should do for Pietermaritzburg”<sup>628</sup>. The same framework had been taken up by Dr Van Der Riet, librarian of Rhodes University, who compiled photographs of early Grahamstown in the same period. In 1966, an exhibition was held in the East London Museum, amongst other places, which Denfield was asked to open<sup>629</sup>. Like Denfield, Van der Riet exhibited photographs from around 1860, which too had to be reworked chemically with the help of photographer G.F. Walters of the Photographic Laboratory of the University. Moreover, Van der Riet had also gathered some photographs from families in Grahamstown.

Despite the positive reviews, however, the book did not fare too well in sales. By June 1965, Timmins indicated that while it remained popular in East London, it made little impact outside the city<sup>630</sup>. By December, Timmins described the book as “being practically dead” with over 600 copies still in stock<sup>631</sup>. Nevertheless, the poor sales did little to waiver the importance attached to the photographs in the East London Museum. If anything, following the publication of *Pioneer Port*, Denfield’s status was made concrete in the subsequent construction of a permanent gallery of the photographs.

### **A permanent exhibition**

As early as 1962 when Denfield first exhibited the images of old East London in the Museum, there were already talks of reserving a special area for a permanent exhibition in the newly extended gallery. Denfield had also appealed to the chairman of the Museum Board to whom he proposed a very particular vision for the exhibition:

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<sup>627</sup> *The Diamond Advertiser*, 22 June 1965.

<sup>628</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 1 December 1965.

<sup>629</sup> *Evening Post*, 21 February 1966. It is not clear, however, to what extent Der Riet’s project had resulted from Denfield’s influence.

<sup>630</sup> DC, H. Timmins, Letter to Denfield, 22 June 1965.

<sup>631</sup> DC, Timmins, Letter to Denfield, 8 December 1965.

The final exhibition as I have indicated before should consist not only of photographs alone, but as I envisage it, should be augmented by various documents, maps, pamphlets, hand bills in fact by anything that helps to tell the story of East London in a way the ordinary man on the street can appreciate. This is a mammoth task. The captions, besides being interesting, must be accurate. Not only does this apply to the photographs but to all the associated material. And for this I need help and guidance...For all this I suggest that there be formed a small liaison fact finding committee. I'm going to suggest the following: first of all Miss Courtney-Latimer who is the guardian of all our historic treasures and is an excellent planner and also I need two others by virtue of their specialised knowledge. Your good self Mr Chairman and our worthy friend here Mr Driffield<sup>632</sup>.

As I pointed out in an earlier chapter, the preoccupation with objects can be linked to the context of the museum's shift into a cultural history museum in the 1960 whereby artefacts became the basis through which the past was constituted. Linked to such was also the commitment to ascertaining facts about 'what happened'. Thus History was configured through a largely empiricist lens. Denfield's insistence on a fact finding committee was unsurprising that since publicising the said images, Denfield had been adamant about legitimising them as historical data. Given the museum's institutional role as authority on historical knowledge, the installation of the photographs permanently would doubtless establish Denfield's intellectual standing.

It also suggested a growing regard of archiving on Denfield's part. Arguably, the move from a temporary to a permanent exhibition suggested a shift in the regard of the evidential power afforded to photographs to one afforded to the establishment of permanent knowledge structures. Given the ideological position of the museum in an economy of historical knowledge, the permanent exhibition situated there would perhaps be more effective as a bearer of knowledge than the book. In fact, as early as 1963 Denfield had suggested the construction of an archive of the data he had gathered from the Cape Archives on microfilm as part of the development of the then-proposed new East London library<sup>633</sup>. In other words, despite operating 'independently' outside academia, Denfield had mapped the move of the historian in virtually step, with the final being the construction of a body of knowledge that resisted questioning.

The permanent gallery of photographs as archive along with other historical objects would be effective as both representations of the real and as *the real*. In other words, it was their materiality that endowed them with an evidential aura. It is perhaps also partly in this light that one can understand Denfield's inclination to collect historical material for other

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<sup>632</sup> DC, Denfield, Letter to G.G. Smith, n.d.

<sup>633</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 29 November 1963.

institutions. In 1967, for example, he gave as a gift to the Johannesburg library an early theatre programme based on a play that had taken place from the turn of the century in Johannesburg. Denfield had had come across it in his archival work. In 1965 he gave documents to the East London Rifle Club that related to its establishment. More so than content inscribed, the materiality of photographs and other historical objects were tangible, indicating an undeniable presence. It was thus not enough to install a gallery of images but this had to be supplemented by other objects of the past.

The importance attached to materiality is reminiscent of the discourse of salvage anthropology that had informed his studies of pagan tribes. For Denfield the pagan tribes of the Nigerian plateau represented the 'real' which he saw as slowly disappearing from the western world. Capturing them would thus mean capturing a *presence* that too was under threat. His exhibition career in salons had afforded him the opportunity to experiment with imagined idealised scenarios in Basutoland, but these ultimately remained largely figments of his own imagination and thus carried little evidential power. After all, once a scene was complete that very materiality which Denfield had organised, including various props, would be dismantled. As a permanent exhibition, the photographs would thus carry a weightier materiality than the earlier *Early Days* exhibition.

By 1966, constructions of the permanent gallery at the Museum were underway. This was to be the final resting place of the images which had traversed different spaces. Denfield's commitment to not only detail but the acknowledgement of his own efforts is notable in his grievance to the Chairman regarding the wording of acknowledgement. The wording that appeared originally on the notice wall of the Gallery was 'The donor would like to express his sincere gratitude to the East London Museum for its substantial material and financial assistance and kind co-operation'. Denfield, however, was not content, arguing:

My collection has entailed during the many years of compilation much expense in special journeys, purchase of negatives, cameras and photographs, extra material for copying and also items from Africana dealers. All this besides the valuable time spend in this tremendous undertaking has resulted in great personal expense. Its reward being that the collection has been given my name (sic.). I estimate the value of the present collection as it stands to be in the regions of R4, 000. The original amended acknowledgement, 'material assistance and kind co-operation' I feel most correctly and adequately covers the situation. The present wording on the notice is incorrect and misleading and conveys to the public that I have been given personal financial and substantial material assistance and I would like to suggest that the acknowledgement be altered to read as follows 'The donor would

like to express his sincere gratitude to the East London Museum for its kind material assistance and co-operation<sup>634</sup>.

Despite framing the collection as an East London- thus collective- project, Denfield was insistent on declaring his independence from the Museum. This suggests he was more fully anchored in the role of the historian with an authoritative voice who did not want to be perceived as merely a product of the Museum but more significantly as a contributor who produced original knowledge. The collection was officially opened on the 5<sup>th</sup> of January 1967. The gallery was to be named the Joseph Denfield Hall, a space that had been kept vacant for Denfield while the Museum was being extended<sup>635</sup>. Van der Riet, whose collection Denfield opened the year before, opened the Denfield Collection to a crowd of largely senior visitors<sup>636</sup>. Van Der Riet described it as ‘a revelation’ advocating for “the great need for the preservation of historic photographs of all time”<sup>637</sup> (Fig. 97). Apart from the photographs, the gallery also included, as Denfield desired, old maps, programmes and menus, including a menu from the ship *Lucy*, when it docked East London in 1886<sup>638</sup>. These were to form part of the East London Africana. Denfield also included vintage cameras he collected to be part of the gallery much as he had done in the 1962 *Early Days* exhibition of the photographs.



Fig. 97



Fig. 98

Amongst the guests was Leo Barnes, a former photographer who had taken some of the photographs exhibited<sup>639</sup>. Present at the opening was also Mrs Curry, an elderly guest who

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<sup>634</sup> DC, Denfield, Letter to G. Smith, 19 December 1966.

<sup>635</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 5 January 1967.

<sup>636</sup> *East London Times*, 6 January 1967.

<sup>637</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>638</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 5 January 1967.

<sup>639</sup> *Evening Post*, 14 January 1967.

was included in a *Daily Dispatch* report looking at a photograph of the opening of the town hall (Fig. 98). This is an event she actually attended in 1899<sup>640</sup>. The foundation stone was laid for the town hall in 1897 by David Rees, then in his 7<sup>th</sup> year as Mayor. Given that it was a jubilee year for the town it was decided to commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> year of Her Majesty's reign by completing the 'Victoria Tower' of the town hall and placing a clock there<sup>641</sup>. Thus Curry had witnessed significant changes and development of the town in her lifetime and had memories that were now reconfigured as visual. Barnes and Curry's presence in the event signalled an extension of the materiality of the photographs having both lived through the periods depicted and in the reconstruction of the past through the images.

Inevitably, since the installation of the permanent gallery more than 40 years ago, the gallery space has transformed. Firstly, the collection is no longer congregated in a particular space. Photographs relating to shipping and the harbour, for example, have been placed in a gallery that focuses exclusively on the ocean. Secondly, the various artefacts that were to be part of the permanent exhibition are no longer on display. However, the photographs remain mounted on glass frames. Thirdly, the gallery has included various other permanent exhibitions over the years, including a spacious ethnology section. However, these images from the collection have since re-appeared in other spaces in the city. Beyond the museum, the extent to which the images have become *the* canonical archive representing the town's past is notable in other public spaces. One can purchase a mounted photograph of an East London scene from the collection from *Rob Pollock's* photo studio, a prominent camera shop in the city. Postcards of the same images are also available. Interestingly, neither the early photographers nor Denfield's name necessarily appear in the photographs, thus indirectly making the owner of the camera shop the 'hereditary' custodian of the images, much like Denfield had done in the Museum. The invisibility of the photographer, it can be argued, helps to further endow the images with universality. Displaced both from private albums and the private subjective gaze of the photographer, they exist with a timeless presence, a past that can be continually re-framed, re-photographed.

In their journey through various stops, part of the fate of the East London photographs has been their alteration in form, that is, chemical treatments, re-photographing, enlargement, etc. Their most recent alteration has been in their digitisation. This is the work of Keith Tankard, an East London-based historian and member of the Border Historical Society. A former

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<sup>640</sup> Ibid.

<sup>641</sup> Denfield, *Pioneer Port*, p 12.

university lecturer and school teacher, Tankard created his history-based website [knowledge4africa.com](http://knowledge4africa.com) at the turn of the twenty first century. This is a site designed with school learners in mind. While it includes various aspects of ‘world history’, it focuses primarily on East London history. Interestingly, its choice in subject matter reads almost like a digital transcription of *Pioneer Port* and the *Coelancanth*, with particular emphasis on the sea, harbour, settlers, Kennaway Girls, etc. Part of the distinction of the site is its use of lavish illustrations of old East London which the creator sourced from the East London Museum. These are the now-familiar images exhibited in the Museum from the Denfield Collection. The homepage of the East London webpage which focuses provides links on East London history, for example, contains an image of the Eastern Beach taken in 1907, the same image Denfield included in *Pioneer Port* to illustrate camptown<sup>642</sup>.

However, the camptown now appears in colour, displaying a myriad of white tents, a blue sky, and green grass. It is an idyllic image of a weekend outing on a sunny day<sup>643</sup>. Another coloured photograph of Orient Beach shows holidaymakers with clothes in an array of colours.<sup>644</sup> Colour treatments are not limited to the beach however. Oxford Street between the 1857 and 1926 is brought to life in its interpretive representations in colour. One views a red tram coming along the gravel road, while a pedestrian crosses in a brown jacket, white slacks and brown hat<sup>645</sup>. East London’s first beachfront hotel, the Beach Hotel, has been given a coat of white paint and a red roof<sup>646</sup>, complementing the Town Hall, with its red and white outside walls<sup>647</sup>.

The creative license exercised by the site creator in his use of images is likely due to the imagined readership of young learners. The use of colour on historical images is partly a contradiction to their conventional black and white reproduction in that the latter form often reinforces the notion of pastness. The use of colour herein perhaps is to conjoin the past and present powerfully. Learners thus view the images of families by the seaside and imagine themselves going through the same rituals. More importantly, however, this temporal conjunction also hints at epistemological continuity. It is reminiscent of the kinds of historiographies that have been generated by the likes of Mark Taylor in the later 1940s and reinforced by the Border Historical Society in the 1960s. This historiography continues in the

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<sup>642</sup> See for example <http://knowledge4africa.com/east-london/index.html>

<sup>643</sup> <http://www.eastlondon-labyrinth.com/homepage/9-useful-page.jsp>

<sup>644</sup> <http://www.eastlondon-labyrinth.com/gallery/orient-beach.jsp>

<sup>645</sup> <http://www.eastlondon-labyrinth.com/gallery/oxford-street-01.jsp>

<sup>646</sup> <http://www.eastlondon-labyrinth.com/gallery/beach-hotel.jsp>

<sup>647</sup> <http://www.eastlondon-labyrinth.com/gallery/buildings.jsp>



post-apartheid present, much like the images that continue to circulate in different contexts, but in an ontologically similar manner. Moreover, while the knowledge4africa site, for example, is highly textual, containing descriptions of various sites and events, the reconstruction of the images in colour suggests too, the importance attached to the visual in narrating the past.

It is also important to note that Tankard's website and its images have, in turn, been reconstituted as 'true sources' for East London history. For example, an East London tourism website, [www.eastlondon.org.za](http://www.eastlondon.org.za) provided a link to Tankard's website for anyone looking for information on East London history. Moreover, the Cory Library of Rhodes University also produced an article in 2009 about the website which was described as an important source<sup>648</sup>. Thus in a manner reminiscent of Denfield's reputation in the 1960s, Tankard has now become the reference point about East London's past.

## **Conclusion**

Parallel to Denfield's anchoring as South African subject was his own formation into a historian whose efforts in reconstructing an East London past through images reflects the practice of historians in the academy. Denfield began an investigation into the history of Border photographers which led him to a few photographs that were part of people's personal collections. Yet from such a 'private' collection he produced a public history that resisted critique or questioning. Ultimately in the publication of *Pioneer Port* and the exhibition of the images in the Museum Denfield's project in his framework was a *presentation* rather than *representation* of history. Denfield saw himself as 'speaking for' the past in a sense through retrieving a past 'lodged' in the photographs. He reconstituted the 'ordinary' in the image and municipal archive into an 'event' to which he could ascribe historicity. Through his committed engagement with the photographs and in archival investigation, he attempted to situate himself inside those events in order to retrieve them. Thus the act of cleaning and restoring was more than a metaphor for the construction of history but became a performance of History, expressing the epistemologies and ontology of empiricist History.

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<sup>648</sup> See <http://www.ru.ac.za/corylibrary/latestnews/name.37347,en.html>

## Chapter 7: *Secure the Shadow*

Don't forget to get yourself a pocket magnifying glass and look through all old photographs to see whether you can identify the name of a photographer. Most albums of street scenes have such a name or studio somewhere among them, and they can be copied. We need portraits of photographers and also pictures of their studios. Only by searching with a magnifying glass can you achieve this<sup>649</sup>.

### Introduction

The period between 1962 and 1967 was a highly industrious one for Denfield. While he delved deeply into the history of East London at this point, parallel to this project was an equally demanding investigation into the history of early photographic practice in the Cape. The results were publications of a few articles in the *Quarterly Bulletin* of the South African Library and *Africana Notes and Queries*, which later expanded into the second book he published and co-authored with Marjorie Bull. More so than any texts he had published, this research marked a distinct intellectual moment: a complete transition into textual history. Even though an investigation into the history of photography preceded the reconstruction of a photographic history of East London, I argue in this chapter that his authorial voice was most concretised when he revisited the investigation following the various projects on the glass negatives

### An investigation into early photographers

Towards the end of his exhibiting career in the later 1950s, Denfield expressed an interest in delving into the history of photographic practice in the country. His initial investigation was focused on photographers from the Border, through which he encountered the glass negatives as noted previously. It is not clear why he expanded his research to include other parts of the country. Seemingly, his research was to include the Eastern and Western Provinces, Natal and Basutoland<sup>650</sup>, although his published results in the end focused on the Eastern and Western Provinces only. Denfield's interest in the 'foundations' of the craft in the country was not unique. In the early 1960s Bensusan was in the process of establishing the Bensusan Museum of Photography, a small institution that would house any dated material relating to

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<sup>649</sup> DC, Denfield, Letter to Marjorie Bull, 26 July 1964.

<sup>650</sup> Denfield requested information on old photographers from the Lesotho Evangelical Society in 1966 but was unsuccessful. Given this date it is also possible that including Lesotho was an afterthought following the initial Cape investigation.

photographic practice. As early as 1935, Bensusan began collecting material for a would-be collection. By 1960, the Bensusan Museum- the locus of the Photographic Foundation of South Africa- was in operation in Houghton Ridge in Bensusan's home basement<sup>651</sup>. Echoing Denfield's own methodology Bensusan argued for the need of such an institution stating that "In farm houses, in town houses, all over the platteland, yellowing among old, old albums in the dorps and the cities, there must be a wealth of old material". He requested specifically for "Old cameras, old magic lanterns, old prints and portraits, old stereoscopes and their pictures- anything photographic in fact" with the promises that donors will be "permanently acknowledged by the foundation"<sup>652</sup>.

By 1963 the museum consisted of archives with about 5000 press cuttings and 500 photographs, photographic equipment such as old cameras, lenses, shutters and lanterns and approximately 1200 volumes of textbooks, manuals and albums<sup>653</sup>. In addition to collecting objects, Bensusan was also in the process of collecting information on 19<sup>th</sup> century photographers who practiced in South Africa, much like Denfield<sup>654</sup>. In 1965, his book *Silver Images* was published, a product of Howard Timmins. The 150-page book which contains images and texts focused on the role played by photography in several moments of South Africa's history, such as the early days of diamond diggings soon after their discovery, Charles Livingstone's photographic documentation in David Livingstone's explorations and travels and the use of balloon photography by the intelligence during the 'Anglo-Boer' war in 1899<sup>655</sup>. Although Kimberly and the Northern Cape featured prominently in the book, the book was not a treatise on a particular region, and thus differed from Denfield's project in this regard.

Bensusan's and Denfield's career trajectories are striking in their similarities. They had both gained prominence as exhibitors in salons at approximately the same period, both earning fellowships at the Royal Photographic Society. Moreover, both deviated from exhibiting and concentrated, again at approximately the same time, on the history of the practice in the country. These similarities are possibly coincidental but they also hint at a seemingly inevitable trajectory following the institutionalised photography of salons and camera clubs.

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<sup>651</sup> *The Star*, 25 July 1963. Incidentally, the Museum has since moved to take up residence on the top floor of Museum Africa in Johannesburg, thus becoming part of this institution.

<sup>652</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>653</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>654</sup> DC, Newsletter: Report on Activities in 1964, The Photographic Foundation of South Africa, 12 January 1965.

<sup>655</sup> *Diamond Fields Advertiser*, 26 April 1966.

Both Bensusan's and Denfield's investigations centred on 'firsts' or foundationalism. They both hinted at a scramble for unquestionable truth and authenticity in the form of material objects and archival facts. For example, in the introductory notes to the first published account of Cape photography Denfield and Bull claimed that "This history is a complete authoritative survey of Cape photography from its beginnings to the end of 1860, the year in which daguerreotype ceased in the Cape. It is based on primary sources of references only". Noting the significance of grounding their account in facts they argued:

Prior to this survey only 10 early photographic establishments in the Cape had been recorded, of which 4-5 practised the Daguerrean art; the existence of Talbotypes (paper negative process) had not yet been proved, and photography on glass, leather, ceramic ware, etc was unknown in South Africa. This survey has brought to light no fewer than 47 recognised photographic establishments of which approximately 26 practiced daguerreotypes at one time or another...Many photographers who have been recorded as starting their careers in the 70s and 80s have now been shown to have begun photography as daguerreotypists in the 50s<sup>656</sup>.

Concerns about origin, authenticity and revision converged in the investigation. Much as had been the case in his search for East London's past, the emphasis was on revision and a search for an irrefutable truth. Again this entailed methodologically reconfiguring the past in terms of a series of discrete events which in this case were photographic 'firsts'. The authors noted for example that "the first general photographic exhibitions have been placed on record, the first publications and photographic contributions have been determined and the careers of the photographer from, and some before, their first announcements have been traced"<sup>657</sup>.

Denfield had been critical of already existing recorded histories of photography, describing them as "meagre and none too accurate" and arguing for a need for "a more authoritative and comprehensive source of reference"<sup>658</sup>.

The shift from practising as a photographer to writing about photography did not only mark a shift towards the intellectualisation of the practice but also establishing one's authoritative voice, endowing one with the power to articulate and exert control over the discipline. Denfield had of course been doing so since his ethnographic work on pagan tribes. His photographs were accompanied by thickly described ethnographic texts. Similarly, while he displayed his images of Basutoland in salons as works of his craftsmanship, he was simultaneously using them as a basis for theorising about Native photography as a distinct genre. While his pagan studies typified power differentials that have characterised

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<sup>656</sup> M. Bull, M. & J. Denfield, 'The History of Early Cape Photography', draft manuscript, 1964.

<sup>657</sup> Ibid.

<sup>658</sup> DC, Denfield, Letter to A.M Robinson, 13 June 1964.

‘colonialist’ photography, his research on the history of photography in the Cape also hinted at the deployment of colonial discourse. As I will later demonstrate, it took for granted the notion of photographic development in the Cape based on the ‘pioneering’ work of a select few (white and largely European) practitioners.

It is unclear why Denfield decided to collaborate with Marjorie Bull in his investigation. A most likely explanation is that Bull was responsible for photographic collections at the South African library until 1966 where part of her responsibilities involved preserving and caring for early photographs housed in the Africana department of the Library. Possibly, they had become acquainted during his earlier archival research into East London history at the Library. It is also probable that Denfield was aware of Bull’s strategic placement not only in the SA library but in Cape Town given the amount of archival research that would be required for the project. Nevertheless, by 1961 Denfield had already started his enquiry.

The South African Library and Cape Archives became the primary sources once again for the research. It is tempting to overlook the taken-for-granted neutrality of these two institutions as sources of knowledge. However, in his study on the intellectual underpinnings in the formation of white South African identity from the nineteenth century onwards, Dubow draws attention to the establishment and functioning of the South African Library as one of the literary and scientific institutions (including the Botanical Gardens and National Museum) that became enmeshed in the process of national self-understanding. Opened to the public in 1822, Dubow describes the South African Library as a bastion of Anglophone cultural and intellectual influence<sup>659</sup>:

Its status was underlined by the tradition, beginning in 1840, of an annual public address to Library subscribers which helped to cement links between members of the intellectual, social and political elites. The annual address was typically delivered by the governor or a leading political personage. Speeches were given prominent attention in the local press and the event itself formed part of Cape Town’s social calendar. By convention, the Library address was on occasion to reflect on matters relating to the Colony’s intellectual, cultural and educational progress; a recurring theme was the utilitarian role of knowledge in fostering social advancement, moral instruction and mental improvement<sup>660</sup>.

According to Dubow arguments about the purpose and function of the Library became matters of long-running debate and are “revealing of different views about the desirable

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<sup>659</sup> S. Dubow, *A commonwealth of knowledge: Science, Sensibility and White South 1820-2000* (Oxford University Press: New York, 2006), p 47.

<sup>660</sup> Ibid.

constitution of colonial society”<sup>661</sup>. Debates would be centred on whether it should be a lending institution or merely a resource of reference, whether it should keep fiction or just ‘serious’ literature, whether it should serve people of Cape Town or become a national institution, etc. For Dubow the micro-politics of readings are suggestive of how wider political debates and discussions about the composition of colonial society were played out within the institutional framework of the Library<sup>662</sup>.

Bull and Denfield consulted a myriad of Cape newspapers from 1840 onwards in the South African Library. Here they paid attention to photographers’ own announcements and advertisements as well as editorial and newspaper comments. From advertisements they were able to establish the existence of photographic establishment in different towns, tracing the types of photography offered in different periods and different regions<sup>663</sup>. The authors noted the significance of the *Cape Monthly Magazine* amongst the media sources they consulted in that it was the first journal to use photographic illustrations under new editorship in 1859. It announced that from January that year a Portrait Gallery would be featured accompanied by original pasted photographs by Frederick York<sup>664</sup>. They argue for the importance of such a move in concretising photography as a craft publically.

In Bull and Denfield’s early accounts, the reader was introduced to York as a significant figure in developing photography in the Cape. He was proclaimed to be the first English daguerreotypist to have come to South Africa in 1855. In his advertisements he described himself as photographic artist, chemist and medical electrician, giving notice of practising the collodian, paper and daguerreotype processes. He soon dropped the paper process from his practise given the lack of demand. Along with Walter from Rio who opened his Daguerrean Rooms in 1856, he introduced stereoscopic portraiture creating rivalry and competition between the two artists<sup>665</sup>.

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<sup>661</sup> Ibid p 48.

<sup>662</sup> Ibid p 52.

<sup>663</sup> The list of newspapers they consulted includes *Albert Times and Aliwal North Advertiser; Anglo African; Burghersdorp Gazette; Cape Argus; Cape Chronicle; Cape Daily Telegraph; Cape Frontier Times; Cape Mercantile Advertiser; Cape Monitor; Cape of Good Hope Examiner; Cape of Good Hope Exchange Gazette; Cape Town Mail; Cradock Register; Eastern Province Herald; Fort Beaufort Advocate; Graaf Reinet Herald; Grahamstown Journal; King William’s Town Gazette; Overberg Courant; Port Elizabeth Mercury; Queenstown Free Press; Sam Sly’s African Journal’ Shopkeeper’s and Tradesment’s Journal; South African Commerical Advertiser; The Colonist; Verzamelaar; Zuid-Afrikaan.*

<sup>664</sup> Bull & Denfield, ‘The history of early Cape photography’, p 10.

<sup>665</sup> Ibid p 8.

The *Cape Monthly Magazine* is also historically significant for being the first magazine to make use of chromo-lithographic techniques in the country in 1874<sup>666</sup>. According to Dubow these were Bushman paintings copied in red, black and bluff, a product of native administrator and farmer Joseph Orpen who revealed the existence of the paintings in the Maluti Mountains near Wodehouse<sup>667</sup>. In his study of the role of the *Cape Monthly Magazine* in the intellectual settler culture of the Cape in the nineteenth century, Dubow relates Orpen's find to the growth of philology in this period:

The foremost representative of the philological tradition in South Africa was the German immigrant and scholar Wilhelm Bleek, who frequently contributed articles to the *Cape Monthly* on linguistic and ethnological topics. With his rigorous training in the methods of comparative philology, his extensive connections with the German and European scholarly establishment, and his important position as the custodian of Governor Grey's literary legacy at the South African Library, Bleek enjoyed an unrivalled status at the Cape in the second half of the nineteenth century<sup>668</sup>.

Dubow thus notes that Bleek immediately recognised the significance of Orpen's drawings arguing that they represented "no mere daubing figures for idle pastime but were instead a truly artistic indicator of the conception of idea which most deeply moved the Bushman mind, and filled in it with religious feeling"<sup>669</sup>. Bleek's comments are but a small glimpse into the kind of conversations that characterised the *Monthly*. In the study in which he pays attention to seven key themes of these conversations namely, aesthetic visions of the Cape, perceptions of the interior land, botanical science, earth history and evolutionism, human antiquity, philology and rock art matters of race regarding blacks and the Boers, Dubow describes the *Monthly* to have been at the very centre of the interlocking networks of institutions that contributed to a sense of colonial achievement and belonging, providing through a series of letters, comments and articles, an outlet for the dissemination of new ideas and original research and thus bringing to public attention many pioneering studies of Africa and its people. Dubow reveals the layered and often times contradictory ideas that would circulate amongst readers in the form of colloquy, thereby developing a 'colonial conversation'<sup>670</sup>. Thus as Bull and Denfield perused through the old pages of the *Monthly* for clues into photography's past, the very foundations of the 'objective' and 'authoritative' narratives they generated were intertwined with the establishment of a colonial culture in the Cape.

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<sup>666</sup>Dubow, 'A commonwealth of knowledge', p 109.

<sup>667</sup> Ibid p 109.

<sup>668</sup> Ibid.

<sup>669</sup> Ibid p 110.

<sup>670</sup> Ibid p 71.

Incidentally, Bull and Denfield's investigation through old newspapers led to an additional smaller project on Denfield's part: an inquiry into the history of newspapers of the Border. Prior to publishing the first article on the history of Cape photography, Denfield wrote an article in the *Quartely Bulletin* in 1963 on this new inquiry. Characteristically, Denfield praised the South African Library as source for his research again regarding it as a "treasure house" where "one is able to obtain accurate information about old Border newspapers, many of which we may not have heard". The investigation into photographic history thus became a reproductive exercise; much like had been the case with the encounters with glass negatives. He wrote, for example "Occasionally by thumbing through these files, one comes across old issues of other newspapers that have not been indexed, but their presence is proof positive of their existence. In addition the old *Cape Almanacus* published an annual 'Periodic Press of the Colony' and here too one is able to find evidence of further newspapers". Not disregarding his previous reliance on the evidential aura of photographs, he also indicated that "At least one copy of each newspaper was photographed, especially the 'firsts' if available, so that factual evidence could always be provided"<sup>671</sup>.

Not only was this particular inquiry a by-product, but led to other historical 'finds'. For example, in 1965 Denfield brought to the King William's Town newspaper, *The Mercury*, a photocopy of a notice of the award of the Victoria Cross to Sgt Peter Leitch in King William's Town on November 1858 for gallantry at the storming of the Redan in the Crimean War, thus making it possibly the first Victoria Cross to be awarded in South Africa<sup>672</sup>. It is also instructive to note the highly detail empirically-oriented investigative approach, much as he had done as he worked through faded images with a magnifying glass. He thus encountered additional details in the image. Denfield did not only transfer the archival documents into images (by photographing all necessary textual documents) but treated them as photographs that one could scrutinise. Invariably, the *Daily Dispatch* stated Denfield "is to be thanked for placing on record a bit of history which otherwise- like the early files of the *Daily Dispatch*- would have been lost forever"<sup>673</sup>.

Denfield also contacted descendants and connections of the early photographers uncovered, who provided with him with biographies, information, portraits and prints of the

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<sup>671</sup> DC, Denfield, 'The old Newspapers of King Williams Town', draft manuscript, 1963, p 1.

<sup>672</sup> *The Mercury*, 29 October 1965.

<sup>673</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 14 August 1963.



photographers. An example is the photographer James Edward Bruton. The following are letter excerpts from descendants of James Edward Bruton:

Sorry for not having replied earlier to your letter d/d 4<sup>th</sup> December but I have been trying to make contacts as suggested in your letter...I am sorry that I cannot find any old photographs of interest but I have written to a friend of mine in Durban (a Mr McGregor) who may be able to assist you as they have been associated with photography in many forums for many years...Aunt Agnes once informed that that an uncle with whom she spent a holiday in Cape Town was a photographer but I don't remember if he was a Bruton...<sup>674</sup>.

I have your letter of 24<sup>th</sup> December but I am sorry that I am not in a position to help you. The only two I recognise in the photograph are Gilbert Bruton and his brother in law Volbrecht. I was only 18 years old of age at the time I went out on rambles with Gilbert Bruton, and these were not club organised outings. In fact I have no recollection of being aware at the time of the existence of a Camera Club<sup>675</sup>.

In a manner that is comparable to his reliance on the networks of relationships linked to the faded glass negatives of East London, here Denfield again relied on the intimate relationships of the late photographers requesting assistance in, amongst other things, putting faces to the names that would appear in the old Cape newspapers. According to Denfield, Bruton, a descendant of the 1820 settlers, was one of the first photographers to have practiced in the Eastern Cape. He opened his photographic rooms in Port Elizabeth in 1858 at age nineteen until 1874 when he moved to Cape Town. Denfield described him as being “undoubtedly the most important early pioneer photographer of the Eastern Province” in that he was responsible for recording various personalities, scenes and events of Port Elizabeth<sup>676</sup>. He was amongst the cohort of photographers whose work featured in the *Cape Monthly Magazine*, as well as *Illustrated London News* in 1866 which portrayed his views of Port Elizabeth<sup>677</sup>. Read against the context of Dubow's investigation into an emerging Anglophone intellectual culture in the Cape, Bruton can be regarded as one of the figures to participate in those 'colonial conversation' through images by putting forward particular representations of the Cape.

While Denfield did not glean much information from Bruton's descendants, he was a bit more successful when inquiring about William Roe and William Henry Rabone. The following was from a descendant of photographer Rabone who was able to give some direction regarding both photographers:

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<sup>674</sup> DC, T.W. Bruton, Letter to Denfield, 11 December 1961.

<sup>675</sup> DC, W.H.H. Butchart, Letter to Denfield, 14 January 1962.

<sup>676</sup> DC, Denfield, 'Bruton, J.E.', n.d.

<sup>677</sup> Ibid.

My father handed me your letters with request to what I could to help you...I was in East London at the beginning of this week with contemporaries of my father who remembered enough of William Roe to point out to me his house, and to talk of their visits to his studios as children. The studio was, to them, a veritable wonderland with a complexity of curtains which he adjusted for lighting and if I had known of your request, I could have brought my copying stand and 'R' houses and copied relevant photographs and newspaper advertisements for you. In view of the time limit of your monograph I append what my father remembers of William Roe and extracts from the 'Midlands Province Banner' to which he directed me. I am also working on a short history of the Essex and Rabone family for the G.R Museum and will send you a copy of the material I send to the Museum. There is nothing relating to photography but in these hitherto unpublished records of the families, you may find some background material for your major work<sup>678</sup>.

Through such familial assistance, Denfield would again reconstruct a narrative of such 'public' figures by relying on their 'private' networks. Moreover, through constituting the past memories of the photographic studio as 'history' (in his intention of writing a history of his family) Rabone's descendant above wrote nostalgically of these early photographic practices as 'historical events'.

According to Bull and Denfield, both Roe and Rabone operated in the Eastern Cape from about 1858 (the former arriving from London)<sup>679</sup>. Roe set up his Portrait Rooms in Port Elizabeth in 1858 and offered a variety of photographic types. Like Bruton, he also published a variety of picturesque views of Port Elizabeth. He was also noted to have practiced in Graaf-Reinet where he took views of the small town<sup>680</sup>. Similarly, Rabone, the brother-in-law to artist Charles Essex, had a school of drawing and did wood engraving at Graaf-Reinet. In addition he sold photographic apparatus<sup>681</sup>. According to Bull and Denfield, Rabone was amongst the early artists who made significant strides to photography by incorporating their skills to the new craft such as colouring on paper and glass.

By 1964, Bull and Denfield had gathered a substantial amount of information. It is possible that Denfield originally had a book project in mind. However, he wrote to the chief librarian in the South African Library, Dr Lewin Robinson, in March 1964, offering an article on early Cape Town daguerreotypists initially for the June issue of the *Quarterly Bulletin* of that year. Robinson declined the offer on the basis of space and suggested its publication be postponed for the September issue<sup>682</sup>. By July the authors had completed the first draft at least, but

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<sup>678</sup> DC, A. Rabone, Letter to Denfield, 27 June 1964.

<sup>679</sup> Bull & Denfield, 'A history of early Cape photography', p 14.

<sup>680</sup> Ibid.

<sup>681</sup> Ibid.

<sup>682</sup> DC, L. Robinson, Letter to Denfield, 23 March 1964.

ventured beyond Cape Town daguerreotypists to include photographers using other forms as well as the Eastern Cape photographers from 1846 to the end of 1860:

...when in September of that year, Cape Town awoke to find that the last of its daguerreotypists, Mr and Mrs Walther, had 'silently stolen away'. In the following year, 1861, photography underwent a marked change, the carte-de-visite was introduced in the Cape, so that our choice of 1860 appears to be an apt one<sup>683</sup>.

### **Photography's History**

It is instructive to contrast Bull and Denfield's account of photographic history with Hayes' 'short history' of photography in South Africa which I discussed briefly in the Introduction. By tracing photography's history from its ties with colonial processes right through its deployment in feminist work, the unfolding of history in Hayes' account is such that the camera has moved from the hands of white males to black males and white females, and to a lesser extent black females, thus mirroring the post-apartheid transfer of power, where photographers no longer arrive via the ocean but emerge, additionally, from the townships. Given the much wider period she discusses, photography emerges as no longer a domain exclusive to mostly white (male) practitioners.

As noted previously, Hayes places much emphasis on documentary photography in the period of apartheid struggle, thus the account takes into cognisance the manner in which photographic practice has been intertwined with anti-apartheid struggle. In contrast, in Bull and Denfield's account race and photography's entanglement with politics were completely effaced. Their version was instead, glossed with an aura of neutrality through compounding it with facts when accounting for historical events. On the other hand, Hayes' account can be located within critical visual studies and thus reads photography's past through an interpretive lens by relying on the three aforementioned modalities. Thus Hayes centres her analysis around historical moments and social contexts, while Bull and Denfield drew attention to specific individuals and their personal enterprises.

Hayes looks at the changing nature of the practice in relation to changing political climates. Even when mention is made of specific photographers it is in relation to how their work resonates with discourses around race, gender and identity. On the other hand, Bull and Denfield wrote of numerous tales about individuals who pioneered and 'developed' the technology and practice of photographs. Bull and Denfield offered a history based on what

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<sup>683</sup> Bull & Denfield, 'A history of early Cape photography', p 1.

Pinney has criticised as “the notion that photographic history is best seen as the explosion of a western technology whose practice has been moulded by singular individuals”<sup>684</sup> in their first article titled ‘A history of early Cape photography’. Yet, upon reading the initial draft, chief librarian Robinson described it as “one of the most important pieces of original research to be published in our *Quarterly Bulletin*”<sup>685</sup>. Bull and Denfield essentially constructed a past of triumphs, trials and at-times, failures of individuals who imported their photographic skills from abroad and experimented with techniques based on popular trends. Attention was drawn to the fact that the early photographers were mostly European and American immigrants.

Invariably, the authors began their account with a technical description of photography. They described the now-familiar tale of photography’s development from the daguerreotype to the calotype<sup>686</sup>. This account is arguably, now taken-for-granted. In many ways, it is a microcosm of Bull and Denfield’s historical account whereby photography began in England and Paris and ended in the Cape where photographic practice’s trials and triumphs mirrored its European predecessors. However, Frizot warns against a reading of photographic history in terms of a sequence of stratified layers and argues for the importance of taking into account the relationship between a certain number of circumstances which brought the photograph into being. He thus advocates for an archaeological approach to history wherein the photograph is read as an archaeological fact brought into being by various factors and being led into burial by others “only to be ‘read’ afresh when it has been brought to the surface again, which itself endows it with an unexpected new aura”<sup>687</sup>. The introductory technical description above became a set-up for the rest of the account which, while not operating as a technical paper, did draw attention largely to the kinds of technologies each individual employed. Arguably, this too reflects the extent to which the Euro-American context was regarded as the locus of South African practice. For example, the reader was told of the competition that existed among photographers in a particular locality based on the kind of technology one used:

Little of photographic significance occurred until November 1849 when the first non-daguerreotypist arrived in Cape Town. He was A.W. Roghe from Frankfort, and probably practiced the paper negative process. Describing himself as a ‘Photographist’ thus distinguishing himself from daguerreotypists, he alleged that his ‘Photographic likenesses’

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<sup>684</sup> Pinney, ‘Introduction: How the other half’, p 1.

<sup>685</sup> DC, L. Robinson, Letter to Denfield, 21 July 1964.

<sup>686</sup> Bull & Denfield, ‘The history of early Cape photography’, p 2.

<sup>687</sup> M. Frizot, ‘Introduction: the age of light’, in M. Frizot, ed., *A new history of photography*, (Kohl: Konemann, 1998), p 12.

were superior to the daguerreotype, the impression being much more clear, distinct and free from the disagreeable expression so frequent in daguerreotypes<sup>688</sup>.

The authors pointed out that this started a period of blatant competition and attacks directed towards fellow photographers where for example in response to Roghe's advertisement above, "Waller, recently returned from Paarl, replied that the daguerreotypes were unrivaled for correctness and durability, and 'Superior to photographic calotype or other method known of producing a perfect likeness by means of the Camera Obscura'<sup>689</sup>.

Bull and Denfield's sequential account also suggested a linearity of the practice based on technical progress, echoing the discursive repertoire that characterised the *Monthly*<sup>690</sup>. The authors drew attention to the changing nature of the technology and experimentation that took place to improve one's craft and attract more customers. The reader was told for example, of the arrival of John Paul in Cape Town in 1851 who had travelled through Europe and the Americas and brought with him the latest improvements in daguerreotyping. He proved very popular with his ability to produce likeness in a short space of from ten to fifteen seconds, until the arrival of W Morgent who set up his studio for 'Photographic and Daguerreotype Processes'. Another competitor in this same period became American-born J. Newman who had set up his "American Daguerreotype Portrait Rooms and had introduced relief on daguerreotypes by the Galvanic process"<sup>691</sup>. Similarly, in the Eastern Cape photographic processes were enabled by competition and experimentation. Bull and Denfield wrote that American-born Henry Selby who arrived in Port Elizabeth in 1854 was the first to take stereoscopic portraits and also introduced Ambrotypes and Vitrotypes, erecting the first glass house in the Eastern Cape<sup>692</sup>. Similarly, Waller erected a 'Blue Glass House' to remove the glare of light and enable sitters to maintain the same expression, a practice that was followed by other photographers<sup>693</sup>. Although the authors chronicled the disputes and failures that these photographers eventually experienced, the tale was one of agential actors whose practice was essentially individualised and whose technical development was comparable to Euro-American trends.

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<sup>688</sup> Bull & Denfield, 'The history of early Cape photography', p 6.

<sup>689</sup> Ibid

<sup>690</sup> Dubow notes the importance placed on 'progress', 'improvement' and 'civilization' in the magazine where such virtues were interpreted in a broad sense to include political, religious, social and economic advancement and intellectual cultivation, p 73.

<sup>691</sup>DC, Bull and Denfield, 'The history of early Cape photography', p 7.

<sup>692</sup> Ibid p 12.

<sup>693</sup> Ibid p 13.

It is partly with this linearity in mind that the authors produced a follow-up article titled ‘The coming of the carte-de-visite and the cabinet photograph’ focusing on the period from 1861 to 1870. They argued that the introduction of this method “marked the beginning of one of the most important periods in South African photography, a period which continued into the present century and which undoubtedly gave photography its greatest impetus”<sup>694</sup>. For Bull and Denfield, both these processes became in their time the most popular forms for recording faces, scenes and events and are thus historically significant. Characteristically, they began the paper with a technical treatise of the carte-de-visite and its development in Europe moving to its introduction in the Cape:

In February 1861, Frederick York of Cape Town became the first photographer to own a carte-de-visite camera. It was a present from H.R.R Prince Alfred’ in recollection of the trip to Natal in 1860’ and consisted of ‘an apparatus for taking four portraits on one plate. The Prince’s initial and coronet, engraved on ivory, is inlaid’. But as York had already made arrangements to dispose of his photographic establishment it was left to his successor, Arthur Green, to be the first recorded photographer to introduce the carte-de-visite to the Colony<sup>695</sup>.

As had been the case with their earlier article, the authors emphasised the convergence between technical progress and place. While their earlier paper drew the distinction between the Eastern and Western Provinces, in the second paper they focused on the spread of the carte-de-visite in each town under the colony arguing “for historical dating it is of paramount importance to know with accuracy when the carte made its appearance in the various centres, and we feel the following data, obtained by a careful and systematic study...should supply a long felt need”<sup>696</sup>. Smaller towns which had hitherto been effaced thus appeared in this historical account. The reader was told, for example, of the likes of James Hensley and Charles Hamilton who offered the carte in Cradock in the early 1860s, F.P Wiemand who advertised this process in Fort Beaufort and M.H Durney who practiced his advertised in ‘cartes la visite’ in King William’s Town amongst others<sup>697</sup>. In the same manner that the authors drew attention to individual photographers, each town in turn was individualised as the authors chronicled its photographic establishments as participators in a broader movement that was sweeping through the Colony.

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<sup>694</sup>DC, M. Bull and J, Denfield, ‘The Coming of the Carte-de-Visite and the Cabinet Photograph’, draft manuscript, 1965, p 1.

<sup>695</sup> Ibid p 2.

<sup>696</sup> Ibid p 3.

<sup>697</sup> Ibid p 5.

It is arguably, also partly in this light that one can understand the exceptionalism that characterised *Pioneer Port* in that the project of East London's pictorial past had emerged out of the research into early photography. The book placed borders around the town's photographic past in its localisation. The criticism that had been launched against *Pioneer Port* on the basis of its unacknowledged similarity to other centres is relevant here in that the book reconfigured the town as a single individual. This emphasis on the uniqueness of place was notable again in another article individually authored by Denfield on 'East London's indebtedness to Carl Bluhm'. Denfield wrote that East London had no resident photographer until 1875 when Hobson set up the town's first photographic establishment on the West Bank:

However, there was on occasion before Hobson's time when East London was visited by a commercial photographer. That was in May 1869 when the committee of the East London Agricultural Society invited the King William's Town photographer Carl Bluhm, to come down and take photographs of the judges at their third agricultural show. This he did and at the same time recorded what appear to be the first professional views of East London. These pictures of East London made headline news and were available at booksellers as far afield as Cape Town... There were four scenes in all, the most important being a panorama of East London taken from Signal Hill and gives a most striking picture of the buildings and stores on the West Bank with the Buffalo River and 'Pilkington's Wall' in the foreground<sup>698</sup>.

As can be seen, photographers such as Bluhm, Roe and Bruton, among others, offered particular views of the changing Cape Colony, thereby also participating in that colonial conversation visually. Dubow notes the manner in which the colonists made sense of the landscape when expressing their views in the *Monthly* as significant in relation to feelings of belonging and connectedness to the continent. This would be commonly expressed in poetic imaging of the landscape, as readers grappled with the meaning of the Cape<sup>699</sup>.

Dubow regards Thomas Bowler as one of the artists who grappled with coming to terms with the landscape of the Cape pictorially. Interestingly, Denfield paid special attention to Bowler in the process of his research, dedicating a single article to him where he pointed towards Bowler's possible reliance on photographs in order to depict minute factual detail. For example, in an analysis of Bowler's painting 'Main Street, Port Elizabeth', Denfield argued that Bowler may have relied on Roe's photograph of an architectural drawing on the town hall in that studied photographs taken around the time that Bowler was on his Eastern

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<sup>698</sup> DC, Denfield, 'East London's indebtedness to Carl Bluhm', draft manuscript, 1966, p 1.

<sup>699</sup> Dubow, *A commonwealth of knowledge*, p 82.

Frontier tour show that the town hall was still in scaffolding, while the artist' town hall is free from building operations and includes a clock tower that was in the original architectural plans but was never erected in the end<sup>700</sup>. In short, while Denfield and Bull's project into early Cape photography was not intended as an inquiry into colonial culture, it offered a glimpse into some of the concerns that preoccupied colonists, concerns which in turn would be expressed in visual media

### **'Operation Book'**

First of all let me say how nice it was talking to you and to hear your enthusiasm. I would have thought you had been working so hard and concentratedly these past few months that you would have had second thoughts- but you are apparently a born researcher...I really am delighted to hear that the next step is 'Operation Book'. And it is with this aim that I hereby dedicate myself. This will mean much more detail about photographers and their work. To write a book we need 20 times the numbers of words that has gone into the monograph! In a book we can quote fully all letters, comments, etc. things relating to photography will be more important than photography itself. We must concentrate on biographies and on every little facet connected with the photographers. Their achievements as well as their murky pasts (sic.). This I call para-photography...This is true research<sup>701</sup>.

Thus wrote Denfield to Bull in a spirited conversation as their investigation grew. Even prior to publishing the first monograph on Cape photographers, the two researchers were already thinking about possibilities of extending their research into a comprehensive exposition. Naturally, this translated into an intensified investigation and here Bull's efforts would prove invaluable. One method of research was contacting relatives of photographers whose names they had established in order to get portraits and any additional biographical information. Seemingly, Denfield printed advertisements in local newspapers to aid him as suggested below:

Your advertisement in *The Herald* calling all Parkers, I cannot give you much information as I was only a very young person when Uncle Herbert Hambly Parker lived in Port Elizabeth. He had his own business here. Eventually he sold out and they all went to England. Years later Bertie Parker returned to South Africa with his English bride. He was running a pet shop in Johannesburg. I am Cecil Parker's daughter. The Parkers all came from Grahamstown<sup>702</sup>.

Re your letter 'calling all Parkers' my grandfather Edward Knight came out from England in, I think, the 1880s and settled in Burghersdorp's Cape Province, as a merchant. He

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<sup>700</sup> DC, Denfield, 'An analysis of three of Bowlers Pictures', n.d., p 3.

<sup>701</sup> DC, Denfield, Letter to M Bull, 26 July 1964.

<sup>702</sup> DC, E .Lumley (nee Parker), Letter to Denfield, 2 August 1966.



prospered – raised a large family 6 sons and 4 daughters of which my mother was one. E.H Knight retired and [was] living in Queenstown<sup>703</sup>.

The entanglement of family biography and photographic history in the communiqué is striking. The authors relied heavily on this particular genre of historical accounts thus as they traced the moves of the photographers they relied on biographical accounts that took those movements into account. In turn, Bull contacted relatives of photographers based in the Western Cape. In all likelihood, Denfield placed adverts in other popular Eastern Cape newspapers to aid the research. Bull's organisational role would also prove invaluable and seemingly, she did much of the bulk of archival work as evidenced by the notices of 'information required' that Denfield regularly sent to her. These would range from death notices, obituaries, past exhibitions, journal publications, etc. On the other hand it seems Denfield may have done the majority of the writing, suggested by the control he exerted over the information that he wanted to be gathered. In the notice of 'information required No. 7' he states in fact "I have stopped writing on exhibitions until I can get the following information..."<sup>704</sup>.

By 1967, the draft manuscript for the book was complete, although it would be another three years until its publication. As the authors had intended, it expounded on the earlier articles on early Cape photography and by editorial estimations became "the first comprehensive and authentic account of early Cape photography"<sup>705</sup>. Similarly, when describing their investigation they wrote that "When we first began our researches into Cape photography, it soon became evident that there were vast gaps and much of what had been accepted could not be substantiated". Noting their felt need to peruse through Cape newspapers from the beginning of the 'founding' of photography in 1839 they stated "No paper, however insignificant it appeared, could be omitted, for unless one was prepared to go through all the available newspapers of the day vital information could be missed". Bull and Denfield felt that the treatise would be "of value to the historian, the librarian, to those interested in Africana and South African art and to the photographer"<sup>706</sup>.

Whereas *Pionner Port* provided an account of the past through its illustrations, *Secure the Shadow* was a highly textual book which contained photographic reproductions that pertained

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<sup>703</sup> DC, F.R. Adams, Letter to Denfield, 17 August 1966.

<sup>704</sup> DC, Denfield, 'Information Required No. 7', n.d.

<sup>705</sup> M. Bull & J. Denfield, *Secure the Shadow: The Story of Cape Photography from its beginnings to the end of 1870* (Cape Town, Terence-McNally, 1970).

<sup>706</sup> Ibid p 25.

to the work of photographers under study. However, Denfield had too, subjected these photographs to chemical treatments and re-photographing and were thus reproduced to also reveal his photographic skills. One example is a reproduction of a daguerreotype of David Livingstone taken by James Cameron in 1852 (Fig. 99). Another is a daguerreotype of John Syme taken by William Syme in 1847 (Fig. 100).

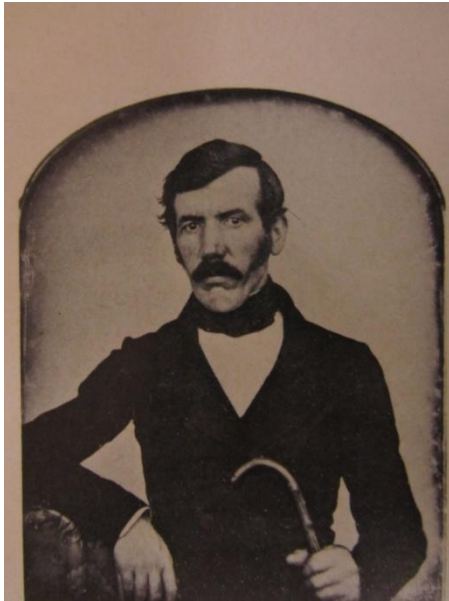


Fig. 99



Fig. 100

The authors did not only elaborate on and provide additional detail pertaining to the previously published pieces but also made a point of revising their earlier accounts in some instances. Again, this expressed the commitment to compiling ‘unassailable facts’. For example, in the 1964 paper *The history of early Cape photography*, they credited Jules Leger to have had the first photographic establishment in the Cape in 1846. In the book published years later, the authors did not necessarily contradict this but pointed to the possible existence of earlier photographers. As noted above, Bull and Denfield relied largely on photographers’ advertisements to trace their activities and discovered that “whenever a new photographic process was advertised for the first time in the local press it would probably be reviewed in its columns for public interest”<sup>707</sup>. However they pointed out that there may have been earlier photographers who did not feel the need to advertise in the papers and used hand bills instead.

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<sup>707</sup> Ibid p 33.

The revisionist impulse that characterised the book is also notable in the chapter dealing with William Syme's anti-convict engravings of 1849 where they argued for the latter's possible reliance on photographs to produce the engravings. Thus the empiricist framework that had characterised Denfield's earlier work, particularly his pagan studies, re-emerged. The magnifying glass Denfield had recommended to Bull as a research tool would prove metaphoric in this paradigm. Arguably, this framework was inherently productive as the search for authenticity became a perpetual task requiring constant re-writing and re-vision. It was contrary to the creatively-driven task of pictorial Basutoland in that the images were self-consciously imaginative. Thus they did not posit the existence of a tangible truth. On the other hand, the images of old East London pointed to a real existence that could be restored.

This particular chapter dealing with the anti-convict engravings points to a subtext permeating the book: the centrality placed on the very technology in the Cape's history. Syme's 'Anti-Convict Agitations of 1849' were an expression of the Cape Town colonists' reaction towards the British Government's proposal to settle convicts at the Cape. These agitations gave rise to several mass meetings which, in turn, were depicted pictorially by different artists. In August of 1849, the *Illustrated London News* contained one engraving entitled 'Great meeting in Cape Town to oppose the introduction of convicts into the Colony'. It was based on the meeting that took place on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May in front of the Commercial Exchange. Bull and Denfield wrote that the *Illustrated London News* would often attribute pictures to artists or even to photographs. This particular image was not attributed to anyone. However, they argued that those without any attribution whatsoever were usually of photographic origin. They also noted that three weeks after the May meeting, the *Cape Town Mirror* published an article acknowledging that drawings, daguerreotypes and calotypes of the said meeting were to be sent to the *Illustrated London News*. The authors argued that the picture appearing in August in the *Illustrated London News* may have been produced by Syme although they are not certain in that it may have been engraved from a drawing or a photograph<sup>708</sup>.

In another example, Bull and Denfield accounted for Thomas Baines' reliance on lantern slides to conduct public lectures on his paintings. After his return to Cape Town from explorations into the Zambezi, Baines held exhibitions of his work and delivered several lectures on his travels with the aid of photographic slides. In their search, the authors found

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<sup>708</sup> Ibid p 44.

that the Lawrence brothers, then established photographers, had made the lantern slides from Baines' paintings<sup>709</sup>. Both examples point towards the authors' attempts to highlight the critical role photography played in an emerging visual economy about the Cape.

But what of the book's emphasis on the different kinds of technologies photographers experimented with? Is it to be read as another instance of the organic explosion of western technologies making their way to the south? Although the book was centred on individual actors, it chronicled their careers in terms of the various kinds of photographic technologies they used, their experimentations, their successes, failures, etc. The end result is a highly technician historiography. When they studied closely daguerreotypes taken by William Groom given to them by his granddaughters, for example, the authors noted that they were 4 ¼ in.x 3 ¼ in size and not of the usual variety where the portraits would usually be laterally reversed. They point to the possible use of a mirror attached to the lens to correct this daguerreotype reversal, a method which increased the long exposure resulting in a softer image. Thus they argue for a possible attempt at experimental daguerreotypes on the part of the photographer<sup>710</sup>. In a chapter focusing on photographic advancements between 1861 and 1870, Bull and Denfield also made mention of new styles and types of photography that made their way as the daguerreotype ceased to function such as the alabastrine process, where the picture was bleached in order to increase the brilliance of the white image<sup>711</sup>.

The book's emphasis on technological improvements and innovation was continuity from the earlier published articles and also reinforced the notion of the Cape's European entanglement that underpins the book. However, the early photographers' experimental attempts can also be read arguably, as an expression of the growing importance placed on photographic seeing, where seeing 'likenesses' were becoming an important means of making sense of one's world. Bull and Denfield noted, for one thing, that new processes and advancements became matters of public interest and the press would review them in their columns and allow examples to be displayed in their premises realising the news value of the items<sup>712</sup>.

Yet, when thinking about the technician account of history offered in the book, I am reminded of the technical lens through which Denfield had framed his subjects particularly when writing about Native photography. I argued previously that when the native question was

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<sup>709</sup> Ibid p 94.

<sup>710</sup> Ibid p 35.

<sup>711</sup> Ibid p 98.

<sup>712</sup> Ibid p 103.

made pictorial and technical, it displaced photographic representations away from the realm of politics to that of ‘common sense’ pragmatism. Similarly, when photographic history is made technical, it is constructed through the lens of objectivity (thereby emphasising actual indisputable events) and is discursively displaced away from its entanglement with the politics of colonialism.

The title of the book, *Secure the Shadow: The Story of Cape Photography from its beginnings to the end of 1870* was doubtless chosen in connection to the photographic phrase the authors described in relation to early styles in photographic advertising. The authors wrote that for a while early notices would highlight the quality of the likenesses the photographers could produce until such styles became less effective:

Gradually a new style in these advertisements began to appear in the form of verse or poetical prose...The advertisement announcing the opening of Mr J. Newman’s American Daguerreotype Portrait Rooms on February 28, 1854, was an unusual one, it was preceded by the couplet ‘Of those for whom you fond emotions cherish, secure the shadow e’er the substance perish’. Although John Newman only used this couplet for his first two advertisements, little did he realise at the time that this little verse would travel the length and breadth of South Africa and that ‘Secure the Shadow’ in its original or modified form would become the standard catch-phrase of photographers for many years to come<sup>713</sup>.

Like the varied photographic technologies, the phrase too reached South African shores. The authors indicated the popularity of the phrase such that photographers in different towns across both provinces took up the phrase and included it in their own poetic formulations from the 1860s. As an advertising tool, the phrase predates and is comparable to George Eastman’s ‘you push the button, we do the rest’. This is a phrase he coined in 1888 after developing what was then the most radical of cameras in the form of a box model loaded with film to make a hundred exposures<sup>714</sup>. In its implicit deployment of imagery of violence, Eastman’s catchphrase is also suggestive of demise while promoting the convenience of the new device.

In taking up the phrase ‘secure the shadow’, the theme of death prevailed in photographers’ promotion of their services. Frederick York, the authors wrote, would remind the public to obtain images of loved ones before being snatched by the ‘hand of death’ in that “it is then...that these portraits becomes absolutely invaluable, and no money can purchase what is

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<sup>713</sup> Ibid p 117.

<sup>714</sup> Szarkowski, *Photography Until Now*, p 144.

now within reach of all”<sup>715</sup>. When thinking about the chosen title of the book, therefore, it is on the one hand an allusion to not only the prominence of the phrase but on the kind of photographers the book focused on, that is, professional and commercial photographers. On the other hand, Denfield and Bull dedicated themselves into uncovering the professional trajectories of several individual photographers, thereby restoring their life histories briefly thus the book essentially secured the shadows of those who had passed in the same manner that Denfield had done for East London in *Pioneer Port*.

The attempt to secure the ‘shadows’ of such photographers can be discerned in the book’s biographical mode. By accounting for photography’s history through individual biographies, the authors effectively constructed each photographer in terms of how he ‘pioneered’, ‘promoted’ and ‘developed’ photography. The authors structured the chapters thematically in terms of photography’s development as technology and social tool. Each sub-theme was punctuated with biographical details of photographers in relation to the development of the craft. Additionally, the book contained a separate chapter providing a brief career trajectory of each photographer named. For the authors this information was not simply an addendum to the book but was to be treated “as additional information intended to elaborate and enhance the full story of early Cape photography”<sup>716</sup>. Fittingly, they also included portraits of each photographer. One example is a portrait of Henry Adlard who hailed from London (Fig. 101) and Cape Town-based William Lawrence (Fig. 102)

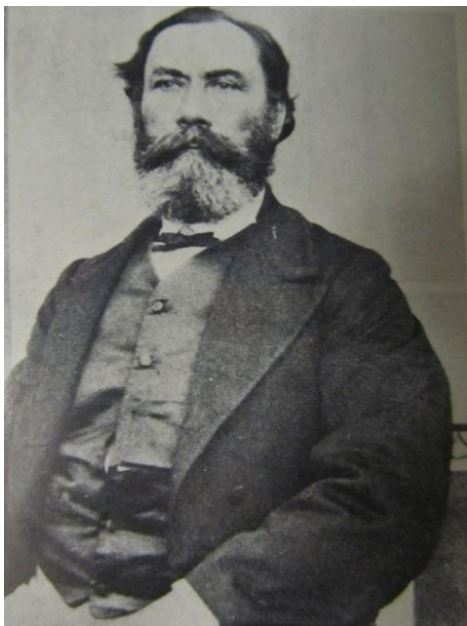


Fig. 101



Fig.102

<sup>715</sup> Bull & Denfield, *Secure the Shadow*, p 120.

<sup>716</sup> *Ibid* p 182.

In varying degrees, the authors traced each photographer's movements from abroad and throughout the Colony, noting shifts in public careers and major contributions to photography. The biography of George Francis Ashley is but one example of the 34 selected biographies and was the template for the construction of the rest of the biographies. The reader would first read about the photographer's birth (26 August 1842 in Cape Town) and some aspects of family life (the eldest son of George Alfred Ashley). This was followed by the beginnings of his photographic career (he began as an assistant to Lawrence Bros.) and greater detail about its trajectory (thus Ashley took over the Lawrence Bros. Establishment in 1865 and opened his own rooms in Caledon Street). He employed Arthur Green for a while. At some point in 1870 Ashley worked with his father as Ashley and Son. The biographies then concluded with the photographer's death (thus Ashley died in Cape Town in 1903)<sup>717</sup>.

By including information on each photographer's background and death, the biographies provided a whole, albeit concise, life story centred on photographic practice. Although the list focused on each individual, it also pointed out the enmeshment of photographers in each other's lives and careers. For example, Arthur Green with whom Ashley was associated was one of the prominent photographers mentioned. Ashley was also the son of George Alfred Ashley, a Cape Town based photographer who arrived from London in 1838<sup>718</sup>. In another example, William Charles Romaine Groom (1825-1900) is said to have worked closely with fellow photographers Sparmann, Wagner and Edward Jones. The authors also wrote that several photographers started their careers while working for Lawrence Bros. Thus the biographies drew attention to the photographers' networks as they participated in the same visual economy. In other words, the list of individual biographies functions as a glimpse into 'settler photography' as the authors traced the careers of 19<sup>th</sup> century immigrants and the first generation descendants.

The biographical mode suggested a close engagement with the subjects, particularly when personal details were included. This level of intimacy is also notable in the researcher's reliance on the families of their subjects in their investigation. Bull and Denfield wrote of the positive responses they would get whenever they would write to a descendant. The following account probably best illustrates the project's entanglement with familial intimacy:

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<sup>717</sup> Ibid p 185.

<sup>718</sup> Ibid p 184.

Another early Cape photographer was William Groom, but just how early was not realised until we visited his granddaughters who were kind enough to entrust us with his invaluable scrap books, a dossier of his letters, various cuttings and priceless photographic albums. There was even a collection of original photographs of the Crimean War. In writings of his early experiences of early Cape Town, Groom mentions his friend Sparmann who 'designed St Mary's Cathedral' and also his friend Jones, with whom he apparently stayed in Kloof Street after he arrived from England early in 1844, a friendship which continued for many years. As we were about to take our grateful leave for all these treasures, our hostess opened a little drawer of a sewing cabinet and asked us, 'By the way, can you tell us what these are?'. She produced some envelopes, each of which was named containing metal plates. Speechless we read names such as Sparmann, Wagner, Langschmidt, Hopkins, Severin and others, and realised that here was treasure trove indeed. The metal plates were unframed daguerreotypes and the images on them hardly discernable<sup>719</sup>.

This method of engagement with their subject is a far cry from Denfield's earlier days in northern Nigeria. Unlike the pagan subjects through whom he constructed totalising narratives and the Basutoland subjects whom he endowed with imagined virtues, Denfield got up close and personal with each subject of the Cape history investigation, whereby the descendants would allow him to traverse their homes and personal belongings. The early photographers, as research subjects, were thus endowed with an aura of individuality unlike the pagan subjects who remained perpetually collective subjects. This was also reinforced by the attention drawn to the ways in which each photographer pioneered. Thus the reader learnt, for example, that George Francis Ashley was the first Cape photographer to employ magnesium light which allowed photographers to taken in a room without the need for sunlight<sup>720</sup>. Samuel Baylis Barnard took photographs of all public men of prominence in Cape Town in the mid 1860 including portraits of the Duke of Edinburgh during his visits of 1867 and 1870<sup>721</sup>. James Cameron was noted to be the first in the Cape to use the calotype process in 1848. He also introduced the collodion method into the Cape in 1854<sup>722</sup>. Frederick Henry I'ons erected in 1866 the largest glass house in the Colony where he held a small exhibition of portraits amongst which were Native portraits<sup>723</sup>. William Roe was credited for being one of the first photographers to record the 1869 diggings when the rush to the diamond fields took place<sup>724</sup>, and the list goes on. Drawing attention to each photographer's most remarkable feats would help reinforce their status as the foundational fathers of

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<sup>719</sup> Ibid p 35.

<sup>720</sup> Ibid p 185.

<sup>721</sup> Ibid p 187.

<sup>722</sup> Ibid p 191.

<sup>723</sup> Ibid p 199.

<sup>724</sup> Ibid p 208.



photography, as the Cape's 'firsts', unlike the pagan subjects who, in salvage anthropology, Denfield saw as a disappearing culture, and thus were a representational 'last'.

Hayes has noted rightfully that implicitly, *Secure* states that photography came to South Africa via the ship<sup>725</sup>. In the process of researching the photographers' origins, Bull and Denfield consulted shipping documents to trace their subjects' settlement into the Cape. Thus in some instances they noted their arrival and departure through sailing of ships. The reader learnt thus, that Frederick York arrived in Cape Town in 1855 in the *Meteor*<sup>726</sup>. William Roe arrived in Algoa Bay on the *Aurifera* in 1858<sup>727</sup>, William Lawrence arrived in Table Bay in 1856 on the *East Indiaman Dinapore*<sup>728</sup>, and shortly after working for Lawrence Bros in 1864 Thomas Henderson came to East London in December of that year by the *R.M.S. Dane*, etc<sup>729</sup>. The attention given to ships points to homologies between *Pioneer Port* and *Secure the Shadow*. In the former, however, emphasis was on shipwrecks as the book indicated how these events produced a particular set of representations. The movement of ships also speaks to colonial boundaries underpinning Bull and Denfield's account. Photography's arrival in South Africa was thus intimately tied to colonial conquest.

The book also chronicled each photographer's movement once settled in the Colony, relocating from one Province to another, or from one centre to another in the same regions. According to Bull and Denfield, in the Eastern Province in particular, many early photographers had no permanent establishments and would visit different centres instead where one would spend several months. Photographers would also tour various regions of the Cape as a means of promoting their photography, making their services available in that centre temporarily to gain an income in that "early photographs were not within reach of everyone's pocket and the population was small"<sup>730</sup>. This is illustrated in the career of William Waller. Waller set up an electroplating business in Cape Town shortly after arriving from England in 1847 and practised as a daguerreotypist in 1848. However "Waller realised from the fate of his predecessor that there was little to be gained in trying to establish a clientele in Cape Town. He went from one place to another and in his photographic travels

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<sup>725</sup> Hayes, 'A short history', p 139.

<sup>726</sup> Bull & Denfield, *Secure the Shadow*, p 218.

<sup>727</sup> Ibid p 208.

<sup>728</sup> Ibid p 203.

<sup>729</sup> Ibid p 197.

<sup>730</sup> Ibid.

must have brought photography for the first time to many new centres in the Cape and elsewhere”<sup>731</sup>.

It is also possible that photographers like Waller did not only bring photography into different parts of the Colony but particular representations, which in turn would circulate as the photographer moved from region to region. Moreover, these images would in some instances continue to circulate abroad, contributing to a growing visual economy about the Colony. Apart from Waller, Bull and Denfield also made mention, for example, of Chapman, the well-known traveller and photographer, who exhibited ‘Photographs Illustrative of South African Sport and Travel’ in the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1867. A lesser-known Cape exhibitor was also W.G Atherstone from Grahamstown who displayed ‘Photographic Scenery in the Eastern Province’<sup>732</sup>. Thus in their identification of ships that brought photography into the Colony, one is reminded of the centrality of the movement of images in the creation of visual economies.

## Conclusion

*Secure the Shadow* represented not only the culmination of years of extensive archival work, but for Denfield, it was also the expression of the late career shift from photographer to historian of photography. Much as he had done in the publication of *Pioneer Port*, Denfield employed a metonymic magnifying glass to reconstruct a history of photography in the Cape. *Secure the Shadow* and the various historical narratives Bull and Denfield produced in the mid 1960s were profoundly shaped by the ideas generated in *Pioneer Port* where again the theme of pioneering men would re-emerge. Like the latter, as a reconstructive exposition of the photographic moment in the latter half of nineteenth century, the myriad of biographical details in *Secure* also spoke of a particular historical moment in the establishment of an early settler culture. The authors intended to provide an authoritative text that built on and revised previous accounts, a feat they successfully accomplished in some sense in that the book remains one of the key texts in South African literature on photography as it is one of few studies on the continent that provide a detailed regional history of photographic practice<sup>733</sup>. Yet, I have also argued, the very means of obtaining such an account meant taking at face value those very sources that became enmeshed in early colonial culture in the Cape. Thus

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<sup>731</sup> Ibid p 42.

<sup>732</sup> Ibid p 115.

<sup>733</sup> M. Frizot, *A New History of Photography* (Koln: Konemann, 1998).

while functioning as an account of irrefutable facts, in its implicit attempt to secure the shadows of these early photographers the book also defended the particular ideological moment in which early Cape photography took place.

## Chapter 8: Ghosts of the city

### Introduction

Joseph Denfield died suddenly at his home on the 30<sup>th</sup> June 1967.<sup>734</sup> *Secure the Shadow: The Story of Cape Photography from its Beginning to the End of 1879* was published three years later and seen through publication by his co-author Marjorie Bull. At every turn in his photographic career, Denfield's voice can be discerned amongst the myriad of texts in the Denfield Collection that surround each set of images. Though lavishly illustrated with portraits and photographic examples of works of each photographer, *Secure the Shadow* culminated this exegesis as a treatise not on photographs but photography. His voice did not necessarily address images but the production of images: the relationships and series of conversations between various actors in a given time and space. In the introduction, I cited Christopher Pinney's invocation on whether pictures have a different story to tell from written words or the spoken voice, a story told in part on their own terms<sup>735</sup>. The challenge to interrogate photographs' "own stories" is particularly significant when paying attention to a set of photographs that Denfield did not formally circulate. There exists in the collection a set of images in *Kodak* envelopes with their negatives intact<sup>736</sup>. Echoing the photographer's death, they have been placed in one drawer loosely with the only textual clue to their signification being the label on the cabinet 'Joseph Denfield negatives and photographs East London 1960s'. In this chapter I revisit these photographs and argue that through the documentary form, they express a form of remembrance of a colonial East London in a period when Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid came to dominate.

### Images in silence

A curious figure of a single anonymous young woman appears and disappears sporadically in the said collection of photographs. She appears only in those photographs taken by the river. One photograph is taken of her from a distance as she sits on the banks of a river. In another photograph of the same scene taken from further up but depicting the same view, she is absent. Was she included deliberately as a 'human interest' to construct an idyllic panorama

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<sup>734</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 1 July 1967.

<sup>735</sup> C. Pinney, *Photos of the Gods*, p 8.

<sup>736</sup> In the process of working with these photographs while completing the dissertation, they were unfortunately stolen, that is, the prints, negatives as well as their digital scans. I had already written about these images thus in the chapter I include my discussion on the missing photographs as well as those that fortunately remained behind.

of the harbour? She sits on the rocks watching the boats as though in contemplation. She re-appears in a photograph in a different scene of the river, sitting close to its edge. The photograph is taken behind her, thus the viewer assumes the same visual perspective as the subject in the photograph. She performs the same act of quiet contemplation as she gazes over the river panorama. Her stiffness in both scenes suggests it is an orchestrated gesture, that is, her appearance is far from fortuitous. She disappears in the frame in other photographs of the river from the same position. The photographer has moved closer to its banks drawing greater attention to the river. Her third appearance is in a sectional view of a bridge. Taken from a distance and showing her in full length, she leans on a rail cutting a solitary figure in the vegetated landscape gazing at the horizon. Characteristically, the same view of the bridge has been photographed again without the mysterious young woman in the scene. The subject's sporadic appearance and disappearance in the collection draws attention to temporality of positionality and seeing as she moves ethereally between absence and presence within photographic moments. That is, she travels on several planes, moving from one site to another and from one temporality to another.

But who is this seeing subject? She remains an ambiguous figure who seems to be following the instructions of the photographer<sup>737</sup>. She is also an image of youthful innocence with a sling-bag across her torso, sneakers and a girly ponytail. Her contemplative gesture is in turn tainted with a degree of naïveté. In each scene, the subject has been included in the frame as both part of the landscape and simultaneously standing apart from it. She sits on the bank of the river rather than in the river. She stands elevated on the bridge removed from river underneath and the bushes around her. But placed within the frame she is part of the landscape captured on camera. This duality in representation highlights the sites photographed as not only sites of gaze but the inclusion of a looking subject also underscores the very *act* of looking. The photographs, in other words, dramatise contemplative seeing. I will return to this figure later when I consider how the collection as a whole expresses ruin gazing.

The organisation of the said set of photographs draws attention to the constitution of the images as a collection. That is, their placement in the Africana library helps to constitute them as a set of images that speak to one another. We come to think of them in this fashion because they exist within the same cabinet and folder in the library and have been clustered

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<sup>737</sup> Correspondence letters to Denfield indicate that Denfield had two daughters thus the figure in the photographs is possibly one of them.

as 'East London Photographs' and dated as 1960s with Denfield's name printed on the cabinet. Through this ordering the set of images can be usefully regarded as a category on its own. The archive is thus performative particularly when considering that it is part of the Africana collection in the library and thus functions as a specific source of knowledge. Therefore, even though Denfield's textual voice may be absent, the photographs, placed in this fashion, are constituted as Denfield's voice through the visual representation.

A distinctive feature of these images is that some are in colour. This is the first instance I came across where Denfield shifted away from monochrome prints thus he sent them to the Kodak photographic labs for printing. This observation indicates while Denfield developed prints himself with his images of pagan tribes, Basutoland and went to significant pains in recreating prints from glass negatives of old East London, this is the one instance where he relied on another developer. For a photographer who placed great emphasis on the technical treatment of his photographs, this reliance suggests this set of images would not be circulated necessarily as an illustration of his own skill but would perhaps be about the content. Moreover, with the appearance of colour the reader is presented with a 'glaring' reality. Frizot argues, after all, that colour is first perceived by reference to reality thus "it is supposed to correspond to what existed at the moment the photograph was taken"<sup>738</sup>. This will become significant when I consider how the photographs function as a form of documentary representation.

In some ways, the existence of the negatives performs an indexical role in relation to the prints by pointing to an existence of a positive. Arguably, the inclusion of the negatives allows for a reading of the images as unmediated truth in that the photographer gave both the product and source of his camera work, and not kept anything back (albeit the possibility of reproducing more photos from negatives), thereby representing them as an authoritative source of knowledge. I liken the negatives to ghosts particularly when placed along with the accompanying positives in that they are lacking in materiality but contain a mysterious aura that surrounds them. They point to the departure of time, yet as 'ghosts' they exist in the present, but perhaps not fully engaged in the world in their ephemeral presence. Moreover, they further accentuate the widely-cited notion of the photograph as oscillating between the past and present<sup>739</sup>. Curiously, ghosts in popular imagination are discontented spirits of the

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<sup>738</sup> M. Frizot, 'A natural strangeness: the hypothesis of colour', in M. Frizot, ed., *A new history of photography*, (Köln: Konemann, 1998), p 422.

<sup>739</sup> R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida: reflections on photography* (London: Fontana Press, 1984).

dead who roam the earth with a sense of having been disgruntled before death. Because of the ‘hidden’ nature of the photographs, that is, the fact that they were not circulated publicly, the prints too contain this ghostly element. Devoid of textuality and existing outside any exhibitionary space, they exist as comparatively less ‘processed’ than the other sets of images.

How one can go about ‘reading’ the content of the images also has partly to do their archival organisation and in relation to other images. For one thing, the first source of the dating of the photographs is the labeling on the cabinet that they are from the 1960’s. The second clue lies in the quality of the prints which indicates that these are not the prints from glass negatives. Another clue lies in the fact that two of the envelopes have dates, specifically ‘E.L. May/June 65’ and ‘Jan 64’. However, the fact that they were taken in the early to mid 1960’s is also made clear in the existence of photographs of the Beach Hotel. The hotel was in existence until 1964/65 when it was demolished. The photographs were thus most likely taken just prior to its destruction depicting the hotel while still functioning. I am reminded of Border Historian Pretorius and his aforementioned distress over the destruction of the Beach Hotel. Notably, the hotel is captured from different angles. Three photographs display it by its entrance facing the beachfront by the left side of the photographer (Fig. 103). With each image the photographer evidently moved around to capture a particular angle. In another photograph, the hotel is captured from a much further distance showing its location in the broader beach area. Dense bushes are in the foreground of the photograph while the ocean that the Hotel faces is discernable. Placed in the frame alongside other sites the Hotel is thus represented less as a prominent site but as part of the beachfront’s architectural plane (Fig 104).



Fig. 103



Fig. 104

Denfield wrote and displayed images of the Beach Hotel in its earlier days both in *Pioneer Port* and in the *Daily Dispatch*. Could these images of the hotel in the 1960s have been taken in relation to the project of restoring East London's past through photographs? There is difficulty in ascertaining this. There is some evidence, nevertheless, that the project of photographing these sites in the collection such as the Beach Hotel, though never fully articulated, can be seen as a continuation of his project in *Pioneer Port*. It operates as a form of a visual sequel by an additional contemporary layer of historical change in the city. Two photographs from this said collection appeared in the last chapter of *Pioneer Port* dealing with old East London's landmarks.

Notably, this chapter that was titled 'Some lesser known old East London landmarks' deviated slightly from the rest of the book by reconstructing historical accounts based on old public sites rather than necessarily images and supplementing it with photographs Denfield took. The two photographs were thus included to draw attention to the city's 'forgotten' history by virtue of the sites they depicted. One is a photograph of cobble-stone remains of the Pontoon approaches on the west bank of the Buffalo River (Fig. 105). Denfield wrote that this road was built in 1876 and that the cobbled portion of the road could be "easily seen at low tide just upstream to the West Bank wharves, while on the bank wall are remains of the Pontoon chains"<sup>740</sup>. The second is a photograph of 'Carrington's Building' in Union Street built in 1880 (Fig. 106). Noting the site's significance, Denfield wrote:

An unusual building in Union Street is surmounted by 'three Roman eagles'. Under the date 1880 are the initials G.T.C. which stands for G.T. Carrington. It seems an ordinary building but when advertised for sale on June 2, 1880, it was described as having 'solid concrete walls which are simply indestructible, and there is no change for any tenant having to make good damage to the interior, for 'tis impossible to effect any injury to such work'. The building has certainly lasted<sup>741</sup>.

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<sup>740</sup> Denfield, *Pioneer Port*, p 118.

<sup>741</sup> Ibid p 118.





Fig. 105

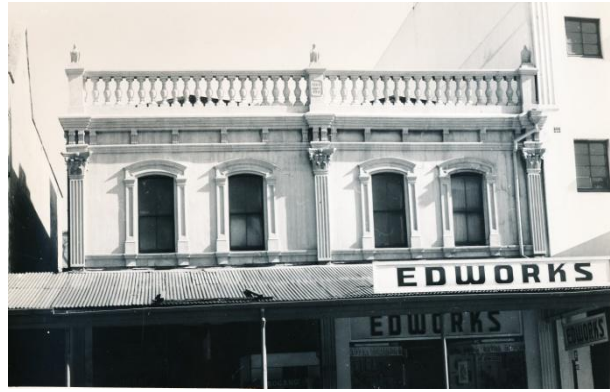


Fig. 106

Possibly, Denfield may have been taking photographs of dated sites in the city parallel to the project of restoring the city's past visually through old glass negatives as well as through the work of the Border Historical Society. Thus even in the process of restoring the negatives materially, a project of 'remembering' public spaces seemed to have been taking place simultaneously. After all, every image in the '1960s' collection points to a concrete construction. It includes photographs of factory sites, shops, graves, the fire brigade, public places and houses. When regarding the two projects as taking place alongside each other, the architectural site and the image converge in that the site can be read as an image, while the photograph becomes a material object depicting the past.

The rest of the chapter in *Pioneer Port* mentioned briefly other sites built before 1880 that continue to exist in the city albeit without accompanying photographs. For example, Denfield wrote about East London's first Public Hall which was called 'Oddfellows' in High Street and whose foundation stone was laid in 1873<sup>742</sup>. In the collection of photographs is a set of images of a large building with the inscription 'ODD'. The rest of the inscription is illegible due to the demolition of the site. Could this be the Oddfellows building (Fig. 107)? Reference was also made in this last chapter of *Pioneer Port* to the old lifeboat slip as being amongst several landmarks in the harbour area<sup>743</sup>. Correspondingly, the photographic collection includes two photographs of a lifeboat slip which is possibly the same site Denfield wrote about (Fig. 108). Mention was also made of concrete steps that used to lead to a Ferry Footbridge as one of these historic landmarks. Could the two photographs of ambiguously captured concrete steps in the collection be in reference to this particular site? Denfield included the story behind the steps because of the tragedy they represented. For Denfield they

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<sup>742</sup> Ibid.

<sup>743</sup> Ibid.

were a grim reminder of the fatal accident that occurred in July 1880 when a shipping officer Captain Zealand, was killed prior to the construction of the Ferry Footbridge. Zealand had been walking on the embankment on which the railway line ran. He did not see or hear an engine with a truck behind it coming rapidly down the incline until it knocked him over. The Municipality was stirred into constructing a subway under the railway embankment for foot passengers and carts<sup>744</sup>. As I noted in the previous chapter, this narrative constructed a past of conflict and tragedy- from which a modern East London was born- that characterised *Pioneer Port*.



Fig. 107



Fig. 108

Homologies between the photographic collection of East London sites in the 1960s and *Pioneer Port* are also notable in the photographs of College Street School taken from different angles. One image shows a plaque, dated 1913, with the inscription ‘This building was erected on the site of the First Public Undenominational School of this town’ (Fig. 109). Incidentally, Denfield wrote about the beginnings of the school in the book in which he included a photograph of the site in 1882 and the original architectural drawing<sup>745</sup>. Included in the contemporary set are two photographs of the ‘master’s residence’ (Fig. 110), which was described in the ‘Saga of East London’ series in the *Daily Dispatch* as the only structure which remains from the original construction<sup>746</sup>. Additionally, the contemporary collection includes a photograph of a dilapidating fire station which was also written about in *Pioneer*

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<sup>744</sup> Ibid p 42.

<sup>745</sup> Ibid p 55.

<sup>746</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 5 March 1964.

*Port*. Included in the chapter dedicated to it was a photograph of the fire station that had just been completed in 1906<sup>747</sup> which, when placed alongside its counterpart taken in the 1960s appears to have little changed (Fig. 111). The crux of the issue is that the two sets of photographs, that is, the glass negatives reprinted and reproduced in *Pioneer Port* and preceding exhibitions, and the set of photographs taken of East London in the 1960s do resonate in content. Moreover, in both instances Denfield relied on the photographic medium to interrogate the town's past. This suggests that the concerns about restoring the past through the medium and the assertion of a particular historicity have continued through this latter collection

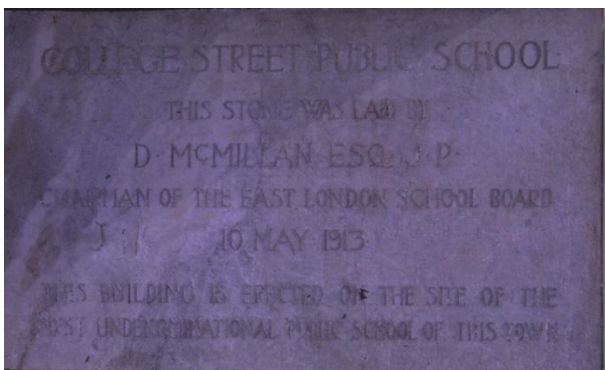


Fig. 109



Fig. 110



Fig. 111

The last chapter in *Pioneer Port* dealing with landmarks indicates a subtle shift in the book from the old images to the old sites, with the latter reconfigured as images. The abovementioned photographs in the collection suggest an inclination to restore the city's

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<sup>747</sup> Ibid p 33.

history through its architecture and image. Such an inclination can also be understood partly in relation to Denfield's involvement in the Border Historical Society whose objectives included amongst other activities the recognition and restoration of old sites as part of the city's historicity<sup>748</sup>. One of its crowning achievements, after all, was the preservation of Gately House under the ownership of the East London Museum in 1964, the same period this set of photographs came into being.

In previous chapters I also drew attention to other Border historians' concern with the demolition of various historical architectural sites in the city. One might recall Driffield bemoaning the inevitable destruction of Lloyd's Building or Pretorius's fear that the Beach House would be reduced to 'a pile of rubbish'. Denfield's photographs register these concerns through pointing towards these sites and through imaging destruction. The emphasis on buildings both in the collection and in the Border Historical Society is significant. Silvester has argued in the case of colonial South West Africa that the construction of brick buildings was visual proof of permanence and possession.<sup>749</sup> He suggests that the physical and photographic display of buildings represented a view of white settlers not only as builders, but also as architects imposing a sense of order and civilization on a recalcitrant landscape. As I will argue later, these particular buildings to which Denfield pointed his camera appear too as ghosts of East London's colonial past whilst existing under British rule.

Although the said photographs may have possibly been taken as part of the broader 'restorative' project which culminated in *Pioneer Port*, the majority of the photographs do not necessarily speak directly to sites mentioned in the book. There are, however, thematic resonances between this set of photographs and those in the glass negatives in the form of specific sites that reappear such as images from Oxford Street, the harbour, beaches and the bridge. It is as though Denfield imagined the past that is represented in the glass images through the contemporary sites, and in turn represented them as being in the process of change. Three distinctive and at times overlapping motifs characterise the collection: death, age and ruin.

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<sup>748</sup> M. Courteney-Latimer, 'A true history of the formation of the historical society, East London', *The Coelacanth*, 7, 2 (1969), 23-30.

<sup>749</sup> J. Silvester, 'Your space or mine? The photography of the Police Zone' in W Hartmann, J. Silvester & P. Hayes, eds., *The Colonising Camera: photographs in the making of Namibian history* (Cape Town/Windhoek/Athens/: University of Cape Town/Out of Africa/Ohio University Press, 1998), pp 138-144.

## Burial sites

A grave can never be a pure sign in the semiotic sense. The relationship between signifier and signified is not, in the end, an arbitrary one, as it is in linguistics, precisely because most people associate the grave with the presence of the dead. When we speak of graveyards being haunted by restless spirits, or of the grief-stricken mourners who prostrate themselves upon tombs, we are also speaking about the grave as a point of access to other worlds<sup>750</sup>.

A collection of photographs in one envelope includes two photographs of a graveyard. One photograph is a wide-length depiction of the yard revealing the overgrown grass that threatens to hide one grave. Based on the tombstones, the graves appear to have been in existence for a lengthy period. This is notable in the second photograph which is a close-up depiction of one grave that is almost completely covered by grass. The grave's concrete exterior is also in demolition. Notably, the photographer did not zoom in on the inscription on the grave, thus was not necessarily representing the grave in relation to the death of the buried subject but to the gradual death of the grave itself. In other words, the photograph configures the grave's heterotopic spatiality as under threat. It is as if the grave will eventually be subsumed by forces of nature, inevitably disappearing further into the underground or will be immersed into a recalcitrant landscape. This process is already underway with graves in the foreground of the same photograph. Moreover, vegetation has sprung up over the graves swathing parts of the concrete structure of and threatening to turn the sites into anonymous rock formation thereby undermining their indexicality to human existence. Several graves are placed close to trees and are overshadowed by large branches and appear as part of the natural landscape.

This differs somewhat in another set of images of graves. Taken in a separate gravesite located close to an industrial space, these images depict several graves, some close up and others from a distance in a neat and obviously well-preserved space. (See Fig. 112, 113 & 114) .Rather than display the condition of the graves, the photographer instead zoomed in on the inscription on tombstones thus reconfiguring the graves with human existence endowed with individuality.

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<sup>750</sup> D. Bunn, 'The Sleep of the Brave: Graves as sites and signs in the Colonial Eastern Cape', in P Landa & D Kaspin, eds., *Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), p 57.



Fig. 112



Fig. 113



Fig. 114

Bunn argues that a tomb “is usually understood to be a chamber for the corpse, a receptacle in which the body undergoes its silent transformation through deliquescence into dust”<sup>751</sup>. He adds, however, that for those who remember the departed “the grave is also a place to be visited. At the graveside, in homage or in mourning, one seems closer to the tangible presence of the dead below”<sup>752</sup>. These photographs depicting graves taken from different lengths echo this attempt at capturing a tangible presence of the departed. Taken from a distance in full length, the tombstones stand erect rooted in the earth and simultaneously with arcs pointing upwards towards the eternal heavens in Christian dogma. Lingering between the hard realism of the earth and the intangible skies, the graves too dramatise contemplation, allowing for various performative repertoires to emerge. This is also the effect of the photograph, and particularly the photograph of death. One such effect is notable in a

<sup>751</sup> Ibid p 56.

<sup>752</sup> Ibid.

photograph of a tombstone taken frontally and depicted in full length. The photograph draws attention to the inscription content which reads:

*Sacred to the Memory  
Col. Serg James Webb  
Died Feb 22<sup>nd</sup> 1862, Aged 27 years  
Also  
P/te Samuel Palmer  
Died April 23<sup>rd</sup> 1862, Aged 24 Years  
Also of  
William, Son of P. E. Thomas  
Died April 25<sup>th</sup> 1862 Aged 2 Years*

The inscription on another has been partly withered and only the following is discernable:

*IN MEMORY OF  
Serg. William Batton of 85<sup>th</sup> Kings Lt Inf. W (?)  
On 5<sup>th</sup> October 1858 at East (London?)  
Aged 32 years  
This stone is erected (?) comrade sergeant as a token of (?) esteem*

Similarly, another reads:

*Sacred  
To The Memory of  
A Petty Officer and five seamen of H.M.S. 'CASTOR'  
Drowned on the bar of this river April 3<sup>rd</sup> 1851  
Robert Langston. Gunner's Mate  
Michael County AB  
George Hodges AB  
John Pickles AB  
Samuel Costin AB  
Buried on the coast between the Buffalo and Kahoon Rivers  
Thomas Clemence AB  
Interred beneath this stone  
Erected by their shipmates serving with them at East London*

To capture the inscription in detail the photographer had to literally move closer to the graves to reveal the textual minutiae. Consequently, each grave's indexicality to "the literal proximity of human remains and the lingering spiritual presence of the dead"<sup>753</sup> is reinforced. Concerned with more than the condition of the graves, the photographer was clearly concerned with the narrative that emerged in each. Noting the English topographical verse tradition, Bunn states that tombs are not mute and instead are "markers of arrest, points at which a freely wandering subject on an imaginary landscape circuit is addressed and cast into

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<sup>753</sup> Ibid p 57.

a meditative mood”<sup>754</sup>. Not only does each tombstone in the said photographs provide a particular narrative but all three resonate as tales pertaining to early European settlers on the Eastern Cape in the nineteenth century. According to Bunn “European gravestones...were a manifestation of public ethics: they spliced together, in epitaph and graveyard, notions of ethical attentiveness with landscape semiotics”<sup>755</sup>. They function as indices not only to the subjects they represent but also speak subtextually of a particular moment in the country’s geographical, political and socio-cultural landscape. However, by depicting the graves in close proximity, text and texture converge, the photographs tell of the ‘pastness’ inscribed in the concrete structure of graves. This is a pastness that reinforces and is reinforced by the text that reveals their age.

To appreciate the urgency to draw attention to a colonial past that is inscribed in the images, it is also worthwhile to consider the visual markers brought by English immigrants in burial forms. Bunn regards the arrival of the 1820 settlers as the most significant wave of English immigration to the Eastern Cape. Of course, East London did not yet exist as a port. However, they brought with them distinctively European forms of public life, including burial forms with visual and spatial forms that set them apart from those of the native Africans. Bunn states:

Envisaged as a solution to frontier instability abroad and civil unrest and overpopulation at the time of the Peterloo massacre in England, this settlement scheme involved joint-stock parties of emigrants who were settled in the Zuurveld district (later called Albany), between the Bushmans and the Great Fish River, centred on the present-day town of Grahamstown...With the arrival of the 1820 settlers in the Eastern Cape, local and property relations were substantially changed. Most visibly, new spatial linkages developed between defensible sites: colonial forts and signalling station; emerging settler villages like Bathurst and Salem; fortified farmhouses; and a network of churches with walled graveyards. All these played a role in the development of the settler public sphere, and churches were particularly important in the regulation of rhythms of visiting and gathering that make up the spatiotemporal experience of community<sup>756</sup>.

Noting the difference between the European and Xhosa grave sites, Bunn points out that in the nineteenth century the latter were not obvious landscapes, while for the former as landscape signifiers graves were associated with ideas of individual citizenship, male subjectivity and property ownership<sup>757</sup>. For the British settlers graveyards in turn became an

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<sup>754</sup> Ibid p 57.

<sup>755</sup> Ibid p 68.

<sup>756</sup> Ibid.

<sup>757</sup> Ibid.



important visual analogue of the idea of white settlement itself in allowing for a dramatisation of genealogy as the second generation continually returned to tend to the graves of the founders. The graveyard, thus, became “a metonymy for the new settler identity in its landscape context”<sup>758</sup>.

It is in this context that the indexicality of the graves in Denfield’s photographs is pertinent in their allusion to the historical period of settlers. The photographs are both material traces of the past and representations of death. The act of revisiting these historical graves (depicted in the photographs) can be read, arguably, as a similar performative repertoire that sought to reinstate a settler historiography, particularly a British trace of the present. These repertoires entailed, in other words, a physical proximity to the graves. This is significant if one considers Bunn’s assertion that graves, as landscape features, usually address civil society in the future tense. He argues “their ability to function within the general syntax of mourning depends on the presumption of a stable civil society in the future, administered by those with roughly the same attitudes to the body and to property”<sup>759</sup>. The act of documenting the historical and decaying graves reconstituted Denfield’s belonging to a particular historical moment in the Cape. Thus even as a later arriving British immigrant (1947) these photographs suggest he anchored himself in a much longer line of settlers that were subsumed into colonial British Kaffraria.

His identification with the early settlers can also be read when taking into account his proximity to the graves. Hayes notes the issue of proximity to be characteristic in the history of photography in South Africa, in particular “the social distance between the photographer and the photographed and secondly the huge gulf between the world audience of viewers and the photographed”<sup>760</sup>. Her analysis in this regard, I have argued, focuses largely on the cohort of struggle photographers in the 1980s who negotiated tensions between ‘intruding’ in communities whose representations would at times circulate in the white walls of the art gallery. She also draws attention to the move by some white photographers in this same period and beyond to photograph their ‘own communities’ including Jenny Gordon and David Goldblatt, as well as feminist oriented photographers whose photography brought

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<sup>758</sup> Ibid p 60.

<sup>759</sup> Ibid p 61.

<sup>760</sup> Hayes, ‘A short history’, p 154.

gender politics into the visual frame<sup>761</sup>. Each context, in short, highlights the politics of the photographer's identity in relation to the photographed subject.

While Hayes' analysis pays attention to the late apartheid period, the notion of proximity can be usefully applied in analyses of photographic practice in different earlier periods. For example, in his study of Monica Hunter Wilson's photographs of Pondoland taken between 1931 and 1938, Assubuji argues that her photographs of women's rituals "suggest a sense of closeness and proximity, in keeping with her predominant emphasis on women in Pondo society, but which differs noticeably from the distant photographs of male rituals like the killing of cattle"<sup>762</sup>. He is also careful in pointing out Wilson's own familiarity of the region having spent her childhood there, as significant in mediating the "sense of cordiality between photographer and photographed"<sup>763</sup>.

A few photographs of the historical graves taken by Denfield are striking in revealing the photographer's physical proximity. He zoomed in closely to the tombstone drawing attention to several (legible) names of the buried: James and Mary Ryder buried in 1852; William Bartely and Mary Ann Bartely buried in 1881. The dates reveal a temporal distance between the subjects and the photographer, a distance that was simultaneously emphasized and abridged by the latter's proximity. The subjects under study appear as objects of 'love' comparable to his description of the writing of *Pioneer Port*. The photographs express what Buckley describes as "an anxious lover's discourse" where "the tumult of anxiety comes from waiting and anticipating the final loss of the loved object"<sup>764</sup>. For Buckley such affect is akin to a form of colonial nostalgia that romanticises imperial days where one remembers "a colonial period that the narrators did not experience directly and yet are still able to call to mind- a Platonic anamnesis, recollections of experiences known in a previous existence, by an earlier soul"<sup>765</sup>. Denfield's proximity suggests an urgency to bring to memory the lives of those buried as if there was the threat of amnesia amongst his imagined viewers.

His physical proximity is comparable to the use of the magnifying glass in the Cape Archives and South African library in pursuit of historical accuracy. The photographer was literally grasping at the inscription detail from which a narrative about the subjects buried could be

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<sup>761</sup> Ibid p 154.

<sup>762</sup> R. Assubuji, 'Anthropology and Fieldwork Photography: Monica Hunter Wilson's Photographs in Pondoland and BuNyakyusa, 1931- 1938', Unpublished MA thesis. University of the Western Cape (2010), p 17.

<sup>763</sup> Ibid 23.

<sup>764</sup> L. Buckley, 'Objects of Love and Decay: Colonial photographs in a postcolonial archive', *Cultural Anthropology*, 20, 2 (2005), p 256.

<sup>765</sup> Ibid 256.

unearthed. Part of what can be ascertained is that the names are clear indications of marital and familiar relationships.

Arguably, it is tempting to naturalise and de-historicise the establishment of white heterosexual relations in East London. In previous chapters I discussed briefly the arrival of ‘Kennaway Girls’ to East London under Grey’s vision of expanding the white population. However this tale is worth revisiting in this context given the manner in which Denfield’s photographs image it on some level. In the second half of the nineteenth century the town became privy to colonial policies which entangled the private with the political domain. One of George Grey’s plans when he became Governor of the Cape Colony in 1854 was the encouragement of greater European settlement regarding them as an important element in his policy for ‘civilising’ the Xhosa natives. According to Houghton, Grey rejected the notion of large tracts of Native reserve preferring the intermixed settlement of whites and blacks to minimise the possibility of an uprising amongst the latter and to provide European farmers with labour “that by such work the Xhosa would acquire habits of industry and learn more progressive methods of farming; and that by their propinquity the Xhosa would learn the ways of civilised living from their European neighbours”<sup>766</sup>. After struggling to attract colonists from families, Grey accepted German legionaries.

The German legionaries emerged in the context of the Crimean War which began in 1854 in which Britain enlisted soldiers from German states. According to Tankard, when the war was over by 1856 the legionnaires found themselves in a dilemma where they could not return home having taken an oath of allegiance to Queen Victoria<sup>767</sup>. Part of the War Office’s solution was to send them to the Eastern Cape frontier in South Africa where Grey had warned that it was about to erupt into another conflagration between the British and the Xhosas. Grey would have received approximately 8000 soldier-settlers. However, Grey had wanted married soldiers. The troop ships left Portsmouth for East London in November 1856. In the end only 2362 soldiers volunteered and out these only 361 were married, some with children. Eventually the Legion spread over different villages: one line of villages above the Keiskamma River, another along what came to Berlin and a third along the Amathole Mountains in present-day Stutterheim.

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<sup>766</sup>D.H. Houghton, *Economic Development in a Plural Society: Studies in the Border Region of the Cape Province* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1960), p 3.

<sup>767</sup> K. Tankard (online) [knowledge4africa.com](http://knowledge4africa.com).

According to Tankard, such a gross inequality in the numbers of men and women threatened to disrupt Grey's vision of the settler society. Charles Brownlee expressed concerns that the critical lack of women could be the failure of the military settlements noting that those with wives were making "every endeavour to render themselves comfortable" thus the lack of females "would be disastrous to the whole community" resulting in "great immorality" on the part of the soldiers without wives to tie them down where they would "roam the whole country in search of females" and be "frequently murdered by the native population"<sup>768</sup>. It is in this context that a group of 153 single women came via the ship, *Lady Kennaway* in September 1857<sup>769</sup>. The heterosexual familial trope thus emerged as a key constituent in the formation of a settler society in the Eastern Province, where women were to be used as instruments in the regulation of male sexuality in ways that were entangled with racial policy<sup>770</sup>.

When looking at Denfield's photographs of the historical graves, they emerge as a gendered trope that is partly a product of colonial policy. Perhaps more forcefully than in life, in the photographs husband and wife lie side by side forming an image of unity. In the graveyard, to some extent the subjects are the colonial settler society Grey hoped to create<sup>771</sup>. Without necessarily signifying Grey's policies, the graves image the heterosexual trope that became entangled with colonial policy and in turn, Denfield's proximity to the grave suggests there was some anxiety on his part to recall the past of settlement, to tend to its material traces even as its demise seemed inevitable. This can be discerned as well in his photographs of old buildings.

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<sup>768</sup> Ibid.

<sup>769</sup> According to Tankard, the emigrants also included 42 English artisans and their wives and 36 children.

<sup>770</sup> Denfield pointed out the failure of such arrangements despite Grey's insistence.

<sup>771</sup> Another wave of European immigration to the region took place when Grey contracted with a firm in Hamburg for the supply of 5000 German agriculturalists and their families. In 1858 to the following year 2315 German civilians arrived, although the males were to be liable for military service for three years. Moreover, from 1857 the population of British Kaffraria increased "as more Europeans filtered in to occupy the land left vacant by the great 'cattle killing' of 1857". This widely debated episode in the history of the frontier involves the Xhosa population's attempt at overthrowing British clout in a context of a series of battles over land and cattle. This involved killing one's cattle and destroying grain stores at the command of a prophetess Nongqawuse whose visions promised a subsequent miraculous recovery. See H.J. Watts & J. Agar-Hamilton, 'Border Port: A study of East London, South Africa, with Special Reference to the White Population', Institute of Social and Economic Research, Rhodes University, Occasional Paper No. 13 (1970).

## Future anterior?



Fig. 115



Fig. 116



Fig. 117



Fig. 118

Buckley argues that within the anxious lover's discourse, love for the object of study is often accompanied by the fear that this object will soon disappear<sup>772</sup>. This emerges in Denfield's photographic studies of historical buildings with a distinctive archaic style in architecture. The buildings have been photographed specifically in moments when they are not populated thus they appear deserted (see Fig. 115-118). The metaphor of the ghosts is useful here indicating loss and departure. Moreover, the photographs reveal an impulse to capture the historicity of the site, as if foreshadowing a possible/probable destruction. The abovementioned photographs of the Beach Hotel, for example, display a building still intact. However, the photographs are also a revelation of the building's impending destruction in 1964, an issue that drew attention in the local media. As the photographer moved from one location to another capturing the building, it is as though there was an attempt to arrest the site completely in time. The photographs taken by its entrance display the Beach Hotel's architectural splendour and size, its distinctive features that speak of an earlier period in

<sup>772</sup> Buckley, 'Objects of love and decay', p 257.

design: the rectangular windows, the roof that curves in parts, etc. Different components of the Hotel are also discernible such as the cars of guests, the bar on the ground floor, rooms on the top floor that extend to the back. In other words, the Hotel's role as place of leisure is clearly noteworthy. The Hotel's size is notable again in the photograph taken from a distance. However, devoid of much detail the Hotel appears less as a space of sociality but as physical construction amidst a largely uninhabited beachfront. Instead, it cuts a somewhat solitary figure in the landscape whose only companion is another large building adjacent to it.

Other photographs that draw attention to architectural historicity are those depicting a three-storey building, the Union House, populated by different stores (Fig. 119). One photograph has zoomed in on the plaque with the inscription "This stone was laid by his Excellency the honourable Sir Walter Francies Hely-Hutchinson C.C.M.C Governor of the Cape of Good Hope 25<sup>th</sup> October 1905". The building is clearly one of the city's oldest and by photographing the plaque Denfield highlighted this fact. A similar objective is achieved in another photograph that displays the same building whereby the photographer has angled the camera upwards to draw attention to the date '1905' that is inscribed on the site. Such a close depiction also reveals the intricate architectural detail of the site which too expresses a European aesthetic of a particular period. The photographs express Barthes' "tense of fascination" where the object "seems to be alive and yet it doesn't move; imperfect presence, imperfect death: neither oblivion nor resurrection; simply the exhausting lure of memory",<sup>773</sup>.



Fig. 119

Captured in functional form, the sites appear 'alive' but devoid of human presence they don't register much existence. A third photograph is a full length depiction of the building taken

<sup>773</sup> Buckley, 'Objects of love and decay', p 256.

from afar and partly revealing buildings on either side of it. Unlike the two said photographs, this one has included, probably by accident, a figure walking past it. This differs from the rest of the collection in which most sites are devoid of human presence. As one's eye moves from the prominently scripted '1905' date on top of the building, to the obscure figure on the ground, one is provided with two temporalities in the frame. The latter figure highlights the site as a place of everyday routine, while the plaque is a throwback to a different time. On the far right of the frame a building under construction is partly in view, albeit minus the photographer's intention in all probability. Visually it is a contrast to the Union House under study. It is in the process of coming into form and thus appears a little delicate in contrast to the older site that stands erect as though displaying evidence of its resilience.

The photographs of a set of buildings in Market Square in the city centre are depicted in a similar fashion. According to Minkley, the area that makes up Market Square/Oxford Street/Terminus Street provided up until 1940 "the public centre of marketing activities in the town and affirmed in the everyday and within living memory a spatial unity that simultaneously crystallized the meeting of [white] men as equals and the citizenship of the pound"<sup>774</sup>. One photograph is a wide-length depiction of buildings located in one corner of the Square and occupied by a hairdresser, butchery, coffee bar, bottle store, a farmer's market agency and a chemist with a large Kodak advert placed on one wall of the latter. Though it was ordinarily a populated place, the Square has been photographed at an auspicious time with no human presence visible. It thus appears to be in desertion, rendering the photographer the only occupier of the location. Yet he too remained at a distance as if to negate his presence and constitute the site as both temporally and spatially remote (Fig. 120).

In a manner comparable to his depiction of the Beach House, Denfield photographed the buildings from different angles revealing his own movement in the region and his choice in emphasising certain sites over others. In one photograph, for example, he zoomed in on the building occupied by the chemist, seemingly the oldest and visually the most prominent of the three adjoined buildings (Fig. 121). The photographer's movements again suggest a struggle taking place at the materiality of the photographic practice. They express a positivist impulse to document the site in a totalising manner, albeit unsuccessfully. The camera mobilised the photographer in his attempt to capture the building in totality. It acted upon him in-as-much as he directed his gaze onto different visual planes.

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<sup>774</sup> G. Minkley, 'Border Dialogues: Race, Class and space in the industrialization of East London, c1902-1963'. Doctoral Thesis, University of Cape Town (1994), p 57.

The term ‘capture’ is significant here suggesting incarceration and confinement. This term also alludes to misdeed and as Foucault has famously articulated, to discipline<sup>775</sup>. While the temptation may be to regard the buildings’ depiction as a project of Denfield’s own objectifying gaze, arguably, the photographer was in turn rendered immobile through the act of photographing which limited his gaze. The subject under gaze can never be fully ‘captured’ thus even as the buildings remained still, it was the photographer who became docile, subjected to the demands of the empiricist paradigm.



Fig. 120



Fig. 121

This can be noted in two photographs of the ‘Grocott & Sherry’ building in Oxford Street. The two photographs in the collection reveal the photographer’s movement while standing across the street capturing the site from slightly different angles (Fig. 122 & 123). Characteristically, the photographer angled the camera upwards to lead the eye to the date inscribed on the building’s arched top, ‘1899’. Inserted between two buildings with more contemporary designs, the building emerges in the frame as a ‘window’ to the past. Signs of a modernising town are evident all around the building, particularly the car parked in front of it and the use of the bottom part of the building as a business premise. By drawing attention to the top part of the building, Denfield configured the site as an object of inquiry, and in particular as an object inscribed with pastness. This is suggested too in photographs of the ‘H. Fletcher & Co’ building. One reveals that the ground floor of the three-storey building has been occupied by a jewellery shop and a chemist, while the first floor is the venue for a ballroom school. All these are signs of human traffic and commercial activity throughout the

<sup>775</sup> M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin, 1977).



building, yet, in another photograph that is oriented upwards to the signs that betray the site's age, the building is in turn reconstituted as historical (Fig. 124).



Fig. 122



Fig. 123

In a manner that is comparable to the representation of 'Grocott & Sherry', the building is temporarily suspended from moment in which it has been of captured and is transported to an earlier period. Like the graves, the old buildings are configured as indexical to the past both in their materiality and as a visual marker in their architectural form. Moreover, they appear as stubborn resistors to the waves of change that the city had undergone. Denfield's description above of 'Carrington's building' - built in 1880- as indestructible is significant here hinting at a desire for permanence.



Fig. 124

Yet, it is as if Denfield's camera could not avoid subtle indicators of change despite his gaze upon the visual 'proof' of permanence. For one thing, while one photograph of 'H. Fletcher & Co' shows a four-storey building on the left of the frame adjacent to it, another photograph shows the same site under construction once again. In both photographs much of the site has been cut off from the frame and thus appears accidentally. This change indicates 'H. Fletcher' was captured at different times, thereby 'accidentally' capturing changes in the built environment of Oxford Street simultaneously. Almost as equally stubborn as the photographer's insistence on drawing attention to the old, both the older building that was eventually demolished and the new building under construction peer through the frame revealing their unavoidable presence.

These photographs of historical buildings, in other words, function simultaneously as historical markers but also in what Grosz has described as the future anterior, which is the sense of "what will have been, what the past and present will have been in light of a future that is possible only because of them"<sup>776</sup>. Drawing on Irigaray in her advocacy of such a tense in feminist history writing Grosz argues:

The past is not a diminished or receded former present, a present that has faded into memory or carried in artefacts that intrude in the present. The past is the virtual that coexists with the present, the past, in other words, is always already contained in the present, not as its cause or its pattern, but rather as its latency, its virtuality, its potential for being otherwise. The question of history is about the production of conceivable futures, the future being understood not as that which is similarly contained in the present but rather that which diverges from the present, one uncontained by and unpredicted from within the present<sup>777</sup>.

Buckley suggests that forms of colonial nostalgia can manifest in a commitment to colonial history that is feared to have been silenced thus colonial objects mediate to create such a link between the past and the present to substantiate "the teleology of a history that one day in the future will be more accurate than it is today"<sup>778</sup>. While reading Denfield's project alongside Irigaray and Grosz's feminist work is potentially inept, the notion of future anterior allows one to interrogate the sense of urgency imbedded in the collection. In his analysis of ruin in film, for example, Von Moltke notes the ways in which the genre of science fiction often operates in the future anterior in its treatments of historic sites, particularly ruins, by projecting the temporality of the ruin into the project. He argues "Where historical ruins memorialise abandoned utopias, science fiction sketches out a future in which the present will

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<sup>776</sup> E. Grosz, 'Histories of a feminist future', *Signs*, 25, 4 (2000), p 1019.

<sup>777</sup> Ibid 1020.

<sup>778</sup> Buckley, 'Objects of love and decay', p 258.

have been abandoned as so much historical debris”<sup>779</sup>. As one peruses through Denfield’s collection of East London in the 1960s, one can discern an evolution in subject matter to that debris.

It is when one considers the images in the collection as potentially a form of documentary photography that one can regard the project as interventionist. Hayes proposes an interrogation of the idea of documenting given its evidentiary underpinnings and the associations with empirical observation, recording of existing phenomena, realist discourses, sobriety, seriousness and truth-telling<sup>780</sup>. Scholars have highlighted its Latin roots in ‘docer’ which means to teach, which was then transposed to legal settings and took on the persuasiveness of proof. In the 1920’s when it emerged, the proliferation and growing complexity of visual fields and specialization meant it was taken up more broadly. With this in mind Hayes thus challenges us to ask what the notion of documentary conceals and what it congeals. This is because the notion of documentary can have repressive functions, although it may also open up other possibilities. The repressive functions are noted in literature that has shown, for example, how instrumental photographic processes were central to managing the new forms of governance intrinsic to colonial expansion, the second industrial revolution and state formation in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>781</sup>.

Much attention has been drawn recently in South African scholarship to social documentary photography and its implication in politics and social change in much of the twentieth century. Arguably, the scholarship has tended to focus on the lives of black South Africans and photographers in the context of the apartheid regime. However, other studies have focused on the earlier decades in which white photographers explored black urban lives. In the introductory chapter I wrote of Du Toit’s exploration of photographs taken by anthropologist Ellen Hellman as part of her research in Johannesburg’s urban slums yards and urban black townships from 1933 to 1938<sup>782</sup>. Hers is one such example of documentary work. Du Toit argues that at a time when images of African women circulating in the regional visual economy framed a narrow range of stereotypes that were seldom destabilized, Hellman’s photographs refocused attention away from women’s bodies as signs of ethnic

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<sup>779</sup> J. Von Moltke, ‘Ruin Cinema’, in J. Hell, & A. Schonle, eds., *Ruins of Modernity* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2010), p 409.

<sup>780</sup> Hayes, ‘Introduction: visual genders’, p 526.

<sup>781</sup> Tagg, *The burden of representation*, p 630.

<sup>782</sup> M. Du Toit, ‘The General View and Beyond: From Slum-yard to Township in Ellen Hellman’s Photographs of Women and the African Familial in the 1930’s’, *Gender and History*, 17, 3(2005), 593-626.

specificity onto the living spaces that constituted the Johannesburg slum-yard, refiguring these as spaces of arduous women's work for the survival of their families.

Similarly, in his volume *Defiant Images*, Newbury analyses the work Constance Stuart Larrabee taken between the late 1930s and 1940<sup>783</sup>s. Newbury notes that Stuart Larrabee's work in the 1930s was dominated initially by studies on 'tribal' Africans echoing the discourses of salvage anthropology that were prominent in Europe at the time. By the 1940s her camera had turned towards urban black South Africans where she captured different street and public scenarios of townships on the periphery of Johannesburg, from mineworkers to the infamous images of 'shebeen queens'<sup>784</sup>. Newbury notes however, that unlike Hellman who used photography as a potential tool for social inquiry and reform, Stuart Larrabee's "main allegiance was to the medium"<sup>785</sup>.

Much of the investigation into documentary photography in South Africa has focused on the 1950s *Drum* era and press photography. One example is Lotter's investigation into Gopal Naransamny's photography in *Drum* magazine and *Golden City Post* whose images documented sport and recreational activities pertaining to 'Indian lifestyles'<sup>786</sup>. Though Naransamny lost a bulk of photographs from his collection, through a series of conversations with Lotter, he was able to reconstruct mental images in drawing. She argues "'Naransamy's mental images are anything but mute. Full of context, if not necessarily detail, they speak with the nostalgic voice of a lost time"<sup>787</sup>. In her account of the role of *Drum* in launching black photographers, Hayes lists Alf Khumalo, Bob Gosani, Ernest Cole and Peter Magubane as amongst a cohort of photographers who, in their representation of popular urban life "portrayed worlds that were extraordinarily animated, vivid and ineluctably modern"<sup>788</sup>. She regards, however, Ernest Cole's *House of Bondage* (1967) as the most sustained body of work in this generation:

As the title suggests, it ripped open the belly of the apartheid beast by making visible the multifaceted challenges people confronted in their daily lives. Peter Magubane followed

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<sup>783</sup>D. Newbury, *Defiant Images: Photography and Apartheid South Africa* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2009)

<sup>784</sup> Newbury notes the importance of such a figure in the urban landscape of Johannesburg. Women, including those who had come to the mining townships in search of their migrant husbands or employment, often brew liquor illegally as a means of making a living, p 26.

<sup>785</sup> Ibid 41.

<sup>786</sup> S. Lotter, 'Gopal Naransamy: a photographer without photographs', *Kronos: Southern African Histories*, November, 33 (2007), 183-180.

<sup>787</sup> Ibid 173.

<sup>788</sup> Hayes, 'A short history', p 144.

with much courageous photojournalist work before and after the 1976 Soweto uprising and state crackdown, until he too was obliged to work abroad<sup>789</sup>.

Such an impulse was eventually taken up by the progressive photographic collective agency, Afrapix, founded by Omar Badsha, Paul Weinberg, Lesley Lawson, Cedric Nunn and Peter MacKenzie in 1982<sup>790</sup>. Publishing their images in photo essays, magazines, newspapers and public exhibition spaces, and to a lesser extent, in commercial galleries or museum archives, the photographers aimed to “document the conflicts between oppressors and their victims so as alert, persuade and elicit support for the oppressed, from the vantage point of the oppressed person”<sup>791</sup>.

Arguably, the emphasis on apartheid and the colonial context as a base of these analyses runs the risk of conflating documentary work with anti-colonial/anti-apartheid work thereby exoticising the genre and over-valuing its progressive characteristics. Given the emphasis on representations of the marginalised in these studies of documentary work, there is some difficulty in situating Denfield’s project alongside such photographers. Yet, Solomon-Godeau points out the model of documentary photography that is “defined within the framework of reformist or ameliorative intent, encompassing issues such as public address, reception, dissemination, the notion of project or narrative rather than single image”<sup>792</sup>. Subsequently, the camera is used instrumentally as a persuasive device. It is within such a framework that Denfield’s collection of East London sites in the 1960s can be regarded as a form of urgent address. Solomon-Godeau thus points out that the retrospective construction of the documentary mode thus begins with Jacob Riis, who, having worked as a police reporter and free-lance journalist in New York, took reformist photographs in the 1880s that depict the lives of the poor<sup>793</sup>.

This has some convergence with the development of photojournalism which appeared at the start of the twentieth century “as a means of showing to the world the evidence of crimes

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<sup>789</sup> Ibid p 144.

<sup>790</sup> Ibid p 146.

<sup>791</sup> D. Kantz, ‘Politics and Photography in apartheid South Africa’, *History of Photography*, 32, 4 (2008), pp 290-300. Attention has also been drawn to documentary practices that have emerged more recently where different forms of struggle are pictured. Most notable, perhaps, is Zanele Muholi’s study of black lesbian sexuality which challenges normative assumptions about heterosexuality. Gunkel writes that by visualising the negotiations of local representations of same-sex intimacies and identities with global lesbian cultures her images “target the assumption- and its effect- that homosexuality cannot act as a signifier for a decolonized subject”. See H. Gunkel, ‘Through the Postcolonial Eyes: Images of Gender and Female Sexuality in Contemporary South Africa’, *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 13, 1 (2009), 77-87.

<sup>792</sup> A. Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the dock: essays on photographic history, institutions and practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p 173.

<sup>793</sup> Ibid.

against humanity, to display through images proof of the unbelievable”<sup>794</sup>. Ritchin writes that the hypocrisy of the Vietnam war would in turn arouse protests of the politically minded photographer who denounced the hypocrisy of the cause of the conflict and its gratuitous violence<sup>795</sup>. Denfield’s photographs also has some resonance with the ‘humanistic’ documentary tradition that became concrete in Europe in the 1950s whose subject matter included the routine and the banal such Henri Carter-Bresson who, in the 1930s “explored the world of humble people and those on the fringes of society in Mexican slums or on the streets of Marseille” with an attitude of sympathy or the work of Bruce Davidson who took various street scenes in Paris in the 1950s displayed nostalgic tenderness and “sought sensitive expression in the most banal situation”<sup>796</sup>. Nowhere are these characteristic more notable in Denfield’s collection than in his photographs of ruins.

### **Images of ruin**

The ruin signals the impending breakdown of meaning and therefore fosters intensive compensatory discursive activity. In its ambivalence and amorphousness, the ruin functions as a uniquely flexible and productive trope for modernity’s self awareness. Indeed, it is one of the master tropes of modern reflexivity, precisely because it encapsulates vacuity and loss as underlying constituents of the modern identity. It is the reflexivity of a culture that interrogates its own becoming<sup>797</sup>.

To appreciate the interventionist impulse that characterises Denfield’s photographs it is useful to firstly unpack the historical context in which they were produced and the kinds of anxieties to which they speak. By the early 1960s South Africa’s political stage brought to the public’s attention the extent of the repressive apartheid regime in ways that one could not efface from one’s imagination. The Sharpeville Massacre contributed significantly in exposing its system of control when sixty nine black protestors were killed while 180 were injured when the police opened fire on a crowd of demonstrators<sup>798</sup>. The demonstration had been a product of the African National Congress and the Pan-Africanist Congress that had been formed in 1959 by breakaway members of the ANC. In December of that year the ANC

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<sup>794</sup> F. Ritchin, ‘Close Witness: The involvement of the photojournalist’, in M. Frizot, ed., *A New History of Photography* (Kolhn: Konemann, 1994), pp. 591-611.

<sup>795</sup> Ibid p 591.

<sup>796</sup> J. Gautrand, ‘Looking at others: Humanism and neo-realism’, in M. Frizot, ed., *A New History of Photography* (Kolhn: Konemann, 1994), pp.613-632.

<sup>797</sup> J. Hell, J. & A. Schonle, ‘Introduction’, in J. Hell & A. Schonle, eds., *Ruins of Modernity* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2010), p 6.

<sup>798</sup> R. Mulholland, *South Africa: 1848-1994* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p 42.

had decided to hold massive demonstrations on 31 March 1960 against pass laws and to link this with a national campaign for a minimum wage of 1 pound. The PAC, however, pre-empted the plan by planning a campaign to defy pass laws on the 21<sup>st</sup> and demand slightly higher wages.

All over the country PAC members defied pass laws and many were arrested. In Sharpeville, however, the police opened fire. The shooting was condemned globally as it had effectively exposed the system of control which was described in overseas press as inhumane<sup>799</sup>. The Massacre and related protests sent ripples of shock throughout the country, resulting in the government exerting greater forms of control. For example, a state of emergency was proclaimed in 122 of the Union's 265 magisterial districts thus giving authorities power to prohibit gatherings, impose curfews, detain suspects, impound publications and search premises as a means of maintaining public order. The effect was felt economically as well, albeit temporarily, when gold and foreign exchange reserves fell from R315 million in January 1960 to R142 million by June in 1961 due to a loss of confidence by investors<sup>800</sup>.

Greater political developments were felt when in 1961 South Africa became a Republic and withdrew from the Commonwealth. According to Mulholland this had been a desire of many Afrikaners nationalists who wanted to regain what they had lost in the 'Boer war' and to loosen ties with Britain<sup>801</sup>. Even though Verwoerd had insisted that becoming a republic would not bring about major changes to whites, it would in practice imply the acceptance of Nationalist policy. Indeed, Verwoerd had campaigned for the issue as a non-party one, employing ideas of the unity between the English and Afrikaans whites<sup>802</sup>. This did not necessarily allay some fears of the Opposition that it would in reality be a 'Verwoerd Republic' characterised by threats to civil liberties and democratic procedures<sup>803</sup>. However, when Verwoerd submitted the republican issue to a referendum of white voters in October 1960, the majority voted despite the United Party and Progressive Party's opposition.

When South African officially became a Republic in 1961 its position in the Commonwealth became precarious. Kenney argues that for the few anti-republics, the Commonwealth represented security in a threatening world and expressed a sentimental attachment to the

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<sup>799</sup> R.Davenport & C. Saunders, *South Africa: A modern History*, (Basingstoke, Hampshire: MacMillan, 2000), p 413.

<sup>800</sup> Ibid p 145.

<sup>801</sup> Mulholland, *South Africa: 1848-1994*, p 45.

<sup>802</sup> H. Kenney, *Architect of Apartheid: H.F. Verwoerd- An Appraisal*, (Braamfontein: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1980).

<sup>803</sup> Ibid p198.

‘Crown’ and ‘home’<sup>804</sup>. This was perhaps coupled with British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan’s speech in 1960 only a few weeks before the Sharpeville shootings that Britain would fail to give South Africa support in light of some of its apartheid policies that went against Britain’s policies of “political destinies of free men, to which in our territories we are trying to give effect”<sup>805</sup>. According to Kenney by the time Prime Ministers met for the Commonwealth Conference in March 1961 attitudes towards apartheid had hardened such that if South Africa were to remain part it would do so in increasingly uncomfortable circumstances<sup>806</sup>. Thus Verwoerd withdrew the application to avoid “interference in her domestic policies”<sup>807</sup>.

Soon after its declaration, more measures were introduced for public control. Discretionary powers were given to a new Publications Control Board in 1963 to prohibit the importation of works and films considered offensive, harmful to public morals, blasphemous or prejudicial to state security. The South African Broadcasting Corporation’s political stance changed to openly favour the policies of government. According to Davenport and Saunders, for those with an attachment to Britain, the umbilical cord was cut leaving them in a position of having to decide whether to remain British or become South African citizens<sup>808</sup>. Many English speakers chose to flee the country to seek “refuge and greater security in more genuinely Anglo-Saxon parts of the world, notably Australia”<sup>809</sup>.

It is when taking into the account the politically charged moment of the early 1960s that one can begin to unpack the manner in which the photographs function as silent ‘protest’. Through their depiction of demolition, on one level, they echo the highly disruptive changes that were taking place in the Republic. Yet, such demolition in the collection is far from haphazard but points largely to sights that speak of an era of British imperialism, or the city’s imperial past. It is as if in the context of shift towards Republicanism they recall a different period of rule, protesting that the Republic had brought ruin.

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<sup>804</sup> Ibid

<sup>805</sup> Mulholland, *South Africa: 1848-1994*, p 44.

<sup>806</sup> Kenney, *Architect of Apartheid*, p 204.

<sup>807</sup> Ibid p 203.

<sup>808</sup> Davenport & Saunders, *A modern history*, p 418.

<sup>809</sup> Kenney, *Architect of Apartheid*, p197.





Fig. 125



Fig. 126



Fig. 127



Fig. 128

Even as Denfield moved through the city capturing architectural evidence of permanence, the buildings nevertheless, contained signs of transience. While the historical buildings photographed show signs of being lived in, his photographs of a different set of buildings throughout the city draw attention to the sites as objects of decay. They are in fact, images of ruin (see Fig. 125-128). Viewed collectively, the photographs in turn image the photographer's own efforts at trafficking through the city in search of ruin akin to what Hell and Schonle regard as ruin gazing<sup>810</sup>. In their edited volume, *Ruins Of Modernity*, Hell and Schonle list a number of famous ruin gazers from Napoleon and his obsession with the description of Egypt's ruins, Freud and his exploration of the unconscious as a form of ruin to Hitler who visited Italy in the wake of Mussolini's reconstruction of Rome as the city of imperial power<sup>811</sup>. Noting the ways in which the ruin emerges through the beholder's gaze, they argue that "The ruin is predicated on a particular gaze cast upon it, either modern or postmodern. The beholder defines the ruin, and the ruin could not exist without such creative

<sup>810</sup> Hell, & Schonle, 'Introduction', p 1.

<sup>811</sup> Ibid p 2.

appropriations”. Thus they argue that as a space for speculative strategies the ruin can tell us much about the ruin gazer<sup>812</sup>.

In such a formulation, the image of the young girl posed in different locations by the harbour in Denfield’s aforementioned photographs, re-emerges as one of ruin gazing. As the photographs are taken showing her back, we watch her in contemplation as she gazes upon the river. The photographs reconstitute both the landscape and her gazing as objects of inquiry, a point that is reinforced by her solitude in the environment. Posed to view the grand panoramas of the harbour, the subject in the photographs reflects what Hell and Schonle regard as tensions raised by ruins, that is, “the enormous tension between minute description and grand narrative, between modernist minimalism and metaphysical philosophising”<sup>813</sup>.

The authors situate ruin gazing in a particular historical moment in the west:

What we now call ruins began to be perceived and preserved as such during the Renaissance, when the awareness of historical discontinuities and the demise of ancient civilisations raised the status of traces from the past. These traces- architectural remnants which had long lost their functionality and meaning- could be invested with various attributes: historical, aesthetic, and political, for example. They reveal an ambivalent sense of time, at once an awareness of an insuperable break from the past that constitutes the modern age and the sense that some valuable trace has endured and needs to be cherished<sup>814</sup>.

Ruin gazing thus involves the conscious effort of reconfiguring the architectural site as a historically meaningful one. Photography becomes an effective method of such a task given its ability to provide vertical samplings of the past. Granted, the photographer of ruins is of course capturing various sites in his own temporality, however, the photographic medium helps to reinforce the historicity of the site as we have seen above. The medium that arrests time, in other words, helps to foster the identification of the site as an object *from* the past. One example is a conspicuous photograph of the ‘Baptist Hall’. It is a full-length depiction of a two-storey building taken by its entrance. The photographer has carefully minimised ‘intrusion’ from the surrounding environment such that the building appears as a solitary figure in an ‘open’ field, although there are smaller buildings around it that peer through the frame. As a result, the Hall, appearing as solitary site, is reconfigured as a *landmark*, in a manner comparable to the treatment of graves. This isolation is exacerbated by the absence of people. The building appears abandoned indeed. Its paint is partly washed off. The zinc roof

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<sup>812</sup> Ibid p 7.

<sup>813</sup> Ibid p 7.

<sup>814</sup> Ibidp 5.

has slowly perished. Moreover, the grass outside is overgrown again suggesting lack of occupation of the space.

Yet, despite these obvious signs of ruin, the Baptist Hall has been photographed majestically. The camera lens has been angled upwards while the building's face receives maximum light exposure. The result is a stately representation of the site elevated from the photographer's eye level. Subsequently, with its signs of decay that give a clue to its age, the building is endowed with historical significance. As part of the collection, the photograph of the Baptist Hall is distinct in such a treatment of a site. However, it is comparable to the aforementioned photograph of the master's residence of College Street School. The two photographs have both set apart the site from its surroundings allowing the building to emerge as an object of inquiry that is distinct from the environment. This is striking when one considers that the residence is in the vicinity of the school which is barely noticeable in the photographs.

A similar effect is achieved in photographs of two adjacent buildings. One site has the inscription 'The Colonial Banking & Trust Co Ltd'. It is a full-length depiction of an uninhabited site in a dire state, from the paint that has peeled off grossly, to cracks on the wall. The photograph is an image of abandonment and defeat. Placed on such a site, the inscription which reveals the building's prior occupation functions as the punctum in the frame. As a commercial site, The Colonial Banking and Trust appears as a historical endeavour itself in ruin, a crumbled effort that has lost its dignity. Yet, by giving it particular attention, the photographer arrested this process from the further corrosion by highlighting instead what the site was and possibly could have been (Fig. 129).



Fig. 129



Fig. 130

This is notable again in the photograph of the building of ‘Power Electrical Contractors’ situated next to it (Fig. 130). Architecturally the latter building is newer in design but it too bears signs of demolition. The inscription on the site that includes the phone number of the business that once utilised the building once again becomes the punctum. Like the Colonial Banking and Trust site, the building speaks of the commercial history of the city. The appearance of the phone number- which would ordinarily indicate communication and interaction with residents at large- is ironic. The building in fact, exists in quiet desertion. However, like the former business premise adjacent to it, the building has been photographed as if to highlight not only its history but its possible future.

On close inspection, the selection of these particular commercial buildings, namely ‘The Colonial Banking Trust’, ‘Grocott & Sherry’, ‘H. Fletcher & Co.’ etc, is far from haphazard. They are all remnants of a particular period in East London’s industrial history. According to Minkley, by the turn of the century East London’s local economy was dominated by large merchant and smaller commercial capital. These pioneering firms were the outgrowths from a Cape Town- and Port Elizabeth centred mercantilism “which was itself integrally tied to metropolitan London establishments, ‘agencies’ and ‘offices’”<sup>815</sup>. For Minkley, “this unambiguously British and Victorian’ commercial web of Empire in taste and volume and in capital and trade, provided ‘daily sustenance’ to this local commercial sector and its ‘men of acumen and character’”<sup>816</sup>. Thus much as had been the case with his photographs of graves, the photographs of ruin direct the viewer to a particular temporality of British rule. Even as they point to the ‘annihilation’ of such a period, the photographs attempt to ‘restore’ its remnants through both the material traces of the buildings and the materiality of the photographs.

In Denfield’s photographs of ruins the past and the future collapse in the frame. The images simultaneously speak of what was and possible futures. Through the photographic, these different temporalities exist in a relational manner. In particular, it is the condition of the site as ruin that allows such a relationship. As Von Moltke argues “At their most challenging ruins confront us with the foreclosed futures of an earlier era, reintroduce contingency into history, and offer ‘memory traces of an abandoned set of futures’”<sup>817</sup>. Arguably, the work of ruins is accentuated by the very medium of photography. In his study of ruin in cinema, Von

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<sup>815</sup> Minkley, ‘Border Dialogues’, p 38.

<sup>816</sup> Ibid p 45.

<sup>817</sup> Von Moltke, ‘Ruin Cinema’, p 401.

Moltke interrogates the epistemological affinities between ruin and cinema, noting how as particularly modern forms of grasping temporality and contingency, ruin and the cinema activate ways of knowing the past and its relation to the present<sup>818</sup>. He states:

If the cinema offers new modes of temporality, including the reversibility of time, ruins invite their visitors to travel along time and distant spaces in the medium of decaying or destroyed architecture. Not only do the remnants index the transient temporal moment from which they survive, but they also serve as the material connection that links the traveller, tourist, or resident of a bombed-out city contemplating (if not living in) ruins to the past as well as to 'possible futures that have been foreclosed on in past defeats'... The related temporality of play of ruin and cinema owes as much to their respective production as it does to paradoxically related modes of perception. A mechanical process captures different light values on a chemical emulsion in the case of film; the production of ruins requires the work of nature and the force of gravity- with the latter of particular relevance in cases where nature has been replaced by engineering, as in the aerial bombing of modern warfare<sup>819</sup>.

Von Moltke's essay is concerned primarily with film. However, some overlaps can be discerned with photography, notwithstanding significant differences in the two media in their treatment of temporality and other sensory modes. Whilst the medium does not allow for a technical reversal of time (here, Von Moltke addresses the technologies of filmic replay), as samplings of time they allow for travel to distant spaces along time operating as traces of materiality to the past. However, it is not only the epistemological similarities with photography and ruin that I wish to highlight but also the importance the medium in endowing the ruin with historical significance. Denfield's photographs, I have argued, help to construct those particular sites as ruins that express concerns about contingency and history. Nevertheless, Von Moltke's allusion to the violence of nature and the chemistry of film is significant not only in relation to similar observations that have been made regarding the relationship between the development of warfare and photography but also in relation to the war idiom that permeates Denfield's images of ruin.

In his exploration of post-war architectural reconstruction in the United States and Europe, from the Second World War right up to the post 9/11 reconstruction of the twin towers, Vidler argues that these efforts implicitly express an anxiety of being bombed into oblivion<sup>820</sup>. In their depictions of lack, Denfield's photographs of buildings in ruin echo a similar anxiety about loss. A few photographs, for example, depict ambiguous sites that

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<sup>818</sup> Ibid 396

<sup>819</sup> Ibid 398

<sup>820</sup> A. Vidler, 'Air War and Architecture', in J. Hell & A. Schonle, eds., *Ruins of Modernity* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2010), p 30.

appear as though they are the effects of bombing. One photograph shows an architectural landscape now turned into rubble. It appears to have been a deliberate destruction of the site. Stones, metal pieces, wooden bits and grass now occupy the site (Fig. 131). The photograph expresses “the feeling of abrupt awakening that ruination produces”<sup>821</sup>. Another ghostly image is in the photograph of an ambiguous stone structure with water pipes on top. Grass is overgrown around. The hole in the centre suggests a grim and ultimately bare interior. The site no longer has signs of life and appears instead as an aftermath of destruction.



Fig. 131

I am reminded of Denfield’s warning of modernity’s destructive potential and his fears of being ‘bombed out of existence’ that he expressed when he circulated images of pagan studies and Basutoland idylls. In the former he perceived an existence that appeared little touched by time. In the latter he found escape in mountains, waterfalls and in the opportunity to construct idealised visions. However, the violence brought on by the repressive apartheid regime could not be obliterated in the public’s imagination in the 1960s and perhaps offered little opportunity for romantic expressions. His photographs of East London sites in the 1960s do not only register these changes but visualise protest against change that appeared to have brought ruin.

## Conclusion

Following her husband’s death, Lea Denfield joined the numerous South Africans who immigrated to Australia in 1968<sup>822</sup>. While one cannot draw too many conclusion from such a

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<sup>821</sup> Hell & Schonle, ‘Introduction’, p 4.

<sup>822</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 22 September 1968.

decision, not least because her reasons are unknown, it does perhaps suggest some discontent with her locality. Twenty years after leaving Nigeria, we now encounter again a concern with the past through Denfield's photographs, with documenting signifiers of the past not through mapping on the body but in the architectural site. While Denfield displaced his Nigerian subjects away from the flow of time, twenty year later he pointed his camera towards those sites that threatened to disappear. As I noted in previous chapters, in the process of his photographic studies of pagans, Denfield expressed his stern criticism of burgeoning modernity and its potential for complete destruction. Similar anxieties can be discerned in his photography of old buildings and ruin. Buildings, like identities, provide structures and a sense of foundation, and yet are vulnerable to change, abandon and obliteration. Undoubtedly Denfield was fully aware of the significant geographical and political shifts that were happening around him in the city. His photographs in some ways echo the very nature of 'destructive' change that was taking place with various zones being destroyed, families removed and relocated, sites replaced and renamed. Unlike the glass negatives of a Victorian East London which appealed to his romantic sensibility, this was the 'real' East London of the 1960s whose rapid and brutal changes undermined any celebratory sense of conquest over the city. As Hell and Schonle argue "the desire for preservation in the interest of historical continuity often barely concealed the political exploitation of ruins as signs of past greatness that could be re-appropriated"<sup>823</sup>. If the 1950s photographs of Basutoland were partly a visual expression of the ambiguities of white English settler identity, in these images he took of a dying East London he once again retreated to signifiers of the past that he had effectively romanticized in *Pioneer Port*.

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<sup>823</sup> Hell & Schonle, 'Introduction', p 6.

## Conclusion

By way of concluding, I return to the filing cabinets in the East London Municipal library where the Denfield Collection resides. In one cabinet, one is greeted with a printed photograph of Denfield standing next to old cameras and smiling for the photographer<sup>824</sup>. It is the first item one sees in its folder which includes texts that briefly describe his life and aspects of his photographic career (Fig. 132). Through its arrangement and content, the photograph is a précis of the archive allowing Denfield to appear as '*ra le tsoantso*' or 'father of the pictures', this time not only to bystanders in Basutoland but to all who peruse his archive. In some ways, it is a contrast to the photograph that appeared in *Photography* where Denfield was shown standing next to another figure in Nigeria approximately twenty years before this particular photograph was taken (see Fig. 29). Inevitably, in the later photograph, Denfield appears older and more wrinkled. Much of the composure and air of authority he had carried since his travels in Nigeria remains but he also appears more self-assured (can one read in his body language air of 'appropriateness' that is often associated with doctors?). He is no longer a stranger in unfamiliar territory but very much an expert in a suit and with his hands carefully placed in front. As Denfield poses with the old camera he appears as one who has returned from his expeditions and has brought back forms of knowledge to share.



Fig. 132

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<sup>824</sup> The same image appeared in an article on the *East London Times* that publicised his permanent exhibition of East London photographs at the East London Museum and was thus likely taken by a photographer of the newspaper



In turn, throughout the thesis I have paid particular attention to the kind of knowledge he brought to the public in the form of images and texts. Doing so has also led me to widen the extent of the Denfield Collection through reading its contents alongside other texts that make up the Africana Room as well as tracing other stops of his collection that lie outside the library. These include the British Museum, East London Museum, the web, newspapers and photo shops. In other words, although I have used the Collection in the East London library as a focal point from which my research has emerged, in the process I have in turn reconstructed Denfield's archive through these aforementioned stops. Nor is this process necessarily complete, in that the emergence of his texts and images in different locations suggests more may be lodged elsewhere. My research simply reflects the organisation of his material as an archive in the library. Thus I have oscillated between using his archive as historical 'source', that is, as evidence from which I have construed a particular historical narrative that traces his career trajectory, and simultaneously as an object of interrogation. That is to say, I have viewed his collection through a critical lens asking questions about its production and the discursive work it does through its content.

Such a framework relates partly to Edwards's notion of raw histories in her characterisation of photographs, which I invoked in the introductory chapter. Edwards is referring specifically to photographs' ability to offer interruptions through fracture, thereby allowing for readings of multiple histories<sup>825</sup>. Arguably, this can be applied in working through archives and indeed I have committed to a reading of both the archive and individual images that takes into account both the trivial and significant. This is perhaps comparable to Stoler's reading of archives *along* the archival grain by paying attention to its granular rather than simply smooth textures<sup>826</sup>.

This paradigm allows both a reading of images through the more familiar lens of 'representation', that is, interrogating the politics of particular depictions in relation to specific socio-political contexts, as well as an analytic lens that goes beyond this model by taking images much more seriously as more than by-products of their contexts. Via Mitchell's provocation, this entails taking into account the image and image-beholder relationality in other words. Moreover, this helps to avoid simply characterising Denfield's work based on overly familiar (and at times nebulous) categories such as colonial, imperial, ethnographic, documentary, etc. and instead further deepening understandings around the production of

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<sup>825</sup> Edwards, *Raw Histories*, p 18.

<sup>826</sup> Stoler, *Along the archival grain*, p 53.

images in relation to each of these categories/contexts. Thus with regards to his pagan studies, for example, I have located them within a longer tradition of classifying non-European 'natives' and I have argued for such studies as foundational over his twenty-year career. Instead, throughout the thesis I have used such characterisations liberally but have also remained cognisant of the ways in which they may be porous at times.

To read carefully through the Denfield Collection is to in fact, engage in travel with him as he traversed different locations over a twenty-year period. The 'trek' emerged as a key characteristic throughout his career and one I have drawn attention to in every facet. Working chronologically, I began by paying attention to his travels throughout northern Nigeria where his career in photography began essentially with regards to offering public forms of knowledge. His notes from this period indicate that there is little doubt that Denfield had intended to develop public forms of representation. Thus his photographs of 'pagans' were to be read as anthropological studies by a European subject who saw the opportunity to 'salvage' the 'disappearing tribes'.

The related discourses of temporality and mapping emerged in this discussion, and in varying degrees, characterised virtually all aspects of his work. Denfield placed his subjects within a particular temporal framework, that is, as signifiers of a bygone era far removed from modernity whose existence was akin to a cultural sanctuary. This is a form of engagement with History through constituting the subjects as symbols of the past. Thus much attention was drawn in his photographs to various aspects of 'pagan' life including dress, housing, the market place and various material artefacts through which 'pastness' was then constituted. Visible difference was constructed most frequently, however, through the body, particularly the naked (mostly female) body and scarification. Such representational strategies, of course, did not exist in a vacuum but can be located in the much longer histories of racial typing, public exhibitions and post-card making which all created a particular visual grammar for depicting the non-European 'native'.

These forms of representation, I have argued, also need to be situated within the discursive framework of mapping 'unchartered territories' and it is in this regard that Denfield's trek through northern Nigeria was politically highly charged. One might recall, after all, Denfield's characterisation of the subjects under study, as 'hidden' and 'alien' to the European reader. Through his movements in different villages, encounters with chiefs and residents and persuasions in getting people to be photographed, power differentials emerged

in each encounter that spoke of colonial relations. In turn, through his photographs Denfield represented the northern villages as though they were a map through which the native was made 'knowable' by representing his/her existence in discrete parts. Indeed, this corresponds with actual military and anthropological maps in the Collection that speak to the notion of conquest/capture and related knowability of the subjects under study. Again the widely-cited analogy of shooting with the camera and shooting with firearms comes to mind here and one is perhaps invited to consider forms of violence that resulted from the kind of image-world Denfield produced. For one thing, this collection opens up issues around the ethics of reproducing such material in relation to the power relations and gestures that went into their making.

However, it is through his work on his pilgrimages through Basutoland that I explored these relations further. Again, his photographs were marked with the trek and this time such a motif was made visible through different photographs that depicted travel. His collection expressed an intensified personalisation of the pilgrimages themselves wherein each marked a deliberate departure from his routine as a medical doctor in East London through planned leaves. This was reflected in the photographs themselves that celebrated the 'simplicity' of nature and the native reserve, drawing to some extent, on the notions of a sanctuary he had imagined in Nigeria. Thus the photographs depicted Basutoland's mountains and waterfalls aesthetically, as though they remained untouched by change. Likewise his peopled images employed iconography such as a mother and child or female beauty in a celebratory manner.

With regards to the latter, his portraits drew from 19<sup>th</sup> century European art conventions of representing individual subjects. Additionally, his chosen captions expressed an intensified romanticisation of each scene depicted. Lyrical captions such as 'The Valley Awakens', 'The Earth is the Lords'', 'Calm is the Morn' and 'Song of Basutoland' contain spiritual and Christian undertones that speak to a sense of 'at-one-ment' with his surroundings. Read against his criticism of burgeoning modernity in its potential for mass destruction, his photographs expressed this yearning for innocence which was then projected onto the rural reserve. This is of course, ironic when considering that reserves were a product of colonial conquest as a 'source' of labour although his construal of the reserve expressed this negation of racial politics.

It is partly with regards to such that I have argued that his photographs of Basutoland image the discourse of anthropology. One might recall that in his earlier travels through Nigeria,

Denfield had expressed his interest in both anthropology and photography and his intention to combine the two. Thus he had some knowledge of the discipline's aims and methods. One crucial method in anthropology is constructing knowledge through fieldwork via participant observation, one that had been well-established by the 1930s. This notion of the field corresponded also to the idea of trekking that had informed his earlier studies. To produce knowledge photographically was to travel 'off the beaten track'. This relates to anthropology's heritage of generating knowledge through the 'other'. Thus even in the field Denfield remained largely a detached observer.

This is imaged in photographs such as 'The Valley Awakens' and 'The Earth is the Lord's' wherein the horsemen stand apart from the panoramas of the mountains, and pause with their horses as though in observation of their surroundings much like the photographer. Similarly in 'Song of Basutoland' and 'Riders on the Horizon' focal length constructs distance between the photographer and his subjects. I have argued that such distance images the manner in which anthropology has maintained distance between the west and observed 'other'. This is comparable to Geary's use of the phrases 'in focus' (suggesting clarity and sharp distinction) and 'out of focus' (implying blurred or not sharply defined) to think about the ways in which people in central Africa have been represented and imagined by Euro-Americans<sup>827</sup>, that is, the image world from hundreds of thousands of photographs and reproductions through photography, printing technology, colonial history and physical anthropology. Likewise, Paul Landau borrows the phrase 'amazing distance' from Michel de Montaigne, to introduce the collection of essays in his book that pay attention to how people have used images to draw together previously 'unformed' social meanings from their own societies, to be used to as a means of being acquainted with people from other societies, thereby contemplating this 'amazing distance'<sup>828</sup>.

Both Geary and Landau essentially refer to making sense of, negotiating, dealing with and at times trying to ease distance, both real and imagined, through photographs and photographic practice. Landau adds, however, that through history images of Africans and Europeans have both repelled one another and overlapped, that is, 'the west's distancing of image-Africa was met again and again by a sense of slippage towards to, or even a congruence with it'<sup>829</sup>. These tensions emerged in Denfield's relationships with intermediaries. Throughout his notes, one

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<sup>827</sup> Geary, *In and Out of Focus*, p 15.

<sup>828</sup> Landau, 'An amazing distance', p 3.

<sup>829</sup> *Ibid* p 3.

encounters various actors that formed an integral part of his expeditions both in Nigeria in Basutoland. Through his travels in Nigeria, one learns of Henry and his ‘pidgin’ English, who is presented as a subservient and reliable ‘boy’. In Basutoland, we learn of Tindale, whom Denfield spoke of with a patronising affection for his ‘most remarkable command of the English language’<sup>830</sup>, his obedience and his comical and child-like character. We are also introduced to head-carriers who appear and disappear sporadically through the archive and whose task included carrying camp and photographic equipment. While several studies have attempted to draw attention to the integral work of such ‘native assistants’ in field expeditions, I have argued that not only do Denfield’s notes express more instrumental relationships taking place between the latter and the assistants, but they also convey colonial relations at play.

This can be noted when outlining his interactions with white intermediaries both in Nigeria and Basutoland. Mac/Norman Hunter and fellow photographer in Basutoland Jack Robinson were written about as peers in the field. He noted his dependence on the former who took on the role of a settler in relation to Denfield by guiding him through the villages. Moreover, Robinsons’ ‘voice’ can be heard more loudly than other intermediaries through the archive in his own accounts of the field. Additionally, both Mac and Robinson are the only intermediaries who appear to have taken images of Denfield in turn in the field. In contrast, his black intermediaries were made visible through their use as models in photographs, yet appeared as anonymous individuals made to represent a collective.

I have argued that rather than ‘redeem’ such intermediaries through endowing them with greater autonomy and authority in the field than has been the case in academia, it is worthwhile considering instead the manner in which Denfield’s relationships with them mediated the kind of images he produced. One example is the aforementioned technique of distancing. Another is the reconstitution of labour as ethnographic data in the form of, for example, photographs of head-carrying. His photographs were also mediated by the materiality of his fieldwork. Denfield’s relationships with each intermediary draws attention to the material practice of photography. In the archive, one learns in addition, of his reliance on traders in Basutoland who supplied him with horses and ‘boys’. Through minute and haphazard detail, one can discern friendships formed with such figures and their families. Photographic practice was then intertwined with embodied and material practices from the

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<sup>830</sup> DC, Denfield, ‘The Story Behind the Pictures’, January 1953, p 2.

trade-store through to the physical labour of head-carriers. In the introduction, I invoked Edwards' conceptualisation of the materiality of photographs<sup>831</sup>. Yet, a study of Denfield's notes from the field also highlights the integral role of various material practices in the creation of the photographs. Although it has not been a primary concern of the thesis, Denfield's encounters with various individuals perhaps ask us to take seriously the materiality of the practice of photography.

Another avenue that mediated the production of the Basutoland photographs was the exhibitionary space of salons whereby his photographs were submitted under the broad umbrella of pictorialism. Salons and related photographic institutions provided a distinct methodology regarding how photographs should be composed. Much emphasis was put on the technical aspects of photography. Denfield exhibited his images of the rural landscapes within such a framework thereby reconstituting the field technically. In turn, I have argued, through framing it pictorially, the 'native question' was then phrased through a highly technicist lens whereby every facet of the native reserve was constituted in the language of pragmatism rather than politics.

Though his photographs taken in Nigeria were not widely circulated as pictorial, this technologisation can be discerned in constitution of the pagan sanctuary through discrete compartmentalisation of the lives of the subjects, that is, through making visible different physiological and socio-cultural aspects that were then turned into objects of gaze. On the other hand, when the native question was made pictorial and technical in Basutoland, it allowed Denfield to speak of his work as distinctly Native photography which offered a particular epistemology for the amateur photographer (presumably one residing outside the reserve). The language he used to describe it resonated with that of the salons in terms of its emphasis on technical detail. Thus every item under study, from the shading of the dark-skinned African body to posing women around huts effectively, was presented in 'logical' terms. Moreover, this articulation expresses the discourses, idioms and repertoires that have informed anthropology, from the autobiographical nature of his accounts in the field that are presented as fact, to the composition of scenes based on concepts that have characterised the discipline such as 'kinship' or symbolism. Yet, I have also pointed out that despite his interest in the concerns of the discipline, Denfield did not dabble with anthropology in a

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<sup>831</sup> E. Edwards, 'Introduction: Photographs as objects' in E. Edwards & J Hart, *Photographs, objects, histories: on the materiality of images* (London: Routledge, 2004).

formal sense thus his 'naive' understanding of the discipline produced images that in turn image its essences.

As I continued trafficking through the Denfield Collection, I extended this reading of a discipline's essences to History through the work on historical images of East London. His encounters with the glass negatives of images taken in East London at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century conveyed many of the themes that had emerged in his earlier photography. Again trekking and mapping appeared as key concerns. Denfield used these images as a starting point from which he compiled a narrative about East London's past but such a task involved widening his photographic archive through requests in the media for individuals to delve into their own private collections of photographs and negatives taken in this period. Moreover, Denfield delved into public archives (particularly municipal documents) to supplement the images with texts. In turn his historical accounts provided a visual map of East London's past through the public spaces depicted. That is, East London's past was configured as a narrative about harbours, beaches, streets, market places, etc. and as such the photographs became 'true' and indexical.

Another familiar motif was the concern with factuality. One might recall that Denfield presented his experiences in the field as 'evidence' from which a keen Native photographer could draw. Similarly, he was insistent on providing an 'accurate' history of East London that revised previously-held accounts. The technology of producing positive prints from faded glass negatives was thus deeply metaphoric for such a paradigm that wanted to tell the truth about the town's past. His project of restoring East London's past mirrored the work of empiricist History through its construction of the images as 'archival sources' and through an insistence on objectivity. The result of Denfield's project was an account that negated racial politics that had been a part of the town's past. Thus we have a development comparable to his technologisation of the native reserve in Basutoland where a political lens was overlooked partly as a result of an empiricist account although such a lens can never be removed from a history of conquest.

This becomes apparent again in a study of Denfield's involvement with the Border Historical Society. It comprised of fellow public intellectuals with similar concerns about East London's past. Like Denfield, the likes of Taylor, Courteney-Latimer and Driffield, among others, were concerned with 'restoring' the city's past both textually and materially, that is, through publications and through physical restoration of what they identified as historically

significant buildings and sites. Yet, a close reading of such work indicates that these were sites that spoke of a settler past in the town. These narratives asserted a distinctly European heritage for the town's residents. This was reinforced through a discourse of the 'fathers of the city' that is, men who were constituted as 'pioneers' and 'founders' of the city. East London's past was then framed through a narrative of a (white) settler history. Without articulating race, the authors nevertheless provided accounts that implicitly asserted race through once again, the discourses of factuality and salvation.

This impulse can also be discerned in the texts Denfield generated about photography, including *Secure the Shadow*. Focusing on the history of photography in the Cape, these publications again emphasised the Cape's 'pioneers' in photography. I have argued that Bull and Denfield's investigation incidentally, was based on the particular moment in settler history where colonists debated questions around identity and belonging in South Africa in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In other words, while the same concerns about settler pasts and identities were emerging within the Border Historical Society, Bull and Denfield's research focused on that particular moment of European settlement. Thus without functioning as a settler history, the book offered a way of reading concerns around settler subjectivities by focusing on the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

It is within such an intellectual climate of the Border Historical Society that *Pioneer Port* was published, a book that doubtlessly concretised Denfield's authority as a historian. Once again, themes of conquest could be discerned. This is significant when one considers that the book emerged in a period when the city was undergoing significant social change due to removals. The city was being re-mapped effectively along racial lines. Simultaneously, the book offered a visual map of the city's past public spaces. I have argued that the project of compiling such a history through the dated photographs allows for reflection on the practice of history by considering the ways in which Denfield maps the move of the historian. As had been the case with his anthropological work, Denfield was not a historian in any formal sense and perhaps his naiveté with the discipline allowed the discipline's essences to emerge. This can be discerned on different layers including the content of the book. *Pioneer Port* constructed a past characterised by disorder from which a 'functional' municipality emerged. This is comparable to Denfield's own efforts at compiling an unambiguous history devoid of the clutter of subjectivity and misnomers. Moreover, he had reconfigured the glass negatives as 'primary data' thereby turning them into 'historical sources' and reconstituted the 'ordinary' in the images into 'historical event'.



A study of Denfield's archive chronologically allows one to trace his changing personal politics over the twenty-year period. I have argued that his work in Basutoland expressed the tensions of a *settling* subject. In the 1950s, it was as though Denfield was caught between a growing Afrikaner nationalist ideology and a receding British heritage. This was perhaps part of the pull of the native reserve as focal point for study at that stage in that inasmuch as it was deeply intertwined with the political change, it also remained at the periphery. On the other hand, the work he conducted on East London's history through the glass negatives and related texts suggest a figure more fully anchored in his South African identity, in other words, a *settled* subject. This can be discerned in the manner in which he wrote of East London's past as his own heritage.

Yet, the early 1960s were characterised by rapid change on the national level. Ideologically, the newly formed Republic of South Africa was severing its ties with its British imperial past and becoming more 'Afrikaans'. Denfield's photographs of ruins in East London taken in the early to mid-1960s registered such changes by zooming in on sites that spoke to the town's British past. They suggest loss, mourning and urgency around remembering such a past. It is as if they protested that the Republic had in fact brought ruin. Gone was the romance of the rural idyll or the Victorian past inscribed in the glass negatives. Instead the anxieties around preserving pagan tribes photographically emerged once again through the impulse of salvaging a past that threatened to disappear.

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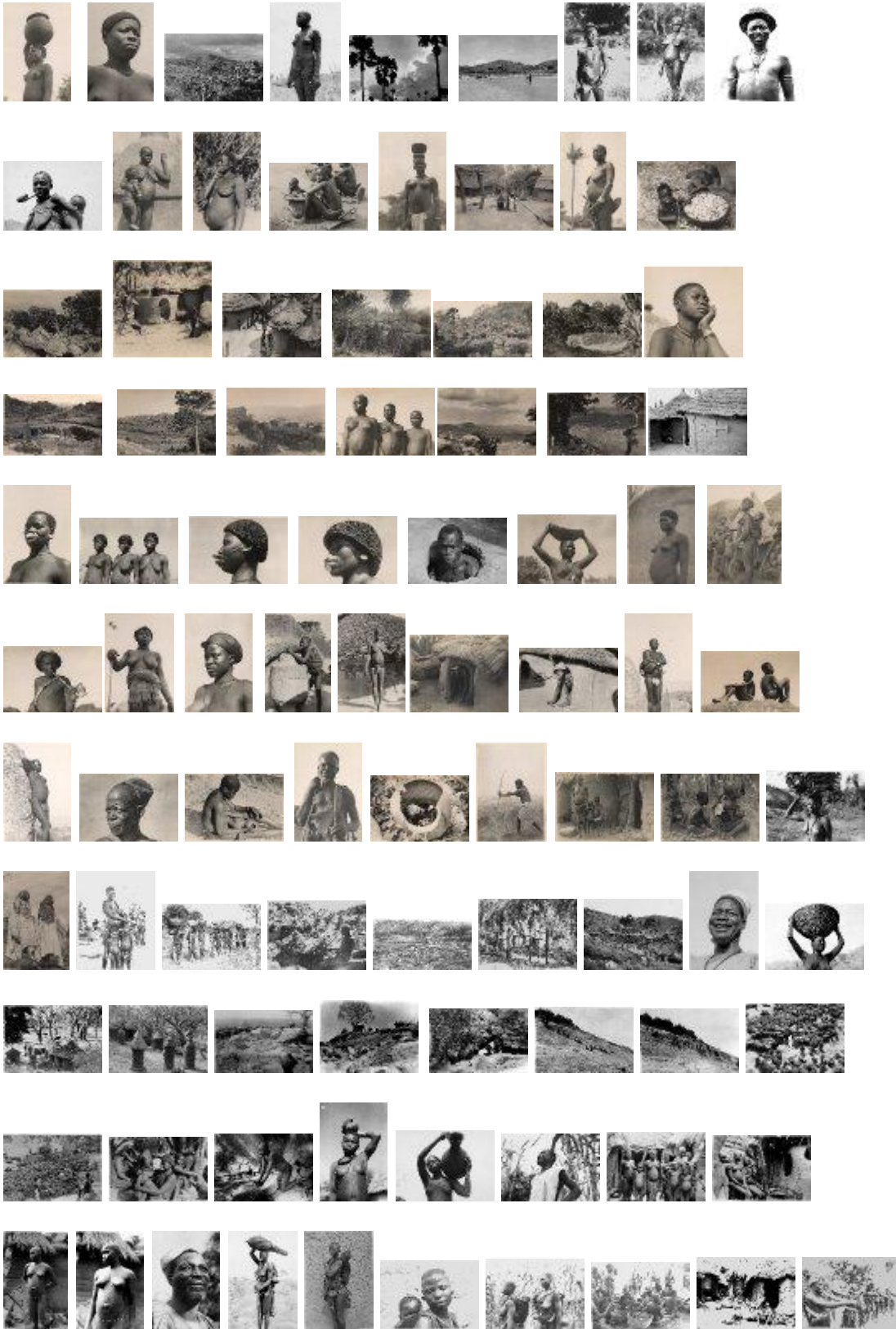
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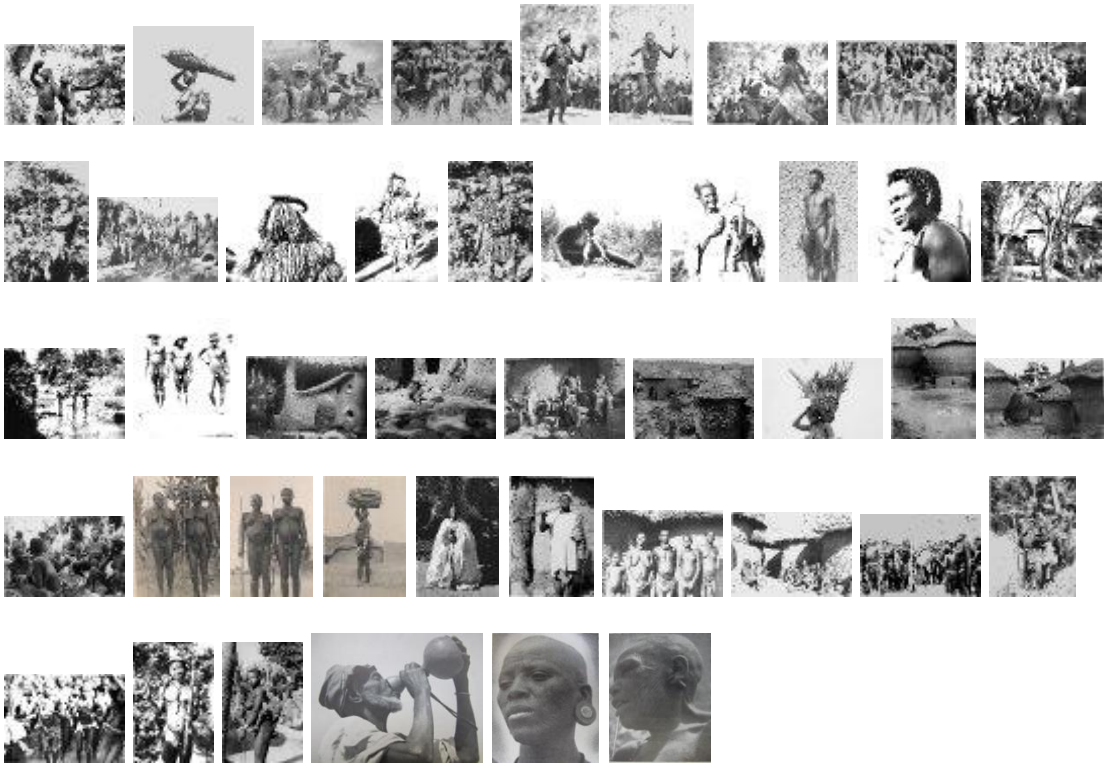
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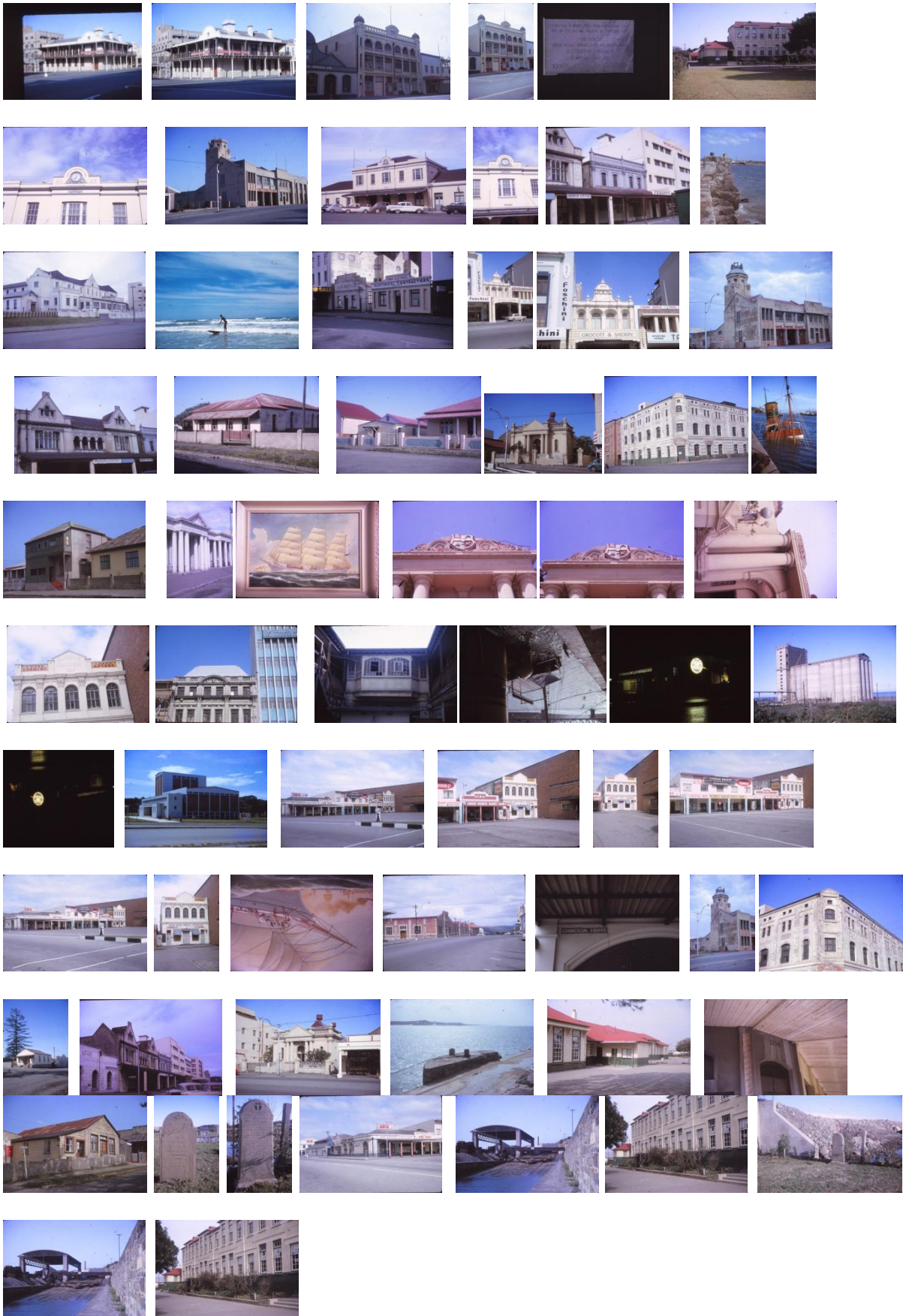
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## Appendix: Photographs by Joseph Denfield











### **Photographs yet to be located**

- 'The man from the hills'
- 'The beauty of beadwork'
- 'The trading store'
- 'Their evening meal'
- 'The diviner (Bhaca tribe)'
- 'A Gcaleka witch doctor'
- 'Born to labour'
- 'Native village'
- 'Woman of the Nhlanguwini tribe'
- 'Gcaleka women'
- 'The initiation dance (Xhosa tribe)'
- 'Initiation ceremony of a girl-dance of the unmarried women (Xhosa tribe)'
- 'Native courtyard'
- 'Young dancers (Xhosa tribe)'
- 'The waterfall'
- 'Woman's work'
- 'Mountain wall'
- 'Through the aloes'
- 'Grandmother Tetyane'
- 'The wanderer'
- 'Of royal blood'
- 'The gorge'
- 'As cauldrons bubble'
- 'Beside the still waters'
- 'At the running brook'
- 'The trek begins'