

## **The Hunt Begins Now!**

Text by - Parvez

For the Performance - The Hunt #2

Performed at Museum 1, Adligenswil on June 05, 2021.

### **Can you hear me? If yes, then the Hunt begins now!**

I have long worked with images - both still and moving. It took me decades to begin to realize the power of a camera. A photograph is believed to speak the truth and even be worth more than a thousand words. While some of this may be true, what we do not see, hear or ask is how much of this is really true? How much of it is a power game between the one who holds the camera and the one who is photographed? And, who sets the 'gaze' upon whom?

I would like to read an excerpt from an article that was published in THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE on Feb. 6, 2019. The title was, 'When the Camera Was a Weapon of Imperialism. (And When It Still Is.)'. It was written by Teju Cole, a Nigerian-American writer, photographer, and art historian. I quote,

"The invention of the daguerreotype was announced in 1839. By the 1840s, photography had spread like wildfire and become a vital aspect of European colonialism. It played a role in administrative, missionary, scientific and commercial activities.

In Africa, as in most parts of the dispossessed, the camera arrives as part of the colonial paraphernalia, together with the gun and the bible."

A little later he writes, and I quote again, "photography during colonial rule imaged the world in order to study, profit from and own it."

The real power of a camera unfolds when a cameraperson walks around with a swag photographing those who may not even have enough to eat and for whom the word 'consent' has neither any meaning, nor do they have any means to ever know who does what with their photographs?

That encapsulates the true spirit of Imperialism and Colonialism. And that remains at the heart of photography till date.

The association of the word 'shooting' with a 'camera' has not come about without a reason. While the guns shot and wounded or killed instantly, the camera 'captured and took away the 'soul' of the dispossessed. It took me decades to realize how true this utterance of an old man from a remote tribe who didn't want to be photographed, was. In a way, a photograph captures the position of an unseen treasure and brings it to those who have the power to 'extract' it, if they so desire.

In the year 1960, during the French war on Algeria, a young French officer, Marc Garanger, was ordered by his superior to photograph the Algerians living in two internment camps. Apparently, the camps were created after destroying the villages and regrouping the residents in these. The purpose was to cut off and also punish the men from the village who had run away and joined the resistance against the French occupiers. The population to be photographed was therefore mainly children and women. And, most women wore a veil and had never shown their faces and hair to strangers. The photographs were needed to make identity cards for the camp residents - as if they had no identity until the French army would give them one. We may therefore infer that unless something is documented and catalogued it does not have an existence in the imperial scheme of things? And if something does not exist, then how does one control and (ab)use it?

The women of Kabylia had no choice in the matter. They had to take off their veil and sit on a stool to be photographed.

These 2000 photographs shot over 10 days, obviously without any consent, tell us everything about the origins of the 'abusive gaze' towards the colonized, by those whose only interest was to extract from the colonies. A look at even a few of these photos illustrates the point. The women of Kabylia stare back at us from each of those photos - bewildered and angry perhaps at the sense of nakedness they must have felt, besides the obvious humiliation and helplessness.

The gaze of the camera has largely continued to remain the same ever since. The affluent camera-phone holding citizens of the world continue to revel in 'shooting' the disposed as an 'exotica'. Images of poverty and misery of the hapless are liberally used to stir emotions and raise funds for charities – an act that merely maintains and upholds the colonial gaze and the inequality it rests upon. The camera does not easily see the root cause – the continued extraction from these lands. Nor does it rise up with similar irreverence against the powers that not only continue to extract but also ensure that 'image making' remains deeply entrenched in the same colonial and Imperial gaze.

I would end with yet another quote from the article by Teju Cole that goes even further and talks about the future of photography. He writes,

“Photography’s future will be much like its past. It will largely continue to illustrate, without condemning, how the powerful dominate the less powerful. It will bring the “news” and continue to support the idea that doing so — collecting the lives of others for the consumption of “us” — is a natural right.”

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