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Images of Africa: Missionary Photography in the Nineteenth Century: an Introduction

T. Jack Thompson

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Missionary Photography in the Nineteenth Century: an Introduction

T. Jack Thompson

Centre of African Studies

&

Centre for the Study of Christianity in
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Dr. T. Jack Thompson visited the Centre of African Studies in May 2003 where he gave two papers as part of his ongoing research project on the missionary photography and its impact on creating stereotypes of Africa in Europe. This *Occasional Paper* represents a revised version of his two presentations.

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Introduction

In the building where I work in Edinburgh hangs a large oil-painting three and a half metres wide, and one and a half metres high. It depicts a famous incident in Scottish church history which occurred in 1843, when the Church of Scotland split. On the surface the painting—made up of images of more than three hundred people—has little to do either with Africa or with photography. In fact, it establishes the close relationship between photography and religion which goes right back to the beginnings of photography, usually dated to 1839.

The oil painting, entitled ‘the Signing of the Deed of Demission’ was painted by David Octavius Hill (and also by his wife Amelia – a famous sculptress in her own right) and although begun in the 1840s, was not completed until 1866.¹ It marks the formation of the Free Church of Scotland following the ecclesiastical split known in Scotland as the Disruption. What is significant about the painting from our point of view is that almost all of the people shown in the painting had been photographed previously by Hill and his colleague Robert Adamson—specifically to make the painting more realistic. There is no African in the painting; but there is a Scottish missionary to Africa, as well as an Indian clergyman. Both of them (as well as several other figures in the painting) symbolically represent the fact that the Free Church of Scotland prided itself on its work in ‘foreign missions’, as they were usually called at this period. So, here, from the very beginnings of photography, is an example of how it (in this case indirectly) interacted with religion, and was used to make a religious point.

¹ *Sunday Times* (London), 13th May 2001, 16.

The beginnings of photography are usually dated to 1839 when Daguerre in France, and Fox Talbot in England announced different techniques for producing what today we would call photographic images. Daguerre's technique (which became known as the Daguerreotype) at first produced higher quality images; but it had the disadvantage of being able to produce only one unique image from each exposure. Fox Talbot's technique (known as the calotype) used a paper negative, and could be reproduced several times. Within a few months of its invention photography had reached Africa:² mostly, at first, in the form of the daguerrotype. The earliest surviving photographs from Africa are mostly of Egyptian monuments. At this period exposures needed to be several minutes long, and almost all photographs were taken out of doors. To my knowledge, the earliest surviving photograph of a black African is a daguerrotype of a female chief from Mozambique, taken by the French photographer Thiesson in 1845, and now in the Eastman Museum of Photography in Rochester, New York.³ The very worn inscription on the front of the daguerrotype reads:

Naturelle de Sofala, Monomo[tapa], agée de 30 ans. Quoique jeune encore celle femme a cheveux presque entierement blancs

Native woman from Sofala, Monomotapa, aged 30 years. Although still young this woman's hair is almost entirely white.⁴

At this point missionaries had not yet entered the photographic arena, but it is nevertheless relevant to ask the question, 'What did the earliest photographers think they were doing when they took photographs?' In the early 1840s Fox Talbot published in instalments, what may well be called the first book to contain photographs. It was called *The Pencil of*

² A.D. Bensusan, *Silver Images: History of Photography in Africa*, 4-8.

³ George Eastman House, No. 22941 3161 69:0265:0140

Nature.⁵ The idea behind the title represents what I would call one end of the ideological spectrum of photography - in this case the belief that the photograph was an exact representation of reality; the view, as it were, through the eye of God.

The other end of the spectrum can be summed up in the term *manipulation*. Recently I picked up a leaflet in a photographer's shop which was headed 'Let us manipulate your photographs'. Here we have the idea that the photograph can be, not simply the representation of reality, but rather the transfer of a particular view of the world held by the photographer. Such an idea is not recent, however, but appears very early in the history of photography. Thus my interest in missionary photography in Africa may be said to be an investigation of the journey between these two poles: photography as accurate representation and as manipulation (or propaganda). Whatever our intention when we take a photograph, we can, at best represent only a portion of reality or of life. The portion represented by missionary photography in Africa helped to determine the image of Africa (in the wider meaning of the word image) which became accepted as the norm in Europe. How Europe thought about Africa in the late nineteenth century was, to some extent at least, determined by the images which were reproduced in countless missionary periodicals and books in the last quarter of the nineteenth and the first quarter of the twentieth centuries. The fact that these dates largely matched those of the colonial 'Scramble for Africa' is not a coincidence.

⁴ It is possible that this is Thiesson's original inscription.

⁵ H. Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature*. Comparatively few copies of the original still exist. One is in University of Edinburgh Library, Special Collections. A commemorative facsimile was published by Hans P. Kraus in New York in 1989.

In this paper I want to ask (in a very preliminary way) the question, 'Where did missionaries stand in this process?' And, in particular, 'How did missionaries in Africa portray Africa to an audience back in Europe?' To do this, I will take a few examples of missionary photography, and through them consider whether, and to what extent, missionary photography distorted or manipulated the African reality.

David Livingstone and Photography

Let us begin with David Livingstone – perhaps the most famous of all nineteenth century missionaries to Africa. Livingstone arrived in southern Africa at approximately the same time as photography itself – the early 1840s. Yet it was not until his Zambesi expedition of the late 1850s that he made deliberate use of photography. At this point two brief technical points need to be made, which, as well as applying to Livingstone, have a wider relevance for African missionary photography – and particularly for its reproduction back in Europe. The first is that although photography itself was invented in 1839, it was not until the late 1880s, with the perfection of the half-tone process, that photographs were able to be reproduced directly in published books. Up until that time, one of two things happened. Either very small print runs of books were produced into which individual photographic prints were stuck with glue. This was how Fox Talbot's book *The Pencil of Nature* (mentioned above) was produced, and when Henry Morton Stanley's book, *How I Found Livingstone* was published in 1872 the only photograph included was one of Stanley himself, pasted into the frontispiece.⁶ More often in the mid-nineteenth century books were illustrated by lithographs. Sometimes, these were engraved from the imagination of the lithographer, or from his

⁶ H.M. Stanley, *How I Found Livingstone*, 1872, Frontispiece.

interpretation of descriptions in the text. Quite often, however, they were based on, and copied from photographs. The photographs could be copied on to lithographic plates, from which skilled engravers could produce extremely accurate lithographs. Paradoxically, however, their skill also allowed them to make subtle changes to the photographic image when this was required for aesthetic or ideological reasons. A couple of examples of this will suffice. The frontispiece of Livingstone's *Last Journals* shows a very fine engraving of Livingstone as a middle-aged man.⁷ It is closely based on a well-known portrait of Livingstone, taken by the Scottish photographer Thomas Annan, while Livingstone was at home in Scotland in the early 1860s.⁸ An original print of the photograph is now in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery in Edinburgh. A detailed comparison of the photograph and the engraving reveals that the engraver has softened Livingstone's features, and given him a much more sympathetic face. Similarly, several engravings in H.M. Stanley's book, *How I Found Livingstone* to which we shall return later, make Stanley appear taller than he actually was.⁹

Briefly, a second technical point: in the mid-nineteenth century photographic equipment was very heavy and cumbersome to carry around. In addition exposures were long (compared to modern times) and the process of developing and fixing photographs (most commonly at this time the wet collodion process) was difficult – especially in the interior of Africa. This meant that while studio photography, and photography in the major urban areas of Africa developed from the

⁷ Horace Waller(Editor), *Livingstone's Last Journals*, Vol.1, Frontispiece.

⁸ An excellent copy of this photographic portrait appears in *David Livingstone and the Victorian Encounter with Africa*, London, National Portrait Gallery, 1996.

⁹ See, for example, the engraving facing page 345, 'The Mutiny on the Gombe River', which accompanies an account of how Stanley confronted a possible insurrection of his porters.

1850s onwards, the use of photography beyond these controlled environments developed much more slowly.

As far as I am aware, Livingstone's Zambesi expedition from 1858 to 1863 was the first major African expedition in sub-Saharan Africa to employ an official photographer. This was Livingstone's brother Charles – a Congregationalist minister who had returned from Boston in the United States to join the expedition. Technically he was employed as the moral agent of the expedition, but Livingstone's instructions to him included detailed information about the kind of photographs he should take.¹⁰ In the light of many later attempts to show the African as 'savage' or 'uncivilised' these instructions are highly interesting. Livingstone wrote to his brother:

You will endeavour to secure characteristic specimens of the different tribes residing in, or visiting Tete for the purpose of Ethnology. Do not choose the ugliest but, (as among ourselves) the better class of natives who are believed to be characteristic of the race ... and, if possible, get men, women and children grouped together.¹¹

Charles Livingstone was not the only photographer on the expedition, however. John Kirk (later to be British consul at Zanzibar) was officially employed as the expedition's 'economic botanist and medical officer'¹² but was also a talented amateur photographer. Indeed, in all likelihood he was a much better photographer than Charles Livingstone, who often experienced great difficulty in producing successful photographs.

¹⁰ Letter of David Livingstone to Charles Livingstone, 10 May 1858 in J.P.R. Wallis (Editor), *The Zambezi Expedition of David Livingstone 1858-63*, Vol. 2, 431.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 420.

In addition to the two photographers with the expedition – one official, the other unofficial – Livingstone's party on the Zambesi also included a painter. Thomas Baines was the official artist to the expedition, and the rivalry between painting and photography in the mid-nineteenth century is illustrated very clearly in one of Baines's oil paintings. It shows a scene at the Cabora Bassa rapids, at a place known as Shibadda. We know from various written accounts that the event took place on 24th November 1858.¹³ The majority of the painting is taken up with the river itself, but down in the bottom right hand corner two tiny figures can be seen standing on a rock, together with a camera on a tripod. The figures are almost certainly Charles and David Livingstone, for Kirk records in his Journal that Charles Livingstone took one photograph of the rapids. The interesting feature of the painting, however, is a group of Europeans standing on rocks to the left. One, seemingly Baines himself, is chatting to another, with a sketch pad in one hand, and a cup of cocoa or coffee in the other.¹⁴ The deliberate implication of the juxtaposition of painter and photographer seems to be that the painter has finished his work, while the photographer toils on. It is not without significance that a fierce personal rivalry (and even hatred) grew up between Charles Livingstone and Thomas Baines during the expedition. Apart from the personal animosity, however, the painting highlights the more general rivalry between painting and photography which was characteristic of the mid-nineteenth century.

Though one researcher has defended Charles Livingstone's ability as a photographer,¹⁵ the general opinion is that he was fairly hopeless at the job. On 3rd November 1858, for example, John Kirk wrote, 'Mr. L has

¹³ Reginald Foscett (Editor), *The Zambesi Journal and Letters of Dr. John Kirk 1858-63*, Vol. 1, 128.

¹⁴ The original of this oil painting is in the Royal Geographical Society in London.

tried photography but has made a mess of it.’¹⁶ A couple of weeks later at Cabora Bassa Kirk again wrote that Charles Livingstone had only managed to take one photograph of the rapids ‘which he subsequently made a mess of’.¹⁷ Even David Livingstone himself was quite critical of his brother’s attempts at photography – writing on 13th May 1860, ‘As an assistant he has been of no value. Photography very unsatisfactory’.¹⁸

If we are to ask the question, ‘What was the practical outcome of the first attempts at using photography during a major expedition to the interior of Africa?’ we would have to say that they were limited. Nevertheless there were some indirect benefits. In the Introduction to the official account of his Zambesi expedition, Livingstone points out that most of the illustrations in the book are based on the photographs of Charles Livingstone and John Kirk, and the paintings and sketches of Thomas Baines.¹⁹ Many of these illustrations are very detailed, and in a few cases (for example where the photographs of John Kirk are still in existence) we can see that the lithographs are very accurate.

Nearly thirty of Kirk’s photographs may still be seen in Edinburgh.²⁰ Unfortunately, none of Charles Livingstone’s appears to have survived – with the possible exception of one, listed in the catalogue of the Livingstone Museum in Zambia, but which I have so far been able to locate.

¹⁵ G. W. Clendennen, ‘Charles Livingstone’, Edinburgh PhD thesis, 1978.

¹⁶ Foskett, *Zambesi Journal*, Vol. 1, 115.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 128.

¹⁸ Wallis, *Zambezi Expedition*, 164.

¹⁹ David and Charles Livingstone, *Narrative of an Expedition to the Zambesi and its Tributaries*, Preface, viii.

²⁰ Kirk Papers – Zambesi Photographs, Acc. 9942/40, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.

David Livingstone himself was photographed on quite a few occasions, but all of the photographs of which I am aware were taken in Britain, rather than in Africa.

‘Dr. Livingstone, I Presume?’

Nearly ten years after the end of his Zambesi expedition Livingstone was on his last journey – looking for the source of the Nile. He had been out of contact with Europe for some time, and Gordon Bennett of the *New York Herald* sent Henry Morton Stanley to ‘find’ him. At the end of October 1871 (there is some dispute about the exact date) Stanley greeted Livingstone with the now famous words, ‘Dr. Livingstone, I presume?’²¹ It is somewhat surprising that given the advances in photographic technology since the 1850s Stanley did not have a camera with him when he set out on his expedition. Thus there is no photographic image of Livingstone from this last period of his life.

Yet the growing importance of photography at this period can be seen in Stanley’s famous meeting with Livingstone. There are, of course, dozens of depictions of the meeting – many in the form of lithographs. One of the earliest of these appeared as a supplement to the *London Illustrated News* on 10th August 1872. Beneath it is printed (in Stanley’s own handwriting) the caption, ‘This engraving, for which I supplied the materials, represents my meeting with Dr. Livingstone at Ujiji, Lake Tanganyika; and is as correct as if the scene had been photographed.’²² This in itself illustrates the growing power of the photograph. But as we have already noted, even if it had been a photograph it would still have had to be reproduced in magazines and newspapers as an engraving,

²¹ H.M. Stanley, *How I Found Livingstone*, 412.

²² Original copy of engraving; personally held.

since it was not until the 1880s that the half-tone process allowed the mass reproduction of photographs. In fact, the classic forms of the Stanley-Livingstone meeting was based – at least partly – on a photograph. As Stanley and his party made their way back to the coast in 1872, after having spent several months with Livingstone, they were met at Bagamoyo by another search party (which, incidentally, included Livingstone's son Oswell) coming to find Livingstone. One member of the party, Lieutenant Henn, took a photograph of Stanley, together with his two servants Selim and Kalulu,²³ and these three figures appear (very accurately represented from the photograph) in almost all reproductions of Stanley's meeting with Livingstone at Ujiji. So there is a sense in which the lithograph which appeared in the *London Illustrated News* and similar ones, for example in Stanley's book *How I Found Livingstone* was indeed a photograph – at least as far as three of the participants were concerned. While in London, on his way back to the USA, further studio photographs of Stanley and Kalulu were taken. Selim Hishmeh had already returned to his home in Jerusalem.

Perhaps more than any other single image, this lithograph established the stereotype of the intrepid European explorer in Africa. Indeed, it did so twice over, for, together with the text of *How I Found Livingstone*, it turned both Livingstone and Stanley himself into heroes: the one for his apparently selfless determination to 'bring light to the Dark Continent'; the other for having 'found' the hero Livingstone. On this basis, Stanley established his own reputation as an African explorer. The great irony is that his priorities and methods were far removed from those of Livingstone: indeed, one might almost argue that they represented diametrically opposed ideals of the European interaction with Africa. And

²³ A copy of the photograph appears in Frank McLynn, *Stanley: the Making of an African Explorer*,

yet, for a few months in 1871-72 they had been almost like father and son.

In spite of the fact that Stanley had not carried a camera with him when he went to 'find' Livingstone, by 1870 it was becoming increasingly common for missionaries and other explorers to carry cameras into the heart of Africa; and it was from this period onwards that missionary images of Africa and Africans began increasingly to influence Europe. Yet it needs to be pointed out that not all missionaries to Africa in this period were, in fact, Europeans. A small, but significant number of African missionaries were also working on the continent in the second half of the nineteenth century. There were, of course, thousands of African Christians who, following their own conversion to Christianity, worked alongside European missionaries as teachers, catechists and evangelists. But here, I am referring to African Christians who travelled to other peoples in Africa as Christian missionaries.

African Christians and Photographic Identity

Here (and specifically in terms of photographic representation) the question was often one of identity. Who were these people? Were they African Christians or black Europeans? Let me refer briefly to two examples. The first is Samuel Ajayi Crowther, the first black African to become an Anglican bishop, when he was consecrated in London in 1864. Recently, in the New York Public Library, I came across a typical photographic image of Crowther.²⁴ It appears to show him at the time of his consecration, in sparkling new ecclesiastical vestments. (There is a

208-09.

²⁴ Digital Images of 19th Century African-Americans, 24 sccdv.jpg, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

similar, more common, photograph taken many years later when Crowther was a much older man.) In one sense the photograph is a perfectly natural one – how else would you photograph a newly consecrated bishop? In another it is very common representation of the ‘civilised’ African – a testimony to the ability of the African, after conversion and acculturation, to become like the European. It is, by the way, doubly ironical, that whoever catalogued Crowther’s photograph in the New York Public Library, obviously didn’t know who he was, for the photograph appears in the section on African-American religion.

Another similar example of the African Christian photograph is one taken in Port Elizabeth, in the Eastern Cape of South Africa, in July 1876.²⁵ It shows four young Xhosa men, about to set out as missionaries to Malawi – over a thousand miles away. In many ways it is a typical late nineteenth century African studio photograph, complete with leopard skin, African ferns etc. Yet the four young men shown in the photograph (William Koyi, Isaac Williams Wauchope, Mapassa Ntintili and Shadrach Mngunana) are all dressed in fashionable European clothes. The juxtaposition of the African context and the European fashion highlights the hybridity of such people, and raises one of the recurring questions of African Christian historiography: to what extent is African Christianity a foreign religion, and to what extent has it become genuinely indigenised? Undoubtedly, in the case of the Xhosa missionaries to Malawi, there was a pull in two different directions.²⁶

²⁵ Original photograph by E.H. Board, Port Elizabeth, July 1876, Lovedale Archives, Cory Library for Historical Research, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa.

²⁶ I have dealt more fully with this issue in ‘Xhosa Missionaries to Malawi: Black Europeans or African Christians’, *International Bulletin Missionary Research*, Vol. 24, No. 4, October 2000, 168-70.

Types of Missionary Photography

For the rest of the paper I want to look more generally at some aspects of European missionary photography of Africans in the late nineteenth century – particularly as the development of the half-tone process made it increasingly possible to reproduce photographs directly in missionary books and periodicals.

I want to begin by highlighting briefly several types of missionary photography. First there is a type of missionary photography which we may define as **anthropological**. On the surface such photography is apparently scientific or factual. It often shows examples of particular ‘types’ of Africans. Sometimes such photos come in pairs, showing full face and profile of the same person. Indeed, it is likely that the oldest surviving photograph of a black African (Thiesson’s photograph of a woman from Sofala, mentioned above) was originally in this double form. It is true that only one daguerrotype, showing the African woman in profile, has survived. However, I base my theory that it was originally one of two, on the fact that in the previous year, 1844, Thiesson had travelled to Brazil. There he photographed several local people. Among them was one woman, described as a Botocudo Indian. Two poses of this subject have survived – one full face, and one in profile.²⁷ The pose chosen by Thiesson for the profile shot is almost identical to that of the African woman at Sofala: white background, plain wooden chair, bare breasts, wrapped cloth, crossed hands etc. Such photographs were very common – both in missionary and non-missionary sources. Often, however, rather than being merely factual, they were meant to show the subject – whether African or Brazilian - as ‘the exotic other’, and to emphasize difference.

²⁷ Michel Frizot (Editor), *A New History of Photography*, 268.

The second type of photography of the African at this period was a development of the first, and may be called the **social Darwinist** approach. Such photographs were more common in non-missionary circles, and indeed the philosophy underlying them was opposed by many missionaries. At the same time, however, the missionary attitude to this approach may be characterised as ambivalent. The purpose of such photographs was clearly to show the African as inferior to the European. This could be done for a European audience in several ways – by choosing African specimens who seemed particularly ugly to the European eye, by placing them against a background (perhaps a broken down hut) which seemed to indicate African backwardness, by showing African women in what (to Victorian eyes) would be an unacceptable state of undress, by juxtaposing the ‘barbarous’ African with a ‘civilised’ European.

A third variation on this theme may be called the **transformative** photograph. This was particularly beloved of missionaries. It is what I sometimes call the ‘before and after’ photograph. Here a pair of photographs is placed together on a page: the one showing a group of ‘heathen’ Africans, the other a group of African Christians. Some of the techniques of the previous type were used here: contrasts in clothing, hairstyles, housing, agriculture could be used to emphasise the transformation which was possible once the African came under European (and especially Christian) influence. An excellent example of this type of photograph appears in Wells’ biography of James Stewart of Lovedale. Here the two photographs are captioned ‘The Natives at Home’ and ‘The Natives when civilized’.²⁸ It should be noted, by the way, that similar types of photographs were used in North America to show

²⁸ James Wells, *Stewart of Lovedale*, facing page 364.

the transformation of native Americans, and also in Britain (by charities such as Dr. Barnardo's Homes) to show the transformation which was possible when orphans were rescued from the streets and placed in orphanages.

Finally (in this very brief survey) there was a genre of photograph which may be called the **crusading**. These were missionary photographs taken specifically to draw European attention to some African injustice. The most outstanding example of such a crusade was that carried out by the Congo Reform Association to highlight the atrocities of King Leopold's rule in the Congo at the beginning of the twentieth century. The most interesting feature of the movement is that many of the most startling and shocking of the photographs used to publicize their cause were taken by missionaries in the Congo – outstanding among them Alice Harris, whose

photographs were used throughout Europe and North America.²⁹ They appeared in newspapers, were used by writers such as Mark Twain (who wrote an anti-rubber trade pamphlet called *King Leopold's Soliloquy*)³⁰ and overwhelmingly were made into magic lantern slides to accompany public lectures to large audiences. Another of the missionary photographers of Congo atrocities was William H Sheppard - an African-American Presbyterian missionary to the Congo.³¹

²⁹ I have written more extensively about Alice Harris's use of photography in 'Light on the Dark Continent: the Photography of Alice Seely Harris and the Congo Atrocities of the Early Twentieth Century', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 26 (4), October 2002, 146-49; and a more detailed account of the work of the Congo Reform Association can be found in Kevin Grant, 'Christian Critics of Empire: Missionaries, Lantern Lectures, and the Congo Reform Campaign in Britain' in *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 29(2), May 2001, 27-58.

³⁰ Mark Twain, *King Leopold's Soliloquy: a Defense of his Congo Rule*.

³¹ For a recent biography of Sheppard, see Pagan Kennedy, *Black Livingstone: a True Tale of Adventure in the Nineteenth Century Congo*.

Photographic Manipulation

In the twentieth century, with the advent of the easily transportable Brownie box camera (and even more so now, with the development of digital photography) we have become used to the snapshot: the quickly taken, informal photograph, with a minimum of fuss or perhaps even forethought. In the late nineteenth century, however, photographic equipment was heavy and hard to handle, exposures were comparatively long, and developing and fixing were complicated and (in tropical Africa) often uncomfortable activities. Take, for example, the following brief account from the diary of a young Scottish engineer in Malawi in the 1880s:

Saturday 21st June [1884] Rose at 7 and devoted the day to photography – took three views in all and developed them but not very successfully. My darkroom consisted of blankets sewed together and hung over the table, but it was too dark and I could not follow the developing and had just to keep the developer moving till I thought the plate was developed.³²

The above account gives some idea of the difficulties of photography in the interior of Africa in the 1870s and 1880s. One consequence of this was that photographs were generally well thought out; they were not ‘snapped’ instinctively, but more often planned and posed. We can be fairly certain, therefore, that the missionary photographs which have come down to us in their thousands, are not a random assortment of snapshots, but represent rather, the deliberate reflection of Europe upon Africa. Given also, that a comparatively large number of such photographs found their way into missionary publications – books, periodicals and magic lantern slides – and that all three forms were seen

³² The Diary of William O McEwan, presently held at the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, Glasgow; but soon to be published with an Introduction and notes by James McCarthy, to whom I am grateful for letting me read the typescript.

by hundreds of thousands of people across Europe and America at any given period, there can be little doubt that the visual image played a prominent part in the building up of European stereotypes of Africa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Nor should it be thought that such photographs reached us in what we might call their pristine state. Or, even less, that they somehow represented an 'objective' view of their subjects. Today, with the advent of digital photography the term 'manipulation' has become almost central to the photographic technique – to such an extent that it has gained an aura of inevitability and even respectability. The concept of manipulation is far from new in photography. The word was used in the very early days of photography, but with a rather different meaning. Then it meant merely the process of turning the exposed surface into a visible photographic print through the use of chemicals: what today we would call developing and fixing, as described above by McEwan.

Gradually, however, the term came to be used for editing or changing the image itself, to achieve an effect other than that caught in the original photograph. Perhaps the most famous manipulation in the history of photography is Stalin's attempt to remove all photographic traces of Trotsky, after the death of Lenin in 1924 – most famously in the physical removal of Trotsky from the side of Lenin in a 1920 shot of Lenin giving a speech to troops in Moscow. Here, the clear intention was to change the representation of the historical reality, and, as a consequence, people's understanding of that reality.

Why, the reader may be asking, am I mentioning a photograph from the political history of the Soviet Union in a paper on missionary photography

in Africa? The reason is that we all too often assume that photographic manipulation is limited to shady political contexts, but has no connections with religion, Christianity, or missionaries. In this last section I want to deal with that topic, and, in particular, I want to broaden the definition, to show that manipulation can occur in a number of different ways.

First, there are clear examples of missionary photographs from Africa that have been manipulated in the normal meaning of that term. The most outstanding example in my own research involves the Xhosa missionary from South Africa to Malawi, William Koyi (who was briefly mentioned earlier in the paper). Some years ago I came across a magic lantern slide³³ taken around 1877. It showed a group of six people – four white and two black. I was excited to find the photograph, for I was certain that I had never seen the picture before; and yet there was something strangely familiar about it. It took me some time to realise what it was. At one end of the group photograph stood William Koyi (whom I recognised). He was standing with his right hand on the shoulder of one of his Scottish colleagues. Nearly fifty years later, a photograph of William Koyi appeared in a well-known missionary biography.³⁴ On closer examination it turned out to be the same pose. Koyi had been ‘extracted’ from the group photograph, and now stood alone; and in the empty right hand which had rested on his colleague’s shoulder a Bible had been placed. Not a very devious example of manipulation, you may think, for William Koyi was, after all a missionary and evangelist – so a Bible was a very appropriate insertion into his empty right hand. Maybe so, but I have come across a similar example where a Bible has been placed in the hand of an African chief who never

³³ A copy of the slide is held at the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World, University of Edinburgh, Magic Lantern Set LS5/1, ‘Laws the Pioneer’, No. 16.

³⁴ W P Livingstone, *Laws of Livingstonia*, facing page 65.

became a Christian; and for every example that I am aware of, there may be a hundred others that I don't know about. Clearly there are examples of manipulation which seem to have been done for merely artistic reasons – to focus attention on the people about whom a text is being written, for example. There are other clear examples, however, where missionary photographs have been manipulated by editors or others in order to make a particular ideological point – either about the success of the mission, or about the nature of the people being evangelised.

When we think of manipulation we most commonly think of changing the photographic image (as in the case above). Photographs can be equally seriously distorted, however, by the text which accompanies them. This is particularly the case where the subject of the photograph is exotic, and unknown to the viewer. Such a photograph on its own may produce a variety of reactions in those who see it. When it is accompanied by a caption, however, the viewer is led along a particular path – invited (sometimes compelled) to take up a particular stance vis à vis the image. Since almost all missionary photographs published in Europe were accompanied by captions, the nature of the captions largely determined the nature of the reaction to the visual image. One such group of captions usually accompany the 'before and after' photographs mentioned earlier in the paper. In the example quoted above³⁵ (as we have seen) the 'before' photo is captioned 'the natives as they are at home', and the 'after' photograph (on the same page) bears the caption 'the natives when civilised'. Thus the implied contrast between the two photographs is heightened, and the clear message is presented that the Africans in the first photograph are uncivilised.

³⁵ See footnote 28, above.

There is, however, a more subtle form of textual manipulation, which I refer to as the 'Anonymous African Syndrome'. In such photo texts the Africans are stripped of their identity – either by being presented as mere types – 'a Zulu woman' – or by being given merely their 'Christian names' – 'David', 'Mary' or 'Samuel', without any reference to their African names – either personal or family. Two examples of these practices may be cited from my own research in Malawi: both appear in a classic missionary biography *Laws of Livingstonia*, quoted above in connection with the manipulated photograph of William Koyi. Although published in the 1920s, the book deals with events going back as far as the 1870s. The first photograph is of two important Ngoni women. (The Ngoni were often described in contemporary European writing as 'Zulu'. In fact, they had fled from southern Africa after fighting against the Zulu leader Shaka. They belong to the same broad ethnic grouping but may better be described as Nguni, or Ndwandwe). The two women in the photograph are Mary Chipeta and Emily Nhlane; the latter was married to an important Ngoni chief, Mtwalo Jere. Yet when the photograph was published the caption read merely, 'Typical Ngoni Girls'.³⁶ The second example, from the same book, records an occasion of considerable importance in the life of the local church. It shows the first three African ministers of the Livingstonia mission on the day of their ordination, together with their missionary teachers and mentors. Photographically the three new African ministers Yesaya Zerenji Mwasi, Hezekiah Mavuvu Tweya and Jonathan P. Chirwa are placed on chairs in front of their mentors, indicating their centrality on this occasion. But the caption which accompanies the photo reads 'Rev. A.G. MacAlpine, Rev. Dr. Elmslie, Rev. Dr. Laws, Yesaya, Hezekiah, Jonathan'.³⁷ While the

³⁶ Livingstone, *Laws of Livingstonia*, facing page 145.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, facing page 289.

European missionaries have been given their full titles, the African ministers have not been accorded the dignity of either their full names, or their clerical titles – in spite of the fact that the photograph was taken specifically to mark the occasion of their ordination as Christian ministers.

Conclusion

I do not wish to suggest that all missionary photography was either manipulative or pernicious. Much of it created a sense of reality and immediacy which earlier lithographs had lacked. At its best it opened Europe's eyes to Africa. Too often, however, it created stereotypes. It was, after all, designed for a 'home audience', and, moreover, was a means of engendering support and raising funds for the missionary effort. This often entailed an exaggeration of the exotic otherness of the African, or, paradoxically, of the success of the mission in transforming African society.

African missionary photography has, for too long, been accepted uncritically (especially in church circles). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries missionary photography was a powerful tool in creating images of Africa in Europe. At the time, they were often accepted as literal representations of reality – not least because (in its early days especially) photography was seen as 'the Pencil of Nature': the exact representation of reality, rather than a particular interpretation of a specific context. Photographs may evoke powerful emotions, but they always represent a particular slant on reality. Increasingly, as we come to value missionary photography in Africa as an important historical source, we need also to become aware of the fact that it tells

us as much about the ideas of the photographer (and the presuppositions of the editor) as it does about the subjects being photographed.

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UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN

Koebmagergade 46, 4.
DK-1150 Copenhagen K
Phone +45 35 32 25 85
Fax +45 35 32 25 90
E-mail cas@teol.ku.dk
<http://www.teol.ku.dk/cas>

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