

This book examines how Western photographic practice has been used as a tool for creating Eurocentric and violent visual regimes, and demands that we recognise and disrupt the ingrained racist ideologies that have tainted photography since its inception in 1839.

With detailed analyses of photographs – included in the book – by Joy Gregory, Wayne Miller, Rotimi Fani-Kayode, Alice Seeley Harris and others, and spanning more than a hundred years of photographic history, *Decolonising the Camera* trains Mark Sealy's sharp critical eye on the racial politics at work within photography.

*Decolonising the Camera* is an extraordinary contribution to the histories of photography and representation of the Other. Mark Sealy analyses a range of photographic practice, from the work of missionary-turned-documentary-photographer Alice Seeley Harris in the Congo at the turn of the twentieth century, to Wayne Miller's portraits of black communities in Chicago after the Second World War. He reminds us that photography is an inherently racialised medium. The book presents a critical methodology for developing 'other ways of seeing' at a time of increasing divisions in society.

**Yasufumi Nakamori, Senior Curator of International Art (Photography), Tate**

A vital contribution to the field, in which Sealy unpacks notions of power, alterity, the margin, and the construction of black subjectivity in the face of visual cultures built upon colonialist legacies. *Decolonising the Camera* is a must-read for anyone interested in the intersection of race, identity, and photography.

**Steven Evans, Executive Director, FotoFest International**

In this deft deconstruction of what is simultaneously before, behind and beyond the lens, Sealy teaches us how to understand photography within a broader system of social, and more specifically, racial control. His incisive critique challenges our understanding of what was, what might have been, and what could be.

**Gary Younge**



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Mark Sealy  
**Decolonising  
the Camera:**  
Photography in  
Racial Time





## Introduction

This book examines how Western photographic practice has been used as a tool for creating Eurocentric and violent visual regimes. It uses the central principle of 'decolonising the camera', a process by which an analysis of photography takes place within and against the political and violent reality of Western imperialism. Through this process, it explores issues of race and cultural erasure within photographic history through the direct analysis of photographic works, informed by two underlying questions. Firstly, has photography been a liberating device, or an oppressive weapon that holds the viewer/producer and citizen/subject in a violent system of continual exposure? And secondly, what epistemic value has photography brought to our understanding of difference?

The book considers whether photographic works concerning visualisations of the 'Other' can produce different or new meanings when they are critically read through the prism of colonialism, its inherent forms of human negation, its temporalities and its violence. This is done by locating and reading the photographs discussed here within the ideologies of colonial time, space and place. Decolonising the camera functions as a critical dialogue with colonial and imperial photographic histories, and the social and visual spaces they occupy. Through the photographs discussed here, I argue that within these common types of racialised photographic spaces, we can analyse the varying levels of violence done in photography concerning the making of the Other, and from that perspective consider how these forms of violence worked in the service of Western colonial and imperial powers.

'Colonialism has been a dispossession of space, a deprivation of identity' (Barlet 2000, p.39), and it created a system of image production that maintained and disseminated its dehumanising

ideologies. At the centre of this book lies the proposition that it is necessary to recognise photography as an active agent of Western colonising authority at work on the body of the Other, both in the past and in the present. It is only through this that we can begin to fully recognise the complexities and political impact of photographs in visualisations of racialised subjects.

Throughout this text I suggest that a photograph of a racialised subject must be both located in and then de-located from the racial and political time of its making and not solely articulated by its descriptive (journalistic) or aesthetic (artistic) concerns. I maintain that it is only within the political and cultural location of a photograph that we can discover the coloniality at work within it, and only then, through understanding this, can a process of enquiry begin into the nature of its colonial cultural coding. A key aspect of decolonising the camera is to not allow photography's colonial past and its cultural legacies in the present to lie unchallenged and un-agitated, or to be simply left as the given norm within the history of the medium. Decolonising the photographic image is an act of unburdening it from the assumed, normative, hegemonic, colonial conditions present, consciously or unconsciously, in the moment of its original making and in its readings and displays. This is therefore a process of locating the primary conditions of a racialised photograph's coloniality and, as such, decolonising the camera works within a form of black cultural politics to destabilise the conditions, receptions and processes of Othering a subject within the history of photography.

The notion of destabilising photography's historical past works through the lens of Stuart Hall's critical writing on race and representation, especially that concerning the British black subject's construction within photography that he wrote in the 1980s. Of particular relevance are his essays titled 'Reconstruction Work: Images of Postwar Black Settlement' from 1984, and 'New Ethnicities', from 1988. In 'New Ethnicities', Hall theorises a decisive turn against the Eurocentric stable and negative representations of the black subject within Western visual culture. He also articulates a politics in which 'unspoken and invisible' (Hall 1988, p.27) subjects in post-Second World War Britain have challenged spaces of representation, and marks the moment that black subjects begin

to contest their historically fixed image. Building on the notion of the 'unspoken and invisible' black subject within Western culture, and analysing a series of complex photographic episodes drawn from various archives of Western photography, I make the case that such archives, in their myriad representative ways, are loaded with unspoken and culturally invisible subjects, and that the photographs within them work politically and aggressively as active agents locked within a colonial photographic paradigm.

Hall claimed that the 1980s were a 'critical decade' for black British photography (Bailey & Hall 1992). I assert here that the 1990s should also be read as a transformative period that heralded the arrival of the Other as photographer within mainstream Western cultural institutions. In the final chapter of this book, I consider the political and cultural conditions of both these decades as decisive periods in which the black subject entered both the domain of representation and its international art markets.

Throughout this text, I examine the visual and structural complexities at work within a given photograph's social and political formation, which I refer to as its 'racial time'. Racial time enables us to consider a photograph's function as a sign within the historical conditions concerning the 'relations of representation' that Hall discussed in 'New ethnicities'. I employ the idea of racial time to signify a different but essential colonial temporality at work within a photograph. In 'New ethnicities', Hall also presented the notion of the 'end of the essential black subject' (Hall 1988, p.28). If this is the case, then it marks an important conjuncture in history and photography where the Other is brought into focus. Hall therefore shifts the cultural landscape in the understanding of the black subject within Western visual culture and I enquire here, as an undercurrent to these chapters, how the cultural landscape in the making of race has been historically constituted and how that landscape might be read today and in the future to produce new meanings.

In my final chapter Hall's influence re-emerges through his essays 'Reconstruction Work: Images of Postwar Black Settlement' (1984) and 'Yanley Burke and the "Desire for Blackness"' (1993). The latter, about the Birmingham-based photographer, is employed as a reminder of the rarity of visual moments concerning black intimacy and tenderness within the history of photography.



My enquiries are not limited to the context of British black cultural politics in the 1980s referred to by Hall but also extend back through the histories of the medium so that we can begin a process of understanding race at work in photography. If, as Hall suggests, the end of the essential black subject was a political reality by the 1980s, then something must have passed on or died. Further, if this is the case, then that ending affords us in the present the opportunity to do new forensic work on the historical sites and bodies of photography that concern its essentialising and racialising nature. This book aims to locate, excavate, extract and expose the slippery, ghost-like nature of the colonial in photography, so as to make the essence of the colonial legacy within photography and its dark epistememes more evident and more visible.

The images discussed here have been assembled on the basis of extensive research in key photographic archives, such as those at Anti-Slavery International, the Bodleian Library, the Black Star Archives at Ryerson University, Getty Images, Magnum Photos and the Imperial War Museum. Analysing this primary material reveals how Western regimes of scopopic violence can be understood in the context of the racialised body, human rights and photographic history. I address the concept of cultural erasure against the Other, informed by a range of enquiries into history, photography, racial and cultural politics in the works of, for example, Paul Gordon Lauren, Emmanuel Levinas, Frantz Fanon, Michel Foucault, Sven Lindqvist and, as already mentioned, Stuart Hall.

Levinas invites us to look into the face of the Other as a duty of obligation and as a sign of our infinite and fundamental responsibility for the individual human Other. For Levinas, taking responsibility for the Other is the ethical site where we locate our own humanity and morality. Using Levinas's philosophy of ethical responsibility, I argue that photography made through the prism of the colonial gaze has created such a wholly dehumanising legacy of images of the colonised subject that it may be impossible to rectify.

Fanon's thoughts on decolonising the mind of the colonised subject here map onto decolonising photography, and relate to the internalising psychological damage that can occur to the human subject when constantly exposed to dehumanising representations of blackness. Fanon's view of colonial violence suggests that violence

generated by the oppressor is rejected with an equal force, and with this in mind, analysing photographs of the black subject from the perspective of a decolonising critic in this book works as a process of political rejection of Eurocentric photographic practices. This opens up such photographs to different possible readings that unlock them from the fixity of the time of their making, which enables us to read, for example, Wayne Miller's photographs as a form of black performativity to white colonial privilege, rather than simply as empathetic documentary work.

For Foucault, power is a function of panopticism, in which the threat of permanent visibility causes subjects to become self-regulating and 'docile'. In the dynamics of race and violence against the black body, such power is derived from controlling the black body through the assumed cultural authority of white rights to observe and display blackness.

In Sven Lindqvist's key book, *Exterminate All the Brutes* (Lindqvist & Tare 2007), he writes the history of genocide as a travelogue through colonial time. This works as a reminder of the role technology has played in Europe's domination and formation of its colonies. By presenting the tragic consequences of those technological developments for colonised subjects, he reminds us of the importance of revisiting and decoding the narratives of history that sanitise the colonial conquests.

The legacies of colonialism and racism worry the history of photography. They enable the fractures of enlightenment and humanitarian thought to haunt the present. Photography, when read within the context of European imperialism, has the capacity to function as a morbid reminder of the intense level of cultural violence that was aimed at the Other over centuries. Photographs are discussed here not just as historical documents but as images open to different interpretations of key moments in Europe's history, such as King Leopold's violent regime in the Congo, for example, or the complexity of agendas surrounding race at the end of Second World War. This form of analysis allows us to read the nuances and gauge the power of the cultural and political forces at work within the history of the genre, and to assess how these forces have impacted on photographic constructions of race, the politics of human rights, identity formations, national narratives and cultural memory.



Throughout this book, I analyse photographs and photographic practices in which issues of race, human rights and identity politics are paramount. The priority here is to analyse the extent to which the humanitarian ideals that have often animated the discourse and practice of photography have impacted on the historical conditions of race, to examine whether those ideals have supported or hindered human understandings of race within photography and to gauge how photography's dominant regimes have assisted, maintained and made possible the creation of a racialised world. The historical work that has been done in photography on constructions of race, human and civil rights has, through the ongoing institutional hegemony of European photography, failed to alter the colonial consciousness within Western thought concerning theories of and cultural attitudes towards race, even when wrapped within the context of a humanitarian concern. I explore this directly through, for example, images circulated by the Congo Reform Association, which was a powerful humanitarian organisation working at the beginning of the twentieth century on religious, political and humanitarian fronts, and also particularly through images made during and immediately after the Second World War that feature the colonised or black American subject.

I maintain that photography is dominated by the legacy of a colonial consciousness repressed in the present. If this is the case, then this ongoing imperial mindset means that the colonial visual regimes historically active within photography remain inherently intact, as the making of photography, its translations and articulations, its distribution networks and knowledge formations, continue to be critically dislocated from the perspective of the subaltern and the marginalised. Realigning photography to include a reading from subaltern or 'different' perspectives (Hall & Sealy 2001), I argue that we have to engage in a form of decolonisation work within photography concerning the Other, or consider the history of photography from within a politics of representation. In this, the primary objective is revealing the specific or latent political implications of a given photograph's production, especially its reading and its reception when the face of the racial Other is brought into focus (Levinas 1979).

The photographs by missionary photographer Alice Seeley Harris and the work of the Congo Reform Association are the

subjects of Chapter 1. They are an acute reminder of the complex layers of the horrific violence that was directed at the African body in the Congo at the turn of the twentieth century. Across Europe and the United States of America, Seeley Harris's early humanitarian photographs highlighted the outrageous abuse and killings that were taking place throughout King Leopold II of Belgium's Congo Free State. They constitute some of the most politically charged images of colonial violence taken in the twentieth century. Their display in public still has the capacity to inform, educate and appal, as was evident in the exhibition titled *'When Harmony Went to Hell' – Congo Dialogues: Alice Seeley Harris and Sammy Baloi*, which I curated for Autograph ABP at the Rivington Place galleries in early 2014. Visitors to the exhibition overwhelmingly expressed limited or no knowledge of the levels of violence suffered by the Congolese people. Fewer still understood the role that Seeley Harris and her photographs played in the downfall of Leopold's regime. However, like all photographs, they carry a multiplicity of meanings according to the cultural perspective from which they are read. Seeley Harris's photographs now afford us the opportunity to enquire why they were, until fairly recently, absent from the dominant narratives of photography's history, and they enable us to address why Seeley Harris, an innovative missionary photographer, has been pushed into the background of the history of photography. These photographs, taken in Africa at the turn of century, are critical to understanding the politics of the European presence on the continent. They also performed dramatic work as documents employed in Britain promoting political and humanitarian reform in Africa. The photos' original display and reception was as theatrical lantern slides, which functioned within a specific set of scripted performative narratives working to service and expand the objectives of British Protestant missionaries based in the heart of the Belgian Catholic Congo. Locating them back within this context deepens their significance, enabling us to consider missionaries with cameras as people uniquely situated on the front line of the British empire, fuelling with their 'knowledge' the wider enterprise of British colonialism. On the surface, these ostensibly benign photographs 'humanise' the African subject by exposing King Leopold II's regime of violence. But they can also be read as rallying



calls, not for the liberation and freedom of African subjects, but for the construction of a higher, morally colonising authority that was understood as uniquely British and therefore just.

Alice Sealey Harris's work and the photographs employed by the Congo Reform Association provoke questions of colonial disavowal and disingenuous imperial agendas as Catholic and Protestant missionaries fought for pole position in the race to convert the 'natives', a battle that mirrored the wider European conflicts across Africa for territorial gain and control. Through an analysis of the way these images were used by Sealey Harris and her colleagues, I make the case that essentially the Congolese were left with three choices – be converted to Christianity, become slaves or be killed – none of which guaranteed their human recognition or advanced the case of humanity for the African subject in the West. The camera in the Congo may well have highlighted the plight of the Congolese under the control of King Leopold II, but it also contributed to the increased security and certainty of the British Protestant missionary presence. Photographs displayed by the Congo Reform Association were evidently a factor in the elderly King Leopold II being pressured to sell his stake in the Congo to Belgium in 1908, just one year before his death, but the king's deluded sense of benevolence lived on through the agency of the Belgian state for at least another fifty years. The racist, dehumanising, violent ideology of Belgium's rule remained intract for decades, up to and beyond Congo's independence in 1960.

While Sealey Harris's work was produced almost half a century before the outbreak of the Second World War, it raises questions that continue to haunt the post-war moment. *Sven Lindqvist's Exterminate All the Brutes* reminds us that 'Europe's destruction of the "inferior races" of four continents prepared the ground for Hitler's destruction of six million Jews in Europe' (Lindqvist & Tate 2007, p.x). The deliberate refusal to see those regarded as Other as human subjects in their own right defines a violent literary and visual legacy that is now firmly part of the Eurocentric construction of the making of world history. Through photography, this legacy has marked those whose lives and cultures have a value and those whose do not.

The photographs taken at the Nazi death camps, discussed in Chapter 2, have had a profound effect on the consciousness of the

modern world. They now count among the most iconic images of humans' inhumanity to other humans ever recorded or shown in public. Many of them first appeared in *Life* magazine on 7 May 1945 and have been discussed at length by historians of both human rights and photography (Lauren 2003; Linfield 2010). However, the specific detail and complexities of these photographs' cultural work is easily overlooked due to the grotesque nature of what they depict. Nuanced cultural work can slip by, unnoticed due to the way in which the photographs have been encoded for public presentation within larger circuits of communication (S. Hall 1973). If we accept the emergence of these photographs, published in *Life* and other Western news media in May 1945, as the origins of 'irrefutable evidence' concerning acts of mass extermination of the Jewish people by the Nazis, then it is also important to read them within a wider racial context. They act as 'irrefutable evidence' not just of Nazi horrors, but additionally of the Allied forces' disavowal concerning the plight of the Jews, the Roma, the disabled, the mentally ill and the many others who died in the death camps: photographs and testimonies were available long before Allied soldiers liberated the camps, but this visual foreknowledge gets left out of the grand narratives concerning violence against the Other.

The lack of recognition of different indigenous cultures through managed misrepresentations of their alterity in the West is a defining marker of the colonial and postcolonial eras: eras that, in various guises, continually scrutinised the 'dark races' and dismissed their capacity to rule themselves and, by extension, to fully engage with the politics of their own lives. By the end of the Second World War, Europe's and the USA's preferred political agenda was simply to maintain the old cultural racial status quo. Through its analysis of racially charged photographs produced in the West during and after the Second World War, Chapter 2 demonstrates that this agenda was also played out in the realm of photographic representation. Freedom for the colonial subject, despite that subject's major contribution to Europe's liberation, was not going to be forthcoming. Western attitudes to race in the late 1940s were resoundingly retrogressive, as was confirmed by the implementation of the Apartheid regime in South Africa in 1948 and the newly formed United Nations' inert responses to it.



Among the images discussed in Chapter 3 are those taken by the celebrated British photographer John Deakin at the fifth Pan-African Congress in Manchester in October 1945, which appeared in *Picture Post* magazine on 10 November 1945. Used in an editorial context, they allow us to take the pulse of British journalistic attitudes towards colonial subjects immediately after the Second World War, and they represent the only in-depth visual account of this significant moment within British colonial politics.

Deakin's photographs accompany an article that focuses on miscegenation rather than African liberation, recalling nineteenth-century European obsessions with racial purity (Lindqvist & Tate 2007, p.100). The *Picture Post* editorial, which was titled 'Africa Speaks in Manchester', unashamedly advocated 'white hostility' towards black subjects if the demands of the colonised carried any meaningful threat. What therefore begins to surface is the arrogant cultural assumption that the status quo concerning the empire and its subjects would be maintained violently as a European right. Within this small body of photographs, their captions and the text, we can see the early signs of a preferred national story, locating the boundaries of global freedom in late 1945 – territorially, politically and racially. Analysing the article reveals a subtle set of wider communications aimed at the British public that, when deconstructed through the prism of race, sends a distinct message that, given the end of the Second World War, there was no further need to embrace or tolerate the colonial black soldier or worker as a colleague in arms, equal in the fight against fascism. The article works as a reminder that, just six months after the end of the war in Europe, Africans could 'speak' regarding their desire for freedoms, but only according to the terms of the old empires' agendas. The article also critically inaugurates a process of cultural amnesia relating to the political promises and new images concerning colonial contributions to the war effort, which had been put into mass production and circulation. Moreover, it ignores the global significance of the transatlantic agreements that had been signed between the Allied forces that effectively promised freedom for all the world's peoples.

George Padmore, the Trinidadian pan-Africanist, is quoted in the *Picture Post* article as summing up the mood of the delegates in

Manchester: 'a Negro's skin is his passport to an oppression as violent as that of Nazi Germany's oppression of the Jews ... we don't need yellow armbands in Africa – just black skins'. As far as racial politics was concerned, across the pages of *Picture Post* in November 1945, the black colonised subject was petrified in colonial time. However, the images belie the new face of radical African liberation and highlight just how out of step the British were with the political mood and determination of their African subjects, many of whom had been hardened by their experiences of war in Europe. The presence of W. E. B. Du Bois in Manchester, probably the most influential black man on the planet in 1945, should have been a clear indicator that the political tide had turned against Europe's empires. Deakin and the editors of *Picture Post*, however, failed to recognise him in the photographs, giving his name to the face of a different delegate at the Congress.

A young German photojournalist, Robert Lebeck, was in the Congo on 29 June 1960, the eve of independence for the newly formed state of the Republic of Congo. On that day he took what has now become an iconic photograph of African independence struggles. The image shows the ceremonial sword of the Belgian King Baudouin being stolen and held aloft by an African spectator of the ceremonies. As the 'thief' turns to run away with the sword, Lebeck, fortuitously placed, takes advantage of the scene, taking a photograph that helps to establish his reputation as one of the leading photojournalists of his day. In Chapter 4, I discuss the complete sequence of photographs taken on 29 June by Lebeck, which were published in his recent monograph, *Tokyo, Moscow, Léopoldville* (2008). Examining the images that were taken before and after the sword was stolen reveals the intensity of colonial rule through the imperial signs of Belgium's symbolic order, thus directing a reading of Lebeck's work away from the traditions within photography that desire the location of a Barthesian 'punctive' moment (Barthes 1981) within a given photograph. I argue that the images are visually saturated to a claustrophobic degree with the signs of Belgium's colonialism. Reading Belgium's monuments and other colonial tropes that appear in the photographs as signs of historical violence, colonial grandeur and indulgence, offers an analysis of Lebeck's series not as a filter that works towards the making of a single deci-



sive moment, but as images that act today as turbulent reminders of the past and visual precursors to the violence that befell the Congo just a few months after its independence. When read now, from the perspective of the known political realities of the Congo, the photographs are important not just as moments that capture African independence but as a record of the degrees of colonial oppression that were still present at the time of the formation of the new state. The sword thief may well have grabbed the symbol of power from the Belgians briefly, but the white Belgian military presence, which was managing the path to independence, rapidly restored colonial order. Lebeck's photographs from 29 June 1960 have become a unique register against which we can begin to deconstruct the damaging totalising effects of Belgium's colonial rule on the minds of both the Congolese and the Belgians.

In Chapter 5, I examine one of the first post-Second World War documentary photography projects that was funded and produced with the specific objective of changing white perceptions of the black US. As a Second World War photographer working in the South Pacific for the US navy, Wayne Miller was, by the end of the hostilities, sickened by the devastation he had witnessed. His experience of being on a racially divided ship and what he saw at Hiroshima affected his perspectives on race and humanity so much so that, on his return home to Chicago, he decided that the most pressing contribution he could make was to try and bridge the cultural and political fault-lines that divided American society racially.

Miller's ambition was to bring black Americans closer to the hearts and minds of white society, by presenting a new vision of black humanity. His project was not a self-financed endeavour; it was funded by two Guggenheim awards, which clearly indicates the Guggenheim Foundation's view of the importance and relevance of Miller's work on race. The funding enabled him to work among Chicago's black community for three years. Miller's photographs taken from 1946 to 1948 therefore represented what was then an unprecedented view of the lives of black Americans taken by a white photographer. Since their publication in 2000, these images have been celebrated as powerful examples of documentary photographs employed as a vehicle for building empathy between different people. However, given the intensity and history of racism in Chicago in

the mid to late 1940s, it is pertinent to consider Miller's privileged status as a well-financed white photographer photographing black Americans, and to examine the possibilities and forms of cultural reciprocity between him and his subjects in such a racially tense environment. Cultural commentators on Miller's work have tended to ignore that the images were made within a dominant regime of representation; the fact of blackness that Miller attempted to make visible was constituted solely from a white perspective in which Miller positioned himself as the interpreter of a form of black humanity, classically aestheticised within the photographic documentary tradition. Miller does not provide any wider social context against which to gauge the levels of white oppression under which these people lived. Therefore, to read the value of the work one has to literally look outside the frame.

Enquiring into Miller's humanitarian project reveals that the photographs became virtually invisible for decades. Instead of being agents for social change in the 1940s US, they became a closed personal archive. They did not surface collectively as images in any meaningful cultural curatorial context for at least another fifty years, apart from some minor usage by the American black press to support arguments relating to black progress in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Additionally, two photographs were included as part of Edward Steichen's 1955 *The Family of Man* exhibition, one of which portrays a black man involved with a sex worker, and the other shows a depressed-looking black man dressed in his denim work clothes sitting on the edge of a double bed while a black woman lies fully clothed on the same bed with her back to the camera contemplating the condition of a fingernail.

Chapter 5 is an analysis of Miller's photographs from the time of their making against the historical background of racial politics in the midwest USA and through the period of their emergence in the public domain, highlighting the fact that they were never released into a place where they could perform the work they were funded to do. Crucially, both Miller and the Guggenheim allowed the project to effectively disappear for over half a century. Therefore, the core purpose of the photographs' making became politically redundant, or at least a failed photographic humanitarian exercise, regardless of how aesthetically successful the images are deemed to be. By not



being brought into the public domain at the time of their making, the project was discharged of its original social intent and its meanings became culturally relocated into an archival story of discovery, rather than being photographs that can be read through the work they may have performed in their own time.

The emergence of black British and African photographers throughout the late 1980s and 1990s is discussed in the final chapter, which considers work that was produced in Britain by black photographers to act as counter-images to the stereotypically negative ways in which the racialised body had been positioned within mainstream cultural institutions and the media. The chapter focuses on the practices of the first wave of black British documentary photographers, then analyses a younger generation of British photographers whose production moved purposely away from the documentary tradition to create scenes where 'new ethnicities' could be imagined (S. Hall 1998). Within this context, I discuss the hybrid and transgressive nature of work by Rotimi Fani-Kayode from Nigeria, who was displaced in London on several counts. I situate his practice in contrast to the cultural business of 'discovery' and display of the Malian photographer Seydou Keita, and other African photographers who came to the attention of Western curators through the 1994 Bamako photography festival. I explore the constructions and receptions of African photography in the West and assess how African photographers and their works have been placed culturally and critically, or abstracted from their original context, to fit within Western frames of reference.

By considering the cultural and political conditions in which these photographs emerged, and through an examination of public and private agencies such as the Greater London Council and Jean Pigozzi's Geneva-based Contemporary African Art Collection, we can recognise how agency and cultural intervention change the course of photographic history. These and other powerful European and North American institutions have worked in different ways to bring black British and African photographers into the mainstream, but at what cost and for whose benefit, especially when we consider work produced from 'different' locations (Hall & Sealy 2001)? This is relevant geographically, culturally and politically, within the context of an increasingly globalised art world economy that

is managed essentially by European art world elites who end up, as in the case of Seydou Keita, in legal conflicts over ownership of African artists' rights and authenticity of the work. Within these critical new domains of representation, progress is made towards a less Eurocentric photographic discourse. However, the process of control and commerce echoes the historically exploitative, competitive, colonising encounters of extraction and consumption of the image of the Other, how it is managed and how it is made real in the West.

*Decolonising the camera* aims to contribute to a form of theoretical uncoupling concerning the making, uses, readings and thinking of photography in Western culture. The main objective of the book is to consider how photography functions within the slippery matrix of colonial power, and to bring into sharper focus the other cultural work that photographs perform, especially if we allow them to be articulated from different perspectives, or other ways of seeing.