

## Wilderness House Literary Review 9/4

Pam Rosenblatt

### War from the Victims' Perspective: Photographs by Jean Mohr

*One rainy Wednesday, October 1, 2014 afternoon Wilderness House Literary Review's art editor Pam Rosenblatt went to see the "War from the Victims' Perspective" exhibition featuring photographs by Jean Mohr of Geneva, Switzerland at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts that ran from Sunday, September 14, 2014 through Sunday, October 5, 2014.*

*She met with two vital persons involved with this eye-opening exhibit: Andreas Rufer, Deputy Consul/Project Leader – Art & Culture for swissnex boston, and Taraneh Pettinato, International Media Relations Specialist for the Office of Communications, Public Relations, and Marketing at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts. After a short interview with Rufer and Pettinato, Rosenblatt viewed and took photos of the photographs displayed on the walls of The Fletcher School's art gallery. The following review is a by-product of this interview at The Fletcher School of Tufts University:*



Although some people view war as a positive means for economic growth, the average person does not enjoy war. People get hurt; people die; people lose homes; people become dispersed; people catch terrible diseases. It is true that people in the military may become heroes through winning a battle or two or through injuries received via military fighting. But sometimes the unsung heroes are those people who watch the fighting on the sidelines – the people who battle for their lives every day a gun is shot or a bomb explodes near where their former homes or schools or hospitals once existed.



War is often depicted through the eyes of soldiers and/or politicians on television and in the movies. Rarely, if ever, is war viewed through the perspective of its victims - the civilians, or the men, women, and children who are not in the military, who may become refugees.

Photographer Jean Mohr (1925 - ) has had over eighty exhibitions worldwide that focus on the humanitarian side of war, the side rarely depicted amidst the active, upbeat strategic accomplishments as well as the downbeats of war. He photographs the casualties of war and the path of upset.

In celebration of the 150th Anniversary of the establishment of Inter-

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national Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the 150th Anniversary of the Geneva Convention, the Musée de l'Elysée, located in Lausanne, Switzerland, and the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland, have jointly curated Jean Mohr's "War from the Victims' Perspective". This exhibition is special. It consists of four sections: "Portraits of Exile", "Temporary Landscapes", "The Children's Diaspora", and "Life Goes On". Each of these four parts has several photographs that depict the progression of the different stages of war for its victims.

Andreas Rufer, the Deputy Consul/Project Leader- Art & Culture for swissnex boston, explained in an October 1, 2014 interview that "Jean Mohr was himself a delegate from the ICRC. It was for only two years. And then he

changed his profession. He became a professional photographer."

Rufer said that all the photographs in the "War from the Victims Perspective" were taken during war conflicts. The first section "Portraits of Exile" and the second section "Temporary Landscapes" show the impact of the course of war. "And then, the third part is 'Children's Diaspora', so featuring photographs with children. And then the last section titled 'Life Goes On' ...I like very much because there is hope. The children – and you see adults – either playing, smiling, or working with a little bit of sun actually everywhere," he said.

"And this is reflective of Jean Mohr, who says, 'Where there is the laughter of children,

there is always hope.' And that's the reason this exhibition ends with this part 'Life Goes On,'" said Rufer. (This

quote may be viewed if you watch the video-interview with Jean Mohr entitled "War from the Victims' Perspective – Photographs by Jean Mohr" that is one of two videos present at the "War in the Victims' Perspective" exhibition.)

"I think it's important to have a close look at every photo and every photo tells a story of its own. It's not just about going through [the exhibition] and that's it. But you really have to have a look at each photo and imagine what



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the story behind each image is," said Rufer.

Mohr's black and white photography is not the type of photography that the viewer can simply glance at and walk away without impact. Perhaps this intensity is achieved through the use of his analog camera.

In "Portraits of Exile", Mohr has photographed such people as at "Farm Work, Sudanese refugee camp, Kakya, Uganda in 1968", courtesy of Musée de l'Elysée; at a "Mozambican refugee at Sunday Mass, in the Lundo installation area of Tanzania, 1968", courtesy of UNHCR; and at a "Refugee camp in Cyprus, 1976", courtesy of Musée de l'Elysée.

The photo of the Mozambican woman praying at a Sunday Mass shows Mohr to be the skillful humanitarian photographer that he is: this woman is intently focused on pray, revealing a sensitive, reflective, and passionate side to her that is probably a result of the hardship of war.<sup>1</sup> Like Rufer suggested, there seems to be a story behind this photograph, one that we may never find out.



There's another photo in "Portraits of Exile" section which attracts attention. It's called "Refugee camp, Cyprus, 1976", courtesy of Musée de l'Elysée. The living conditions of nine people are photographed. Who are these children? Is the girl to the far left of the photo, with short hair and a turtleneck a grown woman or a child like the others in the photo? If not, where are their parents? Do they all live in this small area? are simply a few questions

that may arise when looking at this photograph. Once again, Mohr has captured our attention to the story that lies within this intriguing, contemplative photograph.

In the "Temporary Landscapes" section, there is a photo titled "Mozambican refugees, demonstrations and songs at Nyimba School Zambia,

<sup>1</sup> "War from the Victims' Perspective" information board at the "War in the Victims' Perspective" exhibition at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts, September 14 – October 5, 2014.

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1968", courtesy of UNHCR. It is a picture of a young boy peering through a shattered window with a bullet hole. It's a piercing scene highlighted by the youngster's eyes looking straight at Mohr's camera. Who is this boy? Is he safe? Is he hungry? Again, Mohr has achieved a sensitivity reflective of his humanitarian outlook.<sup>2</sup> The title of this photograph is another very powerful photograph by Mohr is "A few days after the Six-Day War, Israeli officer considers an ICRC proposal, under the gaze of a Palestinian boy/Kalandia Village between Jerusalem and Ramallah, 1967", courtesy ICRC. In this photograph, like its title explains, an Israeli soldier sits under a window with his left hand resting on the lower portion of his face while a young boy eyes Mohr's camera as he looks through a window. Who is this boy? Who is this soldier? Do the two people know each other? Are they both safe? These are some questions that develop after viewing this serious, reflective artwork.



"Children's Diaspora" is the third part of the "War in the Victims' Perspective" exhibition. Two moving photographs are present in this section, among others. The first one is "Refugees from Mozambique, milk distribution at Lundo clinic, Tanzania, 1966", courtesy of UNHCR. It's a photo of a handsome young child grasping onto two bowls with a woman's arm keeping him close to her side. This mysterious woman's hand holds firmly onto the two bowls, which are probably intended for milk distribution. Who are these two people? Are they related? Do they finally get the bowls filled with the milk that they so need? There are many stories that may result from this wonderful picture.

"Young Mozambican refugee, Muhukuru clinic, Tanzania 1966", courtesy of UNHCR is the other photo that captures the hearts of the viewers. A young boy simply twists his two arms playfully together and looks intently into the camera that Mohr holds. The child seems to be acting like any boy his age; he appears to be as curious about the camera as Mohr is about this little boy's situation. This piece makes you reflect on the situation of war and does it have anything positive about it?

The final section of "War from the Victims' Perspective" is "Life Goes On". And it certainly does, in a peaceful way. "Refugees' children playing on a car wreck close to the Buri el-Shemali camp, Tyr, 1963", Collection Musée de l'Elysée is a wonderful picture of two smiling children, a girl and a boy, making the best of a bad situation, as they enjoy themselves while playing in a wrecked automobile. Who are these children? Whose car is or was this? How did the car get damaged? Has the danger of war subsided for these two children? There are plenty of stories, hopefully good ones, that this more light-hearted photo suggests.

"Young Mozambican refugee who gave birth at the Lundo clinic, Tan-

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

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zania, 1968", courtesy of UNHCR is another picture in the "Life Goes On" section and is an intense scene of a woman resting on a bed with her newborn at her side. What hope for the future this artwork gives. Questions that arise: Why doesn't the woman have her arm embracing her infant? Who is this beautiful looking woman? Does she have a husband? Where are these two headed after the hospital? Only good things should happen to these two. And no more war.

The "War in the Victims' Perspective" is a powerful, insightful exhibition that makes the viewer wonder about the necessity of war and what it makes refugees go through. Mohr has documented the harsh realities of war upon its victims as well as the steps that refugees take toward regaining normalcy after such upheaval. His stance is truly a humanitarian one, and one that people perhaps should consider when thinking about war and its negatives.

"War in the Victims' Perspective" is a traveling exhibition that will end in the year 2016. After its show at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy ends on October 5, 2014, the exhibit will move onto Washington, D.C. from November 21, 2014 – February 6, 2015 to happen at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars then onto Atlanta, Georgia from March 19 – June 28, 2015 to exhibit at the Carter Center.

There is actually a second printed exhibition that will travel to Ottawa and next onto Montreal, Canada. This show will also be seen in many other countries.

The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University accepted the "War in the Victims' Perspective" exhibition to be held in their gallery because "We're always looking for opportunities for events of this nature that really fits in with the mission of The Fletcher School which is educating students for global careers. I think that this exhibition ended up being a nice synergy [with ICRC]," said

Taraneh Pettinato, International Media Relations Specialist for the Office of Communications, Public Relations, and Marketing in The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts.

