

An Analysis of Historical Imagery – The Picture of Sir Bob Jones responding to anti-tour demonstrators in New Zealand 1981

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Abstract: The photo of Sir Bob Jones responding to an anti-tour demonstration in Auckland 1981 captures a pivotal moment in New Zealand's history. By analysing the imagery and its connection to the broader historical context at the beginning of the 1980s, we can see a multilayered picture going beyond this brief snapshot. In this article, I carry out a semiotic analysis of the photo, which starts with a description of the visible attributes and the aesthetic dimension. Different micro-aspects of the photo will be described and connected. After considering aspects that are immediately visible, I extend my inquiry to subtleties hidden in the deeper layers of the photo. The analysis includes the subject, the setting, the surroundings and the people involved. It is also beneficial to learn about the story behind the photo, including the motivations of the photographer and the dissemination of the photo.

Keywords: Historic Semiotic Imagery Analysis, Springbok-Tour, New Zealand

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Introduction

The process of analysing a photograph requires consideration of many factors, leading to questions about why a certain frame has been chosen by the photographer, why a particular photograph has been published, and how an audience's reaction may influence the general perception. The semiotic analysis of imagery is one method of analysis that supports the in-depth exploration of a photograph. In this article, I provide an overview of the three steps of semiotic analysis. Firstly,

I give a general description of the content of the image (Figure 3) and the physical characteristics of the photograph. Following this, I delve into the details of the photo. Finally, I interpret the photograph by drawing on extensive research. This analysis refers to the historical context, which is crucial to understanding the social impact of the photograph. The relevance of the protagonist Bob Jones within the turbulent times in New Zealand in the 1980s will be explored and explained through visual details.

cameras, throughout their travels. Their usage of visual devices led to an increased appreciation of the value of photography as a research tool, inspiring anthropologists such as Bronislaw Malinowski and Margaret Mead to incorporate visual documentation into their research. Nowadays, visual anthropology is considered a distinct sub-discipline (Altekamp et al. 2014: 379). With this in mind, this particular historical image analysis aims to combine anthropological and historical perspectives.

Beginnings of visual anthropology in Oceania

As early as the beginning of the 20th century, anthropologists like Walter Baldwin Spencer (1860-1929) and Alfred Cort Haddon (1855-1940) realised the power of photography and kept photographs for analysis. As participants in the Torres-Strait-Expedition, exploring the strait and its islands between Australia and New Guinea, an enterprise that is well known for sparking the birth of modern anthropology, Spencer and Haddon embraced visual materials, like



Figure 1: Protest badge



Figure 2: Demonstrations against the Springbok Tour

Source: Wikimedia 2021.

Source: Pinterest 2021.



Figure 3: Bob Jones at demonstrations in Auckland against the Springbok tour

Historical Background

The late 1970s up until the eighties were turbulent years for New Zealand, marked by demonstrations and social change. From 1974-1976, the Dawn Raids served to crack down on mainly targeted at Polynesian “overstayers”. In the 1980s, the Waitangi Tribunal (1984) was established after Muldoon’s defeat, and *te reo Maori* became an official language (1989). The Springbok Tour, a tour of the South Africa rugby team in 1981, polarized opinions in New Zealand. In 1968, the United Nations called for a boycott of South African sports teams to position against local apartheid laws. Two years later, the “All Blacks” New Zealand rugby team flew to South Africa to take part in a competition as a mixed-race team. Maori team members were allowed to travel as “honorary whites”, which caused discord in New Zealand. Fans claimed that politics and sport should not be mixed, and Robert Muldoon, Prime Minister from 1975 to 1984, announced that the rugby union would allow the tour. Over a decade after these events, the Springbok tour arrived in New Zealand in 1981. Reactions to the tour were violent and

emotional, as comparisons were made between the plight of the black population in South Africa and rampant racism in New Zealand (Figures 1 and 2). This tour sparked a debate about racism, sports, and politics in New Zealand. The photo was taken during this period of political upheaval. (Ministry for Culture and Heritage 2020a)

Sir Robert Edward Jones, known as Bob Jones, a property investor, author and former politician born in 1939 in Lower Hutt (New Zealand), has had a prominent position in the debate pictured. Jones became also known in the political landscape after establishing a political party a few years later, called the “New Zealand Party”. In the photo analysed, Jones’ identity is projected in the noticeable way that his head is positioned high above every-

one else. The fact that there is a lot of free space around him while police keep demonstrators away is a testament to his privileged position. There is no direct contact with those present, but he communicates with the crowd through his posture, gestures, and facial expressions. It is not possible to see exactly where his gaze is falling, but he seems to be addressing the crowd as a whole. A film recording that documents the demonstration shows the moment in which the photo is taken, emerges from a movement in a fraction of a second, which is also shown in the picture. The image reproduces clichés: the rich white man in formal wear with a Rolls Royce and a cigarette is reminiscent of the “Marlboro man”, who stands for “coolness”. While this visual characterises wealth, class mem-

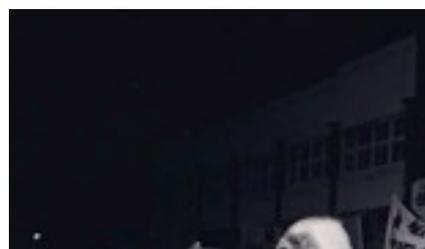


Figure 4: Background zoom



Figure 5: Zoom on banners

Source of figures 3-9: Kapil Arn 1981.



Figure 6: Zoom on car



Figure 7: Zoom on Bob Jones



Figure 8: Facial expression

bership and supposed superiority, the demonstrators in the background are shown with clenched fists, which can be interpreted as aggressiveness, but also as anger and frustration in the face of the situation (Mita 1983).

Methodological approach

Ivy Rogers (2016) states that many picture analyses do not take into consideration how non-visual factors influence a photo. For this reason, he suggests using semiotic analysis, which combines additional research in order to establish the context. The first step to conducting a pictorial analysis is to analyse characteristics of the photographic process, such as where the picture is from and who has taken or produced it. The next step is to describe what is immediately visible. This brings up questions about the subject of the picture and its structure. The picture is layered with many forms of depth, leading to questions about what is seen in the centre of the image and what is located in the background (Brocks 2012).

Description and analysis of the photo taken by Kapil Arn in 1981

Captured by Kapil Arn on the 4th of July in 1981, the photo is titled *Wealthy Property Speculator and Developer Bob Jones Responds to Anti-tour Demonstrators*. It is a gelatine silver print and is sized at 314mm x 474mm. The black and white analogue photo shows a man in a tux wearing a bow tie, standing next to a car with a cigarette in his mouth. There are protesters in the background, which the man is pointing at with two fingers. The protesters hold signs that state: „Rugby yes! Racism no!“ and „A night at the racists“. Police can be seen between the man and the protesters (Figure 3).

To explore the significant aspects of the photo, I cut out persons and objects. Due to the age of the photo, this method seems to be more relevant than digitally processing. By breaking it down to little pieces, the analysis was less overwhelming as a whole. Additionally, I could question details such as the car brand or the identity of the man. By combing through each layer, it is possible to perceive the subject of the photo, the time of day and the setting.

While the protagonist is centred in the photo, the background showcases an industrial area at night (Figure 4). As seen in Figure 5, the banners held by the protestors give a historical context to what is immediately visible in the front layer. They clearly connect the image to the demonstrations against the Springbok-Tour of 1981. These signs express the anger and dissatisfaction of the protestors towards the topic of racism within the related political discourse. (Ministry for Culture and Heritage 2020b)

Through extensive research, it was possible to identify the car as a 1980s Rolls Royce Corniche (Figure 6). As this was a very expensive car, it speaks to the wealth and status of the owner: Bob Jones. The car stands in direct contrast to the protestors in the background.

At the forefront of the photo stands the main protagonist: Bob Jones (Figure 7). His hand gesture can be translated as giving the finger to the protestors. This degrading gesture communicates contempt and insult. In interpreting Bob Jones' facial expression (Figure 8), it is useful to draw on Paul Ekman's et al. (2011) research of micro expressions, which are involuntary expressions face muscles make when reacting to a situation. Ekman notes that the only facial expres-

sion that is unilateral presents itself through a tightened and raised lip corner on one side of the face. It can occur with or without a hint of a smile or angry expression. The posture of the subject is described as upright and looking down on people, expressing arrogance (Ekman et al. 2011).

The photographer Kapil Arn

The man behind the camera is Kapil Arn, born in 1946 in Switzerland. Throughout his life, Arn travelled to different countries, working as a nurse, miner, and border guard before finally settling in Auckland (New Zealand), where he currently works as a reporter and documentary photographer. Arn became known as a photographer both with photos of the 1981 Springbok-Tour in Auckland and photos of the protest against French atomic bomb testing in 1974 on Mururoa (French Polynesia) in the South Pacific. While organising the anti-tour protests, Arn had the opportunity to choose between leading a squad or taking photos. In a video-call, Arn recalls that due to political events and his involvement in the resistance group, he had a perfect opportunity to seize that exact moment and take the picture of Bob Jones (Interview with Arn, 09/29/2020). Arn elaborates that his dedicated efforts to stand against injustice and racism involved joining the resistance group HART (Halt All Racist Tours) and taking a stand against apartheid in a rugby match when the New Zealand team played against the South African team. When participating in different squads, Arn had the opportunity to use his status as established photographer to take pictures of protests from more than one perspective (Interview with Arn, 09/29/2020).

In an archived interview with Lynn Freeman, radio host at the radio format "Standing Room Only", Arn explains that the photo was sold in an auction in Auckland in April 2019 (Interview with Arn, 09/29/2020). Due to the destruction of the film negative, the selling price of the photo was around 1,800 euros, which was the highest selling photo at the auction. Arn describes the photo being his most famous. While the exact location is unknown, it is clear that the photo was taken at a fundraiser hosted by the National Party (Mita 1983). In this



Source: Kapil Arn 1981.

Figure 9: Extracting photo details

interview, Arn confirms various details including that the man in the picture is Bob Jones, one of the invited guests at the event. Arn describes the moment when Bob Jones arrives and is received by singing demonstrators as follows: “And when he arrived there was a lot of demonstrators that were chanting, and he gave them all the finger” (Freeman et al. 2019: 00:01:38 - 00:01:44).

Arn also highlights that the picture was taken at night with a flash, which illuminated the texture of Bob Jones’ velvet tuxedo. In the following years when Bob Jones started campaigning for his own political party, Arn printed the photo and distributed it through Auckland. When Bob Jones was interviewed on New Zealand live television to promote his political party, the interviewer pulled out a copy of the picture and started questioning the aspiring politician (Interview with Arn, 09/29/2020).

Conclusion

Taken at the right time and place, this photo is a historical snapshot. By digging through every layer of this image (Figure 9), it was possible to discover more covert details. In cutting up the pictures and looking at every object and person individually,

I was able to get a different sense of the context and build connections between the persons on the photo and the surrounding circumstances. With this in mind, it is clear that the historical background of a photo is just as significant as visible details. Through additional research, one can find relevant pieces of information that collectively allow for a more complete understanding of the picture. In contacting the auction house where the image was sold and looking at their social media, I found the recorded interview with Kapil Arn. Through the information revealed from the interview, I was able to find documentaries about the Springbok Tour, which helped to find the exact moment when the photo was captured. Therefore, the photo could be better contextualized. Through the interview with Kapil Arn, missing information could be collected to formulate this research note.

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