

what kinds of things are represented?

they looked at a random sample of photographs from about 600 articles on non-Western people in *NG* from 1950-1986

some of their conclusions:

NG focuses on things that appear **exotic**

idealized

naturalized

– portrayed without history other than a narrative of moving from tradition to modernity

sexualized

exoticism

in *NG* nearly one-fifth of the photographs with non-Westerners featured people engaged in or preparing for a ritual, often in a two-page spread as the centerpiece of an article

this ritual is typically represented as something **ancient**

1962 photo of marriage in New Guinea with a caption that says that “tribal life still lies locked in millenniums-old patterns” – assumption is that these are “people without history,” living in a timeless past, blindly following inherited tradition

exotic dress – in more than half the pictures, the non-Westerner is shown in “indigenous dress, tribal fashion, and/or ritual costume” (91)

image of Maasai woman

SLIDE THREE

tend to seek out most elaborate / formal versions of “native” clothing

when western clothes are presented, it’s as part of a narrative of tradition->modern

“idealizes” people

until late 1970s

photos virtually excluded sick, deformed, hungry

“beautification of the world’s people” (95)

smiles – nearly 1/3 of photos show people smiling

evokes “the pursuit of happiness,” order, lack of animosity towards the viewer

portraits – roughly 9% of photos have been portraits, regardless of historical moment – western representation of the individual

a very Western genre, adopting in photo from conventions from painting

– people in Hobeni didn’t like portraits – wanted their whole body from head to feet to be showing

only four pictures from sample showed people fighting, threatening to fight, or evidence of previous violence (98)

a middle-class world

NG “has presented a world that is predominantly middle class, in which there is neither much poverty nor great wealth....It is a world that is comfortable to contemplate. Like the absence of violence or illness, these pictures reflect back to Americans their own self-image as a relatively classless society”

roughly 15% of pictures had indicators of poverty

8-12% had pictures with indicators of wealth

but the majority had no visual cues that indicated one or the other – people were healthy, well-fed, smiling, not appearing particularly rich or poor, content with their lot in life

a world of work

NEXT SLIDE

of pictures which clearly show people at work or play (excluding portraits, pictures of ritual, ambiguous pictures) – 2/3 were people working
industrious natives – in contrast to colonial stereotypes of natives as lazy

a world dominated by men

nearly 2/3 of photos focus on men

1/4 show all or mostly women

11% are mixed

why?

suggest that this is a “western model in which things cultural are masculine and things natural are feminine” (107)

reflects dominance of men in workforce and public life at time of publication

likewise

almost 80% are only adults

about 14% just children

infants typically shown in their mothers’ arms

American ideal of mother-child relationship

SLIDE

replicated in NG:

SLIDE

when older children are shown they are often doing household chores
(replicating an ideal American domestic division of labor)

or children are shown by themselves – reflecting an American perspective that children are “special,” separate from the adult world of work and leisure

elderly are relatively scarce – despite their cultural prominence in most of the world
“In many ways, the age structure of the non-Westerners photographed reflects Western cultural attitudes. The invisibility of the elderly in American society, that is, their relative absence from larger households and from media images, accompanies a cultural emphasis on youthful beauty and on productivity defined as the ability to earn wages” (107)

Naturalization:
“the halo of green”

non-Westerners presented as living closer to nature in one way or another
related to 19th C. view of “natural history” as encompassing non-western world – to this day, much of the anthropology collections at the Smithsonian are housed in Natural History museum

nearly 1/3 of backgrounds show people with no evidence of social context at all –purely natural background, or blurred background

heavy focus on rural settings (68 % in sample)
regardless of rate of actual urbanization at any place and time

rural : urban :: traditional : modern

underlying message:

“There are only two worlds”

despite all the focus on difference, often represents just two worlds
the traditional and the modern
“the rest” and “the West”

VSI pp. 62-67 -- point out that this is not only in popular thought but in the social sciences

pp. 67-68 -- definition of “traditional” often basically the inverse of some aspect of the observer’s society

narrative structure of modernization

article from 1952: “Yemen opens the door to progress: American scientists visit this Arabian land at the invitation of its king to improve the health of his people”

or

“Progress and Pageantry in Changing Nigeria: Bulldozers and penicillin, science and democracy come to grips with colorful age-old customs in Britain’s largest colony” (1956)

NB no context of anti-colonial struggle

consider **photo of Samoan women at microscope**
(overhead)

an example of “tradition” -> “modern” narrative but also brings up final point
“the naked black woman”

presence of nudity in a “family” publication a decisive characteristic feature of *NG*

of the 235 sample photographs of women, 11% showed them in some degree of undress

first picture of a bare-breasted woman in *NG* appeared in 1896, and was accompanied by editorial explanation

“the pictures...were included in the interest of science; to exclude them would have been to give an incomplete or misleading picture of how the people really live. This scientific goal is seen as the sole purpose of the photos,” and *NG* staff adamantly deny that there is erotic or sexual dimension to the selection of photos

perhaps this is the case

why don’t they show white womens’ breasts?

none of the women whose breasts appear in the magazine are white

“The [interest of science] did not lead to documentation of the coming of nude sunbathing to Mediterranean beaches” (115)

likewise they cite an example where the magazine darkened the skin of a bare-breasted Polynesian woman

women are presented as beautiful objects

“built on a foundation of racial and gender subordination: in this context, one must be black and female to do this kind of symbolic labor” (116)