

Invisible conflicts

This series of photographs, taken in Israel between 2000 and 2012, documents various layers of conflict and tension in Israeli society, and does so in a way different from their usual visual representation. In this sense, therefore, these photographs can be seen as an attempt to take a stand in the field of culture in general and photography in particular, with reference to the question what conflict is and how it should be photographed.

There is no society without conflict, as the philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel determined over a hundred years ago in his article on this subject.¹ Conflicts and tension are a fundamental basis of society. This is the point of departure for the series of photographs here. In particular these photographs attempt to formulate a position with regard to the question of the relationship between conflict, in its visibility, and the possibility to embody it in photography.

The educated observer is accustomed to the iconography of visual representation of the Israeli conflicts, to the extent that its visual representation is to a large extent its reproduction. The series of photographs here treats a number of Israeli conflicts while attempting to evade their iconographic expressions which would be identified by an educated person anywhere in the world (such as the separation wall, or a soldier in the border police). The iconographic representation remains external to the conflict it describes. Therefore there is a correspondence between representation of the conflict and the position of the photographer observing it.

This series of photographs attempts to forge a different manner of representation of Israeli conflicts and tension, a manner which by definition would embody the tension from within the conflict and not from the outside. Since the photographs lack those iconographic expressions, many observers will not find evidence of the conflict in these photographs, and even though photography is a visual medium by definition, they will find the tensions embodied by the photographs to be invisible.

The informed eye here is not that which knows how to analyze a photograph, but rather that which is profoundly familiar with social reality. The informed eye will identify aspects of tension and conflict in the photographs in this series, and so will be able to see their visual expressions. For example: two religious Jewish children play tennis on a basketball court next to the Damascus Gate, outside the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem - one of the primary centers of tension in the city. Nothing in this picture is in its place: a mismatch between the game being

¹ Georg Simmel, "Conflict", *Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms* ed. Donald Levine (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 70-95 on 76.

played and the ball court, between the pleasant sports activity of two Jewish children (American tourists?) and the activity's location. Each photograph embodies the point of view of the photographer. Perhaps due to the photograph's humor, perhaps to the absence of iconography of the conflict, the photograph embodies "invisible conflict" from within.

Each of the photographs holds different expressions of conflict. Each one expresses tensions which tear Israeli society apart – and which constitute it. Piles of garbage strewn in a crowded municipal environment, as if from time immemorial, alongside stone buildings of long faded glory, document the crumbling layers of the present in the very process of its formation. This is a present in conflict with its past, and despite its violent attempt to repress the past it fails to do so, and the past resurfaces stubbornly from beneath. These, then, are the documents of a torn society, photographs of "invisible" conflicts.

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July 2012