**De Beer's Diamond Mine in the 1880s: Robert Harris and the Kimberley Searching System**

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*Synopsis*

In the mid 1880s a little-known photographer named Robert Harris produced a series of albumen prints showing the stages of body searching that black labourers in De Beers diamond mines were obliged to undergo by state ordinance enacted in 1883. The original photographs surfaced briefly in the sale-room in 2007 but have since disappeared. Two sets of copies survive. Bearing in mind the history of documentary photography in South Africa, this essay examines the historical and textual significance of this series of photographs in the context of the history of mining and discusses the imperatives and ethics of locating, researching and publishing controversial imagery in the internet age.

*Key Words*

albumen , amputation, archive , body, Brazil, Cape Town, censorship, clothing, compound, copy, Ernest Cole, De Beers, diamond, discipline, Alfred Duggan-Cronin, Robert Harris, holocaust, India, internet, Johannesburg, ‘kaffir’, Kimberley, Alicja Kwada , labour, Leon Levson, miner, Horace Nicholls, photograph, searching system, South Africa, strike, theft, trauma, woodbury type, worker, X-ray, Alicja Kwada

*Introduction*

Brazilian and Indian diamond mines had been photographed early by travellers who then published ethnographic accounts. Louis Rousselet visited Panna in North East India; photographs of his tour formed the basis of *Voyage dans l’Inde* (1869) and *L’Inde des Rajahs* ... (1875) describing his travels and illustrated with over three hundred wood engravings after photographs. 143 of the original photographs are in the Musée Goupil, Bordeaux. By the nineteenth century, diamond mining in Brazil and India (the two main sources of diamonds in the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century) had been overtaken by South Africa. Nonetheless photographic records of Brazil (by a method called heliographs) were included in a French publication in 1884. [[1]](#endnote-1) The opening up of diamond mines in South Africa coincided with the spread of commercial photography. Patricia Hayes has pointed out that the daguerrotype reached Durban via Mauritius in September 1846 and that Livingstone had his portrait taken in Cape Town before setting out on his exploration. In her words: 'In southern Africa in the late nineteenth century, photography is related to the history of exploration, colonization, knowledge production and captivity'.[[2]](#endnote-2)

Among photographers taking advantage of the opportunities offered in South Africa was Robert Harris who compiled two volumes of views of colonial architecture, the landscape of South Africa and in a few instances black miners and white managers (fig.1). One of these volumes, *South Africa Illustrated by a series of one hundred and four permanent photographs* was published in Port Elizabeth in 1888 and is in the Wellcome Library and in Cambridge University Library as well as other major libraries around the world. [[3]](#endnote-3) *A Photographic Album of South African Scenery* published in the 1880s seems to be rarer (according to worldcat there are copies in UCLA Library and the University of Cape Town Library but none in the UK).[[4]](#endnote-4) Harris used the woodbury type for the first album; this was a process invented in Britain by Walter Bentley Woodbury and Joseph Walter Swan and patented in 1864. It was often considered the most perfect and beautiful photomechanical process, capable of reproducing the delicate half tones of photographs. [[5]](#endnote-5) The second volume contains albumen prints which accounts for its comparative rarity. The bland representations of buildings and the evidently posed and heroic groups of miners photographed by Harris and incorporated into the second of these volumes have been noted and discussed by Michael Godby who gives the date of publication as ca. 1880-1886 based on the dates of awards won in commercial exhibitions. Among the venues at which Harris exhibited was the London Colonial and Indian exhibition of 1886.

Both volumes comprise double card pages with photographs tipped in. Godby argues persuasively that Harris was contributing to attempts to construct 'a public identity for South Africa at the moment its economy and society were being transformed by the diamond mines at Kimberley and elsewhere.' [[6]](#endnote-6) He notes the large number of images devoted to the new town of Kimberley and analyses a photograph (fig. 2) entitled 'Searching Kaffirs, De Beer's Mine' which he describes as 'an obviously staged photograph of two African men submitting, apparently cheerfully, to being searched for purloined diamonds'.[[7]](#endnote-7) Harris was, however, responsible for a very different set of photographs depicting ‘kaffirs’ being searched for diamonds. These photographs, which I came across accidentally while searching for illustrations for a recent book, are the subject of this essay. [[8]](#endnote-8)

*Robert Harris*

So who was Robert Harris? Unlike Alfred Duggan-Cronin (1874-1954), Leon Levson (1883-1968) and Ernest Cole (1940-1990), all of whom are widely recognised for their documentary photographs of migrant labour, Harris who must have been a generation younger, has virtually no presence in standard reference works.[[9]](#endnote-9) His albums are cited without any information on the photographer in 'An Outline History of Photography in Africa to 1940' published in 1989. They are presented as examples of the products of photographic studios established in the Cape as part of a local industry that expanded with white settlement. [[10]](#endnote-10) The two albums are also mentioned in a 2001 book of South African photographers again without any information on Harris himself. [[11]](#endnote-11) He has no entry in John Hannavy ed., *Encyclopaedia of Nineteenth-century photography* (2008) but is mentioned briefly as an example of a photographer who ‘depicted an idealized picture of the European presence in South Africa to garner support for the colonial agenda at home’. [[12]](#endnote-12) The only information about Harris I have found is contained in a 1963 compendium of nineteenth-century photographers in South Africa based on commercial documentary sources in which he is listed working from premises on Donkin Street, Port Elizabeth 1880-1890 and then with a photographer called McNaught 1891-94.[[13]](#endnote-13)

However, Harris evidently also made albumen print photographs of subjects that did not conform to the sanitised public image of colonial South Africa that is enshrined in the albums and, given the diasporic capacities of the art market, blogging, and digital outreach they have not (as might have been anticipated - or indeed hoped) disappeared altogether from sight. Furthermore, the tendency of owners of albums to augment them with additional tipped in photographs, rather in the manner of extra-illustration or grangerising, has resulted in the orderly pictorial discourse of civic and economic development being subverted. And I should at this point add that the auction houses have ignored requests to help locate the photos that have appeared in their catalogues and that my attempts to gain access to De Beer's historic archives have been fruitless (see Appendix).

The first inkling I had about Harris's serious interest in recording human subjects came from the discovery on the web of a sale at Bonham's 5 October 2010, *Travel and Photography: India and Beyond*, at which an album of twenty-nine images by Harris was sold.[[14]](#endnote-14) The lot was described in the sale catalogue as albumen prints on mounts printed 'R. Harris' and 'Port Elizabeth', many captioned (and some signed or with initials) in the negative, images approximately 130 x 208mm. The record of that sale on the auction house site now includes the same lot on web page 29 of 30 but illustrated with a quite different photograph than that which had attracted my attention. The ‘new’ photo is of ‘a Zulu family [posing] in front of their kraal’. Undated carte de visite photographs of Zulu subjects in traditional dress sometimes grotesquely with Christmas greetings added survive in the special collections of the Sterling Library at Yale (fig. 3) and elsewhere. The Bonham's album evidently contained similar photography of what were regarded as ethnographic types. The photograph that interested me is quite different (fig. 4). It shows a white double amputee standing outside a signal box and, with narrowed eyes, pointing a raised finger to the viewer while a chained long-tailed monkey (a native of South Africa) performs a dance on its hind legs nearby.

It is worth pausing firstly to ask what this portrait with its juxtaposition suggesting and interest in the bizarre might show and secondly what the photographer has made of it. My first thought was that Harris had photographed a veteran from the Boer war (1899-1904), which would have been possible given the time frame we know for Harris's photographic business. Then I came across research by osteoarchaeologists who studied the records of the Kimberley Hospital and found that thirty-five amputations a year were performed in this period amounting to 50% of all surgery. [[15]](#endnote-15) So it seems just as likely this man may have lost his legs as a result of a mining accident. The amputee stand outside signal box 8T overwhich a flowering shrub casts its shade. He looks towards the photographer and makes a hand gesture like a warning or an alert, making the presence of the photographer felt and signalling (he is a signal man) that he is in charge despite impressions to the contrary. The chained monkey on two legs is human-like while the peg legs of the immobilised human are on a par with the metal levers which he pulls to change the points if a train (ever) comes down the tracks.

*Harris and the Kimberley Searching System*

Searching via Google I came across a blog called 'Soul Safari' on which were two photographs also attributed to Harris which, according to the handwritten inscriptions on them, represented what was known as the Searching System at De Beer's Kimberley mine in the 1880s. [[16]](#endnote-16) I contacted the blogger who very helpfully told me that he had downloaded these low resolution images from the Dreweatts/Bloomsbury New York site where they were advertising an item in an auction 24 October 2007 (lot 188). By the time I accessed the site the photographs had been removed. Soul Safari still has two of them. The first is inscribed by hand on the print: 'Looking at the bottoms of feet / They often cut a hole in bottom of foot and secrete a diamond in it'. The second shows a group of miners and is inscribed:' Morning examination of sorting house gang. They are worked [sic] naked and do not come out till evening'.

The established scholarly practice when wishing to locate works of art sold at auction is to write to the Auction House enclosing an (open for inspection) letter to the purchaser. This procedure, repeated at some months interval, elicited no response. My calls and emails to the Photography Department went unanswered. As auction houses regularly alert interested parties to items in their sales, I found myself wondering whether De Beers had purchased this lot and requested the images be removed from the site. I do not, however, have any firm evidence for this and further investigation suggests it may be an unlikely supposition, considering that a formal archival structure seems barely to exist in this case (see Appendix). Again, despite the inadequacy of the image on the Soul Safari website (see n. 16) it is worth noting that the hand-writing on the photographs in this series must have established a narrative as well as something like a personal appropriation of an image, given that the subjects of these images could not themselves have written anything. Indeed, the superimposition of script onto the photographs emphasises the subjects’ loss of identity in so far as these inscriptions, in rendering the subjects as specimens, eradicate any possibility of portraiture. They are thus an extreme example of how photographs objectify, turning an event or a person into something that can be possessed, to paraphrase Susan Sontag. [[17]](#endnote-17)

According to the Dreweatts/Bloomsbury sale catalogue the album sold as lot 188 contained nineteen albumen print photographs: ten were of a 'standard anthropological type' and a second group of nine images, all by Robert Harris, showed scenes inside the mining compound at Kimberley and recorded in detail the degrading body searches that miners had to undergo at the end of each shift to ensure they were not trying to smuggle out diamonds. Seven photographs had the title 'Kimberley Searching system' in the negative, six with the photographers initial "RH" in the negative'. The Album was described as 'extremely rare'. [[18]](#endnote-18) I contacted the Africana Research Library, the South Africa Archive, the McGregor Museum Kimberley and the National Library of South Arica as well as a number of specialists in the field to see whether they had purchased the album or knew of its whereabouts but without success. However, the auction house evidently employed a knowledgeable cataloguer as the entry concludes with the statement: 'We have only been able to track down one other record of this series which is in the Manuscripts and Archives section at Yale University. This series is not complete, consisting of five photographs, and they are later copy-camera photographs rather than original prints.' In fact this is not entirely correct as there are eight photographs at Yale. [[19]](#endnote-19) Nonetheless it was a break-through as I was then able in April 2016 to see eight of the images in the series, and purchase high-resolution images one of which I published in my book. The Yale series is numbered on the prints: 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8 plus one that has a mark that may be a 1, and one that has no number that I have labelled 0. I use these numbers to identify the images in this essay. Number 4 is identical to the image sold in New York of the foot inspection but the 'morning examination' image is not among the Yale copies. The fact that the Yale series are copies may detract from their commercial value as photographs but the fact that they survive not only allows us to consider them as historical evidence but raises interesting questions about why they were made and why they were copied as well as about the ethics of photography.

*Harris's Photographs of the Searches*

All photographs in the series at Yale are taken in the same location though probably not at the same time. The first (0) (fig. 5) shows a black worker pulling back his foreskin with his right hand while the other is raised, presumably to ensure he cannot transfer anything into that hand. The inspector who is also black bends forward to look. The second (no. 1)(fig. 6) shows a different worker both arms held above his head by a different, also black, inspector exposing the worker's arm-pits. The inspector we see in number 0, readily identifiable by the checked shirt he has tied apron-like around his waist, stands nearby and observes in number 1. These are disturbing images - others in the series are even more so - and I shall therefore at this point try to address two questions. Firstly is it justifiable to re-circulate these images of colonial oppression and commercial exploitation within a scholarly discussion, bearing in mind what Susan Sontag called 'the mystery, and indecency, of co-spectatorship' of shocking photographs, [[20]](#endnote-20) and secondly what do we know of the context in which these photographs were taken?

In response to the first question it is worth pointing out that these photographs are already in the public domain. Indeed, partly probably as a result of my many enquiries and discussions with fellow scholars in the past twelve months, the Yale image bank link on which they are reproduced has worked its way up from near invisibility to page one of Google's search facility. [[21]](#endnote-21) Photography is, among other things, an art of replication. These images are already further replicated - that is and was the point of them. This is not of course a justification for making them the focus of a journal article. To this I would respond that the ethical issues surrounding images of inhumane, violent or abusive events are nothing new, even if the internet - which is threaded through this research both as problem and as resource - has made this more urgent. In *Poetics*, Aristotle speaks of the instinct for imitation in human nature and the pleasure we feel in things imitated. He goes on to point out that

'Objects which in themselves we view with pain, we delight to contemplate when reproduced with minute fidelity: such as the forms of the most ignoble animals and of dead bodies'.[[22]](#endnote-22)

There is nothing prurient about the process of opening up these photographs to historical interrogation. A repeatable performance is recorded, chilling in its matter-of-factness, while lacking all frivolity as well as all abjection - raising the question of how resistance is registered or measured. The context may be unmistakeably industrial but the drama takes place not between men and machines (of which we know there were already many at Kimberley) but between men. [[23]](#endnote-23) No story is ever complete but images are sorely lacking in the published histories of South African diamond extraction in the 1880s: photographs adequately identified may contribute to an historical narrative in inestimable ways. [[24]](#endnote-24) Finance, greed and mistrust are the foundation stones of the organisation; as part of the maintenance of this edifice a witness with a photographic apparatus was b(r)ought in. This is all we can know factually - all else is, however valuable, context and interpretation.

I do not intend to suggest by this that we should suppress emotions before such images (we may indeed feel many things such as empathy, shame, fascination). However, without a theoretical and historical framework within which to analyse these artefacts as documents and as works of art we merely consign them to the category of sensation, what invites gawping or, when institutional protectiveness prevails, consigns them to a numbered archive box accessible only on request. John Tagg has referred to a ‘new regime of truth’ and a ‘new regime of sense’ in relation to the workings of nineteenth-century photography. [[25]](#endnote-25) Both are in evidence here. Censorship is no solution to disturbing imagery from our common human past and as scholars we have a responsibility not only to bear witness but to reconcile documentation with empathy or, as Tagg puts it 'the frame as a machinery of capture and expulsion' in the methodological choice between ‘the close reading of texts and the expansive reconstruction of social history context'. [[26]](#endnote-26)

The Holocaust has been described as the 'limit case of contemporary evil' but to argue that the 'unspeakability' of the events, the horror of the documents of research, prohibits enquiry is - it has been asserted - to endorse Himmler's proposition of the Holocaust as a sublime and sacred glory that could never be represented. Is silence a response to unspeakable trauma? [[27]](#endnote-27) I do not in any way intend to suggest that a series of photographs of body-searches at the Kimberley diamond mine at the end of the nineteenth century equates to the photographs of Auschwitz discussed by Georges Did-Huberman in *Images in Spite of All*. But I have found helpful his exhortation that we should not invoke the unimaginable when dealing with what is horrific in our history. Invoking Primo Levi's insistence that violence inflicted on man is also inflicted on language (and by this we may also understand the image) and noting photography's ability to 'curb the fiercest will to obliterate', Didi-Huberman's statement on images of Auschwitz whose dual mode troubles historians is pertinent here: 'Images such as these we have here have a fragmentary and lacunary relation to the truth to which they bear witness, but they are nonetheless all that we have available to know and imagine concentration camp life from the inside.' We often ask too much or too little of the image, he states; we expect the whole truth from stolen shreds or we ask too little by immediately relegating images to the sphere of the simulacrum, severing them from their very substance. [[28]](#endnote-28)

In answer to my second question, I offer a brief summary drawing on well-known published sources (not all of which however are in agreement and none of which specifically address the Searching System).[[29]](#endnote-29) Diamonds were discovered in the Cape area of South Africa in 1867 and by 1870 there was a diamond rush. Despite extensive diamond mining in Russia and Canada, Southern African states are still today the main source of diamonds.[[30]](#endnote-30) The history of South African apartheid and the separation of large numbers of people from their families is directly linked to the exploitation of its mineral wealth. Cape Town was founded around 1650 by Dutch settlers and was invaded in 1795 and again in 1806 by the British. It was ceded to them by treaty in 1815 at which time slavery was abolished. In the 1880s, De Beers organised compounds for their black workers who lived away from their homes for long periods - sometimes for years - and whose contracts were not renewed unless they complied. While not technically forced labour, the conditions of employment of the *kaffirs* (‘boys’ or indigenous workers) were hugely exploitative. As late as the 1960s labourers were recruited from Lesotho, Bostwana, Zambia and Angola in order to avoid having to pay the rates that urban-employed Africans were earning; the black photo-journalist Ernest Cole managed at that time to get into a number of gold and diamond mines and found conditions 'miserable beyond imagining - worse even than the slums of Johannesburg'. [[31]](#endnote-31)

In his study of black mineworkers in South Africa, V.L Allen explains how in the 1870s migrant black workers behaved like a free market and either only worked for a few months to be able to purchase a gun and then returned to their tribal lands, or moved employers if the pay was not enough or the food poor, or if they regarded a mine as unsafe. Initially there was no discrimination between black and white workers: diggers and labourers lived alongside each other in mining camps. [[32]](#endnote-32) According to Patrick Harries, by 1882 the several hundred individual claims that had once made up the Kimberley mine had been consolidated into nine companies, of which the largest, the Kimberley Central, employed over eight hundred men. Few whites laboured alongside black workers by this time and those who remained in the fields had either been absorbed into managerial positions or had become overseers. These developments stratified the labour market along racial lines.[[33]](#endnote-33) It is worth noting here that by contrast the men who appear to be working in an overseer function in the Harris photographs, conducting the inspections, are, with one exception, black. [[34]](#endnote-34) Was this perhaps because Europeans refused to be photographed enacting these procedures?

A closed compound system was established in 1885 with institutionalised recruitment and labour touts who, owing to the constant demand for labour, attained a powerful position. Resistance to the compound system had been, until then, not driven by humanitarian reasons but on the grounds of defending free movement of labour. In order to have maximum productivity De Beers argued for maintaining a surplus of workers and won their case. De Beers West End compound covered 4 acres and was built for 3,000 men; Europeans were excluded from the compounds endorsing European authority and causing further divisiveness. [[35]](#endnote-35) A later photo of the so-called Kaffir Compound at Kimberley in the Yale collection shows the living conditions of black miners (fig. 7).[[36]](#endnote-36) Political and economic forces drove the ever-increasing control of the black population so that by the mid 1880s, 80% of Kimberley’s mine labour came from areas under white control. However, the price of diamonds was unstable and, as profits fell, a search for scapegoats led to an obsession with what were seen as the stealing tendencies of black workers, creating a mythology that spread beyond the borders of South Africa. Charles Van Onselen in a pioneering essay wrote about forced labour, ruthless discipline, and appalling conditions in Rhodesian mines, not least through the coercive compound system. The misleading concept of paternalism was predicated on the stereotyping of African workers as 'Sambos' unable to understand wages and money. [[37]](#endnote-37)Allen for his part argues that the very notion of private property was alien to the African migrant workers. By the early 1880s it has been estimated that 25 to 40% of all finds were disposed of illicitly; the many lengthy stages which the blue ground went through before it reached the washing machine and the lengths to which white diamond touts and dealers went in order to secure stones secreted by labourers made illicit diamond buying rife across the diamond fields. [[38]](#endnote-38) It is, however, important to emphasise that, just as there were at least at first many Europeans working in the mines alongside the indigenous South African labourers, it was openly admitted in commissions and private letters that white workers and even managers were as much involved in illicit diamond buying as black workers. [[39]](#endnote-39)

Ordinance 11 of 1880, not actually introduced until 1 March 1883, gave employers the legal right to strip search all workers black and white with the exception of managers, but white workers soon objected that they were being treated like ‘common kaffirs’. [[40]](#endnote-40) This has been described as an 'explosive issue'.[[41]](#endnote-41) The Searching System was enacted into law by a proclamation of the governor of the Cape followed by a set of recommendations made by mining men for a set of rules: ' "to establish a system of search in and around the Mines ... with a view to the better control of the Native Population generally ..." '. [[42]](#endnote-42) After a joint strike in 1884 (during which six white strikers were killed) unity crumbled and thereafter only black workers were searched. Body searching had taken place a century earlier in Brazilian mines where slave labour was used but it was in South Africa that strip-searching combined with closed compounds to control African labourers and facilitate searching became institutionalised. [[43]](#endnote-43) It also became increasingly invasive: in April 1887 black miners went on strike over the use of the speculum for detecting diamonds hidden in the rectum. [[44]](#endnote-44)

Cecil Rhodes was aware of the Brazilian precedent when he proposed in 1882 an amalgamation plan for all black workers to be confined to barracks. In 1884 De Beers negotiated with the Cape Colony government for free service from men in local gaols resulting in many young men being arrested and gaoled on minor or trumped up charges. These tools of labour control, it has been argued, included the pass laws that became so notoriously central to apartheid. [[45]](#endnote-45) ‘When a worker reached the end of his contract he was subjected to confinement and every inch of his body critically examined to see that none of the coveted gems were concealed in his hair, nose, mouth, ears, or any other orifice. Everything removed from the building was subject to the same scrutiny.’ [[46]](#endnote-46) Very few diamonds were ever found in searching houses even though they were in operation at least into the mid 1880s. [[47]](#endnote-47) An investigation in 1883 found that the searching was extremely expensive as it reduced productivity and ineffective as far as finding purloined diamonds was concerned since diamonds could be dropped over the fence on the way to the search house. Nonetheless it continued as it performed a 'disciplinary function by ensuring stricter control of the time spent working in the mines'. [[48]](#endnote-48)

In addition to the first two photographs that I have already mentioned (figs 5 and 6), there are a further six several of which include a lighted candle; it was hoped that any secreted diamond would gleam in the flickering candlelight. They show a candle held to the open mouth (no. 2) (fig. 8) and a mouth and armpit search (no. 3) (fig. 9) in a shot that communicates distressingly like a scream; searching the sole of the foot (no. 4) (fig. 10) as included in the New York sale discussed earlier. Three further photos are even more disturbing: awaiting a worker's bowel movement (no.6) (fig. 11); inspecting the anus (no.7) (fig. 12); administering an enema (no. 8) (fig. 13). Each photographic copy measures 13.5 x 20 cm and is mounted on black card (see no. 4, fig. 10 photographed with the mount). The card is battered and dog-eared and the original photographs were evidently very worn at the time they were copied as stains (see no. 7, fig. 12) and tears (no. 2 lower left, fig.8) are discernible as also are the ghostly signs of official stamps (as in no. 0 and no. 2 top left (figs. 5 and 6) and in no. 3 where the date 188- is legible (fig. 9).

We can draw a number of conclusions from the material characteristics of this collection. We know from the inscriptions that they represent a system, that is, a deliberately organised and legally sanctioned set of procedures that could be reproduced or emulated elsewhere. The evidence of wear and tear both on the originals and on the copies suggests much handling. In some instances there may have been cropping (no. 7, fig 12) or the photographer has chosen to cut off the feet. I surmise that what we are looking at is a set of commissioned photographic images made by Robert Harris (signed RH in the negative) subsequently re-photographed whether by Harris or someone else and mounted on card perhaps as an aid to instruction. They might have been used for the purposes of demonstration or as a training tool. So the photographs may be not only a document evidencing what happened but also a part of the procedures for controlling, managing and reproducing what happened. Their survival testifies therefore both to the suffering of those caught up in the system and to the agencies deployed in the maintenance of that system.

In all the images, the same corrugated iron shed (presumably the search house through which workers had to enter and exit the mine) appears with a door sometimes open, sometimes closed. These search houses were built on the edge of the mines, which had been enclosed by wire fences, prior to the introduction of the searching ordinance. [[49]](#endnote-49)A pile of sacks in the background, boards sometimes leaning against them sometimes on the ground, also indicate that the inspection is taking place somewhere on the mine premises. Miners were supposed to put on sacks in the search houses to make secreting diamonds more difficult, a rule profoundly resisted by labourers. [[50]](#endnote-50) In the only image to show a white person - the bowler-hatted administrator of the enema (fig.13)- the structure of some kind of mine-head machinery is visible that can also just be seen in no. 0 (fig.5). The workers are always naked while the inspectors in all but one (no. 7, fig. 12) wear tepee caps and either shirts tied like aprons or dungaree bottoms with a distinctive stripe down the sides. In no. 8 (fig. 13) the onlookers are all wearing overcoats or jackets suggesting that this was taken at a different season. Patrick Harries has pointed out that black workers' clothing was an important cultural marker and that the 'cast-off, colourful military tunics of Imperial regiments were frequently worn with a range of second-hand garments and footwear', a practice remarked upon by European observers.[[51]](#endnote-51) There is certainly something suggestive of a military cast-off in the jacket worn by the taller of the two subjects of a search in fig. 2. The presence of the photographer is registered in no. 4 (fig. 10) where the worker turns his head to look at the photographer and most arrestingly in no. 6 (fig. 11) where he looks straight out at the viewer.

I shall take just two images in order to examine what - in this evidently highly pre-mediated series - we can learn from the accidental element that the medium of photography entails in circumstances like these. I have already noted what seems to have been Harris's interest in what might be termed ‘the grotesque’ in his photograph of the amputee signalman, so what seems accidental may of course not be entirely so. But we may be sure that these elements did not form part of De Beers commission. In no. 2 (fig. 8) there are no observers and the photographer has closed in on the two figures. The nakedness of the worker is made all the more vivid by the motley collection of accessories with which the inspector is equipped: cap, shirt tied round his waist to cover his genitals, and purse slung round his left shoulder. All three items situate him at a remove from the worker. None more so than the shirt which does not cover his buttocks and appears like an afterthought to add authority to the other two items. Clothing as remarked was significant and even fundamental: to have the right to cover oneself is to have the right to assume a position of power even if only in relation to someone just marginally subordinate to oneself. The worker is positioned in such a way that the knob of the closed door in the corrugated iron shed seems to penetrate the small of his back just as the candle approaches his open mouth casting light into this orifice. At the feet of the two erect figures are a piece of a stone slab and what looks like an old tin mug - human detritus. Just as the shutter clicks a mongrel by the inspector's feet moves as it cleans itself or searches for fleas, exposing canine genitals and creating a blur at the heart of this carefully-devised clarity.

In number 1 (fig. 6) it is harder to decide what is going on. The inspector we have already seen has stood aside and waits arms hanging limply in front of him, feet neatly together. Has he called in his colleague to assist? The camera angle is slightly different so we can see more of the hut. The worker holds his head high and looks to the side rather than at the inspector who as though to begin a wrestling match stretches himself to full height to meet the raised hands of the worker. It is unclear what he intends but his action has provoked some curiosity as two other workers inside the hut - one looking over the shoulder of the other - crane to see what is happening. The arms of the protagonists form a sharp St. Andrew's cross shape that echoes the angles of the hut, a reminder of martyrdom. The hut we can now see has a dark horizontal aperture above the closed door.

So how can or should we think about these photographs of bodies undergoing inspection. It would be all too easy here to invoke the assuredly ground-breaking and certainly relevant work of Alan Sekoula, drawing on Michel Foucault, to link nineteenth-century photography to classification, surveillance and disciplinarity; the apparatus of the camera in this account would be understood as fuelling an ideological investment in colonialism and nation building.[[52]](#endnote-52) But caution is needed: as will have become clear we know rather little about the Kimberley Searching System or those involved in it. Charles Van Onselen, writing against the grain of much labour history at the time, points out that it is inadequate to gauge consciousness through lack of industrial action. Africans had a well-developed awareness of their position as exploited workers from the earliest years of capital-invested industries in South Africa. [[53]](#endnote-53) In this regard, the use of the look on the part of the African miners undergoing searching in Harris's photographs figures 10 and 11 may be interpreted as acts of resistance. Van Onselen also cautions against assuming over-simplified notions of what is meant by 'system'. He points out that De Beers were correctly accused of running a 'closed compound system', the words 'closed' and 'system' being synonymous not (only) because of how they confined labourers in appalling conditions but because they excluded outsiders (including whites) of being able to sell things to African workers - monopoly capital at the expense of commercial capital.[[54]](#endnote-54) Many other factors within the brute forces of colonialism were at work shaping the power dynamic at Kimberley during the period Harris photographed mine-workers, not least among which were religion, architecture and medicine. [[55]](#endnote-55)

Although at first sight the uniformly fine musculature of these naked men, as well as the sometimes contorted positions they have been required to adopt, may appear to resonate with more familiar representations of the male nude in Western art, those associations (whether conscious or not on the part of the photographer) serve to underscore difference. [[56]](#endnote-56) They also illuminate the importance of understanding the Kimberley Searching System photographs *as a series*; the stages shown targeted at discovering diamonds hidden or ingested match the list of subterfuges targeted by today's high-tech scanners sold for use in South African mines. [[57]](#endnote-57) Image no. 4 (fig. 10) taken in isolation might readily be interpreted as a benevolent intervention to assist a man with a thorn in his foot, a reminder of the *spinario* (boy with a thorn in his foot) a widely copied Hellenistic statue.[[58]](#endnote-58) As Steve Edwards reminds us images like this have a double or 'paradoxical' nature, appearing simultaneously as document and as art, as literal and at the same time as conventional. [[59]](#endnote-59) But the classical body that the photograph might connote aspires to closure and though the athletic contortions of some of Rodin's or Degas's models (male and female) might hover in the awareness of the viewer of the Kimberley photographs, the 'kaffir' bodies shown manifest precisely the opposite order of embodiment in which the male form is treated as a series of openings actual or implied. The bodies of men like these were, though this is not visible, scarred and, to use the medical term, 'traumatised' but these images by no means belong to that category of images that Susan Sontag describes as showing atrocious suffering to be deplored - and stopped. [[60]](#endnote-60) Shocking though they are, their intention was not to shock. The suffering in this instance has to be largely inferred from what is shown or from what we know circumstantially.

We cannot 'read' these bodies in any literal or morphological sense. It is, for example, instructive that osteoarchaeologists excavating an area of the cemetery at Kimberley that De Beers had given in 1897 to extend the availability of ground for unmarked African burials, found extensive evidence of trauma. For example, of 297 individuals 27% had well-healed fractures of which a large number were skull fractures, many had amputated limbs. There was also much evidence of cuts and signs of 'interpersonal violence'. The authors point out that the high level of cranial fractures is suggestive of violence, possibly owing to assaults with a knobkerry, a traditional South African weapon in the form of a club or stick with rounded end, but other instruments and rocks can produce same effect.[[61]](#endnote-61) Kimberley was an extremely dangerous place for everyone on account of the hazardous conditions in the mine, the appalling living conditions and inadequate food in the compounds, tribal rivalry and the high stakes involved in diamond extraction. It was especially dangerous for indigenous Africans. [[62]](#endnote-62) In 1888 black mortality was almost 10 per cent at Kimberley. [[63]](#endnote-63)

*Horace Nicholls and Robert Harris's Kimberley photographs*

At a late stage in the revisions of this essay, my already meandering route took another unanticipated turn. Thanks to the generosity of fellow scholars I became aware of a set of glass negatives (formerly in the Royal Photographic Society and now at the Victoria and Albert Museum). Part of the Horace Nicholls (1867-1941) collection they were first alluded to by Gail Buckland in 1975. [[64]](#endnote-64) They both complicate and consolidate my argument. Duplicates are made when a use is envisaged or a record seems worth keeping: this set of negatives evidences, at the very least, interest in procedures for managing labour at De Beers.The collection contains material that is not the work of Nicholls but the assumption is that, as Nicholls worked in South Africa as a very young man (1892-3) and then as a photographer of the Boer war, returning to England permanently in 1903, this set of eight standard size half plate glass negatives are by Nicholls. One of the negatives is cracked and a couple have been printed. [[65]](#endnote-65) The series is identical or extremely closely related to Robert Harris's photographs as recorded in the Yale Library set. However, it includes the view of the group of miners with three supervisors that was in the album sold in New York now known only from the Soul Safari blog mentioned earlier. The title and the inscription ‘morning examination of sorting house gang …’ is missing from the plate (fig. 14). The Robert Harris signature that is evident in the negative of both the New York and the Yale set has been eradicated or suppressed, raising questions about motives that we cannot at present answer. Three of the set from the Nicholls archive show the same event as the Yale photographs but with different participants or from a slightly different viewpoint. Colin Harding, to whom I am very greatly indebted for drawing my attention to the 'Nicholls' set which he had already connected to Harris in his own research, has pointed out that the Yale set cannot therefore be prints from these glass negatives. [[66]](#endnote-66) One possibility is that the album sold in New York contained Robert Harris's own prints - in which case the written inscriptions would be his - and that both the 'Nicholls' set and the Yale set are copies that were made for reference purposes though, as we shall see, they cannot have been made at the same time.

As the ‘Nicholls’ negative plate of the ‘morning examination’ of the sorting house gang (fig. 14) offers now the only possibility of a detailed perusal of this scene in the series, it is worth pausing over it. It represents an evidently tense occasion and indicates how naked black bodies were seen in the mining context as part of nature distinct from white clothed bodies for whom nakedness constituted degradation - an issue that led to violent dissent at Kimberley as I will discuss. The supervisors are fully dressed including hats and the loss of one of these - it lies at the feet of the man on the right (left in the plate) - may offer an explanation for what is taking place. The presence of the third supervisor whose figure is half visible at the right (left in the plate) and who holds something in his hand, seems sinister in combination with the facial expressions and body positions of the miners, at least one of whom appears to be shouting. But crucially the ‘Nicholls’ plate has cropped the figure of this third white man. Comparison with the Soul Safari image (at <https://soulsafari.files.wordpress.com/2012/09/miners-being-inspected-2.jpg>) shows immediately that this man is looking at the camera and that whatever he holds in his hand has moved, creating a blur. Without access to the original it is not possible to say more.

The divergences between the 'Nicholls' copies and those at Yale can be summed up as follows. Aside from the inclusion of the ‘morning examination …’ (fig.14) there are three obvious variants in the 'Nicholls' set. Negative no. 1457 is the same procedure in the searching sequence - examining the inside of the mouth while the arms are raised - but both the black worker and the black searcher are different individuals than are shown in the Yale image of this stage (fig. 8). This endorses the interpretation of the series as the representation of a serial set of procedures: it is the stage in the procedure that matters not the individual. In the negative the searcher does not wear braces and the worker has longer hair. Moreover their positions are slightly different and a third figure is visible to the right. In the procedure where a supervisor is holding the worker's arms above his head watched by another supervisor and two other workers (fig. 6), the 'Nicholls' photograph (which has been printed) (fig. 15) shows a different searcher and worker from those in the Yale image, there are no witnesses to the event, and the clutter around the yard is different. In the case of the foot examination (fig. 10) in the 'Nicholls' negative the image is reversed which surely indicates the two sets are not interdependent but that at least one other set of copies and probably more were made.

We are told that Nicholls took up a post in the studio of a Mr. Goch in Johannesburg, 1892. [[67]](#endnote-67) He was then aged twenty-five. He was back in the city in 1893 after a trip to England to get married. Harris disappears from the record in 1894 so it is possible they knew each other. But Harris was by this time in Port Elizabeth over a thousand miles away and most likely focusing on his probably lucrative practice of photographing views and indigenous people. The most likely explanation is, therefore, that Harris was commissioned to take the Kimberley Searching System photographs some time between 1883 and 1888. Then or at some later date copies were made probably for instruction. [[68]](#endnote-68)As this method of body searching probably continued into the early twentieth century, the original photographs showing the different procedures required of searchers would have become unusable. Diamonds fluoresce under xray and so at least from 1919 this process replaced the body searches [[69]](#endnote-69) and continued through the 1950s. [[70]](#endnote-70) Today full body scanners are used.

*Conclusion*

De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd. was formed by Cecil Rhodes (still in his thirties) in March 1888. By 1890 the company controlled 90% of the world’s diamond production. Diamond mining is about searching. Unlike, say, coal mining, it necessitated meticulous sifting whether in alluvial deposits or in quantities of soil removed from a volcanic pipe. It was estimated in 1890 that every load (weighing about 1,600 pounds) of blue ground from Kimberley mine yielded at that time on average from one and a quarter to one and a half carats of diamonds. [[71]](#endnote-71) Kimberley was entirely dependent on 'kaffir' labour. It was the bodies of black labourers working under constraint that enabled Rhodes's monopoly; by 1891 virtually all Kimberley’s output was channelled to members of a syndicate based in London that controlled the system and Rhodes was able to use this power base to pursue his white supremacist goals.

Harris's photographic apparatus was deployed to reinforce a system that depended on low-tech equipment (candles), medical devices (speculums and syringes) and overwhelmingly on the objectification of the animate body as a searchable mass. Through the act of photography these invasive procedures are captured as ceremonial quasi ritualised actions with an occasional audience of fellow workers and ultimately with the audience of viewers possibly being informed about the System and how it was applied. The silent sometime witnesses, the seemingly passive 'kaffir', the candles and the master-slave narrative that is invoked by these images of searching have a deeply unsettling quality as though some rite of passage is taking place. Orifices are exposed to the light and inspected, body waste evacuated and searched and this by perpetrators who are of the same (or closely ethnic) group as the workers, indicating how the system invaded not only bodies but also social relations. How, we wonder, did the candle-holder (fig. 8) get to have this role?

Through the search – which is not just random but part of some kind of system as the inscriptions tell us – the labourer’s body becomes synonymous with the kimberlite ground of the mine in which the tell-tale glitter of a diamond might be perceived in the dross of the mine. Digging for evidence that has been buried, whether by some agent or by happenstance, my work has been touched by the digging of archaeologists who uncover the skeletons of African workers and, with the help of time, also uncover the evidence of damage to the body to which the now buried photographs bear witness. The workers’ orifices stand in relation to the apertures (initially multiple) of the mine itself, and the non-life of the mineral is (whether in actuality or imagination) a part of that body. Harris’s work bears testimony to the way in which, through the procedures of humiliation, the black worker was subsumed into the organisation of the mining corporation. That the process is named and photographed indicates just how proud its organisers were of what they had achieved. The substitution of X-ray machines at Kimberley was merely a more efficient way of appropriating the body of the labourer, allowing what Gareth Hoskins sees as a new form of visualization that might in a post-humanist moment enable us not only to understand surveillance techniques but also to recognise [further] the de-animation of the miner through these techniques.[[72]](#endnote-72)

Apertures, holes, openings are what remind us that a surface is not pristine and that humans are part of the earth from which riches are foraged: nostrils, mine shafts, rectums, wells, holes in the feet, fissures in the rock - these suggestive lacunary spaces invoke what is lost or hidden, secret or witheld. The vocabulary is interchangeable: we speak of fractures in rock just as we speak of bone fractures. It is perhaps fitting that all that survives today of the Kimberley mine (De Beers’ oldest mine until 2015 when it was sold) [[73]](#endnote-73)is a huge hole - the Colesberg Kopje or Kimberley Big Hole. A gigantic 463 metres in width and originally 240 metres in depth (fig. 16) (though it was partly in-filled with debris and now is also partly filled with water) the Kimberley big hole is testimony to the labour of around 50,000 miners with picks and shovels between 1871 and 1914.

*Postscript*

Thinking about the themes of burying, concealing, excavation, extraction, and the searching of and for lands, histories and bodies, I found myself pondering my own investment in this research. The memory surfaced of my primary school in the West Riding of Yorkshire and I recalled how my friends’ fathers all worked ‘down the pit’. I remembered the sacks of (free) coal slung over bicycle cross bars wheeled home from the colliery, the blackened faces, the state-of-the-art Prince of Wales colliery which closed in 2002 and on the site of which five hundred houses are currently being built. The colliery had pit-head baths but the miners often preferred to return to homes, many of which in the early 1950s still did not have bathrooms, and fill the zinc bath by the range. I recalled squatting miners chewing tobacco and old miners on the bench outside The Mason’s Arms choking with emphysema. I was five when we moved from Hendon, where I had started school at Wessex Gardens, a state school still situated on the A1 near the junction with the North Circular, to a small village near Hemsworth, a constituency famed as the safest Labour seat in the country, consistently returning majorities over 80% from 1935 to 1974 and until recently always returning a miner to Parliament. A child of educated middle-class parents, I was transported from a London suburb to a fascinating if alarming landscape shaped and above all coloured by coal extraction and its waste. Diamonds are constituted of pure carbon; coal is equally carbon but with impurities, which is what causes pollution when it is burned. The chemical relationship between them has provoked a number of contemporary artists including Alicja Kwada; born in 1979 in Poland where coal continued to be mined long after the Yorkshire coal fields had ceased to operate, she has made ‘diamonds’ out of coal dust and coated coal briquettes with gold leaf. [[74]](#endnote-74) In my own case, I now recognise, it was a relationship not only material and historical but also personal that impelled me to undertake this project.

**Appendix**

Attempts to contact De Beers have never been promising as I discovered when researching for my two books that deal with diamonds (*Brilliant Effects: A Cultural History of Gem Stones and Jewellery*, London and New Haven: Yale University Press (2009) and *Rocks, Ice and Dirty Stones: Diamond Histories*, Chicago and London: Reaktion Books (2017) ). It seemed, however, important to try again in the light of the sale of a set of photographs intimately connected with the history of De Beers' mine of which the whereabouts were now unknown. This appendix concerns this attempt and what I learned from others about accessing De Beers' 'archive'.

In July 2017 I telephoned De Beers UK head office at 20 Carlton House Terrace and asked to speak to their archivist or someone informed about the history of the company. The receptionist informed me that unless I had the name of an individual she could not put me through. The De Beers website has no names and no links except for those wishing to purchase diamonds. I then wrote a letter addressed to 'the archivist'. On 20 July I received an email reply from Guy Eaglesfield, Graphic Design Specialist at de Beers. He told me that de Beers employ a Photo Librarian in Johannesburg and that he, as longest serving member of the design team, had a good knowledge of the photographic assets. De Beers, he stated, have various, prints, transparencies and digital files relating to the 1870s and 1880s mainly of the Kimberley mine (the Big Hole) rather than the nearby De Beers mine.

I took up Mr. Eaglesfield's suggestion that I call him and explained to him that I was interested in locating the whereabouts of a set of photographs of the Kimberley Searching system sold at auction in New York in 2007. I followed the phone call with an email:

*Dear Mr. Eaglesfield*

*Thank you very much indeed for speaking to me on the phone this morning. Here are the details of what I am trying to find out.*

*On 24 October 2007 there was a sale at Dreweatts/Bloomsbury New York. Lot 188 contained 19 albumen print photographs. Within this group were 9 photographs by Robert Harris showing the Kimberley Searching system. A description of the lot can still be read on the website  <[http://www.dreweatts.com/cms/pages/lot/NY002/188](http://www.dreweatts.com/cms/pages/lot/NY002/188" \t "_blank)> but the pictures are no longer there.*

*I am trying to find out who purchased this set of photographs and where they are now. There is a set of the same photographs (with the exception of one) in the Yale University Library but they are copies of originals. My supposition is that the set sold in New York were the originals. There is a further set in the form of copies on glass plates by Horace Nicholls (who worked in South Africa early in his career) which are now in the Victoria and Albert Museum.*

*I have contacted museums and archives in South Africa none of whom know where the images sold in New York have gone.*

*If it were possible to either see these or obtain high resolution digital images of them I would be delighted. But it would also be very helpful simply to know where they are now held, even if this is in a private collection.*

*Thank you very much for your help*

*Best Wishes*

*Marcia Pointon*

Mr. Eagelsfield responded on 27 July by forwarding my email to Sally MacRoberts, the librarian at Brenthurst, described as one of the finest privately owned Africana libraries: http://www.brenthurst.org.za/brenthurstlibrary.cfm. The library grew out of the collections of Sir Ernest Oppenheimer and his son Henry Oppenheimer. The former controlled De Beers and founded the Anglo-American corporation of South Africa. Sally MacRoberts replied the following day:

*Dear Prof Pointon,*

*I have looked through all of our early Kimberley photographs, and I am afraid that we do not have these photographs. I have spoken to someone who used to work for Robin Fryde (who is now dead, but at that time was the biggest Africana dealer in South Africa) as I thought Robin may have bought the album for a client. My contact remembers the sale, but says that as far as he remembers, Robin did not bid. Is Dreweatts not prepared to contact the buyer on your behalf?*

*My only local suggestion is Kimberley – either the McGregor Museum, the Kimberley Africana Library or the archives of De Beers in Kimberley.*

*If the V&A has the images on glass, is it not possible that these are the glass negatives?*

*Regards,*

*Sally MacRoberts*

*The Brenthurst Library, Johannesburg*

On 31 July Sally MacRoberts copied me into an email to Guy Eaglesfield:

*Dear Guy,*

*I spoke to one of my retired colleagues who used to deal with the De Beers Archives in Kimberley. There was/is an archive there, which used to have dedicated staff, but Diana says they ‘closed the doors’ a few years ago, although, as far as she knows, the material is still there. She suggested contacting De Beers in Crown Mines to find out who to contact to get access...*

*Do you have contacts at Crown Mines?*

*Regards,*

*Sally*

I had already contacted the McGregor Museum and the Kimberley Africana Library during my trawl through public museums and libraries in South Africa. Despite a reminder neither correspondent was able to come up with a contact at Crown Mines. So at this point the internet exchange went silent and these helpful people appeared to have nothing more to offer.

During the course of the summer of 2017 I contacted two eminent historians of South Africa, Charles Van Onselen and William (Bill) Worger, some of whose work I had read for this article. They replied immediately. Having absolutely no claim to any knowledge of South African labour history I am deeply grateful to them for their generosity with their time and knowledge. I addressed to them the same enquiry I had sent to De Beers. Bill Worger, Professor of History at UCLA, replied as follows:

*Dear Marcia (if I may):  
  
I am delighted to hear that you will be publishing an article about these images which appear to have been hidden from public view for more than a century. I only became aware of them about a year ago in a google search. I attempted to find out information from the auctioneer about their provenance -- no response -- and checked with antiquarian book dealers who I know in South Africa, none of whom knew of the collection. I am checking now with the retired Africa bibliographer at Yale, Moore Crossey, who likely purchased the set of copies that are held by that University (very nicely digitized) and will let you know what information he may have.  
  
Just as personal background, I did research at the De Beers company library and at their archives in 1978 and had access to most materials available (much of the paper archives were then being properly organized so were not available, but De Beers had microfilmed many of them for copies). I did not see these photos then. When I attempted to do further research in 1983 I was told by the Company archivist, Dr Moonyean Buys (now deceased), that the archives -- beautifully organized by 1983, she showed me proudly the boxes and inventories -- were embargoed and I could not have access. While some people have gained limited access for particular subjects (usually ones that do not get to the heart of De Beers' business practices), I have never been allowed back.  
  
Separately either in 1983 or a couple of years later, the company librarian who I had worked with in 1978 (and who had left De Beers in the late '70s or early '80s) told me that all the "controversial" photos -- I remember her speaking particularly of images of the men in the purge houses who had to wear "boxing gloves" on their hands -- had been removed from the company's library. She did not say what had been done with them once removed.  
  
My assumption when I learned after the fact of the 2007 auction was that De Beers had purchased the images. Though the Oppenheimer family has now acknowledged to some extent the harsh labor conditions of the mines, they are still very protective of their historical image internationally, especially now that they are such a large benefactor of African Studies at Harvard in particular as well as elsewhere.  
  
Beyond what I wrote in my book on Kimberly I don't think I have further details on the searching process but I will check my old notes from my 1978 research year. Rob Turrell may have some information in his book and perhaps Patrick Harries in his? But likely you have already seen their work.  
  
I very much look forward to reading your essay.  
  
Best,  
  
Bill*

*William H. Worger  
Professor of History*

I had already been in touch via Yale librarians with Moore Crossey. Charles van Onselen, Professor of History at the University of Pretoria, sounded a cautionary note, pointing out that the Oppenheimers collected watercolours and rare books not material related to the history of the company and that although there are many 'legends' about the secretiveness of the mining houses about their historical records he did not believe that this was still the case. The big houses, he suggested, no longer care greatly about their reputations and are now owned by hedge funds and companies rather than associated with individuals. The whereabouts of the set of photographs sold in New York in 2007 remains at least for the present a mystery.

1. In addition to the helpful comments of two anonymous readers and the editor, my thanks are due to the following for their advice: Luke Battenham, Elizabeth Edwards, Michael Godby, Colin Harding, Shirley James, Graham McCallum, Darren Newbury and Louise Purbrick. Bill Worger and Charles Van Onselen were extremely generous in replying with precision and alacrity to the enquiries of a novice to South African history and Guy Eaglesfield and Sally MacRoberts did their best to help me with De Beers. Lindsay Smith read a first draft and I am, as ever, grateful for her insightful suggestions. To Patrizia di Bello, Mark Crinson, Steve Edwards, Lynn Nead and all those colleagues and students who attended the seminar at Birkbeck in February 2017 where I presented this material I owe a great debt for their observations and their encouragement, as also to the research seminar at Norwich University of the Arts. Finally I thank the librarians at Yale University library who willingly helped me to access material that they themselves found disturbing.

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   Captions

   1. *De Kaap Gold Fields, South Africa: Miners of the Republic Gold Mining Company'*, woodbury type, after a photograph by Robert Harris, *South Africa Illustrated by a series of one hundred and four permanent photographs,* Port Elizabeth, 1888, 12.6 x 19.00, Wellcome Library London.

   2. Robert Harris, *Searching kaffirs De Beer's Mine*, albumen print, from *A Photographic Album of South African Scenery*, Port Elizabeth 1888, 38 x 33, courtesy of Michael Godby.

   3. *Wishing You the Compliments of the Season*, albumen print carte de visite Christmas card, South Africa Historical Collection (MS 1556). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

   4. Robert Harris, Untitled [A double amputee with a long-tailed monkey outside a railway signal box], albumen print on mount, Bonham's London auction no. 18061 *Travel and Photography: India and Beyond*, 5 October 2010 lot 290, 'Album containing 29 images by the Port Elizabeth, Kimberley and Zulus [sic] by Robert Harris', photograph courtesy of Bonham’s London.

   5. Anonymous photographer after Robert Harris, Untitled [A miner undergoing a body search in De Beers Kimberley Mine, South Africa], photographic print, ca. 1884, South Africa Historical Collection (MS 1556). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library

   no. 0

   6. Anonymous photographer after Robert Harris, *Searching System, Kimberley* [A miner undergoing a body search in De Beers Kimberley Mine, South Africa], photographic print, ca. 1884, South Africa Historical Collection (MS 1556). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library

   no. 1

   7. Anonymous photographer, Untitled [‘Kaffir' compound, De Beers mine, Kimberley], late 1880s, albumen print on card mount, South Africa Historical Collection (MS 1556). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

   8. Anonymous photographer after Robert Harris, *Searching System, Kimberley* [A miner undergoing a body search in De Beers Kimberley Mine, South Africa], photographic print, ca. 1884, South Africa Historical Collection (MS 1556). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library

   no. 2

   9. Anonymous photographer after Robert Harris, *Searching System Kimberley* [A miner undergoing a body search in De Beers Kimberley Mine, South Africa], photographic print, ca. 1884, South Africa Historical Collection (MS 1556). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library

   no. 3

   10. Anonymous photographer after Robert Harris, *Searching System, Kimberley*, [A miner undergoing a body search in De Beers Kimberley Mine, South Africa], photographic print, ca. 1884, South Africa Historical Collection (MS 1556). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library

   no. 4

   11. Anonymous photographer after Robert Harris, *Searching System, Kimberley* [A miner undergoing a body search in De Beers Kimberley Mine, South Africa], photographic print, ca. 1884, South Africa Historical Collection (MS 1556). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library

   no 6

   12. Anonymous photographer after Robert Harris, *Searching System, Kimberley* [A miner undergoing a body search in De Beers Kimberley Mine, South Africa], photographic print, ca. 1884, South Africa Historical Collection (MS 1556). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library

   no. 7

   13. Anonymous photographer after Robert Harris, *Searching System, Kimberley* [A miner undergoing a body search in De Beers Kimberley Mine, South Africa], photographic print, ca. 1884, South Africa Historical Collection (MS 1556). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library

   no. 8

   14. Attributed Horace Nicholls [Searching System Kimberley, ‘morning examination of sorting house …’] copy of photograph by Robert Harris, glass negative standard half plate size (Royal Photographic Society no. 1458), © Victoria and Albert Museum.

   15. Attributed Horace Nicholls, [Searching System, Kimberley], copy of photograph by Robert Harris, modern print from glass negative standard half plate size (Royal Photographic Society no.1465), © Victoria and Albert Museum. .

   16. C. Evans, De Beers Mine Kimberley, albumen print, ca. 1873, courtesy Africana Research Library, Kimberley.

   *Dernier Lavage, Mine de M r Schubert à Lençoes (Brésil)* (final washing, M. Schubert’s mine, Brazil), heliograph after Dujardin, Henri Jacobs et Nicolas Chatrian, *Le Diamant*, Paris: L G. Masson, 1884. Examples from Rousselet and Jacobs and Chatrian are reproduced in my book *Rocks, Ice and Dirty Stones: Diamond Histories*, Chicago and London: Reaktion Books, 2017, ch. 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Patricia Hayes, 'Power, Secrecy, Proximity: A Short History of South African Photography', *Kronos*, 33:1 (Nov. 2007) 139, 142. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. The 104 prints are described in the album as 'permanent photographs'. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. According to rare book sale catalogues it was published in Port Elizabeth in 1888 though no evidence for this is provided and the volume is cited as 'no date', https://www.vialibri.net/item\_pg\_i/1140005-1888-harris-obert-photographic-album-south-african-scenery.htm. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. https://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications\_resources/pdf\_publications/pdf/atlas\_woodburytype.pdf. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Michael Godby, 'Forward, Ever Forward: a reading of Robert Harris, *Photographic Album of South African Scenery*, Port Elizabeth, ca. 1880-1886’, *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies*, 40:1 (2014) 85. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid 96 [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Pointon, op. cit. chapter 2 ‘Diamonds and Empire’ pl. 21. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Hayes, op. cit. 142 points out that Duggan-Cronin moved from extraordinary figural and ethnographic studies on the Kimberley diamond mines to field visits where he photographed historic sites from which arteries of migrant labour originated. Typical of his work is *The Bantu Tribes of South Africa, reproductions of photographic studies by A.M. Duggan-Cronin*, Cambridge and Kimberley: Cambridge University Press, 1928. See Michael Godby ‘Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin’s Photographs for *The Bantu Tribes of South Africa* (1928-1954): The Construction of an Ambiguous Idyll’, Kronos 36:1 (November 2010), online at: http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci\_arttext&pid=S0259-01902010000100003. Gary Minkley and Ciraj Rassool identify the roots of a South African documentary photography to the 1940s and '50s and to the work of Cole, Levson and Peter Mugubane. See Gary Minkley and Ciraj Rassool, 'Photography with a difference: Leon Levson's camera studies and photographic exhibitions of native life in South Africa, 1947-1950', *Kronos* 31:1 (November 2005), 188. Other collections, like the photographs taken by Isaac Schapera and now held by the Royal Anthropological Institute (UK), were taken between 1929 and 1940, see *Picturing a Colonial Past: the African Photographs of Isaac Schapera*, ed. John L. Comaroff, Jean Comaroff and Deborah James, Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2007. None of the photographs in this publication shows an industrial subject. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. David Killingray and Andrew Roberts, 'An Outline History of Photography in Africa to 1940', *History in Africa* , 16, (1989), 197-208, 198 note 9. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Massimo Zaccaria, *Photography and African Studies: A Bibliography*, Pavia: University of Pavia Department of Political and Social Studies, 2001. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography, ed. John Hannavy, London: Routledge (2004) 2008, 18. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. A.D. Bensusan, ‘19thc Century Photographers in South Africa’, *Africana Notes and News*, 15:6 (June 1963), 236. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Bonham's London auction 18061 5 October 2010 lot 290. <http://www.bonhams.com/auctions/18061/#/aa0=10&MR0_length=10&w0=list&m0=0> [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. A.E. Van der Merwe, M. Steyn and E.N. L'Abbé, 'Trauma and Amputations in 19thC Miners from Kimberley, South Africa, *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology*, 20, (2010), 304. When De Beers established their closed compound in 1885 they built also a hospital ensuring segregation extended to the treatment of effects of accidents, which were many given land-slips in wet weather. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. <https://soulsafari.files.wordpress.com/2012/09/miners-being-inspected-2.jpg> [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, London: Penguin, 2003, 72. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. '[South Africa: circa 1880-1890]. 4to (9 1/2 x 7 1/2 inches; 240 x 190mm). 19 albumen print photographs on 14 leaves (10 photographs [each approx. 7 1/2 x 5 3/4 inches] mounted recto and verso of five card leaves, 9 photographs [each approx. 5 x 8 inches, 7 of these with series title 'Searching System. Kimberley' in the negative, 6 with the photographers initials 'R.H.' in the negative], all 19 with manuscript titling beneath in a single hand, 9 of these with additional text above many images). Bound to style in green half-morocco over contemporary pebble-grained cloth covered boards, spine gilt, contained within a modern green morocco-backed green cloth box, titled in gilt on ‘spine’. *Condition:* Most somewhat faded, two with small tears, most of the first ten photographs have rounded corners, mounts browned and chipped): <http://www.dreweatts.com/cms/pages/lot/NY002/188>. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. The eight Yale photographs can be seen at <http://images.library.yale.edu/madid/showThumb.aspx?qs=16&qm=15&q=ms+1556>.

    They were acquired for the library by the former Africa collection librarian, Mr. John Moore Crossey before his retirement in 1998. The Library has no correspondence relating to the photographs and no further information on their origins. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Susan Sontag, op. cit., 54, discussing the picture taken by Eddie Adams in 1968 of the execution of a Vietcong suspect in the street. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. See note 19. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. S.H. Butcher, http://classics.mit.edu//Aristotle/poetics.html, downloaded 26-08-17, part IV. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Patrick Harries describes the alienation of workers who came from agricultural work on sugar plantations in Natal to Kimberley and had to adjust to a machine-driven industry governed by washing machines, windlasses, buckets and carts, Patrick Harries, *Work, Culture, and Identity: Migrant Laborers in Mozambique and South Africa, c. 1860-1910*, London, Johannesburg and Portsmouth NH: Witwatersrand University Press, 1994, 50-51. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Few of the secondary sources I cite reproduce any photographic evidence, despite the fact that we know that photographers were at work in South Africa. Where images do appear their low status as evidence is reflected in inadequate or complete lack of captions. Harries, ibid, reproduces on p. 52 a photograph of a team of black miners equipped with picks and shovels preparing to enter Kimberley mine. No date and no source for this image is given anywhere in the book. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*, Houndmills: Macmillan, 1988, 61. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. John Tagg, 'The Pencil of History' in *The Disciplinary Frame*: *Photographic Truths and the Capture of Meaning*, Minneapolis and London: University of Minneapolis Press, 2009, 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. These ethical and historical questions are discussed by Richard Kearney in 'Evil, Monstrosity and the Sublime' in *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia*, 57:3, (July-September 2001), 489, 490, 494; downloaded from JStor 17-08-17. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, trans. Shane B. Lillis, Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2008 (original title *Images malgré tout*, 2003) 3, 20, 32-33. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Historians have been largely interested in the ordinance that put into law body searches at the Kimberley Mine as a cause of labour unrest. See William Worger, *South Africa's City of Diamonds: Mine Workers and Monopoly Capitalism in Kimberley, 1867-1895*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987, 128-9; in particular Robert Vicat Turrell, *Capital and Labour on the Kimberley Diamond Fields 1871-1890*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1987), 135-6 and Harries 68, mention the body searching but in an account of relations between capitalist employer and migrant worker. Harries states, 68: 'Degrading and humiliating body searches and tight controls over the worker's movements, extending to those of his bowels, reduced the level of diamond theft. The terrifying degree of surveillance inherent in this system of control has led several historians to find the inspiration for the compound in the prison'. No source is given. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. The history of Kimberley is outlined and analysed in Worger op. cit. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Stephen Kanfer, *The Last Empire: De Beers, Diamonds, and the World,* London, Sydney, Auckland: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux (1993) 298-9; quotation from Ernest Cole, *House of Bondage by Ernest Cole*, with Thomas Flaherty, introd. Joseph Lelyveld, New York: Random House (1967) 23. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. V.L Allen, *The History of Black Mineworkers in South Africa*, vol. 1 *Techniques of Resistance 1871-1948,* Keighley: the Moor Press (1992) 109-129. Allen records (21) his fruitless attempts to get access either to the mines or to crucial data during the course of his research and points to the influence of the mining houses on the availability of evidence for this aspect of South African history. See also Worger, op. cit. ch. 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Harries 50. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Vicat Turrell 88 also describes overseers as white. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. See Vicat Turrell ch. 8 and especially 154. Harries 55 states that by about 1882 there were nine thousand black individuals living on the fields but not working for the mines, rather providing a service and entertainment sector. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. According to Worger op. cit. who reproduces it, the photograph of the compound is dated 1894. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Charles Van Onselen, 'Black Workers in Central African Industry: a Critical Essay on the Historiography and Sociology of Rhodesia', *Journal of South African Studies* 1:2 (April 1975) 234-237 downloaded from J Stor 18 -08-17. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. John M. Smalberger, 'I.D.B. [illicit diamond buying] and the Mining Compound System in the 1880s', *South African Journal of Economics*, 42:4 (December 1974), 398, 399. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Vicat Turrell 154. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Originally an Islamic term meaning unbeliever it came to be used in South Africa to refer to any black person and is now regarded as a racial slur; on the diamond fields it was translated as boy. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. See Vicat Turrell 136. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Worger 139-140, quoting Proclamation 1 1883. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. George Beet and Thomas Laurent Terpend in *The Romance and Reality of the Vaal Diamond Diggings*, Kimberley: Diamonds Fields Advertiser (1917) illustrate on p. 87 diamonds swallowed by and recovered from one worker. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Smalberger, ‘I.D.B. and the Mining Compound System’, op. cit., 413. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. See John M. Smalberger, ‘The role of the diamond-mining industry in the development of the pass-law system in South Africa’, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 9:3 (1976), 419-434. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. Smalberger, 'I.D.B and the Mining compound system’, op. cit., 412-3, quoting S. Ransome, *The Engineer in South Africa*, London: Constable (1903) 66-7. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. Worger 140 referring to reports in *Daily Independent*. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. Vicat Turrell 135-6 [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. Worger 140; Vicat Turrell 135-6. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Harries 60. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. Alan Sekoula, 'The Body and the Archive'*, October* 39 (Winter1986) 3-64. For a discussion of Sekoula in relation to South African photography see Lauri Firstenberg, 'Representing the Body Archivally in South African Photography', *Art Journal*, 61:1 (Spring 2002) 58-67, downloaded from J Stor 19-07-2017. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. Charles Van Onselen, 'Workers Consciousness in Black Miners: Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1920, *The Journal of African History*, 14:2 (1973) 238. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. Personal communication August 2017. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. On this see John L. and Jean Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*: volume 1 *Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1991; volume 2 *The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1997; Belinda Bozzoli, *The Political Nature of a Ruling Class: Capital and Ideology in South Africa 1890-1933*, London: Routledge, (1981). [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. Susan Sontag draws attention to the appetite for pictures showing bodies in pain as also to the desire for bodies shown naked, Susan Sontag, op. cit. 36. [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. http://www.miningweekly.com/article/hi-tech-scanners-to-expose-diamond-theft-2015-01-23/rep\_id:3650. Botswana mining company Debswana was reported in 2015 to be installing ten upright full body Scannex x-ray machines at four of its mines. The machines, it is claimed, will identify theft of diamonds that at the time comprised: 36% hidden in the anus; 30% hidden between the buttocks; 14% hidden in socks and hair; 5% concealed in the mouth; 2% hidden under the scrotum; 2% hidden in clothes; 2% in underwear; 10 % by 'other means'. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. One of a number of copies is in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence; it was widely copied also in the Renaissance and cast in bronze. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. Steve Edwards, *The Making of English Photography: Allegories*, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press (2006) 11. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. Sontag 38. [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. Van der Merwe, Steyn and L'Abbé, 294, 302. [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
62. Note however that Charles Van Onselen, 'Worker Consciousness' 240, estimated that the majority of fatalities among Africans were due to inadequate housing and food. [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
63. Harries 65. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
64. Cecil Beaton and Gail Buckland, *The Magic Image: The Genius of Photography*, London: Pavilion Books (1975) 126: 'When he was in South Africa he took photographs of black diamond-miners stripped naked and subjected to humiliating searches for loot'. [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
65. This happened while they were in the National Media Museum in Bradford, before transfer to the Victoria and Albert Museum. [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
66. I am extremely grateful to Darren Newbury of the University of Brighton for introducing me to Colin Harding who is researching Nicholls as part of an AHRC funded project on Horace Nicholls, artist-photographer at war, with the Imperial War Museum. [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
67. Beaton and Buckland 126. [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
68. It is possible that technical analysis by an expert of the plates attributed to Nicholls and the prints at Yale might produce further evidence. [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
69. http://gizmodo.com/south-african-miners-used-to-be-inspected-by-x-ray-for-1597519629. [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
70. http://rarehistoricalphotos.com/mine-worker-x-rayed-diamond-check-1954/. [↑](#endnote-ref-70)
71. Edwin E. Streeter, *Precious Stones and Gems* (London, 1898) 88. [↑](#endnote-ref-71)
72. Gareth Hoskins, ‘Geo-centric histories of diamond mining in Kimberley South Africa’, paper presented at the Visuality, Materiality and Mining symposium, University of Brighton, 26 June 2015, downloaded from Academia.org (unpaginated). My parenthesis. [↑](#endnote-ref-72)
73. https://www.debeersgroup.com/en/news/company-news/company-news/de-beers-completes-sale-of-kimberley-mines.html. [↑](#endnote-ref-73)
74. See her installations at the Hamburger Banhof in 2008, http://berlinfromwithin.blogspot.co.uk/2008/08/alicja-kwade-at-hamburger-bahnhof.html. [↑](#endnote-ref-74)