

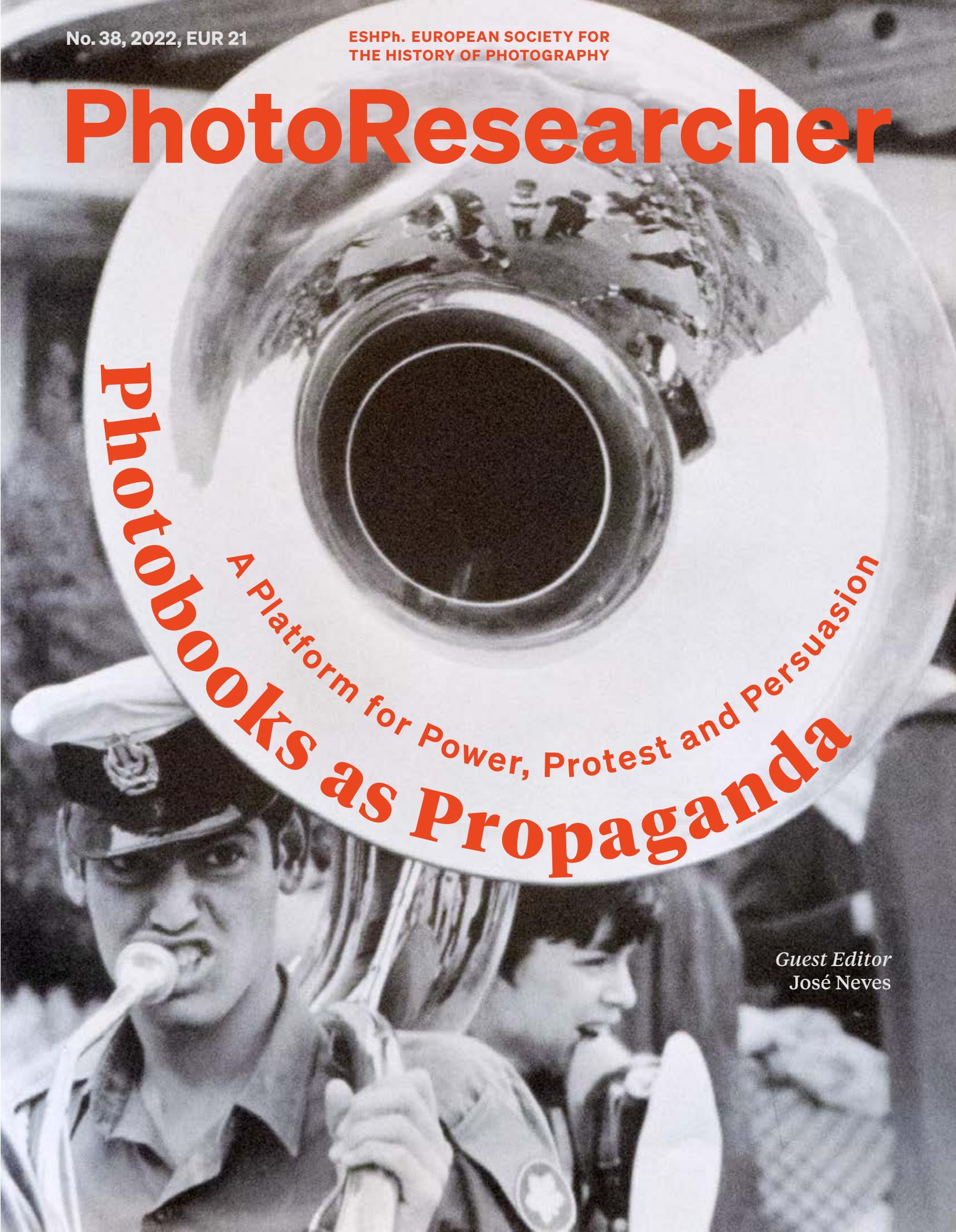
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Photobooks as Propaganda
A Platform for Power, Protest and Persuasion

Guest Editor
José Neves



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Editorial

Propaganda: What's in a Word?

What exactly is propaganda? The answer to that question is inevitably rooted in the definition of the term itself, which, as noted by David Welch, “is a much maligned and often misunderstood word ... [that] always has a bitter aftertaste.”¹ This aversion is undoubtedly linked to the prevalent perception of propaganda as an activity shaped by deception and manipulation. A belief strengthened with the weaponisation of propaganda in World War One and its ample use in subsequent armed conflicts and totalitarian scenarios.² It could be argued that the relationship between warfare, fabrication, and propaganda is irrefutable. However, as the different articles in this issue will demonstrate, propaganda is a rich, nuanced, and multifaceted communication instrument that permeates a diverse range of social and political contexts and can be used to promote positive change. Importantly, as pointed out by Oliver Thomson, there is no “particularly valid division between the use of lies and the use of truth to achieve propaganda results. If anything, it is easier for propaganda to be effective if it is based on the truth.”³ That is the case in several of the titles examined in the following pages. At its core, all the photographically illustrated printed matter discussed in this issue employs different degrees of manipulation to persuade readers to engage with specific points of view or further an agenda. In some cases, this is done within the ‘traditional’ context of authoritarian control and deceit. In others, truth is used to shine a light upon injustice and empower those without a voice.

Photobook and Propaganda: Everyone has an agenda.

Although photographically illustrated propagandistic printed matter appears in Horacio Fernández’s *Fotografía Pública: Photography in Print 1919–1939*,⁴ the first systematic analysis of propaganda photobooks seems to have materialised in Martin Parr and Gerry Badger’s *The Photobook: A History, Vol. I*,⁵ an examination expanded a decade later in the first two chapters of the survey’s third instalment⁶ in a somewhat artificial distinction between “propaganda” and “protest” photobooks. This

1___ David Welch, *Propaganda, Power and Persuasion: From World War I to Wikileaks*, London 2013, 2.

2___ Welch 2023 (reference 1), 15.

3___ Oliver Thomson, *Easily Led: A History of Propaganda*, Gloucestershire 1999, 3.

4___ Horacio Fernández, *Fotografía Pública: Photography in Print 1919–1939*, Madrid 1999.

5___ Martin Parr and Gerry Badger, *The Photobook: A History, Vol. I*, London 2004.

6___ Martin Parr and Gerry Badger, *The Photobook: A History, Vol. III*, London 2014.



fig. 1
 Yan (pseud. Jean Dieuzaide), 'Portal of The Parish Church' and 'Procession', in: Yves Bottineau, *Portugal* (with 168 photographs by Yan), Thames and Hudson, London 1957, plates 26, 27.

separation is a product of the authors association between propaganda and totalitarianism formed in the first volume of their study, and the necessity to maintain that compartmentalisation in the subsequent expansion of their analysis. However, this methodology inevitably reinforces the common perception of propaganda as inherently totalitarian and partially erases the multifaceted nature of this communication tool. Curiously, in their preliminary analysis of propagandistic photobooks, Parr and Badger acknowledge the ideological and material diversity of this book practice by asserting that these “come in all shapes, sizes and ideologies. Sometimes they tell half-truths; sometimes they lie outright; sometimes they are as factual as company reports.”⁷ The following academic articles aim to uncover some of that multiplicity and explore the crossover between propaganda and subjects such as tourism, AIDS, colonialism, children’s literature, and activism. Contributors were also challenged to explore different formats of photographically illustrated books in order to showcase the variety of photobook-making grouped under the umbrella term: ‘photobook’. Whereas several of the essays do engage with the “specific kind of photobook and ... particular breed of photobook producer”⁸ examined in the three volumes of *The Photobook: A History*, in many cases, the articles expand the current characterisation of what constitutes a ‘photobook’ by examining – among other formats – annuals, booklets, exhibition catalogues, tourist books and travel guides.

7 ___ Parr and Badger 2004 (reference 5), 182.

8 ___ Parr and Badger 2004 (reference 5), 6.

Ben Krewinkel's essay, for instance, analyses in great detail two versions of the 1940s propaganda booklet *A Spear of Freedom*. Whereas its African-issued version weaves a photo-textual narrative purely aimed at persuading African men to join the British military campaigns in East Africa during World War Two as labourers and soldiers, emphasising the economic and social benefits of that position, the London-issued version is, as pointed out by Krewinkel, more understated in its propagandistic goals. In this second version, the key political message of the publication aims at reaching a more racially diverse audience and presents a somewhat more nuanced portrayal of Kisarishu, the model soldier at the centre of this title.

On the other hand, Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer and Jörg Meibauer look at political propaganda within the context of mass-produced photographically illustrated children's literature – titles many times mass produced in print runs exceeding tens of thousands of copies – in the German Democratic Republic during the 1950s and early 1960s. Their analysis of these picturebooks, as they are defined in the academic field that studies this particular type of bookmaking, surveys how the complex photo-textual arrangements that compose some of these photo-books weaved a sophisticated narrative that aimed to inculcate socialist values in its young readers.

Susana S. Martins' analysis also surveys the manipulation and control of visual information by an autocratic power, in this case, within the context of Portugal's dictatorial *Estado Novo* regime (1933–1974). Some of the photographic books analysed in her essay are key examples of international tourism-related publications that contributed to the construction of totalitarian propaganda during that period in Portuguese history. Importantly, Martins looks not only at how multiple foreign photographers documenting the country throughout the 1950s and 1960s actively reiterated the official visual clichés of the state's propaganda machine, but also at how several publications simultaneously challenged – many times combining latent denunciation and romanticism on the same page spread (___ fig. 1) – the 'official' portrayal of the country.

Galia Yanoshevsky's essay deals with a similar subject: in this case, the use of photography to construct a portrait of the State of Israel during the 1960s. In her article, Yanoshevsky surveys several volumes of Peter Merom's *Israel Photography Annual*, highlighting not only the educational function of these annuals as instruments of photographic literacy and practice, but also how they contributed to a visual discourse that simultaneously disseminated and counteracted the inevitable propagandistic nature of the themes and events represented throughout its pages.

At a time when Brazil is heading towards a potential new political and social cycle, Vitor Marcelino dissects a 'classic format' photobook – with individual images placed on each page spread accompanied by a caption – that endeavours to raise awareness about the plight of Indigenous peoples in the region. Created by renowned photographer Claudia Andujar in 1978, *Yanomami: Frente ao Eterno* is a considerate and impassioned visual and textual study of the Yanomami's cultural identity that focuses specifically on the richness of their social practices and customs, while also addressing the persistent exploitation and destruction of this Indigenous people.



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HI! I'm TEE

THIS IS ME AT HOME ENJOYING DAY TO
DAY LIVING, AS YOU CAN SEE I DONT HAVE
A WORRY IN THE WORLD AT THIS POINT
BUT I'M A P. W. A. SURPRIZED DONT BE
BECAUSE I'M JUST LIKE ANYONE ELSE.

TEE
4/88

fig. 2

Billy Howard, 'Tee, New York, New York.
May 25, 1988', in: Billy Howard,
*Epitaphs for the Living: Words and
Images in the Times of AIDS*, Southern
Methodist University Press, Dallas
1989, 34,35.

This issue concludes with an essay by José Neves examining several photographic publications that document the AIDS epidemic in the late-1980s. His analysis explores the complex reception of the portraits included in these titles; particularly how AIDS activists perceived these visual documents as a reiteration of the unscrupulous representation of the condition in the media. Importantly, his examination raises questions concerning the adequate representation of people living with AIDS (PLWAs) and what potential photobook-making strategies (— fig. 2) are most suitable to produce a dignified and politically effective portrayal of those facing discrimination and stigma.

José Neves
Vienna, October 2022