

Africa

by Sebastião Salgado

Sebastião Salgado's latest book *Africa* is an extraordinary journey through a land of war and famine, poverty and adversity but, through his lens, it is also a land of great beauty

Words: Beth Wicks

A budding young economist sets off to Africa with a simple camera on loan to him and returns an influential photographer at the very start of a career, which would make him one of today's most internationally respected photojournalists.

Taking his camera where few others have wanted or dared to go, Sebastião Salgado has devoted himself to documenting the great relocations of people driven by war, famine, poverty and climatic adversity. His powerful and evocative black & white images document the lives of the world's dispossessed people and their constant struggle for survival.

Despite working throughout the world, Salgado's imagery concentrates heavily on Africa. His photographs cover the numerous catastrophic events that have afflicted Africa's people; the wars of independence, the severe droughts, the horrendous acts of genocide and the countless refugees driven from their homes, thrown together in makeshift camps and lining the roads, dying of hunger, epidemics or sheer exhaustion.

While Salgado focuses on Africa traumatised by suffering and despair, his stunning new book simply entitled *Africa*, also draws on the positives. It pays homage to the continent's history, people and natural flora and



fauna, highlighting the many facets of a beautiful and varied continent.

His lens captures the overthrow of apartheid, the collapse of the colonial regimes, the end of civil wars and the advent of peace in southern Africa. He documents the long awaited return of the exiled workers and the symbolic moment when the women set ablaze their temporary homes where they had taken refuge.

Salgado has also captured the pride and beauty of the continent, photographing the Himba people amid the dunes of Namibia, the traditional Dinka tribe in southern Sudan and the mountain gorillas and spectacular volcanic region of the Virunga Mountains. He

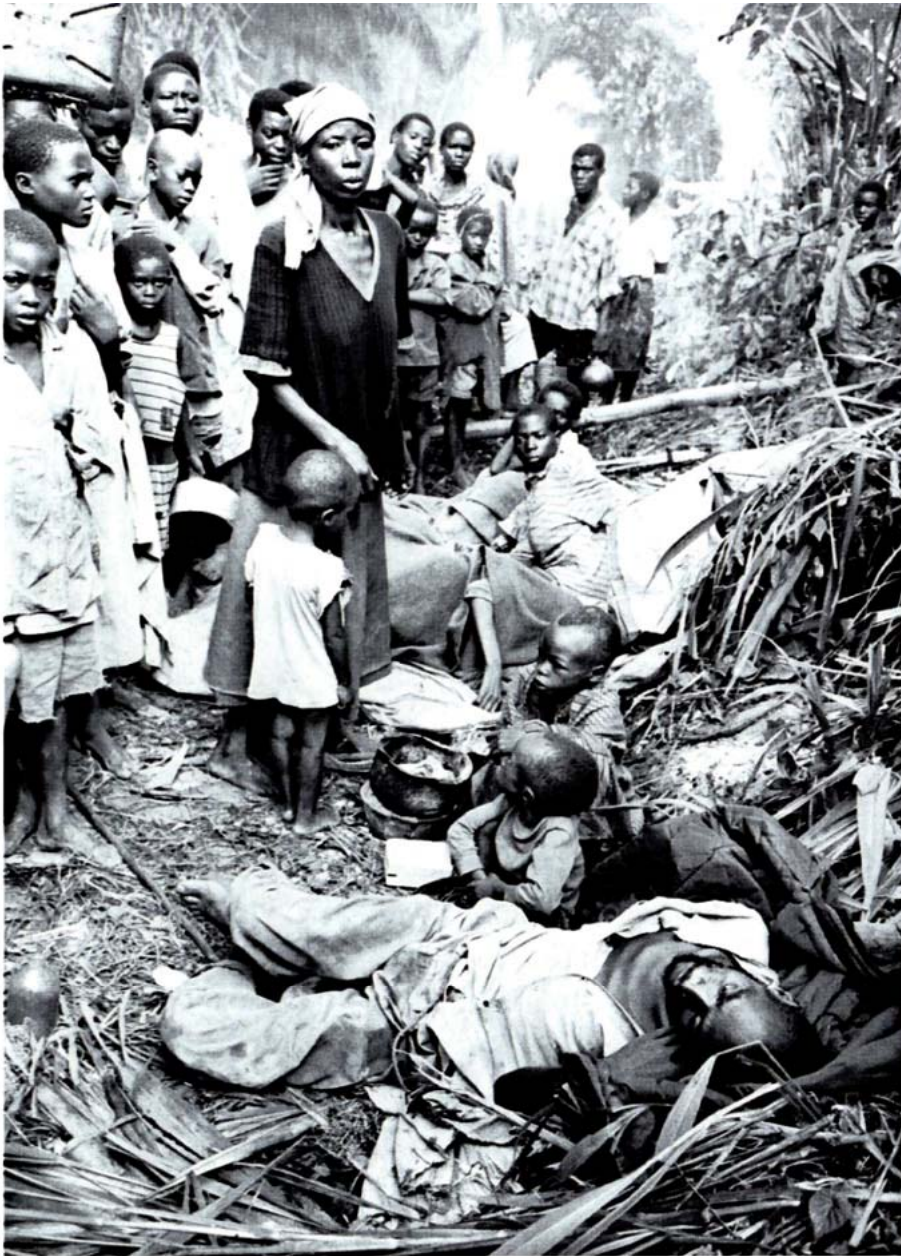
emphasises both the natural curvature and sharpness of the African landscape through the use of grain and dramatic contrast. Salgado also photographs much of the native wildlife including the impressive Great White Pelican in flight and the powerful African leopard.

As we move with him to the Great Lakes region, Salgado's photographs bear witness to the criminal elite manipulating and murdering others simply to hold onto power and accumulate wealth. Never in modern history have so many human beings been slaughtered in such a short time – Africans themselves legitimise the unimaginable. The juxtaposition of the corpses of the murdered

Tutsis alongside the Hutus imprisoned for their crimes in the Rwandan genocide adds a powerful undertone.

In the Sub-Saharan region, the sand and wind reign supreme, a bird of prey hovers over a refugee camp as if human beings, plagued by famine, poverty and the encroaching desert, have simply been reduced to defenceless prey. A mother pushes forward through the force of the wind, desperate to find food to add substance to skin and bone. Through his work, Salgado documents the centuries-old battle between man and nature. Often his subjects, particularly the children, stare at the camera – strong, confrontational, heroic, even in their despair.





The text is written by renowned Mozambique novelist Mia Couto, who looks back at her own homeland and reflects on how today's Africa is a consequence of colonisation as well as economic, social, and environmental crises.

For Salgado, the images are only the first step in raising awareness and generating international action. He has collaborated with many international humanitarian organisations, including spending 18 months working with Doctors Without Borders, to awaken others to the plight faced by the less fortunate, exhibiting his work, donating reproduction rights and documenting global campaigns. His subsequent books have also been accompanied by international exhibitions and educational programmes created specifically to support these organisations. In the introduction to his book *Migrations* (Aperture, 2000), Salgado writes, 'More than ever, I feel that the human race is one. People flee wars to escape death, they migrate to improve their fortunes, they build new lives in foreign lands, they adapt to extreme hardship...I wish that every person who enters one of my exhibitions leaves a person different,' he says.

Working entirely in black & white, Salgado's images testify to the dignity of the African people and the beauty of the vast continent while simultaneously protesting against violation by war, poverty and other injustices. **B&W**

ABOVE Rwandan Hutu refugees collapse, exhausted from their interminable trek, between Ubundu and Kisangani, Zaire, 1997

RIGHT As a symbol of no return, a family of Mozambican refugees burn their house before going back to their country. Mwanza, western Malawi, 1994

Reader offer

Readers of *Black & White Photography* can purchase a copy of *Africa* by Sebastião Salgado (TASCHEN) for £35 with free p&p (RRP £39.99). Call mail order on 01903 828 503 and quote ref TASCHEN003

