



Coded Information

Over the past thirty years, Miki Kratsman has been active as an artist, photojournalist, investigator, and archivist. Hagai Ulrich reviews his new book, the result of collaboration with curator and scholar Ariella Azoulay. The book examines the way in which photography can turn individuals into ultimate suspects.

Review / Hagai Ulrich April 19, 2017

Miki Kratsman with Ariella Azoulay. *The Resolution of the Suspect*. Cambridge: Peabody Museum Press. 2016. 216 pages, 300 color images.

1747-7 60x50B.jpg



[1]Miki Kratsman. Wanted person #1, 2007



Miki Kratsman's new book, *the Resolution of the Suspect*, the result of a collaboration with curator and researcher Ariella Azoulay, includes five bodies of work created over a period of more than thirty years, from the 1980s until today. They present portraits of Palestinians as wanted persons and as targets for assassination, although sometimes the people photographed are Palestinians suspected by Israel of combat or terrorist activities, or they might be anonymous, suspected of nothing. The book describes how the whole Palestinian population has become a population of suspects, a doom of death constantly hovering over them.

The first body of work features a contact sheet of a photographic film and a few printed frames. Kratsman took these photos in the winter of 1988, the beginning of the second Intifadeh, in Qabatiya . The photographs show a Palestinian man with a sack over his head, surrounded by IDF soldiers. They reveal the photographic choices of the photojournalist, made under conditions ranging from chaos to military control (what captured his attention, what the military allowed him to photograph and what not, what was included in each frame and what was left out).

[unnamed \(1\).jpg](#) [2]



[3]From the archive of Miki Kratsman. Qabatya, 1989.

In the second series, *Targeted Killing*, Kratsman took pictures of Palestinians in Issawiya, an Arab village located on the slopes of Mount Scopus, which has become a neighborhood of Jerusalem. He photographed the Palestinians from the window of his office at the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, from 800-1000 meters away, using a lens usually mounted on a drone. From that distance, and via the photographic image, the figures look suspicious even when they are performing ordinary daily activities. They appear as abstract information – humans who have lost their specificity through distance, alienation, and military surveillance practices.

A third group comprises a series of portraits, from 2007, showing Palestinian wanted persons. They carry weapons, standing against a white wall. A photograph of a weapon-carrying Palestinian emphasizes the fact that he is armed, perhaps justifying his being pursued, according to IDF reasoning. The photographed and the photographer both participate here in making the photograph.

Later, in the fourth series, Kratsman was photographing at an event for Palestinian wanted persons who were released from Israeli prisons, in 2007. He took many pictures of the event and its participants. In 2011, he printed them up, enlarging them, brought them to the Jenin refugee camp, and asked residents to tag in them people who have been killed by Israel. The residents did it by drawing a sort of blue-and-red halo around the heads of the dead.

[1283243018.jpg](#) [4]



[5]Miki Kratsman, from "Targeted Killing," 2010

[unnamed.jpg](#) [6]



[7]From the archive of Miki Kratsman. Jenin, 2007

[Untitled-16.jpg](#) [8]



[9]From the archive of Miki Kratsman. Jenin, 2007



The last body of work is an ongoing project that was started in 2012. Kratsman created a Facebook page called "People I Met," where he posts close-ups of faces of Palestinians cut from the backgrounds of photographs he has made over his years of working as a photojournalist. Kratsman invites visitors to the page to talk about what happened to the people in the photographs, some of whom were children during the first Intifadeh, when the photos were taken. Here lies the heart of the project – displaying the figures in the photographs and presenting the question to the viewers.

Ariella Azoulay wrote the companion text for the series. She identifies Kratsman's work as a position that challenges the familiar reasoning of the ostensibly detached photographer, who takes a picture and views it only as direct proof of the event, independent and detached from its external context. Azoulay describes Kratsman's work as an important, ongoing, multifaceted action, his life's work of opposition to the logic of the invisible photographer who is an objective witness. She seeks to turn the audience of Kratsman's images into active viewers and readers, who participate in the complex events the photograph signifies. She defines Kratsman's strategies and claims that the photographs present the Palestinian, any Palestinian, under the category of the 'Resolution of the Suspect.' Through the use of the term 'resolution,' referring to the quality and sharpness of an image, she defines the meaning and the way each Palestinian (and, ultimately, any human being) can transition from individual to suspect. This happens when an actual person becomes a political category, viewed through the practice, technologies, and logic of surveillance, which mark and separate him from the space he had been in and the context, so that he no longer seems a person with an identity, personality, and history – just coded information. Just a cypher to be cracked, his humanity is forgotten, and he becomes a threat to be thwarted, recruited, or killed – a situation that forces everyone involved to participate in exerting power on the other side, even if unintentionally.

[97 Dir_Istya2001 2.jpg](#) **[10]**



[11]Miki Kratsman. From "People I Met"



The complex situation demonstrates the inability of the photograph to express the complexity that has created it and continues to operate through it and activate it through the many implications it might have on reality. Azoulay employs several disciplines, binding them together - photography, language, politics, civics, literature, the law, and intelligence - to demonstrate that complexity, which cannot be contained by the definition of the photograph as objective (and, consequently, defining the whole situation as objective). The text flows between the various dramas connected to making a portrait of the Palestinian as a suspect - the gaze of the military, the intelligence services, the parliament and the government, the legal system and the media in Israel. Interviews Azoulay has conducted as part of her ongoing research on these topics are also included - with the historian Hillel Cohen, the civil-rights lawyer Michael Sfard, Zakaria Zubeidi (former commander of Fatah's Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades in Jenin), [1](#) an anonymous Israeli soldier who had operated under cover as an Arab, and with Miki Kratsman.

The text occupies a major part of the book, describing the use of advanced photographic surveillance technologies through drones and other UAVs. It introduces complex stories about the daily life of the Palestinian wanted by the Israeli authorities: what is the meaning of a sack over the head? How did Zubeidi learn to evade different kinds of drones as he was escaping them? What do terms such as 'targeted killing' mean? Under what circumstances would a Palestinian be accused of being a 'collaborator'? What is the difference between 'wanted,' 'suspect,' and 'collaborator?' Azoulay elaborates them with stories and examples, sometimes leaving gaps between topics and chapters. This writing strategy forces the reader to re-examine the text and thus become an active reader who does not accept what he has seen in the photograph or read in the book as self-evident. The reader or viewer reassesses his right not to accept reality automatically and stresses his right not to use his power over reality or another person.

[Zakaria-Zbaidi.jpg](#) [12]





[13]Miki Kratsman. Zakaria Zubeidi – borrowed time, 2002

The book connects photography and ways of looking at it to surveillance and intelligence techniques, tying them to the formation of consciousness regarding those being observed through the resolution of a suspect. Kratsman uses these practices for various purposes, albeit in a way that shows how it is impossible to separate those observed through this resolution from the ones observing them with these military practices and techniques, which eventually form a collective consciousness in the civilian realm also. Kratsman's and Azoulay's cooperation in the book makes the argument that no image of reality can express a simple, objective view, seemingly separate, sovereign, independent, and objective, or as if the (alleged) single frame can isolate one element of a power balance from its environment; as if one event can be separated from the historical dynamics and the political, legal, and linguistic categories at its basis.

The book examines this resolution, through which the Israeli regime looks at the Palestinians (and through which, mostly, the Israeli attitude towards the Palestinians is formed), through linguistic and visual images: collaborator, suspect, wanted, militant, terrorist, a ticking bomb. These categories manufacture an Israeli point of view that sees in all Palestinians a death threat, immediately or in the future, directly or indirectly. This complexity cannot be captured in a photograph, but Kratsman's work tries to present it to the viewer through the practices employed. Kratsman and Azoulay are asking whether the readers and the viewers of the portraits would perceive the photographed Palestinians as deadly political categories and keep them under *the resolution of the suspect*, or be active viewers and see them as individual images, under a civilian resolution.

- [1.](#) Zubeidi was wanted by Israel when his portrait was shot for the series on Palestinian wanted persons. His status as a wanted person to Israel changes from time to time.

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