

Thorne Anderson and Kael Alford

Eye Level in Iraq

INTRODUCTION

WHEN the United States invaded Iraq in March 2003, independent photojournalists Thorne Anderson and Kael Alford trained their cameras on the other side of the conflict, documenting its effects on the lives of Iraqi citizens. In these images, and in the photographers' introductory essays, the Iraqi people command the center of the frame, approached not from an embedded military perspective but from within their midst, at nearer eye level. Here Iraqi men, women, and children—at work and leisure, in prayer and defiance, in celebration, anger, and grief—live amid the threat and effects of violence in ways that, however foreign, Western viewers might recognize.

In 2005 Anderson and Alford collaborated with two other independent photojournalists, Ghaith Abdul-Ahad and Rita Leistner, to produce a book of their work, *Unembedded: Four Independent Journalists on the War in Iraq* (Chelsea Green Publishing), where some of the following photographs appear. Two gallery exhibitions from *Unembedded* are currently touring the United States.

Thorne Anderson was born in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1966 and has a master's degree from the University of Missouri–Columbia School of Journalism. He has covered international news with Corbis/Sygma since 1999, working extensively in the Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq, Israel, and Palestine. He has taught photojournalism at the American University in Bulgaria, and his photographs regularly appear in major American newspapers and newsmagazines as well as international publications such as *Stern*, the *Times* (London), and the *Guardian*. He spent ten months in Iraq over the course of several trips and is among the few active journalists who worked there during the prewar sanctions period. He recently spent two months photographing in Afghanistan.

Kael Alford was born in Middletown, New York, in 1971 and likewise earned a master's degree from the University of Missouri–Columbia School of Journalism. She has covered culture, politics, and conflict in the Balkans and the Middle East for many U.S. and European publications, including *Time*, *Newsweek*, *U.S. News and World Report*, the *New York Times*, and *Vanity Fair*. She is currently working on a long-term project about the environmental degradation, landscape, and culture of the Gulf Coast. She has also taught photojournalism at the American University in Bulgaria and now teaches documentary photography at the Savannah College of Art and Design in Atlanta. She is represented by Panos Pictures in London.

M.W.

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Thorne Anderson

Najaf, 27 August 2004

Visitors headed to the Imam Ali shrine in the old city center witness the destruction after the nearly three-week battle between U.S. forces and Muqtada al-Sadr's Mehdi Army militia.



Thorne Anderson

Baghdad, 19 July 2004

Water pipes, dominoes, and prayer occupy these men in the garden of a tea house along the Tigris River. Although socializing after dark in Baghdad virtually ceases during the heaviest fighting, a conservative night-life reemerges during ensuing periods of relative calm.



Sadr City, 18 April 2003

Some 50,000 Shiite Muslims bow in prayer outside the Heqma mosque in Sadr City, formerly known as Saddam City, after the mosque imam's call for a unified Iraq free from American occupation. The portrait depicts Sheikh Muhammed al-Sadr, a Shiite leader assassinated by Saddam Hussein's regime in 1999.



Thorne Anderson

Mosul, 4 February 2004

A teacher leads her students in cheers as they watch a parade of the Jerusalem Army, a civil militia of about one million Iraqis who had pledged to defend their country against an American invasion.



Thorne Anderson

Karbala, 22 April 2003

Pilgrims self-flagellate with chains as they circumambulate the Imam Hussein mosque, one of the holiest shrines in Shiite Islam, to mark the anniversary of the death of Imam Hussein in the Battle of Karbala in 622, the historical event that marks the split between Shiite and Sunni Muslims.



Kael Alford/Panos Pictures

Sadr City, 29 July 2003

Children at a *husseiniya*, a center for religious learning, reenact a battle between U.S. soldiers and the Mehdi Army in which a teenage boy was the first victim.



Thorne Anderson

Sadr City, 7 August 2004

A young boy watches his relatives repair a rocket-propelled grenade launcher in the home of a Mehdi Army fighter. Violence—and the tools of violence—have become increasingly commonplace in Iraqi homes.



Kael Alford/Panos Pictures

Najaf, 21 August 2004

On the wrecked outskirts of the old city, a father tries to cross the front lines with his terrified child, signaling to snipers to hold their fire. Father and son crossed safely.



Kael Alford/Panos Pictures

Najaf, 27 August 2004

Residents inspect the ruins of their neighborhood after three weeks of fighting between the Mehdi Army and U.S. forces.



Thorne Anderson

Baghdad, 16 May 2003

A father rushes his daughter into the Yarmouk Hospital emergency room. She was shot when a children's dispute over a ball escalated into a gunfight among adults.



Thorne Anderson

Baghdad, 3 May 2003

In the first of two triage tents at the Saudi Field Hospital in Baghdad, new patients arrive exhausted from long journeys. Saudi Arabia and Jordan rushed emergency field hospitals into the chaos of Iraq after the U.S. invasion, when overburdened, underequipped, and unprotected Iraqi hospitals failed to provide treatment.



Kael Alford/Panos Pictures

Baghdad, 9 April 2003

A pool of blood is left on the floor of the lobby of the Saddam City Medical Center after a man died on a makeshift operating table. Located near the front lines, the hospital was overflowing with patients.



Thorne Anderson

Fallujah, 27 September 2003

Mourners prepare to bury Sheikha Beijiya, an elderly woman killed—along with her daughter, son-in-law, and one-year-old grandson—by American soldiers, who said the family's car drove through a temporary checkpoint on the road from Fallujah to Baghdad.



Thorne Anderson

Hilla, 15 May 2003

The remains of brothers Naim and Fasal, exhumed from an unmarked mass grave twelve years after their deaths in a Shiite uprising, are returned home for mourning.



Thorne Anderson

Najaf, 17 August 2004

The body of a slain fighter—considered a martyr by the Mehdi Army and its supporters—is carried through the courtyard inside the Imam Ali shrine. Martyr funerals were a nearly continuous ritual in the shrine compound throughout the deadly three-week siege of Najaf.



Kael Alford/Panos Pictures

Baghdad, 11 September 2004

Shiite worshippers attending a festival pass a heavily guarded checkpoint on a road closed to car traffic at the entrance to the Khadimiya shrine. Such festivals and public gatherings are often targets for car bombings and other violence.



Kael Alford/Panos Pictures

Baghdad, 3 September 2004

| This twenty-year-old woman, a supporter of the Mehdi |
| Army, says she is prepared to become a martyr. |



Thorne Anderson

Baghdad, 19 July 2004

The nightclub in the Coral Hotel—racy, by Baghdad standards—was one of the few in the city to reopen after heavy fighting in the spring of 2004 scared customers into their homes for the nights.



Sadr City, 15 July 2004

As the Mehdi Army enforced a stricter social code, women began to dress far more conservatively. This bride will not reveal herself until she is within the privacy of a family gathering, for fear of reprisal by the militia.



Sadr City, 7 July 2004

A young girl follows her mother out of a bridal shop. As conservative groups gain influence in Iraq, women are encouraged to marry and stay home rather than study or join the workplace.



Kael Alford/Panos Pictures

Baghdad, 5 September 2004

Deteriorating security in the city forces women to spend more time at home than they did before the war. These Baghdad University students ventured out to a restaurant favored by young, middle-class Baghdadis.



Kael Alford/Panos Pictures

Sadr City, 14 July 2004

Female supporters of the Mehdi Army, some of whom are the wives or widows of the soldiers, pose with a poster of Muqtada al-Sadr. They cook for the Mehdi fighters and help transport ammunition, and they say they will take up arms against the occupation if necessary.



Kael Alford/Panos Pictures

Ramadi District, 18 April 2003

Beyond the gaze of male relatives, these cousins play freely in the Euphrates River. In conservative regions such as this one, men and women maintain a careful social distance.



Thorne Anderson

Sadr City, 8 May 2004

A member of Muqtada al-Sadr's Mehdi Army mans an improvised barricade at a major intersection as the ceasefire between U.S.-led coalition forces and the militia breaks down. Improvised control checkpoints, a potentially deadly hazard, are a terrifying feature of Iraqi life.