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# Mohamed Amin

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# INTRODUCTION

For the thirteenth edition of the Photo London magazine, we are proud to present works from the Mohamed Amin Collection.

With over 8,000 hours of raw video footage and approximately 3.5 million still photographs taken between 1963 and 1996, the Collection represents one of the world's largest photographic archive, a visual documentation of the key historical events that helped to shape post-colonial Africa, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

In a career that spanned more than 30 years, Mohamed was the "eyes and ears" on the frontline, having covered every major event in modern African history. His 1984 footage of the Ethiopian famine shocked the world into action and became the catalyst for a global famine relief programme, including Band Aid and Live Aid.

This issue features a selection of works and videos from the Collection as well as an interview with Mohamed Amin's son, Salim, whose own work as a producer continues to give voice to 21<sup>st</sup> century Africa.



General de Gaulle and Negus Haile Selassie in Ethiopia, 1966



# Foreword

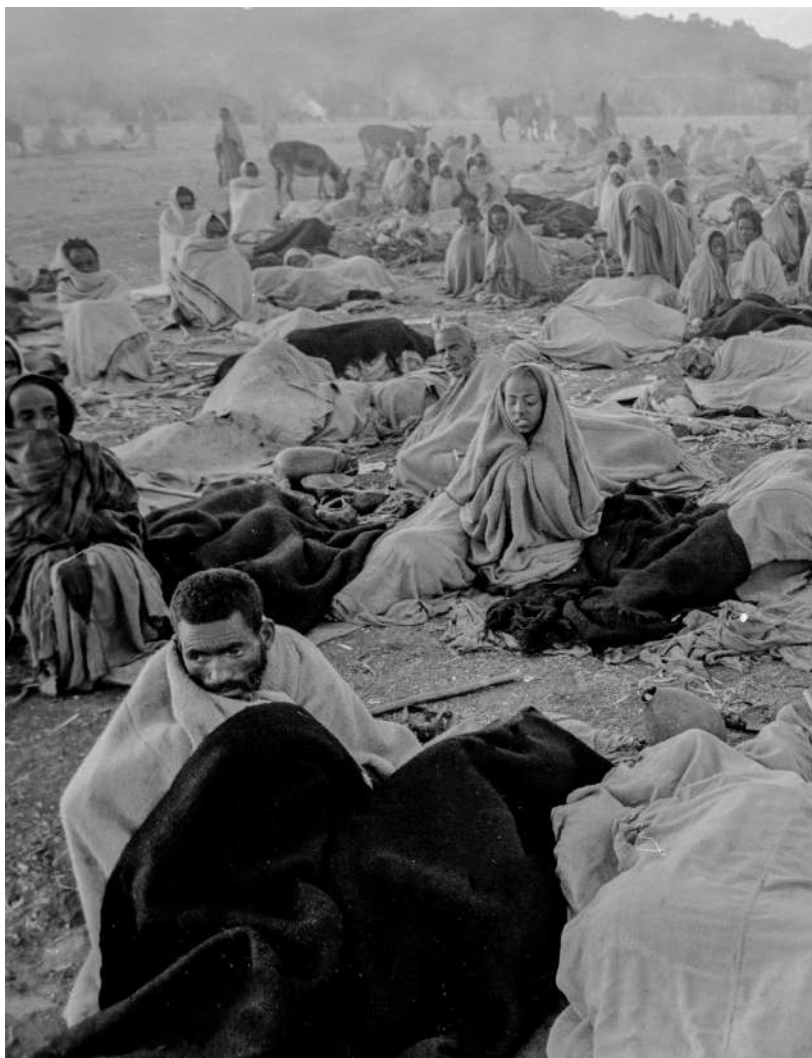
By Lidija Khachatourian  
& Salim Amin

The turmoil of Africa's emergence into the 20th century has long been the focus of the critical eye of the Western World. From exploration to exploitation; from fear and famine to fame and fortune; from war-torn horror to wildlife wonder; it has all been exposed to the relentless gaze of the international press.

No one has caught the pain and passion more incisively than Mohamed Amin, photographer and frontline cameraman extraordinaire. He was the most famous photo-journalist in the world, making the news as often as he covered it. 'Mo' trained his unwavering lens on every aspect of African life, never shying from the tragedy, never failing to exult in the success.

Mohamed was born into an Africa at the high noon of colonial decline, and by his early teens was already documenting events which were soon to dominate world news. He witnessed and recorded the alternating currents of his beloved continent and beyond, projecting those images across the world, sometimes shocking, sometimes delighting millions of television viewers and newspaper readers. Through the gaze of his camera lens, he showed the world what some were afraid to see and what most people wished they could ignore.

His coverage of the 1984 Ethiopian famine proved so compelling that it inspired a collective global conscience and became the catalyst for the greatest-ever act of giving. Unquestionably, it also saved the lives of millions of men, women and children. He served as both the inspiration and as a catalyst for Band Aid, USA for Africa and Live Aid.







Ethiopia famine – images of despair

Since Mohamed's death in 1996, an inconspicuous back room in Nairobi has been locked off from the public, maintained only by two solitary sentries stationed between file cabinets in a windowless, climate controlled vault.

Now, after years of frame-by-frame cataloguing and the digitization of thousands of hours of raw video files, the Mohamed Amin Collection is opening its doors for exploration and exhibition.

The Mohamed Amin Collection includes more than 8,000 hours of raw video content and approximately 3.5 million still photographs gathered between 1963-1996. It represents one of the world's greatest unexploited historical artifacts, and includes unique, high quality documentation of the events surrounding post-colonial Africa, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Afghanistan. This timeless work of art features culture, conflict, political upheaval, wildlife, entertainment, and an unparalleled visual chronicle of the daily life of millions of Africans.



Julius Nyerere and JF Kennedy



A famine victim in the highlands of Korem, Northern Ethiopia, 1984



A hospital attendant and Dr Rafiq Chawdry lift the stretcher bearing a mortally wounded Tom Mboya out of the ambulance at Nairobi Hospital, 5 July 1969

# Interview with Salim Amin

Some children live in the shadows of their fathers. Others, like filmmaker and entrepreneur Salim Amin, build on their fathers' legacy while standing in a light of their own.

The heir to one of Africa's largest and most renowned television production companies, Salim became the reluctant leader of Camerapix upon the untimely death of his father in 1996.

"I was still learning the ropes," says Salim. "My father's death at the hands of terrorists put him at the center of an international story. It was a huge loss for our family, and his shoes remain too large to fill."

From humble roots in a small shop in Dar es Salaam, Salim's father, Mohamed Amin, established Camerapix in 1963. With the instincts of a warrior and the heart of a leader, Mohamed built Camerapix into a sustainable, world class organization covering news, features and producing documentaries with a variety of global networks including the BBC, NBC and Reuters.

Recognized in 2007 as a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum, Salim's leadership has been rewarded. Today, Camerapix works in collaboration with production partners throughout the world. *New African Magazine* has recognized Salim as one of the top "100 Most Influential Africans" and has named Salim among their "Top 50 Under 50."

Salim was one of only 150 global leaders invited to President Obama's 2010 summit on Presidential Entrepreneurship in Washington DC.

*When did you first realise your father was one of the most important photojournalists in the world? How did it feel?*

I don't think I really ever appreciated his influence as a photojournalist or his achievements, until many years after his death. I knew he had done important things. I realised during all the memorial services for him after his death that he had made an enormous impact on the world. But I think it was only when I made *MO & ME* in 2006 that I fully grasped the magnitude of what he had achieved and how he had changed the world.

*What was it like growing up? Presumably your father was always travelling and working?*

I didn't really know him as a father. I idolised him and wanted to be like him, he inspired me, but I didn't really know him. He was always travelling and always busy even when he was at home. He worked from 2am to 8pm every day, weekends, public holidays, Christmas...we never went on family vacations unless he happened to want to photograph something...so he would be working even then. He always wanted to be up early to take advantage of the morning light and get the best pictures.

*You started taking photographs at quite an early age. Was your father the key inspiration?*

He was definitely the inspiration, but it was also a way for me to get close to him and to spend time with him. I really enjoyed the photography, but I enjoyed hanging out with him more. I was first published when I was 10 years old and I got "hooked" seeing my by-line. I never wanted to do anything else after that. Ironically my father never wanted me to go into this business. He felt it was too dangerous.





Joseph Murumbi, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta and Tom Mboya in this iconic image of Kenya's top post-independence politicians

*What's your fondest memory of your father?*

Spending that time covering the Safari Rally with him in Kenya... every Easter for more than a decade. We had an amazing time on the road. He would be cracking jokes and be completely relaxed.

*Could you tell us more about Mohamed as a father?*

I know he loved me but he was from a background that was not very expressive in showing affection. He wanted the best for me and gave me everything I wanted. What I wanted was to spend more time with him, and maybe he thought we would do that as he grew older, but we never got that chance.

*Preserving and managing your father's archives must be a very demanding task. In 2018, you published the beautiful limited-edition book "Kenya: Through My Father's Eyes" and it was first historical book to incorporate augmented reality. What prompted you to do that? What are your thoughts on the use of technology in the art world?*

I had not spent nearly enough time over the years going through my father's archives as I should have, since I was trying to keep the business running. But over the last 3 years I have taken to spending much more time on the images and we are discovering a real treasure here! There is some incredible content about events and moments in history that I really knew very little or nothing about.



Rally 2nd April 1975

It was while we were delving into this content that we thought about experimenting with a book that showcased his images of Kenya and its rich history. I decided to start with Kenya as this was his home and has always been mine. I was introduced to the augmented reality idea through a friend and, as we also have close to 10,000 hours of video content, we thought this would give a unique element to the book. Young people are not reading as much as they used to and this application would hopefully get them interested in the stories and push them to learning more after watching the short clips.

I think the use of technology can really enhance art, photography, exhibitions and the like. It brings a completely different element to the work but you have to be able to create compelling, quality video to keep the viewer hooked. The platform is good, but the content has to be great!

*You took over Camerapix after your father's sudden passing. What sort of strategic changes have you made to the company? Please tell us more about what you do.*

The first challenge I faced was convincing people that Camerapix still existed without my father. His name and persona were so huge that people assumed once he had gone, the company would go with him. So we had to keep producing better and better content to be able to build on his reputation.

The industry also changed dramatically with the emergence of digital...there was a lot more competition and our traditional news clients (broadcasters like BBC, NBC etc. and agencies like Reuters) were all opening more bureaux around the continent and needed our services less and less. So we started doing more long form content - features and documentaries in order to keep the business going.



Mo Amin and Bob Geldof

I launched the Mohamed Amin Foundation in 1998, which is a training school for young African journalists from around the continent. We branched out into doing more training as there was a demand from the ever increasing number of media channels being launched around Africa. I also launched an online media agency in 2009, which I think was ahead of its time and didn't last very long.

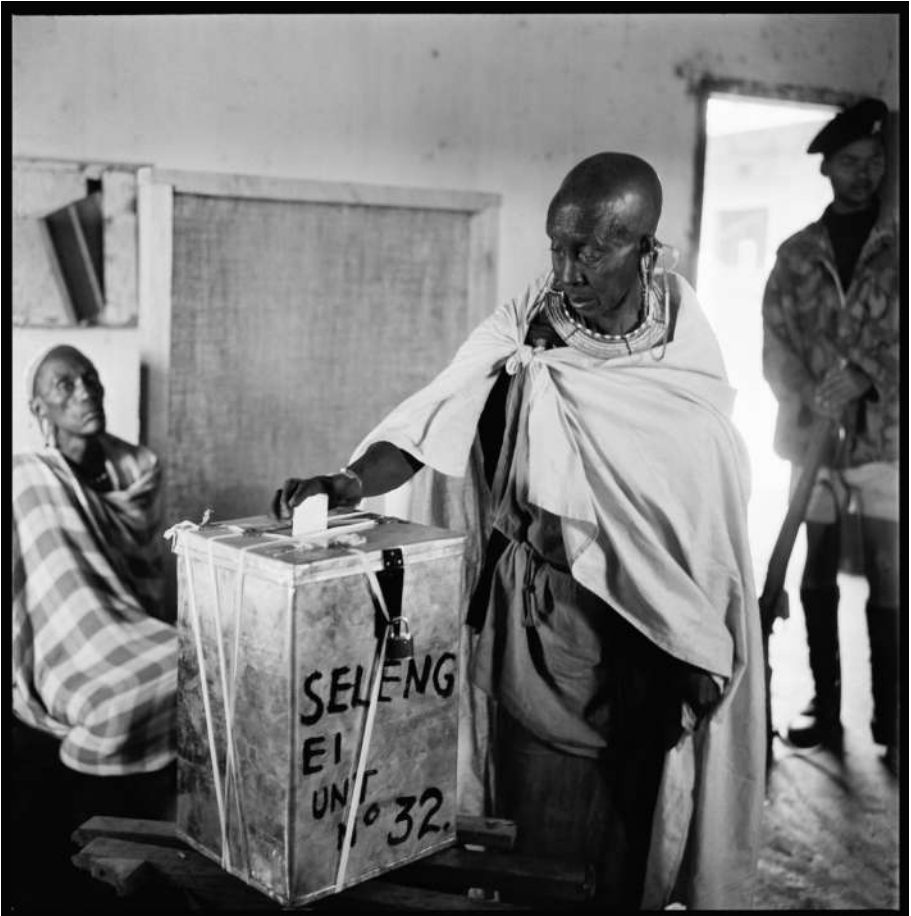
I hosted my own weekly talk show called "The Scoop" for two and half years and it was an incredible experience to be able to meet such amazing and talented people from across the continent and hear their stories of success.

*The issues of equality and diversity have long been a concern in African society. How do you feel about the recent #BlackLivesMatter protests, and the toppling of historical monuments?*

As you know, we have a long history with colonialism in Africa and we still feel the effects six decades after Independence. I believe the #BLM movement is long overdue and people are sick and tired of being made to feel like second or third class citizens in their own country just because of the colour of their skin, or their beliefs, or their backgrounds, or the way they speak.

What we cannot do is to deny our histories – good or bad we need to be aware of what has happened and to ensure the mistakes of the past are not repeated. I think young people are not aware enough of history and are not taught it properly, nor exposed to it enough and therefore will make the same mistakes because of ignorance. If we do not know our history we will never be able to properly move forward into our future.

In Africa this is a particular problem. Local and African history are not taught enough in primary and secondary schools across the continent and therefore we continue to repeat mistakes from the past.



Polling in Maasailand in an election

*2020 will no doubt go down in history as the year of Covid-19. How has your life been affected by the lockdown?*

We have had to postpone all the filming work we were doing both around Kenya and in the region due to both the travel restrictions and lockdowns, as well as our interview subjects being wary of being filmed...it has been very difficult financially and we have spent most of our time working on the archives, which has been one of the positives.

I think all artists have suffered a lot during this time due to their work not being exhibited and seen and bought, but the explosion of digital opportunities will hopefully open doors for many artists who have been able to take advantage of people staying indoors.

*We live in a world where everyone with a smartphone can be a photographer. What is your personal opinion on the future of photography?*

I have told so many people that the chances of a professional photojournalist being the first person to photograph a breaking news story is about the same as winning the lottery! Every breaking news story going forward will be captured by someone with a cell phone.

Yes, everyone has become a "photographer" ...and don't get me wrong as there are some brilliant and creative people who take incredible images on their cell phones (and the technology on these camera phones is also amazing!)...but I feel photojournalists are still very important to be able to give context to major events.

We have talked about the #BLM protests – there were some excellent images from protestors themselves but the Movement was brought to life by the iconic images of professional photojournalists. Those are the images that moved people. This talent cannot be replaced.





Video: [Inspiring change](#)



Queen Elizabeth Riding With Haile Selassie During Her Visit to Ethiopia in 1965



Jomo Kenyatta Addressing A Rally



Prince Jean Bedel Georges Queen Catherine Denguiadé and Jean-Bédél Bokassa during Coronation

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A candid shot of Malcolm X in his hotel room in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in October 1964



Margaret Thatcher greeting children during her Kenyan visit in January



Idi Amin and Gaddafi

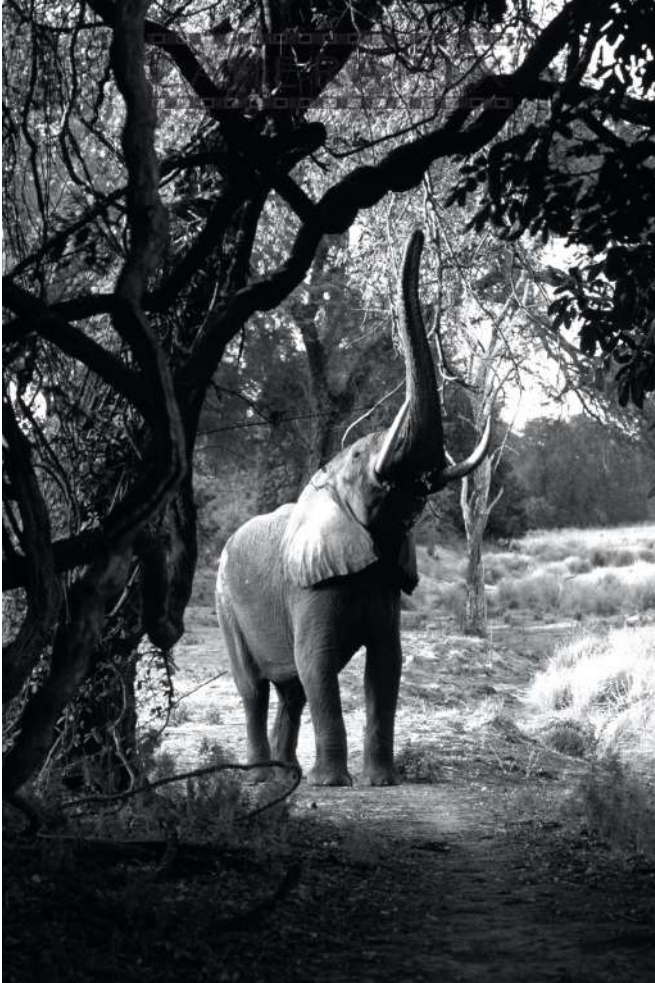


Samburu Elders attending a funeral





El Molo children fishing in Lake Turkana



An Elephant in Chikwenya Safari Camp in Zimbabwe 2



A lion quenching its thirst at The Ngorongoro Crater Tanzania



Elephants in the Amboseli National Park

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Cheetah spots its prey from an acacia tree, against a background of Africa's highest peak, Mount Kilimanjaro



Ethiopia drought, 1973



Ethiopian children at a famine camp in Korem, Northern Ethiopia, October 1984



Family portrait 1960's





A handler with his camel



Dancing and having a good time

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Boy Greets Santa Claus in the 60's in Tanzania



Europeans In Uganda Swear Loyalty To Man Who Overthrow Milton Obote



Idi Amin ordered white residents to kneel before him and swear an oath of allegiance



Jomo Kenyatta riding with Haile Selassie



Fidel Castro with Julius Nyerere when he visited Tanzania in 1977







Mt Longonot, Kenya



Bobby Kennedy Junior riding a rhino in Amboseli Game Park



Ove Anderson and Arne Hertz racing in a Peugeot 504 in 1975





Sunset in Masai Mara 2



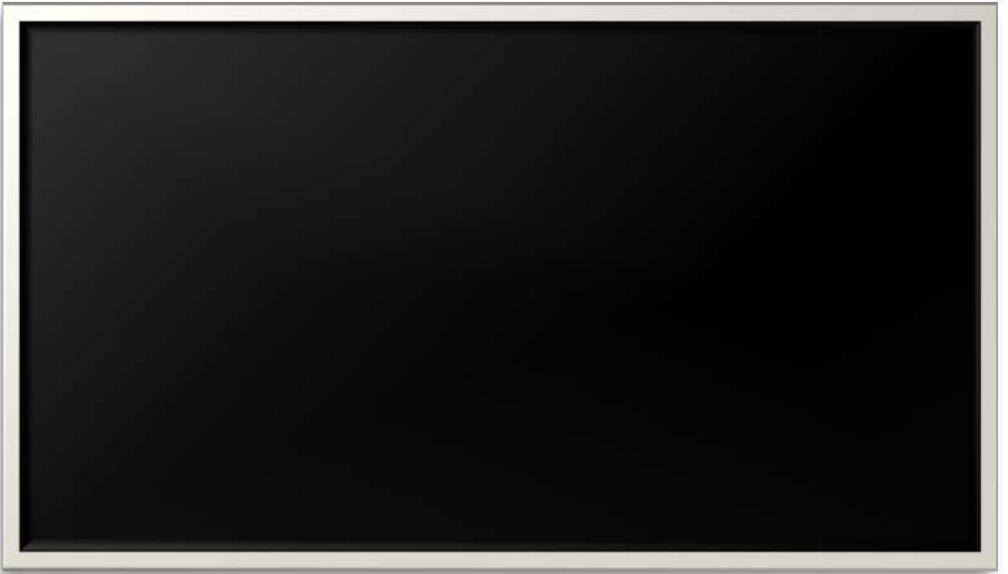


Mecca pilgrimage 1977



Mohamed Amin Visit To Ethiopia Emperor Haile Selasies Place





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Video: Mo Dream is Alive

# Biography

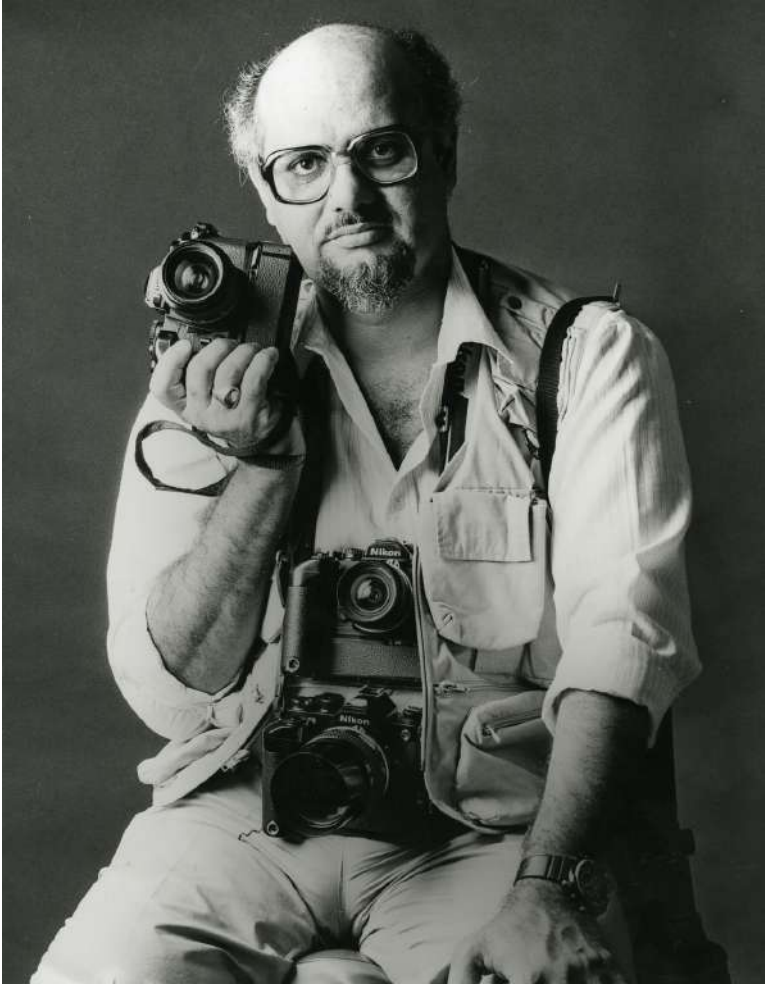
Born in Nairobi, Kenya on 28 August, 1943, the second son of a poor railway worker, Mohamed Amin ("Mo") was soon faced with racism, an inevitable product of colonialism. He never forgot those underdog years and fought against prejudice the rest of his life.

From the time he acquired his first camera, a second-hand Box Brownie, Mo's future was determined. Quickly he learned photographic and darkroom skills and was already applying them to commercial use when he went to secondary school in the then Tanganyika. Before he was 20 he was a recognized force as a freelancer in Dar es Salaam and his work appeared in all the Fleet Street national newspapers.

In a career spanning more that 30 years, 'Mo' was our eyes on the frontline in every situation and his honest unwavering approach to photojournalism earned him the unconditional respect of both friends and enemies alike. Mo covered every major event in Africa and beyond, braving 28 days of torture, surviving bombs and bullets, even the loss of his left arm in an ammunition dump explosion, to emerge as the most decorated news cameraman of all time.

Mo's remarkable life was cut tragically short in November 1996 when hijackers took over an Ethiopian airliner forcing it to crash land in the Indian Ocean killing 123 passengers and crew. Mo died on his feet still negotiating with the terrorists.

By any standards, Mo's life was truly extraordinary; action-packed, full of pain and passion and inseparable from the troubled chronicle of emergent Africa.



Mohamed Amin

# Acknowledgments

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We are especially grateful for the opportunity to interview Salim Amin and to have been given access to his father's archive.  
<https://www.camerapixtv.com/>



Mecca pilgrimage in 1977

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