

## Chapter 5

### Documenting war, visualising peace: towards peace photography

*Stuart Allan*

Engaging with peace journalism encourages one to pose awkward questions about familiar assumptions, to look afresh at reportorial conventions with enhanced self-reflexivity. This is as important for photojournalism as it is for other types of journalism, especially where its capacity to record distressing truths is concerned. For the photojournalist confronted with the challenge of bearing witness to violent conflict on our behalf, the effort to document its human consequences raises issues of perspective, judgment and interpretation. ‘Photographers are many things – historians, dramatists, artists – and humanitarians’, the photojournalist James Nachtwey recently observed. ‘As journalists, one of their tasks is to reveal the unjust and the unacceptable, so that their images become an element in the process of change’. In this way, he added, photography ‘gives a voice to the voiceless. It’s a call to action’ (2009, pp4–5).

Such a view renders problematic the longstanding principle that photojournalists must strive to be scrupulously impartial, an obligation to dispassionate relay recurrently expressed in the language of professionalism. At a time when the proliferation of digital technologies is helping to rewrite the relationship between professionals and their ‘amateur’ or ‘citizen’ counterparts, this priority acquires even greater salience. Still, one need not subscribe to a romanticised conception of the origins of photojournalism to appreciate that a pronounced reportorial ethic informed the ethos shared by many of its founding practitioners. To the extent that it is possible to discern the guiding tenets giving

shape to photojournalism as a reportorial craft, it is striking to note how often a language of social – and moral – responsibility resonates within accounts from the outset (see Allan 2011). ‘The earliest photojournalists [from the late 19th century] expected images of injustice to push viewers into action,’ Susie Linfield observes; ‘photographs were regarded not as expressions of alienation but as interventions in the world’ (2010, p59). From the vantage point of today, however, such ideals risk appearing naïve, even dangerous. As Linfield elaborates:

To turn from the image and put right the world: this is the photographic ideal that still lives today. But like so many ideals, it has been chastened by experience. Now we know that pictures of affliction can be easily ignored – or, even worse, enjoyed. Now we know that photographs of suffering can be the start of human connection – and the endpoint to deadly fantasies of revenge. Now we know the fatal gaps that exist between seeing, caring, understanding, and acting. (2010, p60)

Important questions thus arise regarding ‘our camera-mediated knowledge of war,’ to use Susan Sontag’s phrase, which bring the exercise of communicative power to the fore. ‘Look, the photographs say, *this* is what it’s like. This is what war *does*. And *that*, that is what it does, too,’ she writes. ‘War tears, rends. War rips open, eviscerates. War scorches. War dismembers. War *ruins*’ (2003, p7). Such imagery, it follows, invites a shared stance or point of view with the photographer, regardless of its implicit claim of being a ‘record of the real’ faithful to journalistic impartiality. The ways in which a photograph of an atrocity privileges a moment, effectively making ‘real’ events which ‘we’ might otherwise choose to ignore, is as much a question of framing (including but also, by definition, excluding) as it is of objectification. Such photographs ‘give rise to opposing responses,’ Sontag points out; ‘A call for peace. A cry for revenge. Or simply the bemused awareness, continually restocked by photographic information, that terrible things happen’ (2003, pp11–12). In each instance, photography makes possible the means to apprehend – at a distance – other people’s pain, with all of the moral implications such a form of spectatorship engenders.

Accordingly, this chapter signals its intention to contribute to this book's strategic agenda by exploring the significance of photographic images in reportorial terms. Realising this objective is not as straightforward as it may sound. When considering journalistic narratives of violence, it is worth noting the extent to which corresponding forms of news imagery have recurrently eluded sustained scrutiny. Here we recall Rune Ottosen's suggestion that 'in promoting a peace journalism strategy, more emphasis should be placed on visual elements' (2007, p2). He points to the ways in which internet-based digital technology 'offers new methods for mobilising sympathy for human suffering through visual documentation', thereby better enabling peace journalism to 'focus on the "true face" of war when the media fail to do so' (2007, p14). Similarly Frank Möller (2008) contends that peace studies 'have as yet been quite unaware of visual culture', not least with regard to how 'pictorial memory' – by which he means 'the huge reservoir of images that every person carries with them' – shapes our interpretation of incoming visual information. Previous exposure to images influences perceptions of new occurrences, yet he observes that the importance of photography in this regard has been largely ignored by peace researchers. Barbie Zelizer makes the further point that scholars have failed to fully grasp the ways in which photographs articulate a 'subjunctive voice' in the visual representation of death. 'Viewing death has long been associated with voyeuristic spectacles of suffering', she points out, 'where looking at those dead or about to die constitutes a public duty, often of an involuntary nature [...] and with an invitation to either empathise or dissociate' (2010, p25). Delving more deeply into this process of meaning-making, she suggests, promises to help reveal the extent to which opportunities for emotional engagement find expression in representational terms (see also Guerin & Hallas 2007).

At stake, then, is the need to reconsider war photography anew. This chapter, in seeking to disrupt the ideological purchase of its accustomed norms, values and priorities, aims to secure the conceptual space necessary to explore its capacity to visualise peace. Several examples will be scrutinised over the course of this discussion with a view to distinguishing the reportorial tensions negotiated by the photographer striving to

bear witness. On this basis, it shall be argued that a photojournalism committed to peace raises pressing concerns about the re-mediation of discursive power, a process that will be shown to be uneven, contingent and frequently the site of resistance from those whose interests are called into question.

### ‘Your photos pose a threat to us’

Typically working under intense pressure, photojournalists in today’s conflict zones are recurrently forced to negotiate a range of formidable challenges. Longstanding professional ideals are certain to prove conditional upon the ad hoc negotiation of conflicting demands, not least where the perceived benefits of rolling deadlines, processing speed and heightened immediacy effectively streamline decision-making processes (see also Matheson & Allan 2009). Photojournalists ‘embedded’ with US or British troops in Iraq, for example, have evidently welcomed the mobility afforded by portable digital technologies (the capacity to relay images while travelling, for example, being a critical consideration when personal safety is threatened), yet recognise that the sheer range and volume of such images risks denying them sufficient explanatory context. Moreover, what the ‘embed’ gains by way of access to the war zone is countered, in turn, by a corresponding loss of journalistic independence, not least when photographs are perceived to have contravened the tacit rules of sanitisation enforced by military minders. Even the ‘unilateral’ photographer working without the benefits of military access or protection is likely to test the limits of what are relative freedoms at risk of censure on the basis of their images’ possible impact on public support for the war.

A case in point is the experience of freelance photographer Zoriah Miller, who found himself barred from covering the US Marines in Iraq after he posted photos on the internet of three soldiers killed by a suicide bomber (having first waited for their families to be notified). ‘It is absolutely censorship’, he stated at the time. ‘I took pictures of something they didn’t like, and they removed me. Deciding what I can and cannot document, I don’t see a clearer definition of censorship’ (cited in

Kamber & Arango 2008). In a recent interview, Miller (2010) explained what he seeks to achieve as a photojournalist:

I hope that my photographs make people think a bit about what it is like for others around the world. It is so easy to get caught up in our own lives, we forget that there are so many people struggling in some really terrible situations. I want to make photographs that hit people on an emotional level, punch them in their gut and make them feel something. If people can connect to those I photograph then they can empathise with them. This kind of understanding is the first step in changing the situations that affect these people.

In the long term I would hope to leave behind historical documents, photographs documenting lives, situations and struggles that may otherwise have vanished and been forgotten. I hope that at some point there will be fewer conflicts in this world, and if this happens I want my photos to remind people of the horrible things people go through in war.

Finally, I want my work to be art. I want to leave something behind that will inspire people to not only be creative but to also be kind to their fellow human beings, even the ones who live thousands of miles away that they may never meet.

Crucial here, his comments suggest, is the necessity for photojournalists to be compassionate, to see in their work the potential to forge connections between distant publics that encourages empathy and understanding in the face of indifference. Photography may be a modest 'first step' in this direction, but the value of its documentary evidence is such that the individual photojournalist must recognise the moral responsibility at the heart of their craft. 'It is just about being human,' Miller adds; 'it is not hard, just something that some people forget to do at times.'

For photojournalists striving to extend this commitment to moral responsibility, tensions may arise with their sense of professionalism; that is, their personal adherence to the ideals of dispassionate, impartial reportage. Such tensions, under certain circumstances, may invite

insidious forms of self-censorship in accordance with wider discourses of 'the national interest', 'patriotism', or 'support for our troops'. Compounding matters is the extent to which major news organisations are withdrawing their photojournalists from the field altogether, typically citing safety as the principal concern. There is little doubt that documenting events is often extraordinarily dangerous, which is why local Iraqis are being increasingly relied upon at the frontlines, many of whom are routinely risking their lives to document the human devastation left in the wake of military attacks. Several have been killed, while others have endured arbitrary arrest and imprisonment by US and Iraqi military authorities. The experience of Bilal Hussein is telling. Born in the Al-Anbar Province, he worked in several jobs over the years before he became involved with the Associated Press (AP), initially as a guide for its journalists and helper with interviews in Fallujah. A keen amateur photographer, he received training and equipment from AP's Baghdad bureau – initially being paid \$50 a photograph on a trial basis as a local stringer – before being sent to Ramadi to work as a contract photographer (see also Arango 2007; Lang 2007b; Layton 2007). Carrying out a range of assignments, he sharpened his new craft, taking a number of impressive photographs, not least one of insurgent fighters in Fallujah in November 2004 included in an AP collection awarded a Pulitzer Prize the following year.

On 12 April 2006, Hussein's life was dramatically altered when he was held – without formal charge – for 'imperative reasons of security', with no opportunity to hear the evidence against him. He was subjected to intense interrogation, which included spells of solitary confinement and being blindfolded for nine days, in a facility in Ramadi, before being transferred to Abu Ghraib and then on to a detention facility at Camp Cropper. A 46-page report later prepared by Hussein's attorney alleges that US military interrogators initially sought to recruit the photographer as an informant working within AP, which he refused because of his ethical and professional commitments. The report went on to state:

USM interrogators have focused, in particular, on several photographs taken shortly before his arrest showing Iraqi children playing with

[a] torn-off leg of an injured US or Iraqi soldier. One interrogator said to Hussein: 'Do you know what would happen if these photos were show[n] in the US? There would be huge demonstrations and we would have to leave Iraq. This is why you won't be released. Your photos pose a threat to us.' (cited in Lang 2007a)

AP worked quietly behind the scenes to secure his release, but, after more than five months without success, went public. 'We want the rule of law to prevail', Tom Curley, AP's president and chief executive officer stated in September of that year. 'He either needs to be charged or released. Indefinite detention is not acceptable. We've come to the conclusion that this is unacceptable under Iraqi law, or Geneva Conventions, or any military procedure' (cited in AP 2006). In a letter to *The New York Times*, Curley (2006) pointed out that no evidence had been provided by the military to support their claim – no formal charges having been filed – that Bilal had improper ties to insurgents, which left him incapable of mounting a defence. 'All we are asking is that Bilal have appropriate access to justice: charge him or let him go', Curley wrote. 'Likewise, due process should apply to the thousands of others [estimated by AP to be as many as 14 000 people] being held in the United States military vacuum.'

Pentagon insistence that Bilal Hussein was a 'terrorist media operative' who infiltrated AP was based on 'convincing and irrefutable evidence' that officials refused to disclose. Calls for his release, including from organisations such as the Committee to Protect Journalists, were ignored. As time wore on, several AP editors became increasingly convinced that Bilal's arrest was in retaliation for photographs he had taken. The company's Chief Executive Officer, Tom Curley (2007) stated in an interview with Salon.com:

Bilal Hussein was operating in Anbar Province. Anbar was a black hole in the coverage of Iraq. For most of the war, there have been virtually no journalists there or very few journalists, so getting any information from Anbar was difficult. These pictures came at a time when the U.S. was trying to say that things were OK, and we know now that they were deteriorating.

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He continued, explaining that every single photograph taken by Hussein, including outtakes, had been examined by AP with a view to determining whether he may have somehow known about events before they took place.

His images are very much what you'd expect from other parts of the country. It's all the aftermath of violence – not just US on Iraq violence, but Iraq on Iraq violence, foreign fighters on Iraq violence, shattered buildings, grieving families, burned out car shells. When there's damage to vehicles, it's obvious [from Hussein's photo] that has long since occurred. If there was an attack on a military convoy, they would lock it down, and by the time Bilal was able to take pictures, there would be children playing in the background.

Besides Hussein's own fate, he pointed out, the integrity of news reporting was at stake:

Of course it's not just about one man. It's about our ability to operate as journalists in a war zone. It is the most important conflict on the planet today. This is about any journalist's ability to do their jobs without fear of open-ended imprisonment without charges. This is not treatment that would happen in the United States. (Carroll 2007)

This latter point was further underscored by one of the lawyers working on the case for AP. 'I am absolutely convinced', Scott Horton stated:

that the ton of bricks fell on these two guys – Bilal Hussein and Abdul Ameer Hussein [CBS cameraman arrested and imprisoned in Abu Ghraib for one year before being acquitted by an Iraqi court] – because they were working as professional journalists. They were the eyes of the world, covering things that the Pentagon doesn't want people in America to see. (cited in Herbert 2006)

Intense pressure to avoid using this type of imagery has also been brought to bear on news organisations by a number of staunchly conservative, pro-war bloggers in the US. Several condemned Bilal Hussein and other photographers for producing propaganda for the



insurgency, engaging in what Eric Boehlert (2008) aptly described as ‘mob rule-style pseudo-journalism’ to advance their accusations. Blogger Michelle Malkin was arguably Hussein’s fiercest critic, but other warbloggers weighing in included ‘The Belmont Club’, ‘Captain’s Quarters’, ‘Federal Way Conservative’, ‘Flopping Aces’, ‘Infidels are Cool’, ‘Jawa Report’, ‘Little Green Footballs’, ‘PowerLine’, and ‘Wizbang’, amongst others. Charles Layton (2007), writing about the controversy in the *American Journalism Review*, pointed out that the ‘first word of Bilal Hussein’s arrest seems to have come from the blog of Michelle Malkin, Hussein’s long-time critic’, which cited an anonymous military source maintaining that he had been ‘captured’ by US forces in a building in Ramadi ‘with a cache of weapons.’ The perception lingered that the military had fed the story to Malkin because of her past histrionic criticism of Hussein’s imagery, which appeared consistent with a broader strategy articulated by the Pentagon and the Bush administration. Layton points to a radio address made by Bush in October of 2006, when the then president stated:

[...] the terrorists are trying to influence public opinion here in the United States. They have a sophisticated propaganda strategy. They know they cannot defeat us in the battle, so they conduct high-profile attacks, hoping that the images of violence will demoralize our country and force us to retreat. They carry video cameras and film their atrocities, and broadcast them on the Internet. They e-mail images and video clips to Middle Eastern cable networks like Al-Jazeera, and instruct their followers to send the same material to American journalists, authors, and opinion leaders. They operate websites, where they post messages for their followers and readers across the world. (Bush 2006)

In this way, ‘images of violence’ documenting the atrocities ‘they’ commit become a strategic priority because of their perceived propaganda value to broader media campaigns to undermine popular support for the war. Photojournalism risks being regarded as serving the enemy’s interests, by this logic, effectively complicit in extending the aims of those – in Bush’s words – ‘trying to divide America and break

our will'. For Hussein, this meant two years of imprisonment before the accusations (formal charges were never filed) against him were finally dismissed in April 2008. 'I think the case is more than Bilal Hussein', his lawyer said at the time of his release. 'He was part of a much larger issue, which is who is going to control the flow of information from the battlefield. ... I think he was someone who got caught up in the debate, and it will be a continuing debate and struggle between the media and the military' (cited in Lang 2008).

Further instances where Iraqi photojournalists endeavouring to provide firsthand reportage in a war zone have found themselves detained by US forces continue to be revealed by major news organisations. This form of intimidation is one strand of a broader effort to control disturbing imagery which has met with considerable success from a military vantage point. As Michael Kamber and Tim Arango (2008) of *The New York Times* observe, while 'the conflict in Vietnam was notable for open access given to journalists – too much, many critics said, as the war played out nightly in bloody newscasts – the Iraq war may mark an opposite extreme.' Five years into the war, and after more than 4000 US combat deaths, the searches and interviews they conducted 'turned up fewer than a half-dozen graphic photographs of dead American soldiers'. The newspaper's public editor, Clark Hoyt, referred to Kamber and Arango's findings in a column addressing the 'longstanding tension between journalists who feel a duty to report war in all its aspects and a military determined to protect its own'. Hoyt pointed out that commanders in the field will employ a range of tactics to try to prevent photographs of the dead and injured from being published, a problem compounded by the dwindling number of Western photographers deployed in the first place – evidently, the newspaper had only two in Iraq at the time. Bill Keller, the executive editor, is quoted in the column to underscore Hoyt's contention that a newspaper has an obligation to report all aspects of war, including death, even though it may be painful. 'Death and carnage are not the whole story of war – there is also heroism and frustration, success and setback, camaraderie and, on occasion, atrocity – but death and carnage are part of the story', Keller maintains, 'and to launder them out of our account of the war would be a disservice' (cited in Hoyt 2008).

This insight into journalistic reasoning usefully highlights aspects of decision-making processes concerning the handling of such imagery that seldom come to the fore for discussion. One exception to this general rule occurred in September the following year, however, when a news photograph depicting a US Marine mortally wounded in combat in Dahaneh, southern Afghanistan, sparked a controversy that proved sufficiently newsworthy to garner coverage in its own right. The image in question was taken by AP photographer Julie Jacobson, who later described the moment in her personal journal. ‘For the second time in my life, I watched a Marine lose his. He was hit with the RPG [rocket-propelled grenade] which blew off one of his legs and badly mangled the other’, she wrote. ‘I hadn’t seen it happen, just heard the explosion. I hit the ground and lay as flat as I could and shot what I could of the scene’ (cited in de Montesquiou & Jacobson 2009). Lance Corporal Joshua ‘Bernie’ Bernard, 21 years old, is shown lying on the ground, his fellow Marines tending to him before he was transported to a helicopter that would take him to a field hospital where he died on the operating table. When informed that he had passed away, Jacobson reflected: ‘To ignore a moment like that simply ... would have been wrong. I was recording his impending death, just as I had recorded his life moments before walking the point in the bazaar’, she said. ‘Death is a part of life and most certainly a part of war. Isn’t that why we’re here? To document for now and for history the events of this war?’ (cited in AP 2009). In her journal, she mentions that Bernard’s comrades asked to see the photos on her laptop computer she had taken of the ‘Taliban ambush’ that day. ‘They did stop when they came to that moment. But none of them complained or grew angry about it’, she recalled. ‘They understood that it was what it was. They understand, despite that he was their friend, it was the reality of things’ (cited in de Montesquiou & Jacobson 2009).

The ‘reality of things’ looked very different from Defense Secretary Robert Gates’ perspective. Alerted about AP’s intention to distribute the photograph as part of a larger package of related material, he made a personal plea to AP President and CEO Tom Curley to withhold pub-

lication.<sup>1</sup> Insisting it was a matter of ‘judgment and common decency’, he contended that its release would mark an ‘unconscionable departure’ from the restraint most journalists had exercised since September 11, 2001. Bernard’s parents, who had been shown the photographs beforehand by an AP reporter as a courtesy (permission for their use was not requested), also demanded that the news agency reconsider a decision they believed would be disrespectful to their son’s memory. Whilst mindful of these views, AP remained steadfast. ‘We thought that the image told a story of sacrifice; it told a story of bravery’, John Daniszewski, senior managing editor, explained. ‘We felt that the picture told a story that people needed to see and be aware of’ (cited in Bauder 2009). His colleague, director of photography Santiago Lyon, pointed out that AP had followed the military regulations set down for journalists ‘embedded’ with US forces. Moreover, they had allowed for

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1 In addition to several related photographs (including of Bernard’s memorial service), AP distributed a detailed account of what had transpired, excerpts from Jacobson’s journal and a video she narrated, as well as an article outlining its rationale for publication. Gates’ intervention took place after AP had wired the package to its outlets, but prior to the expiry of its embargo on its use (intended to give news organisations sufficient time to decide whether or not to proceed with it). ‘Why your organization would purposely defy the family’s wishes knowing full well that it will lead to yet more anguish is beyond me’, Gates (2009) wrote. ‘Your lack of compassion and common sense in choosing to put this image of their maimed and stricken child on the front page of multiple newspapers is appalling.’ In actuality, the image at the centre of the controversy was more likely to feature on news websites than in newspapers, and when it did appear in the latter, it was on an inside page. Several newspapers refused publication outright on the grounds of ‘poor taste’, while others objected on patriotic grounds, amongst other reasons. Amongst those that did run the photograph was the *Intelligencer* (Wheeling, West Virginia), which sought to justify its decision – taken ‘after hours of debate’ – in an accompanying editorial: ‘Too often, we fear, some Americans see only the statistics, the casualty counts released by the Department of Defense. We believe it is important for all of us to understand that behind the numbers are real men and women, sometimes making the ultimate sacrifice, for us’ (cited in Bauder 2009). Such decisions were taken in the face of an onslaught of criticism from politicians, including Sarah Palin who condemned the release of the photograph as ‘a despicable and heartless act by the AP’ on her Facebook page. ‘The family said they didn’t want the photo published. AP, you did it anyway, and you know it was an evil thing to do’ (cited in CNN 2009).

a ‘period of reflection’ and waited until after Bernard’s burial, which took place ten days after he died, before releasing the images. ‘We feel it is our journalistic duty to show the reality of the war’ in Afghanistan, he maintained, ‘however unpleasant and brutal that sometimes is’ (cited in AP 2009).

Reactions from members of the public, appearing in ‘letters to the editor’ as well as on various online forums, tended to express strongly held opinions. While it is impossible to generalise, there is little doubt that a key factor prompting such intense discussion was the relative scarcity of such imagery in the first place. This point was underscored by Lyon, who felt that there was a journalistic imperative to show the ‘real effects’ of war otherwise being lost in a ‘very incomplete picture’ that amounts to sanitisation. ‘What it does is show – in a very unequivocal and direct fashion – the real consequences of war’, he argued. ‘So I think it really becomes a very immediate visual record of warfare that, in and of itself, is compelling, and that becomes more compelling because of its rarity’ (cited in Dunlap 2009). For Jacobson, the photographs she took that day were consistent with her conviction that journalists have a ‘social responsibility to record *and* publish’ images of what happens in war, even when they risk upsetting people. In her words:

An image personalises that death and makes people see what it really means to have young men die in combat. It may be shocking to see, and while I’m not trying to force anything down anyone’s throat, I think it is necessary for people to see the good, the bad and the ugly in order to reflect upon ourselves as human beings.

It is necessary to be bothered from time to time. It is too easy to sit at Starbucks far away across the sea and read about the casualty and then move on without much of another thought about it. It’s not as easy to see an image of that casualty and *not* think about it. I never expect to change the world or stop war with one picture, but only hope that I make some people *think* beyond their comfort zones and hope that a few of them will be moved into some kind of action, be it joining a protest, or sending that care package they’ve put off for weeks, or writing that letter they keep meaning to write, or donating money to

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some worthy NGO, or just remembering to say I love you to someone at home. Something. (cited in Dunlap 2009)

And here she proceeds to underline a basic contradiction at work where editorial decisions about the use of such imagery come to bear. Pointing out that war photographers ‘have no restrictions to shoot or publish casualties from opposition forces, or even civilian casualties,’ she asks: ‘Are those people less human than American or other NATO soldiers?’

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Jacobson’s question, together with her call for action (which resonates with Nachtwey’s words quoted at the outset of this chapter), encourage new ways of thinking about what I propose be called ‘peace photography’.<sup>2</sup> Documenting the horrors of warfare is of vital importance, but so is the need for visual alternatives in the name of peace. Every photographic image of suffering, as Susie Linfield observes, is also one of protest: “‘This goes on’, but also, by implication: “‘This must stop”’. Such is the dialectic – and the hope – at the core of such photographs, and yet therein lies a paradox. ‘There is no doubt’, she writes, ‘that photography has, more than any other twentieth-century medium, exposed violence – made violence *visible* – to millions of people all over the globe’. At the same time, however, ‘the history of photography also shows just how limited and inadequate such exposure is: seeing does not necessarily translate into believing, caring, or acting’ (2010, p33). To redress this failure, I would suggest, is to reconsider anew photography’s potential contribution to ongoing efforts to reinvigorate peace journalism.

While photography has long been recognised as a tool to raise awareness, efforts to create spaces for public engagement struggle to claim a purchase in an image-saturated culture. One modest yet effective example is the ‘Frames of war’ exhibition currently touring different

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2 For a more detailed elaboration of ‘peace photography’ as a concept, please see my book, *Conflicting images: photojournalism and war*, (Routledge, in preparation).

countries. Intended by its coordinator, *Nepali Times* editor Kunda Dixit, as a contribution to the reconciliation process underway in Nepal, it has garnered critical acclaim and widespread public interest. The collection of 179 photographs, selected by Dixit and photojournalists Shahidul Alam and Shyam Tekwani from an archive of over 3000 shot by both amateurs and professionals, documents the impact of the war on the Nepali people during and after the ten-year 'People's war' (which ended in 2006 with a death toll close to 15 000 people, the vast majority of whom were civilians). 'Pictures remind us to remember the brutality', Dixit explained in an interview about the exhibition. 'And also what the violence does to those who want no part in it'. Given the 'great care' taken by the news media 'to filter the images of war', he felt the exhibition's inclusion of 'raw' images was necessary to show the 'human cost' of the conflict – and, moreover, the fact that 'peace does not come at the end of war'.

In calling for a paradigm shift in journalism training from war correspondent to peace correspondent, Dixit proceeded to underscore the importance of reconceptualising journalistic priorities. 'Reporters who go to war are almost celebrities. They cover the war as a series of battles, they count the body bags and chronicle the carnage', he observed. 'War correspondents focus on the battle plans, the strategy of the warring sides, and the hardwares of killing'. A peace correspondent, in marked contrast, 'tries to look at the human cost so that the politicians who lead people to war understand the pain they have unleashed, or cover[s] stories that help in the reconciliation process rather than polarising society' (see also Keeble et al. 2010; Lynch 2008, 2010). Photography, it follows, can play a crucial role in this process. The exhibition attracted more than 350 000 visitors during its initial tour in Nepal, many of whom found it an intensely emotional experience as evidenced by comments inscribed in visitor books. 'Because of Nepal's low literacy rate, the picture is the only way to communicate', Dixit added. 'At many exhibition venues we saw young school girls reading aloud the captions of the photographs to their illiterate grandparents'. A follow-up film and book have further extended this initiative, enabling wider audiences to

gain critical insights into the conflict and its aftermath.<sup>3</sup> In this way, then, 'Frames of war' exemplifies an alternative conception of photography, one that strives to create shared communities of interpretation in the hope of furthering mutual understanding.

Building on these insights, a further elaboration of what I am calling 'peace photography' extends this conception to consider the polysemic nature of war imagery. That is to say, the 'meaning' of any one image is subject to a multiplicity of possible readings, with much depending upon the subjective positionalities brought to bear by the viewer in what is a complex process of negotiation. Here we remind ourselves how precariously contingent this process always proves to be, with any invocation of significance at risk of being undermined by alternative interpretations. The oft-rendered assertion that the grisly representation of violence necessarily threatens public support for military intervention, for example, glosses over a range of prospective reactions, such as where revulsion solicits renewed determination in the face of adversity. Similarly, there is no necessary correlation between images of human suffering and compassion, let alone concerted action, in response. In other words, there can be no easy extrapolation of a singular, preferred meaning from visual evidence, and yet this is not to suggest that any potential reading is equally viable either. Rather, I would suggest, it is the subtly inchoate way in which images ostensibly invite certain readings over and above alternative ones that we need to foreground for exploration. Research into peace photography may then attend to the subjunctive, seemingly 'common-sensical' criteria shaping these tacit, unspoken rules of inclusion and exclusion so as to discern the extent to which they reaffirm militarist perspectives.

Of pressing importance, this chapter has suggested, is the need to document the lived realities of human suffering in all of their complexities while, at the same time, engendering opportunities to visualise alternatives. Peace photography constitutes more than anti-

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3 Information about the exhibition, together with the quotations attributed to Kunda Dixit, have been drawn from the following sources: Buddha's Breakfast, 2009; Pacific Media Centre, 2010; Wilson, 2010a, 2010b. See also the video 'Frames of war'. [Online]. Available: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=dMZnFwa6Xys](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dMZnFwa6Xys) [Accessed 12 August 2011].



war photography, because disrupting the logics of familiar binaries ('good' and 'evil', 'victim' and 'oppressor', 'us' and 'them') is only the initial step. As important as such efforts consistently prove to be, a second step is vital in this regard. It is my contention that peace photography calls for nothing less than a profound re-imagining of photographic form, practice and epistemology in order to move beyond the imposition of binaries in the first place. To succeed in challenging the codified strictures of war photography, I believe, it is necessary to recast anew the otherwise implicit assumptions, values and normative proscriptions shaping its priorities and protocols. It is in the creation of a new visual grammar resistant to the pull of binaries that the diverse array of ethical choices at the heart of photojournalism will be thrown into sharp relief. Searching questions then may be raised regarding how best photography may contribute to the re-articulation of visions of the world in the service of human rights and social justice.

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