An Understanding of War Photography

By Antonisia Schroder
Introducing war photography

- Origins in mid-19th century (Crimea - Russia)
- Even early photographers were accused of ‘staging’ shots (Roger Fenton – above)

**Another example**
- This was shown more recently in 2004 when the Daily Mirror had to apologise for printing faked torture pictures
The American Civil War

- The American Civil War, 1861-65, was one of the first conflicts to be photographed from beginning to end.
- One of the most famous Civil War photographers was Alexander Gardner.
- He took some of the most well-known shots of President Abraham Lincoln, including being the only photographer allowed into see the people who killed him receiving the death penalty themselves.

Abraham Lincoln, Allan Pinkerton and John Alexander McClellan, Alexander Gardner, Picture source: art.com
The genius of Robert Capa

- Capa is generally seen as the godfather of war photographers and what they all aspire towards.
- “If your photographs are not good enough, you are not close enough.”
- Perhaps not surprisingly, he was killed in action when he stepped on a land mine in the Far East.
Documenting history

• Some pictures become what that war is remembered for – such as this famous shot
• The picture was turned into a sculpture at the US Marines War Memorial and commemorated through a series of postage stamps
• Rick Findler: “...you have a front row seat to the world’s history happening in front of your eyes.”
Why is it important?

• Sometimes pictures have to be taken to remind humanity of the evil that has been committed

• Margaret Bourke-White and others (such as Lee Miller) were deeply affected by what they saw in the Nazi concentration camps

• Margaret Bourke-White: “Using a camera was almost a relief. It interposed a slight barrier between myself and the horror in front of me.”
The beginnings of female war photographers

- Elizabeth ‘Lee’ Miller is pictured here by David Scherman in Hitler’s bathtub shortly after the end of the war and Hitler’s suicide.
- Miller was one of a new breed of female conflict photographers.
- Miller, Dickey Chapelle and Margaret Bourke-White were all well respected photographers during World War II.

Lee Miller in Hitler’s Bathtub, David Scherman, Picture source: Time
Remembering the ‘home front’ too

- An important part of documenting war is the impact it has on the citizens of involved countries (ie. UK, USA in World War II)
- This is another iconic shot taken on the day the war was won, in New York City
- It is shots like this which show the emotions like relief, joy and delight which greeted the news of the end of World War II

VJ Day Kiss, Alfred Eisenstaedt, Picture source: theweek.co.uk
Showing war ‘up close and personal’

- Catherine Leroy was one of those photographers who went to war accompanying a group of soldiers
- She got to know the soldiers and, like Capa, wanted to get as close as possible to the action
- This shot shows the moment that soldier Vernon Wike realises his friend has died – again, the human touch.
How photos can change public opinion

- This picture and the one on the next slide played a major part in turning public opinion against the war in Vietnam
- Nick Ut, the photographer, immediately put away his camera after this picture and took the girl to hospital
- He and the girl, Kim Phuc, have remained strong friends ever since. She now lives in Canada
How photos can change public opinion

- This is another image which had a massive impact. It won Eddie Adams, the photographer, a number of big awards.
- The picture showed the brutality of war to the public.
- Adams has often said since that he regretted the impact it had on the General’s life (the shooter).
Heading towards modern day war

- This was an experienced war photographer who has worked all over the world
- He was a central photographer during the fighting in the Balkans
- He was able to gain the trust of ‘Arkan’ (a military leader, in the photo) and as a result got some of the strongest pictures (like this) of that war.
The further development of female photographers

• In recent conflicts, female photographers have been able to use their gender to their advantage
• This has resulted in series like those by Andrea Bruce, which has shown the widows of Iraq, and also prostitutes in Baghdad – series which would have been difficult to get for a man
• Bruce is also based in the Middle East – important to get to know the area and people you are photographing.
Female v male war photographers – advantages and disadvantages

Advantages

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<tr>
<th>Male war photographers</th>
<th>Female war photographers</th>
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<td>• Physical strength</td>
<td>• Ability to deal with sensitive issues</td>
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<td>• Stamina</td>
<td>• May have a greater affinity/empathy with victims of female issues like female genital</td>
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<td>• May be more able to gain trust of key ‘fixers’ and drivers in male-dominated</td>
<td>mutilation and child marriage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle Eastern society</td>
<td>• May be less likely to suffer violence if kidnapped or ambushed</td>
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<tr>
<td>• May be able to more quickly gain the trust of male-dominated platoons of soldiers</td>
<td>• May be less likely to be killed if targeted by militants</td>
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<td>if embedded</td>
<td>• May more easily gain the trust of children or women who are in crisis situations.</td>
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<td>• May find it easier to get stories from male ‘society leaders’ in male-dominated</td>
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<td>countries.</td>
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Female v male war photographers – advantages and disadvantages

Disadvantages

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<th>Male war photographers</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Could be more likely to suffer violence or death if kidnapped by militants/terrorist groups</td>
<td>• Less physical strength and stamina than men</td>
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<td>• Could find it difficult to gain the trust of women or children in crisis situations</td>
<td>• May struggle to find key contacts in male-dominated Middle Eastern society</td>
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<td>• Will not have as great an understanding as a woman of issues like female genital mutilation and child marriage and may find it difficult to gain trust of victims</td>
<td>• May suffer sexism if embedded with mainly male platoons of soldiers, which could impact on her ability to get the pictures she needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>• May struggle to find good ‘human’ and ‘family’ stories to tell unless he can find very good ‘fixers’.</td>
<td>• May struggle to gain the trust of ‘society leaders’ in male-dominated countries</td>
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<td>• May be more affected by emotional impact of kidnap or assault.</td>
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The dangers for war photographers

- Many war photographers have died for their love of photography
- Camille Lepage was only 26 when she was murdered earlier this year
- She had been passionate about the importance of telling the world what is happening in some less well known war zones – like the CAR (Central African Republic.)
How war has changed

• War is now very different to 70 years ago
• Much more about new ways of fighting than traditional war
• Innocent people instead of trained soldiers are being used by terrorist groups to achieve their goals.

The Beheading of David Haines, Unknown (Islamic State), Picture source: bbc.co.uk
Thank you! Any Questions?