

Effective and Safe Conflict Reporting: The Photojournalism Perspective

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Abstract

Photograph is an integral part of media reportage, especially for print and online media. This important place of photographs in the media brings to the fore the role of photojournalist in providing photographic coverage of news events, irrespective of the nature of the event. Photojournalist, whether affiliated with a media organization or operates as a freelancer are sometimes expected to provide coverage or reports on conflict situation. This paper examines the photojournalism perspective of conflict reporting. The paper has the following objectives: to identify effective and safe conflict reporting by photojournalists and how to get the right pictures in reporting violent conflict. The paper through reviewed works found that for effective and safe conflict reporting, photojournalists should, among other things get the necessary equipment and kits; get necessary training and retraining; get important situation report from other journalists in the field; weigh up the risk and decide if the story is worth it; If your telephoto can get the relevant pictures, there is no point going too close to a violent scene. To get the right pictures a photojournalist must look for memorable, unique/historic scenes and stay focused to capture emotion.

Keywords: Photojournalism, photojournalist, violent conflict, reporting, media

Introduction

Imagine reading a newspaper/magazine or online news that is void of images or pictures. The media are incomplete without a touch of Photos. The use of relevant images has become an integral part of media reporting. This genre of media reportage is usually the responsibility of photojournalists who snap compelling photos to accompany and summarizes news stories.

According to Wanke (2014) the act of using photos to support news report, makes newspaper/magazine reading and news watching on television more effective

and enable audience relate the report to real-life situation and understand what it must be like to be in the actual place and time. Interestingly reporting with the aid of photos cuts across all journalism genres and reporting (sports and games, features, documentary, war and conflict etc.).

Conflict reporting is an area that has a historical relevance or significance to photojournalism. Photojournalists were documenting news as early as 1850s while engravings were used to print photos. However, the Crimean War or 1853 pioneered the emergence of early photojournalism when Carol Szathmari and Roger Fenton took pictures of British Soldiers in the field (Laurel Marysa and Margareth, 2009; Keith and Presdee, 2010). This is to say coverage of conflict is synonymous to photojournalism.

Conflict reporting, which has long been a challenging and most times dangerous ventures, has in recent times become unavoidable because of the frequent eruption of conflict worldwide. Hence, media organization strives to ensure that they provide updates in both text and images on happenings in areas engulfed by conflict. The growing demand for photos to enhance, corroborate and showcase reality in news report has placed a lot of demand on professionalism in respect of providing relevant and effective photos for the heterogeneous media audience.

Reporting conflict is not as simple as reporting on other day-to-day happenings. Its multi-dimensional nature requires multi-dimensional approach to reporting. According to Tahir (2009) it is not sufficient to just report a violent incident, as conflicts keep on brewing even when the parties involved are not resorting to hostilities against each other. Conflict gone violent, often leaves a trail of destruction, human and social catastrophic ordeals for victims thus changing perceptions of conflicting parties about each other. This multidimensionality of conflict compels photojournalists and other journalists to search for information beyond what has been made available to media by conflicting parties and beyond the bare facts.

Photojournalists covering conflict have to fulfil expectations from societies, from victims and perpetrators, from political and economic, from the media and from themselves. A photojournalist and other journalist are saddled with the responsibility to critically inform his or her immediate societies and the rest of the world about the situation in conflict zones. Conflict reporting is not convenient reporting. Photos must not only represent conflict, but must represent it in the most objective way (Below, 2010)

There are several reports, such as Gara (2014); Addario (2014); Picone (2015), on photojournalists exposed to dangers and sometimes killed in covering conflict. Seymour (2016 para.1) notes that “the camera is not a shield” photojournalists “put their lives on the frontline as well as their cameras to show the truth of life in conflict zones – and in the age of Isis, they are targets themselves”. For example, in 2011, The death of two photojournalist; covering the conflict in Libya was widely reported my news media globally. CNN (2011.para 2) reported that “Oscar nominee Tim Hetherington and acclaimed photojournalist Chris Hondros died Wednesday while chronicling the gritty violence in the war-torn city of Misrata in Libya”. This is a reoccurring issue,

especially in conflict zone around the world. Besides reported deaths, there are other challenges a photojournalist is exposed to in reporting conflict through the lens. There are injuries, arrest and mob actions. And kidnapping. Addario notes (2014 para 19) that “kidnappings are now rampant, making coverage nearly impossible for even the most experienced and intrepid war correspondents”

Journalist, especially those reporting for international media organization are often taken hostage and huge ransoms are demanded. Addario (2014 para 22) points out that “In so many countries, Western journalists are viewed simply as dollar signs. We're ransom objects”. In all of these the expectation is that effective coverage is necessary.

Considering slew of conflict resulting in catastrophic violence globally, including the Israel-Gaza reoccurring violence, the ongoing conflict in Syria, Somalia, the popular Boko Haram conflict affecting Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger, the reoccurring xenophobic attacks in South Africa etc all present the growing need for photographic coverage and makes it imperative to look at effective ways to report and stay safe as a photojournalist. According to Ambrose (2018 para 5) . “Nowadays photojournalism has taken a step by training photographers via a risk-focused program that helps them evaluate risks before they enter a danger zone”. Therefore, this paper examines conflict reporting from a photojournalism perspective. The paper has the following objectives to identify effective and safe conflict reporting by photojournalists and how to get the right pictures in reporting violent conflict.

Literature Review

Photojournalism

Photojournalism is an arm of journalism practice that communicates news primarily through pictures. Photojournalists collect, process and present news material for publication or broadcast through the use of photographs with a supplementary written copy. The news images are usually supported by text known as captions or outline that describes the photo.

Today's photojournalists do not only need the ability to tell a story in an image, they are also responsible for editing and processing them for publication and ensuring that they have portrayed their subject matter ethically (Cifuentes, 2014).

The use of pictures as news materials are guided by the elements of news gathering which distinguishes photojournalism from ordinary photography. These elements include:

- Prominence : The images involve a known personality or event
- Oddity: The images center on something usual, shocking, strange
- Objectivity: the situation implied by the images is a fair and accurate representation of the events they depict in both content and tone.
- Timeliness: the images have meaning in the context of a recently published record of events.

- Narrative/Relevance: the images combine with other news elements to make facts relatable to the viewer or reader within a societal context.
- Proximity: The images are nearby, local or depending on the context of the news
- Human interest/Consequence: the images touch an emotion and affects many people
- Conflict: The images involve scandals, arguments, disagreements, armed struggles etc.

A photojournalist applies some or a combination of these elements to gather news photographs for delivery to the audience. Like any other journalist, a photojournalist is a reporter, but often make decisions instantly and carry photographic equipment, especially the camera, while exposed to significant obstacles (physical danger, weather, crowds).

The importance of these photographic reports is necessary because Photos usually:

- Enhance news stories
- Summarize what has been written in news stories through images
- Uphold a level of public trust and convey truth through images
- Create visual appeal (photos are visual magnets. Photos draw the audience into a page or a story. It serves as an entry point)
- Evoke public emotion
- Record events and
- Entertain the audience.

Photojournalism: Reporting Conflict from the Camera Lens

Reporting conflict, especially violent conflict requires a lot of planning to be able to capture and present standard and relevant news photos. Cable News Network's (CNN) live reporting of 1991 Gulf War and Nick Ut's still shot of the immediate aftermath of Napalm in Vietnam respectively are some photojournalism efforts that have been credited with armed conflict accessible to civilians (McGill, 2012). A photojournalist has a role to play in a conflict zone. The need to capture moment to visual is increasingly necessary so as to bear witness, to make the invisible visible, the unheard heard and to create a visual history. However, this responsibility comes with enormous responsibility that often expose photojournalist to dangers. Picone (2015 para 11) notes that "Apart from the inbuilt danger of working in a war zone, photographing war is a philosophical, emotional, ethical and moral minefield (pun intended). On many occasions, I have found myself questioning what I was documenting. But the decision about whether or not to press the shutter has to be made in a micro-second and is fraught with responsibility". According to Seymour (2016. Para 14)

Conflict photography has never been more dangerous. Since 1992, 1,197 journalists have been violently killed trying to do their job. In 2015, that figure stood at 109. As major news publications close down their

foreign bureaus, they rely more and more on independent photographers working without the backing of a large organisation and on a shoestring budget. And, as we saw with the death of the British journalist Marie Colvin in Syria, journalists are now targeted as enemy combatants.

Reporting armed conflict is always a challenge. It requires impartiality, sensitivity and care that parties involved do not learn of deaths or injuries from news reports, plus the close monitoring of images and a lot of care as to how the photojournalist survives while in the field (Kuwayama, 2009). It's hugely risky for photojournalist these days. Addario (2014) notes that the Committee to Protect Journalists reported that 70 journalists were killed as a direct reprisal for covering conflict in 2013, of which nearly a quarter were photojournalist.

Being photojournalist covering violent conflict, at the moment seems more dangerous than ever. The feeling, according to Addario (2014) is such that The more they cover the events, the more they feel their odds of surviving are wearing out. The growing risk is enormous. Addario (2014 para. 23 and 13) notes that

The reality is that photographers and war correspondents working under repressive regimes are more at risk now than ever. Everyone seems to want to shoot the messenger, and the notion that journalists should be respected as neutral observers documenting the reality on the ground no longer exists. From Pakistan to Colombia to Russia, journalists are deliberately targeted and, too often now, killed to silence the voice of their pictures and words.

Picone (2015 para 9) notes that his vast experience in covering conflicts in various part of the world: Angola, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Gaza Strip, Israel, Soviet Central Asia and the former Yugoslavia made him understand that coverage of both, or multiple sides of the conflict possible and a photojournalist "in less structured conflicts can cross enemy lines, evading censorship and propaganda. But these wars also pose their own challenges - leaving you open to accusations of spying and making it much easier to 'disappear'".

Nevertheless, these pictures have to be captured and circulated widely. With the increasing technological developments in digital and social media, there has been an enhanced changes in the visibility and reporting of conflict. Images taken by photojournalists around the world, especially conflict flash points have been widely circulated by news outlets and have succeeded in representing conflict with an improved touch of reality. There is hardly any report in a news outlet that does not carry images

to support it. The internet, newspaper and magazine pages are awash with photos of the armed conflict in Syria, insurgency in North East Nigeria, post 2016 USA presidential election street protests; Arab Spring in North Africa in 2010, the xenophobic conflict in South Africa in 2015 and 2017; the armed conflict in South Sudan. There are several of such photographic reportage of conflict. Interestingly, photojournalism, through an ever-changing digital landscape, has enhanced the availability and presentation of the reality of conflict through pictorial representation.

Although the representation of conflict through images might seem simple, at times, the relative freedom in which these images were taken sits in stark contrast to the controlled path of embedded journalism, where the professional journalist works in conjunction with the military. These new players, relationships, and communication methods, have raised a number of surprises and questions (McGill, 2012) The role of citizen photographers and amateur photographers at a spot of a conflict can never be ruled out, the bulk of the task of pictorial news gathering rests largely on the professional photojournalist who has the professional ability to go in and out of news in near impossible situations.

Kocialkowska (2012) pointed out that conflict reporting has always been the most dangerous arm of journalism and has become even more so in the changing political landscape in recent years. According to Woodbridge (2015) the world isn't getting any safer for members of the media. Yet, Difficult and dangerous stories still need to be reported and there will always be journalists drawn to cover conflicts. Woodbridge noted that Conflict novice or first timer that is prepared is acceptable and okay, but unprepared, poorly supported first-time is not acceptable.

Seymour (2016) notes that the series conflicts globally point to an important factor necessary to get the pictures coming from the conflict zones. Photojournalists make serious efforts to keep themselves safe, as they report from conflict zones that, by nature of their sophistication, are getting riskier than ever before. Although many photojournalists are self-employed and the risks are theirs, photojournalists require to be routinely schooled in safe and effective coverage. Training cuts across several areas such as battlefield first aid, as well as hostile environment training (Seymour,2016).

For effective and safe conflict reporting in photojournalism. It is important to note the following:

1. Get the necessary equipment and kits: (Camera and lenses, spare camera batteries, camera memory cards) Getting the right equipment is important. If a photojournalist is covering a protest, what does the photojournalist need to have if he or she is hit with pepper spray or tear gas? Kuwayama (2009) identified the other kits such as notebooks, IDs press, mobile phone and sim cards for phone networks available in the conflict area, Thuraya, power strip universal/multi-port for regional power plugs, adaptors, USB cables, helmets and bullet proof vest, audio recorder, GPS navigator. Getting relevant shots in a violent conflict situation is a high risk job, thus Woodbridge (2015) noted that such jobs require

specialist safety gear, such as body armour, head and eye protection, gas masks among others.

2. Get necessary training and retraining. Training in camera handling is not enough, but other trainings such as hostile environment training, basic language and courtesies of the people of the conflict spot. Woodbridge (2015) noted that training and retraining are necessary, even if a journalist is born and raised in a conflict flashpoint. That “If you've never had, hostile environment training, then you're not as prepared as you should be to work in a hostile environment”. It is vital to learn amongst peers who have some experience. It is also important to get basic first aid or trauma medical skills.
3. Get important situation reports from other journalists in the field before venturing out (Places to go, places to avoid, who to see, where to get a reliable guide, if terrain is unfamiliar, travels information, where to stay, what are your alternatives are available, what kits to carry along, what are the threats and counter measures. If you have been there before, what has changed) The latest information is vital in helping a photojournalist to think about the deployment detail before stepping out. A photojournalist must always complete a risk assessment and talk to local reporters. No matter where he or she is going, whether the photojournalist had been there or not, the people who live and work there know what's going on best and can help assess the current situation (Hylton, 2016).
4. Be mindful and focused: Photojournalism is an embedded form of reporting and requires the photographer to get close both physically and emotionally with people and being human with them.
5. Staying safe in the field: A wounded or dead photojournalist can not report happenings in the field. Hence, physical safety is held paramount. According to Tahir (2009) no news story is good enough to risk death or serious injury. When reporting in violent conflict areas, the photojournalist's priority must always be the safety. Unfortunately the safety of journalists has been greatly threatened (Pugh, 2015).

Kuwayama (2009) noted that safety begins with physical fitness before deployment, it is important to get in shape a photojournalist can to rebuild the basic fitness exercise of running, lifting, swimming, wall climbing, yoga etc. It is vital for photojournalist to get the help of the reliable and trusted kind through team sport or work with other reporters. A loner photojournalist might just end up end up in trouble with no one to call, and his or her story terminates there. A photojournalist would need all the necessary support to stay in violent conflict places and ensure. If possible, it is good to deploy as part of a team. Have someone sitting somewhere safe, who knows your plan, and knows what to do if it fails: A person to oversee your progress, be a point of contact for regular updates, and who will raise the red flag if suddenly those updates stop coming (Kuwayama, 2009; Woodbridge, 2015).

Tahir (2009) noted that conflict reporter must be aware of the safety concerns and must take precautions. Some basics general safety measures which applies to photojournalist reporting conflict are:

- Weigh up the risk and decide if the story is worth it
 - Plan your escape routes in advance in case a conflict gets violent making you a possible target. Planning: Planning, proper response and having the necessary contingency plan are very vital. That will save a photojournalist's life in a risky environment. Always have an exit plan. Know where to retreat to if something goes wrong, where the nearest medical facility is and how you can get there.
 - Never carry a weapon or travel with a journalist carrying a weapon.
 - Be ready to always identify yourself clearly if challenged. Never describe yourself as anything other than a reporter.
 - Ensure you always wear civilian clothes unless accredited as an official war correspondent and required to wear special dress. Never wear military or paramilitary clothing.
 - Be acutely aware of signs that you are moving into a changing situation, possibly another faction's sphere of influence.
 - If working on both sides of the front line, never give information to one side about operations on the other.
 - Don't carry maps with markings that could suggest you might be spying.
 - If caught in a situation where people are threatening, try to stay relaxed and act in a friendly manner.
 - Wear a bracelet or tag indicating your blood group in case you are wounded.
 - Wear shoes that you can run into when covering potentially dangerous situations.
 - If working in a danger zone, check that your employer has you adequately insured.
 - If your telephoto can get the relevant pictures, there is no point going too close to a violent scene.
 - Ethical safety: Research ahead of time and consider your safety, your sources, especially young people and vulnerable individuals.
6. Get reliable tour guides: The widely known as fixers, media consultants, contacts, field producer in journalism parlance. They could be local journalists, locals, medical and aid workers, taxi drivers or who speak and know the terrain and how to get things accomplished. Kuwayama (2009) noted that it's important to accord such guides respect for their knowledge, and the risk they take to make your work possible but "but don't trust them blindly. Some of them are shady".
7. A photojournalist must know his or her motives and the motive of the conflict before venturing out to the field. Jones (2013) pointed out that a photojournalist

could be reporting a conflict because it matters for some reason. For example, it could be for a course one supports, hoping to make money from the images. This motivation is usually the driving force. It is also important to have an idea of the motive of the conflict. Jones further noted that if a photojournalist does not know the objective of the conflict and the controversy that might surround it, the journalist may as well stay at home as the photos would be no better than that of a tourist who has blundered into the event while on holiday.

Getting the Right Photos

The right photo tells the story and bring audience close to reality of the conflict. While pressing the shutter button, the photojournalist should:

1. Shoot as many times as possible. Since everything happens so spontaneously, it is usually very difficult to get the desired pose or exact pose or expression. However, the several shots might just get the exact shot or so desired. Dray (2016) pointed out that a photojournalist should get into position and snap numerous frames, using a continuous shooting mode
2. Focus and capture Emotion: Conflict situation offers a myriads of emotion. People expressing anger, people crying, shouting, in pains etc. A photojournalist should strive to always get the action. The a tele-photo lens is ideal for this as it makes it easy to single out individuals, focusing in on their expressions (Dray, 2016)
3. Show Context: it is important a photojournalist to show context by getting, for example, the crowd, show the destroyed building. Getting such photo requires shooting from an elevated angle, using a telephoto or wide angle lens
4. Capturing detail: A photojournalist must get the needed closeness to the conflict space or spot to get detail. For example, what are the contents of the placards displayed by protesters or demonstrators? Capturing such detail brings reality much closer to the audience. However, Dray (2016) warns that that a photojournalist should be careful, especially where the parties involved would not want their faces captured. A mere presence of a photographer could lead to attacking such person.
5. Capture Conflict: a photojournalist should look for moments when the two sides of the conflicting parties clash. For example, protesters and police clash. These make for interesting photo opportunities, but be careful because one can never tell when he or she becomes a target (Dray, 2016).
6. Look for memorable, unique/historic scenes: in the heat of conflict, there are unique and memorable moment, such as the arrival of a new baby, appointment of a new leader in conflict situation.

Conclusion

A photojournalist reporting conflict, perhaps like other journalists has to be convinced of the essentiality of his or her work. Photojournalists must willingly avail

themselves in some of the most dangerous situations around the world, so as to capture and document truth through the lenses of their cameras and bringing reality to the audience who most times are far away from such happenings. However, as the news has been full of reports about conflict worldwide, such events are grounds for some great photojournalism opportunities if approached in the right ways. Safety is key and effectiveness in carrying out the duties is necessary for every photojournalist.

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