

SHOOTING WAR

AEYLIYA HUSAIN

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF FINE ARTS**

**GRADUATE PROGRAM IN FILM
YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO**

September 2016

© Aeyliya Husain, 2016

ABSTRACT

Shooting War is a 20-minute documentary that portrays the Iraq war through three photographs captured from the point-of-view of photographer Franco Pagetti, as he explores the impact the conflict has had on a country, a region and the world.

When the Americans declared war on Iraq in 2003, Franco Pagetti was on the ground with his camera, ready to document the conflict as he saw it (from 2003 – 2008). He was one of two photographers working for TIME magazine during a war that lasted far longer than predicted, and with devastating global consequences. As a photographer, he understands the power of an image and the impact it can have. Pagetti recalls the Vietnam War as he says: “How many good writers were there, but what do you remember from that war? The picture of the girl burned by napalm.”¹ Images from each major conflict, in the twentieth and twenty-first century, have told stories that reveal a truth about war not told in the headlines. What are the stories from the Iraq War? What truths will they reveal?

By revealing the events surrounding the photographs, the viewer gains a better understanding of what the image is saying. Errol Morris states, “it is interesting how a photograph quickly changes when we learn more about what it depicts, when we provide a context, when we become familiar with an underlying story.”² It is this premise that the film, ‘*Shooting War*’ explores.

¹ Pagetti, Franco, Interview March 2016

² Morris, Errol, *Liar, Liar, Pants on Fire*. New York Times (2007)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the support, guidance and flexibility of my thesis supervisor John Greyson, who helped me jump over every hurdle I encountered while making my thesis film (and there were many).

For the invaluable feedback provided by my other committee member Colleen Wagner, I am grateful for her insight and fresh perspective.

To Kuowei Lee, who tirelessly provided all the information and assistance that any graduate student could ask for.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
LIST OF FIGURES	v
INTRODUCTION	1
Comparison to Previous Work.....	2
Why Photography?.....	3
Thesis Subject.....	4
Franco Pagetti - Background	6
STRUCTURE AND STYLE.....	8
Influences	10
THE POWER OF THE IMAGE	12
FROM VIETNAM AND SOMALIA TO IRAQ.....	16
IRAQ	20
Background.....	20
2003 Conflict	25
SHOOTING WAR.....	28
CONCLUSION.....	36
BIBLIOGRAPHY	38
FILMOGRAPHY	39

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: AP (photographer not mentioned).....	5
Figure 2: Gary Knight, On the rontlines: Start of the Iraq War, 2003.....	7
Figure 3:William Waud, Burning of Columbia, 1865. Library of Congress.....	8
Figure 4: Francisco Goya, The Third of May, 1808, Museo del Prado.....	9
Figure 5: Ernest Brooks A wintry scene on the Western Front, National Library of Scotland	13
Figure 6: AP Eddie Adams 'Saigon Execution: Murder of a Vietcong by Saigon Police Chief, 1968'	14
Figure 7: Paul Watson, 1994 TIME Magazine	18
Figure 8: "He was fighting to save his life to the very end, till he was completely burned up," Jarecke says of the man he photographed. "He was trying to get out of that truck."...	23
Figure 9: Franco Pagetti, Schoolgirls, Baghdad, Iraq 2004.....	24
Figure 10: Yuri Kozyrev Iraq War 2003 – TIME magazine An Iraqi man paints over a portrait of President Saddam Hussein	25
Figure 11: AP US Army marching through Baghdad, Iraq 2003 (photographer not named)	26
Figure 12: Yuri Kozyrev, Iraq 2003 – TIME magazine US Marines stand in front of the Ministry of Oil in downtown Baghdad	26
Figure 13: Franco Pagetti, March 21 st , 2003, Baghdad	28
Figure 14: Kate Brooks, Sept. 2003 An estimated 125 people were killed in a car bombing at the Tomb of Imam Ali in Najaf. The attack targeted a prominent Shiite cleric and occurred as the faithful were leaving after Friday prayers.....	31
Figure 15: Franco Pagetti, Baghdad, 2004.....	32
Figure 16: Franco Pagetti, Ramadi Iraq, 2007	34

INTRODUCTION

“The problem is not that people remember through photographs but that they remember only the photographs. To remember is, more and more, not to recall a story but to be able to call up a picture. ”

~ Susan Sontag³

Since the invention of the camera, images have taken on a power that surpasses the word, in cultures that are image-based. The photograph is easier to recall than a film. Even though a film excites and stimulates us, it is the still image that is imprinted onto our memories. British journalist Harold Evans states: “The image can trigger all the emotions aroused by the event or personality.”⁴

This essay-style film explores the stories behind war zone photographs, and how those stories change viewers’ readings of particular images. It’s an exploration of the role of photography, the importance of the images spread across various media platforms and how these inform the public about a conflict as it unfolds. The film is interview-based and told through the perspective of one person, the photographer, Franco Pagetti. He tells the story of the Iraq War through his lens.

I spoke to various photographers for this project, among them Larry Towell, Paul Watson, and Louie Palu, all of whom have worked in conflict zones. Paul Watson told me you shouldn’t trust the text that accompanies an image because “it is a false construct”⁵ and doesn’t accurately represent what is outside the frame. So the more we understand what is outside the frame, the better we understand the image. A strong photograph makes the viewer curious about

³ Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York (Picador, 2003)

⁴ Evans, Harold. *The American Century*, New York. (Alfred A. Knopf, 1998).

⁵ Watson, Paul. Interview. October, 2015

what happened and why. Franco Pagetti believes that photographs “need to get people to think about the conflict and not turn away.”⁶ He believes this is done through artistic photographs of war, not by those that are two-dimensional and cold. Instead, he tries to get the viewer more interested in the story, to become curious, to find out what happened.

Comparison to Previous Work

There are similarities and differences in story telling between this film and my previous work. It is not a process-driven documentary like my film *‘The World at 10’*, which follows two subjects over a span of ten months. In this film, the subjects are two ten-year-old children from Regent Park, who navigate their school and outside world. *‘Shooting War’*, is similar, however, in that the story is delivered through the subjects’ point of view. Another of my films, *‘Daughters of the Revolution’* tells the personal story of activist-lawyer, Mehrangiz Kar, and her challenges with the Iranian government. Through interviews with her and her family, this film illuminates the risks she took to bring about change in the legal system for human rights and the consequences of her choices. Stylistically this film also resembles *‘Shooting War’* in terms of my usage of archival footage and text on screen to provide context on the subject.

The subject matter of *Shooting War* is similar to another film I am developing, *‘An Unlikely Soldier’*. This film follows a group of young females through the rigors of basic training as they deal with cultural expectations confronting them at Pakistan’s top military academy. It is a story about tradition and change. It examines the conflicts and experiences of women trying to navigate the military construct and no doubt, a patriarchal military structure. Here the specific perspective is a window onto the closed world of the military through the eyes of women. The

⁶ Pagetti, Franco, Interview. November, 2015

film has one main character, with several secondary characters who tell the story of how women break down barriers in a very traditional country and what role these women play in conflict.

Focusing on conflict is a theme in my work, as is photography.

Why Photography?

My personal interest in doing a film about photography is based on my professional history. I studied photography during my undergraduate degree, and worked as a commercial photographer before transitioning into filmmaking. My work focused on editorial images, some of which were published in *Chatelaine*, *Flare* and the *Globe & Mail*. In addition, I photographed musicians for EMI Sony Music Canada. I also assisted with one of Canada's top advertising photographers, Bert Bell, working on a number of major ad campaigns. These included, CIBC Bank, President's Choice and the Bank of Montreal.

I was interested in the challenge of capturing a story about a person, or a feeling, that could be conveyed through an image captured in a fraction of a second. There were also different styles I could use depending on the client. My photographs of the musicians were more abstract. They aimed to convey the image or style of music. Here it was not the person but the idea that the band and their music represented that I sought to capture. With these images I could be less literal and create movement. The photos taken for newspapers or magazines had a more realistic portrait style. Conversations with the subjects although often too brief, always provided insight into who they were. Frequently, I found that my editors were only interested in one photo for publication and that I had no control over their choices.

I have always found that a still image can capture an event or an emotion and hold on to it in a very unique way. We can become transfixed by an image. It can move us, and provoke questions about the subject. What I find most interesting about the image is how it alludes to

events and moments outside the frame. Interpretation of the image becomes very subjective, determined by each person's personal language. Politics and culture determine that language. The events that lead to the image were always of interest to me. I wanted to find a new medium to tell that story, which eventually led to filmmaking.

Through filmmaking I was able to employ such elements as audio, still images and found footage. This allowed me to tell a fuller story, to go outside of the frame of the photograph and hear the voices there.

Thesis Subject

During my research phase, many of the images I came across of the Iraq War were of the coalition forces, mainly the United States and Great Britain, and their role in the conflict. These often depicted them on the offensive or helping vulnerable women and children. The voices of the Iraqi people were muted. I wanted to hear the untold stories from the other side of the Iraq war and understand the impact the conflict has on people. I was tired of the images of angry young men protesting, explosions, and headlines that did not say anything and dubbed the invasion as 'Operation Iraqi Freedom'. Images that circulated from the pre-war period showed a backward country. One image, for example, showed a small population who cut their fingers to vote with their blood during a referendum; another showed a group of men demonstrating their support for regime of Saddam Hussein. The image, which appeared on the BBC online website in 2002, read: 'Voting day brought many public displays of patriotism.'⁷ These images encourage viewers to pity the subjects presenting them as duped victims in need of liberation.

⁷ Hawley, Caroline. *Saddam 'wins 100% of vote'*. BBC, (October 16, 2002).



Figure 1: AP (photographer not mentioned)

There were photographers who showed a different point of view. There were also Iraqi photojournalists such as Ahmed Najm , who covered the war, and works with the newly established Iraqi photo agency Metrography, (established in 2009) working out of northern Iraq. But interviewing local Iraqi photographers would have made filming close to impossible, due to the ongoing violence and political instability in the country. This lead me to look at agencies based in the United States or Europe.

In order to select a photographer whose images showed a different perspective, I analyzed contemporary photography to determine the perspective from which they were shot and the impression they conveyed of the conflict. I approached the photographers' representative, VII Photo Agency. I initially approached the photographer Ashley Gilbertson but he declined. The VII Photo Agency encouraged me to find another photographer from their group, which included James Nachtwey, Ron Haviv, Ed Kashi and many other critically acclaimed photographers. I wanted to work with someone who had not previously been the subject of a documentary. After going through the portfolios, I asked them to approach Franco Pagetti. What

drew me to Pagetti's work was how he did not just focus on the U.S. military soldiers. Looking through his portfolio I could see he also focused on the people who were affected by the war, showing what an invasion looks like from the people living it. He agreed to participate. We began Skype conversations in late November 2015 and after pre-interviewing him over a few months, we arranged shoot dates for March 2016.

Franco Pagetti - Background

Based in Milan, Franco Pagetti, grew up in northern Italy with his mother and two older sisters. He was five years old when his father died. After studying, he started working in a company as a manager. After four months he was fired and decided that was not the type of job or career that he wanted. While working in a left-wing bookshop, an architectural photographer came in to purchase some photography books. She and Franco started up a conversation and before he knew it, he became a photographer's assistant. From there, he started his career as a fashion photographer, eventually working for Italian *Vogue*. Earning a good living as a fashion photographer, Pagetti nevertheless did not feel satisfied with the work saying, "I felt empty, it's not something that's motivating me."⁸ He started thinking about photojournalism and traveled to South Soudan, Afghanistan and India as a freelancer. He quickly learned how to tell a story with his photographs, commenting, "If you want to be a good photojournalist, you must be in the middle."⁹ He photographed conflicts in Ireland, The Occupied Territories and Afghanistan, working for the *New York Times* (NYT), *The New Yorker*, *Washington Post* and some other major European publications.

⁸ Pagetti, Franco. Interview. November, 2015.

⁹ Pagetti, Franco. Interview. (March, 2016).

As a European, he was an outsider in the Iraq War, from both the U.S. platoons he was embedded with and from the local population. Pagetti was able to bring a unique perspective to his photographs and this war. One of my main reasons for deciding to interview and profile this photographer was that his images were not only of the soldiers he was embedded with, but how that impacted the civilian population.

Many photographers working on this topic focused on how the military was enduring the war and what challenges the soldiers faced, depicting soldiers during their off time and patrolling towns. It was a single lens approach. The work of photographer Gary Knight (also with the VII Photo Agency) includes examples of this type of image. I found that Knight's images rarely convey what it is like to live through or be inside a conflict. We understand the challenges for the soldiers, but not the consequences for the civilians living there.



Figure 2: Gary Knight, On the frontlines: Start of the Iraq War, 2003

STRUCTURE AND STYLE

Shooting War consists of interviews with photographer Franco Pagetti, TIME magazine Photo Editor, Alice Gabriner and Middle East historian, Sara Farhan. The film adopts the photographer's point of view throughout; the photo editor and historian provide background and context on some of his photographs' invisible elements. Pagetti's unique lens provides viewers with a micro look into the world of war. The film deconstructs three photographs: one from the beginning of the war, one from the middle and one closer to the end of the conflict.

One of the reasons I chose these images is that they are classic compositions. By this, I mean similar scenes have been depicted throughout the centuries from classical paintings to contemporary images; from the Napoleonic Wars to the present. A city burning is one of the first images from many conflicts, signaling success, or one army's superiority over another. The painting, *The Burning of Columbia*, by William Waud in 1865, during the American civil war, is one such example.



Figure 3: William Waud, *Burning of Columbia*, 1865. Library of Congress

The paintings that depict capturing of prisoners, resistant fighters or insurgents is another image from conflicts. Francisco Goya's painting *'The Third of May, 1808'* is a significant painting which illustrates this: the Spanish resistance fighters during the Napoleonic Wars. One can draw similarities between Goya's painting and the second photograph examined in the film: the faceless soldiers and a single light source showing the young man who is about to be executed. In the lower left side of the painting depicts executed men, signalling impending doom for the man with his raised arms. The painting is highly symbolic of the resistance that took place during the French invasion of Spain. The second photograph by Pagetti, of the young man, is symbolic of how the local population is oppressed by the invading forces. As Middle East historian Sara Farhan states: "That particular photo has a lot of symbolism...Men age fifteen to twenty-five were targeted. They were the able bodies, the ones that were capable of forming resistance."¹⁰ The photographs in the film are images that have been seen in past conflicts and will continue to be seen in future wars.



Figure 4: Francisco Goya, *The Third of May, 1808*, Museo del Prado

¹⁰ Farhan, Sara. Interview. (May, 2016)

In addition to the images shot by Pagetti, colour archival footage of Iraq from 1978 is used to illustrate the country during pre-war days. Initially I intended to do a one-day shoot in Baghdad for visuals. I had already spoken to the cameraman about what I needed. Unfortunately the political situation for the past five months has made it extremely difficult for him to film anything in the city. I chose instead to use scenes shot in New York to create contrasting visual imagery between that city and Baghdad. For example, as Pagetti explains, the night the bombs fell on Baghdad, he is situated on a New York rooftop.

Influences

Using contrasting visual imagery between cities is a stylistic approach inspired by the works of Omer Fast. In particular, *'5000 Feet Is the Best'* influenced me in how the streets scenes filmed in New York would be cut with the dialogue, as the photographer tells the story of the war. Fast's hybrid film uses interviews with a drone pilot over images of Las Vegas. He dramatizes the scenes told from the interview and skillfully juxtaposes drama scenes with the documentary interview and military drone footage. The film highlights the remoteness of war, the 'virtual war' that takes place in places so far away from the battlefield. His film also explores how the media presents images of war, how we become acclimatized to these images and fail to see the consequences of the war globally.

Filmmaker Adam Curtis's use of archival footage in *'Bitter Lake'* also influenced my choices in this essay-style film. In Curtis's film, the images often did not literally relate to what he was saying. But the number of images and the fast paced editing successfully visualized the ideas of the narration. Curtis uses both fiction and non-fiction archival footage in this and many of his other films. An example of this in his film is at approximately 19:31, when a scene from a

fiction film is edited in after a funeral of an important Afghan leader. The scene pictures an interaction between the British military and Indian royalty. This style is more pronounced in his other films, *'The Trap'* and *'The Power of Nightmares'*. In the later film, at around 07:40 – 07:44 archival footage of women socializing is edited to convey the idea of corrupt morality.

Although I have not used any fictional archival footage, *'Bitter Lake'* did help inform my stylistic choices about the use of archival footage. Curtis's fast-paced editing is not one I employed for my film because the style did not suit my subject matter. I wanted to hold on the photographs to allow the viewer to think about what was being said. Although I find Curtis's film very engaging, he does not leave a lot of room for pauses in his work.

I also considered adopting elements of Errol Morris' *'Standard Operating Procedure'*. This film is a series of in-depth interviews with the people who took the photographs at Abu Ghraib. It is an interesting account of the circumstances surrounding these photographs. Morris explores this thoroughly and tells the stories behind the images by those who took the photographs, the American soldiers. However, I found those men that appeared in the images were victimized again; they were talked about as if they had no identities; as objects rather than subjects. Unlike the subjects of Morris' film, Pagetti speaks about his subjects and gives them agency.

Text is used in *'Shooting War'* to add another element of narration, to provide context for the war. I use it three times during the film, to provide historical context about the war and to inform viewers about the country today. For the sound, I used drones and other ambient pieces to create the soundscape. This is still a work in progress.

THE POWER OF THE IMAGE

“The image is a metaphor meant to say this is not just this moment but represents the conflict”¹¹

~ Paul Watson

The photograph is a powerful and important medium for documenting events in history, especially wars. How war is presented by the media to the public at large and what is really occurring on the ground can often be two completely different stories. The images are meant to be evidence of what happened. Some of the most memorable and powerful images throughout various conflicts have had that impact. Photographs force us to look away or catch our breath. Nick Ut’s ‘*Napalm Girl*’, is one photograph that impacted the public.

Many of the stories behind some of the most powerful images have been forgotten or are completely unknown. Images of WW I in the National Library of Scotland collection include limited details about the subject of the photograph and at times provide some political context. For example, this image below, states in the caption, ‘A wintry scene on the Western Front’.¹² This caption does not inform us about the soldier or even his rank. The full description gives a detailed account of the clothes the soldier is wearing and mentions the cigarette in his hand. Today the captions from war images may give the reader a little more information, but they still lack the full story behind the image.

Photo editor Alice Gabriner of TIME magazine made a similar statement about imagery across the internet. She states: “It is problematic that there are so many images without any captions, that they just float and inundate us.”¹³ She recalls during the Iraq conflict a tsunami of

¹¹ Watson, Paul. Interview. (October 2015).

¹² Brooks, Ernest. National Library of Scotland. First World War ‘Official Photographs’.

¹³ Gabriner, Alice. Interview. (March 2016).

images across all media platforms, creating a fog that obscured the events of the war. The photographs did not tell the story. They raised questions, but in order to understand what happened, one needs to know those invisible elements outside the frame. A picture does not tell a thousand words, as reading them and knowing about real events is difficult. The photograph begs for interpretation. Even captions do not convey the whole story.



*Figure 5: Ernest Brooks
A wintry scene on the Western Front, National Library of Scotland*

The full story reveals a clearer account of what took place. An example of this is the Eddie Adams photograph, “Saigon Execution,” of a Vietnam General executing a Viet Cong. This is another iconic photograph from a war zone. This powerful image is taken the moment the trigger of the gun is pulled. What do we know of this photograph? What were the events that lead to this man facing his execution? The officer pulling the trigger came to symbolize the brutality of the Vietnam War. General Nguyen Ngoc Loan who pulled the trigger was vilified his entire life because of this image. But when we understand the story behind this photograph it becomes clear the image does not accurately tell the story. What happened outside the frame is critically important in understanding this event.



*Figure 6: AP Eddie Adams
'Saigon Execution: Murder of a Vietcong by Saigon Police Chief, 1968'*

The image does not tell you that this Viet Cong, who was brought before the General, was the leader of a death squad and had many innocent civilians murdered. He was captured at a mass gravesite, where officers and their families were murdered. The General's action was allowed under the Geneva Conventions. But the image does not convey that fact. Even the photographer, Adams, regretted taking the image, stating: "Two people died in that photograph: the recipient of the bullet and General Nguyen Ngoc Loan. The general killed the Viet Cong; I killed the general with my camera."¹⁴ Adams considered the General a hero, but the photograph was not interpreted that way. And it is the story, the narrative told about the photograph, that conjures up emotions that can determine how that image will live on in history.

When the invisible elements surrounding a photograph are revealed, the events that lead to the moment of that image takes on a new meaning, a more complete story. The photograph is better understood the more information given, leaving less room for misinterpretation. Sontag states: "What a photograph says can be read in several ways."¹⁵ Pagetti understands how photographs can be misunderstood. He writes detail descriptions of his photographs before sending them to the photo editor for publication. How much of his description is used depends on the photo editor and publication.

When a photograph punctuates moments in conflict zones, engages us and it captures our attention, it becomes embedded into memory. Years from now, when the Syrian refugee crisis is recalled, the photograph of the toddler washed up on the beach of Turkey will be one of those iconic images like the 'Napalm Girl'. But will the cause of this crisis, the events and the story that lead to that photograph be forgotten? As important as war photography is, so is its context because that is how we will remember the events and the images that go along with it.

¹⁴ Adams, Eddie. *Saigon Execution, 1968*. Associated Press.

¹⁵ Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York. (Picador, 2003).

FROM VIETNAM AND SOMALIA TO IRAQ

I researched many photographs and films from various wars before deciding which conflict and images to focus on for this documentary. I looked into what images were instrumental in mobilizing protests and government policies. I spoke with photographers and photo editors. I quickly realized I wanted to focus on a contemporary conflict, one that matches the impact of Vietnam or WW II. This decision led me to the Iraq War (2003), since it is a war that greatly impacted the geo politics of the region. This war threatened to fracture a state, created insecurity within the country and has spilt over to neighbouring states. I looked at the images from the 2003 conflict, by the photographers previously mentioned, to see how they inform us about this conflict while also asking how the images from past wars informed viewers of those conflicts.

The Vietnam War is a clear example of photography's power to forge a movement against a war. It was the first war to be witnessed by television cameras, introducing a "new tele-intimacy with death and destruction,"¹⁶ says Sontag. Uncensored photographs shocked a public back home. The photographs discussed earlier by Eddie Adams and Nick Ut played a significant role in shaping public opinion against the war. These images and others like them moved the masses, causing people to protest in cities across the United States. The photographers were embedded with the US military, but control over the media was less sophisticated than it is today. Pagetti himself was embedded with the US military in Iraq in 2003. He states: "To do any story you have to go to the CPIC (the Centre for Press Information Committee)."¹⁷ This was set up by the American military during the first Gulf War (1990) for all the press representatives.

¹⁶ Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York. (Picador, 2003).

¹⁷ Pagetti, Franco. Interview. (March 2016).

Pagetti understood that he needed to work around the bureaucracy. He did this by forming relationships with the top commanders of every unit with which he was embedded. When commanders scheduled a mission, he simply asked them if he could accompany the unit. Photographer Don McCullin said a photographers' job is to show the real face of war, but "that job has been becoming increasingly difficult ever since the US decided that the media had lost the war in Vietnam for them."¹⁸

On another occasion where a photograph prompted action was in 1994 in Mogadishu. In Somalia, the photographs of a famine-stricken people across the country spurred action by the UN. This was to be a humanitarian mission, but it went horribly wrong. Canadian photographer Paul Watson was on the ground covering the crisis. During a phone conversation, he told me "the best war photographs will take you to that place and make you feel it and that's when you want to stop it."¹⁹ His photograph of the US soldier being dragged through Mogadishu, published in TIME magazine, influenced the American public to demand an end to U.S. involvement in that country. The incident, referred to as the Battle for Mogadishu, saw a mission that left eighteen Americans dead and over seventy injured. That event greatly impacted American foreign policy in Africa. The U.S pulled out of Somalia and to this day remains reluctant to get involved in the region.

¹⁸ McCullin, Donald. *This is War*. The Guardian. (February, 14, 2003).

¹⁹ Watson, Paul. Interview. (October 2015).

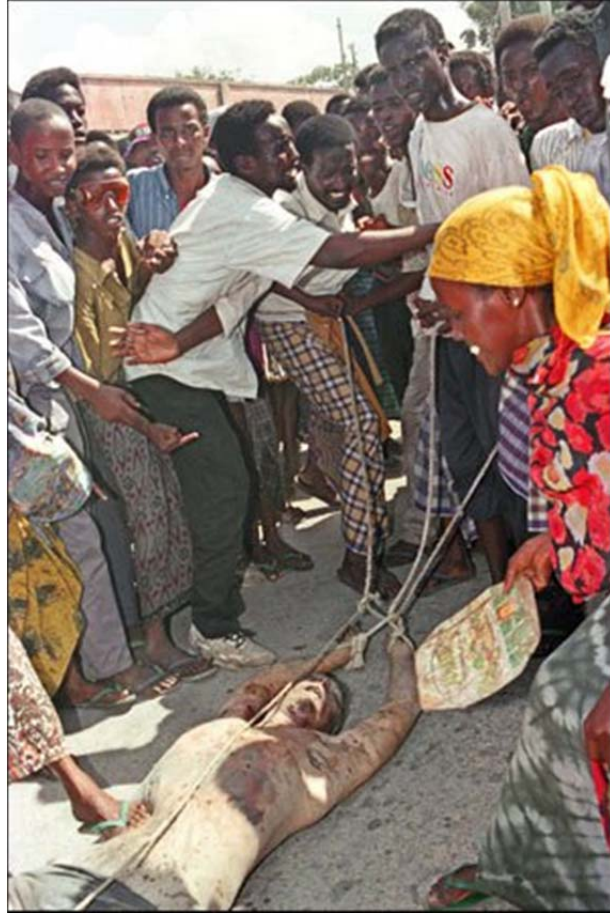


Figure 7: Paul Watson, 1994 TIME Magazine

But though this image contributed to policy changes, a year later, the images from the Rwandan genocide did not stir the same reaction from the American public. David Levi Strauss states about the genocide: “The images were put there to illustrate news stories but in the end they acted independently. The truth is, no one read the news stories. If they read them, they would have demanded that something be done to stop the killing. They did, however, look at the images. Why didn’t people respond to these images with outrage, and demand political action?”²⁰ Strauss goes on to answer his important questions by stating that, “it is partly because the politics of images and, the way they are organized, has changed and this has acted to erode

²⁰ Levi Strauss, David. *Between The Eyes*, (Aperture Foundation Inc. 2003)

their effectiveness and their power to elicit action.”²¹ Thus if the impact of the Rwandan images has been eroded, then a decade later, when so many digital images proliferate on screens, what possible effect could they have? The photographs of the Iraq War selected for major Western publications showed the war through the lens of the coalition forces.

The US military was very astute in their use of the media in Iraq. It understood how the media could influence public opinion and support for war. As political historian WT Mitchell states, “if Iraq seemed to provide ample opportunities for icons of victory (the Mission Accomplished photo) and the defeat of the enemy (the capture of Saddam Hussein), at the level of reality things were going quite differently.”²² The reality on the ground was a complete lack of security for the Iraqi civilian. The only areas that were patrolled were the oil fields and the Ministry of the Interior. Photographs were used to create a fog, showing only what the government wanted the public to see.

²¹ Levi Strauss, David. *Between The Eyes*, (Aperture Foundation Inc. 2003).

²² Mitchell, WT. *Cloning Terror: The War of Images, 9/11 to the Present*. Chicago (University of Chicago Press, 2011).

IRAQ

“A photograph is used as a means of communication, the nature of lived experience is involved, then the truth becomes more complex.”²³

~ John Berger

Background

Following 9/11, the Americans were looking for answers and the Iraq War provided just that. The G.W. Bush administration used trigger words in speeches which the media repeated throughout their broadcasts. These were: ‘911’, ‘Bin Laden’, ‘Axis of Evil’, ‘WMD and terrorism.’ These phrases repeated enough times in the media played a significant role in preparing the population for war. War historian Brian Orend states, “speeches by leading officials portrayed the Hussein regime as a mortal danger to the security of the United States and other countries by suggesting that Iraq would likely supply Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) to terrorist groups, with catastrophic consequences.”²⁴ Although the country was already fighting in Afghanistan (but it was not considered a high value target in the eyes of the administration), the groundwork was laid for a second war. The photographs mentioned earlier of Iraqis voting with their blood or celebrating a referendum outcome, helped in conveying that image.

The human consequence of the Iraq War remained almost invisible. Images that were taken from long distances or at high altitude either erased any human presence on the ground, or showed a clean war with few civilian casualties. Voices from the Iraqi side were muted, their stories rarely heard in Western media accounts. The images were almost entirely symbolic: the occupying forces with children trailing behind them, or moments which showed

²³ Berger, John. *Another Way of Telling*. Toronto. (Random House, 1982).

²⁴ Orend, Brian. Interview. (April 2016).

the success of the operation, such as the crowds welcoming the American troops as they marched into cities. Two examples of these kinds of images are reproduced below, taken by a TIME and AP photographer. These images were intended by the media to show an American public the success of 'Operation Iraqi Freedom.' Images of wounded soldiers were rarely seen. I believe many publications self-censored themselves, deeming some images too brutal to reach the public. Photo Editor Alice Gabriner stated that "the editor of TIME would say that the newspaper man outside his apartment would say, Iraq is on the cover of TIME, nobody buys it."²⁵ A war weary public could influence what publications were printing. But war photographs have always been censored and Sontag states that there is "a need to suppress images...to display the dead after all is what the enemy does."²⁶ Filmmaker Ken Burns stated of the Gulf War (1991) that it "felt cinematic and often sensational, with distracting theatrics and pounding new theme music, as if the war itself might be a wholly owned subsidiary of television."²⁷

The censoring of images is nothing new. Since WW I., what photo editors decide to publish in times of conflict is carefully controlled. There were only a handful of photographers allowed on the frontlines of the First World War. In 1982, then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher only allowed two photographers to cover the Falkland Wars. The images were clean, sterile, showing only military involvement rather than the effect of war on the population of the country. Images included soldiers saying goodbye to loved ones, Argentinian prisoners of war (POW), British soldiers marching down roads and the enemy surrendering. The use of photographs as propaganda is something many war photographers are aware of. Pagetti himself is selective of the scenes he chooses to direct his lens to. He states, "I would never take

²⁵ Gabriner, Alice. Interview. March 2016.

²⁶ Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York. (Picador, 2003).

²⁷ DeGhett, Torie Rose. *The War Photo No One Would Publish*. The Atlantic. (August 8, 2014).

photographs of the soldiers giving candy to children. If I felt they were doing these things because it would make a good photograph, I would put my camera down.”²⁸

The Iraq War was presented as a high tech war, the enemy faceless. The fact that no images of casualties were published, especially at the beginning, made the war much more tolerable to the Western public. That allows media companies to better sell a newspaper or get broadcast ratings. Showing US military casualties or anything similar to what occurred in Somalia would have drained away much-needed support. One image that was deliberately withheld from the American public during Gulf War (1990) was that of Ken Jarecke’s charred soldier, which both TIME magazine and the Associated Press refused to publish. It debunked the myth of a clean war shown only as a ‘video game’. *The Observer* in the United Kingdom and *Libération* in France did decide to print the image, but no American media outlet did until much later. As historian Marita Sturken explains, “most of what the American audience saw were maps, still photographs, and live images of reporters in Israel. CNN’s round-the-clock television coverage of the war offered only the illusion that viewers could see everything. The few images that were produced did not accumulate in cultural memory but rushed past in a succession of replays.”²⁹

²⁸ Pagetti, Franco. Interview (March 2016).

²⁹ Sturken, Marita. *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, The Aids Epidemic, And the Politics of Remembering*. U.S. (University of California Press, 1997).



1992 © KENNETH JARECKE (CONTACT PRESS IMAGES)

Figure 8: “He was fighting to save his life to the very end, till he was completely burned up,” Jarecke says of the man he photographed. “He was trying to get out of that truck.”³⁰

Then the leaking of the Abu Ghraib photographs changed everything. Though the images from the Rwandan Genocide failed to move Western nations to act, the images from Abu Ghraib had the opposite effect. The notion that the United States was complicit in torture, and had not abided by the Geneva Conventions or the Rules of Engagement during war sent shock waves through the nation. The revelation of these images turned the tide of the war. According to Historian Brian Orend “Abu Ghraib was a turning point in the conflict. People started questioning, what are we there for?”³¹ Public opinion in the United States started to shift against the war. Photo Editor Alice Gabriner observed that, “we needed to combat these images and stop

³⁰ DeGhett, Torie Rose. *The War Photo No One Would Publish*. The Atlantic. (August 8, 2014).

³¹ Orend, Brian. Interview. (April 2016).

making people turn away.”³² One of the ways she did this was by working with Pagetti, whose images showed what people were feeling. “He created a kind of relateability to the people of Iraq that was really important.”³³ Pagetti himself states that he was interested in photographing “the people living under the war. What are they thinking? What are they feeling?”³⁴ One example of everyday life that Pagetti captures, is the image below of two young schoolgirls laughing, the joy in their eyes and the shyness is not a typical image from a war zone.



Figure 9: Franco Pagetti, Schoolgirls, Baghdad, Iraq 2004

³² Gabriner, Alice. Interview. (March 2016).

³³ Gabriner, Alice. Interview. (March 2016).

³⁴ Pagetti, Franco. Interview. (March 2016).

2003 Conflict

“The idea that photographs hand us an objective piece of reality, that they by themselves provide us with the truth, is an idea that has been with us since the beginnings of photography. But photographs are neither true nor false in and of themselves. They are only true or false with the respect to the statements that we make about them or the questions that we might ask of them.”³⁵

~Errol Morris

As the American public was heading into another war in 2003, patriotism was at an all-time high. The images across TV screens and publications were similarly streamlined, showing an uncomplicated war. With these images, the public felt informed without feeling any guilt. But I feel a side effect of this is that the public becomes desensitized to the suffering. And images like the ones below do not show the real face of war and what it does to a country and its people.



*Figure 10: Yuri Kozyrev Iraq War 2003 – TIME magazine
An Iraqi man paints over a portrait of President Saddam Hussein*

³⁵ Morris, Errol. Morris, Errol, *Liar, Liar, Pants on Fire*. New York Times (2007).



Figure 11: AP US Army marching through Baghdad, Iraq 2003 (photographer not named)



Figure 12: Yuri Kozyrev, Iraq 2003 – TIME magazine, US Marines stand in front of the Ministry of Oil in downtown Baghdad

Of all the images I looked at I felt that photographer Franco Pagetti's works presented a different point of view and captured the war through a different lens. It was not from the US perspective, nor from the Iraqi civilian perspective, but rather from the viewpoint of someone who is in the middle, who with sensitivity and understanding produced photographs that revealed a different side of war. His images pierced the visual noise with the understanding of death and destruction caused by an invading army. How did he do this? Pagetti gave agency to the Iraqi civilians who were living in the conflict. As Areilla Azoulay states, "When the photographed persons addresses me...they cease to appear as stateless or as enemies."³⁶ With his camera Pagetti forces us to address the civilians and relate to them, creating a connection with them to understand what the person in the photograph may be experiencing. By doing this, he provokes us to question what is unfolding and how the subject of his images came to be in the particular situation pictured. This takes us outside the frame of the image and into the invisible elements of the photograph. Pagetti takes us on a journey to understand the forces of destruction at play in a war zone, by focusing on the people and the human cost of conflict.

³⁶ Azoulay, Areilla. *The Civil Contract of Photography*. New York. (Zone Books, 2008).

SHOOTING WAR

Through his photographs, Franco Pagetti tells the narrative of the Iraq War using his camera to write that story. This image below is the first of the three photographs deconstructed in the film, and it is from the beginning of the war.



Figure 13: Franco Pagetti, March 21st, 2003, Baghdad

This scene was one that many people saw on the front pages of publications around the world or on their TV screens as they watched the war unfold. The photographer described the day the bombing started as a Hollywood movie, like ‘Apocalypse Now’. Sontag states how, “when we experience events that we only witness through images then the experience ‘will often

seem eerily like its representation... 'it felt like a movie' seems to have displaced the way survivors experience 'it felt like a dream.'"³⁷

Like a movie or a dream, this is an image that has been repeated in many wars (as discussed earlier). We have seen cities burn over and over again from every war, from paintings to photographs to drone footage. These images of conflict are a click away. Many do not hold our attention. What we see are sanitized versions served up to the viewer to leave them undisturbed by what their governments do.

What is also interesting about this image is how all the photojournalists knew when to capture the first strike and from the right vantage point. Pagetti states that one of the photographers in their group received a call from the US base at Diego Garcia, in the Philippines, telling him that the jets were on their way to Baghdad. Calculating the time the jets would arrive, the photographers and cinematographers were ready waiting on the roof of a hotel, to capture the scene. What strikes Pagetti is that after the first few days, the bombing took on a completely different look. He states, "they were still bombing the city but without any smoke or flames. There was nothing."³⁸ He argues that "they did this sort of bombing only for the press, to get the cover of TIME or New York Times."³⁹ The bombings that continued over the next few days lacked the same sort of theatrical display, no large plumes of smoke or flashes of light.

The invasion was successful and the occupation of Iraq began. For about a year after the invasion, there was little resistance from the civilian population. The government had been dissolved and the military disbanded. The occupying forces were seen by the Iraqi population (for the most part) as a welcoming change after all the suffering experienced under Saddam's

³⁷ Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York. (Picador, 2003).

³⁸ Pagetti, Franco. Interview. (March 2016).

³⁹ Pagetti, Franco. Interview. (March 2016).

regime and the heavy sanctions, but they did not know what kind of change these occupying forces would bring.

A year later, the country was in complete turmoil. What were the images the West saw? They showed angry men protesting, cars burning, or vulnerable women and children, as the examples below show. These images of an uncivilized and violent population, or oppressed women, perpetuated the stereotypes of this region and the people. Photographs become a lens for viewers to ‘understand’ the country, its people and what is happening in the conflict. Whenever Iraqis were depicted in American publications, “they were angry radical Muslims...instead of victims of armed conflict...perpetuating a violent Muslim, jihadist stereotype,”⁴⁰ according to University of Maryland Professor, Rosas-Moreno.

⁴⁰ Cantrell Rosas-Moreno, Tania. *Framing ideology: How TIME magazine represents nationalism and identities through visual reporting*. Spain. (Universidad de Navarra, Vol.26 (3), 2013).



Figure 14: Kate Brooks, Sept. 2003

An estimated 125 people were killed in a car bombing at the Tomb of Imam Ali in Najaf. The attack targeted a prominent Shiite cleric and occurred as the faithful were leaving after Friday prayers.⁴¹

The second photograph examined in the film is from the middle of the conflict (2004). The image is striking and at first glance it looks like it was filmed on a set with actors. However, upon closer examination, we see two soldiers in their aggressive stance silhouetted in the shadows, while a young half naked man looks away. It is haunting in many ways: the single light source, the handcuffed figure, the faceless soldiers who surround him. In fact, the only face you see is that of the Saint on the wall. Pagetti takes us into the scene as if we are spectators at the event. The red inferno-like glow of light in the far middle-righthand side implies danger and doom. We experience the vulnerability of the young man, his helplessness and imagine his fear and immediately sympathize with him.

⁴¹ Brooks, Kate. TIME Magazine. (Sept. 29, 2003).



Figure 15: Franco Pagetti, Baghdad, 2004

We also make assumptions about this image, thinking that perhaps this young man is guilty of a crime, there must be proof that he was targeted by the soldiers. However as the photographer states, “not everything that is happening is very clear.”⁴² Pagetti went on a raid with this platoon to catch a sniper who killed three soldiers from their unit. They had paid informants working for the US military and the soldiers were told by their informant that this was the young man responsible. However, after searching the house, they did not find any weapon or proof that this was the sniper. Yet his life is changed forever. Just viewing the photograph, we do not know if this young man was guilty or not, it is only when we try to find

⁴² Pagetti, Franco. Interview. (March 2016).

the story behind the image, asks questions about what is happening and why, then maybe some truths are revealed.

What is interesting about this image is how religious iconography informs the composition of the photograph. Pagetti states, “I grew up in a Catholic country and this reminds me of the crucifix, how skinny he is and his position, the body twisting.”⁴³ We all grow up with diverse visual languages and learn how to read images through them. For this Italian photographer, his visual language has been informed by the predominant religion of his country.

The third photograph deconstructed in the film is near the end of Pagetti’s stay in Iraq and closer to the end of the occupation (2007). This is one of his most powerful photographs: the intimacy of the moment captured, the expression of the father and the reaction of the boy, how he draws the attention of the viewer. The scene unfolds through his eyes.

Pagetti’s comments about this photograph are insightful. He says, “I remember what it means to grow up without a father. There is a difference between your father being gone and your father being taken away from you... The boy didn’t understand why someone from another country would come to destroy the stability of his life. If he’s still alive [today] what is he doing – is he with ISIS, or is he a normal person?”⁴⁴ This photograph shows the generational effect of the war, how it has torn apart a region, a country and a father and son.

⁴³ Pagetti, Franco. Interview. (March 2016).

⁴⁴ Pagetti, Franco. Interview. (March 2016).



Figure 16: Franco Pagetti, Ramadi Iraq, 2007

This photograph does not have any hidden meaning -- we understand the fear and how distraught the boy is. The military were doing raids in the Iraqi city of Ramadi. The photographer describes how the platoons surrounded the city so no one could leave or enter. Once the perimeter had been secured, platoons entered and searched the houses one by one. If there is any suspicious looking material, an arrest is made. But what is the impact of that action on the household? With little to no security for the civilian population, men formed groups to protect their communities. If there is only one adult male in a household, how will the remaining family members survive? Will they be able to earn money for food or protect themselves? The photograph shows us the moment of the arrest, but understanding the effect of that action is invisible to us, unless we ask questions and probe further into the image.

Pagetti states that he “wanted to show the love, that this photograph is about love.”⁴⁵ He shows the love between a father and son, their bond and the fracturing of that bond. Pagetti explains the father’s reaction and how his smile is for his son, to make him less upset, to show the boy that he is still strong. This universal love between a parent and child is what Franco Pagetti was able to capture in his photograph.

⁴⁵ Pagetti, Franco. Interview. (March 2016).

CONCLUSION

“The dream of every photographer in that frame of a second is to bring the people back – try to get the viewer more interested in the story – to become curious, to find out what happened.”⁴⁶

~ Franco Pagetti

How a photograph from a conflict zone is contextualized is critical to understanding what happened in that setting. Photography is not a universal language. The meaning of these images is read through each person’s politics and culture. The images that a publication chooses to focus on conveys to the public what is important, what is cared about. The photographs that were published during the Iraq War played a large role in how people viewed the conflict. These images passed through a number of editorial hands before a select few were chosen for the front pages and covers of top Western publications. Politics also greatly determines what images are published. Every photograph is a record of both a moment and an editorial process, while the past and the future of that moment is unknown, except by the photographer.

It is only when we understand what is outside the frame that we get closer to the truth of what the image is saying, and the event that occurred. For better or worse, the images from the Iraq War will provide a window into this conflict for future generations. It will be as Franco says: “ In the next century, people will be looking at this like we do now at WWII.”⁴⁷ The war will be studied and analyzed for years to come for the impact it had. The photographs taken during this time will play a vital role in how this conflict will be remembered in history, and the stories that are told about it.

⁴⁶ Pagetti, Franco. Interview. (March 2016).

⁴⁷ Pagetti, Franco. Interview. (March 2016).

By selecting three images and hearing the stories behind those photographs, the intent of the film is to examine how our perception of the image changes once we learn more about the photograph and the invisible elements outside the frame.

Photographs are vital in understanding what is taking place in conflict areas. When the story behind the image is revealed, and questions asked, it is then that some elements of the truth are revealed. Through the photographs of Franco Pagetti, *Shooting War* sheds light the stories and circumstances in war.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Azoulay, Ariella. *The Civil Contract of Photography*. Zone Books, Brooklyn New York, USA, 2008
- Berger, John. *Another Way of Telling*. Random House of Canada LTD. Toronto, Canada, 1982
- Cantrell Rosas-Moreno, Tania. *Framing ideology: How TIME magazine represents nationalism and identities through visual reporting*. Communication & Society, VOL. 26(3), Universidad de Navarra, Facultad de Comunicación, 2013
- Evans, Harold. *The American Century*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, USA, 1998.
- Mitchell, WJT. *Cloning Terror: The War of Images, 9/11 to the Present*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago IL US, 2011
- Morris, Errol. *Believing is Seeing*. The Penguin Press, New York, USA, 2011
- Orend, Brian. *The Morality of War*. Broadview Press, Peterborough, ON, 2006
- Reinhardt, Mark. *Beautiful Suffering: Photography and the Traffic in Pain*. University of Chicago Press, Williamstown MA, 2006
- Reinhardt, Mark. *The Visual Politics of Violence & Terror in Azoulay's Civil Imagination*. Theory and Event, Vol. 16 Issue 3, 2013
- Sassower, R. and Cicotello, L. *War Images*. Lexington Books, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc. New York, 2010
- Sliwinski, Sharon. *Human Rights in Camera*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago IL, 2011
- Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. Picador, New York, USA, 2003
- Strauss, David Levi. *Between the Eyes, Essays on Photography and Politics*. Aperture Foundation Inc. New York, USA, 2003
- Sturken, Marita. *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering*. University of California Press, Ltd. Berkeley and Los Angeles, California, 1997
- Wilkes Tucker, Anne. *War/Photography: Images of Armed Conflict and it's Aftermath*. Museum of Fine Arts Houston, 2012

FILMOGRAPHY

Alper, Loretta & Earp, Jeremy. *War Made Easy – How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us To Death*. USA MEF 2007

Burke, Martyn. *Under Fire: Journalists in Combat*. USA Mercury Media Int. 2011

Curtis, Adam. *Bitter Lake*. BBC 2015.

Fast, Omer. *5000 Feet is the Best*. Israel/Germany Commonwealth Projects 2011

Frei, Christian. *War Photographer*. USA Film Transit International 2001

Gibney, Alex. *Taxi to The Dark Side*. USA THINKFilm 2007

Herzog, Werner. *Lessons of Darkness*. France/Germany/UK Hemispheric Pictures 1995

Hetherington, Tim & Junger, Sebastian. *Restrepo*. USA Virgil Films & Entertainment 2010

Longley, James, *Iraq in Fragments*. USA The Film Sales Company 2006

Morris, David & Morris, Jacqui. *McCullin*. UK Artificial Eye 2012

Morris, Errol. *Standard Operating Procedures*. USA Sony Pictures Classics (2008)

Poitras, Laura. *My Country, My Country*. USA Zeitgeist 2006

Scranton, Deborah. *The War Tapes*. USA SenArt Films 2006