THE ROLE OF NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS (NGOS) IN PRACTISING EDITORIAL PHOTOGRAPHY IN A GLOBALISED MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

Louise Grayson

The news media industry has changed dramatically into a global business with ever-increasing attention being devoted to entertainment and celebrity across the last 10–20 years. There has also been a growing reliance on images produced by citizens (citizen photojournalism), by media outlets and publishers. It is widely acknowledged that in tandem these changes have shrunk publication opportunities for professional photographers undertaking editorial projects. As a result, photographers are increasingly relying on non-government organisations (NGOs) to gain access to photographing issues and events in developing countries and to expand their economic and portfolio opportunities. This increase in photographers working for and alongside NGOs has given rise to a new genre of editorial photography which I call NGO Reportage. By way of a case study, an exploration of this new genre reveals important issues for photographers working with NGOs and examines the constructed narratives of images contained within these emerging practices.

KEYWORDS citizen photojournalism; developing countries; NGO Reportage; photojournalism; photographers

Introduction

Editorial photographers have traditionally had to remain up to date with a constantly changing industry. Historically we can see how technological, cultural, political and economic factors impact upon this practice. Technological advancements in digital equipment which can be used in the field to meet the demands of a 24/7 news cycle have resulted from the advent of new publishing opportunities such as the internet, while concurrently shrinking more traditional publication opportunities such as newspapers (Tiffen 2010; O’Donnell, McKnight, and Este 2012). The cultural and political environment in which photographers work, and those of the client or employer for whom they work, impacts on access to places, people and then the meanings within the resulting photographs. Economic imperatives challenge photographers to balance their personal desire to create meaningful photographs with the need to earn a living.

This balance has become further challenged with editorial changes from hard news to more of an entertainment focus for the global advertising-directed media outlets. Photography is driven by market forces and can result in an impact on narrative within often homogenised images published in today’s media outlet (Myers 2008). Rarely do we see in-depth visual coverage in the form of photo essays or confronting photojournalism images. Rather, there is today the cult of celebrity that currently reigns (Turner 2010; Rojek 2012; Long 2010).
Traditional photojournalism is also facing competition from the citizen photojournalist (Quart 2008). “Amateur snappers” armed with camera phones at newsworthy events are able to email digital imagery to newspapers and television stations (Evans 2007, 32). As Quart (2008, 16) notes, “some lucky people at the right awful place at the right awful time” challenge the “valor” of the Western photographer in capturing the crucial events of the day. There has also been a general decline in revenues for newspapers and magazines, the main source of funding for photographers undertaking editorial projects (Laurent 2009, 18; Myers 2008). Rather than believe this all means the “death of photojournalism”, this paper explores a new approach many photographers are using to create more in-depth visual work through co-operation with not-for-profit non-government organisations (NGOs).

In order to create important visual stories, photographers have historically been provided with resources such as travel and living expenses that today’s media outlets are often unwilling or not able to commit to. In part, this may reflect the fact that citizen images are freely or cheaply available across a range of news and feature events. However, much of the citizen imagery captured by amateurs today on mobile phones and utilised by news outlets concerns either rare iconic events such as the Twin Towers initial air crashes or the 2004 Asian Tsunami; very fast-moving events or calamities and emotive newsworthy items, such as floods, hurricanes, violent acts, public humiliation or “outrage” displays, where the amateur’s chance location with a camera is the key factor for publication (Lai 2011; Quart 2008). This citizen journalism, the cult of celebrity and the robust appetite for the perpetual news cycle has diminished the devotion to photojournalism and documentary genres. As a result, photographers are increasingly seeking co-operation with aid agencies to help them access the stories they feel a desire to tell.

There are, however, considerable implications to such co-operative relationships. It is the contention of this paper that how photographers deal in practice with personal beliefs and cultural background, while working within the constraints of various organisations, has an impact on the narrative contained within resulting images. That is to say, the narrative potential of a photograph is affected by external influences that pertain to professional editorial photography (Grayson 2012a, 2012b). There are multi-faceted influences experienced by photographers who are creating images that, in turn, are part of constructing and presenting the narrative potential of editorial photographs. There is an important relationship between professional photographers and the technical, cultural, economic and institutional forces that impinge upon all stages of production and publication. Therefore, to understand the meanings inherent in photographs we cannot look merely at the end result. It is essential to keep looking at the actions of practitioners, and the influences upon them, to determine how external influences affect the meaning potential of editorial photographs (Grayson 2012a, 2012b).

With this in mind, a case study of my personal work with an NGO in Africa is used to, firstly, explore important issues of representation. Practitioners need to understand the impact of messages or narrative contained within photographs that reflect the influence of working with an NGO. And secondly, I argue that there is an important role for the photographer undertaking photojournalism projects by embracing the role of the NGO. If a photographer’s quest is to attempt positive change through images, it can be done in this new globalised environment albeit via a very different approach to traditional industrial approaches to photojournalism and documentary photography. I coin the term NGO Reportage to take account of this emerging practice and space for photographers, whose professional and economic support structures have diminished over the last 10–15 years.
Editorial Photography Redux

Within the term “editorial photography” I include the genres of press photography, photojournalism and documentary photography. Press photography is influenced strongly by predetermined publication outcomes and expectations. These photographs are often accompanied by visual elements that include text, headlines and captions. Photojournalism takes a less predetermined approach to image making by telling stories visually as events occur. Documentary photographs deal with issues in greater detail and often reflect the pre-determined perspective of the photographer (Grayson 2012b).

Publication opportunities for this type of work are shrinking in today’s publishing environment, which reflects a 24/7 news cycle (Long 2010; Yaschur 2012). While press photography and photojournalism meet this modern desire within mainstream media for instant photographs from the field, documentary projects can take months or even years to produce.

A lack of access opportunities for photographers has contributed to the challenges of mounting editorial photographic projects. Politicians have been blamed for restricting access, especially to war zones (Evans 2007, 32). Some access issues can be overcome by building relationships with NGOs, allowing photographers to undertake commercially viable projects. Some organisations, such Magnum Photo Agency and NGOphotography.org are developing ties with NGOs to fund photographic projects or act as image libraries for established and emerging photojournalists. The VII Agency has sought out partnerships with non-profit groups to compensate for the dwindling revenue streams for photojournalists from editorial markets. Agency director Stephen Mayes says “VII has never thought of itself as strictly a journalistic organisation, as much as a group of photographers trying to achieve specific social goals” (http://www.viiphoto.com/).

An increasing number of photographers are commissioned to fit the needs of organisations with a political or humanitarian agenda, but then get published across different multimedia outlets around the world (Laurent 2009). For some photographers, NGOs also offer a way to get into the field for a longer time, to undertake a more in-depth body of work.

As photographers now embed with NGOs we can see a new genre emerging within editorial photography: the NGO Reportage. It has a mix of visual similarities and content with what one might define as press photography but with certain patterns of practice and image genre that follow a mix of documentary photography and photojournalism. NGO Reportage finds its visual outputs in annual reports for NGO agencies, websites and newsletters; press reports by way of NGO public relations, as well as reports via traditional journalism; remixing by photographers and editors of the visual outputs for related and even unrelated news stories; and then the photographer may even mount exhibitions of the collective work.

The Road to NGO Reportage

The editorial photographer has spent much of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries covering war and famine. Vietnam was a very “open” war to the media and the US authorities did not like some of the resulting images that made it back. In later conflicts, governments have made it more difficult for photographers to access war zones and when they do have access, photographers must operate under both access restrictions and highly chaperoned and even staged activities (Walker 2002). This has led
to soldiers taking their own photos and sneaking them out to the media. The infamous pictures of the torture of Iraqi prisoners by Americans in the Abu Ghraib prison are now regarded as an iconic example of wartime citizen photojournalism in practice (Sontag 2004, 25).

The Abu Ghraib lynching pictures were in the nature of photographs as trophies—taken by a photographer in order to be collected, stored in albums and displayed. The pictures taken by US soldiers themselves were to record their war, their fun, their observations of what they found picturesque, their atrocities—and the images were swapped among themselves and emailed around the globe (Sontag 2004, 27). The war in Afghanistan has been identified as the first war in which many photographers worked with digital cameras, with images transmitted via satellite phones (Kawamoto 2003, 93). They were constrained only by the rigours of war, although a few magazine photographers worked simultaneously with film and digital cameras since their deadlines came later (Kawamoto 2003, 93). These instances highlight the increasing challenges for the traditional editorial photographer to secure both work and meaningful images in a professional context in theatres of war when they are often manipulated by agencies and usurped by the citizen photojournalist. And while some such amateur images gain significant currency in the public sphere (and sheer numbers of amateur snappers put Instagram at 70 million users and worth US$1 billion; MacMillan 2012), their place in the machine of professional news making is also brought into tension with issues such as ethics, ownership, legitimacy, verification and very simply—newsworthiness (Mortensen 2011, 14). Blaagaard’s (2013, 197) analysis of citizen journalism images and their objectivity posits such work as more than just a “democratic deliberation”, and unpacks those issues around objectivity as a way for citizen-journalism technology to become “an extension of the life-world and of narrative”. And much like the ambitions and motivations of the documentary photographer, such images from “on the inside” show the world “not only from the perspective of another individual, but ‘as if’ we were inside that person’s body, seeing the world with his or her eyes, generating a potential for affective empathy or solidarity”.

In addition to the reliance on citizen photojournalism by news media, “shrinking editorial budgets have translated into fewer assignments where photographers can shoot in-depth essays on issues like the effects of war or famine or disease” (Estrin 2012). While a few photographers have pursued alternative funding through Kickstarter or other foundations, assignments from private aid groups and NGOs have proved to be more reliable, sometimes providing the only access to tough stories that might otherwise go untold. The casual or indignant “amateur snapper” grasping their iPhone is unlikely to venture into Africa for weeks at a time to unpack the complexity of HIV and famine; while the “crowd-sourced” wisdom and contributions of the citizen journalist must also submit to community interrogation and verification (Muthukumaraswamy 2010). This model still falls short on the type of embedded support (financial, cultural and publishing) that in-depth coverage of hard to get to places requires in the very challenging environments in which NGOs are often established.

However, photographers’ increasing relationship with paid assignments from NGOs raises questions about the nature of objectivity, influence and control of the image. Like other large organisations, NGOs are moving into the “information age” and utilise professional advocacy to mobilise public opinion through popular media, and images are a core component of that work (Davison 2007, 137). And, NGOs are big business.
The NGO sector is the eighth largest economy in the world—worth more than US$1 trillion a year (Myers 2008). This represents real possibilities for photographers to work alongside a multitude of organisations, both very small and specialised to the very largest of organisations with multinational efforts and multiple platforms and issues. Some offer paid work at commercial photojournalism rates (less common) while others offer a combination of support (airfares and living expenses) right down to full volunteer activity (and the burgeoning image libraries and NGO photographer agencies). At the “big end of town”, an organisation like Oxfam will produce a range of media with their annual reporting publications and press releases constituting a major output for photojournalism. The aesthetics of NGO Reportage are complex and are well illuminated by Davison (2007, 154) in his analysis of the cover page photo of an Oxfam annual report: “The Oxfam cover is a tour de force as a statement of the multiple nature of the NGO operations and advocacy”. Using Barthes functions of the photo, it informs, surprises, causes and signifies an arousal for desire—the ultimate desire being the provocation of “charitable instinct” in the decoder.

In what follows I explore this new phenomenon of working with NGOs to reveal important issues for practitioners wanting to better understand the messages or narrative contained within photographs. This is achieved through examining my experiences in the field working for the NGO KYEEMA Foundation. I do not offer an in-depth textual analysis of the photographs created in their final form to determine influences on narrative, but rather, the external influences placed upon me and, as a result, my actions in the field. I suggest it is these influences that, in turn, impact upon the narrative within the photos I create.

**Case Study: Working for NGO KYEEMA Foundation**

For the past seven years I have volunteered to document photographically the work being undertaken by a group of Australians in HIV/AIDS-stricken communities of Africa. I have travelled throughout Mozambique, Malawi and Tanzania photographing how a vaccine, developed by University of Queensland veterinary researchers, is eradicating disease from local rural poultry. Chickens provide a source of protein for AIDS-affected people and especially provide women and children with a currency and food source in fatherless families. This work is funded through the not-for-profit organisation, the KYEEMA Foundation. Representatives of this Foundation are working in-country to supply the vaccine to families battling HIV/AIDS, and to teach local residents how to implement the programme successfully.

My trips are sponsored by the KYEEMA Foundation that covers all my expenses in-country. I am required to take photographs of particular activities that are being undertaken in the country, and, specifically, that reflect the positive impacts of the work being done in Africa. The photographs were required for a variety of promotional purposes including publications, reports and websites.

There is always a high level of security specified by the client. KYEEMA’s view is that a woman travelling with conspicuous camera equipment could be a target for the groups of armed thieves who are active throughout the country. This means my field activities were closely controlled from the moment I arrived and am collected from the airport. Any desire I have to walk the streets and take spontaneous photographs are stifled by the security concerns.
I am taken to places across Africa where the Foundation is working. Pulling up outside villages in a four-wheel drive vehicle, I am ushered to the huts or community areas where people are ready to demonstrate the work they are doing. I have input from Foundation people “suggesting” a shot here and there. Representatives of the KYEEMA Foundation are proud of the work they are doing, and have a preconceived idea of the kind of photographs they want. They pose local people for photographs in ways they think will best capture their work. This can be seen in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1 exemplifies the types of image preferred by the KYEEMA Foundation. HIV/AIDS has killed a shocking number of parents in African nations. As a result, many grandparents need to become primary carers for children. The woman featured in this photograph has her grandchild tied to her back as she works in her village. The healthy chicken she is holding proves the success of the vaccine.

Figure 2 is shot with a long lens and is purely illustrative. It shows clearly how the vaccine is administered to a chicken, but that is all. It does not reflect the importance of rural poultry to these communities, nor the relationship between residents and their

FIGURE 1
Mozambique
animals. It is the kind of photograph that would need to be published in a series to be "read" clearly, or have accompanying text to put it in context.

There is little time or opportunity to stay longer than a few hours in each village, and I feel frustration about this. For example, Laurence (pictured in Figure 3) is a 16-year-old boy who was left to raise his six siblings alone when both his parents died from HIV/AIDS. I would have liked to stay for an extended amount of time with this young family. When I can spend time with people, a sense of trust is formed and they stop posing or being so aware of the camera. This is when I can capture photographs of people acting more in their natural way rather than the self-conscious way they adopt when I am only around for a short amount of time. Unfortunately, the vets with whom I was travelling had to move on within a couple of hours and were not willing to leave me alone in a village for a few days.

As my trips continue, my minders have begun to get to know and trust me, and so give me greater autonomy. This allows me the occasional opportunity to move with fewer restrictions and take photographs such as Figures 4 and 5. For these images, I used my preferred wider lens. I was still aware of potential dangers of working in a country of civil unrest, and took only limited risks to capture these images.
I respond to these images in a manner that is lacking in the previous Figures 1 and 2. The man bending over to sweep the road in front of a billboard promoting a hotel reflects a social contrast. The billboard is written in English, showing that the hotel is aimed at expatriates rather than the local population, who speak Portuguese. The social stratification is also reflected in the man cleaning the street, who would not have the opportunity to visit such a hotel as a guest. The road, with only one tree and no grass, represents the dry landscape of Africa.

Equally, the photograph of a broken-down bus left beside the road tells of a struggling economy. It has not been fixed and clearly has been there for some time. A
group of ladies sit having a chat. Their head scarves and clothing reflect a conservative society. In both images, the cleanliness of the streets—a man sweeping and bags of rubbish lined up—reflect a country that is strongly influenced by missionaries, who have dictated that "cleanliness is next to Godliness".

The photographs sent to KYEEMA are now being used to raise awareness and funding for the rural poultry immunisation project that continues to be introduced in more developing countries. They have been successful in a variety of ways in terms of raising awareness of the project. The photographs are displayed at relevant international conferences, annual reports, websites and promotional materials. Curious to investigate the change to editorial content within existing newspapers, I approached the daily newspaper in Brisbane, Australia, *The Courier-Mail*, with my photographs and an accompanying article about the work being done by these Australian vets. The features editor suggested I rewrite the article as a travel piece rather than the hard news feature I had initially submitted. This travel article was published. The photographs chosen to accompany this article are published as a series that illustrates the accompanying travelogue text. I submitted a series of different photographs from which the newspaper layout editor chose those that would be published, how to design the page and what headline/caption was written. I had no input into these matters (see Figure 6).

In 2010, the national daily *The Australian* published one of my photographs to illustrate an article it ran about the immunisation project. A journalist from that newspaper wrote the article after visiting Mozambique. The KYEEMA Foundation sent a series of my photographs to *The Australian* for publication and requested that my by-line be printed next to any published material. I had no control over what photographs were used, or how they were cropped or laid out on the page. One photograph was published, with no acknowledgement for either the KYEEMA Foundation or myself (see Figure 7).
Discussion

I take the case study from my experiences working with the NGO KYEEMA Foundation to suggest that a new genre within editorial photography has emerged. It differs markedly from the traditional hard-hitting “shock” value of many photojournalism.
Academic focus in aid to Africa

Universities are uniquely positioned to provide expertise and infrastructure.

ANNABEL HEPWORTH

AUSTRALIA may be a small player in donating aid to Africa—this year it will give about $200 million—but the government has committed to increase that by 2015. Foreign Affairs Minister Kevin Rudd told the UN last week that support would increase for the least developed countries, including those in Africa. A continued focus is expected on projects that tap expertise within Australian universities.

Robyn Alders, associate professor in international veterinary medicine at Tufs University in the US and a board member of the Brisbane-based Kyema Foundation, says the higher education sector has a major role to play. “There are numerous examples of the long-term benefits that come from linkages between students and researchers that cross geographical and cultural divides,” Alders says.

“Australian universities have been very innovative in the relationships that they have formed with research institutions and governments in many parts of the world.”

Kyema is an Aboriginal word meaning “of the dawn” and the Kyema Foundation works to help people to improve their livelihoods and so bring about a new beginning.

The foundation has been instrumental in developing a program for villagers in Mozambique, Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia through which University of Queensland researchers have been working in partnership to develop a vaccine to control outbreaks of Newcastle disease, which can kill up to 100 percent of affected chickens. Kyema’s Mozambique-based director, Rosa Costa, says the program has had a significant impact in the villages. As chickens are often owned by women, they provide not just food but also income for some of the most disadvantaged people.

“The results have been fairly good,” Costa tells the HES during a visit to the Mozambican capital of Maputo last week.

And rural households are increasingly willing to accept the vaccine. “When we started this program, the mortality [of chickens] reduced and they could see the results of the program,” she says “Now they are the ones who go and look for the vaccine when we go.”

A partnership involving UQ’s veterinary science school and Universiti Patra Malaysia, with support from the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, developed a cheap, heat-tolerant, non-patented vaccine so that a master seed can be sent to developing countries, which then produce the vaccine.

The Australian Centre for International Agricultural Development and the Australian Agency for International Development are also involved in the project.

A part of AusAID’s focus in Africa has been on a program of scholarships. Percy Stanley, counsellor of the Africa Aid program, says these attract students with an interest in priority sectors, including agriculture.

While work in developing countries is increasingly seen as a hallmark of world-class universities, higher levels of government assistance for work in the developing world, such as dollar-matching arrangements, are needed, says higher education professor Simon Marginson from the University of Melbourne.

“Government aid is largely routed through education but through other areas like infrastructure and security. To the extent to which aid is focused on building local higher education or allied areas such as health services, Australian universities and government no doubt could cooperate more than they do,” Marginson says.

Alders says the work in southern Africa is interdisciplinary, with animal and human health specialists, economists and medical anthropologists working together. “Universities are uniquely placed to do this type of work because many have all of the disciplines within their faculties and school,” she says.

Alders says the greatest difficulty of working in Africa is not corruption, but time, with the time frame for typical development programs simply too short. There is a tendency to rush the introduction of interventions, rather than building on existing local systems and knowledge, she points out.

FIGURE 7

The Australian, 2010

images brought back from developing nations. Nor are these images specifically aimed for press publication in a news outlet. It could be argued a documentary is beginning to form due to the ongoing nature of these visits.

There is a term within media, “compassion fatigue”, implying mass audiences are tired of seeing shocking photos and hence they are losing the ability to bring about the change they once did. This is a key driver for my personal photography—and that of many others I speak to. I do not wish to shock people, I want to bring about positive change
through my work. In order to achieve this, I have embraced this new genre of editorial photography—working in co-operation with an NGO. I can still meet my personal desire to bring about change but through a “softer” approach rather than the traditional hard-hitting photojournalism images that used to grace the covers of our daily newspapers.

There are commercial limitations to not-for-profit NGO work and I accept that my photos will be used for a more public relations outcome than “hard news”. An in-country NGO can give me access to locations in developing countries I would otherwise find difficult to access. The compromise for me is the restrictions placed on my actions from its policies and the content it requires within my work. There are very few media outlets in today’s commercial environment that will fund long-term projects of this type.

The significance of this case study for me as a practitioner is that I have achieved a better understanding of my own subjectivity, and therefore what it might mean to my future work. I have found that the personal changes that I have been inspired to make through the course of working with an NGO, as opposed to a media outlet, have changed my perspective on photographs within different genres. I acknowledge the importance of work within all genres and the role they play in communicating important issues in our society.

Conclusion

It has been the purpose of this paper to explore the impact on narrative within images created when working with an NGO, as many editorial photographers are doing in today’s shrinking media market. I have argued that only looking at photographs in their final form cannot enable us to understand fully to what degree the narrative, or storytelling functions, within editorial photographs are affected. Rather, I have looked at a case study of my actions in the field working for an NGO to unpack resulting messages in my work. What has resulted is a greater understanding of how my photos are influenced by various external factors different from traditional editorial photographic projects undertaken for media outlets.

While I aim to present an objective reality, I acknowledge that I am influenced by personal issues, including taste, conscience and culture, and by the effects of commerce, technology and institutional practice. Conditions during all phases of production can influence meaning potentials because these meanings are determined by context of action. Results from this research have shown that photography operates within an ongoing state of flux that depends on external forces and the ways in which they affect the actions of practitioners.

A political landscape can impact on narrative within photographs and this has been seen since the crackdown from political opponents of photographers gaining access to many events. It has extended to the ability of the armed forces to take photographs while being involved in major military events. Gaining access is affecting our actions as photographers, and raises questions about what will happen to photojournalism as politicians deny access to wars and everyday events. This political crackdown is adding weight to the growth of citizen photojournalism. People personally involved in news events are often not at the mercy of political restrictions, especially when independent online outlets are willing to publish their material.

I propose there is a new genre within editorial photography: NGO Reportage, whereby the role of the NGO is an important one. The desire by photographers wanting to
make a difference via their work can be met by joining with an NGO. Hard-hitting images that shock are not being published on the front page of newspapers. Rather, it is positive images that appeal to a new diversified audience “reading” their news from multiple platforms. There is no reason to judge negatively positive images gained from field work with an NGO as irrelevant within the greater genre of editorial photography. The work of public relations in its many forms in the globalised media landscape can instigate great change.

I do not for one moment suggest that traditional approaches to photojournalism and documentary photography are not important anymore. They are. It remains essential to continue to capture events as they happen in our world and to document what happened at a particular time and place to acknowledge it. However, if we want to bring about change through our photographs, there is no place for hierarchical attitudes between “hard” news images and soft. New genres are emerging constantly, as has occurred since the beginning of photography. To stay relevant today is to embrace all elements of the new global media landscape and to work with it the best we can, to continue to bring about positive change. The place of the citizen photojournalist will continue to impact upon the professional contexts of photojournalists and the news-making process—further research is required to analyse and unpack the uncertainties of the narratives and professional imperatives in the increasing use of the “amateur snapper”.

REFERENCES


Louise Grayson, Journalism, Media and Communication Discipline, Queensland University of Technology, Australia. E-mail: l.grayson@qut.edu.au. Web: http://staff.qut.edu.au/staff/graysonl/
Copyright of Journalism Practice is the property of Routledge and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.