

In the blink of an eye, the Holy Land descends from near peace to brutal madness. Now the struggle to rekindle hope

By LINA BEYER

IT WAS LATE MORNING WHEN Brigadier General Gad Alon left appeared at the door of his home, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, with dreadful news. Two Israeli reserve soldiers had wandered by mistake into the West Bank city of Ramallah and had been crushed by an onrushing Palestinian mob. They were beaten, stabbed—one was tossed out a secondary window—and duffed again. At 10:30 a.m. on Thursday, Barak, who serves as his own head of the Defense Ministry, was at his headquarters in Tel Aviv, dressed for the part in an open shirt and windbreaker. Immediately, he summoned his top commanders into the room. And some of the most ferocious violence ever between Israelis and Palestinians, Barak—until the visit by Alonkatt, his military secretary—had been struggling to avoid an escalation that would imperil the peace process he hoped would bring a lasting end to such mayhem. But the Ramallah attack was “too much,” says Deputy Defense Minister Ephraim Kishon. “That was the end.”

From his generals across the table Barak wanted advice on where to strike back. The officers, who had been shading at a policy they considered too restrained, were happy to oblige with a detailed target strike list. Within hours, Israeli Cobet attack helicopters were in the air over the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, unleashing their missiles on five carefully chosen Palestinian security sites, one of them close enough to rattle the Gaza headquarters in which Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat was holding court. The

NEW PHOTO: An Israeli soldier orders a Palestinian away from a Jerusalem mosque.

Photographic Style and the Depiction of Israeli-Palestinian Conflict since 1948

Michelle L. Woodward

A spread in *Time*, 23 October, 2000, p. 34-35. “An Israeli Border Policeman and a Palestinian scream at each other in the Old City of Jerusalem October 13, 2000 as the Palestinian is refused entry to the al-Aqsa mosque for Friday prayers.”

Photo by unidentified stringer/Reuters

Over the past 60 years, the look of news photography has changed dramatically as the field of photojournalism has been transformed culturally, technologically, and economically. American media representations of the Middle East, however, are often analyzed in the limited political terms of editorial bias and prejudice without looking at the larger forces influencing photographic practice.¹ While it is certainly useful to deconstruct the stereotypes, clichés, and misinformation that hinder a better public understanding of the region, this essay proposes a different method. Instead of an exclusive focus on ‘reading’ the meaning of images in an attempt to determine their political effect, I suggest that we look behind the photograph to examine the myriad forces that work to construct them. One way to do this is by analyzing changes in visual style in the field of photojournalism over time. ‘Style’ in photography is created by the interaction of formal visual elements such as light, colour, focus, angle of view, and composition, which result from the photographer’s choices and skills in using



Published in *Time*, 24 May, 1948, p. 34. Original caption: "Arab dead in Haifa." This photo was taken in the Haifa bus station in April 1948 before the fall of the town to Jewish forces. Photo by unidentified photographer/International

particular equipment. These choices are shaped by trends in the professional and social world of photography, technology, markets, and working conditions. Ultimately, style creates meaning and guides audiences in their interpretations.

While photojournalism is rarely discussed in terms of style, this essay makes the case that investigating problems of style should not be limited to works of art, but can lead to insights in other types of visual representation and, in this case, may contribute to broadening the vocabulary of ideas that critics of media images draw upon.² This study also attempts to get beyond reductionist readings of photographs that posit certain images as 'good' or 'bad', 'positive' or 'negative'.

The photographs analyzed here were published in the American mass-circulation magazines *Time* and *Life* during four periods of conflict between Israelis and Palestinians - 1948, the establishment of the state of Israel; 1967, the Six Day war and Israel's occupation of the Gaza Strip and West Bank; 1987 - 1988, the beginning of the Palestinian *intifada* or uprising; and 2000 to 2004, the second or al-Aqsa *intifada*.³ Magazine coverage of the fighting in 1948 consisted primarily of the aftermath of conflict between Jews and Palestinians, such as a burning taxi or dead bodies, or of static moments between fighting, such as the inspection of troops or captured prisoners under guard. *Time* magazine especially relied on images provided by agencies such as the Associated Press, Acme and International that sent photographs by wire to a wide range of subscriber newspapers and magazines.

Life magazine, on the other hand, had staff photographers who produced exclusive photo essays. In 1948, *Life* photographer John Philips received press accreditation and a uniform from the Arab Legion under King Abdullah of Jordan, allowing him to



Photo from *Life*, 7 June, 1948, p. 43. "Wounded Arab Legionnaire is carried by civilian volunteers, May 1, 1948". Photo by John Phillips/Time & Life Pictures/Getty Images.

photograph as its forces took control of the Old City of Jerusalem. While *Time* published text with occasional, small photos for illustration, *Life* emphasized pictures as the most important source of information, often spreading photos across two pages. A double-page spread of several photos in the 7 June, 1948 issue starts on the upper left with Arab Legion trucks advancing along a narrow Jerusalem Old City street. The end frame in lower right shows a wounded Arab Legionnaire being carried away by volunteers. In between are photographs depicting Arab troops crouched with guns and sandbags along the top of an Old City wall, Palestinian civilians crowding together at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to hear battle bulletins, and explosions around Jewish-held buildings seen from a distance. This simple version of a photo essay presents a narrative of the fight to hold Jerusalem, shot from the Palestinian side.

Fast-forward to October 2000 and the early days of the second Palestinian *intifada*. *Life* magazine is defunct and double-page spreads in *Time* now feature one close-up photo full of colour and action. There is an emphasis on emotionally-charged scenes not present in the psychologically-distant photos of 1948. Other differences include the use of colour, greater use of composition and light to produce an aesthetically pleasing quality, and an emphasis on dramatic action through a low angle and getting very close to the subject. How did we get from there to here?

There is an assumption that this difference is a natural progression, a result of improvements in photographic techniques and technologies and changes in taste. But what seems natural is constructed to appear that way. This essay suggests that investigating the various forces that shape photojournalism allows us to recognize that photographs are, all at the same time, culturally-constructed objects, vehicles for spreading knowledge about the world (mediated through aesthetic practices) and participants in ideological frameworks and relations of power.

The Importance of Magnum Photos

In the world of photojournalism, Magnum Photos remains the most prestigious and widely influential agency of the last half-century. It has represented some of the most famous photographers, including *Life* magazine's Robert Capa and *Time* magazine's James Nachtwey. Magnum photographers were important documenters of the birth of Israel in 1948, as well as later conflicts in the Middle East. I argue that Magnum, founded in 1947, has created an enduring visual style that arose from a certain historical moment combined with the sensibilities and needs of a small group of primarily European photographers. Although Magnum remains elite, albeit now more diverse, the group's style has played a crucial role in defining what is considered exemplary photojournalism.

While Magnum's visual style has changed over time, and individual photographers do have different modes of expression, I argue that there is a recognizable 'classic' style that dominated the agency's output from the founding years through the late 1970s.⁴ The style combines dramatic moments with a sense of documentary realism and utilizes narrative devices and formal techniques to create aesthetically and intellectually-compelling images. These elements are interconnected: for example, a sense of drama may be created by the use of narrative devices, such as juxtaposing subjects to convey a startling paradox. Magnum's classic style combines these four main elements to create highly-ordered, clearly-arranged compositions emphasizing a revealing moment, expression, or gesture that implies the revelation of an important understanding. This sense of a realistic, yet aesthetically-rendered, dramatic narrative is created through choices in subject, framing, light, depth of focus, angle of view, choice of lens, composition, and treatment of space. Although a new postmodern visual mode has emerged in Magnum since the late 1970s, the classic style has remained a prominent trend within the agency and in photojournalism in general. Magnum did not 'invent' this style, it would be impossible to trace it to any one particular origin, but the agency's photographers were its major initiators and excelled at distilling and promoting it.

The classic Magnum style also includes an emphasis on a photographer-author persona that is heroic yet humanistic, and which remains the ideal that many photographers aspire to embody. From the moment of its founding, the ethos and political convictions of Magnum distinguished the group's photographers from many other news photographers and contributed to their emerging visual style. Attributes that set them apart included leftist political aspirations of affecting change in the post-war world, an emphasis on individual artistic expression, and commitment to photojournalism as a lifestyle rather than a job, combined with a pioneering insistence on the right of the photographer to control and own his/her work.⁵ Philosophically, the photographers at Magnum shared a belief in the dignity of humanity and a compassion for the individual, manifested in their frequent focus on civilians in times of war, and



Featured in *Life*, 16 June, 1967, p. 38B-C. Original caption: "Faces aglow, conquering Israelis stand again inside Old Jerusalem." Taken in the yard of the Haram al-Sharif, Jerusalem's holy mosque. Photo by Cornell Capa and Micha Bar-Am/Magnum Photos.

ultimately leading to the description of their work as 'concerned photography'. They also asserted the importance of being personally invested in their subjects, and were committed to raising the standards of photojournalism as a serious artistic and political practice that rejected cheap sensationalism.

The agency itself (perhaps drawing on its founders' experiences with early European picture magazines' unusual treatment of photographers as inspired authors rather than employees servicing someone else's vision) made recognition of the individual photographer a central tenet of its philosophy. This emphasis on the author can be seen as an effort by Magnum to endow photojournalism with what Michel Foucault calls the 'author-function'.⁶ Foucault describes the author-function as belonging to some discourses in society but not others, for example, to the discourse of literature but not to the discourse of legal contracts or private letters. The author-function does not refer simply to a real individual, but to a constructed being called 'author'. Photojournalism did not have a strong tradition of authorship before illustrated magazines in Europe, and later Magnum, began to endow their photographers with traits of independence, personal expression, heroism, honesty, and dedication. Early in its history, news photography was considered primarily a mechanical process achieved by the camera; the photographer was there just to manage the machine and press the button. Magnum worked to elevate the status of the photographer to that of an intelligent author of creative work.

Most photographs taken in the 1948 period and featured in *Time* and *Life* are stylistically similar to early news images where the photographer was 'apart' from an

event and photographed it in a seemingly impartial and mechanical style. The more engaged, dramatic and authored style of Magnum and others did not appear regularly until the 1967 period under review, from then on becoming increasingly the norm in photojournalism. An example of the Magnum classic style appears in the 16 June, 1967 issue of *Life* magazine. A double-page spread is filled with one photograph credited to Cornell Capa of Magnum and Micha Bar-Am. Crammed into the image from right to left are 18 Israeli soldiers who have just secured control of the Old City of Jerusalem (they are probably standing in the courtyard of the Haram al-Sharif, or Dome of the Rock, compound). The expressions on each face can be read clearly due to the use of a wide-angle lens that allowed the photographer to get up close and yet include the whole group. Many of the soldiers are looking upwards, at something outside the frame, creating the effect of basking in the sunlight that falls on their faces and implying an almost religious gaze towards the sky. The caption states: “Faces aglow, conquering Israelis stand again inside Old Jerusalem.”

It appears that the soldiers are grouped as if for a portrait. Several men crouch down in front and many wear self-conscious slight smiles, but the gaze upward takes away from the staged effect, ensuring that each face is visible and well-lit, and creating meaning. The concern with recording the experience of the everyday soldier in historic circumstances, not just the roles played by commanders, is a reflection of Magnum’s ethos. The close-up use of a wide angle, the creation of drama (seen here in the upward gazes and crowding the frame with faces), the capturing of emotional expressions (amazement, happiness, relief), and the inclusion of meaningful contextual details (Middle Eastern architecture, binoculars, guns, radio antennas) are all hallmarks of Magnum’s style. All these stylistic elements come together to narrate one story: that for Israelis this is a moment of triumph and joy of near-religious proportions. By organizing the elements into such a comprehensible message, the photographers leave no room for doubts, complexity or alternative narratives.

As picture magazines like *Life*, *Look*, and *Picture Post* – some of Magnum’s biggest clients – declined in circulation and popularity in the late 1960s, postmodernism was on the rise. This era of changing markets and altered paradigms coincided with the slow emergence of a new mode of postmodernist photography at Magnum that was at odds with classic black-and-white modernism but in tune with photography’s growth in the art market.⁷ The basic elements of drama, narrative, art, and realism are still present, but often in a new configuration. Instead of orderly, coherent compositions emphasizing one message, a new mode of representation evolved to emphasize disorder, chaos, and exoticism. Whereas the classic Magnum style was perhaps photojournalism done artfully, the balance seemed to shift to an emphasis on expression, with little promotion of documentary value. As with the classic style, this new look was not invented by Magnum, but it seems to have been made more prominent and important to photojournalists through its use and development by certain members.

The emergence of this mode in the late 1970s and early 1980s was fundamentally a switch from a modernist (the classic style) to a postmodernist understanding of the world.⁸ Contrasting these two visual modes, it is clear that the classic style invokes a belief in the importance of history and the individual, a belief that truth can be revealed, that certain master narratives can explain events, that heroism is possible. The postmodern mode overturns many of these assumptions, suggesting that there are many truths rather than one, that the photographer cannot presume to determine the meaning of the photograph, that individuals are overshadowed by a world they can't control or understand. While some photographers at Magnum seem to be embracing a postmodern perspective, others continue to work in the classic style. Meanwhile, the classic style, which seems to present a neatly-ordered world of comprehensible (even if reprehensible) human moments and a somewhat simplified world, remains the norm in photojournalism.

Although mainstream news magazines such as *Time* or *Newsweek* have not found the postmodern mode of photography particularly useful, it is often prominent in the world of art exhibits, photography festivals, and glossy books. James Nachtwey, a former Magnum photographer often praised as a daring war photojournalist, photographed the aftermath of fighting in Jenin for the 13 May, 2002 issue of *Time*. The opening double-page photograph reflects some aspects of the new postmodern vision with its emphasis on a camera angle that peers out from within the concrete rubble and twisted metal of demolished buildings. Only on the very edges does he include a person and an intact building to indicate scale and provide an anchor to keep the viewer from becoming too disoriented. In this photograph, the focus is on being buried in chaotic uncertainty, reflected in the title of the accompanying piece – “What really happened? ... Untangling Jenin's Tale.”

The scene is one of rubble left behind, but the photographer seems to imply that looking closely at the physical evidence does not necessarily lead to clarity of vision. The view remains fractured, obstructed and of uncertain scale. This complicated view can be a relief from the certainties of the classic style in its acknowledgement that different interpretations of events coexist and that the photographer in the field may have no way to know ‘what really happened’, or at least no way to tell the story visually. But, for this very reason, the postmodern mode is not well suited to photojournalism, which according to prevailing conventions must provide at least visual evidence for the written story and can at most supply a complementary narrative within its frame.

In comparison with Nachtwey's photograph from Jenin, a photograph by Frank Scherschel from the 31 May, 1948 issue of *Life* of a rubble-strewn street in Jaffa looks at the scene from a conventional standing position with a standard lens that closely replicates normal human vision. His neutral style of framing and straight-forward angle imply that he is representing the scene as it would appear to any observer,

not providing an interpretation or commentary on events as Nachtwey seems to do. The debris in the foreground frames the empty street patrolled by a British tank, while the background clearly shows the surrounding houses still intact. The meaning unfolds neatly in layers – recent fighting in the city (background) that the British are attempting to control through patrols (middle ground) has led to partial destruction (foreground). This method of surveying a scene from a distant standing perspective, rather than in close-up or at an angle, common in contemporary photojournalism, gives the impression of a simple observation of facts. But it is just as much a crafted style as Magnum's classic style or postmodern mode. In this case, the implied message is that the British are impartial intermediaries between warring sides, which is neatly explained in the caption. The photographer may be uncertain of the larger forces that caused this destruction, but his representation of the scene does not reflect any doubt or suggest more than one interpretation. In the culture of photojournalism at the time, that was inconceivable. The photographer was expected to use this seemingly-impartial style to give viewers the sense he was capturing only what was before his lens, not making his own evaluative judgments. Of course, like all photographers, he probably had his own opinions and political perspective on what he witnessed, but the extent to which this influenced his photographs must be weighed with the myriad other influences of, for example, his profession's expectations, his employer's instructions, cultural understandings of his role as observer, and technical limitations. In 1948, most photographers were following these stylistic conventions, but some were not. Magnum photographers were among those breaking them consciously in order to create images that had more to say about the situations they were observing.

Technology shifts

The influence of visual trends and value systems within the field of photography is only one set of factors in why photojournalism styles changed dramatically over the past 60 years. Technological changes are often seen as primarily practical developments in photojournalism, but they also have an important role in shaping style. Photojournalists who quickly adopt new technology have often been influential in the field of photography. In the late 1930s, the pioneers were those who first used the new miniature, 35mm camera technology and were involved with the earliest iterations of the photo essay form in European magazines. Members of Magnum were among those who first switched from glass plate cameras to the compact 35mm Leica that used long strips of film. They effectively exploited its qualities to produce a spontaneous new look using natural light rather than bright flash, typically called 'candid camera' photography because the more sensitive film could capture the subject unaware and unposed, while the film could be advanced in an instant from frame to frame. Most photojournalists were initially reluctant to change and derided the new cameras as mere toys.

Many of those who embraced the 35mm camera's potential worked for the new mass circulation picture magazines: the German *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, French *Vu*, British *Picture Post*, and *Life*. A new class of photojournalists, often university educated and not trained as traditional press photographers, emerged after WWI in time to photograph the Spanish Civil War and WWII. With their small lightweight cameras they were able to get closer to the action, emphasize dramatic moments and capture expressions without being noticed. The picture magazines enhanced the photographs' drama and novelty by publishing them large and in great numbers as extended essays.

The advent of colour photography was another technological change that divided photographers and eventually created a new look in photojournalism. Until the 1960s, colour was seen as extraneous, superficial and only appropriate to advertising photography. Serious photojournalists were reluctant to use colour film; among photographers today there are still those who use only black-and-white film. However, *Life* magazine adopted colour early for news work, publishing a number of its photographs of the 1967 Six Day war in colour, while *Time* was still using only black and white. The use of colour film allowed photographers a greater range of options for expression. Now the colour of light, of clothing, of blood, could add an emotional register and a sense of realism particularly lacking in the abstracting eye of black and white. In the beginning, switching to colour film created difficulties for photographers since the film required more light for proper exposure. Some photographers spent more time setting up shots and working out ethical dilemmas about that phenomenon as a result.⁹

Beginning in the early 1990s, digital cameras rapidly began replacing film cameras in photojournalism. The ability to cut out the darkroom procedure of chemical processing and the increased speed of delivery of photographs from the field to the office over telephone lines rather than by mail have made digital photography today's industry standard. But this change has certain liabilities. With intense competition between media outlets that provide news 24 hours a day, photographers are working as fast as possible to capture dramatic images and transmit them to their editors. Readers now expect near-immediate coverage of world events on the internet. This emphasis on speed takes a toll on reporting. With less time to investigate a situation or wait for events to unfold, photojournalists are more likely to make decisions based on insufficient information. With dramatic images more highly valued, photojournalists may miss important subtleties as they hunt out the most striking shot. Photo editors also report that photographers take many more shots of an event when using digital equipment, though the repercussions of this practice are unclear.

In the case of news magazine photographs of Israeli-Palestinian conflict, technological changes have enabled more dramatic coverage. Photographs of Palestinians carrying

the wounded to safety went from a staid image of quiet determination in 1948 to one of agony and haste in 2000 (for a good example of the same subject see *Time*, 23 October, 2000, p. 36). The intensely-detailed clarity of higher resolution film, digital files and reproduction technologies, realistic colours, and use of a wide angle lens give recent photographs an immediacy and sense of intimate involvement lacking in the one taken in 1948. With cameras that focus automatically and shoot rapid-fire, and (since the 1970s) long lenses that can isolate a subject in the frame from a great distance, there is now no reason not to capture the anguished expression of the wounded that was not at all visible in the 1948 photograph.



Photo from *Time*, 16 June, 1967, p. 27. "Egyptian prisoners being trucked to the rear."

By 2000, *Time* had become as much of a picture magazine as *Life* ever was, printing photographs in large spreads with text floating around the edges. But the style of photojournalism in *Time* magazine covering the 1967 war still appears out-dated compared to *Life*. Photographs of Egyptian prisoners under Israeli guard in 1967 illustrate contrasts in impact due to stylistic choices in composition and use of colour. *Time*'s 16 June, 1967 issue ran a black and white photograph of Egyptian prisoners crammed into the back of a truck, most with hands on heads, while Israeli soldiers stand around in the background sand of the Gaza Strip. With deep shadows obscuring almost all the faces, we are left with only a collection of pale grey shapes for prisoners and dark grey shapes for Israeli soldiers. The photograph only serves to illustrate the caption, "Egyptian prisoners being trucked to the rear," without adding any additional information. Poor technical reproduction, harsh lighting, black and white tones, and a composition that does not highlight any one element but treats everything as an even plane all produce an-emotionally detached image.

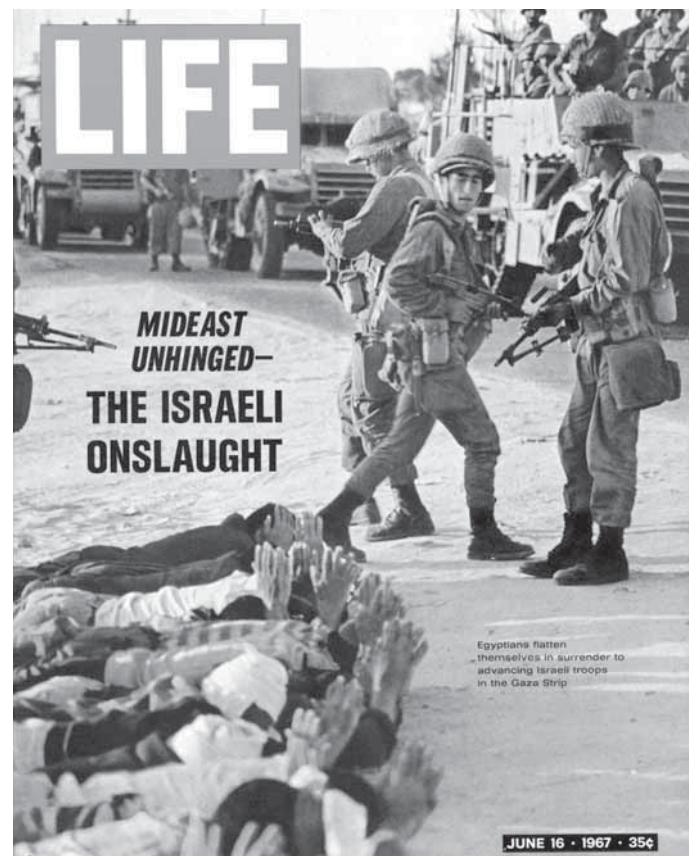
In contrast, *Life*'s 16 June, 1967 cover photo of Egyptian prisoners and Israeli soldiers uses a dynamic composition to tell a story within the frame of the photograph. The line of raised hands leading to the soldier's boots reinforces a message of surrender. The varied colours of the surrendering men's clothing, in contrast to the Israelis' green uniforms, maintains a sense of separation between the two groups and suggests that the men labelled Egyptians in the caption are not a professional army. David Rubinger's use of a telephoto lens compresses the space and brings the subjects closer

together than they really are, creating connections and contrasts. The low light of late afternoon or early morning lights up the Israelis' faces and brings out details of texture. The main focus on the trio of soldiers reveals them to be young individuals, in contrast to the surrendering men, who are faceless.

In these examples, the photograph in *Time* is taken in the old style of black-and-white, mechanistic photojournalism, where shooting the scene from a standing position with a standard lens was the norm. However, the 'look' of neutrality is deceiving; the choice of subject matter and emphasis is clearly meant to tell a certain story of conquest. *Life's* photograph, however, displays elements of the newer style of colourful, dramatic, artfully-composed images that create detailed narratives within the frame, rather than simply illustrating a caption. Through the use of different technologies, black and white or colour film and a standard or zoom lens, and the choice of composition the two magazines tell a similar story in strikingly different ways.

Work Practices and Conditions

The photographs a photojournalist can produce depend, as we have seen, on trends in photography and available technology, but also on such variable factors as individual experience, press censorship, assignment length, field conditions and editorial demands. These other factors, categorized here as work conditions and practices, create a structure that affects what can be accomplished visually. Working conditions are moulded by market forces, professional standards, employer contracts, and personal abilities, all of which develop into industry practices such as flying a top photographer to a conflict zone for a week to cover a situation he or she knows little about. How conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is represented in American magazines is influenced by all these factors.



From *Life*, 16 June, 1967, cover. "Israeli soldiers guard a group of Egyptians in civilian clothes by the side of the road during the Arab-Israeli Six Day War, Rafah, Gaza Strip, June 5, 1967". Photo by David Rubinger/Time & Life Pictures/Getty Images.

Access to sites of conflict is an obviously crucial element of doing the job. During the 1967 Six Day War, photojournalists often did not get to the arena of war quickly enough to capture actual battles. Those that did arrive in time were confronted with Israeli bans on recording fighting and casualties, or the numerous obstacles faced by reporters on the Arab side.¹⁰ The war ended so quickly that many were only able to depict the aftermath – burned tanks, dead bodies, prisoners of war and Israeli victory celebrations.

In contrast, both the first and second *intifada* lasted years – long enough for photojournalists to develop knowledge of the situation and find ways to get close to moments of conflict. The style of photographing Palestinian protesters and Israeli soldiers at the beginning of the first *intifada* was often influenced by the use of telephoto lenses, where the photographer could stand safely out of range of the street fighting and still capture dramatic photographs. On the other hand, the long lens flattens the image, often draining it of the tension between elements that can be conveyed through the use of close-up or medium-range lenses. A photo of women confronting a soldier in the 25 January, 1988 issue of *Time* was shot with a long lens; it's clear that the photographer is some distance from the interaction and there is no sense of real space between the figures, which are flattened together on the picture plane.¹¹ While the expressions and gestures of the women in the face of the soldier are compelling and powerful, this photo does not have the emotional immediacy visible in later photographs of confrontation.

A photograph from the 23 October, 2000 issue of a Palestinian man arguing with an Israeli soldier emphasizes the physicality of their confrontation by photographing at extremely close range (see photo on page 6). The soldier's arm shoots across the entire photograph, threatening to break out of the frame while the Palestinian man's fists on the soldier's chest push in the opposite direction, creating a dynamic, tangible tension.

The intensity created by the technique of photographing from within the middle of an unfolding event seems to have become the norm in *Time* magazine's work on Israeli-Palestinian conflict since 2000, as photographers became more and more familiar with the situation. Indeed, it's become a bit of a cliché for young photojournalists to start their careers there. As photographers have made themselves an integral part of the scene, the look of these conflict photographs has become more emotionally charged and focused on the actions of anonymous, rather than famous, individuals. Historically, this is an important change. Photographs of conflict in the 1948 issues of *Time* and *Life* reduced people to mere figures in a broader canvas, close-up views were reserved for noteworthy politicians or military leaders. By 1967, *Life* magazine occasionally focused on individual anonymous Israeli soldiers, but not yet on Palestinians.

During the first *intifada*, local actors quickly became media savvy and were careful to present their cases through the images they projected to journalists. Photographers

became a necessary part of the scene for stone-throwing youths eager to broadcast their struggle. On the other hand, Israeli soldiers have become more and more wary of these images, resulting in the shooting and harassment of some photographers.¹² Photojournalists have had to adjust their methods to account for these and other changes in their working environment. The sheer abundance of conflict photographs taken in the 1990s and later have led some photographers to attempt new techniques for capturing the reality of life in the West Bank and Gaza.¹³

As picture magazines such as *Life*, *Look*, and *Picture Post* declined in circulation in the late 1960s, photojournalists began to lose important venues for their work. When *Life* ended its weekly publications in 1972, budgets and space for photography at many magazines were shrinking, pushing them to cut the number of staff photographers with full-time contracts. Television was an additional pressure on photojournalism as it lured audiences away from picture magazines.

Around the same time as its decline in print publications, photojournalism began to garner respect in the art world. The photography exhibit “On the Line: The New Color Photojournalism,” which travelled to at least seven art venues in the United States beginning in 1986, heralded a new era where some photojournalism (often by Magnum photographers) was seen to have elements of visual style, to use colour in an artistic manner, and to warrant a second life on a museum wall beyond its original purpose as news in the pages of a magazine.¹⁴ For many ambitious photojournalists today having a gallery show or publishing a book is the best way to communicate with an audience on the photographer’s terms.

Currently, newspapers, magazines and wire services that cover the Middle East depend largely on stringers (freelancers) who live in the region for the day-to-day material. Only when large-scale violence breaks out do they send in the top photographers. Most photojournalists these days work on spec, taking photographs they believe are in demand, or more idealistically, should be seen. They send them on to their agents for sale to a wide variety of media and corporate clients. Some photographers receive assignments from publications, but for most these are only occasional, not predictable, sources of income. Assignments in general are also much shorter, less well-funded and focused on breaking news rather than the long-term, in-depth stories that were common before the 1970s. With a limited market for photojournalism there is no incentive to explore a story in-depth but instead pressure to supply dramatic, explosive images that rely on cliché to convey an instant message. This trend is impoverishing our image landscape. There are many photographers dedicated to using their skills to investigating and reporting on social and political issues, but without a market interested in such work these projects are rarely seen in the mainstream media.

Conclusion

This short study has noted several trends of stylistic change over the past 60 years. The most striking is the move into the middle of the action by the photojournalist. Not only have photojournalists become physically closer to those engaged in conflict, or to those affected by it, but they have also gone from using techniques that emphasize cool detachment to those that create and convey a heightened sense of emotion and drama. The consequences of this shift may be to attract more viewers, but it also obscures subtleties and ignores quieter but often more sinister and powerful developments on the ground. Some photographers are aware of this and choose to work in a different style. For example, in a conversation among photographers begun on 23 February, 2007 on the networking website *Lightstalkers*, discussion centred on disappointment in the results of the Pictures of the Year International (POYi) contest. Ziya Gafic commented, “I’m really sick of the bloody, distorted, screaming imagery that alienates our subject even further...we already live in a Kafkian alienated world and photography is such a great medium to bring people closer.”¹⁵ Gafic chooses to use a medium-format camera to create detailed studies of people in their environments. More photojournalists are now experimenting with the use of different technologies and visual styles in response to pressures to stand out from competitors, to appeal to art designers and corporate clients, and to express themselves.

Photojournalists are enmeshed in a web of relationships with peers, employers, mentors, editors and audiences. Echoing the idea that the Magnum classic style with its emphasis on authorship as described earlier has become the standard for good photojournalism, Bruno Stevens asks on *Lightstalkers*, “Where are the Gilles Peress, the Phillip Jones-Griffith, Eugene Smith photo essays of our time in these winning pictures? Don’t get me wrong, I have nothing against the awarded works, it is the lack of individuality, or personality that is striking.” Later he laments the current working conditions for photojournalists that limit what images get published and awarded prizes, “Tons after tons after tons of glossy magazines full of ‘celebs’, offering ‘readymade’ dreams to the masses... I genuinely think there is a major problem in photojournalism today, NOT lack of talented photographers, far from that, I repeat there is nothing wrong with any of these POYi winners, there has never been so many gifted new talents, but rather the changing media world, changing economical models, the impossible task of many great picture editors faced with up to 8,000 pictures a DAY on the wire, and the constant pressure for the ‘instant’ over the ‘in depth’.”

Historical shifts in the look of news photography are due to a confluence of factors, not just the choices of individual photographers or editors. For example, the fact that magazine photography in the US began to depict anonymous Israelis as individuals rather than generic masses or types, before presenting Palestinians as individuals, is not simply a result of bias against Arabs, although that could be one factor. A number of Magnum photographers, such as the Hungarian brothers Robert and Cornell Capa,

saw Israel in idealistic terms and romanticized its emerging society in their work of the early 1950s. The British Magnum photographer, George Rodger, on the other hand, was more attuned to the situation of Arab societies at this time and his work appears sympathetic to Palestinian refugees. But the general sense among the left-leaning Magnum photographers, early proponents in creating a style that depicted anonymous people as individuals, was that Israel's fight for existence was uniquely important in the years after WWII, resulting in a focus on Israelis to the detriment of others. Issues of logistics, such as permission to photograph and access to people and events also played a role, as did the camera equipment and skills of various photographers and the length of their assignments.

In what became the predominant style of candid photojournalism after the 1950s, influenced by Magnum's classic style, an emphasis emerged on creating a narrative within the frame of the photograph, not simply capturing a general scene. Israel's own narratives of a small, democratic, Western-friendly nation battling forces of aggression were very effectively disseminated to the media and easily illustrated by photojournalists. The Palestinian-told story, however, was not well broadcast, leaving the creation of a narrative to others (which may be one reason photos emphasized broad themes of refugee flows and dispossession, and later anger and resistance) but often without specific humanizing details. As photojournalists began to explore the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in depth during the years of the first *intifada*, more nuanced and informed work has been produced, although in an increasingly-tight market for photography, not necessarily published in newspaper or magazine form.

Photographs are not transparent windows onto reality or simple reflections of political points of view. Photographs are also not easily controlled – details appear that the photographer missed, expressions and gestures are ambiguous and open to multiple interpretations, and crucial non-visual information is absent. Studying these limitations and the multiple forces acting on photography enables a better understanding of the complex ways photographs are created and circulated. Photojournalism needs to be examined as a set of practices that work within society to both reflect and produce knowledge, identities and politics.

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Endnotes

¹ This is particularly true among activists but also in more conventional communications or media studies work. For a number of examples see, Yahya Kamalipour, ed., *The US Media and the Middle East: Image and Perception* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997). A more in-depth study, but also focused on reading the meaning of images in political terms, is Tamar Liebes, *Reporting the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (London: Routledge Research in Cultural and Media Studies, 1997).

² A focus on style here does not mean ignoring the content and meaning in photographs, instead I focus on the interplay between style, content, and context.

³ Due to high licensing fees I was not able to reproduce all the photographs I discuss. I chose to concentrate on the older photographs that may be less accessible to the reader.

⁴ For a full analysis of style in the photojournalism of Magnum Photos see Michelle Woodward, "The Construction of Photojournalism: Visual Style and Branding in the Magnum Photos Agency," SM thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2002.

⁵ Since Magnum was founded by photojournalists for the purpose of protecting their interests and freeing them from the editorial control of magazines, they championed policies that reconfigured the relationship between photographer, editor and publisher. The principle of a photographer's ownership of his/her own work remains an important tenant of Magnum's policies that was adopted by many other agencies, although that currently is being eroded across the industry.

⁶ Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. David Lodge (Essex: Longman Group UK Limited, 1988).

⁷ For examples, see Michael Ignatieff, ed., *Magnum Degrees* (London: Phaidon Press, 1999), a book of photographs taken after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, which reveals their earlier classic themes in a new form.

⁸ For a description of a related parallel disruption of perspective, from modernist frameworks to postmodernist ones, see George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

⁹ Karin E. Becker, "To control our image: photojournalists and new technology," in *Media, Culture and Society*, vol. 13, no. 3, July 1991, p. 386.

¹⁰ "Covering the Crisis," *Newsweek*, June 19, 1967, p. 82.

¹¹ See *Time*, January 25, 1988, p. 34. "Angry Arab women attempt to block a house to house search in Gaza."

¹² "Breaking Access Barriers On the West Bank," *Photo District News*, June 2002, p. 18 - 19.

¹³ For examples see the work of George Azar and Simon Norfolk.

¹⁴ Nancy Roth, "The Elements of Style," in *Afterimage*, vol. 14, no. 3, October 1986.

¹⁵ This and the following comments can be found here, http://www.lightstalkers.org/poyi_wins_bloody_hell.