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The World As Seen Through Award-Winning Photos: How Photojournalism Contests Contribute to Geographical Stereotypes

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The World As Seen Through Award-Winning Photos: How Photojournalism Contests Contribute to Geographical Stereotypes

A woman kneels on the ground, arms splayed out in front of her, fingers outstretched as if asking “Why?” Her purple and yellow sari is the only color against the earthen ground where her hands have imprinted the dust. She cries out in grief, mourning her dead relative whose lifeless arm reaches into the photo where she lies. This was the World Press Picture of the Year in 2004, which highlighted human suffering after a 9.3 magnitude earthquake caused tsunamis in nine Asian countries. The most damage occurred in Tamil Nadu, India where the photo was taken.¹ It is just one example of the death and suffering that consistently appears in award winning photojournalism, especially in photos shot in developing and non-Western countries.



When a photojournalist creates an image intimate or moving enough to win an award, it is often due to the moment’s historical importance, a novel way of expressing an event or issue,

¹ Arko Datta, *World Press Photo 2004*, World Press Photo.

or an interesting composition that stands out to judges. Even more often, winning images tend to invoke a sense of empathy for the subjects in the picture. Two primary goals of photojournalism are to inform and to tell a story, according to Kenneth Kobre author of *Photojournalism: The Professional's Approach*.² The kinds of pictures that ignite primal or compassionate emotions are often the strongest photos and the ones that win photojournalism competitions.³ International photo competitions such as World Press Photo (WPP) and Pictures of the Year International (POYI) annually celebrate the photographers and pictures judged to be the best. The winning photographs from these competitions are distributed around the world as a representation of the important events, triumphs, and tragedies of the year. Because these photos are judged as the best of photojournalism, they could be expected to accurately express the human experience. So what do award-winning photos communicate about the world?

I examined both World Press Photo and Pictures of the Year International single image winners to determine what themes are most common among award-winning photojournalism and how those themes relate to geographic location. This is important because as these photos get circulated in the media, they become some of the most vivid representations of human history.

Pictures of the Year began in 1944 as a contest for photographers from the United States and became Pictures of the Year International in 2001. Tens of thousands of pictures are entered each year and the winners are commemorated in exhibits, a book, and on the POYI website. Workshops and seminars have also become part of the POYI organization.⁴ Like POYI, World Press Photo began as a national competition, the Zilveren Camera, which was first held in Holland in 1930. It became an international competition in 1955. In the first competition, 42

² Kenneth Kobre, *Photojournalism: The Professional's Approach*, (Burlington: Elsevier, 2008), 229.

³ Kobre, *Photojournalism*, 456.

⁴ "History of the Contest," Pictures of the Year International, accessed February 2, 2014, <http://poyi.org/67/history.php>

photographers from 11 countries submitted about 300 photos. Today more than 5,000 photographers from 125 countries submit more than 90,000 photos annually. The organization also puts on the world's most expansive photo exhibition and offers a variety of learning opportunities and fellowships.⁵

Both contest organizations select an international jury with the expectation it will uphold the ethics and values of photojournalism. Telling the truth with photographs is the primary goal, which guides ethics that include not altering photographs and avoiding conflicts of interest with subjects.⁶ Judging is a subjective process, which is why the organizations select judges with a variety of strengths and aesthetic values to balance opinions. Still, a great photo is easily recognized. "Photography has a magic that happens [instantaneously]. On one hand it's difficult to judge because it's so fast, but on the other hand...as soon as you're looking at the screen you have a gut feeling that tells you that it's something you like or not," says World Press Photo 2014 nature jury chair Daniel Beltrá.⁷ Judges sift through the initial set of entries purely by whether or not the photo is interesting at first glance. They then go on to consider the news value, originality, difficulty of capturing the shot, and the meaning of the photo to make final decisions.⁸ The judges take their job seriously and want the photos they choose to represent photojournalism at a high professional level in order to set the bar for the quality expected in the profession.

⁵ "History of the Contest," World Press Photo, accessed February 2, 2014, <http://www.worldpressphoto.org/history-contest>

⁶ "NPPA Code of Ethics," National Press Photographers Association, accessed February 10, 2014, https://nppa.org/code_of_ethics

⁷ "2014 Photo Contest Jury Interviews," World Press Photo, accessed February 15, 2014, <http://www.worldpressphoto.org/2014-photo-contest/jury-interviews>

⁸ "2014 Photo Contest Jury Interviews."

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study addresses what themes are present in the single-image first place World Press Photos and Pictures of the Year International from 2004-2014 and whether certain themes appear more frequently in specific geographic regions. The study also examines the nationality of the photographers and how it relates to the representation of various geographic regions.

By looking at the two most highly regarded photojournalism competitions, the themes attributed to powerful photojournalism emerged. Previous literature affirms that most award-winning photos contain violence, conflict, or suffering in some form.⁹ To add to the field, I analyzed whether the common themes in award-winning images have changed over time and which themes are most prominent in which geographic regions. The way these images frame the events of the year demonstrates the view of important world events from the judges' perspectives as well as photojournalists in the field. This study examines if those images have changed between 2004 and 2014 and how they continue to permeate the representation of certain parts of the world as violent, sorrowful, and exoticized places.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: FRAMING

The themes of the images coded in this study frame a specific perception of the world. Framing is essentially the selection of specific terms and parts of reality in order to make an event or issue more digestible and memorable. Robert Entman describes framing as using parts of reality to “make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a

⁹ Hun Shik Kim and Zoe C. Smith, “Sixty Years of Showing the World to America: Pulitzer Prize-Winning Photographs, 1942-2002,” *Gazette: The International Journal for Communication Studies* 67 (2005): 308.

particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.”¹⁰

While Entman mostly discusses written text, visuals frame issues as well. In fact, since photojournalistic images are often believed to be closer to the truth than writing, according to former photography director for the Associated Press Hal Buell, they have a greater influence over the viewer. Buell says writing is someone’s interpretation of an event while pictures document what actually happened.¹¹ But photographers, like writers, can interpret an event through their composition and choice of what to photograph.

Of the four effects of frames outlined by Entman—define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, suggest remedies—visuals are very capable of defining a problem. “It is the photographs that give one the vivid realization of what actually took place,” former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said about the photos of Iraqi prisoner abuse in 2004.¹² Barbie Zelizer explains that photographs make it more difficult for a viewer to doubt the reality of a situation in her book *About to Die: How News Images Move the Public*.¹³ In this way, images are crucial to catching people’s attention and making them notice, rather than ignore, an issue. Yet, if the same issues are repeatedly covered in the same geographic regions, a skewed version of life in that location may begin to emerge.

According to Lulu Rodriguez and Daniela Dimitrova, image analysis is important because images “override messages embedded in the text.”¹⁴ How events or issues are framed in

¹⁰ Robert M. Entman, “Framing: Towards Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm,” *Journal of Communication* 43 (1993): 52.

¹¹ Hal Buell, *Moments: The Pulitzer Prize-Winning Photographs*, (New York: Black Dog and Levanthal Publishers, 2002).

¹² Shapiro, “Vivid Photos Remain Etched in Memory.”

¹³ Barbie Zelizer, *About to Die: How News Images Move the Public*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 2.

¹⁴ Lulu Rodriguez and Daniella Dimitrova, “The Levels of Visual Framing,” *Journal of Visual Literacy* 30, no. 1 [2011]: 49.

the media affects how readers understand these events. Just like text, pictures can communicate metaphors and emphasize one aspect of a story while obscuring another.¹⁵ Rodriguez and Dimitrova attribute the power of images to frame events to the fact that they are “less intrusive than words and as such require less cognitive load.”¹⁶ Essentially, a viewer can take in more information with less work, in less time, with images than with text—the proverbial “1,000 words” in a picture. Due to the power of images to invoke strong emotional responses and provide more instantaneous information, people are less likely to question information in a photograph according to Rodriguez and Dimitrova. In fact, visuals often take precedence for a reader when textual and visual framing is contradictory.¹⁷ This is why how people and places are represented in photographs is so important.

The way an image is framed makes it more salient, or “more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences,” according to Entman.¹⁸ Location, repetition, and addition of meaningful icons are all methods of making information memorable. This study focuses on prevalent themes in photos and how they are associated with specific geographic regions.

SETTING THE STANDARDS

POYI and WPP act as the industry standard to legitimize the best of the best photojournalism. Because the winning photographers get recognition and the photos are viewed widely, the winning photographs become examples of how to do great photography. Bruno S. Frey and Susanne Neckermann explain how psychological effects of awards and prizes define

¹⁵ Rodriguez and Dimitrova, “Visual Framing,” 50.

¹⁶ Rodriguez and Dimitrova, “Visual Framing,” 50.

¹⁷ Rodriguez and Dimitrova, “Visual Framing,” 50.

¹⁸ Entman, “Framing,” 53.

role models for future behavior and how to be successful.¹⁹ Because conflict-stricken themes tend to win prizes, photographers may be drawn to similar thematic situations in order to mimic the most desirable types of photos. Thus, awards indirectly guide future behavior.²⁰ Although photographers choose pictures that they believe to be their best work, it is ultimately the judges' selections that set the standards for subsequent years.²¹ When photographers see the winning images, they may be prompted to follow a similar style or issue previously deemed successful. This causes photographers to focus on similar themes when making images in specific geographic regions, ultimately molding stereotypes of issues in that area.

Some judges view it as a mistake to have too much similarity to previous winners. Kerim Okten, World Press Photo 2014 sports jury chair, says he sees that photographers struggle with connecting their work in the news cycle with the expectations of competitions. While he thinks they should be aligned, photographers are changing their photos or shooting specifically for what they think the judges will like.²² A typical mistake is that photographers focus on a topic that won the previous year. "Who's not following the trend, who is following his own soul," is more likely to stand out from the rest of the photos, Okten explains. Still, these contests give signals as to how photojournalism should proceed, and when similar topics are photographed year after year, certain regions become associated with certain themes.

BUILDING ON PAST STUDIES

¹⁹ Bruno S. Frey and Susanne Neckermann, "Awards: A View from Psychological Economics," *Journal of Psychology* (2008): 6.

²⁰ Frey and Neckermann, "Awards," 8.

²¹ Keith Greenwood, "Picturing Defiance: Visions of Democracy in Iran," *The International Communication Gazette* 74 (2012): 624.

²² "2014 Photo Contest Jury Interviews."

A comparison, by Keith Greenwood and Zoe Smith, of the themes of POYI award winners to a study on Pulitzer Prize winning photos from 1943 to 2003 found that these photos limit the representation of the world, and especially developing countries, as a conflict-ridden place.²³ This is important because most people cannot visit everywhere in the world, and photographs are one of the ways people understand events and life beyond a domestic scope. An individual's idea of reality, especially about foreign countries, is heavily influenced by the media rather than his or her own experiences.²⁴ Photographs influence how people view other cultures and can either break or mold stereotypes about those places.²⁵

According to Marta Zarzycka and Martijn Kleppe, award-winning photos have become less about capturing a specific moment or event uniquely and more about adhering to a system of these recognizable tropes or visual metaphors.²⁶ “The more multi-purpose and generic [tropes] are, the more commercial and widespread they become, capturing the contemporary shift of photography from witnessing to becoming a symbolic system, a system actively and intentionally sustained by powerful agents,” Zarzycka and Kleppe explain.²⁷ As humans, we relate to specific moments. Even cross-culturally, there are ways that we express emotions that everyone can understand. Visual cues represent ideas and experiences we all have. A great photo can tell the story in one shot, and including symbols that people recognize makes the story easier to understand. Specific symbols, such as blood, guns, a protestor in action, or a person being rescued, according to Zarzycka and Kleppe, represent themes of violence and suffering that Hun

²³ Keith Greenwood and C. Zoe Smith, "How The World Looks To Us," *Journalism Practice* 1, no. 1 (January 2007): 82.

²⁴ Nadia Hameed and Aisha Zubair, "Effects of Photographic Framing on Perceptions of Social Protest," *FWU Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 5, No. 1, (2011): 75.

²⁵ Greenwood and Smith, "How The World Looks To Us," 86.

²⁶ Marta Zarzycka and Martijn Kleppe, "Awards, Archives, and Affects: Tropes in the World Press Photo Contest 2009-11," *Media, Culture & Society* 35, no. 8 (November 2013): 990.

²⁷ Zarzycka and Kleppe, "Awards, Archives, and Affects," 990.

Shik Kim and Zoe Smith also found appear again and again in photographs.²⁸ The frequency of these visuals (blood, guns, mourners) makes them symbolic of issues and they become subsequently more frequent because they help the meaning of photographs register quickly.

When international news is viewed through photographs, especially those in competitions, the impression becomes episodic and focused on violence and conflict. Keith Greenwood studied the focus of photographers during the 2009 Iranian presidential election and found that photographers focused on the public outrage after the voting results contained irregularities rather than the peaceful voting and support rallies for the tenth presidential election in the country.²⁹ This is partly because photographers relied on the frame of violence to quickly and efficiently show the most salient outcome of the election. While repeating symbols and themes helps photos convey a message quickly, according to Greenwood, too few frames in relation to an issue or region lead to a “common interpretation of the event...and limit the development of alternative points of view.”³⁰

STEREOTYPES OF FOREIGN PLACES

Readers’ responses to photographs tend to reinforce stereotypes, according to a study of images and text in a story about Saudi Arabia in *National Geographic* by Andrew Mendelson and Fabienne Darling-Wolf.³¹ Images have a more immediate response than text because they communicate a message in one glance. Mendelson and Darling-Wolf claim that images are more denotative than text.³² When people only view photographs, as they do when they look at the

²⁸ Kim and Smith, “Sixty Years of Showing the World to America,” 308.

²⁹ Greenwood, “Picturing Defiance,” 620.

³⁰ Greenwood, “Picturing Defiance,” 622.

³¹ Andrew L. Mendelson and Fabienne Darling-Wolf, “Readers’ Interpretations of Visual and Verbal Narratives of a *National Geographic* Story on Saudi Arabia,” *Journalism* 10 (2009): 798.

³² Mendelson and Darling-Wolf, “Readers’ Interpretations,” 801.

galleries of award-winning images, they focus on the exotic and previously formed stereotypes that the pictures may reinforce. “The photographs of Saudi Arabia, particularly when seen on their own, were more likely to resonate with and confirm stereotypes than to contradict or complicate them,” Mendelson and Darling-Wolf wrote about their study.³³ The images of Saudi Arabia in the study fixated on the impression of a threatening and dangerous place.³⁴ Not only did viewing only photographs tend to reinforce stereotypes, the photos also separated the viewers from a more complex understanding of the country. According to Mendelson and Darling-Wolf, pictures emphasize stereotypes especially when the images of a place recurrently focus on the same themes.³⁵

Part of the reason why these stereotypes are so easily reinforced is because photojournalists tend to adhere to a set of conventional symbols that help quickly define meaning in their photographs. Photographers “choose from a repertoire of standard types of pictures that used a limited number of visual components and compositional devices,” explains Dianne Hagaman in her book *How I Learned Not to be a Photojournalist*.³⁶ This makes it harder for photojournalists to break free from standard news photography. These symbols and themes are present in award-winning photos, and they maintain perceptions of some foreign countries as places with continual conflict and suffering.

METHODOLOGY

³³ Mendelson and Darling-Wolf, “Readers’ Interpretations,” 812.

³⁴ Mendelson and Darling-Wolf, “Readers’ Interpretations,” 809.

³⁵ Mendelson and Darling-Wolf, “Readers’ Interpretations,” 810.

³⁶ Dianne Hagaman, *How I Learned Not to be a Photojournalist*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 11.

I updated and expanded a study by Greenwood and Smith about the themes in award-winning photos between 1943 and 2003 to determine whether the common themes found in award-winning photojournalism have changed within the last ten years. This study examined the themes of single-image first prize photos in World Press Photos and Pictures of the Year International from 2004 to 2014 in context of the geographical region in which they were shot. I also looked at the nationality of the photographer in comparison with the region the photo was taken. Categories included General News, Spot News, People in the Media, Daily Life and the World Press Photo of the Year in World Press Photos. Pictures of the Year International categories included General News Reporting, Spot News, Feature, Pictorial, and Conflict in both Newspaper and Magazine Divisions. Contest categories excluded from this study were Sports, Arts and Entertainment, Portrait and multiple-picture photo stories. Sports photos are usually focused on peak action and are less about putting a story into broader context. Portraits also have a different intention than other categories because they often focus on a person rather than action. Still, portraits and sports are present within the other categories. I also excluded multiple-picture stories because they use a series of photos to communicate an issue, and this study focused on what themes can be encompassed in a single image.

In this content analysis, I coded for the presence of a variety of prominent themes, which appeared in Greenwood and Smith's study. Their themes include war/coup, poverty/social problems, demonstration/protest, crime/terrorism, accident, natural disaster, racial/ethnic problem, sports, prominent person, human interest/oddities, to which I added politics and health. I also coded the geographic area the photo was taken and nationalities of photographers which fit into the regions Eastern Europe, Africa, Latin America, Middle East, Southeast Asia, Asia, Western Europe, South Pacific/Australia, North America, and India. I double coded when more

than one theme appeared in the photograph. The captions of the photos were referenced to determine geographic location, the photographer's nationality, and to differentiate between themes such as a war scene and a natural disaster scene.

While the World Press Photo categories generally remained the same throughout the ten years studied, Pictures of the Year International has updated its categories and divisions to stay consistent with new media and current events. There were originally two sections for all the categories in Newspaper and Magazine Divisions and it evolved into a single General Division in 2009. There are also fewer single image POYI winners since 2009 because the contest now focuses on multiple-picture stories. When the World Press Picture of the Year was also a winner in another category, I did not code twice. It should be noted that there were a few years missing from archives. The WPP 2010 winners and the POYI 2012 winners have not been archived online. The feature photo for POYI 70 in 2011 is not available online either.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Ninety-four photographs over the span of ten years were coded for symbols that fit into common themes defined by Greenwood and Smith. Thirty-three of the photos were from the Middle East. The next most frequent geographic locations were Africa and North America, each with 14 photos. Southeast Asia, Asia, India, and Latin America were each represented in six to eight photos. In contrast to Greenwood and Smith's study, only seven of the ninety-four photos, or 7 percent, were taken in Europe, whereas the highest percent of photos in their study, almost 30 percent, were taken in Europe. I added the geographic regions of North America and India to my study because photos were frequently taken in those locations in the last ten years and were not represented in the previous study.

The most well-represented theme was war/coup, which has not changed since Greenwood and Smith's study ended in 2003. Since my study double coded for themes, for example when protests dealt with poverty or refugees were from a war, the number of represented themes exceeded the number of photographs.³⁷ Each photo competition equally represented the war theme with fifteen photos to make up 32 percent of all the coded photos. The war/coup theme was present in 40 percent of the POYI photos studied by Greenwood and Smith from 1944 to 2003.

The next most common themes were poverty/social problems and crime/terrorism, each showing up sixteen times. Demonstration/protest and politics, which was added to the themes in the previous study, were also frequently represented, present twelve and eleven times respectively. Often, the protest themes were in conjunction with the politics theme because people were protesting the government. For example, Photo A shows demonstrators in Egypt after a televised speech in which the country's president stated he would not resign from his 30-year regime. These men are protesting the outcome of a political statement, therefore warranting two coded themes.

³⁷ Themes were coded a total of 119 times and there were 94 photographs.

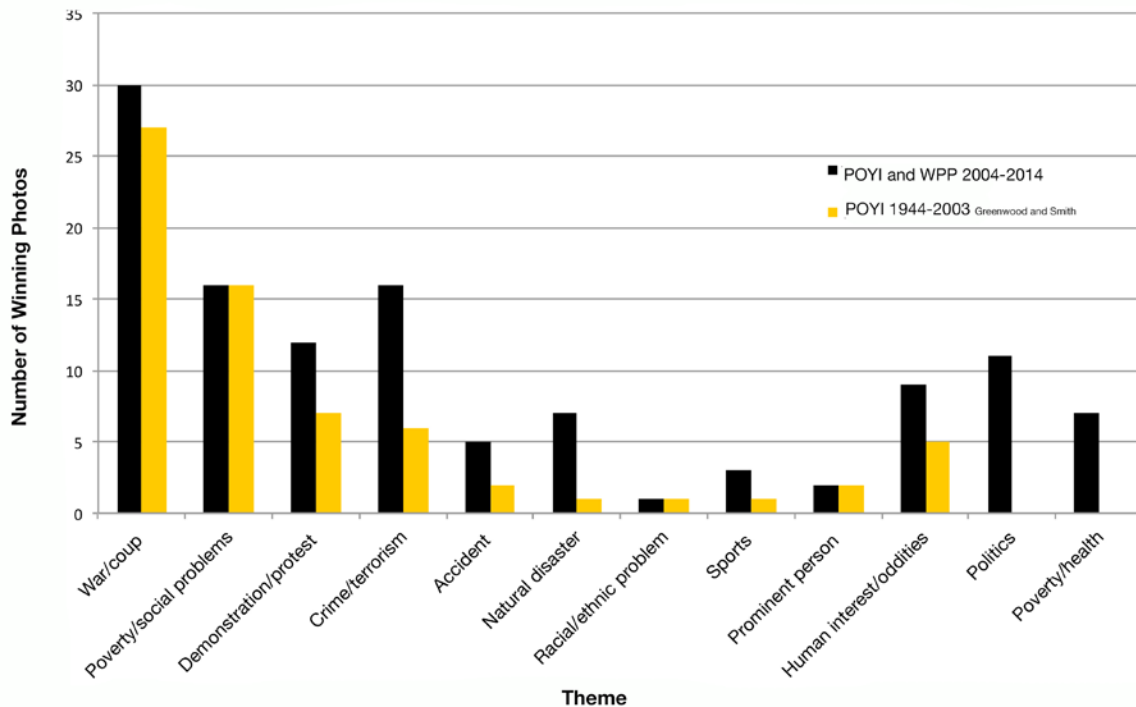
Photo A
Photographer: Alex Majoli
Nationality: Italy
Location: Cairo, Egypt

Demonstrators on Tahrir Square, Cairo, react to Egypt's president's, Hosni Mubarak, statement that he would not give up power after a 30-year-old regime.



Other themes, which in general are less intense, or longer-lasting issues, such as health, were not represented as frequently. A comprehensive visual of the frequency of thematic outcomes is available in the graph below.

A Comparison of Theme Frequency Between Studies



Sixty percent of the war/coup photos were from the Middle East, as well as half the demonstration/protest photos and 56 percent of the crime/terrorism photos. This could be due to the saturation of the data with photos from the region. The frequency of these kinds of photos perpetuates the stereotype that the Middle East is a violent place where people are terrorists.

Issues related to poverty were most frequently photographed in Africa. Of twenty-two poverty-related photos, eight were from the region. The effects of natural occurrences, such as a drought, that cause health issues and starvation tend to be photographed widely there. Photo Set B shows examples of health related photos in Africa. The portrait of the woman shows the effects of a malnourished child in Niger following a drought. The other photo depicts a man caring for his child who is suffering from malaria. These photos represent poverty in relation to health commonly photographed in Africa.



Photo Set B

Photographer: Finbarr O'Reilly
Nationality: Canada
Location: Niger

The fingers of a malnourished child are pressed against the lips of his mother at an emergency feeding center. One of the worst recent droughts and a heavy plague of locusts that had destroyed the previous year's harvest, leaving millions of people severely short of food.



Photographer: William Daniels
Nationality: United States
Location: Uganda

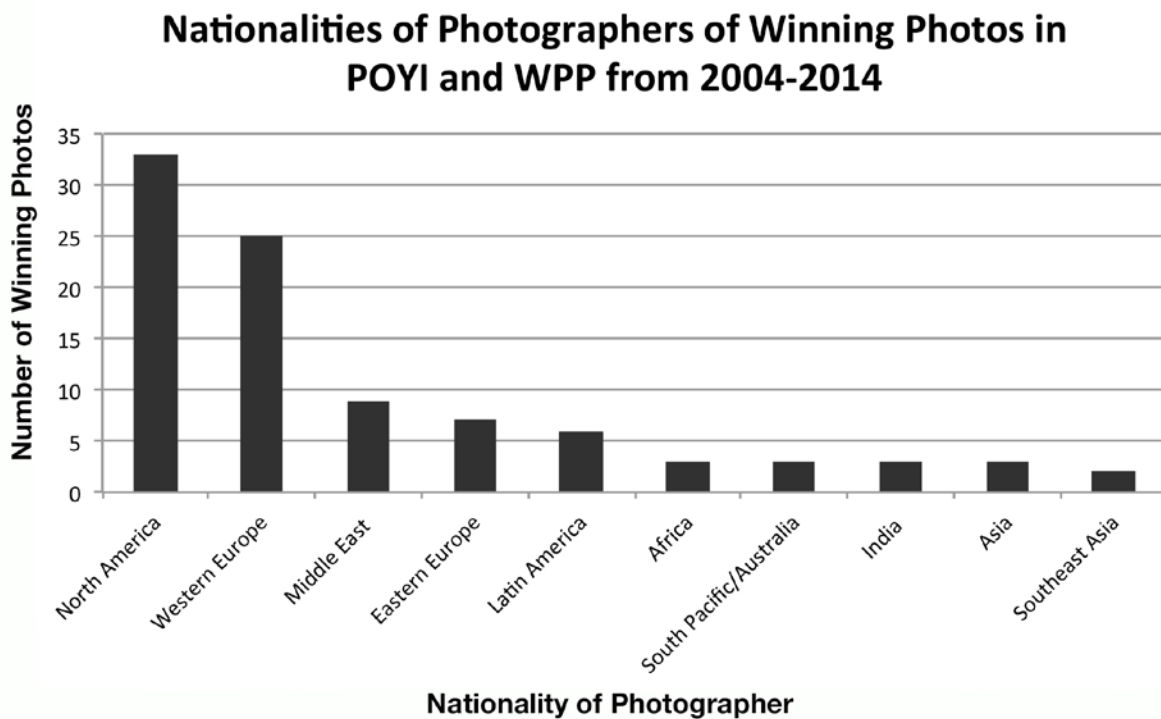
A man and his child who is suffering of headache and strong fever due to malaria lie under an old untreated mosquito net that doesn't protect well from malaria mosquitoes.

Most of the photographers—thirty-three to be exact—were from North America, which was primarily the United States, save one Canadian photographer. Twenty-five of the photographers were from Western Europe, and the last third of photographers were from every other region combined. The nationalities of photographers most frequently represented are completely different than the regions most commonly photographed. This shows that photographers who travel to take pictures and photographers from developed Western countries dominate these photo contests.

The only regions where a native photographer did not win with a photo of his or her homeland in one of these photo contests were Western and Eastern Europe. Every other country had at least one native photographer representing an understanding of issues in his or her own country. Africa was most photographed by photographers from every other region. Only Latin American, Southeast Asian, and the South Pacific/Australian photographers did not win with

photos from Africa in the years studied. This shows that Africa is a popular location for foreign photographers to flock.

North America was rarely photographed by foreign photographers, with only two foreign photographers, one from Western Europe and one from the South Pacific/Australia, which makes it the only country that is almost exclusively photographed by people who know the place best—its inhabitants. While the photos in the United States were still about serious issues like war or poverty, the photographs were more intimate and less violent, instead of action in the midst of warfare. Some examples include a soldier's funeral or soldiers saying goodbye. The graph below shows the unequal dispersion of photographers' nationalities.



The density of violent photos and the noticeable absence of uplifting pictures (only nine of ninety-four photos were human interest, sports, or politics without also including another theme such as protest, poverty, or war) shows a world that is stricken by suffering. If the purpose of taking pictures of these atrocities is to bring awareness to the situation to make a change, then

the continuation of images portraying violence and suffering in photo contests proves photos do not have the influence photographers hope they do. But this year's World Press Photo of the Year marks a change. Instead of being a photo of a mourning person or in the midst of war, it shows people trying to communicate. It is a photograph of people from Djibouti searching for cell signals from Somalia where mobile plans are cheaper. The technology represents a shared human desire for connection, and the most common way that we communicate today. World Press Photo 2014 judge Gary Knight describes the World Press Photo of the year as "so hopeful."³⁸ The silhouettes can be taken out of context to symbolize virtually any person. It is a photo of gaining and maintaining relationships and is a good example of a photographer from the United States portraying the developing world beyond episodic events.



Photographer:
John Stanmeyer
Nationality:
United States
Location:
Djibouti

African migrants
on the shore of
Djibouti City
raise their
phones in an
attempt to
capture an
inexpensive
signal from
neighboring
Somalia.

Images of daily life like the one above are rarely depicted in photo contests because newsworthy international news are often violent. The picture is still part of an

³⁸ "2014 Photo Contest Jury Interviews."

³⁹ John Stanmeyer, *World Press Photo 2014*, World Press Photo

important issue, but it is something unusual instead of the expected. “Every jury that I have ever been on, here, has always sought to find something a little bit different, something that nevertheless addresses a really critical issue. Very rarely does that happen, and very rarely do you have the opportunity to make that choice with the photos that are left on the table,” explains Gary Knight, 2014 World Press Photo contest jury chair, about photo judging.⁴⁰ This is because winning photos tend to mimic other winning photos. The idea that the best photos must go beyond the ordinary does not play out in reality. For example, the four photos below are similarly composed images of relatives mourning or holding their injured or lifeless loved ones. The body language in the photos is almost identical and it shows how multiple themes—protest, natural disaster, and war—can all produce the same photo concept. These are the types of photos that commonly win photo contests.



WPP 2012 People in the News/POY: A woman cradles her son who was harmed by tear gas in a street protest.
WPP 2005 General News: A man holds his son who is getting treated after losing an arm in an earthquake in India.
POYI 2013 Spot News: A man holds his son who was killed by the Syrian Army.
POYI 2013 General News: A Palestinian man kisses the hand of his dead relative.

⁴⁰ “2014 Photo Contest Jury Interviews.”

As the photos above demonstrate, photographers focus on war and disaster along with the universal themes of human relationships. But some judges feel that photographers should go beyond the expected events. The problem is that important stories are now photographed by fewer professionals, with less depth, in less time. Budget limits and time limits along with a Western perspective may be part of the reason photos around the world are episodic and acute. It may also be why photographers revert to taking photos that immediately communicate consequences like the photos above. Knight says he was disappointed at the “narrow view” of what photographers felt necessary to photograph and enter in the World Press Photo competition in 2014. He attributes it to less financial support for photojournalism than there was ten years ago. Other judges also expressed that budgeting seemed to limit photographers. Instead of an all-encompassing view, these pictures show the simple, yet globally shared emotional trials of losing a relative.

In general, the narrow view of photojournalism focuses on the aftermath or consequences of either human-caused or natural disasters. Rarely did the photos focus on the causes of issues, which may be due to the resources and research required to document issues before they cause a major problem. In many cases, photos anticipating a problem are not taken because it isn't until there is violent outbreak or a disaster to notify journalists something significant is happening. The consequences of an issue are also much more visually dynamic than events leading up or the process of recovery afterwards. Perhaps foreign photographers are unlikely to stay in a region long enough to document long-term, so they mostly cover major events. In order to avoid Western stereotypes of other countries, I would be wise for photographers to document daily life and ongoing issues for longer periods.

A photographer's nationality may influence how he or she frames an issue or a place because their perceptions of the world will surface in their work. They frame issues by what they choose to photograph and how they photograph it. Editors and judges also determine frames when they choose which photos to publish or which photos are the best. A Bangladeshi photographer, Shahidul Alam, also thinks the nationality of who created a photograph matters. Bangladesh is a poor country, and is considered a developing country to the developed Western world, and he thinks the local people should be telling the local stories. Alam explains, and my study affirms, that the Western world has a monopoly on the media and it doesn't represent developing countries fairly.⁴¹ Having Westerners photograph horrific events in developing countries without showing more long-term successes, arts, or daily life, becomes "patronizing storytelling" in which the developed world is documenting the parts of the developing world that they need to help.⁴² In this way developing countries become known only for atrocities or for unusual cultural practices.

It is true that war, crime, poverty and health issues exist everywhere. But when photographs only document the negative aspects of a people or a region, the narrow view propagates stereotypes. Alam says that foreign photographers and Western media rarely focus on Bangladesh's culture and art so he has made it a project to educate and inspire people from all over the world to document the stories that matter to them.⁴³

It is becoming more common for other native people to show their own perspectives and a variety of programs and books provide people with the resources to do so. For example, Leah

⁴¹ James Estrin, July 19, 2013, the Work of Shahidul Alam, "Wresting the Narrative From the West," *The New York Times Lens Blog*, accessed February 3, 2014, http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/07/19/wresting-the-narrative-from-the-west/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=2

⁴² Estrin, the work of Shahidul Alam, "Wresting the Narrative From the West."

⁴³ Estrin, the work of Shahidul Alam, "Wresting the Narrative From the West."

Bendavid-Val, a photography historian who is interested in how photography affects regional perceptions, recently published a book showcasing Russian photographers to expand stereotypical views of the region in films and media. Bendavid-Val values native photographers because “photographers from any country, from any culture, have a way of seeing their homeland and their own people that outsiders are unlikely to have.”⁴⁴ Still, the vast majority of photographs that get published in major media outlets and win photojournalism competitions are by professionals who tend to come from more developed regions in North America and Europe.

CONCLUSION

Oversimplification and exaggeration of issues and events in photos may stem from a shallow understanding of the people in a region. While individual photos that document true conflict and suffering do not necessarily alter the truth or breach ethical guidelines, not representing all parts of a story, including successes or recovery, does.

In a global world, we need to think about catering to a global audience. Pictures that primarily focus on the negative or exotic aspects of a country might not represent that country adequately. There need to be more ethical considerations as far as how foreign photographers only show an etic point of view. Since photographers from developed, Western countries were the dominant winners in major photojournalism contests from 2004 to 2014, the contests only show outsiders’ perspectives of the world. While there is not a complete global idea of photographic ethics, The Center for Journalism Ethics at the University of Wisconsin has proposed a proposition for global ethics that arises from a need to change the Western

⁴⁴ Diana Markosian, March 10, 2014, Review of Leah Bendavid-Val’s latest book, *Life and Happiness in Siberia’s Cold*, *The New York Times Lens Blog*, accessed March 10, 2014, http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/03/10/life-and-happiness-in-siberias-cold/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=1&

perspective that controls global media.⁴⁵ Photographers do need to document wars, poverty, and other social and environmental inequalities and uprisings in order to bring light to these situations and the importance of these photos is probably why they win contests. But their predictable coverage and content creates regional stereotypes that could be alleviated by more coverage from native photographers and photographing beyond the onset and aftermath of violence or disaster.

⁴⁵ Stephen J. A. Ward, "Global Media Ethics," University of Wisconsin: Center for Media Ethics, <http://ethics.journalism.wisc.edu/resources/global-media-ethics/>

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