



Photographer: Mannie Garcia ©1994

Image 1: The image is of a starving kid in Goma sitting on the ground sleeping with a group of people standing behind him



Photographer: David Turnley ©1991

Image 2: The image is of a US Sergeant crying after he learns that the body bag near him holds a friend of his that was recently killed by friendly fire.

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### It is the Job of a Photojournalists to Capture the Truth in Their Images

My father introduced me to his friends and colleagues Mannie Garcia and David Turnley, who he has worked with since the late 1980s. Garcia and Turnley have covered war and suffering around the globe for nearly 30 years. I have chosen to analyze Garcia's image of a starving child sitting on the ground sleeping with a group of people standing behind him and Turnley's image of a US Army Sergeant crying after he learns that the body bag near him holds a friend of his that was recently killed by friendly fire. While both of their images are of different events – Garcia in Goma, Zaire, and Turnley during the Gulf War in 1991 – both share a similar and common thread: A truthful representation of human suffering caused at the hands of others during war. In her book, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag states that there is a necessity to look at these types of images even as we risk exploitation, as she would argue that both, Garcia's and Turnley's, images do. What Sontag does not consider is that many of these images she sees as exploiting the suffering of others are made by photojournalists, whose sole job is to tell and show the truth in their images to bring us what someday will be the history of an event.

Garcia's image of the starving boy sitting in the dirt asleep was made while he was on assignment for Reuters Wire Service to Goma, Zaire to cover the mass exodus of people from

Rwanda. Garcia goes on to explain the situation and conditions in the war-torn regions and the living conditions for the refugees. “Daily, local women would travel around the village of Goma to gather the displaced children, these children would be taken to NGO compounds to be stripped, cleaned up, then given clean clothes and fed” (Garcia). The mass exodus was a result of the genocide in Rwanda during the 1990s and Garcia says that the purpose of the image was to show the effects of the genocide on Zaire, a neighboring country. He spent most of his time in Zaire observing and photographing the people there and how they lived their lives. During his observations, he noticed that “once washed, the children merely stood in the sun to dry which was when I noticed a little naked boy sitting on the ground sound asleep. He was so tired. That’s why the title of the image is ‘Too Tired’” (Garcia).

In photography, to provide the best angle for depicting the emotion in the image, it is all about perspective when capturing the image. Garcia said, “with this image I was looking for perspective. Many of the images I had seen up to that point were of children taken from an omniscient perspective. To capture this image, I wanted to make myself on an equal footing, so I laid down on the ground.” By laying on the ground, Garcia gets to the level of the subject, simulating a different perspective compared to the perspective that could have been created by is he had been standing up. By laying down, the image only shows the legs of the people behind the boy, not their entire body. Doing this creates a juxtaposition between the face of the boy as a part of the foreground and the legs of the various people in the background. This juxtaposition in the photo is the contrast of the pure emotion in the boy’s face, and the lack of emotion we see from the legs in the background.

Image 2 shows US Army Sergeant Ken Kozakiewicz sitting inside a helicopter crying after he learns that the body bag near his feet holds a friend that was recently killed by friendly

fire during the Gulf War in 1991. The image was taken by David Turnley who was on assignment with the *Detroit Free Press* and *US News and World Report* magazine. “I had originally been dispatched as part of a pool to be attached to the 82nd Airborne as one of the forward-most combat photographers” (Turnley). While Turnley spent most of his time covering the war in the Middle East, one of the most memorable images of the war came from a helicopter departure on what ended up being the last day of battle. When talking about how he captured the image, Turnley said “I got into the helicopter, they put the body bag into the helicopter, and then we lifted off. And it was that second that the medic passed the dog tags across, in front of [Sgt. Ken Kozakiewicz], to the medic behind him and it was that second that he realized that his best friend was in the body bag” (Turnley).

The way the photograph was framed had the main subject, Kozakiewicz, off to the side, allowing the viewers to see what is in the background as well. Doing this allows viewers to soak up context about the atmosphere of the image. A wide-angle lens showing the entire inside of the helicopter helps put the viewer into the scene and it shows that the photographer meant to have the environment of the subject shown, to give the viewers a full understanding of what is going on.

In both images, there is a similar emotion of helplessness depicted. In image 1, the sleeping boy sitting alone conveys helplessness. The feeling of helplessness that the boy is expressing in the image can be seen as a representative of the tiredness and helplessness all the people affected by the Rwanda genocide felt. In image 2, the way Kozakiewicz is seen crying and sitting without any contact from anyone around him conveys helplessness. Both images depict great emotion, and that might have been the thought behind both of them. Turnley said, “I had been so determined for months to do what I do, which is to try to make pictures that touch

the humanity of people's lives that are affected by war, on all sides of the war" (Turnley). When stating this, Turnley talks about the true meaning behind many of the images that he took during his time in the Middle East. Turnley wanted to show true, raw emotion from war, to show the rest of the world what was going on – what they caused. In both images, we can see that the subject is sitting and being watched by people, but they are truly alone; symbolizing how the world looks in on cases of human suffering around the world.

Sontag's main claim in her book is that we need to look at these images. She states, "it was argued, there is an obligation to 'examine'—the more clinical 'examine' is substituted for 'look at'—the pictures" (Sontag). Sontag claims that there is an obligation that we have in viewing these images. Even though we are obligated to view these images, they cannot just be looked at and moved on from. To close out her claim, Sontag says "remembering is an ethical act, has ethical value in and of itself. Memory is, achingly, the only relation we can have with the dead" (Sontag). We are obligated to examine the images by Garcia, Turnley, and other photographers of human suffering. By examining these images, we are getting a true sense of what went on, which is why Sontag believes that viewing them is a necessity.

One of Sontag's arguments is many images of human suffering are staged. While this may have been true in the infancy of photography, in the work of Garcia and Turnley this claim appears to be completely false. Garcia said, "my job is to see what's in my environment and document it with a camera. In reality, sometimes my images are beautiful to some, and sometimes my images are difficult to view. The most important thing is they are all honest" (Garcia). Both Garcia and Turnley agree that the job of a photojournalist is to tell the story in the best way possible using pictures. Whether it be good or bad, a photojournalist is there to tell the

truth, as the photojournalist and journalist are the first eyes of history. Caruth said, “this crisis of truth extends beyond the question of individual cure and asks how we ... have access to our own historical experience during times of violence” (Caruth). This statement by Caruth goes back to one of Sontag’s claims: How do we know what happened in the past? Are pictures the best record of historical truth?

Photojournalists are there to show the truth; both Garcia and Turnley’s photos are full of sorrow, but they are the truth and the story of the moment. Not all truth is pretty, not all truth is a beautiful landscape, not all truth is touchy feeling happiness. Truth can be painful, truth can be hurtful, truth can be sad, truth can be happy, but all that matters is that it is the truth. “I was not concerned about people’s reaction(s) to seeing the image. I was, and still am, concerned with capturing the truth” (Garcia). Turnley concurs with Garcia “I had been so determined for months to do what I do, which is to try to make pictures that touch the humanity of people’s lives that are affected by war, on all sides of the war” (Turnley).

Photographs have been targeted by critics for being an “easy way out” when it comes to viewing human suffering. Sontag states that “Images have been reproached for being a way of watching suffering at a distance as if there were some other way of watching. But watching up close – without the mediation of an image – is still just watching” (Sontag). Sontag is creating a claim that even if you are there, just watching, you are no different from those looking at it later when viewing it as an image. While Sontag’s argument can be somewhat correct, what she misses is the fact the many of the images she seems to be against are taken by a photojournalist who is there as neutral observers of the moment, the event, and the history that is unfolding. History is littered with unpleasant events some of which have happened since the invention of

photography, many long before and those were depicted through paintings and illustrations that were never viewed in such a way as Sontag does with photography.

Many images of human suffering can be hard to look at, but what matters is they are truthful as there is a certain value to realism. Photojournalists work to use photography as a medium to capture the news. The images they take are real, a real representation of the moment, the truth to believe otherwise is to argue that there can be objectively truthful photographs and there can never be. The issue is what photographs tell us about our truths, about our beliefs that we take for granted, and that we as a people stick to, weighing what we see.

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