

Failing Leviathan: Magnum Photographers and Civil War



Detail of the frontispiece of Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*, by Abraham Bosse, 1651

Thomas Hobbes famously imagined the state as a Leviathan, a giant that collected and encompassed the strengths of a nation's people to secure a monopoly over violence. Under the threat of that ultimate force, peace and prosperity can flourish. When a group tries to establish that power, it is usually through violent suppression and elimination of their rivals; equally, when the Leviathan's strength falters and fails, others emerge to fight for the enormous privileges that go with leading a state.

Hobbes wrote *Leviathan* during the English Civil War, at a time when the old legitimacy of the monarchy was being challenged by an infant democracy, so that the very constitution of the state—its moral and political foundations—were urgent and controversial issues. Hobbes' solution was to recommend a state of absolute authority, unified under a monarch, to impose order. Civil war was,

for him, the ultimate terror, but the fear that it engendered, of the violent chaos of an ungoverned life, led people to make an implicit contract with the state, which would alone wield the sword

Armed conflict has been in long-term decline. You are far less likely to die in warfare now than in previous generations. The decades following the end of World War II saw a steep fall in the frequency, scale and duration of wars, and this continues. Warfare between states of roughly equal power has become vanishingly rare, in part because the vastly destructive power of even conventional weaponry makes any other solution preferable. Superpowers have more commonly made armed attacks on much weaker nations, but here, too, the results (in Vietnam and Afghanistan—for both the Soviets and the US—and Iraq) have hardly encouraged the frequent exercise of that power. When wars do take place, the greater and growing proportion has been fought within states rather than between them.

The character of civil war has also changed. Waves of civil war were driven by the overthrow of colonial regimes and the power struggles that often followed; by Cold War conflicts fought indirectly by the great powers across other nations; and by the crumbling of authoritarian regimes once propped up by both sides during the Cold War, as it came to an end. More recently, civil wars have been fought on a smaller scale in post-colonial nations, as their states have slipped into such frailty that they can no longer maintain their monopoly of violence.

In the great power struggles fought within other nations—in Spain, for instance, where Germany, Italy and Russia were involved, or Korea, where US and UK forces battled Chinese troops—the media were invited to view large military engagements, and to witness the prowess of the various antagonists. Deep ideological and political differences were at stake, as Fascism, Communism and capitalist liberal democracy went to war.

As those wars were fought from the 1930s onwards, the role of photojournalism evolved with them. War became seen as the ultimate testing ground of the new photography as published in the illustrated magazines. The most accomplished photographers of conflict, such as Robert Capa, achieved great fame. Across the pages of *Vu*, *Regards*, *Picture Post* and *Life*, which sold millions of copies each week, and which (before television) were the major outlet for illustrated news and the powerhouses of advertising, stories were told in finely edited picture sequences. This was also the time of Magnum's founding, in 1947 by Capa, Henri Cartier-Bresson and David Seymour (also known as Chim), among others. The agency was made to defend the integrity of photographers against the power of magazine and newspaper editors, and to allow photographers the freedom to pursue serious, long-term documentary projects.

Photographers who went to war attempted to put their own views across, though their work also would be framed by the political and commercial agendas of the magazines: Capa, working for the leftist *Regards*, could openly support the Republican cause in Spain; Werner Bischof, publishing in *Life*, found his ambivalent photographs of a Korean prison camp put firmly into a pro-US, Cold War story. The battle lines, both military and ideological, were quite clear, as was the role of the photojournalist as an image-making handmaiden of war.

In more recent civil war in postcolonial states, and in those nations that had authoritarian stability imposed on them by Cold War superpowers—from the Congo to Bosnia, and Liberia to the Ukraine—the ideological issues at play are far murkier (if they are drivers of war at all). The competing sides are generally composed of small, informal militia forces, which may suddenly shift allegiance, and what these forces want from photojournalism is far from certain. These militia groups usually avoid direct combat with each other, preferring to conquer and hold territory by terrorising civilians, and then exploiting their captive populations and land to the hilt. The resulting wars divide people by ethnicity, tribe or religion as groupings from which to loot an area of diamonds, gold or coltan, funding continuing warfare and enriching militia leaders. Violence is often extravagant and put on display—a dismembered and tortured body is dumped in the street, for example—to frighten people into compliance or drive them away. Yet a wider display of that violence in the media is unwelcome. What is more, the publishing landscape has changed too: the illustrated magazines have long gone out of business or have become mere ghosts of their former selves, while newspapers, ever since the turn to profit maximisation as their main priority from the 1980s onwards, spend less and less on foreign news, or hard news of any kind.

How, then, do photojournalists navigate such chaotic and dangerous situations in which they are not necessarily wanted, and how do they get their work out to a wide public? They have increasingly turned to different forms of dissemination, including self-published books and social media, such as Instagram, which complement conventional magazine stories. They also make work which reflects on their own situation within civil conflict, fixing on uncertainties and subjective impressions, and highlighting photographers' complex and fluid relations to people in front of their lenses. With the rise of social media, including Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram, which have been widely used in the revolts of the Arab Spring and the war in the Ukraine, these subjects have become sophisticated image makers in their own right. Where photojournalists cannot safely go, they make their own work; and they know very well how to turn the photojournalists' lenses to further their own cause.

Failing Leviathan offers a series of contrasts in themed rooms to highlight some of these changes in the character of civil war, photojournalism and documentary photography, in their interaction and co-evolution.

In civil wars, opposing sides often try to mobilise people, regions and cities in their support, and sieges have long been a feature of these conflicts, as they were right back to the English Civil War. The room on siege juxtaposes Robert Capa's photographs of the defence of Madrid, at the beginning of the city's three-year siege by Fascist forces, and Jerome Sessini's photographs taken in Aleppo in 2012, as the Free Syrian Army encircled and besieged forces loyal to the regime of Bashar al-Assad. Capa, a partisan for the Republican cause, took pictures of people who for the most part had never held a camera, and his highly novel work was given great prominence in the illustrated magazines. Sessini got himself into Syria, from which all foreign media were banned, and worked with the Free Syrian Army, amid activists who were also citizen journalists, photographers,

videographers and sophisticated users of social media. As the war developed, and Saudi money favoured Islamic fundamentalists amongst the rebels, Sessini began to wonder where he stood.

Connected to the control of a divided populace is the widespread use of the camp, in which the line between refugee and prisoner is often blurred. From the Boer War, in which the British Army pioneered their use to confine and spy upon the insurgent population, camps have been a regular feature of civil war, and their inmates pawns in military, political and diplomatic power plays. In this room, two very different camps run by the UN are contrasted: Werner Bischof photographed the massive Korean camp of Koje do, with its lethal regime of repression and indoctrination, while Ian Berry photographed a camp for Baluba people during a secessionist war at the time of the Congo's move to independence. While Berry's pictures were taken in 1961, the sectarian struggle for mineral resources, in which the UN was not an innocent party, is more typical of later civil conflict.

In the next room, the move from established print media to digital forms and self-publishing is shown. Chim, as part of a wider UN book project about children in the aftermath of World War II, photographed a Greek camp during the war against Communist resistance forces. Michael Christopher Brown made pictures of the Libyan rebels on his phone camera to upload to Instagram, and Moises Saman offers a personal, intricately organised picture sequence about the Arab Spring in his self-published book, *Discordia*. Chim's picture sequence is typical of the humanist magazine stories for which Magnum was first known; in Brown and Saman, the narrative is more complex and uncertain, and their subjects far more knowing users of photographic media.

As they evolved in the postwar period, counter-insurgency operations have systematically employed some of the most extreme acts of torture, dismemberment, rape and mass killing known in warfare. This exemplary violence has often been directed against civilians, with the purpose of terrifying them into submission, or forcing them to move out of disputed regions, or of polluting an area with such horror and cultural destruction that it is unthinkable to move back. Many of these tactics were honed by the US forces in Vietnam, and taught to proxy counter-insurgency forces around the world. As a professional photojournalist, standing apart from the perpetrators, it is always perilous to photograph such events. Susan Meiselas took great risks to do so in the long and savage war in El Salvador. Tim Hetherington, as part of a project about the Liberian civil war and the peace process that followed, was confronted with a situation of extravagant violence, much of which he was obliged to depict indirectly. Thomas Dworzak, in his 'Magnum Instagram Collection Scrap Books' made for *Failing Leviathan*, shows how images run out of control, changing the economy of exemplary violence, as the pictures of atrocities that soldiers have long taken, and kept to themselves, are thrown into the digital realm and made public.

Lastly, and importantly, given the decline in the number and duration of wars, the process by which the Leviathan is re-established is indicated through a series of pictures from Philip Jones Griffiths' long and detailed examination of the peace brought to Vietnam, after the vast destruction wrought by the US. If peace is merely the absence of war, its photographic depiction would be difficult, since photography finds it much easier to point to positives (this happened, this was here, I did this) than negatives. Yet the process by which the Leviathan reconstitutes itself, following its collapse in civil

war, often contains common elements—of violent suppression, of mourning and memorials, of justice and restitution, and of the physical restoration of war damage and the disposal of the detritus of war.

As a whole, *Failing Leviathan* looks at the connection between failing states and the weakened news media, which are part of the same political and economic ecology. Post-colonial states are weakened by increasing inequality, corruption and sectarianism, the vagaries of commodity prices and the demands of the international financial organisations. The news media are weakened by excessive profit-taking, competition from ‘free’ digital media, and an increasing cynicism and disengagement from politics. As social media arise to complement or even replace the old, centralised institutions of the media, what role for the professional photojournalist, skilled weaver of tales in finely composed images?



Robert Capa, Madrid, November-December 1936. Watching an air raid over the city

Robert Capa in Spain

Robert Capa, pioneer of battle photography on 35mm film, and author of the infamous picture of a Spanish militia fighter falling in combat, also travelled to Madrid in autumn 1936. Franco's professional army had up to then swept aside all Republican opposition, and it seemed as though Madrid, and all of Spain, would swiftly fall to the Fascist coup, which defended monarchy, the Church and property against the elected socialist government. That government had fled as the Fascist forces approached, leaving the capital to its apparently inevitable fate. It was the trade unions and the Communist Party that organised a defence, as workers armed themselves as best they could, and manned the edges of the city. There, they engaged in prolonged, fierce and bloody urban warfare. The city's defences and morale were also reinforced by the arrival of the International Brigades, some of whom were professionally trained and armed ex-soldiers.

Attempts to take the city by force failed, so a long siege and bombardment became the preferred tactics. This moment was the idealistic high point of the Spanish resistance, when everyone worked together, with few of the sectarian divisions that were to open up later as the war and the siege

dragged on. Immense pride and hope was taken in stopping Franco's war machine, and saving the city (for the time being) from the terrible revenge that was to be meted out to those who defended democracy.

Capa was no mere reporter, but a Republican partisan. He showed the solidarity between fighters and the civilians who supplied and supported them. He shows the weariness of the lengthy siege, and the poor equipment of the Republican fighters—how few even have helmets! The German Condor Legion, an aerial force, was active in the siege and evolved new methods of attack, including carpet bombing. Capa also shows crowds watching bombing raids and dogfights above the city, as the German airforce attacked the city, being instructed to avoid the wealthier areas, where Franco supporters resided.

Such pictures were unprecedented: Capa placed himself in mortal proximity to the battle, and he showed the expressions on the faces of those fighting, waiting and working. His images were assembled into stories in illustrated magazines such as *Vu* and *Regards*, which gave European readers a rich, impressionistic and disturbing glimpse into the mire of urban warfare. Many of them would experience it first-hand within a few years.



Jerome Sessini, Aleppo, October 18, 2012. Civilians and badly wounded FSA fighters are taken to Shifa hospital. A man carrying a civilian wounded by mortar shelling

Jerome Sessini in Syria

The ongoing civil war in Syria was a product of the Arab Spring, in which corrupt and repressive dictatorships were challenged by mass protests. In Syria an ever-narrowing elite of state functionaries and favoured tycoons lived ostentatiously while the rest of the population became increasingly and rapidly impoverished. The Assad regime had faced dissent before, and had not shied away from brutal repression to remain in control. This time, however, it had lost control of its monopoly of the media, as protestors shared news stories, photographs and videos across social media. Acts of state violence, which notoriously included the arrest and torture of children, as well as the killing of many demonstrators, echoed through this media space, and fuelled the revolt. The regime, fixed in its old ways, reacted with yet more extreme measures, until the protestors were forced to take up arms.

Jerome Sessini's photographs, taken in Aleppo in 2012, show the conditions in this much fought-over historic city, one of the main foundations of the Assad regime, which had for a time immune been from the war. The regime had banned foreign journalists from the country, and those who stayed, at great personal risk, had to cover the war from the rebel side. Sessini worked with the Free Syrian Army, a group mostly composed of former conscripts. This is siege seen from the point of view of the besiegers, as at this time government forces were cut off by the rebels in the western half

of the city. The government was forced to resupply its troops by air. In the battle for the city, the regime used its monopoly of heavy weaponry and aircraft to bombard enemy areas without regard for civilian casualties, and vast numbers of people fled their homes, leaving the city mostly to the combatants. The Syrian airforce unleashed its notorious barrel bombs, indiscriminately killing thousands of people, and causing huge amounts of physical damage. Sessini shows combat and casualties, but is also highly sensitive to the urban environment in conditions of prolonged and intensive combat—including the sheets erected to shield areas from sniper fire, and the remarkable ruination of the city. Siege has become one of the standard tactics of the regime, which boxes rebels into areas which are then bombed and shelled from a distance, while being encircled and starved. Great suffering has been caused by the collapse of the normal functions of everyday life: shops are closed, electricity and water cut off, rubbish rots in the streets, and criminals thrive amid the many armed groups.

Sectarian divisions were encouraged by the regime in its bid to retain control. In the early days of the war, Sessini could work with and trust the anti-Assad forces, but as the situation became more fractious, and as hard-line Islamist groups took over much of the opposition, his position became more troubled and dangerous. Sessini is aware that his work may be used as propaganda, and in an interview with the *Telegraph* in 2013, he said ‘The difficult thing, particularly in Syria now, is to know who are the good guys.’ The battle for the city has gone back and forth, and at one point it was the rebels who were besieged by the government; currently, neither side dominates, and the conflict continues.



Werner Bischof, Island of Koje do, South Korea, 1952. The prisoners perform a square dance in front of a large Statue of Liberty

Werner Bischof in Korea

By the end of the Korean War, in the vast island camp at Koje do, 170,000 soldiers and civilians were held and re-educated in the virtues of capitalism. While diplomatic tussles were fought over their future (should they be shipped to the North, or prepared for life in the South?), they were kept in extremely harsh conditions. The Korean and Chinese prisoners were starved, beaten and tortured, forced to work, and to participate in cultural activities celebrating US values. Some were forcibly tattooed with anti-Communist slogans to ensure that they could never go to the North, while those who refused were beaten or even killed.

Shortly before Werner Bischof arrived to photograph the camp (which was officially administered by the UN, but was in fact run by the US Army with the assistance of vicious Korean guards), a revolt had broken out in which the camp commander, General Francis T. Dodd, had been seized. The prisoners demanded an end to torture and killing, and better food and treatment—and were promised them. On his release, Dodd was sacked, and the subsequent commander reneged on the agreement. Further resistance was put down by lethal force, including the use of tanks, and five-hundred prisoners were killed.

Bischof was unusual among the photographers who were invited to depict the Korean War because he was less interested in the armed forces than in the appalling plight of civilians—who had been uprooted, bombed, strafed and massacred without compunction. At Koje do, he shows the propaganda efforts, including tattooing, as well as the imprisonment of children as young as six. He

suggests what he cannot fully show: in the sinister image of clothes hanging on the barbed wire, and in the hastily snatched image of forced labour. A selection of his pictures was published in *Life* magazine in March 1952, in a conventional Cold War frame, though even there it was stated that the prisoners are 'terrorised' by their gaolers. Kojedo is now a prison camp theme park, in which the history of the place is presented as a bland, whitewashed heritage experience. Bischof's pictures remain a sensitive and barbed riposte.



Ian Berry, Elizabethville, Katanga, Congo, 1961. A Swedish UN soldier with a fixed bayonet tried to control a crowd of starving Balubas in a refugee camp from swamping the distribution of flour.

Ian Berry in the Congo

Many nations were dumped precipitately into independence by retreating colonial powers. The Congo, a Belgian colony designed to extract rubber and copper, was one of the most extreme cases. The place had been run on such strict hierarchical and racial lines that it entered independence with a black population of 20 million, of whom just 17 were university graduates. Even so, the election of Patrice Lumumba was greeted with optimism by many Congolese, who hoped that he would lead a government that would respond to their needs, and share the many riches of the vast nation more equitably.

In a complex situation, fissured with colonial and Cold War forces, the province of Katanga, led by Moïse Tshombe, seceded from the newly independent Congo. This was a dire threat to the state, since Katanga held most of its mineral resources—not just copper but gold and uranium. Belgian mining companies, and the Belgian state itself, worried that Lumumba would try to obtain money from the mines for the development of the nation, covertly supported the secession. UN forces were brought in but these were far from being in a peacekeeping role. They first protected Tshombe, and stood by while Lumumba was deposed and murdered. Once a pliant dictatorship had been put in place, they went on to unify the nation by attacking the Katangese army and mercenaries

that Tshombe had assembled. The UN force was composed of Irish, Swedish and Moroccan troops, as well as Gurkhas, and some of these freely slaughtered Katangese civilians, and engaged in looting.

Ian Berry, who had long experience of working in Africa and was at the time based in Johannesburg, photographed much of the conflict, including sectarian rioting, battles between the Katangese and UN troops, and political dignitaries. The situation was chaotic, rapidly changing and very dangerous especially since journalists were often regarded with suspicion. In 1961, Berry made a remarkable series of photographs at a refugee camp for Baluba people in Elizabethville (now Lubumbashi). Balubas, who did not generally support Tshombe, were unfortunate enough to be attacked by both sides, and Berry portrays the harsh conditions of the camp, the attempts of UN troops to control the distribution of food to malnourished and desperate refugees, and the forces that patrolled and controlled the place. The camp was as much prison as refuge, and even the provision of food was erratic: the US distribution of corn meal that caused such frenzy was an unusual event. Berry is a consummately skilled teller of stories through image sequences, and his photographs have been published in many of the most prominent illustrated magazines, including *Drum*, *Life* and *Paris Match*.

As for the Congo, the dictator installed was Mobutu Sese Seko, who was to rule for thirty years in an extraordinarily violent, repressive and rapacious fashion. After decades of stealing and exporting the wealth of the state, government functions were so undermined that when attacked by tiny neighbouring Rwanda, the army simply collapsed, and the nation was plunged into prolonged civil war.



David Seymour Ioannina, Greece, 1948. Refugees from the civil war areas

David Seymour in Greece

In the division of Europe into spheres of influence following World War II, decided upon by Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill at Yalta, many fates were settled. Among them, those of the Greek partisans who had harried the German occupation throughout the war, and at its end had much public support. They were, however, dominated by Communists, and Greece had been allocated to the West. So in the first phase of the war, the British Army fought their erstwhile allies in an attempt to recover the majority of Greek territory from the partisans; later the US lavishly supported Greek government forces in a long and bitter war to restore monarchy, dictatorship and capitalism.

Children became a major issue of contention, as they were moved out of battle areas, and often separated from their parents as well as their homes. Those in Communist areas were evacuated to Eastern Europe, where many settled and did not return; those in government areas were sent to *paidopoleis* (children's cities), initially run by Queen Frederica, and later by the UN. In both cases, some children went willingly, some were forced at gunpoint, and some went reluctantly in fear of their lives. The *paidopoli* at Ioannina, which David Seymour (Chim) photographed, was one such camp, which housed its children in a highly regulated, quasi-military and all-encompassing

environment. It provided often very poor children with food, clothing, indoctrination, and training in skills meant to equip them for a return to rural life.

Chim had been commissioned by the UN to document the plight of children across Europe in the immediate aftermath of the war, and the organisation's efforts to help them. His photographs, which were published in the UN book *Children of Europe* and many other places, represent the founding ideal of photographic humanism, with which Magnum was imbued. Chim was one of its most sensitive and accomplished practitioners, able to build subtle and affective compositions from the chaos of fast-moving social scenes. He presents a pressing social and economic problem—in many Greek villages desperate poverty was as big a killer as the war—along with an international effort to solve it. In some pictures, there are hints at the politics and the disputes that underlay that humanist response: that the children dwell under watchful armed guard, and that they are pawns in an ideological conflict to determine their future. In the imagination of the Greek Right, they were to serve in a renewed village life, in which the children would grow up to be religious, conservative and loyal subjects, content to labour at traditional crafts. For most of them, it hardly turned out like that, but the Greek constitutional monarchy, while failing to stop the move to the cities and an excess of politically inconvenient education, remained a fragile and fractious affair, dominated by Cold War politics, and eventually falling foul of military dictatorship.



Michael Christopher Brown, from the book *Libyan Sugar* to be published by Twin Palms 2015

Michael Christopher Brown in Libya

Michael Christopher Brown went to Libya expecting to photograph a revolution on the lines of Tunisia or Egypt, not a war. But the Gadaffi regime was of a very different character: over four decades, it had come to control every facet of economic, political and social life, and resistance had to be built from nothing. The regime swiftly declared that all opposition was illegitimate and would be put down by massacre, so Libyans wanting to see the end of the dictatorship had no choice but to fight. The resulting conflict was immensely dangerous. At one point, Brown was kidnapped, and

at another, in Misrata in 2011, very badly wounded in an explosion that killed the well-known photojournalists Tim Hetherington and Chris Hondros.

Brown dropped and broke his main camera early on in the conflict, and had to rely on his phone camera—an iPhone which he used with Instagram, a very popular photo-editing and sharing app. But while the initial move may have been due to an accident, others were doing the same, including Hetherington and Benjamin Lowy. The use of Instagram was controversial, especially for those fixed on the old and conventional signals of documentary objectivity, but Brown, in an interview with Alessia Glaviano, strongly defended its advantages:

The most exciting photographic development is Instagram, designed for amateurs with the idea that people feel a need to share their story and vision of the world, whether it is their new bikini or their newborn child. As photography becomes more democratic, professionals need to embrace this democratization and not brush it aside, in denial of its power. We will continue to become less powerful until we recognize that our methodology and delivery is outdated. If tens of millions of people are inspired by Instagram, and if we do have some responsibility, we should not only be using it as a delivery platform but we should be at the forefront of innovation.

Instagram is often used for various kinds of social display: look at what I am doing or eating, where I am, who I am with. The Libyan rebels, faced by well armed and trained elements of Gadaffi's Praetorian Guard who were bolstered by mercenaries, knew that their survival depended on encouraging foreign intervention through a continual flow of sympathetic images. Sometimes they seem to act with crazy bravado, breaking cover and firing wildly in the direction of the enemy. This was not to make war but to make pictures, or rather to make war by making pictures. Such images helped to bring on the NATO air attacks that were decisive in helping the rebels to destroy the regime.

In this light, Brown's Instagram feed made much sense. Like Capa, he was a partisan photographer who worked with the rebels, and identified with their bid for freedom. They could immediately see what Brown was doing and how it aided their cause. The use of common Instagram genres, clichés and visual manipulations had a remarkable double effect: it brought the Libyan rebels closer to the publics of the West, who often represented themselves in similar ways; and at the same time it brought that familiarity into contact with the strangeness, desperation and violence of revolution.



Moises Saman, Libya, March 9, 2011. A Qaddafi supporter holds a portrait of the Libyan leader as fireworks go up in the background on a soccer field in a suburb of Zawiyah where government minders took a group of foreign journalists to attend a staged celebration

Moises Saman and the Arab Spring

Moises Saman's *Discordia* is a personal documentary book about the events of the Arab Spring, in which authoritarian governments were challenged, and some toppled. In a move that has become increasingly common, it will be self-published. The book has been essential to the development of documentary photography for many decades, and has offered freedoms that were rarely found in the constrained worlds of the illustrated magazines and newspapers. Books could allow the unfolding of long and complex photographic sequences, the support of pictures with much text, and the introduction of subjective and artistic elements. Of the Magnum photographers shown in *Failing Leviathan*, we may think of Philip Jones Griffiths' landmark *Vietnam Inc.* (1971), a systematic photographic exploration of the war in Vietnam; or Susan Meiselas' *Nicaragua* (1981), a sustained account of many aspects of the Nicaraguan revolution, made (unusually for the time) in colour; or Tim Hetherington's *Long Story Bit by Bit* (2009), which mixed documentary pictures of Liberia's civil war with meditative landscape and still life images.

Saman's book is different again, as it uses various approaches to his photographic material as it is arranged across double-page spreads: some images are isolated; more often, fascinating, unexpected

and provocative two-image comparisons are made; and sometimes figures are cut out from numerous images and collaged against grainy backgrounds, or the reverse.

Ever since 1938, when Walker Evans' *American Photographs* established what became known as the 'documentary style', the picture sequence as it works across an entire book has become important, building a visual argument in a series of interlocking contrasts and similarities. Saman does this here to give an impression of the Arab Spring, the fall of governments and the conflicts that followed. It is often hard to know exactly what is going on in these pictures, and their juxtaposition, but we see people in small, claustrophobic conference; then in protest on the streets of cities which are deeply impoverished, amid degraded environments; and of ordinary life going on amid the violence and the fear. Photojournalism is most effective at pointing at the spectacularly visible—street battles, for example—but the Arab Spring revolts have been characterised by features which are harder to photograph, especially the use of social media to undermine states' powers of censorship and news management, and the upsurge of women claiming rights to the public and political sphere which they had been long denied.

The outcomes of revolt in the Arab Spring have been divergent: in those nations, such as Tunisia and Egypt, where opposing forces had developed and grown—including trade unions, women's groups and loose associations of online activists—the regimes were forced from power; where the regimes had been so repressive that there could be no such development, as in Libya and Syria, revolt was forged in violence, and the outcome has been prolonged civil war. *Discordia* shows the hopes, idealism and strength of rebellion against long-established dictatorial regimes, and also—with great clarity—the price paid for it.



Susan Meiselas, El Salvador. Soldiers search bus passengers along the Northern Highway, 1980

Susan Meiselas in El Salvador

Susan Meiselas is best known for her remarkable photography of the successful revolution in Nicaragua, in which the brutal and exploitative dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza was overthrown by the Sandinistas. In the 1970s and 1980s, Meiselas spent over a decade in Central America, also documenting the long civil war in neighbouring El Salvador. There, the more usual pattern was followed, as seen throughout South America and Asia: the savage repression of popular revolt. The US Army trained government troops, particularly the notorious Atlacatl Battalion, in the counter-insurgency tactics that it had evolved in Vietnam: assassination by death squads, torture, rape and massacre. 30,000 people were killed, overwhelmingly by government forces, in twelve years of civil war. This violence was meant to be visible locally: mutilated corpses were dumped in the street or by the roadside, as warnings to those who would resist.

Meiselas, at great personal risk, photographed the signs of the repression amid a general landscape of terror. She describes how she trembled with fear as she took the picture of white hand prints on a door—the mark of the death squads. In 1982 Meiselas photographed the aftermath of the massacre at El Mozote in which Atlacatl troops killed over 1000 people. Exemplary violence was supposed to terrify ordinary El Salvadorians into passivity, but neither the dictatorship nor its US sponsors wanted images circulating more widely. In the US, Meiselas' pictures became tools in a political

controversy, in which radicals sought to expose the rampant human rights abuse that came with support for the El Salvadorian dictatorship.

Meiselas has clearly said that as a white woman and a US journalist, she could photograph scenes that no local would dare to take. A limited privilege surrounded her, though it did not guarantee immunity. In Nicaragua, Meiselas' pictures became beacons of a successful revolution, though she also came to document the war waged against the new government by guerrillas created and funded by the US, which specialised in killing those who brought social improvement, particularly teachers and medics. In El Salvador, her pictures stand as records of one of the darkest and most violent episodes of the Cold War.



Tim Hetherington, Monrovia, Liberia, 2003

Tim Hetherington in Liberia

The long, intermittent Liberian Civil War was in many ways a typical post-colonial conflict, in which the government, long weakened by corruption, sectarianism and the vagaries of commodity prices on which its income depended, lost control of parts of its territory. In areas rich in resources—in Liberia, diamonds, iron ore, rubber and timber—wars are funded by their sale, and often continue as the various sides use violence to get rich. Such wars may be fought by ragtag troops—many of whom are damaged, drugged and deluded, and some of whom are children—but they are financed by respectable multinational corporations that care little how their raw materials are mined. Liberia one of the worst of these civil wars, in which children were regularly used as fighters, and in which the various forces fought each other little, but instead terrorised civilians with impunity. The war was

largely fought for the control of land, along with its resources and people—and the latter had to be terrified into compliance.

Tim Hetherington spent four years in Liberia, photographing its complex and lengthy second civil war, in which the government of ex-guerrilla leader Charles Taylor was challenged by the forces of the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD). He evolved a distinct way of showing and suggesting the meting out of exemplary violence. While Hetherington was allowed to accompany the LURD in their successful attempt to unseat Taylor, his situation amid the unpredictable and sometimes crazed troops was always perilous and uncertain, and the pictures that he could take had to be negotiated with each subject, from moment to moment. He chose to use a larger and slower camera than is usual in photojournalism—a medium format Hasselblad that took square images—to make highly considered pictures of the conflict. Many allude to a violence that he cannot directly show: through portraits of fighters and their grandiose leaders, in a series about wartime graffiti, and in images of the environment of slaughter.

Hetherington's commitment to Liberia was remarkable, and involved extensive community work as well as photography and film making. Many of his pictures are records of the relations he patiently cultivated with his subjects. In time, he came to photograph the peace process, the disposal of weapons, and the election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, with a government committed to reconciliation, and to improving health and education.



Thomas Dworzak, image comparison from Magnum Instagram Collection Scrap Book

Thomas Dworzak's Magnum Instagram Collection Scrap Books

Soldiers have taken their own pictures ever since the Box Brownie made photography accessible to relatively unskilled users in the first years of the twentieth century. These photographs changed surprisingly little, and fell into distinct genres: portraits, military equipment, camp scenes and tourist sites. Soldiers also took photographs of the dead, sometimes as trophies of those they had killed, and passed them around within their troop units. This was another form of exemplary violence. It served to boast of the troops' efficacy as killers; and also to frame, delimit and manage scenes of killing, death and mutilation among those who know that they may be the next victims.

The sharing of photographs across social media quickly transformed this old and static amateur picture-taking. On Instagram and other platforms, war imagery could be shown to numerous followers, far and near, military or civilian, in close to real time. Images of war were also jumbled in among all the other typical contents of the Instagram feed: celebrity portraits, pets, selfies, meals and snapshots of loved ones.

In three books made for *Failed Leviathan*, Thomas Dworzak has mined Instagram feeds of people involved in the civil war in the Ukraine. His selections show the transition of individuals from civilian life to warfare; the role of women as fighters and cheerleaders for war, and as sexual objects to be fought over; and the partisan passions on both sides. In one sense, the war is an old-style great power dispute over spheres of influence; but in another, it is a media-saturated conflict drawing in

many willing volunteers, some driven by an extreme nationalism which shades into Fascism. The image of war that emerges from the books is disturbing: people seem to enjoy warfare and set out to gild it with a sexualised 'glamour'. Violent scenes are shared, liked and commented on in a parade of militant patriotism. Yet, as in any snapshot, people usually put on a smile and present their best face to the world. There are countervailing photographs that undermine the propaganda: the soldiers who cannot control their expressions, and look scared or haunted; and the couple in bed, kissing and holding up Russian and Ukrainian passports, and giving the finger to national divisions.

In all of this, exemplary violence is radically transformed. Less and less can it be localised, and held up only before those it is meant to sway. The triumphant trophies of one side will be seen as documents of barbarism by the other; and perhaps they will be seen that way, too, in the wider realm of the global media.



Philip Jones Griffiths, Vietnam, 1980. During the war the lack of doctors and specialized surgical techniques led to the adoption of amputation as a timesaving measure. In post-war Vietnam the production of artificial limbs has become a major industry. With the country's recent change in economic direction, limbless beggars have become a common sight.

Philip Jones Griffiths in Vietnam

The end of the Vietnam War left the nation devastated. Never had such destructive ferocity been unleashed on any country; far more bombs were dropped there than in all the theatres of World War II put together. Millions of people, mostly civilians, had been killed, and many more wounded and maimed; people and animals had been poisoned with dioxin, and the land was littered with vast numbers of unexploded bombs and shells. Most urban structures in the North had been obliterated, and everywhere many agricultural structures, such as dykes, had met the same fate, as the US attempted to starve the enemy into submission. In addition, promised war reparations were never paid, and the US imposed a harsh trade embargo on the newly united nation. Even so, the transition to peace, while it involved widespread internment and re-education, and the flight of many refugees implicated in the Southern dictatorship, was relatively peaceful. This was partly because the new government enjoyed great support among most Vietnamese, and at first offered significant improvements in health, education and welfare.

The collapse of the Soviet Union pushed the government towards market reforms in the hope of getting the trade embargo lifted. Under the Doi Moi programme, a Chinese-style solution was sought which allied economic reform with an authoritarian state. It eventually brought about very rapid economic growth but at the price of greatly rising inequality, and the dismantling of free healthcare and education, and even the privatisation of agricultural land—an issue over which many farmers had fought the war in the first place.

Philip Jones Griffiths won fame with his landmark book, *Vietnam Inc.* (1971), the most coruscating and systematic critique of the war in photographs and text. The book got him banned from Vietnam by the Southern dictatorship. After its fall, Griffiths went back, again and again, documenting the rebuilding of the nation, the struggles of its poor, and the rise of consumerism and Western values. Some see in Doi Moi a betrayal of the ideals of those who fought first the French and then the Americans, in a vast historical tragedy. Griffiths' view was more sanguine, as he fixed on people's resilience, and what he took to be their resistance to consumer culture, materialism and exploitation.

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