Photojournalism is not so much a vocation as a way of life.

Author
Bridger, Earle Robert

Published
2008

Journal Title
RED

Copyright Statement
Copyright remains with the author 2008. For information about this journal please refer to the publisher's website or contact the author.

Downloaded from
http://hdl.handle.net/10072/23922

Link to published version
http://www.griffith.edu.au/
PHOTOJOURNALISM IS NOT SO MUCH A VOCATION AS A WAY OF LIFE

Introduction by EARLE BRIDGER
Deputy Director Development, QCA

It is not a nine-to-five job and has little financial security. It is not glamorous and is often dangerous. Yet photojournalism studies at the Queensland College of Art (QCA) attracts the most dedicated students who believe that their images of society’s forgotten, alienated and needy citizens can make a positive difference. Our current students work on community projects with real outcomes producing images that inform and challenge society to care and respond. QCA graduates travel the globe working for international publications that also share the belief that documentary images provide a visible measure of a country’s social conscience.

The following pages provide a glimpse at the work of both current and graduated QCA photojournalists.

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS AT AN AFGHAN STAG NIGHT
Words and photographs by Travis Beard/Argusphotography

The Afghan spring wedding season is a celebrative time when thousands of men launch themselves into debt, paying up to $20,000 for their wedding. The ceremony lasts for three days and on the second day there are both a hens’ night and a stag night. The stag night evolves around men drinking a volatile cocktail of whisky and vodka warmed over an earthen pot and smoking copious amounts of hashish. A group of traditional musicians play Afghan classics to which the men dance intimately, constantly reassuring us that “this is not a gay social club”. The serious part of the all-nighter arrives with the henna ceremony. Historically the grooms’ palms were cut with little insertions so that they could be joined in blood with their brides. As time passed they replaced it with henna so it would be more healthy and less messy. After the two brothers are blessed by their father and given permission to go and marry, other guests are permitted to colour their beards if they desire.

Above: The father of two sons who are about to marry applies henna to their hands. This ritual dates back hundreds of years when instead of henna the groom’s hands were cut and the blood mixed with that of his bride.
Left: After the grooms have completed their henna ritual, other members of the party are welcomed to have their beards hennaed.

Right: After henna is applied to the groom's hand, it is wrapped in a white cloth symbolising purity. In Islam, men and women are not meant to have sex before marriage.

Below: The music at an Afghan stag night may be traditional, but the dancing can be very erotic. The men's moves will be similar to the old pastime of a young boy whose purpose is to dance like a woman for the older men. Men in Afghan society cannot watch women dance for entertainment.
Top: A 17-year-old patient stares at his repaired lip after his surgery. The surgery to repair a cleft pallet is life-changing for older children and adults who have lived their entire lives with cleft lips and pallets.

Above: Patients wait to find out if they are eligible for surgery aboard the ship. Many who turn up for screening do not get operated on due to restricted time and resources.

Left: Genilton de Jesus recovers after surgery. Genilton and his family live in an Internally Displaced Persons camp (IDP) in Dili and were brought to the preliminary screening by a United Nations policewoman who noticed Genilton’s cleft lip while visiting the camp.

No matter where you grow up in the world, there is no denying that our physical appearance does matter. In July this year I travelled to Timor Leste as a volunteer with Operation Smile to document a medical mission for children (and some adults) with cleft lips and pallets. The mission took place on a US Navy hospital ship called The Mercy, currently touring the Pacific region. Although completely independent from the navy staff, patients and volunteers slept and ate on the ship during the five days of surgery. During this time 76 children had cleft lips and pallets repaired.

In the past my photography has focused on issues of physical identity and how this impacts our social experience of the world. To a degree this project was no different. Aside from the obvious and important health benefits that come from the surgery, the social benefits that come with repairing the cleft lip and pallet are enormous. I witnessed the father of one child cry as he watched his three-year-old son drink juice an hour after emerging from surgery to correct his cleft pallet. I remember thinking that it was a relatively normal scene considering all everyone had been through to get to the ship and complete the surgery. It wasn’t until the father explained to me that this was the first time in his son’s life that he had been able to drink or eat anything without it coming back out through his nose that I understood the real significance of the situation.

OPERATION SMILE IN TIMOR LESTE
Story and photographs by Kelly Hussey Smith

No matter where you grow up in the world, there is no denying that our physical appearance does matter. In July this year I travelled to Timor Leste as a volunteer with Operation Smile to document a medical mission for children (and some adults) with cleft lips and pallets. The mission took place on a US Navy hospital ship called The Mercy, currently touring the Pacific region. Although completely independent from the navy staff, patients and volunteers slept and ate on the ship during the five days of surgery. During this time 76 children had cleft lips and pallets repaired.

In the past my photography has focused on issues of physical identity and how this impacts our social experience of the world. To a degree this project was no different. Aside from the obvious and important health benefits that come from the surgery, the social benefits that come with repairing the cleft lip and pallet are enormous. I witnessed the father of one child cry as he watched his three-year-old son drink juice an hour after emerging from surgery to correct his cleft pallet. I remember thinking that it was a relatively normal scene considering all everyone had been through to get to the ship and complete the surgery. It wasn’t until the father explained to me that this was the first time in his son’s life that he had been able to drink or eat anything without it coming back out through his nose that I understood the real significance of the situation.
ANOTHER INDIA: HEROIN IN MANIPUR

Words and photographs by Adam Ferguson

In 2006, India’s internal conflicts were listed by Medecins Sans Frontiers as one of the most unreported humanitarian stories in the world. At the heart of this statement are the ongoing insurgencies that plague India’s north-eastern states like Manipur, where up to 16 different militant groups fight for tribal states independent of India, or simply a piece of India’s booming economic pie. The conflicts waged between militants and government forces leave the civilians of India’s north-east living in marginalised communities that are politically volatile and economically stifled.

Amid these tensions in Manipur’s Churanchandpur District, a climate of minimal opportunity and high unemployment causes a large number of youth to turn to drugs to escape poverty. With heroin being produced in the Golden Triangle that stretches between Myanmar (formerly Burma), China and Thailand, and a primary trafficking route being one from Myanmar across the porous border into India, Manipur’s youth are vulnerable to a surplus of high quality cheap heroin.

With restricted media access for foreign journalists to India’s troubled north-east, I visited Churanchandpur District twice in 2007 as a HIV program officer, with an NGO working with injecting drug users. Meeting youth battling heroin addiction on the streets and in rehabilitation centres, people living with HIV contracted through drug use, and families struggling internally with members using heroin, I began to document the lives devastated by Manipur’s heroin trade.

In a state already plagued by HIV, the second highest per capita in India, drug use facilitates the spread of disease, imposes health risks and degenerates Manipur society. Every family in Churanchandpur has or knows a user, a local explained to me.
In India, forty million women live as widows. Being without a husband often leaves them at the mercy of relatives, the community, religion and charity.

For many Hindu women widowhood becomes a state of social death. Women are expected to renounce symbols of sexuality and lead an austere life. As such thousands of Hindu widows continue to migrate to Vrindavan, the birthplace of Krishna, in the hope of finding spiritual peace and a means of surviving by begging from pilgrims or chanting in ashrams for a few rupees.

In Islamic Kashmir the remarriage of widows is permitted, but culturally rare, as women do not wish to abandon their first children to remarry. The war between India and Pakistan over Kashmir has left thousands widowed, orphaned, and vulnerable to exploitation. The "half-widows"—the women whose husbands have "disappeared"—live in agonising uncertainty as to their fate. And because they are not 'widows' they cannot claim the meagre compensation given by the Indian state government.

Across India cultural diversity creates specific reasons for social marginalisation. However for millions of women living with the stigma of widowhood, the day-to-day issues of survival become much the same.
Left: A widow leaves the bathroom in Anur Bari—a home for widows in Vrindavan, Uttar Pradesh, India which houses 120 widows who have been abandoned by family and have nowhere else to go.

Below: Morning in the largest Bajan Ashram, Vrindavan, Uttar Pradesh, India. Women chant mornings and afternoons for four hours for 3 rupees a session. For Hindu widows bajan (religious music) is a socially acceptable pastime.

Marisol da Silva and Kelly Hussey Smith are both completing an Honours year for their Bachelor of Photography (major in photojournalism) degree at QCA.

Adam Ferguson and Travis Beard are graduates of QCA’s Bachelor of Photography (major in photojournalism) program.