# ปริทัศน์หนังสือ
# Book Review

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**Fehrenbach, Heide, and Davide Rodogno (eds.) 2015. *Humanitarian Photography: A History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.**

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In their introduction "The Morality of Sight" to *Humanitarian Photography: A History*, editors Heide Fehrenbach and Davide Rodogno write: "This book is the first to investigate how humanitarian photography emerged and has functioned historically in diverse political, institutional, and social contexts" (p. 1). The statement leaves no doubt as to the significance of this collection of essays. I was drawn to it through my own research on the rubber boom, which is discussed in two of the chapters. As a staunch materialist scholar, I have always been wary of the media and media studies, which I associate with philistinism, abstraction, and overall fraudulence. With time, though, I have come to recognize that abstraction too is part of the fabric of everyday life. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to comprehend the horrors of the rubber boom—the

torture and killing of millions—without taking into account the full "circuit of culture" (Hall et al., 1997): to the traditional dialectic between (African/Amazonian) production and (European/American) consumption, we must add other contributing factors, such as representation and identity, that are intimately attached to the forces of mediatization. The distorted nature of atrocity photographs and the dubious morality of their public display, in short, cannot be analyzed separately from the factual evidence of the Congo and the Amazon. Humanitarian photography stands at the crossroads between reality and representation, and visual history is intertwined with technological progress, experiments in marketing, and the evolving "structures of feeling" (Williams, 1978) of different historical periods. This idea calls for a temporal rather than thematical approach. The twelve chapters in the book are, then, arranged chronologically and will be reviewed in order. I would be hard-pressed to think of an edited collection where the transition between essays is so seamlessly smooth.

Chapter One (Heather D. Curtis, "Picturing Pain: Evangelicals and the Politics of Pictorial Humanitarianism in an Imperial Age") situates the roots of the humanitarian gaze in the golden age of European imperialism. A Western but non-European nation (the United States) played a crucial role in the formation of a new emotional culture. Shock and charity at the sight of pictures of distant suffering were the pillars of this culture. It was a private effort with an important geopolitical subtext. Julian Hawthorne's reportage of the Indian famine was published in *Cosmopolitan* magazine in 1897, on the eve of the U.S. intervention in the Cuban War of Independence. It served a double purpose: it sanctioned the

rise of investigative-yet-sensationalist journalism, a hybrid between truth telling and advertising that the Americans learned from the Victorians, and it announced the coming of the United States as a new kind of imperial power—an improved version of the European example, based on the cunning of marketing and a diminished need for territorial conquest. This new narrative economy relied heavily on the medium of photography, which required little in the form of verbal explanations, and which, from the outset, "created a climate of suspicion about the credibility of images that undermined attempts to present photographs as incontrovertible evidence of catastrophe in remote regions" (p. 14). Despite the secular leanings of the U.S. press, the best examples of early modern philanthropic photography are to be found in religious publications. Evangelical reporters claimed that words could not convey "the horrors they were encountering firsthand," (p. 29) and this alone justified the emotional blackmailing inherent to humanitarian photography. As Curtis notes in the conclusion, throughout the twentieth century, "even the most ambivalent" American journalist "found the persuasive power of pictures hard to resist" (p. 43). Susan Sontag's famous book, *On Photography* (1977), asked the question of how to reconcile the photographer's automatic empathy with the chronic voyeurism of the photographic gaze. *On Photography* could be interpreted as a modern philosopher's answer to the many ethical questions raised by the American Century.

Chapter Two, Christina Towmey, "Framing Atrocity: Photography and Humanitarianism" overlaps with the first one, in that it deals partly with the pictorial representation of the Indian famine. The approach is different, though, as the author attempts to

separate our understanding of human rights, a product of the Jewish Holocaust, from the "language of 'atrocity' [which] came to dominate discussion of the violation of the human body in the context of war and colonialism" (p. 48). The spread of a vocabulary of atrocity in the mass media and the growth of "humanitarian sentiment" go obviously together. This type of "public concern" is only possible in places where humanist politics (i.e. liberal democracy, and the middle-class upon which it depends) are taken for granted. There is of course no photographic evidence of the French Revolution, when historian Lynn Hunt located the "invention" of human rights (2007). Twomey too makes the case for continuity between the pre-and -post photographic eras in the discourse of atrocity. The anti-slavery campaigns of the early nineteenth century are a good example of the former. Without images, words could indeed trigger sentiments that had many of the qualities of modern humanitarianism. Moreover, photographic technologies existed decades before tabloid newspapers were even able to use them, let alone afford them: "In the 1870s, technology did not allow for the reproduction of photographs in newspapers" (p. 51). When it became commonplace, photography "was perceived to breach distance" (p. 53), as popular sympathy was enhanced through direct visual contact with the object of pity. In a context of European imperialism, photography also widened the gap between the colonizers and the colonized, as it "enabled members of the extended British world to demonstrate a particular kind of empire that distinguished them as a civilized, white community from a vulnerable, racial other" (p. 54-5).

Chapter Two closes with a brief analysis of the pictorial work undertaken by the Congo Reform Association in the first decade

of the Twentieth Century. The genocide of the Congo in the first decade of the twentieth century is the theme of Chapter Three, Kevin Grant, "The Limits of Exposure: Atrocity Photographs in the Congo Reform Campaign". If the US had ulterior geopolitical motives to publicize horrific snapshots of suffering in a British colony, so did Britain when it exposed the Congo's "heart of darkness". At the time, the Central African country was a personal possession of the Belgian King, Leopold II. Other academic essays (e.g. Sliwinski, 2006) have recognized the role played by the Congo scandal in the birth of the modern humanitarian gaze, thanks to the use of new technologies, such as the portable Kodak, and new tactics of mass persuasion, namely the lecture-with-magic lantern, a precursor of the PowerPoint presentation. Grant offers new insights: "Developing after the eighteenth century, this narrative was distinguished by extraordinarily detailed descriptions of the suffering body and the causes of suffering" (p. 65). It wouldn't be far-fetched to compare the Congo photographs (of mutilated men and women, such as the one that appears on the cover of the book) with the clinical but far from neutral study of bodily difference that Michel Foucault identified in other early modern places—the prison, the school, the mental hospital (e.g. 1975). Grant also speaks of gender distinctions in the visual representation of evangelical work: "Female missionaries embodied dutiful maternalism, while men were to embody the ideal of 'muscular Christianity'" (p. 74). Women tended to be represented in motherly roles, often in the company of schoolchildren, while the aftermath of torture was typically assumed to be a matter of male investigation.

Chapter Four Peter Balakian, "Photography, Visual Culture, and the Armenian Genocide" provides a counterbalance to the

postmodern suspicion that iconic war photographs must be invariably staged. The Armenian genocide took place as the First World War unfolded, and many of the existing images of the context in which the killings took place (rather than the killings as such, which we can only guess by looking at the pictures) "were taken by bystanders who found themselves in unforeseen circumstances" (p. 92). The main question the author asks is: "How do we understand photographs taken by bystanders who snapped them spontaneously in unexpected situations of mass violence; or by bystanders who were compelled to record what they could, in a given moment, because of their sense of horror or curiosity?" (p. 92). There is in this chapter a well-known image of men being marched out of a provincial Ottoman city. We know they are going to be tortured or murdered or at the very least abused for no reason other than their ethnic background, and we wonder whether or not, or the extent to which, the person who took the snapshot was aware of the fate of the photographed. "The photograph captures the tension between the city as a structure of civilization and the chaos and impending destruction of the deportation" (p. 95). The very word, "genocide," was coined to convey the systematic and legal nature of this particular event, something unprecedented. Despite the industrial qualities of the Armenian tragedy, Balakian succeeds in reminding us that the photographs were accidental: the finger pressed the button, for whatever reason, freezing in time "a glimpse of the conditions of minimal survival" (p. 98) endured by millions of ethnic Armenians during the making of modern Turkey. The chapter concludes with a study of later photographs, carefully constructed as posters and leaflets, during the relief campaign that followed the massacre: "The two segments of visual culture might be said to move from the raw to the cooked" (p. 112), the author concludes.

Chapter Five Caroline Reeves, "Developing the Humanitarian Image in Late Nineteenth- and early Twentieth-Century China" is a departure. It is the only one to deal with the origins of humanitarian photography outside the West. The Chinese gaze had distinctive characteristics, derived from (a rejection of) local history and the selective (and unusual) consumption of novelty Western tropes. In fin-de-siècle Asia, only Meiji Japan was a faithful re-enactor of European culture. The author's premise is as follows: "The spectacle of suffering seemed to be the most effective way to move Western—and Japanese—audiences to compassion and to generate funds for wealthy causes. How did China's philanthropists fit in with this visual convention?" (p. 115). The question provides a hint: the camera in China was turned towards the face of the man behind the donation. At least two aspects of this localized visual culture stand out. First, it broke with a centenary tradition of using Chinese print technologies for the purpose of depicting misery "in the service of [state-sponsored] philanthropy" (p. 117). The new fashion was imported from Europe, a local take on the *carte-de-visite* fad that had swept across the continent in the early years of photographic reproduction. Second, while the Chinese were not fond of picturing pain, a very modern Western trend, they nonetheless pioneered the conspicuous involvement of famous sponsors (celebrities) in the promotion of humanitarian causes. All of which resulted from the establishment of the Red Cross in China after the collapse of the Qing dynasty, and the "flurry of publishing activity" that ensued (p. 123).

The Swiss Red Cross is the focus of Chapter Six Francesca Piana, "Photography, Cinema, and the Quest for Influence: The International Committee of the Red Cross in the Wake of the First

World War". Piana "frames the relationship between the ICRC's humanitarianism, photography, and cinema within the transnational emergence of Western civil society, modern humanitarianism, and mass culture" (p. 141). We are introduced to the 1920s, when cinema is an established medium of communication, in some ways superior to photography, and when both governments and advertisers have just discovered the secret powers of propaganda (the rising fascist states would soon make ample use of it). It is somewhat striking that the early publications of the Propaganda Commission, founded in 1919, seemed to be indifferent to the printing of emotion-stirring images, and either contained no illustrations or refrained from including photographs of missions in the field. It is even more striking, as the author notes, if we consider the long tradition of printing, of Calvinist roots, that existed in Switzerland, particularly in Geneva. "There might have been a bias," Piana speculates "that educated readers—the target audience…—had less need for visuals than the general audience" (p. 145). Movies differed from photographs in several ways. Films required generous funding and their production, including scripts, was tightly supervised. The topics of these early humanitarian documentaries, dated around 1920, included epidemics in Poland, prisoners of war in the Baltic Sea, Russian refugees in Istanbul, and the poverty-stricken children of Budapest. In all cases, the camera is there to shed light on, and to elevate, the relief actions of the Red Cross. But the early publications of the Propaganda Commission were an exception to the rule: in the photographs, the "suffering body" was common currency, while in the movies audiences where shown "images of rescued people" and glorified doctors. "We can assume," the author writes, "that a success story would bring [the Red Cross] more financial contributions" (p. 152), although a moral boundary

may have also been drawn by the all-too-real realism of the still new experience of the moving image.

Chapter 7 Heide Fehrenbach, "Children and Other Civilians: Photography and the Politics of Humanitarian Image-Making" delves into what is perhaps humanitarian photography's favorite subject matter. "For over a century," the chapter opens, "humanitarian appeals have increasingly relied on images of children to raise public awareness and funds to alleviate human suffering" (p. 165). Fehrenbach traces the chronology of the "symbolic figure of the child" (p. 167): in nineteenth century humanitarian pictures, children appear in group or familial settings; by the turn of the twentieth century, they are portrayed in various suffering states, often with their mothers "in variations of the well-known Christian tropes of Madonna and Child" (p. 167); in the aftermath of the First World War, when famine was no longer exclusively a colonial problem, images of lone suffering European children entered the vocabulary of the medium; after 1945, children in pain became the visual norm in official publications, as well as in pamphlets of both religious and secular NGOs, and of course in the profit-driven general press. What's most interesting, again historically, is how from the early 1920s shocking pictures made their way into the world of advertising, and not only the other way around. The existence of "before and after" photographs in baby food advertisements gives some indication as to the numbing effect that regular exposure to violent images had on the public. As early as the 1920s, it seems, compassion fatigue was already a feature of the humanitarian gaze. Citizens, now equated with consumers, were both touched and entertained by the sight of a positively starving child. Yet another innovation of the interwar period was the use of scientific

language for authoritative effect: a "strategy of combining shocking images with expert reports authored by respected medical doctors and public health officials" (p. 181). During the Second World War, both Nazi and Allied propaganda relied on images of children. The result of these appeals to popular sentiment was the crystallization of "the notion of 'the civilian' as imagined through the figure of the innocent endangered child" (p. 191).

Chapter 8 Silvia Salvatici, "Signs of Benevolence: UNRRA's Recipients Portrayed" expounds the institutionalization of humanitarian culture in the aftermath of the Second World War. We know, as the author notes, that humanitarianism has a long history and various possible roots prior to 1945. These were downplayed by the organizations created in the post-Holocaust world, particularly the UN: "after World War II, the United Nations agencies played up the idea of a 'new beginning' in order to emphasize the break between the present and a past marked by 'barbarism'" (p. 201). Of course, the UN did not emerge out of thin air. The people in charge in 1945 had been employed in humanitarian efforts in the 1930s and earlier. For instance, Morse Salisbury was hired to lead the Public Information Office of UNRRA, based on his experience in an identical position with the US Department of Agriculture during the Great Depression. We are reminded of the colonial undertones of all humanitarian campaigns, including the allegedly neutral work of the UN. America emerged from WWII as the undisputed global power, which only highlights the need "to investigate the foundation of UNRRA as part of the U.S. program to internationalize the New Deal" (p. 203). UNRRA had no time for pictures of pain. Instead, their photographs in the field (e.g. a camp for Russian refugees, soon

to be returned to their home country) "convey a sense of order and efficiency" (p. 206) that distorted a reality of chaos and unhappiness on the part of the victims, many of whom refused repatriation. What UNRRA achieved with its visual campaigns was to successfully sell "the idea of a new international body salving the wounds of the war and paving the way for a new kind of international cooperation" (p. 217).

From 1945, until the boom of grassroots NGOs in the 1980s, the identification between the UN and the very notion of humanitarian labor was almost total. Chapter 9 Davide Rodogno and Thomas David, "All the World Loves a Picture: The World Health Organization's Visual Politics, 1948-1973" covers the pictorial work of the WHO, direct successor of UNRRA. In the 1950s, the WHO "benefited from the rise of photojournalism, particularly visual practices of glossy prestige magazines like *Life*" (p. 225). The risk of institutionalization was in the projection of an image of technical, bureaucratic dullness that had little to no appeal in the public sphere. "Humanitarian narratives… were a way to give a human dimension" to the eminently technocratic labor of the WHO. As in the case of the Red Cross, these post-1945 organizations were mostly interested in self-promotion: "The reader of the WHO magazine was led to believe that the world was on the verge of a revolutionary improvement in health standards [which] was dramatically narrated and visually staged" (p. 227). Furthermore, the WHO set out to persuade the world of the "universal validity of *the* model" (p. 227). To achieve the goal of universalization of the (Western-centric) humanitarian gaze, the WHO worked with prestigious photographers from the Magnum agency. These were "expensive" but widely believed to

have a knack for "real story material" (p. 228). It is interesting to learn that the WHO's contracts stipulated what the photographer was to emphasize. For instance, in a series about premature born babies, the Magnum man was instructed to focus on the work of the nurse rather than on the modern equipment in the room. Keeping the appearance of technological wizardry was essential, but only insofar as machines were endowed with a human face. Gender roles come once more into play. The halo of humanity was provided by female nurses caring for babies, whereas men were pictured next to metallic objects that symbolized the cold infallibility of industrial modernity. Populist headlines "The baby born too soon: will it live?" faded away in the 1970s, but sentimental photographs remained central to the WHO's universalist thinking: "[A] single shot could capture the dream of humanity achieving the utopian objective of better health for everybody, everywhere" (p. 244).

Chapter 10 Lasse Heerten, "'A' as in Auschwitz, 'B' as in Biafra: The Nigerian Civil War, Visual Narratives of Genocide, and the Fragmented Universalization of the Holocaust" builds upon the problem of globalizing the humanitarian gaze. It also enters new visual territory. We might call it postmodernism. After 1945 there was a growing sense (in Western culture alone, despite the universalizing goals of the WHO and similar organizations) that no violation of the human body could be as horrific as the Jewish Holocaust. In the humanitarian imagination, the Nazi death camps became the measure of all things, and an obligatory reference in the mass media's coverage of genocide. The Holocaust—like Elvis or Hitler himself—became something of a pop icon, to be consumed visually at the superficial level of everyday entertainment. In 1968, when the images of the

Biafran famine arrived in Western Europe and the United States, "'the Holocaust' had not yet emerged as the symbolic core of a memory culture focused on genocidal violence" (p. 253). The new crisis received unparalleled media coverage. The notion that Biafra was an "African holocaust" took hold, giving the Jewish genocide its current "cultural power". Moreover, "Biafra heralded the 'age of televised disaster'": "it was the interplay of television images and photojournalistic reports that created the event—and Biafra's iconography" (p. 255). In the 1960s both Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (1976) and Marshall Mcluhan's dictum, "the medium is the message," were all the rage. What Western Europeans and North Americans saw, both on TV and in the illustrated magazines, was a series of pathetically malnourished children. The image of the skeletal Biafran child remains entrenched in the popular imagination to this day. The result of this mass-produced image of Africa has been, however, a "fragmented universalization" of the Holocaust—it remains a Western icon, a nightmarish spectacle that other cultures experience from a far less mediated distance.

Chapter 11 Henrietta Lidchi, "Finding the Right Image: British Development NGOs and the Regulation of Imagery" deals with the type of grassroots humanitarianism that branched out of the 1960s counterculture. Lidchi explores the work of the British-based organization Christian Aid, and the links that exist between the visual economies of the nascent NGO culture and the concept of "development." The critique of development, centered around the morality of fundraising, may be traced back to Jorgen Lissner's *The Politics of Altruism* (1977). Lissner laid the foundations of today's attacks on NGO campaigning: "Starving baby images,

[Lissner held], were neither true not accurate pictures of reality overseas, but a reflection of the laziness of fundraisers who chose to feed Northern prejudices for profit" (p. 266). According to the same author, "negative" images reinforce the colonial gaze, in the sense that they turn subjects into objects of representation, "and by implication *objects* of development" (p. 279). The Ethiopian famine of 1984-5 popularized the concept of NGO, giving new life to Lissner's theoretical musings. The famine was heavily covered by the BBC, "producing tears and unprompted donations" (p. 282), although the real success story was the pop song "Do they know It's Christmas?" and the subsequent Life Aid Concert, both hugely successful, which turned their organizer, British pop singer Bob Geldof, into the celebrity spokesman of the NGO era. A new visual cliché took shape in the process: "Ethiopia, which became synonym with Africa, was depicted as a country, poor to begin with, brought to its knees by famine, and needing outside assistance to feed itself on a scale without historical precedent" (p. 282). The mediatization of the famine also brought a wave of Lissner-type criticism which resulted in "a move toward positive imaging" (p. 293).

The final Chapter Sanna Nissinen, "Dilemmas of Ethical Practice in the Production of Contemporary Humanitarian Photography" lays out the soul-searching done by NGOs in the years that followed the Ethiopian crisis. A 1989 publication, *Code of Conduct on Images Related to the Third World*, "affirmed the values of representing subjects to emphasize their equality and dignity and recommended including the opinions of Southern partners in the representational process" (p. 299). This was more than just a declaration of intentions. Post-Ethiopia, NGO work became

standardized, and photography was subjected to rules and regulations. Industry terms such as "visibility projects" are used to describe the "communication formats with new methods of distribution" employed by NGOs. Some of these new methods and formats include social media, blogs, and mobile applications. Regulation is the product of self-awareness, but it comes pregnant with its own ironic downside: industry standards are rightly perceived as strategies of continuity (fundraising through the visual exploitation of otherness) wrapped up in all manner of meaningless euphemisms. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a case in point. Professionalization also diminishes the instinctively empathetic role of the photographer, who is now expected to "follow strict client protocol and organizational guidelines" (p. 301). Industry regulations have the purpose of avoiding obscene visuals, and yet there are ways of working around the rules, through the use of captions, which have not been fully codified and which "can create the shock/horror-work that graphic imagery was able to do before ethical governance" (p. 303). On the plus side, after Ethiopia the photographed other was to be given a voice. No longer was he or she to be represented as a helpless victim, but as an agent of his or her own destiny instead. That is, at least, the ideal scenario.

There are very few weaknesses in this tidy collection of essays. The main one is obvious enough, and is highlighted in the Introduction: humanitarianism in the modern sense of the word is a Western invention and, both in practice and in theory, is decidedly western-centric. Historians of humanitarianism will need to 1) explore modernity's fate outside the geographic limits of the West (the essay on China in this volume is a start) and 2) investigate non-mediatized empathy, human and otherwise. Animal empathy

(non-human benevolence) has been thoroughly discussed by Frans de Waal (e.g. 2013), expert in bonobo ethology, whereas the Russian aristocrat-cum-anarchist Peter Kropotkin was known for his belief that "mutual aid," not the "struggle for survival," was the key to understanding evolution in the natural world. How do humans *feel* the pain of others, regardless of the medium? In relation to the history of photography, an opening essay on the representation of war victims in the mid-nineteenth century (in the Crimea or the American Civil War, for instance) would have been welcomed. Other than that, this is an excellent collection, all the more so because of the quality of the edition —that Cambridge University Press was willing to print so many photographs in a single volume, albeit in black-and-white, is a testament to the sheer importance of the enterprise.

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