

I'm Not a War Correspondent

Jason Athanasiadis

Often while being introduced I have to explain that I'm not what I've just been presented as: a war correspondent.

There's a fundamental difference between those of us who cover a country or region because we want to explain it (in good times and bad), and that tribe migrating from conflict to conflict because of the thrill the process provides.

Today it's Grozny, tomorrow Sierra Leone, later on it'll be Aleppo and Ukraine. It doesn't much matter that they don't speak any of the languages or know much of the history: war and humanity's reactions when caught up in extreme situations speak their own dialect.

My definition of war is that it's what happens in any given society when amnesia afflicts critical demographics and they forget the consequences that egoistic and selfish behaviors usually have. When these groupings overstretch in their greed, a sensitive balance is lost. Destabilization usually follows.

This is a series of images I took in a region that I've dedicated my life to covering: the landmass stretching from Morocco to Afghanistan where

Arabic, Persian, and Turkish are spoken. It is a region where conflict isn't rare but that doesn't mean that its societies are afflicted by atavistic and unexplainable struggles, their roots lost in the mists of time; the presence of conflict doesn't become an excuse to stop seeking the reasons for why things are as they are, a search that often unearths some personal culpability.

I never once set out to cover a war, and plans to attend a few were overwhelmed by a sense that my presence could offer little of value in a space of heightened emotions and overburdened resources.

Sometimes though, the curve of history or the economics of my profession dispatch me in the direction of a conflict happening in my region, at which point I engage in the kind of photography that often misses the conventional main story in favor of small but insightful details.

I end this series with an image of a Tunisian child running through the Roman-era city of Dugga. I like it because it portrays a state of innocence in an ideal world stripped of conflict and its attendant dislocating effects on humanity, cities, landscapes, and psyches. *



Jason Athanasiadis covers the eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East, North Africa, and parts of central Asia. He studied Arabic at Oxford and Persian and Contemporary Iranian Studies in Tehran, and was a 2007 Nieman Fellow at Harvard. In December 2017, his work on formerly cosmopolitan ports was awarded the Anna Lindh Foundation Mediterranean Journalist Special Alumni Award. He lives between Athens, Istanbul, and Tunis.



Libyans headed to the battlefield (Libya, 2011)

At a graduation ceremony for army officers in Kabul, American trainers positioned the few female officers in the first row to give the impression that gender quotas were being filled (Afghanistan, 2010)





Young Libyan men walk through the derelict Courthouse Square in Benghazi, a few years after it was the focus of the Libyan Revolution (Libya, 2013)

An American soldier sporting night vision goggles cuts an isolated figure in the middle of a floodlit market in an Afghan village close to Kandahar (Afghanistan, 2010)



Previous Page: A supporter of the Lebanese militant group Hizbullah sits atop a mound of rubble in a bombed-out district of Beirut that was believed to host many of the organization’s command centers (Lebanon-Israel War, 2006)



A Syrian relative cries over her injured child in a refugee camp in Jordan (Jordan, 2014)



A celebrating Libyan stands on a burning tank on the day when NATO-backed Libyan rebels took over the Eastern Libyan town of Ajdabiya (Libya, 2011)

A Lebanese man stands on the staircase of his once-lavish home in South Lebanon, a few days following the ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon in the 2006 war (Lebanon, 2011)



Libyan rebels in the Eastern Front retreat in the face of shelling by the government side (Libya 2011)



An American soldier aims his rifle during an operation in South Afghanistan (Afghanistan, 2010)

An internally displaced Iraqi boy waits for handouts at a United Nations-administered camp in East Iraq (Iraq, 2014)



A young Syrian refugee boy pauses while playing to shed a tear (Northern Iraq, 2014)



Next page:
A Tunisian boy runs through the remains of the Roman city of Dugga (Tunisia, 2016)



A one-legged Syrian boy does his homework at a school set up in a refugee camp in Jordan (Jordan 2014)



African migrants bed down in a model detention center in the Libyan capital of Tripoli (Libya, 2017)

Disabled Iranian veterans of the Iran-Iraq War are paraded through the streets of Shiraz during a religious festival (Iran, 2005)



