

Is travel photography ethical?

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Illustration

Figure 1 unknown photographer found on Amycouchblog/Wordpress

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Summary of Thesis

I this thesis I will be discussing the topic of travel photography and more importantly if travel photography is ethical in terms of the environment and morally right for the people or landscape people are taking pictures of, I aim to discover what I think is important to me as a photographer and I aim to try to find a sustainable way of photograph and travel.

Is Travel Photography Ethical?

I have loved to travel from the moment I went to Spain for the first time, and then when I visited Egypt. Travel has always been a huge part of me and I have long thought that it would be a huge part of my life someday. However, I've recently been thinking of what I wanted to do back then and now I know that would not be ethical or morally right because, at that young age, I'd wanted to take photos of the places and people.

I have done some research but my point of view has changed drastically since I was 12. I now have a moral compass which I think every photographer should be in tune with, especially now. Within this essay, I'm going to be writing about the rights and the wrongs that I think travel photographers should do and I'll also be writing about

how there is a difference between photographing a destination and photographing a subject within the destination.

Which Type of Travel Photography is More Ethical?

For me, there are two types of travel photographers. One who goes to places and takes pictures of their destination for travel magazines, and then there are photographers who go places to take images of people in need or who are in poverty. In basic terms, one photographer shoots scenery and agriculture, and the other photographer shoots life and culture. The two are not any less than each other though, I think they are both important to us as a society if done correctly that is.

Scenery and Agriculture:

I believe that a lot of people would say that this is the most ethical style of travel photography because it is less invasive than other options, as it sees only taking images of things like sunsets, beaches, and animals to put in a magazine for thousands of people to see. But this is where it becomes an issue. Because of that image, people are going to flock to that place because they saw it in a magazine, and you have to ask yourself is that less invasive than the other style or is it just as invasive because people are constantly going there disturbing the natural wildlife. Some may have to take transport to get there which is polluting, just to get to and from the place they want to visit and they also might disturb the people who live there. So, in the long run, one image can potentially change the course of that place.

Life and Culture Photography

Now, this style of travel photography can be amazing to see, as it can shed light on a subject that isn't talked about much, but on the other hand, it can be very demoralizing for the subject. There have been cases where photography has dehumanised races and cultures for the sake of a good photo. For example, a photographer I have researched, Jimmy Nelson, . He's gotten quite a lot of backlash from indigenous people for two main reasons.

The first one was because he titled one of his pieces of work "BEFORE THEY PASS AWAY", and naturally (and rightfully so) a lot of people were angry with this decision because it implies that they are fading from existence and he doesn't even give them a name. The second reason was that he photographed them in his vision and what he wanted them to be, rather than capturing who they really are.

In a quote:

"I saw the photos and I didn't like them. This man only wants to force his own ideas on the photos, to publish them in books, and to show them to everyone so that people will think he's a great photographer. Just like Chagnon, he does whatever he wants with indigenous peoples. It is not true that indigenous peoples are about to die out. We will be around for a long time, fighting for our land, living in this world and continuing to create our children." - Davi Kopenawa, spokesman of the Yanomami tribe in Brazil and known as the "Dalai Lama of the Rainforest"

In final terms of which I believe is more ethical, I believe that they have both pros and cons, but I also do believe that if you go about photographing a subject properly,

you may get a minimal effect, but at least it's completely truthful and you will still get recognition for who and what you are photographing.

The Effects that it can Cause on Land:

The effects of the scenery and agriculture in travel photography can be horrifying. Just a single photo can cause extreme effects all because of a little social media thing called geotagging.

Geotagging is something where you can appoint and add your exact coordinates, so naturally, people just flock there. Especially if you're a celebrity or an influencer. After doing some research about what can happen to the land, I came across an article about the environmental impact caused by careless photographers it said that photographers sometimes go into restricted areas knowingly, just to take a photo and then post the technically forbidden image, on Instagram and geotag it so then others will do the same exact thing. For example, many places that were once a hidden treasure are now so full you can barely breathe and stretch.

Another example is places like Paris, the Eiffel tower, the leaning tower of Pisa, the great wall of China, the Sistine Chapel, and the Vatican City are now all places that are jam-packed with tourists trying to get the perfect Instagram worthy photo.

For me personally, I wouldn't add a geotag, or if I think that even the photo itself would cause mayhem to the people living there I wouldn't even take the picture.

On a brighter note, there is something small being done about all of this. There is a group of people called 'LEAVE NO TRACE' and they set out to help get the public to realize that we need to start caring about the places we visit, so others can enjoy it

equally as much. They have certain rules themselves, but would also like others to follow them and in my personal opinion, they have very respectable rules.

- *Plan Ahead & Prepare.*
- *Travel & Camp on Durable Surfaces.*
- *Dispose of Waste Properly.*
- *Leave What You Find.*
- *Minimise Campfire Impacts.*
- *Respect Wildlife.*
- *Be Considerate of Other Visitors.*

Pollution due to travelling

I love travelling as much as the next person, in fact, I would like it to be a part of my future career but I have found it very eye-opening researching into how I can do this in an eco-friendly way which I have discovered is almost impossible.

Digital cameras

Some of the cameras we have available today use a lot of energy, and to make them they have to extract and refine rare heavy metals such as gold, copper, lead and aluminum all of these materials go into different parts of the camera, then there is the battery which has nickel-cadmium and lithium-ion these elements also end up polluting soil and water.

Another issue I have found is the conditions people work in to manufacture and make these both in the mines where the materials are sourced and also the factories where the cameras are made are not ethical they have unacceptable working conditions.

Looking at all the information I have gathered above I find it shocking that the lifespan of an DSLR camera is only up to 5 years, and it's more cost-effective to buy a new camera when these break leading to more pollution, not to mention the expense and environmental impact of charging them and buying new batteries. I hadn't really thought of the effect of not having a camera with film in it, but when using a camera with a film you have a limited number of shots to take with a digital camera you can shoot multiple photos of the same thing knowing you have a huge amount of storage, however, these photos need storing and this brings me on to the next issue which is data hubs they use fossil fuels to stay cool and they have been shown to use 25% of technology-generated greenhouse gas emissions also adding to the issue.

Film cameras

While film cameras are more durable compared to digital, they also add pollution to the environment. This is because of two different things: number one is the number of chemicals needed to develop the films.

Developing a film requires chemical developers and fixers which create toxic waste and eventually end up in the underground water or sewerage which again causes add-on effects to the climate crisis we are in.

The second is the films themselves contain plastic and silver halide. This is a light-sensitive chemical that helps to create the image on the paper.

What makes a Good Travel Photographer?

A good travel photographer can do many things. But a great one can do everything technical with their camera, such as knowing when to change the iso settings. A great one should know the fundamentals of photography like editing, getting the "perfect" image and taking many to look through and decide on, and knowing how and what makes an interesting photo. But for me, a great travel photographer can make a story out of any image. They should be respectful of the subject that they've selected to photograph and they should get permission from the subject themselves that it is okay to photograph them. They should get to know the subject personally, talk to them and make them feel comfortable. Most importantly, they shouldn't make their subject feel alienated or any less than human.

A comparison between four travel photographers

Ira block

Ira block is an American photographer born in 1949 and since the mid 70's he has been a travel photographer for different magazines but now is freelance I believe he has done many different projects for example he spent 3 months in the north pole with late explore Naomi Uemura I have done some research into him and from what I could find he does spend time with the people he is photographing and not all of them have traditional clothing on so that tells me he isn't staging these people to photograph them in his vision.

Jodi Bieber

Jodi Bieber is a South African photographer who was born in 1966. Jodi says she doesn't see herself as a photojournalist

"I do not aspire to objectivity. I'm simply a photographer. I show what I see and what strikes me, always from my point of view."

When I was doing research into Jodi I was looking at the project she did with Bibi Aisha this was about the project about how Bibi Aisha was held down by her husband and family member while they cut off her nose and ears because she tried to run away from her husband and he did that to teach the other women a lesson while she and Jodi and the translate was talking Jodi put down her camera and had a talk with Bibi as Jodi felt that it was becoming stressful for Bibi, which is a very little thing but very important as many other photographers would have continued taking the picture in spite of the fact that she was feeling uncomfortable, this show that Jodi take her time with people and actually treats them with respect which is amazing it was only when Jodi ask Bibi did they continue to work together.

Jimmy Nelson

Jimmy Nelson is a British photographer born in 1967 who is mostly known for his pictures of tribal and indigenous people but he has had some extreme backlash from the work he had made in his own idea of what they are meant to do/look like and he entitled the work as if they people won't be around for much longer, in other words, he has fed into a false narrative that this is what they do and what they look like.

People like Stephen Corry (director of survival international) have seen his images and have said that “ they are no more than just a photographer fantasy” and the tribes themselves have come out to say

“What Jimmy Nelson says about us is not true. My people, the Dani people, were never headhunters, it was never our tradition. The real headhunters are the Indonesian military who have been killing my people. My people are still strong and we fight for our freedom. We are not ‘passing away ’, we are being killed by the brutal Indonesian soldiers. That is the truth.” - benny Wenda

This is an example of a bad photojournalist not in the sense that his skills in photography are bad but bad in the respect of his mortals and how he does treat the tribes and people with respect and how he has falsified a whole project because he did it based on his vision and not for who they truly are.

Steve McCurry

Steve McCurry is an American photographer who was born in 1950 he is mostly known for the work of the afghan girl but when her story got out to the general public McCurry was criticized because of the way he took the images he had not only endangered Sharbat Gula he had also taken pictures of her that one was against her religion ,then other reason is that he made her feel very uncomfortable and very scared he was falsified her story by saying that her mother was dead by being blown up by a bomb when she had actually died from appendicitis. He was also accused of photo manipulation

In 2016 it was discovered accidentally by Paolo Viglione who thought it funny, but a lot of people were upset by the misuse and him claiming that he is a photojournalist. For these reasons, I believe that McCurry is a bad photojournalist but again not in the sense that his skill is bad but in the sense that he has continued his behaviour is not respecting the people, he is taking pictures of but he also making heavily edited photos.

Conclusion of comparison

As you can see the four photographers I have written about they are all very different but as you read two of them Ira block and Jodi Bieber are two photographers who actually talk to their subjects and who the people they are photographing have a voice be seen and heard for who they really are, Ira talk's to the people of the country he visits he engage with them by asking them questions and Jodi forgets about the camera for a while to talk to people and want to help them from the research I have found they are two genuine people who care about the people the photograph. Then the two other photographers I have researched, Jimmy Nelson and Steve McCurry are vastly different Jimmy Nelson has created false narratives and published them as if they were true. He has taken images of tribes and indigenous people normally wearing traditional clothing that they rarely use anymore and he is alerting people. And with Steve McCurry he publish a photograph of a young girl and not only make a false narrative and of her background but also endangered her and her family and 10years later because he did the same thing again and he also has had association and tampering with his photography, in conclusion, I would say what Jimmy Nelson and Steve McCurry did wasn't what a photojournalist should do, I feel like as a photojournalist you shouldn't take images of romanticised version of what is actually going on I feel like you shouldn't always

have the camera in someone's face and I believe that you should also try to be like Ira Block and Jodi Bieber.

White privilege

The definition of white privilege according to google is

“inherent advantages possessed by a white person on the basis of their race in a society characterised by racial inequality and injustice.”

In Layman's terms, it is where the colour of your skin doesn't affect your life in a negative way. The reason I bring this up is more often than not white photographers who travel to other countries and photograph different cultures make them feel like they are animals in cages just being stared at through a lens. And depicting something which is in fact incorrect and very far from the truth.

Back in the heyday of photography travelling was mainly a thing of privilege which white people had and in fact, still, have I feel this is because people have been told and shown over time that other races like ingenious people and people of colour are not as worthy as white people an example of this is in the New York city times where Sarah Lewis writes about her grandfather being expelled from New York City public high school because he asked a question

“ Why did their textbooks not reflect the multiracial world around him ?” a

And his teacher replied

“ African Americans, in particular, had done nothing to merit inclusion”

This is just one example of a long list of racial issues within photography.

During the times of the black lives matter movement, people were using this metaphor “ if you’re in a neighbourhood and one house is on fire the firemen wouldn’t help every house along the way they would just go to the emergency

In regards to photography, many photographers were white and now many are of colour which is amazing to see, but when travel photography started to become as big as it is the majority of photographers were white and they often travelled to poorer countries or countries where People of colour are the main skin colour, they painted this image of what People of colour are and how they should act according to the white races beliefs they are they then printed in books and magazines and these people were forever looked at like they were less than human, what some white photographers used to do almost alienated them from society.

Othering



Fig 1 /photographer unknown /found on amycouchblog/wordpress accessed on 3/10/2021

Othering is to treat or consider a person or group of people as alien to one's self because of racial gender or social class.

I have put a quote below which I feel is appropriate

“Othering shapes society into a harmful weapon and can fatally wound the actions and attitude of those in our society “

I feel this is a very powerful quote because it's the blunt truth, we automatically believe the images which are put in front of us usually without question, which leads me to believe photographers hold a lot of power as they can fabricate stories out of thin air with just a picture and we would assume it is true. So in effect, it only takes one photographer with a distorted view of society's views or ideas to create a divide thereby othering certain aspects of the world.

I also have to question if we as the viewers are partially to blame for blindly following the photographer's tales based on the images which are put in front of us, I believe it is still a huge issue within society not helped by people in a position of powers such as newspaper reporters not checking the facts or not caring about the facts before sharing them with the world.

How does this affect the way we see others?

In my opinion, photography can have a massive effect on how to see others and how we treat them. As I've discussed in the sections above we are sometimes misled by the images we see and that can cause us to close our minds to what you could find by looking further into a subject, photography can add to the issue of bullying as

people who see the images could use them to hurt someone based on their gender or race.

On the other side, photography can help us to empathise with others emotions and can help us understand what it feels like to be someone else it can almost enable us to see what it's like to walk in their shoes, it has been shown that photos can help people and children understand their emotions it can help them to deal with trauma and day to day life.

An example of this is an article by Petapixel called photography and the feelings of others: from mirroring emotions to the theory of the mind. This article goes into great detail about how photography can actually help with seeing others emotions and as said above this can help younger children discover what they are feeling they have two tests that can help you discover your emotions this is specifically useful for children who are closed of emotionally as it gives them a safe environment with low stimulus to express and understand their emotions through images. images can also help diagnose potential autism in children again this is helpful because it's a low stimulus so will not overwhelm the child the same way talking does. Within the article, it says that when you see a happy or sad photo it can trigger the muscles in your face to express what they see in the image.

Photography can also be used alongside therapy to help combat depression and other forms of mental health both with children and adults. Photography also helps to get you active and you're doing something you enjoy which will have an immediate impact on your mental health. Photography can help calm your mind as you are so focused on taking a photo you often forget about all the different stresses in your life

it can become a positive escape. As you can see photography can help us in many different ways but can also hinder us as well. it can affect us to see certain people in a way which is very narrow-minded and distorted, it can also be used to control people and it can be used to belittle peoples races and genders, it is not just the photos themselves that do this it is also the photographers behind the images feeding you lies and false stories because it helps there images stand out from the rest. The saying photographs never lie has a lesser-known ending ... liars may photograph, this is something that I feel is very powerful as it puts into words the influence that photographers have.

My manifesto

In this paragraph, I will be talking about my manifesto and the rules I give myself to stick to if I decide to go out to do travel photography

- 1) I will always ask permission to photograph someone
- 2) I will do my best to use the least polluting method of travel to get to my destination
- 3) I will always try to get the facts and do my research before I go out to shoot or before I post my images
- 4) I will try not to be biassed and go in with an open mind to make sure I don't use what I think people are meant to look/act like
- 5) I will always tell the truth
- 6) I will not use heavy editing tools

7) I will try to use my photography for good

I feel like these things are important because these are the things I value in other photographers that are demoralizing and they are my core values.

Number 3 is a very important value because I don't know what to be the kind of photographer that lies or misinterpret the situation has it would be very unprofessional and shows that you don't care about the subject you are shooting

Number 2 I believe that there isn't any way we can do photography in an eco-friendly manner but there are steps we can take to help shrink our carbon footprint

Number 1 is also very imprint as one it is very illegal to post a picture of someone without their permission and also they could have a religious reason as to why they can't have the images in the public eye

Number 6 is also important because I'm shooting in a documentary style so I need to be as true to the real-life action as possible.

What could I do to make my photographic career any more ethical?

There are many things I could do to have a more ethical career and I will discuss them with you now. One of the things I could do to help my career is to stick to my manifesto as I have some of the reasons as to what makes an ethical photographer in my opinion, one of the most important rules to me is to stick to my moral compass and I have to think to myself, would I be comfortable if a complete stranger did this to me? What things could I do to help the person I'm photographing be more comfortable? And these are things you have to think about when photographing

someone. I would also not add geotagging to any of my images so I can protect not only the land I have found but also the people around it.

Another action I would take is to take good care of my photography equipment to ensure it has the longest lifespan possible and when the time does come that my digital camera has died I would recycle it in a proper manner so it would add less pollution to the world. When I use a film camera I would try to limit the number of times I would have to do the developing process by doing a big batch all at once and not a lot of little small batches.

Finally, I would always be a kind and caring photography even more so when I'm photographing people because some of the people I may be photographing could have tragic backstories or maybe be in poverty but regardless of the situation as to why I'm taking the photograph I would always ask for their permission and also always talk to them like a human being and no less

Conclusion

Now to conclude my final thought, during this Thesis I have talked about the different areas of travel photography and what is it that makes a good travel photographer and I have compared different photographers and seen what qualities make a good photographer and how the quality makes their photography an ethical or unethical one. I have also explored what is important to me as a photographer and I have found different ways of being more sustainable and also ethical so my final thoughts are that travel photographer is ethical if you do it in the right way, that right way is that you always have to think about the other person if you're photographing them and you always think about your influence as a travel photographer and what that might mean for the land you're shooting and for the other people who live around that

area and how your image might impact them and also try your best to do the right thing for the environment and dispose of your camera equipment and try to find a more eco-friendly way of traveling.

Bibliography

Burkinshaw, *Travel Photography Explained | Iceland Photo Tours*. [online] Iceland Photo Tours. Available at:

<<https://iceland-photo-tours.com/articles/landscape-and-nature-photography/travel-photography-explained>> [Accessed 12 October 2021].

In the article, Burkinshaw discusses how and why travel photography is important to both us as a society and us personally. It was clear that he explained how to create a good travel photography portfolio within the article. He mentions that there are two types of travel photography in media. The ones who will travel for photography as their main occupation while on the other hand, you have those who like to travel and take photos of their own experience to complete their travelling agenda. Burkinshaw also says that in order to be a good travel photographer, you have to make a story from your surroundings. These include landscape and portrait photos you might take. Moreover, Burkinshaw gives us tips and hints on the items we should have to bring and include and what we need to do to stay safe during our travel.

ling times. The article is useful to me because it explains to me what I need to do to become a travel photographer. It helps me answer the question of how it is important to society because of how Burkinshaw discusses culture among other helpful things.

Pasternak, G., 2020. *The handbook of photography studies*. 1st ed. London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing, Plc.

The book is about answering various theories, questions, and photography-esque things. The author, Pasternak wanted to answer these questions for himself and for his students. He wanted to write about things such as the post-truth era, and other historical and theoretical-based things. "The handbook analyses the field's histories, theories, and research strategies." It will often discuss photography in a more advanced academic manner. The book "draws out the main concerns of photographic scholarship and interrogates the photography culture and geo-political influences." The book is extremely useful to me as it relates to my practice. It involves aspects of the post-truth era and that is something I'd like to write about further when it comes down to my dissertation. It also covers so many aspects of photography studies it will help me in my future research purposes

The Wire. 2019. *You'll Never See the Iconic Photo of the 'Afghan Girl' the Same Way Again*. [online] Available at:

<<https://thewire.in/media/afghan-girl-steve-mccurry-national-geographic>> [Accessed 12 October 2021].

The article mentions a video made by Tony Northrup, telling the real truth about the story of Steve McCurry and the Afghan girl. It describes how McCurry knew the situation. In McCurry's version, he was taking pictures of a girl, no posing and completely natural. But the real version is he posed her like it was an 80's glamour photo shoot. In the original article, McCurry mentions her eyes. He said "Her eyes are the fear of the ear.", but in reality, what was seen in her eyes was the fear of McCurry being in the room. The article suggests how important it is to have credibility within your images. I feel like this article is very good for my dissertation because it's important to have credibility and honesty within your images and it's even more important to have these traits for travel photography.

Krist, B. 2017. *The fundamentals of travel photography*.

[Accessed 20 October 2021]

In this series of lectures/books, Bob Krist writes about the fundamentals of travel photography. In this, he describes how a photographer should not only take high-quality photos but also look for a story to tell. A good photographer should be able to tell a story through images alone. He also goes on about what you may need and what you may find along your travels. I feel like this will be good to write about or reference because Bob Krist is a credible source as he has worked for national geographic and won a multitude of awards and it is what I want to do in the future. It's also something that is directly in relation to what I'm writing about. It also gives me a lot of source material to pull from. Bob Krist has made a TV show about the fundamentals of travel photography.

blog, p., 2021. *Travel Photography: the importance of making a connection when photographing people* - *PhotoHound Blog*. [online] PhotoHound Blog. Available at: <<https://www.photohound.co/blog/travel-photography-the-importance-of-making-a-connection-when-photographing-people/>> [Accessed 21 October 2021].

This is a blog about building a repertoire with your subject and not letting your fear of photographing a certain subject overcome you. It goes into detail about how you should be genuine and respectful with your group or subject. Keep the respect for no matter who or what they may be. For example, when this person was taking photos of Panos Laskarakis he knew that taking pictures from a distance with a telephoto lens wouldn't tell the whole story, so he instead made a connection with the people and explained what he wanted to achieve had to gain the acceptance of his presence being there and as a result, he got amazing photos. I believe this will be a good subject to discuss as it is related to culture and being respectful to others and not lying about anything or staging anything and letting what comes natural, be natural.

Erinoutdoors.com.2018.[online] Available at: <<https://erinoutdoors.com/ethics-of-travel-photography/>> [Accessed 21 October 2021].

This is a blog about the ethics of photography. More specifically, travel photography. It's about asking yourself all different questions and seeing whether it would either help people that you're taking photos of or will it hinder them instead. If you're taking a photo of a landscape, would it help or hinder it? This is something very important to me as I believe as a travel photographer you need to have a moral compass, you need to think about whether or not the photo will help the people and you need to also be 100% truthful with what you put out there. Therefore I believe this would be good to refer to

times, n., 2021. The Racial Bias Built Into Photography (Published 2019). [online] Nytimes.com. Available at:

<<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/25/lens/sarah-lewis-racial-bias-photography.html>> [Accessed 18 November 2021].

This article helped me a lot as it helps to show how even in today society racism is still happening and has been for a while

otherness and fetishization. 2021. [online] Available at:

<<https://petapixel.com/2016/11/16/otherness-fetishization-subject/>> [Accessed 5 December 2021].

This help when I was looking for examples of othering it talked about how the photography world sometimes causes harm

Blind-magazine.com. 2021. *Being a photographer and an ecologist*. [online] Available at:

<<https://www.blind-magazine.com/en/stories/2557-must-we-stop-taking-pictures-to-save-the-planet-en>> [Accessed 7 December 2021].

This article showed me that my career has many downfalls on the environment and I will help in my essay to show how photography might not be so ethical in terms of the environment.