A new vision of photojournalism: the unique and artistic features of Alexandra Boulat's work

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Introduction

Photojournalism was born with the invention of photography at the end of the 20th century. Although photography, and therefore photojournalism, first appeared in the 19th century, it was in the 20th century, and more especially in the 1920s with the invention of the Leica portable camera, that photojournalism has developed.

Photojournalism is defined as the transmission of information and news through photography. Since its creation, this journalistic practice has continued to evolve in different forms along with the evolution of the new technologies and society.

Today, photojournalism raises many questions, such as the difference between photographic art and photographic reporting, the new role of the "citizen journalist", the impact of social media on the profession, etc. It also presents ethical questions, such as the way in which conflicts are documented today.

The work of photojournalist Alexandra Boulat sheds light on these questions. She is a photojournalist who, throughout her career, has changed the traditional perspective of photojournalism by adopting a more human and artistic point of view.

The aim of this essay is to analyse how Alexandra Boulat's photographic style combines journalistic testimony with an artistic approach, in order to capture humanity in conflicts.

We will begin by looking at her vision of photojournalism. We will then analyse the features of her unique style and the questions it raises on photojournalism. Finally, we will look at what is done to maintain her memory while also observing the impact she had on the profession.

Alexandra Boulat and her vision of photojournalism

To start with, Alexandra Boulat was born in Paris on May 2, 1962. Her father was Pierre Boulat, a famous photographer who worked for LIFE magazine and her mother was Annie Boulat who founded the agency Cosmos photo in 1979. Alexandra Boulat was then, surrounded by pictures all her childhood.

She had a background in art because she studied graphic design and art history at the Beaux-Arts in Paris. "I have studied arts, painting and art history in Paris, and I was a painter for 10 years, but I always wanted to be a photographer."[1]

She began in photojournalism by being the assistant of her father from 1989 with the French press agency, Sipa. She went to the Balkans in the 90s and covered the dislocation of the ancient Yugoslavia. Being one of the few women photographers there at that time, Alexandra became recognized for her work. She stayed

[1] A. Boulat, *Snipper Alley*, https://sniperalley.photo/alexandra-boulat-en/?utm_source=com#3 [access : 14 IX 2025].

there from 1991 to 1999 while going to Kosovo and Bosnia Herzegovina. Her style is far removed from traditional photography.

Represented by the Cosmos agency and then the Sipa Press agency, her photographs were also published in different medias such as Paris-Match, National Geographic Magazine and TIME. On September 9, 2001, she co-founded the VII Photo agency with six other photographers: James Nachtwey, Christopher Morris, John Stenmeyer, Gary Knight, Antonin Kratochvil and Ron Haviv. The aim of the agency is to "produce an unflinching record of the injustices created and experiences by people"[2]. These photographers wanted to put into perspective the other side of a conflict. A year after the creation of the VII Photo Agency, she won the World Press Photo award for her photography of the last show of Yves Saint Laurent[3].

From 2001 to 2007, she went to Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq...etc. She documented the crisis situations in these countries in her own way by highlighting women and children who are not considered in those conflicts.

The role of photojournalism in conflicts: giving a voice to the voiceless

The role of a journalist is to gather, verify and diffuse information to the public by the media. A journalist is a witness of an event. However, each journalist has his own way of practicing his profession. This applies for a journalist who is writing an article, one who is approaching it on the radio and also the photojournalist who is taking a picture. They all have their own specific view on the world. For instance, a journalist who is writing an article about the war in Ukraine can choose, to write about the soldier or the stay-at-home mother. It is the same for photojournalists. Moreover, it depends on the will of the newspapers the journalist is working for and on their own personal traits. A journalist can be either interested in reporting facts about a soldier or a mother. In this essay, we will look further at the journalist who choose to take a picture of the mother. This is what Alexandra Boulat is famous for: taking pictures of the ones who are impacted by the war, the collateral victims. The purpose of this comparison is to better understand her journalistic focus. This essay is all about analysing why Alexandra Boulat's work is unique and outstanding.

To understand better her work, there is a need to explain the framing theory. For Ervin Goffman, an American sociologist, the framing is the way individuals perceive and organize their social experience. It is the emphasis on certain aspects of an event and the influence of this on the individuals. This theory has been taken up in the field of journalism and used to explain how the media influence the public's perception of events. Moreover, the framework determines what information a journalist will treat and how.

Robert M. Entman explains that the framing "involves selection and salience".[4] The salience is "making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audience". For Entman, framing is the selection of aspects of reality that are put in a certain way which makes them more salient. The framing highlights some bit of information.

[2] The VII foundation website, https://theviifoundation.org/ [access: 14 IX 2025].
[3] Y. Saint Laurent, A. Boulat, Pierre and Alexandra Boulat Official website, January 17, 2002, https://pierrealexandraboulat.com/work/yves-saint-laurent-3/ [access: 14 IX 2025].
[4] R. Entman, *Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm*, "Journal of Communication", 43(4) 1993, p. 51-58.

Alexandra Boulat has chosen to frame her work on humanity in crises and conflicts. In an article she wrote in Nieman Reports (a newspaper on journalism issues), she explains one of her main focus: "Much of my photographic work illuminates these women's daily lives and the choices they make as part of a political and economic struggle woven with the obligations of their religious observance."[5] By going to countries with unstable situation, she shows the world how people live in disastrous conditions. Her photographs differ from traditional ones that the public is used to seeing.

Alexandra Boulat's work compares to traditional journalistic works: the covering of Afghanistan

To understand better her work, in this part, we will look further into her photographs she took in Afghanistan. She went in Afghanistan when the Talibans took power from 1996 to 2001. She returned after 2001 when the Americans invaded.

In Afghanistan, women are oppressed by the Talibans, who deny them access to education and employment. Moreover, they have the obligation to wear the burqa.

Alexandra Boulat documented the impact of this on the population. Women are the center of her attention because they are the forgotten ones. She wants to put them into light.

Nevertheless, her work also involves collecting and diffusing information. In all her photographs, information is present, even if subtly. Her photographs gathered on the website made in memory of her and her father[6], are mainly pictures from 2001. At that time, Americans invaded Afghanistan in response to the 9/11 attacks. The Taliban's power went away with the American defense. This notion of freedom is seen in the photographs of Alexandra Boulat.

Women have now the right to vote. She took a photograph in which women went voting. There is a crowd movement that characterize the force of women, and the sensation of freedom installed now in the country.[7] The angle of the photograph shows that nobody can stop them from voting and therefore from living.

The political changes in Afghanistan are also described in a picture where women are going to a wedding. Alexandra Boulat took a picture with the angle focused on the legs of women and a girl in a queue. One of them is wearing a burqa, the other a modern dress and the girl a pink lace dress.[8] Here, political change is illustrated by the freedom of women to wear what they want. Alexandra Boulat could have chosen to take a photo of the president elected to explain the change in policy, but she chose instead to show the effect of this change on the population. Talibans tried to impose the Sharia law, which is a fundamentalist religious concept of Islam. Some aspects of it are considered against human rights because it restrained the freedom of expression, of women...etc. However, religion still is important in Afghans lives, and Alexandra Boulat transcribes that in her photographs. She

[5] A. Boulat, *Women and Islam: Bearing witness to their daily lives. An Essay in Words and Photographs*, Nieman Reports, Summer 2007, p. 51, https://niemanreports.org/women-and-islam-bearing-witness-to-their-daily-lives/ [access: 14 IX 2025].

[6] Pierre and Alexandra Boulat website, op. cit.

[7] *Afghanistan 2004 – Alexandra Boulat*, October 2004. Source: Pierre and Alexandra Boulat website. https://pierrealexandraboulat.com/work/modest/ [access: 14 IX 2025].

[8] *Afghanistan 2002 – Alexandra Boulat*, July 2002. Source: Pierre and Alexandra Boulat website. https://pierrealexandraboulat.com/work/afghanistan-today-may-2002/ [access: 14 IX 2025].

took a picture where a mother is in the mosque with her children.[9] Wednesday is the day women go to the Mosque. One of her children is holding her by her veil and the other are following her. She is walking and the angle of the picture make her look powerful and unstoppable.

Her photographs illustrate the power and freedom of women, but others also show that the situation in the country remains unstable and irregular.

To better understand why Alexandra Boulat's work is unique, we can compare her work with more "traditional" press photographs. To continue with the example of the war in Afghanistan, Zabi Karimi[10] took a photograph of the Talibans seated at a desk. It shows explicitly that they have taken power. It is a more factual way of illustrating the information.

Robert Capa, a famous photojournalist of the 20th century, took multiples photographs during wars. His work is much more focused on the war in itself. For example, this picture shows a soldier when he got shot.[11] Capa even said, "if your pictures aren't good enough, you're not close enough." This highlights perfectly his photographic style, which is being the closest to the military conflict.

Another famous war reporter is Don McCullin. He covered the war of Vietnam and the picture of a US soldier at the battle of Huế shocked the world.[12] In one picture, he shows the impact of the war.

Traditional war photographers are distinguished by their proximity to the battlefield. However, being at the heart of the conflict doesn't mean that photographs are lacking emotions compares to photographs focused on the civilians suffering from the war. The photograph of the soldier took by Don McCullin illustrates that.

Each journalist has their own way of illustrating the information, which makes them unique and therefore essential to the dissemination of information.

Alexandra Boulat's work highlights the living conditions of women and children, and above all, the people most often affected by conflict. Her work is striking and, in a way, artistic.

The features of Boulat's unique and powerful photographic style

Press photography, an implicit informational narrative bias

James Nachtwey, a photojournalist from the VII Photo Agency said: "Photographers are many things – historians, dramatists, artists – and Humanitarians."[13] A humanitarian is defined as someone "who is interested in the good of humanity, who seeks to improve the condition of mankind."[14] A journalist's work can be huma-

[9] *Afghanistan 2004 – Alexandra Boulat*, September 2004. Source: Pierre and Alexandra Boulat website. https://pierrealexandraboulat.com/work/modest/ [access: 14 IX 2025].

[10] *Taliban took control in Kabul – Zabi Karimi*, August 15, 2021. Source: Time of Israel website. https://www.timesofisrael.com/catastrophe-in-afghanistan-for-afghans-israel-the-region-and-for-america/3 [access: 14 IX 2025].

[11] *Loyalist Militiaman at the Moment of Death*, Cerro Muriano, September 5, 1936 – Robert Capa. Source: Magnum Photos website. https://www.magnumphotos.com/photographer/robert-capa/ [access: 14 IX 2025].

[12] *Shell-shocked US marine, the Battle of Huế* – Don McCullin, 1968. Source: BBC website. https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20190212-don-mccullin-the-photos-we-cant-look-away-from [access: 14 IX 2025].

[13] S. Allan, T. Allbeson, *Conflict images – History of war photography in the news*, Routledge, 2024, p.8.

[14] Definition from the LAROUSSE dictionary.

nitarian in nature, showing the daily lives of these people and their living conditions. However, the aim of journalism is not to help these people directly. It can be considered as an indirect aid.

Alexandra Boulat can therefore be seen as both a journalist and a humanitarian, because through her photographs she seeks to shed light on the disaster of unstable situations around the world, and this allows thus "to improve the condition of mankind", as the definition explains.

The aim of each photograph is to report facts and events. In Alexandra Boulat's photographs, we see the event indirectly. Each photograph she took illustrate the effects of political decisions on the population. But this is highlighted implicitly. It is the viewer who understands what the photographer is conveying. As André Gunthert explains, an implicit dimension is created in every press photograph, and this is made possible by the viewer. "The image makes it possible to say something while pretending not to have said it – a mechanism typical of implicit messages, the understanding of which depends in the recipient returning the missing part."[15] To understand this better, let's take the example of the photograph taken by Alexandra Boulat in 2004 in Afghanistan, showing women going to the polls. The photograph shows women dressed in the tradition sky-blue burqa pushing through a gate. Their strength enables them to go beyond the gate. Here, Alexandra Boulat shows that by uniting, women become even stronger: they fight for their right. Opening the gate means access to all possibilities, and therefore to a form of freedom. The legend explains that these women were going to vote. Alexandra Boulat does not show this directly, as the women in this photo are not holding a ballot paper. Yet, we understand that a change is taking place, because by going beyond this gate, they become freer. Here, we see the introduction of the right to vote for women implicitly. Women's right to vote was reinstated in Afghanistan in 2004. However, today their rights are again restricted, and they can't vote.

To go further, Roland Barthes analyses press photography in *Le message photographique*.[16] He explains that it is made up of a denoted message, meaning that the image conveys what is real and a connoted message, which corresponds to the way in which society reads this image. This second message is based on signs, each of which implies a code. These are cultural codes, stereotypes in a way that every human being can have about society. These codes are readable by the public because "press photography is an object that is worked on, chosen, composed, constructed and processed according to professional, aesthetic or ideological standards, which are all factors of connotation."[17] A photograph relies on connotative processes, which are elements that make up the connotated message and therefore the photograph itself. Barthes names six of these, but we are going to look at the "pose" that is apparent in Alexandra Boulat's photographs. The pose would be an element of the message, connoted but also denoted. These are stereotyped and cultural attitudes that constitute means of meaning. Let's take the example of Alexandra Boulat's photograph taken in Afghanistan in 2004.[18] In the center of the photograph,

[15] A. Gunthert, *Les icônes du photojournalisme, ou la narration visuelle inoubliable*, Sciences et cultures du visuel, Dijon, Presses du Réel, 2014, p.8.

[16] R. Barthes, Le message photographique, In Communications, 1, 1961, p.127-138.

[17] Ibidem.

[18] *Afghan refugees in Herat, Afghanistan – Alexandra Boulat*, spring 2001. Source: Pierre and Alexandra Boulat website. https://pierrealexandraboulat.com/work/afghan-refugees/ [access : 14 IX 2025].

a woman wearing a long veil is surrounded by her children, one of whom is tugging at her veil. The photograph, taken from below, emphasizes the power of this mother. Her pose is reminiscent of a pillar, conveying a message about her strength as a mother and a woman.

Alexandra Boulat's photographs implicitly convey information. They also highlight the impact of events in certain countries on the population. This goes beyond simply providing information. But is it still journalism? Press photography has been analysed by many scholars, like Barthes, because it has always raised a number of questions. One of the questions that comes up most often is its possible link with art.

Artistic features in press photographs?

"The media image would be a new history painting – but a spontaneous, paradoxical, miraculous painting, the effects of which we simply observe."[19] This is what communications researchers Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites explain in their book *No Caption needed*. Press photography has aspects of painting and is even perceived as « a new painting ». However, to say this would be contrary to the definition of press photography.

Let's go back to what Barthes says about the connotation process[20]. Of the six connotative processes, two others are interesting to analyse here: photogenic and aestheticism. The process of photogenic, as its primary definition indicates, is the fact that a photograph is embellished by the use of certain characteristics such as the play of light, angles, colors, and so on. For example, Alexandra Boulat plays a great deal with the angles from which her photographs are taken. The photograph of the Afghan women forcing their way through the gate to vote is proof that the message conveyed here is based on elements of photogenic. The sky-blue colors of the burqas embellish the photograph and reinforce the unity of these women. But what is also striking is the way the photograph is taken from above, showing the movement of the crowd in a wide shot. In his explanation of the photogenic process, Barthes adds that there is no art, only meaning in it. Each element taken relates to a fact, a piece of information. That's what we can see in this photograph.

The process of connoting aestheticism calls this into question. This process refers to the fact that the aim of a press photograph is to resemble a painting. Barthes explains that by imitating the codes of a painting (angles, colors, etc.), the photograph aims to resemble the painting and is therefore not art itself. This can be seen in Alexandra Boulat's photograph of a child's funeral.[21] This photograph could be worthy of a pictorial representation because of the elements that make it up. An artistic analysis of this photograph can be made through the appearance of several codes. The photographic angle places the child's body, held by his family, at the center. The white of the sheet stands out from the dull and dark colors of the photograph and may be a symbol of peace or paradise. This photograph has elements that might suggest a divine scene. Moreover, the fact that the child's body is surrounded by many people praying accentuates this aspect of divinity. Accor-

[19] A. Gunthert, *Les icônes* ..., op. cit, p.8.
[20] R. Barthes, *Le message*..., op. cit..
[21] *Afghan refugees in Herat*, *Afghanistan - Alexandra Boulat*, spring 2001. Source: Pierre and Alexandra Boulat website. https://pierrealexandraboulat.com/work/afghan-refugees/ [access: 14 IX 2025].

ding to Barthes, the aestheticism is explained by the desire to show the pictorial aspect in the photograph, whereas painting is itself pictorial. „This photograph is in no way a painting; [...] its aestheticism (maliciously) refers to the very idea of a painting (which is contrary to all true painting)."[22] This is what distinguishes press photography from painting.

It should be added that press photography is in no way a staging, a modification of reality, as painting can be. As Alexandra Boulat explains: "The mission of a journalist is very simple, and it must not go beyond its limits. She's a witness, and that's it. She herself does not change anything."[23]

Finally, Susan Sontag, an American essayist, highlights that a painting evokes something whereas the photograph shows it. Her affirmation questions what we are looking at. A painting that evokes the death of soldiers is different than a photograph that shows the death of soldiers. Sontag explains that there is "a satisfaction in being able of bearing the image without shuddering."[24] This desire of looking at, for example, death bodies is seen as disturbing. It even goes to question the ethics being it.

The question of ethics concerning war photography

The role of a war reporter, as explained above, is to document the war. They must gather, verify and disseminate information.

Every journalist has their own way of doing their work. However, there is kind of an ethic to respect.

Sontag questioned the limits set by government and society. She explains that the "good taste" is what people use to determine whether information can be disseminated. If it corresponds to society's expectations, it can be disseminated. She explains that nowadays, war reporters are taking pictures of dead bodies and horror every day. "The camera invites the viewer into proximity, excessive proximity. [...] The image dispenses unnecessary, indecent information."[25] The level of violence seen as acceptable in mass culture is increasing more and more. Therefore, this raises questions about the ethic behind war photographers. Should a journalist show violence and death without any limits or is there also a question of respect and distance to be considered? Alexandra Boulat shows the violence suffered by people in her photographs, but is this "acceptable" to the public? For example, the photograph of the burial of a young child took in Afghanistan shows explicitly the body, but not the face of the child,[26] is it then appropriate? The question of ethics and the morality in journalism has always been a subject of reflection.

Susan Sontag explains that there is also a separation between the "us" and the "others" that is forming. Western journalists go to countries that westerners may never have visited. Therefore, a sort of voyeurism is created. Westerners want to see how the "others" are living, and photographs are the only one to be able to do so. Then, what the journalist shows is the main source of information, so it's impor-

[22] R. Barthes, *Le message*..., op. cit.
[23] *Snipper Alley – Alexandra Boulat*, op. cit.
[24] S. Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others, Penguin, 2003.
[25] Ibidem.
[26] *Afghan refugees in Herat, Afghanistan – Alexandra Boulat*, spring 2001. Source: Pierre and Alexandra Boulat website. https://pierrealexandraboulat.com/work/afghan-refugees/ [access: 14 IX 2025].

tant to broadcast as ethically and neutrally as possible. Journalists in a way shape the public's view of the world.

The viewers have total confidence in the journalist. Therefore, journalists must diffuse true information. For example, Capa's photograph of a soldier being shot[27] is still the subject of debate today. There is a speculation that it was a training exercise, not an attack as the title suggests, and so the photograph could be false. Susan Sontag explains that the photograph *Le Baiser de l'hôtel de ville*[28] by Robert Doisneau is a complete makeover: "The revelation, some forty years later, that the image had been fabricated, the man and the woman having been hired by Doisneau for the occasion."[29]

The Munich Charter of 1971[30] is the only legal framework for European journalists. It said journalists must: "respect the truth, whatever the consequences, because of the public's right to know the truth." It also explains that they are: "obliged to respect the privacy of individuals." There are no legal rules governing what may or may not be shown in conflicts. However, there are ethical principles that are common sense but which, because they are not written in law, can be challenged. This "common sense" can be perceived differently from one person to another.

The journalist profession is always at the center of debate, particularly on the question of what should or should not be broadcast.

The absence of specific law on this also means that journalists are freer to express themselves, an essential quality of their profession. For example, Alexandra Boulat's took the liberty of having artistic features that make it unique and recognisable.

Boulat's legacy and her impact

Actions taken in her memory

Alexandra Boulat died on 5 October 2007 after suffering a ruptured aneurysm on the West Bank. However, her death does not mark the end of her unique work. Indeed, several actions have been taken to ensure that her photographs are not forgotten.

Firstly, to pay tribute to her and her father Pierre Boulat, who died on 11 January 1998, an association called the "Association Pierre et Alexandra Boulat" has been set up in 2008.[31] Its aim is to preserve and disseminate their photographs. Each photograph taken is listed on the website, with the aim of making the public aware of their work.

VII Photo Agency which Alexandra Boulat co-founded, is still going strong and pursuing the same objective: to "covering the crucial issues of our time"[32]. New

[27] *Loyalist Militiaman at the Moment of Death, Cerro Muriano, September 5, 1936*, Robert Capa. Source: Magnum Photos website. https://www.magnumphotos.com/photographer/robert-capa/ [access: 14 IX 2025].

[28] *Le Baiser de l'hôtel de ville*, Robert Doisneau, 1950. Source: Artnet website. https://www.artnet.com/artists/robert-doisneau/le-baiser-de-lh%C3%B4tel-de-ville-yGfa9zs_GC9IQLOs1PtJdA2robertc [access: 14 IX 2025].

[29] S. Sontag, *Regarding* ..., op. cit.

[30] Munich Charter, November 24, 1971.

[31] Pierre and Alexandra Boulat website, op. cit.

[32] The VII foundation website, op. cit.

members include Stephanie Sinclair and Joachim Ladefoged. Their slogan is centered around three verbs – *educate*, *report* and *campaign*. They educated young journalists to visual journalism in over 100 countries. They have also created long-term projects such as films and exhibitions. The Yves Saint Laurent exhibition, for instance, features photographs by Pierre Boulat and Alexandra Boulat recounting the life of the great couturier. The VII photo agency is pursuing Alexandra Boulat's objectives and values, which makes it possible to pay tribute to her.

Lastly, the Pierre and Alexandra Boulat prize, created the same year as the association, is awarded to a working photojournalist who wishes to "produce a personal work of a social, economic, political or cultural nature, with a journalistic approach, but who has not been commissioned by the media."[33] The winner receives 8.000 euros from the Scam, "Société civile des auteurs multimédias", which aims to protect the rights of authors of multimedia works.

In tribute to Alexandra Boulat, several actions are being taken to support journalistic work in general, which remains under threat around the world today. In fact, the Reporters Without Borders press freedom index for the world[34] illustrates that being a journalist is increasingly complicated, especially in countries experiencing crises, conflicts or war. For instance, France is ranked 21st, Poland 47th and Afghanistan, one of the countries Alexandra Boulat covered, 178th out of 180 countries.

By documenting the situation in troubled countries such as Afghanistan, Alexandra Boulat is taking a different look at the world.

The impact on a new generation of photojournalists

By defending humanitarian journalism, Alexandra Boulat is part of a new generation of photojournalists who document conflicts in a way that goes beyond the battlefield. "War photography [...] must not be limited to the battlefield as traditionally understood, but rather encompass the military camp and the munitions factory, the home front and anti-war street protest, campaigns of genocide as well as asymmetric warfare waged on city streets."[35] By highlighting women who are seen as both actors and victims of war, Alexandra Boulat has helped to launch a new era of journalism that focuses more on the victims of war than on the military aspect. The Femaid association, founded in 2001, defends "the right and dignity of women and children in war zones."[36] The goal is to help to education, health and safety of the collateral victims of war. By going on site, for instance in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2012, or in Ukraine since March 2022, projects are created, with the help of local charities, to help women and children.

Another association is « Too young to wed » founded in 2012 that aimed to denounce forced marriages especially on minors. On the website we can read "every three seconds, a girl is married against her will" and "Too Young to Wed envisions a world where girls are free to simply be children and determine the course of their own lives.". Launched by the photojournalist Stephanie Sinclair, the aim is that through photography, she denounces this violation of the rights of women and children. Her work on this subject started in Afghanistan where she documented young girls

[33] Pierre and Alexandra Boulat website, op. cit.
[34] Reporters sans Frontières website, op. cit.
[35] S. Allan, T. Allbeson, *Conflicting images*..., op. cit.
[36] Femaid website, op. cit.

that set themselves on fire, and most of them because they had been forced into marriage as children. It is what led her to go in depth in this subject and to denounce it by her association. By giving education and healthcare to these girls, they can speak up and also create local communities that defend their rights. Stephanie Sinclair is a member of the VII photo agency since 2008. Alexandra Boulat and she have the same goal: giving a voice to the life of the voiceless by their photographs and by being engaged in the human rights.

This generation of journalists has a more emotional and artistic approach that is evident in their work. An article from *Madame Le Figaro*[37] presents the portrait of six women war reporters. Through their testimonies, they show that their profession is as exciting as hard. Indeed, these women are subject to societal pressure of motherhood, which can sometimes prevent them from accessing stable work. Inequalities are there but Denis Ruellan explains in *Reportères de guerres*, that women can have advantages that men don't and vice versa. For instance, he explains that women "say also that they gain access to women's worlds that, in many countries, are forbidden to men; they can develop specific subjects and benefit from sources of information through the voices of women who do not speak publicly."[38] This can be seen in Alexandra Boulat's work who accesses environments in which men have no access, such as the day reserved for women at the Mosque, which also allowed her to take this photograph of a mother and her children.[39] Stephanie Sinclair was also able to have access to more restricted areas where she documented the forced weddings of young girls. Men reporters in these areas can't enter. This works also for women who can struggle to access to male environments. Testimonies are gathered easily when a woman talk to a woman because she can feel freer to talk, where in some countries, a separation between men and women is created.

The work of these journalists is in the same vein as Alexandra Boulat's humanistic and artistic ambitions.

Conclusion

To conclude, Alexandra Boulat was a photojournalist who made an impression with her unique artistic photographic style. She is part of a new generation of journalists who focus on indirect victims of conflicts and war in the world. She said: "You can show a war without showing a gun."Her journalistic style got a more humanitarian aspect compared to traditional photographs in mainstream medias. Her photographs took in Afghanistan illustrate that.

The possibility that presses photographs contain artistic features is to be taken into consideration. In addition, the ethics of the profession are still being debated today and probably always will be. However, it does show that journalists are free (only in some parts of the world) to exercise their profession fully.

The foundation of an agency that brings together photojournalists with the same values allows to give importance to this profession but also to victims who through these photographs are brought to light and listened.

[37] *« J'ai pris des risques, trop peut-être » : 6 envoyées spéciales qui font changer le regard sur la guerre*, Madame Le Figaro, Guylaine Idoux, July 23, 2024.
[38] D. Ruellan, *Reportères de guerre* , November 2016.
[39] *Afghanistan 2004*, Alexandra Boulat, September 2004. Source: Pierre and Alexandra Boulat website. https://pierrealexandraboulat.com/work/modest/ [access : 14 IX 2025].

Many films and books illustrate the work of these women photojournalists. For instance, the fiction film *Civil War* by Alex Garland shows the daily life of a war photojournalist with scenes focused on the power photography can have. Another film, *Lee Miller* by Ellen Kuras, recounts the life of one of the first women war photographers.

These recently released films show that the war photographer profession is exciting and can bring much to the world. As Alexandra Boulat's photographs convey, the power of a photograph can sometimes be stronger than words.

Nevertheless, the role of this profession is now being questioned by the rise of social media. The rise of amateur journalism questions the profession itself. "While the value of citizen eyewitness visuals is recognised when events are sudden or journalists' access is restricted, journalists think that citizen eyewitnessing is still of secondary importance to the presence of professional journalists". The role of social media in the dissemination of information and sometimes in the creation of fake news adds new challenges to the job, but also new perspectives. Although amateur journalism questions the necessity of being a journalist, it is not likely to disappear with the discovery of photographic talents like Alexandra Boulat.

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Abstract

This essay explores the life, work, and legacy of Alexandra Boulat, a photojournalist who reshaped the boundaries between journalism and art through her coverage of conflict zones. Situating Boulat's work within the history of photojournalism, the study highlights how her approach diverged from traditional war photography by focusing on the experiences of women, children, and other marginalized groups. Drawing on framing theory and debates around press photography, the analysis examines how Boulat's images combined journalistic testimony with artistic features to convey implicit narratives about political and social realities. Ethical questions surrounding war photography are also considered, particularly in relation to representation, voyeurism, and the limits of visualizing suffering. The essay further discusses Boulat's lasting influence through the VII Photo Agency, the Pierre and Alexandra Boulat Association, and the award established in her name, as well as her impact on a new generation of humanitarian photojournalists. It concludes that Boulat's vision demonstrates how photography can bear witness to conflict while also functioning as a form of artistic expression and advocacy for human rights.

Streszczenie

Esej podejmuje temat życia, twórczości i spuścizny Alexandry Boulat – fotoreporterki, która przełamała granice między dziennikarstwem a sztuką, dokumentując strefy konfliktów. Umiejscawiając jej dorobek w historii fotoreportażu, autorka podkreśla, że Boulat odchodziła od tradycyjnej fotografii wojennej, koncentrując się na doświadczeniach kobiet, dzieci i innych grup marginalizowanych. W oparciu o teorię ramowania oraz debaty dotyczące fotografii prasowej, analiza ukazuje, w jaki sposób zdjęcia Boulat łączyły świadectwo dziennikarskie z elementami artystycznymi, przekazując ukryte narracje o rzeczywistości politycznej i społecznej. Rozważane są również kwestie etyczne związane z fotografią wojenną, w tym problem reprezentacji, voyeurismu i granic wizualizacji cierpienia. Esej omawia także trwały wpływ Boulat poprzez działalność agencji VII Photo, Stowarzyszenia Pierre'a i Alexandry Boulat oraz nagrodę jej imienia, a także jej oddziaływanie na nowe pokolenie fotoreporterów humanistycznych. Konkluzja wskazuje, że wizja Boulat dowodzi, iż fotografia może być zarówno świadectwem konfliktu, jak i formą ekspresji artystycznej oraz rzecznictwa na rzecz praw człowieka.