

The Relationship Between Photography and Propaganda: The Case of Lisa Kristine

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Article Info

Abstract

Keywords:

Photography
Propaganda
Mass Media
Propaganda Photography
Lisa Kristine

Propaganda is a form of communication that aims to persuade a specific idea or thought in a purposeful and comprehensive manner to a determined audience through communication tools. Propaganda must be persuasive, applicable and realistic within its jurisdiction. The most important characteristics of propaganda are that it reconstructs reality in the way it wants and that it is a conscious attempt. While photography was only a copying tool at the time of its discovery, it has become indispensable for mass media over time due to its authenticity and objectivity. The use of photography is frequently encountered in daily life. The images contained in photographs can express certain meanings without the need for any textual explanation. These visual images have the power to convey the complexity and emotional depth of the photograph to the viewer. In this study, in which qualitative research methods were used, the concept of propaganda, the purpose of propaganda, and the relationship between photography and propaganda were examined in general terms. The visual examples of the research were selected from Lisa Kristine's Modern Slaves series, which has the mission of presenting a message to the society with visual images, which is the main purpose of propaganda photography, and examined in detail. As a result, the processes of influencing the thoughts and behaviors of the society through propaganda photographs and the role of photographs in the process were examined and discussed in detail. The study also emphasized how propaganda photographs shape the masses.

Introduction

The main purpose of propaganda is to persuade, win and transform. Propaganda has a history as old as human history and has been practiced in every period of history. Throughout history, human beings have tried various methods to persuade the masses. Depending on the need, these methods were sometimes done verbally and sometimes with written and visual tools. In these processes, different mass media such as newspapers, magazines, posters, television, radio, internet and cinema have been used. Propaganda's most important features are that it reconstructs reality in the way it wants and that it is a conscious attempt. Propaganda has been used by many groups, associations and artists, especially in political activities, in times of war, in advertising and marketing activities, in spreading beliefs, and in announcing social and cultural events.

Photography, which was only used as a copying tool when it was discovered, has started to be used to announce events that are not on the agenda and to direct the masses for a purpose over time due to its reality and objectivity. The fact that it can be understood and interpreted by society has led to the

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widespread use of photography in communication tools. The use of photography is frequently encountered in daily life, advertisements, social media, press and various propaganda tools. In these photographs, the photographer's interpretation and the way he/she abstracts the events direct and shape the masses. All visual elements used in the communication process are actually like the words of the photographer. Therefore, the photographer can influence how the masses react to events. The images contained in photographs can express certain meanings on their own, without the need for any textual explanation. These visual images have the power to convey the complexity and emotional depth of the photograph to the viewer.

Lisa Kristine, whose mission is to present a message or idea to the public through visual images, which is the main purpose of propaganda photography, presents social events to the world. Kristine is an internationally recognized journalist and artist who combines aesthetic concerns with documentary journalism, photographing different cultures and social issues in many countries. Kristine succeeds in influencing the thoughts and behaviors of the society through her propaganda photographs. With this approach, it can be said that she aims to change the current negative situation through her propaganda photographs by creating emotional or mental effects on the viewer. Critical thinking is at the forefront for the viewers who evaluate the photographs by being exposed to them, because it is important for the viewer to be able to question the photographs, to comment on the images specifically given by the photographer and to receive the photographic message behind them.

Methods

In this study, a literature review, one of the qualitative research methods, was conducted and the infrastructure of the research was prepared by creating a conceptual basis for propaganda, photography theories and theories. Visual support was provided to the theory by including examples of propaganda photographs that have taken place in the history of photography and continue to be effective today. On the other hand, the examples of propaganda photographs of Lisa Kristine, which constitute the main subject of the research, were compiled from her personal website and interviews she has made and analyzed, interpreted and inferences were made on the basis of modern slavery.

Findings

The Concept of Propaganda General Approaches

In basic terms, propaganda is a form of communication of a particular idea or thought, which is carried out in a purposeful and comprehensive persuasion-oriented manner to a determined audience through the means of communication. Today, the concept of propaganda is considered by most people as a negative perception process. However, it can be said that the most important reason for this is that the propaganda applied is an attempt to persuade individuals or societies by creating lies and manipulating the truth. Another reason for this misconception is that propaganda has been used by the authoritarian politicians of the period in the historical process (Çakı 2018: 13).

On the other hand, it can be said that the concept of propaganda is an approach that is as old as the history of humanity and has been practiced in every period of history for years. Since the early periods of history, human beings have tried various methods to persuade the masses. These persuasion efforts have sometimes been carried out verbally and sometimes through written and visual means, depending on the need. In this process, propaganda has been carried out through many different mass media such as newspapers, magazines, posters, television, radio, internet, cinema, etc. (Tekinalp and Uzun, 2013:87). These methods have evolved by constantly changing and developing in the historical process. From this point of view, the development in mass media has influenced the propaganda approach according to the period. Along with the developing technology, the definition of propaganda has also changed and started to include different meanings.

Although the scope of use has expanded throughout the 20th century, the concept of propaganda has carried different meanings at different times (Welch, 2019: 15). Propaganda is a Latin word derived from the verb "propagare" and has taken its place in our language. It can be defined as spreading an idea, a thought to a community (Öymen, 2014: 111). In addition to this, it also ensures that the thoughts of the masses are shaped in the desired direction (Yaylagül, 2017: 165). It means spreading, promoting or encouraging a certain idea (Jowett and O' Donnell, 2012: 2). As a result of these definitions, propaganda can be defined as a combination of communication tools and techniques used by a group or organization to influence people's behavior in order to provide support for a particular idea, opinion, ideology or purpose.

The Intended Use of the Concept of Propaganda

The purpose of propaganda is to persuade, win and transform. Therefore, it has to be persuasive, applicable and realistic within its jurisdiction. The most important characteristic of propaganda is that it constructs reality in the way it wants. Another distinguishing feature is that it is a conscious attempt. Although propaganda is used for different purposes, as a result, it includes a language that aims to influence the masses, and it is a frequently preferred approach for political activities (Yaykın, 2009: 61). Apart from being used by political parties and governments to influence voters, it is also used for many other purposes. For example, during wars, it is used by parties to defend their causes and create a negative image against their enemies, by advertising companies to promote their services and increase sales, and by religious groups to spread their beliefs. Propaganda is also frequently used by activist groups, associations or artists to draw attention to or oppose social and cultural events.

The Relationship Between Photography and Propaganda

Human beings are the only creatures that consciously communicate and shape their lives accordingly. It has the ability to organize and accumulate the messages it receives and to develop new inventions by producing new information as a result of these accumulations. Photography is one of the inventions realized as a result of this ability. The importance of photography, which was not fully understood at the time of its discovery and was used only as a copying tool, has started to be used to keep the events that are not on the agenda in the spotlight, to arouse interest in a subject or event and to direct the society towards a goal due to its reality and objectivity over time (Ötken, 2011: 13-14). With these aspects, photography has become a provocative and important tool that conveys the reality that is in the memory of the society.

In addition, the fact that it can be understood and interpreted by a large part of the society has caused the use of photography in mass media to increase day by day. Photography, which has been a versatile means of expression from past to present, has become an international language with the visual images it contains. In some contexts, the lying and deceptive aspect of this language is emphasized more. Such narratives are frequently encountered in photographs used in advertisements, social media, press and various propaganda tools in daily life. Despite such abuses, it should be known that the responsibility lies with the photographer, not the photograph (Ünal, 2012: 25).

In this context, what Ünal wants to emphasize is the decision made by the person behind the camera to convey events in an unbiased manner. The photographer's interpretation and the way he or she abstracts events guide and shape the masses. According to Ünal, what the target audience wants to perceive from a photograph is directly related to the guidance of the photographer. Because the photographer reveals his own interpretation with the choices he makes during the shooting (Ünal, 2012: 33). According to Er, if photography is the articulation of an intellectual expression, making visible what exists or does not exist, and conveying it to the society or a certain group, this style of expression becomes the photographer's communication tool in a sense. All visual elements used in this communication process actually express the words of the photographer (Er, 2022: 67). When considered in this context, photographers decide how society or the target audience will react to social events.

A historical example of this discourse is Nick Ut's photograph titled "Nepal Girl", which is known as the photograph that ended the Vietnam War. This photograph, one of the photographs taken by Nick Ut during the Vietnam War, is of a group of children fleeing from napalm bombs. Ut photographed a group of children running away from a village that was accidentally bombed with napalm. The fact that a nine-year-old girl among the children has no clothes on and is screaming in pain, crying and running away from the village where she lives, did not escape the photographer's attention to represent the war. With the effect of the napalm bomb, a large part of the child's body was burned (Özkemahlı, 2023: 74-75). The fear and pain seen on the faces of the fleeing children make this photograph remarkable. The publication of this photograph in news sources mobilizes anti-war demonstrations and turns the photograph into a symbol. Thus, it contributed to the American public's desire to end the war (Smith, 2018: 117).



Image 1. Nick Ut, Vietnam War "Napalm Girl"

The photographer not only shows the painful moments of people, but also raises a moral issue. The screams, wails and bomb sounds contained in the image are lost in the visual void of the photograph (Clarke, 2017: 190). Roland Barthes describes this situation as follows: "The photograph must be silent. The absolute can only be achieved in silence and by striving to preserve silence" (Barthes, 2016: 69). In this discourse, Barthes emphasized that the images contained in photographs can make sense on their own in that silence, without the need for any textual explanation. All these visual images have the ability to convey the chaos within the photograph to the viewer.

The image we see in a photograph is related to different aspects represented by the object of the photograph. A current example of this situation is the photograph of Aylan Kurdi, a Syrian boy taken by photojournalist Ali Ballı, which caused a great resonance in the international community. The photograph of 3-year-old Aylan Kurdi, whose tiny body washed up on the beach in Muğla's Bodrum district, has become a symbol of the tragedy experienced by migrants. Undoubtedly, there is a significant difference between what this photograph shows and what people see in this photograph. If this were not a photograph but a hyperrealist painting, what this image represents and what is seen in the photograph would have to be addressed on a different level. Of course, such a painting would not have the shocking effect of a photograph. At this point, the real problem arises when this hyperrealist painting is mistaken for a photograph (Değirmenci, (2016): 84-85). This context emphasizes the difference between what the photograph shows and what people perceive, and the representational power of the visual images in photographs. The power of representation created by photography enables it to be used in many different disciplines.



Image 2. *Ali Ballı "Aylan Kurdi" News Photo.*

The photographer not only shows the dead body of baby Aylan, but also raises a social problem. Aylan Kurdi's photo has become a symbol of the refugee crisis, prompting Western politicians to take action. The photo, which was shared in news sources and the media with the hashtag "Humanity has hit the shore", proved again how powerful a tool photography is ([http-1](#)). As a result of these contexts and examples, it is understood that photography, which can quickly arouse and mobilize people's emotional reactions, creates a propaganda effect and is frequently used as a propaganda tool consciously or unconsciously.

Examples of Propaganda Photographs of Lisa Cristine: Modern Slaves

Lisa Kristine, who makes it her duty to present a certain message or idea to the society through visual images, which is seen as the main purpose of propaganda photography, presents social events to the whole world from an aesthetic point of view. In this respect, Lisa Kristine is an internationally recognized journalist and artist who combines documentary journalism with the aesthetic concerns of fine arts, has photographed local cultures and social causes in more than 150 countries on six continents for more than thirty years, and has permanent works in many museums ([http-2](#)).

Through her propaganda photographs, Kristine reaches the potential to influence the thoughts and behaviors of the society. In her photographs, in addition to her instinct to present the events in their entirety as a journalist, she uses photographic and aesthetic values to present her photographs to society from an artistic point of view. With this approach, it can be said that he aims to change the current negative situation through his propaganda photographs by creating emotional or mental effects on the viewer. In this context, critical thinking comes to the fore for the viewer who is exposed to and evaluates the photographs. Because it is important for the viewer to be able to question the photographs, to comment on the images especially given by the photographer and to receive the photographic message behind them.

In this research, Kristine's photographs of propaganda-based projects that have had an impact on communities were selected and evaluated in terms of both the message they convey and the aesthetic concerns they have. The first of these projects is an example of modern slavery practiced in Nepal in South Asia. The photographs are of people working like robots in a brick factory in Nepal in a dense dust cloud without questioning. Stacking bricks on their heads and carrying them from inside the factory to the vehicles waiting outside can be shown as an example of this modern slavery (Image-3). This situation was used by the photographer as a motivating force in the production of the photo project. Photographer Lisa Kristine is prohibited from directly assisting modern-day slaves in the region. Due to her circumstances, it was not possible for Kristine to provide direct financial support ([http-3](#)). However, with these propaganda photographs she produced, she announced the problem of slavery in the region to the whole world. When the photograph is evaluated from an aesthetic point of view, the bricks dividing the frame in the middle create two graphical areas in the photograph, light and dark.

The people working in the dark area contrasted with their light-colored clothes at the bottom of the photograph. In the upper part of the photograph, silhouettes of people working in a cloud of white dust create a clear contrast. According to Freeman, the concept of balance in photography is the equalization of opposing forces to create a sense of equivalence and harmony. The basic principle of visual perception is the effort of one eye to balance the other. This balance is a state that offers harmony, clarity and an aesthetically pleasing appearance (Freeman, 2018: 40). Considered in this context, Kristine has obtained a photograph that attracts attention aesthetically and is likely to have an impact on society.



Image 3. *Lisa Kristine, Stratum-Nepal.*

The second example by Lisa Kristin is of a family living in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh and engaged in the silk trade. This photograph (Image -4), another example of modern slavery, belongs to a family living in the region and having to make a living from silk farming. The hands in the photograph, painted in black, are those of the father, while the hands painted in red and blue are those of the sons of the family. When the photograph is evaluated aesthetically, the visual feast created by the combination of different colors is remarkable. The color distribution within the frame of the photograph is too important to be ignored. Colors and the relationship between colors have a direct relationship with the message desired to be conveyed in the photograph (Kanburoğlu, 2007: 174). When considered in this context, while the photographer's approach to the subject is effective, in the background the photograph is a symbol of another pain. Family members who are engaged in dyeing the silks produced are constantly exposed to dyes containing carcinogenic substances. While this photograph of these people, who have no other alternative, is extremely effective in terms of photographic composition, it is also a representation of modern slavery (<http-4>).



Image 4. *Lisa Kristine, Blue, Red, Black - India.*

Another example was photographed at Lake Volta, the largest artificial lake in the world, located in the Brong-Ahafo region of Ghana. Even today, when modern slavery continues, it affects children the most. In the example representing this situation (Image-5), a group of children were photographed fishing. However, the situation contains a drama beyond the visible. All the children in the photograph are slaves, ripped away from their families and bought, and must fulfill the demands of their owners under all circumstances. Forced to fish in all weather conditions, these children are only provided with their basic needs. Since most of the children who are thrown into the lake to untie fishing nets that often get caught in the roots of trees in the lake do not know how to swim, the process often ends in death. These children are intimidated and frightened by their owners and do not even try to escape (http-5).

When the photograph is evaluated aesthetically, the dominant sky squeezing the slave children at the bottom and the child on the right side of the frame running away from the environment are almost visual symbols of the event. Akbaş emphasizes that every photograph has a critical moment and that capturing this moment depends on the right timing during the shooting (Akbaş, 2007: 121). When considered from this point of view, the lighting conditions, the position of the horizon line and the child running away from the environment are photographed at the right time, almost expressing the event. This project, which consists of propaganda photographs, is of great importance in terms of announcing the existence of child slaves to the world and mobilizing the society.



Image 5. *Lisa Kristine, Fish – Ghana.*

In this project, Lisa Kristine photographed slaves forced to work in gold mines in Ghana, slaves who have been subjected to violence and bear the traces of violence on their bodies (Image-6). Some of the slaves are forced to work in water poisoned by the mercury used to extract gold, and some of them are forced to work in chains. Slaves are exposed to injury, disease and violence. Due to the current conditions, many slaves suffer from mercury poisoning in a short time and face fatal consequences (http-6). With these propaganda photographs, this situation that exists in the 21st century world has been documented and engraved in the public memory. When the photograph is evaluated aesthetically, it is seen that the portrait in the foreground is placed according to the basic composition rules and the direction of gaze is left blank. The fact that the photograph is in black and white helps to convey the situation in a dramatic way. The helplessness of the slave in the foreground, looking at the photographer with a hopeless expression, and the traces of violence on his face and head are presented to the viewer as the crucial element of the photograph. According to Turan, although a photograph is presented in a frame, the characteristics of the frame from which it is cut and taken play an important role in determining the meaning of the photograph. Therefore, a photograph is not limited to the objects visible on its surface. The elements outside the frame of the photograph are of great importance in the process of creating meaning. The camera, on the one hand, sets boundaries to images, and on the other hand, it provides hidden information about what is outside its boundaries (Turan, 2007: 33). When considered

in this context, the traces of violence and despair contained within the limited frame of the photograph are a representation of the violence, hopelessness and despair in the background that is not visible in the frame.



Image 6. *Lisa Kristine, Wounds – Ghana.*

Lisa Kristine is involved in the construction process of the stance against modern slavery by informing the masses through the photographic representations she takes with the belief that the dramas experienced should be known by others. This can be explained by the double construction process proposed by Peter Hamilton. According to this approach, Lisa Kristine's creation of images representing slavery can be considered as the first stage of this construction process. The second construction process is realized by making unseen events visible and sharing or distributing the visual representations created with the whole world (Hamilton, 2017: 113).

Discussion/Conclusion

This article examines the evolution of the concept of propaganda from the past to the present and how propaganda and photography are integrated with each other. Propaganda is defined as a communication tool used to convey, influence and direct a certain idea or thought to the masses. In the research, the development of propaganda and the purpose of its use in the persuasion of the masses were discussed, and important information was given on how photography was used as a propaganda tool. It was emphasized that photography is a visual tool that has the power to influence society and it was explained how the photographer directs the masses with his/her choices. It was stated that photographs can express meaning without the need for textual explanations and can create emotional or mental effects on the viewer. Within the scope of the research, how photographers are effective in the field of propaganda and how they can influence the thoughts and behaviors of the society are examined with examples. Lisa Kristine's project photographs titled "modern slaves", which are seen as the main purpose of propaganda photography, which aims to present a certain message or idea to the society through visual images, were analyzed. It is understood that Kristine creates emotional effects on the masses by photographing social events from an aesthetic point of view and aims to change the current situation. As a result of all these inferences, this study, which was conducted in line with qualitative research, concluded that photography has a very important task in terms of raising awareness, guiding and mobilizing the society, apart from confining the reality of life in a frame. In conclusion, this article presents a comprehensive examination of the relationship between propaganda and photography.

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