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World Press Photo Tour

27 April 2011, by Marie-Charlotte Pezé

It is like a roadside accident; we cannot help but look, our fascination with horror stronger than our protective desire to avert our eyes. The light and composition call to the hole in Aisha's face, like a window ajar onto one of our worst nightmares, without make up or special effects.

But quickly our glance rises a few inches and is caught by her eyes, her defiant and powerful eyes. And more than a formal portrait of mutilation or a hollering plea for women's plight in Afghanistan, it is the contrast between the horrendous vision and the look that transcends it which probably won Jodi Bieber the 2010 World Press Photo Tour award. Aisha's dark, direct stare says words about what she has overcome.

The girl, whose face talks of a past loveliness, was married off right after puberty to a much older Taliban fighter. Not entirely surprisingly, she found herself in an abusive household, and, in a show of strength that today's wilful look proves was not taken from her, she courageously fled.

An eye for an eye - or a nose for a nose, in Taliban law, as a man scorned is said to have "lost his nose" - her own husband cut off her ears and her nose as retribution before abandoning her.

Published on the cover of Time in August 2010, the arresting image illustrated a controversial article on "What Happens if We Leave Afghanistan." Some call it teary-eyed pro-war propaganda; some applaud the effort to raise again the issue of women's rights in the Middle East.

Wouldn't it be lovely, though, if that was the one real purpose of the war - liberating? Would it really be so bad, using a disfigured girl as the very real emblem of what remains to be accomplished?

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Photo by Jobi Bieber, Institute for Artist Management / Goodman Gallery for Time magazine. Thumb photo by Uwe Weber for Bild.

A collection of the most important images of the past year, each a powerful depiction of the events that have contributed to shape our world (terribly sometimes, but beautifully too), the [World Press Photo Exhibition](#) opened in Amsterdam on April 22, on exhibit at the Oude Kerk before continuing its world tour.

It is a rare chance to get out of our comfort zones and admire the work of these courageous photographers who travel the globe to capture what is often unthinkable, with a series of images more striking than text or television - because, frozen in time, the moment does not talk, does not move, yet says so much. Like, "I survived."

About the Author



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Photographer and journalist, I started out as a director of photography in New York, working on inde...

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