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The Smiling, The Sick, The Suffereing: Snapshots of Syrian Displacement

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The Smiling, The Sick, and The Suffering: Snapshots of Syrian Displacement

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for honors in the
Department of Political Science

**Union College
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Abstract

Karlee Bergendorff, Department of Political Science, 2015.

Photographic images of Syrian refugees--smiling, sick, or suffering-- on the news and in the ads of human rights organizations have been employed to mobilize governments, armies, or businesses. These images are effective in mobilizing various forms of support or intervention because they have a strong emotional impact on the mass public. The emotionally driven connection between spectator and refugee, however, raises some troubling questions about whose interests the images serve, and how they are used for various efforts. Is it possible to depict the suffering of Syrian refugees without violating their dignity, agency, and autonomy? I argue that well intentioned efforts to mobilize societies and governments through the use of photographs can become counter productive to the interests of refugees. Many refugees are silenced by these efforts, and left out of the dialogue regarding their rights and visual portrayal. Nevertheless, the use of photographs depicting refugees can be a powerful political tool, which should not be entirely disregarded as a form of mobilization. Photographic depictions are vital to the education of societies and governments, as well as a vital form of historical documentation, and it is possible to achieve a higher degree of autonomy and agency for Syrian refugees.

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Introduction

Depictions of human rights abuses in news and on behalf of human rights organizations are usually employed to mobilize governments, armies, businesses, or militias.¹ Images of refugees are effective in gaining the attention of these structures by having an emotional impact on the mass public.² You can analyze an image of a refugee from many viewpoints, such as aesthetic quality, accuracy, narrative, and moral agency. The emotionally driven connection between spectator and refugee reveals a great deal about ethically and morally problematic constructs, which are perpetuated by the manipulative use of imagery.

Many refugees are silenced by well intentioned efforts, and left out of the dialogue regarding their rights and survival. I find that the use of photographs depicting refugees can be a powerful political tool, which should not be entirely disregarded as a form of mobilization. Photographic depictions are vital to the education of societies and governments, as well as a vital form of historical documentation. This thesis seeks to determine if it is possible to represent the pain and suffering of Syrian refugees without violating their agency, and further victimizing them? I argue that it is possible to achieve a higher degree of autonomy and agency for Syrian refugees, using the institutions and structures that are currently ineffectively advocating on their behalf.

Efforts to mobilize societies and governments through the use of photographs can become counter productive to the interests of refugees and their rights. Photography has the

1 Thomas Keenan, "Mobilizing shame," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 103, (2) (2004): 435.

2 Thomas Keenan, "Mobilizing shame," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 103, (2) (2004): 436.

ability to move masses of people in a way that words and numbers can not. By acknowledging this power, organizations and individuals will be able to participate in a more respectful practice of photography, which involves greater respect for the autonomy of refugees. A conscious effort must be made by the consumers and producers of photographs to responsibly use these images. A responsible consumer or spectator should contemplate the conditions of a photograph before responding or taking action. This allows spectators to avoid snap judgements and assumptions. It is also the responsibility of the publisher or producer of the photograph to avoid generalizations and ambiguity. If you are using an image to aid your message it should be explained as a way to make an image more accessible. Coherent, inclusive, comprehensive, and tolerant photographs can help raise public awareness without causing fear or disinterest. The continuous stream of photographs, makes it more important than ever to understand the political and social implications of the photograph.

In order to delve into the implications of this subject we must overview the backdrop of the Syrian crisis, the identity of the refugee, and the literature surrounding photography. I will first outline a brief history of Syria to date, and explain the current situation, which has led to the massive refugee crisis impacting an entire region. Then, I will detail what the formal definition of a refugee is, which will become relevant in my analysis of why certain refugees are visualized more frequently than others. Lastly, I will move into a literature review, which will set the preface for the following chapters. The literature review will discuss the photograph as an object, an art, and political tool.

In the following chapters my argument will use photographs of Syrian refugees as a case study to discuss problematic imagery and visual narratives surrounding refugees. My argument develops as follows, photographic depictions have become inevitable, which means that the next

step should be the promotion of ethical practices in terms of photographing refugees and the dissemination of such images. A degree of acceptance towards this practice is required to move forward in analyzing the ways images are used to manipulate reality, and ways we can improve upon the use of refugee imagery. First I will discuss the photographic depictions of refugees in mainstream news. I take the stance that, the sensationalism involved in photographic reporting risks the legitimacy of photojournalism, as well as the struggles faced by refugees. I find that the market mentality of news networks relies upon dramatic narratives, and consequently exploits refugees' suffering.

Then, I turn to an analytical discussion of humanitarian photographs, which have greatly shaped the perception of Syrian refugees around the globe. I take issue with the emotional manipulation that occurs at the expense of the individuals displaced by the Syrian conflict. Photographs objectify those captured to make them possessable to viewers. NGOs' use of images aim at a specific political, social and ethical goals. The color, mood, and gesture of a photograph can manipulate the viewer's response. Photographs can be critiqued based upon a degree of immorality or injustice.

Next, I delve into the ways social media works in conjunction with the news, media, and humanitarian organizations. While I take issue with many formal internet campaigns, I also discuss the ways in which internet activism can raise awareness as well as much needed donations. Through the discussion of different forums and campaigns, I present an argument which concludes with the importance of social media as an educational resource.

Finally, I attempt to determine what exactly makes an image ethical, and politically legitimate. All widely disseminated images are at risk for dismissal and delegitimization, especially those of suffering. By looking at images that both fail and succeed in returning agency

and autonomy to Syrian refugees, I will assess photographic traits which step away from exploitation and disenfranchisement. I conclude that it is impossible to overcome narratives of drama and epic warfare, and present a photograph as an unbiased document. To take an image with the objective of recording and documenting is an honest approach to photography. However, it is impossible to shed the relationship between spectacle and spectator, and other secondary actors. A photograph is always a representation of a refugee, it is impossible to ignore the artisanal nature of the photography. Similarly, it is impossible to ignore the documentative nature of the photograph.

Some qualities I consider in my discussion of photographs are perspective, purpose, intended audience, and context. I seek to understand how these impact the responses of spectators, emotional and otherwise. I also explore the tense of photographs: before, during, and after displacement. This helps to establish the chronology of displacement, and what types of visuals are missing from the visuals of Western coverage. Ultimately, I find that photographs can simultaneously be successful in certain respects, and fail in others. This thesis details the creation of the picture perfect refugee, and how to move away from this imagery.

A Brief History to Date: Assad, Displacement, and The Islamic State

To analyze photographs of Syrian refugees one should be familiar with the context of the Syrian civil war, and the accompanying humanitarian crisis. By understanding the history behind photographs, it will make deciphering their intended messages easier. Some photographs provide little factual detail, and depend greatly on the viewers competence to infer and deduce certain information. I will outline a brief history of Syria, which will bring us up to date on the current crisis in Syria and surrounding border regions.

Modern Syria gained its independence from France in 1946, but has had periods of political instability since.³ From 1958 until 1961 Syria united with Nasser's Egypt, but a military coup restored independence. Syria did not like being the junior partner in the United Arab Republic. The Ba'athist rule began with the 1963 coup, and was maintained under the al-Assad dynasty. The al-Assad dynasty began with the current president, Bashar al-Assad's father, Hafez al-Assad. Hafez was popular at first because he was able to improve infrastructure, access to education, and improve the lives of rural citizens.⁴ The Ba'athist party initially was a socialist, extremely nationalist, sectarian, and pan-arabist party. The Ba'athist party defined arab in an inclusive manner that includes arabs of all religions.⁵ The Assad regime has been domestically authoritarian, and has held an anti-Western stance on foreign policy.⁶ Religion and ethnicity have

³ Jeremy Bowen, "The Bitter Struggle for Syria," BBC News, Last edited November 11, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30011154>.

⁴ Robin Wright, *Dreams and Shadows The Future of the Middle East* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), 220.

⁵ Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991), 405.

⁶ "Syria Profile." BBC News, Last edited October 7, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14703856>.

not dictated party lines within Syria, some Sunni Muslims are part of Assads party and hold appointed government positions. However the Ba'athist party has been dominated by individuals outside the majority Sunni population, it was primarily composed of the new educated class of Christians, Druze, and Alawites.⁷ This notion of arab spread to the surrounding nations and the arabian peninsula. In the time since the first Assad's coming to power the notion of pan-arabism has been removed from the national government's agenda. Hafez was part of the Alawite minority in Syria, a sect of Shia Islam that accounts for about only ten percent of the Syrian population.

Syria's highly diverse population in terms of politics, religion, and ethnicity was suppressed under the Authoritarian rule of Hafez. Hafez al-Assad came to office in 1971. As early as 1976 violence broke out between the Ba'athist party and opposition parties associated with the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. In 1982 part of Hama was seized by the anti-regime party. In response to this seizure Assad ordered the Syrian army to brutally attack the city, including civilians. Tens of thousands are estimated to have been killed in the suppression of the uprising in Hama. The city was destroyed, Assad's actions demonstrated his ruthlessness, and instilled fear in all Syrian citizens for years to come. Following Hafez's death, Hundreds of political prisoners were released.⁸

The primary foreign policy concerns of the Assad regime have been Arab unity and suppressing Israel's influence in the region and retrieving the Golan Heights from Israel.⁹ In

⁷ Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991), 404.

⁸ Bowen, "The Bitter Struggle for Syria," BBC News, Last edited November 11, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30011154>.

⁹ Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991), 392.

1967 Syria lost the Golan Heights to Israel following the Arab defeat in the Six Day War.¹⁰ In the past, the Assad regime has supported several anti-Israel armed groups, specifically Hezbollah and Gaza-based Palestinian group Hamas.¹¹

The 1990s held two events which altered Hafez's intentions for the future of his nation. First, the fall of the Soviet Union left Syria without the backing of a superpower, without a supply of arms, or subsidies. In the 1990s Hafez had to enter peaceful relations without the Soviet Union's backing but he ultimately failed to reach an agreement over the Golan Heights. His unwillingness to compromise placed Syria in a state of isolation both on an international scale and in the Arab world.¹² Domestically, Hafez's plans were also set askew with the death of his intended heir, his eldest son, Basil.¹³ Hafez's prepared Basil for the position but his death left him with no choice but to bring his middle son, Bashar, home from London to become his successor.

Bashar lifted exit permits, allowed more trade, and the internet, which made him more popular, initially. From 2000 to 2001 Syria experienced a brief period of vibrancy and development.¹⁴ Bashar also promised a more liberal government but he became more repressive as citizens began to demand democratic elections, in light of the Arab Spring. Governments were

10 "Syria Profile." BBC News, Last edited October 7, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14703856>.

11 "Syria Profile." BBC News, Last edited October 7, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14703856>.

12 Robin Wright, *Dreams and Shadows: The Future of the Middle East* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), 222.

13 Robin Wright, *Dreams and Shadows: The Future of the Middle East* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), 225.

14 Robin Wright, *Dreams and Shadows: The Future of the Middle East* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), 226.

replaced in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and Libya. The people of Syria had been under the rule of the al-Assad family since 1970, and saw this as their time for political change. In 2001 a prominent political figure, Seif, announced that he intended to create a new opposition party called the Movement for Social Peace. Seif publicly questioned the social, economic, political, and media monopoly in Syria.¹⁵ A large percentage of the population grew dissatisfied when Bashar fell through on his promises of reform. They found the al-Assad regime as corrupt and oppressive, and the opposition party as appealing. The Syrian government found the support for the idea of an opposition party unsettling and threatening.¹⁶ Bashar was not prepared to step down or allow open elections. The opposition party was shut down, Bashar's attitudes shifted, and Seif was arrested.¹⁷ He was in prison until 2006 but shortly after the secret police showed up at his home.¹⁸ The Assad regime's authoritarian nature only continued to fuel the political unrest within Syria.

Bashar's stringent rule has culminated in a civil war, which is responsible for mass human displacement, among other human rights violations. Deaths, arbitrary detentions, and acts of terror were continuous under Bashar's government.¹⁹ Bashar then ordered military action against protesters. In 2011 and 2012 Syria's security forces used tanks, gunfire and mass arrests to try to end the anti-government street protests. Then in 2013 there was the chemical weapons attack in Syria that the Assad regime was found to be implicated in, which reportedly killed more

15 Robin Wright, *Dreams and Shadows: The Future of the Middle East* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), 229.

16 Robin Wright, *Dreams and Shadows: The Future of the Middle East* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), 226.

17 Robin Wright, *Dreams and Shadows: The Future of the Middle East* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), 222.

18 Robin Wright, *Dreams and Shadows: The Future of the Middle East* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), 229.

19 "Bashar Al Assad: Criminal Against Humanity," Fidh, last edited July 28, 2011, <https://www.fidh.org/en/north-africa-middle-east/syria/Bashar-Al-Assad-Criminal-Against>.

than 1,400 people. This was branded as the world's worst violation against human rights in the year of 2013.²⁰ This escalated into the current civil war, and has lead to a weakening of the central authority. As part of a minority party and ethnic group, Assad was fearful that his loss of power would lead to the oppression and ousting of his cabinet. Although Assad has lost control of portions of the country, his government has remained in place. He has received military, diplomatic and financial support from Iran, Russia, and Hezbollah.²¹ Bashar refuses to give up rule, and both internal and external actors continue to support him. However the Assad regime's stance on internal opposition has also contributed to its isolation and unpopularity in the international community.

Assad's regime has come under great scrutiny, and has become illegitimate in the eyes of other governments. Syria violated a UN ban regarding the arming the Lebanese Hezbollah militia, which led to the extension of US sanctions in May 2010. By December of 2012 the United States, Turkey, Gulf states, France and Britain had recognised the main opposition National Coalition of the Syrian Revolution as the only legitimate representative of the Syrian people.

Despite Syria's international isolation, all of Syria's neighbors and the superpower nations have become involved in the conflict.²² The rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia has manifested in the Syrian conflict through monetary and arms support. Saudi Arabia and Iran have

20 Staff Writer, "US: Syria Leads Human Rights Violations in 2013," Al Arabiya News, Last edited February 27, 2014, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/world/2014/02/27/US-Syria-leads-human-rights-violations-in-2013.html>.

21 Bowen, "The Bitter Struggle for Syria," BBC News, Last edited November 11, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30011154>.

22 Bowen, "The Bitter Struggle for Syria," BBC News, Last edited November 11, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30011154>.

been fueling both sides of the conflict, which suggests little hope of reaching a resolution. The involvement of Russia and the United States has also fueled the conflict, and has at times been inconsistent. The stance of the United States on the Assad government and action in Syria has deviated with the emergence of a terrorist opposition group. This has caused the United States and Iran's interests in the region to align to some extent.²³

The opposition in Syria is factionalized, and has also bared responsibility for the displacement of many Syrians. There has not been a major force for change in secular or moderate Islamic groups in Syria.²⁴ Jihadist groups have become the dominant rebel force fighting against the regime. large swathes of Syrian territory remain in rebel hands.²⁵ Specifically, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) or the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has committed large scale human rights violations and war crimes within Syria. A major contributing factor to the growth of terrorism in Syria has been Syria's marginalization of moderate opposition groups.²⁶ ISIS has aligned itself with remnants of the Baathist regime of Iraq, once led by Saddam Hussein.²⁷ ISIS has declared an Islamic "caliphate" covering northern Iraq and eastern Syria. The group has oil revenues, arms, and has become organized enough to

²³ Elise Labott and Stephen Collinson, "U.S. Opens Channels with Iran over ISIS," CNN, Last edited November 6, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/11/06/politics/obama-iran-isis-letter/>.

²⁴ Bowen, "The Bitter Struggle for Syria," BBC News, Last edited November 11, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30011154>.

²⁵ Bowen, "The Bitter Struggle for Syria," BBC News, Last edited November 11, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30011154>.

²⁶ "Security Council Adopts Resolution 2170 (2014) Condemning Gross, Widespread Abuse of Human Rights by Extremist Groups in Iraq, Syria | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases," UN News Center, August 15, 2014. Accessed March 13, 2015.

²⁷ Josh Rogin, "America's Allies Are Funding ISIS," The Daily Beast, June 14, 2014, Accessed March 13, 2015.

maintain control of expanses of land.²⁸ It is estimated that the value of the output from the oil fields and refineries under ISIS's control in Iraq and Syria at one-million to two-million dollars a day. Most members of ISIS come from Syria and Iraq, and some external members have come from Tunisia and Saudi Arabia. ISIS has acquired hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of weapons from Iraqi and Syrian militaries.²⁹ The UN has reported that Syrians present in areas controlled by the group have experienced massacres, beheadings, torture, sexual enslavement, and forced pregnancy.³⁰ ISIS and the Assad regime have both been responsible for the displacement and suffering of masses of Syrians, which has been widely recorded in photographs.

This brings us up to the current situation, Syria has now been plagued by years of suffering and displacement. Of Syria's twenty-two million population, around eleven million Syrians, half of the population, have been forced from their homes.³¹ For the purposes of this paper I will refer to both internally and externally displaced Syrians as refugees. Syria, itself, was home to a number of refugees from Iraq, Palestine, Somalia, and Afghanistan.³² Of displaced Syrians, about six-and-a-half million are internally displaced, and three million Syrians have fled

28 "How ISIS Works." The New York Times. September 15, 2014. Accessed November 18, 2014. http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/09/16/world/middleeast/how-isis-works.html?_r=0.

29 "How ISIS Works." The New York Times. September 15, 2014. Accessed November 18, 2014. http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/09/16/world/middleeast/how-isis-works.html?_r=0.

30 "UN: ISIL Committing War Crimes in Syria." Al Jazeera. November 14, 2014. Accessed November 18, 2014. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/11/un-isil-committing-war-crimes-syria-2014111415108320501.html>.

31 Bowen, "The Bitter Struggle for Syria," BBC News, Last edited November 11, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30011154>.

32 "Syrian Arab Republic," UNHCR News, Accessed November 18, 2014, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e486a76&submit=GO>.

across the border into neighboring nations.³³ The majority of internally displaced Syrians are found in the regions of Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Deir Ez-Zor and Idlib. The conditions for internally displaced Syrians have been very difficult in terms of violence and economic well being. The Syrian Pound has been devalued by more than 50 percent since the outbreak of the conflict.³⁴ The prices for basic needs are rising, and gas, oil and electricity are in short supply. Life in Syria is insecure

The neighboring nations of Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq host many of the Syrians that have escaped their borders, but around one-hundred and fifty thousand Syrians have also claimed asylum in Europe.³⁵ Germany has accepted a large proportion of the Syrian immigrants who fled to Europe. Germany has taken in seventy-thousand Syrians since 2012. The humanitarian and financial responses of different nations have been varied. Syrian refugees in other nations can be found in government-run camps, unofficial camps, or assimilated into urban cities.

Both refugees and violence have spilled over from Syria into Lebanon. Lebanon now contains over a million Syrian refugees, around a quarter of Lebanon's population is now made up of Syrians.³⁶ This has been a complete shift in the relationship between Syria and Lebanon, the civil war in Lebanon during the 1970s allowed Syria to extend its political and military influence. Syria pulled its forces out of Lebanon in 2005 after being implicated in the

33 "Syrian Refugees; A Snapshot of the Crisis – in the Middle East and Europe," <http://syrianrefugees.eu/>.

34 "Syrian Arab Republic," UNHCR News, Accessed November 18, 2014, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e486a76&submit=GO>.

35 "Syrian Refugees; A Snapshot of the Crisis – in the Middle East and Europe," <http://syrianrefugees.eu/>.

36 "Syrian Refugees; A Snapshot of the Crisis – in the Middle East and Europe." Syrian Refugees. Accessed November 16, 2014. <http://syrianrefugees.eu/>.

assassination of a Lebanese prime minister, but up until the current civil war, Syria had maintained a presence in the country in terms of policy and economy.³⁷ Despite the influx of Syrians, there are no government funded refugee camps in Lebanon. Due to the lack of government support for the refugees many have been forced to pitch tents and camp in the desert regions along Lebanon's border. Other Syrians live in rented housing within Lebanon. The heavy influx of Syrians into low-income communities has been completely destabilizing. The new population of refugees has caused trouble for the country's hospitals and schools. The refugees also compete with the workforce, which causes the Lebanese to lose out on job opportunity. The refugees Refugees in Lebanon are very dependent upon civil society, since the government only agreed to start registering refugees in 2013.

One-million Syrians have settled in Turkey, of that number around 30 percent of these live in twenty-two government-run camps near the Syrian-Turkish border.³⁸ Turkey has spent a reported four-billion on Syrian refugees so far, and has received only two-hundred and fifty million from the international community. Turkey has carried much of the financial weight for the Syrian refugee crisis.³⁹ The refugees in Turkey are not legally considered refugees but rather 'guests'. This means that the Syrian refugees in Turkey do not have access to all the legal safeguards typically accorded to refugees, and that they must look elsewhere in order to permanently resettle. In September of 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq launched attacks against

37 "Syria Profile." BBC News, Last edited October 7, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14703856>.

38 "Syrian Refugees; A Snapshot of the Crisis – in the Middle East and Europe." Syrian Refugees. Accessed November 16, 2014. <http://syrianrefugees.eu/>.

39 "Lebanon Wants End to Flow of Syrian Refugees," last modified October 28, 2014, <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2014/10/28/40-nations-hosted-by-germany-look-to-help-with-flood-syrian-refugees/>.

Kurdish villages near the Turkish border, which has caused hundreds of thousands of Kurds to enter Turkey.⁴⁰

Like Turkey, Jordan has established government-funded refugee camps. Yet only 18 percent of Syrian refugees within Jordan are located in camps.⁴¹ The United Nations had registered around six-hundred and nineteen-thousand refugees in Jordan. Approximately 80 percent of Syrian refugees in Jordan live in urban areas, while the remaining 20 percent live in camps such as Za'atari, Marjeeb al-Fahood, Cyber City and Al-Azraq. Over eighty-thousand Syrian refugees are registered in the camp Za'atri. Within Za'atri it is estimated that two-hundred and eighty-five people have died.⁴² Communities along the border of Syria and Jordan have always been closely connected through family ties and marriage. During the 1940s, following independence, Lebanese and Syrians felt that they were one people with two nations.⁴³ At the start of the conflict, this relationship made the transition into Jordan very easy, however as the conflict raged onward massive numbers of unrelated Syrians have entered Jordan. Many Jordanians have grown to resent the growing Syrian population because their willingness to do cheap labor makes them more attractive to employers, than low laboring Jordanians.⁴⁴ The minimum wage for Jordanians is far above the minimum wage set for migrant workers, which

40 "Syrian Refugees; A Snapshot of the Crisis – in the Middle East and Europe." Syrian Refugees. Accessed November 16, 2014. <http://syrianrefugees.eu/>.

41 UNHCR, *At a glance: Health data for Syrian refugees Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon, 2013 Annual Report*, file:///Users/karleebergendorff/Downloads/HISSyriaresponse-AnnualReport20132.pdf.

42 UNHCR, *At a glance: Health data for Syrian refugees Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon, 2013 Annual Report*, file:///Users/karleebergendorff/Downloads/HISSyriaresponse-AnnualReport20132.pdf.

43 Robin Wright, *Dreams and Shadows: The Future of the Middle East* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), 218.

44 Asfour, "Jordan: Local Perceptions on Syrian Refugees," Fair Observer. Last edited March 19, 2014, http://www.fairobserver.com/region/middle_east_north_africa/jordan-local-perceptions-syrian-refugees-62951/.

makes it nearly impossible for the host population to compete for low-level jobs. As is the case in Lebanon, local perceptions towards Syrian refugees have grown negative, many Jordanians feel that the Syrian refugee population lacks skilled laborers and investment. The external assistance given to Syrians has further caused resentment because Jordanians feel that the international community is disregarding the urgent needs of impoverished Jordanians. The relationship between Syria and Jordan is complex, and has been further complicated since the Syrian civil war.

Significantly fewer refugees have fled to Iraq. Around twenty-two-hundred-thousand refugees have registered with the UNHCR organization in Iraq. The vast majority of recorded refugees in Iraq are located in Iraqi Kurdistan.⁴⁵ In the past Syria has welcomed Iraqi refugees. In June of 2014, ISIS took control of the Iraqi city of Mosul, which created another refugee crisis. The actions of ISIS have perpetuated and worsened the Syrian refugee crisis, and regional immigration issues. It is estimated that approximately one-million seven-hundred-thousand Iraqis have been displaced in 2014.⁴⁶

Multiple world leaders called for Assad to step down as early as August of 2011. However, he continues to remain in power over Syria. In a recent, 2015 interview, Assad denied his regime's use of chemical weapons, and claimed to have authority over all of Syria. The rise of ISIS has led to a major shift in international perspective and visual rhetoric. Assad is now regarded as the lesser of two evils. Western leaders are unlikely to demand his removal from power, now that there is a chance that this could benefit ISIS. America has not officially

⁴⁵ "Syrian Refugees; A Snapshot of the Crisis – in the Middle East and Europe," <http://syrianrefugees.eu/>

⁴⁶ Cameron Thibos, "35 Years of Forced Displacement in Iraq: Contextualising the ISIS Threat, Unpacking the Movements," Migration Policy Centre, October 4, 2014.

withdrawn its demand that Assad step down. Assad has suggested that ISIS would not exist if the west and Saudi Arabia hadn't supported the rebel movement in Syria.⁴⁷

The United Nations envoy to Syria Staffan de Mistura has stated that, Assad will have to be included in a deal to end the fighting in Syria.⁴⁸ Rebel leaders and rights groups have accused Syrian government forces of shelling and dropping barrels bombs. Rebel leaders have refused to further discuss issues if the solution does not entail the exit of Bashar al-Assad, and the prosecution of war criminals.⁴⁹ "falls short of an initiative to resolve the humanitarian crisis of our people targeted by the regime's use of chemical weapons and barrel bombs prohibited by the international community." Staffan de Mistura had hoped that the presence of ISIS would persuade the rebels and the government to agree to a temporary end to their conflict. Although both groups view ISIS as a common threat, the rebels still regard the regime as a larger threat. The U.N. envoy has argued that ISIS has exploited the civil war, and that they are the real enemy.⁵⁰ This statement completely disregards the initial reasons for displacement. A recent resolution passed by the European Parliament's General Assembly discussed the difficult conditions suffered by refugees and displaced people in both Syria and Iraq, and the need for the

47 Shackle, Samira. "Western Powers Accept Assad as the Lesser of Two Evils." Middle East Monitor. February 11, 2015. Accessed February 18, 2015. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/articles/americas/16917-western-powers-accept-assad-as-the-lesser-of-two-evils>.

48 "UN Envoy: Assad Is 'part of the Solution'" Middle East Eye. February 13, 2015. Accessed February 18, 2015. <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/un-envoy-assad-part-solution-792913185>.

49 Dettmer, Jamie. "Syrian Rebels in Aleppo Reject UN Peace Effort." Voice of America. March 1, 2015. Accessed March 5, 2015. <http://www.voanews.com/content/syrian-rebels-in-aleppo-reject-un-peace-effort/2663692.html>.

50 Dettmer, Jamie. "Syrian Rebels in Aleppo Reject UN Peace Effort." Voice of America. March 1, 2015. Accessed March 5, 2015. <http://www.voanews.com/content/syrian-rebels-in-aleppo-reject-un-peace-effort/2663692.html>.

EU to lend them a helping hand. The resolution condemned the attacks launched by both the Syrian regime and ISIS.⁵¹

In my discussion of the relationship between the displaced and displacer, I seek to establish who or what is the displacer of Syrians. Who Western publics have visualized as the displacer in the Syrian conflict has altered throughout media discourse. The current actors discussed in this thesis are: the Syrian regime, IS, Western media, regional powers, Western powers, the governments in receipt of refugees, the rebels, and the refugees, both Palestinian and Syrian. I will point to the difference between the depiction of these actors in commonly held narratives, and in photographs which deviate from this narrative. I will discuss the ways that photography can be honest, and reveal the truth.

⁵¹ "EU Calls for Conference to Help Syrian and Iraqi Refugees." Middle East Monitor. February 13, 2015. Accessed February 18, 2015. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/europe/16958-eu-calls-for-conference-to-help-syrian-and-iraqi-refugees>.

Do Unphotographed Refugees Matter?

As argued throughout this thesis, widely viewed photographic depictions of Syrian refugees tend to focus only on demographics which garner the most empathy and compassion. In this section I establish what constitutes a refugee versus re-imagined visual depictions produced by mainstream television outlets and social media campaigns. This discussion will illuminate part of the issue found throughout most depictions of life as a Syrian refugee. This all leads to concern for the unphotographed and photographed Syrians representation, or lack there of.

The current Human rights regime came into place as a result of the Holocaust and WWII. In Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of human rights 1948 it is recognized that it is the right of persons to seek asylum from persecution in other countries. The 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees defines who is a refugee, their rights and the legal obligations of states. The United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951 was originally limited in scope to persons fleeing events occurring before 1 January 1951 and within Europe. Then, the 1967 Protocol removed geographical and temporal limitations from the Convention.⁵²

A refugee, as defined by the Convention, is someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion. The Convention further stipulates that, subject to specific exceptions, refugees should not be penalized for their illegal entry or stay. The Convention lays down basic minimum standards for the treatment of refugees, without prejudice to States granting more favourable treatment. The Convention does not apply to individuals that have committed war crimes or crimes against

⁵² "Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees." UNHCR News. Accessed March 13, 2015.

humanity, serious non-political crimes, or are guilty of acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations. This definition has been used by refugee protection regimes around the world, and in the development of international human rights law.⁵³ Governments' perception of refugees altered after the cold war, when the "good" refugees fleeing communism, suddenly transformed into "bad" refugees threatening our civilisation.⁵⁴ The current legal definition established by the convention is all encompassing in nature. However photographic depictions give the impression that refugees fit into a very narrow mold. This may leave the public unaware of the spectrum of refugees, and the unique challenges they face.

A photograph goes through a political transformation that is determined by both the perspective of the distributor and the spectator. Current constructs emphasize visuals of especially vulnerable refugees. The process of victimization depicts refugees as passive figures that are incapable of representing themselves. There is this idea that the refugee needs representing, which leads to voyeuristic and misguided representations. Visual accounts are regarded with the same weight as statistical data but the photograph is really more analogous to an opinion. A photograph may capture an event or a figure but the practice of photography removes context and distorts the event, leaving even those included in the picture misrepresented. Some one chooses what figures to include, and what details about subjects to include and exclude. This concept is best articulated by Sontag, "to photograph is to frame, and to frame is to exclude."⁵⁵

53 "Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees." UNHCR News. Accessed March 13, 2015.

54 Caroline Moorehead, *Human Cargo*. (New York: Random House, 2009), 41.

55 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 46.

This lead to my next concern, if no one photographs refugees do they exist?⁵⁶ Do they matter? Do the refugees left out of the picture experience further hardship because of their lack of representation. Photographs are regarded as evidence of refugee realities. Those unvisualized and unrepresented also are in need of support and solidarity. The absence of a photograph presents another concern, related to the representation of Syrian refugees. The photographer and the venues of dissemination filter the types of refugees and their messages to create an illusion of the perfect refugee.

Does it say something that we have to show the absolute worst image of the worst possible circumstance to create a response? Images of massive numbers in complete despair have become the necessary threshold to elicit compassion. This means that absolute suffering is expected in humanitarian photographs, and anything less is at risk of dismissal. Refugees that are sufficiently suffering by global standards, may not appear to be suffering enough to be photographed.

The Kleinmans suggest that there is no one way to suffer. They further find that pain is perceived and expressed differently.⁵⁷ This should be true in the visualizations of displacement, however widely distributed photographs of displacement depict the same demographics again and again. Both visualized and unvisualized refugees are exploited and ignored. The absent

56 Larry Minear, and Colin Scott. *The News Media, Civil War, and Humanitarian Action*. (Boulder: L. Rienner, 1996).

57 Arthur Kleinman and Joan Kleinman, "The appeal of experience; the dismay of images: cultural appropriations of suffering in our times," *Daedalus* (1996): 2.

image is also a form of political appropriation.⁵⁸ In the process of handling a refugee crisis, those involved forget to listen to the subjects of their concern.

While this thesis critiques a variety of photographic depictions, that is not to say no visual response should be made in regards to injustice and displacement. A visual understanding has become an important part of in forming social consciousness and social action. In this thesis I explore ways that the current systems disseminating photographs of refugees can become less biased more self aware of their influences, privileges, and biases. This thesis advocates that their are responsible alternatives to the current visual imagination surrounding displacement. A wider variety of visualizations that look deeper into the refugee experience. Local depictions and a more inclusive visualization of displacement could greatly contribute to the reframing of refugee discourse.

Refugees come from situations where their own government is unable to or unwilling to ensure their physical safety and most fundamental human rights.⁵⁹ Refugees are forced to seek protection from the international community. Hannah Arendt defines refugee is a 'vanguard of their people'. A refugee is a person who is outside his or her country of origin or habitual residence because he or she has suffered persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or because he or she is a member of a persecuted 'social group'. Such a person may be referred to as an 'asylum seeker' until recognized by the state where he or she makes his or her claim. In this thesis, I include internally displaced peoples (IDPs) in my discussion of Syrian refugees because they too have faced the same physical and political insecurities, and

⁵⁸ Arthur Kleinman and Joan Kleinman, "The appeal of experience; the dismay of images: cultural appropriations of suffering in our times," *Daedalus* (1996): 17.

⁵⁹ Alexander Betts, *Refugees in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1.

have been acknowledged by the UNHCR's mandate. UNHCR has become the chief advocate for refugee rights.⁶⁰ A simplistic view of the refugee is someone who has fled from conditions exceeding 'normal'.⁶¹

While this paper seeks to explore a more personal understanding of the Syrian displacement, it is important to recognize the role of refugees in international politics. The refugee has become a symbol of the failure of the state-citizen-territory relationship.⁶² Refugees are representative of international failings. The presence of refugees, like images of war challenge the idea that peace is the norm.⁶³ Refugeehood is largely defined by the international legal regime. We think of refugee in terms of international community, which has led to rhetoric of protection. Refugees are nearly always discussed in the context of problem solving.

Haddad identifies the core actors in a situation of displacement are the origin nation, host nation, and refugee. Haddad states that the creation of the refugee is inevitable.⁶⁴ The presence of refugees implicates the government of origin because the government's inability or refusal to protect those under jurisdiction.⁶⁵ The refugee is representative of the clash between sovereign rights and human rights.⁶⁶ Arendt wrote that, "The Rights of Man, supposedly inalienable, proved

60 Caroline Moorehead, *Human Cargo*. (New York: Random House, 2009), 39.

61 Emma Haddad, *The Refugee in International Society: Between Sovereigns* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1.

62 Emma Haddad, *The Refugee in International Society: Between Sovereigns* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1.

63 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 74.

64 Emma Haddad, *The Refugee in International Society: Between Sovereigns* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 9.

65 Emma Haddad, *The Refugee in International Society: Between Sovereigns* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 2.

66 Haddad, *The Refugee in International Society: Between Sovereigns*, 2.

to be unenforceable--even in countries whose constitutions were based upon them--whenever people appeared who were no longer citizens of any sovereign state."⁶⁷ This reveals the flawed nature of the international state system in regards to protecting human rights.

Haddad emphasizes that refugee creation is not an isolated event. Refugees are reflective of the way we view the international state system and sovereignty.⁶⁸ The movement of refugees can have serious political and economic repercussions between states, causing tensions. Haddad finds that political ideologies impact the ethical decision making abilities of governments.⁶⁹ The need for refugees to seek safety and protection elsewhere suggest that a change in government or policy may be necessary. This is why including the Assad regime as part of the solution becomes problematic. There is currently a solution oriented approach to studying refugees. Discourse around displacement is focused on how policy changes and humanitarian support can fix the issue.⁷⁰ I find that this passes over into how publics look at refugees, and photograph them.

Beginning in the 1980s, Western nations began to withdraw financial support from asylum seekers who were deemed not to meet the criteria, then detentions and deportations began.⁷¹ There is a tendency to dismiss the stories of asylum seekers because they are too painful for others to even comprehend.⁷² It is important for spectators to understand that no one wants to

67 Hannah Arendt, *The origins of totalitarianism*, (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1973), 293.

68 Emma Haddad, *The Refugee in International Society: Between Sovereigns* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 3.

69 Haddad, *The Refugee in International Society: Between Sovereigns*, 2.

70 Emma Haddad, *The Refugee in International Society: Between Sovereigns* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 4.

71 Caroline Moorehead, *Human Cargo*. (New York: Random House, 2009), 42.

72 Caroline Moorehead, *Human Cargo*. (New York: Random House, 2009), 267.

be a refugee. Exile is terrifying, lonely, and confusing experience.⁷³ This distrust and disbelief is also directed towards images of extreme suffering. The idea of the 'bad refugee' also came into the dialogue regarding global asylum practices. This bad refugee is a person not so much in flight from persecution but actively in search of work and a better life, using the asylum route to gain entry into a nation with better prospects.⁷⁴ Refugees began to be seen as a system abuser rather than a victim. As a result, donor nations began to focus on funding relief support, rather than providing refugee protection.

Attitudes towards refugees have become characterized by panic and fears of chaos.⁷⁵ A climate of intolerance has risen, Xenophobic and anti-immigration arguments are a common part of the discussion of refugee policy.⁷⁶ Large groups of migrants instill fears of culturally different and impoverished people imposing strain upon a nation, and alter its national identity.⁷⁷ A huge gap has grown between reality and Western rhetoric surrounding refugees.⁷⁸ This negatively impacts the effectiveness of refugee programs, fewer than half of all people applying for asylum receive it.⁷⁹

73 Caroline Moorehead, *Human Cargo*. (New York: Random House, 2009), 260.

74 Caroline Moorehead, *Human Cargo*. (New York: Random House, 2009), 41.

75 Moorehead, *Human Cargo*, 46.

76 Caroline Moorehead, *Human Cargo*. (New York: Random House, 2009), 51.

77 Caroline Moorehead, *Human Cargo*. (New York: Random House, 2009), 349.

78 Moorehead, *Human Cargo*, 41.

79 Moorehead, *Human Cargo*, 41.

Refugees pose a challenge to international cooperation and ideas of justice. It becomes an international political issue when identity fails to correspond with a nation state.⁸⁰ The refugee is inherently viewed as an outsider.⁸¹ Refugees are physically and theoretically marginalized. I find that they are further marginalized by current photographic practices. Those who are unrepresented visually are likely absent from mainstream discussion, which means they go through a second process of marginalization. Refugees can be integrated back into discourses surrounding displacement can be achieved through responsible policy making and photograph taking.

The figure of the refugee redefines theoretical and literal space. The globalization of space is a challenge to current notions of sovereignty and citizenship. Similarly, refugees are redefined by their new location. Forced migration leaves the individual out of context and marginalized. The experience of being displaced does not end with relocation and settlement. Soon after arrival, assimilation is demanded by the citizens of a host nation. The experience of relocation can be ostracizing and alienating. Returning home is also problematic for many refugees, and this aspect often goes undiscussed and unphotographed. In Moorehead's chapter, "Going Home," she points out the literal and psychological difficulties of a refugee's return home.⁸² A 'normal' citizen is thought of as rooted. A citizen is defined by ideas of sovereignty

80 Alexander Betts, *Refugees in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1.

81 Emma Haddad, *The Refugee in International Society: Between Sovereigns* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 7.

82 Caroline Moorehead, *Human Cargo*. (New York: Random House, 2009), 291.

and territory.⁸³ Questions of belonging and identity will remain even after the Syrian conflicts end.

In both *On Photography* and *Regarding the Pain of Others* Sontag discusses if the presence of photographs makes an event more real. She notes that there are terms of use for non military cameras at the frontlines of conflict, which dictates what events can be recorded, and consequently seen by Western publics.⁸⁴ This begs the question, do events and people that go unphotographed matter to Western spectators in the same way that visualized figures do? Visibility currently plays a prominent role in Western publics understandings of refugees, which means that lack of visibility has a strong correlation with marginalization. Sontag finds that images that fill audiences with pity and disgust should not prevent onlookers from questioning, “what pictures, whose cruelties, whose deaths are not being shown.”⁸⁵ This inquisitive outlook characterizes a more responsible consumer of images. However spectators do not frequently question sources about the absence of images. Images of conflict create the conflict, without photography there is no war.⁸⁶ Similarly, unphotographed refugees do not exist in the consciousness of Western publics.

83 Emma Haddad, *The Refugee in International Society: Between Sovereigns* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 8.

84 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 100.

85 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 14.

86 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 66.

Taking the Time to Understand Why We Are Taking Pictures

A Literature Review

The sensitive identity of the refugee is critical to our understanding of how to photograph them in a responsible way. In this section I will look into past literature on visualization of suffering, and photography as a medium and political tool. Professional appropriations of suffering created by organizations and news entities should be held to a higher degree of responsible visualization and dissemination. I use the work of scholars from many disciplines, primarily focusing on the works of Sontag, Chouliaraki, and Azoulay. I first outline some basic concepts and terms to help establish the relationship between the refugee and the photograph. I use the works of Sontag, Chouliaraki, and Azoulay to discuss the shortcomings of visualizing and photographing suffering.

This section moves beyond ‘the photojournalist’s dilemma’ to look at all actors involved in the creation and dissemination of photographs, including consumers, governments, humanitarian organizations, and news outlets. Within this literature review the topics of morality, ethics, suffering, agency, representation, solidarity, distance, and empathy are of particular importance. Understanding how to appropriately respond to photographs of refugees is perhaps more relevant than ever with visuals of violence, war and atrocity being intermingled in with visuals of everyday experiences on social media.⁸⁷

In *The politics of pity*, Hannah Arednt made the distinction between those who suffer and those who do not. She also wrote that ‘seeing’ and ‘looking’ are considered as different concepts because sufferer and observer are physically distant. This creates the “spectacle of suffering,

⁸⁷ Iain Wilkinson, “The provocation of the humanitarian social imaginary,” *Visual Communication* 12, no. 3 (2013): 262.

unfortunate people are observed by those who do not share their suffering, who do not experience it directly and who, as such, may be regarded as fortunate people.” Arendt’s thinking also helps set the backdrop for more recent political thinker’s work on the topics of suffering and refugeehood. She finds that, “Once they had left their homeland, they remained homeless; once they had left their state, they remained stateless; once they had been deprived of their rights, they became rightless, the scum of the earth.”⁸⁸

There are a variety of academics that have written on the use of photographs, and more specifically, how different organizations, governments, news outlets, and individuals can use photographs to shape the way the public views the ‘reality’ of life as a Syrian refugee. Due to advances in technology, there is a greater dissemination of visual representations of different societies than ever before, which greatly impacts the relationship between spectator and sufferer. There new visualizations of the human experience have transformed societies capacity for self and social understanding, which holds promise in reaching a higher standard of photographic depiction of refugees. Photographs can be narrative or conceptual in nature. In each chapter I will discuss the way in which different intermediaries shape the visual relationship between spectators and syrian refugees. I will also discuss the molds that refugees are forced into, and how this has created a visual rhetoric of suffering. Images of violence and suffering are often employed to be shocking, and create an interruption of the viewer’s world.

Central to my discussion is determining the best way to express solidarity as a response to images of displacement. Paying and speaking are considered the principal forms of

⁸⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The origins of totalitarianism*, (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1973), 267.

commitment or solidarity towards communities in circumstances of misfortune.⁸⁹ Speech can be seen as a form of action, which seeks to reduce the suffering through its effects and awareness.⁹⁰ It is often easier to see paying as an action because it is calculable and can be seen as more of a sacrifice in the name of those suffering. The commitment behind donations is often masked by the medium, making it seem more insincere. At times spending is regarded as a way for one to rid themselves of guilt. The relationship between the donor and the recipient remains minimal and abstract.⁹¹ The issue with speech is that it can be perceived as detached from action. Speech holds more importance when it faces opposition, making it courageous in some way. Either means of action can be minimized down to 'just words' or 'just money.'⁹² Boltanski speaks of the 'crisis of pity', which can be understood as a political crisis where public action is demanded in the name of universal ethics focused on the discourse of suffering. This discourse is centered around indignation and guilt that is placed on the perpetrators.⁹³

The work of Said helps give us a critical eye towards images of exotification. Said finds that the viewer's ability to identify as a Western representative is worked out in visual terms.⁹⁴ Traditional orientalist narratives regard subjects first by their ethnic identity, and only

89 Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering Morality, Media, and Politics* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 14.

90 Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering Morality, Media, and Politics* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 35-54.

91 Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering Morality, Media, and Politics* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 18.

92 Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering Morality, Media, and Politics* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 19.

93 Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering Morality, Media, and Politics* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 35-54.

94 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 247.

secondarily as human.⁹⁵ Said finds that there is a “culturally sanctioned habit of deploying large generalizations by which reality is divided into various collectives: languages, races, types, colors, mentalities, each category being not so much a neutral designation as an evaluative interpretation.”⁹⁶ Said takes issue with the lack of individual, historical narratives of Arabs.⁹⁷ This historical tendency to speak of distant people in terms of a collective entity become relevant in the analysis of descriptions and depictions of Syrian refugees. News depictions of humanitarian crises are rooted in post-colonial discourse. Many news organizations are responsible for orientalizing and dehumanizing portrayals of victims.⁹⁸ Similarly, Humanitarian Organizations contribute to orientalizing visual rhetoric.⁹⁹ Orientalist rhetoric has become prevalent in the discussion of the Syrian crisis in all forums. For example, images of ISIS tend to emulate the orientalist notion that, Western culture is threatened by external barbarism.¹⁰⁰

Chouliaraki’s work explores newer developments in imagining and photographing refugees. She identifies two mainstream photographic approaches to suffering: the ‘shock effect’ and the ‘positive’ imagery. The former has been denounced for dehumanizing the sufferer, and the later has been accused of glossing over the misery of suffering. These critiques present the most prominent concerns when representing distant others. This might leave one wondering if

95 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 231.

96 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 228.

97 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 230.

98 Lilie Chouliaraki, “Post-humanitarianism: Humanitarian Communication Beyond A Politics Of Pity,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 13, no. 2 (2010): 107-26.

99 Calhoun, Craig. “The imperative to reduce suffering: Charity, progress, and emergencies in the field of humanitarian action.” *Humanitarianism in question: Politics, power, ethics* (2008): 73-97.

100 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 258.

public agency towards vulnerable others is even possible.¹⁰¹ The 'shock effect' tends to elicit low-intensity emotions and short-term forms of agency due to 'compassion fatigue'. Susan Moeller's definition of "compassion fatigue," refers to a profound indifference and empathic exhaustion produced by the repetition of shocking images.¹⁰² There is also a fatigue towards 'positive images'. Positive examples of 'aid in action' can be misrecognized as proof that the organization has fully addressed the situation at hand. This could potentially lead to inaction.

Being able to recognize the different photographic tools and mechanisms employed helps viewers to better understand what a photograph is actually saying, and avoid being feeling fooled by the camera. Some 'Shock' aesthetics rely on their ability to manipulate emotions of guilt, and 'positive' aesthetics play on the emotions of empathy and gratitude. Each new image of suffering demands a fresh mourning for injustice against humanity.¹⁰³ Many onlookers become unresponsive altogether towards 'shock effect' campaigns. This compassion fatigue leads to reactions of 'I've seen this before.'¹⁰⁴ On the other hand 'shock' aesthetics can be ineffective because they evoke too strong of an emotional response. Cohen suggests that, many onlookers feel powerless upon viewing photographs of suffering. Photographs that make a spectacle of suffering can give the impression that a situation is utterly hopeless. This leaves many privileged viewers unable to even think about the situation. The practices of 'positive image' appeals can

101 Chouliaraki, L. "Post-humanitarianism: Humanitarian Communication Beyond A Politics Of Pity." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 13, no. 2 (2010): 108.

102 Moeller, Susan D. *Compassion fatigue: How the media sell disease, famine, war and death*. Psychology Press, 1999.

103 Sliwinski, Sharon. "Camera war, again." *journal of visual culture* 5, no. 1 (2006): 91.

104 Susan Moeller, *Compassion fatigue: How the media sell disease, famine, war and death* (Psychology Press, 1999), 2.

address the evils of ‘shock effect’ appeals, and address people’s sense of powerlessness towards distant suffering. Some ‘Positive’ campaigns reject the imagery of the sufferer as a victim, and instead focus on the sufferer’s agency and dignity. Others gloss over the complexity of issues facing refugees.

The ‘positive image’ style can personalize sufferers by focalizing the appeal on distinct individuals as actors. This approach appeals to donors by addressing each one as a person who can make a concrete contribution to improve a sufferer’s life. This however can easily lead to interventionist and orientalizing rhetoric. In portraying sufferers as powerless victims or as dignified agents, these campaigns produce a universal discourse of justice. Interventionist conventions of justice ultimately lead to the dehumanization of the sufferer. This visual discourse allows the spectator to view the sufferer in their context.¹⁰⁵ Chapter Three of this thesis will discuss how positive representational practices can be used in both interventionist humanitarian projects and progressive images of empowered refugees.

Wells explores whether or not an emotional understanding less important than a political understanding of a refugee crisis?¹⁰⁶ Wells explains that the use of emotion in photographs of suffering is not always something to shy away from. Wells begins by defining melodrama as a way to generate sympathy ‘for disenfranchised political subjects.’ Dramatic photographs are employed because they do not require any knowledge of the historical or political implications involved. These representations are easy to understand, and respond to.¹⁰⁷ Melodramatic

105 Chouliaraki, L. "Post-humanitarianism: Humanitarian Communication Beyond A Politics Of Pity." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 13, no. 2 (2010): 120.

106 Karen Wells, "The melodrama of being a child: NGO representations of poverty," *Visual Communication* 12, no. 3 (2013): 277.

107 Karen Wells, "The melodrama of being a child: NGO representations of poverty," *Visual Communication* 12, no. 3 (2013): 289.

approaches do not require knowledge as a precondition for action. However these images can excuse the viewer of seeking more information after viewing. Dramatic photographs risk being seen as a reduction of politics to ethics or morals.¹⁰⁸ This visual relationship villainizes the spectator, and leads them to question what will happen to the child if they don't intervene or take action.¹⁰⁹ The focus on 'universal moral truths' and dramatic narratives prevents a deep and thorough analysis of political situations. Wells advocates melodramatic approaches to suffering, I find that both an emotional and political understanding are necessary for public solidarity.

Visual representations have the ability to awaken social consciences, cultivate and enact solidarity, and consequently affect political change. Public images of violence, suffering and trauma call on audiences from predominantly stable, western societies to act in solidarity. Arendt defines solidarity as 'a community of interest with the oppressed and the exploited'.¹¹⁰ Arendt also suggests that compassion is directed towards specific beings in specific situations without any generalization, whereas pity generalizes as a means to deal with distance. A degree of locality and contact is necessary for compassion. This understanding of suffering and solidarity helps spectators to have an informed and critical eye when regarding images of displaced Syrians.

Spectators' encounters with visual representations of distant suffering can create virtual communities of witnesses. These communities constitute ideas of shared humanity and solidarity

108 Karen Wells, "The melodrama of being a child: NGO representations of poverty," *Visual Communication* 12, no. 3 (2013): 288.

109 Karen Wells, "The melodrama of being a child: NGO representations of poverty," *Visual Communication* 12, no. 3 (2013): 287.

110 Hannah Arendt, *The origins of totalitarianism* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1973), 88.

with distant others.¹¹¹ However many others, including Sontag, regard the practice of capturing suffering and violence visually as doomed to fail. Sontag was certainly not the first to suggest we wage war with pictures, but her book showed that the connection has become definitive: one can no longer talk about war without talking about the presentation of war. An image of atrocity becomes a secondary effect of atrocity itself, part of the traumatic crisis that is war 'passed on' through visual representations.¹¹²

The work of Sontag, Chouliaraki, and Azoulay help inform my understanding of photographs throughout this thesis, as well as my understand eachothers' theory. Sontag's work is at the core of understand representations of suffering. Sontag comments that, "essentially the camera makes everyone a tourist in other people's reality, and eventually in one's own." To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It mandates that the photographer to engages in a certain type of relationship with the world. This relationship provides the photographer with what feels like knowledge and power. Along similar thought, Sontag also stated that, "to photograph people," Sontag said, "is to violate them...It turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed."

Photography is a way of certifying an experience, while simultaneously refusing it by limiting the experience to a search for the photogenic. The experience is converted into an image, or a 'souvenir' as Sontag has put it. In her book *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag suggests that, "To take a photograph is to participate in another person's mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's

111 Sharon Sliwinski, *Human rights in camera* (University of Chicago Press, 2011), 5.

112 Sharon Sliwinski, "Camera war, again," *Journal of visual culture* 5, no. 1 (2006): 89.

relentless melt.” This is precisely what occurs during the act of photographing refugees. Sontag regards photography as a ‘privileged moment’. The plethora of images depicting Syrian refugees disseminated in Western publics are privileged visuals that exploit their vulnerability.

Sontag’s states that, “a photograph has only one language,” illuminates another reason why a photograph is such a powerful political tool.¹¹³ This universality of seeing and understanding a photograph allows its message to spread quicker. The visual vocabulary of photography broadens the audience, as compared to an article alone.¹¹⁴ This is part of why photography has become a global discourse, where the same image can become iconic in different countries and contexts.

At the close of her second chapter, Sontag discusses the various actors involved in the life of a photograph. A photographer is often criticized on the grounds of ethics and morality, however the scrutiny photographers face is not applied to the way organizations put these images to use. Sontag writes that, “The photographer’s intentions do not determine the meaning of the photograph, which will have its own career, blown by the whims and loyalties of the diverse communities that have use for it.”¹¹⁵ This, along with Azoulay’s literature on the evolution of a photograph, help establish the chronology of a photograph’s existence. In the article “The appeal of experience; the dismay of images: cultural appropriations of suffering in our times” the Kleinmans also find that a photograph goes through a process where it is remade, distorted, and thinned out in terms of content.¹¹⁶

113 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 20.

114 Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 20.

115 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 39.

116 Arthur Kleinman and Joan Kleinman, “The appeal of experience; the dismay of images: cultural appropriations of suffering in our times,” *Daedalus* (1996): 2.

Sontag moves on to articulate the pleasures of viewing suffering in Chapter Three. She discusses how the art historical taste for horror and tragedy has become a part of photography as well. Making images of real dead bodies surreal, as if they were a creation of a paintbrush. She writes that, "There is the satisfaction of being able to look at the image without flinching. There is the pleasure of flinching."¹¹⁷ This understanding of suffering as beautiful helps to explain the use of photographs throughout all my chapters. Specifically, Chapter Five hones in on the double standard for photography as a medium to express suffering.

Sontag's chapter entitled "In Plato's Cave," explores how the image has impacted society. In this chapter she regards the camera as a predatory weapon. She states that "Manufacturers reassure their customers that taking pictures demands no skill or expert knowledge, that the machine is all-knowing, and responds to the slightest pressure of the will. It's as simple as turning the ignition key or pulling the trigger. Like guns and cars, cameras are fantasy-machines whose use is addictive." This statement implies that responsibility is displaced on to the camera, not holding users responsible for their practice. There are no set moral rules or ethical practices controlling the way the way photography is practiced.

Sontag states that, "the image as shock and cliché are two aspects of the same presence," which can be seen as the initial recognition of the figure that Chouliaraki identifies as the ironic spectator.¹¹⁸ This idea of the ironic spectator is the focus and title of Chouliaraki's book, which explores the spectator's awareness of photographic manipulation, and the spectator's ambivalence towards images of suffering. She discusses the relationship between feeling and

117 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 41.

118 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 23.

doing in terms of spectatorship, and questions if focusing on feelings is the best way to mobilize viewers.¹¹⁹ The thesis of her book is that “only when we examine solidarity as a problem of communication, that is, as a moral claim seeking to reconcile the competing demands of market, politics and the media, that we can better understand how the spectacle of suffering is subtly but surely turning the West into a specific kind of public actor- the ironic spectator of vulnerable others.” Her exploration of ‘detached knowingness’ helps us to understand the underlying issues in the relationship between spectator and distant, disadvantaged others.

In her book, *The Ironic Spectator*, Chouliaraki argues that ‘the humanitarian social imaginary’ should be studied in terms of ‘performativity’.¹²⁰ Chouliaraki finds that ‘positive image’ appeals appear to empower distant sufferers through discourses of dignity and self determination but that they simultaneously disempower them by appropriating their otherness in Western discourses of identity and agency.¹²¹ These photographs suggest that empathy for an unequal counterpart can only occur when there are similarities drawn. Chouliaraki finds that spectators are still targeted as moral actors. She defines the ironic spectator as ‘an impure or ambivalent figure’ who is disinterested in moral appeals but is willing to do something for those who suffer.¹²² I find that this conception of the spectator can help us better understand how to better use photographs of displacement, and move beyond visuals of the ideal refugee.

119 Lilie Chouliaraki, *The Ironic Spectator: Solidarity in the Age of Post-humanitarianism* (Cambridge, Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013), 1.

120 Lilie Chouliaraki, "Post-humanitarianism: Humanitarian Communication Beyond A Politics Of Pity." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 13, no. 2 (2010): 113.

121 Lilie Chouliaraki, "Post-humanitarianism: Humanitarian Communication Beyond A Politics Of Pity." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 13, no. 2 (2010): 113.

122 Lilie Chouliaraki, *The Ironic Spectator: Solidarity in the Age of Post-humanitarianism* (Cambridge, Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013), 1.

Chouliaraki suggests that shock effect and positive image campaigns are grounded in market logic and persuasion. They manipulate emotion for their own interest, which may or may not be serving those they depict.¹²³ Humanitarian organizations operate under the conditions of marketization and mediatization, which define their legitimacy. On a similar note, Wilkinson notes that visualizations of human suffering are more valued for their potential to generate attention, support, and donations, than for its ability to authentically represent a social reality.¹²⁴ This becomes important in my critical analysis of humanitarian visual discourse.

Chouliaraki finds that humanitarian communication, no matter the photographic approach, is always under the threat of delegitimization by the public.¹²⁵ Sontag similarly suggests that all photographs are waiting to be explained or falsified by their captions. She then continues to discuss how the same image of dead children can be recontextualized and reused numerous times.¹²⁶ This speaks to how the same image can motivate a variety of reactions depending on how the photograph is framed contextually. The images power does not come from its factual matter, but from its ability to beckon an emotional response. This response can be manipulated to mobilize publics in a variety of different ways. The same image can lead onlookers to call for political action, sanctions, troops, and ceasefire agreements.

123 Lilie Chouliaraki, "Post-humanitarianism: Humanitarian Communication Beyond A Politics Of Pity." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 13, no. 2 (2010): 120.

124 Iain Wilkinson, "The provocation of the humanitarian social imaginary." *Visual Communication* 12, no. 3 (2013): 261.

125 Lilie Chouliaraki, "Post-humanitarianism: Humanitarian Communication Beyond A Politics Of Pity." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 13, no. 2 (2010): 107.

126 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 10-13.

Apart from conventional ploys, like emotional shock and positive imagery, there are new ways to approach visualizing humanitarian discourse. Chouliaraki discusses a new form of visual appeal regarding suffering, which she describes as the post-emotional style of appeal.¹²⁷ This image breaks away from typical notions of pity and privileges. This branding of suffering disengages public action from pity, and grand emotion towards suffering. It invites viewers to rely on their own judgement as to whether public action is desirable.¹²⁸ This new type of visual marks a shift away from photographic realism, and the use of a photograph as a form of authentic witnessing. Chouliaraki describes these ads as, momentarily engaging in practices of playful consumerism. She finds that the move to the post-emotional is a reaction to critical attitudes towards the relationship between politics and humanitarianism. These ads focus far less on morality and grand emotion. She also recognizes these ads as a response to the mediatized global market in which humanitarian agencies operate.¹²⁹ She views this as a positive attempt to renew the legitimacy of humanitarian communication.

Azoulay's work has greatly informed the chapters that follow because of her focus on the relationship between statelessness and photography, and how they challenge our understandings of citizenship. Azoulay finds that, to become a spectator is to become a citizen.¹³⁰ The critical approach that I take towards images of displacement is grounded in the work of Azoulay. In *The*

127 Lilie Chouliaraki, "Post-humanitarianism: Humanitarian Communication Beyond A Politics Of Pity." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 13, no. 2 (2010): 107.

128 Lilie Chouliaraki, "Post-humanitarianism: Humanitarian Communication Beyond A Politics Of Pity." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 13, no. 2 (2010): 115.

129 Lilie Chouliaraki, "Post-humanitarianism: Humanitarian Communication Beyond A Politics Of Pity." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 13, no. 2 (2010): 107.

130 Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 167.

Civil Contract Azoulay rethinks the political and ethical status of photography. She suggests that photography must be thought of as inseparability from the many catastrophes of recent history. Azoulay argues that photography is a particular set of relations between individuals to the power that governs them, and, at the same time, a form of relations among equal individuals that constrains this power. The civil contract of photography enables a subject to share with others the claim made or addressed by the photograph. She explores under what legal, political or cultural conditions does it become possible to see and to show disaster that befalls those flawed citizens in states of exception. Azoulay's work helps us understand state violence, violations of human rights, and the potential of the photographic witness.

In *The Civil Contract* Azoulay states that, "The assumption is that the photographs show or perform something that is already over and done, foreclosing the option of seeing photography as a space of political relations. In the political space that is reconstructed through the civil contract, photographed persons are participant citizens." This text helps us to better understand the actors involved, and the action of taking an image. Throughout my thesis I recognize the life of a photograph, and the process that follows after an image is captured. *The Civil Contract* also provides the framework for evaluating the relationship between a photograph and its context. Azoulay finds that, "A solitary image cannot testify to what is revealed through it, but must be attached to another image, another piece of information, another assertion or description, another grievance or piece of evidence, another broadcast, another transmitter. An image is only ever another statement in a regime of statements."¹³¹ This becomes particularly relevant in my discussion of photographs, and their corresponding text.

131 Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 191.

Azoulay's *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography* regards the photograph as merely one event in a sequence that constitutes photography. She also finds that this practice always involves an actual or potential spectator in the relationship between the photographer and the individual portrayed. The focus of this book is on the process and practice of photography, rather than the product. She analyzes relations of partnership, solidarity, and sharing that come into being at the expense of sovereign powers that threaten to destroy them. Azoulay argues that the "civil" must be distinguished from the "political" as the interest that citizens have in themselves, in others, in their shared forms of coexistence, as well as in the world they create and transform. Spectator is defined as one who looks on or watches, and takes no part in what they are observing- the role of the spectator in my discussion of Syrian displacement is focused on how to best express solidarity.¹³²

Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography acknowledges that the life of a photograph is eventually out of the control of the photographer, which is relevant in my discussion of different actor in the politicization of the photograph. On this subject Azoulay writes that, "The photograph...is never solely the realization of the preconceived plan or a vision of a single author, but is rather the outcome of an encounter. This encounter involves four protagonists at least – a camera, whoever stands behind the lens, whoever faces the lens, and whoever might become a spectator viewing the product of the encounter."¹³³ This helps reframe the way we think about the life of a photograph, and its influences. In the following chapters, the

132 Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 168.

133 Azoulay, Ariella, and Louise Bethlehem. *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography*. English-language ed. London: Verso, 2012.

relations discussed deviate from the traditional discourse surrounding spectator-spectacle relations.

The most important thing that Sontag does for us in *Regarding the Pain of Others* is to outline specific signifiers of exploitative photographic approaches. She finds that, distant sufferers are more likely to be photographed in close proximity, and that they are more likely to be individually focused on due to the anonymity typically assigned to 'others'. She suggests that a photographer would have to be more discreet in photographing recognizable individuals from the Western world. When regarding distant others, Sontag identifies hyper realism as a common attribute for images of death and suffering from Western audiences.¹³⁴ The more exotic the location of suffering the more likely it is that a photograph will be a full frontal of death.¹³⁵ It is best to avoid essentializing, naturalizing, or sentimentalizing suffering. There is this assumption that distant others must be protected and represented by Western professionals. Few local voices or acts are visualized to distant publics, instead most images fit into a neo-colonial framework.¹³⁶

Sontag is helpful in setting up some of the criticisms that photographs fall into, including the spectator's paranoia of manipulation. The camera has traditionally held the ability to 'beautify' subjects, and now its ability to 'uglify' has become a major concern to onlookers.¹³⁷ Western audiences have become particularly concerned with the exploitation of sentiment, emotional manipulation.¹³⁸ The 'How do I know this is real?' sensibility heightens mistrust,

134 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 62.

135 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 70.

136 Arthur Kleinman and Joan Kleinman, "The appeal of experience; the dismay of images: cultural appropriations of suffering in our times," *Daedalus* (1996): 7.

137 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 81.

138 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 80.

leaving the media and humanitarian organizations to prove the validity of their photographs.¹³⁹ However this distrust towards photographs indicates a misunderstanding of the camera. The camera is always biased, it is not simply a document of reality. The fear of a photograph's deceit reflects an irresponsible spectator, who is unable to think critically about images in general.

Sontag also warns that the feeling that nothing can be done leads to an unresponsive spectator.¹⁴⁰ When a viewer feels out of control and hopeless towards an image, their response may become bored, cynical, and apathetic.¹⁴¹ Due to the continued nature of the Syrian conflict people switch off to the terrible images.¹⁴² This is particularly relevant in my discussion of how social media perpetuates compassion fatigue towards images of suffering.

The familiarity of a photograph builds our sense of the present and immediate past. Photographs become visual references, contributing to collective memory associated with a set of images.¹⁴³ The issue Sontag takes issue with societies tendency to remember only through photographs.¹⁴⁴ Sontag discusses the flaws in the concept that "the camera is the eye of history." There is common idea that there is a duty to record, especially in times of war.¹⁴⁵ Photographs are

139 Cohen, Stanley, and Bruna Seu. *Knowing enough not to feel too much: Emotional thinking about human rights appeals*. Rutgers University Press, 2002.

140 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 100.

141 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 101.

142 Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 100.

143 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 85.

144 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 88.

145 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 52.

always a representation, not an absolute visualization of an event, which problematizes people's dependence on photographs for understanding and remembering history.

In *From Palestine to Israel*, Azoulay teaches us how to read the photograph as a document, one of the 'dual powers' or functions of the photograph as designated by Sontag. Sontag suggested that the dual powers of photography are to generate documents and to create works of visual art.¹⁴⁶ In *From Palestine to Israel*, Azoulay describes Palestinian displacement as a catastrophe, and regards it as an event without perspective.¹⁴⁷ This is an intriguing way to try to contemplate the images we view of Syrian displacement. This practice allows onlookers to really listen to the photograph, and formulate their perspective based upon the image itself.

Using the knowledge discussed in the pages above, I will move into a case study of photographic depictions of displaced Syrians. This literature review has served to identify the actors, the process, the constructs, and the discourses involved in photographing and distributing images of refugees. The works and concepts above have laid the backdrop for the discussion of photographic depictions of Syrian Displacement. Although many questions around how to best visualize solidarity continue to exist, at the conclusion of this literature review, I stress how vital an informed contemplative response is towards any photograph. The still nature of the photograph allows the viewer to contemplate without disturbance, and consider the variable impacting the photograph.¹⁴⁸ In the ensuing pages there will be photographs that completely diminish the agency of individual refugees, as well as photographs which seek to empower. By

146 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 76.

147 Ariella Azoulay, *From Palestine to Israel a Photographic Record of Destruction and State Formation, 1947-1950* (London: Pluto, 2011), 13.

148 Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 93.

comparing these various images we will approach the qualities that make a photograph better, or more responsible.

Chapter One

Refugees and Rebels: Drawing the Line in News and Media

As the crisis in Syria continues to burn on, those suffering as a result have continuously been covered in news and media. Iconic news media images exercise great power in the shaping of politics and public opinion. A photograph is a particularly powerful way to report information because only one language is required.¹⁴⁹ The spectator's perception of reality is created by the images of suffering that frequent their television screens and newspaper pages. War has become an integral part of domestic, television entertainment.¹⁵⁰ The most commonly shown images of the Syrian crisis are of refugees, rebels, and ISIS. Certain refugees have been selected by Western news empires and have become the face of Syrian displacement. The visual rhetoric surrounding Syrian displacement is widely centered around women and children as innocent victims. The other imagery central to the Syrian conflict is massive destruction and massive displacement, characterized by expanses of faceless refugees. The news is not monolithic in nature, and is unreliable in many senses. The news does not expose everyone's suffering, and the suffering presented is often inaccurate.¹⁵¹ There is a preference for narratives of victimhood, and a lack of stories focused on empowered figures of displacement who are agents of their own lives.

For the purposes of this chapter, references are primarily Western media sources. Western news stations have quantified the conflict and chosen the faces of human suffering. These visualizations of conflict and its impact have great intended impact. The practice of using refugee

149Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 20.

150Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 21.

151 Minear, Larry, and Colin Scott. *The News Media, Civil War, and Humanitarian Action*. Boulder, Colo.: L. Rienner, 1996.

imagery in News and Media is a persuasive political tool. The historical practice of using photographs of refugees in news and media is a very specific way to depict conflict. News images rarely focus on the alienation of displacement experienced by refugees. News reports on displacement are often presented in the context of a political problem or as a component of war.

In every war news takes a side. In the case of the Syrian conflict Western media first labeled the culprit as Assad, and now ISIS has become the central villain. The displaced women and children of Syria are the literal victims of the conflict, and their suffering is presented as the visual of the Syrian civil war. By emphasizing the hardship of the victims, the news has been able to create a blanket of guilt. The current discourse about public action relies heavily on the language of grand emotions about fatal suffering.¹⁵² The ethics of seeing images of violence and pain have been outlined in the literature review, and will continue to be analyzed through the lens of news and media.

In the case of the Syrian crisis there is a clear distinction between those who suffer and those who do not. There are viewers who observe the spectacle of Syrian suffering. This action is distinctly observation because the viewer does not share in the experience of suffering in any way.¹⁵³ In this relationship the viewers are those deemed fortunate. These viewers have both personal and public responses to images of suffering. The misery of the misfortunate can be ignored or inspire pity.¹⁵⁴ The way in which adversity is visualized in the news and media can be described as perverse, oblivious, morally unacceptable, and enlightening. The presentation and reaction to photographic depictions of Syrians in the news and media have been varied, and

152 Lillie Chouliaraki 108

153 Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering Morality, Media, and Politics* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 3.

154 Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering Morality, Media, and Politics* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 5.

worth closer analysis. An idealized photograph is imagined based on the intent of the media source.

The intent of sharing visual depictions of refugees in the news and media is often to mobilize action and solidarity with those suffering. A commitment to a cause or an issue is usually made through either speech or financial support. Financial support as a means of action is covered more in depth in the depiction of Syrian refugees by humanitarian organizations. For the discussion of news entities visualization of Syrian refugees I will focus on speech as the primary intention. Speech advocating for change and action has the potential to persuade governments and societies.¹⁵⁵ Onlookers speak about their emotional response to the visuals of suffering and the painful aesthetic of crisis. By articulating why these visuals impacted one person, it creates a larger group of concerned individuals. By vocalizing concern it displays a political commitment.

Today, news stories are rarely published without an accompanying image.¹⁵⁶ These images may be impacting public perception of the story more than the text is itself. Photographs can convey emotion in a way that news reports cannot. News images tend to dominate the text which they accompany.¹⁵⁷ Readers' eyes are first drawn to the image, which informs their entire

¹⁵⁵ Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering Morality, Media, and Politics* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), xv.

¹⁵⁶ Monika Bednarek, and Helen Caple, "Why do news values matter? Towards a new methodological framework for analysing news discourse in Critical Discourse Analysis and beyond," *Discourse & Society* (2014): 4.

¹⁵⁷ Monika Bednarek, and Helen Caple, "Why do news values matter? Towards a new methodological framework for analysing news discourse in Critical Discourse Analysis and beyond," *Discourse & Society* (2014): 5.

perspective before even beginning to read. Photojournalism can be defined as the visual reporting of newsworthy events. News photographs are simultaneously recognized as neutral documents and carefully crafted.¹⁵⁸ This causes onlookers to regard photographs as a “window into reality,” which is not questioned to the same degree in which traditional text news is. A photograph is often mistakenly regarded as evidence, a testimony of sorts. The news photograph, like news text, should be regarded as a retelling of events.¹⁵⁹ A photograph is more analogous to a reliable witness, and in some cases a biased witness.¹⁶⁰

Depictions of human rights abuses in news and media are usually utilized to mobilize governments, armies, businesses, or militias.¹⁶¹ Images of refugees are effective in gaining the attention of these structures by having an emotional impact on the mass public. Public opinion matters to governments, armies, businesses, and militia because they are vulnerable to feelings of dishonor, embarrassment, disgrace, or ignominy.¹⁶² Out of shame institutions and groups intrinsically incapable of guilt are put in a position in which they must act in accordance with public opinion. Governments play a significant role in creating public perception for Syrian refugees through their use of news and media. A lack of accurate information regarding Syrian refugees has had a role in the rise of hate speech towards Syrians in some host countries.¹⁶³ While refugees are portrayed as victims in Western media, the perception of refugees in host countries is quite different. Citizens of host nations often feel that their country is hosting

158 Monika Bednarek, and Helen Caple, “Why do news values matter? Towards a new methodological framework for analysing news discourse in Critical Discourse Analysis and beyond,” *Discourse & Society* (2014): 3.

159 Monika Bednarek, and Helen Caple, “Why do news values matter? Towards a new methodological framework for analysing news discourse in Critical Discourse Analysis and beyond,” *Discourse & Society* (2014): 7.

160 Monika Bednarek, and Helen Caple, “Why do news values matter? Towards a new methodological framework for analysing news discourse in Critical Discourse Analysis and beyond,” *Discourse & Society* (2014): 8.

161 Keenan, Thomas. 2004. Mobilizing shame. *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 103, (2): 435.

162 Keenan, Thomas. 2004. Mobilizing shame. *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 103, (2): 436.

163 <http://www.bianet.org/english/world/158008-14-ngos-underscore-syrian-refugee-rights-in-turkey>

refugees at their expense. While displaced Syrians are certainly not seeking to take anything from other communities in need, impoverished populations indigenous to the host nations have become jealous of the flow of external aid directed towards Syrian refugees.

Over exposure can result in voyeurism, compassion fatigue, or the obscenity of images. Many news images are intended to be a “wake-up call” to alert the public about some event or situation. In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Sontag notes the truth behind the journalism phrase, “If it bleeds, it leads.”¹⁶⁴ Sontag points out that journalistic photographs are intended to arrest attention, shock, and surprise, and that this practice is not novel or out of line.¹⁶⁵ Photographs of people’s pain is for the privileged and safe, these images are somehow supposed to make this distanced suffering more “real” to them.¹⁶⁶

Images of violence or suffering are often intended for an audience outside of the nation in which the situation is occurring. Images of suffering are often directed towards distant and privileged actors. Since the suffering does not directly impact distant nations, it is a concern that distant nations will not act without visual manipulation. Sontag describes the constituency for these images as ‘nominally concerned’ about the distant conflict.¹⁶⁷ These images are to help the intended audience ‘share’ this experience of suffering.¹⁶⁸ The second component of privilege is vital because without power and money, solidarity becomes devalued. Sontag’s literature on this matter is important in that it blatantly recognizes that images of distant suffering are manufactured purely for the consumption Western audiences.

164 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 18.

165 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 23.

166 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 7.

167 Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 7.

168 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 6.

Arendt suggests that compassion is directed towards specific beings in specific situations without any generalization, whereas pity generalizes as a means to deal with distance. A degree of locality and contact is necessary for compassion.¹⁶⁹ This suggests that compassion for distant refugees is impossible because there is no concrete connection between the spectator and sufferer. The politics of pity is simultaneously general and specific. While it is in the nature of politics to generalize, and take broad and quantitative stance on issues, pity requires a face.¹⁷⁰ To convey suffering and elicit pity it is necessary for the issue to be visualized and humanized. This is why articles often make use of personal, frontal photographs of a refugee but then attach the image to general information. This tactic still deprives refugees of their agency but it allows news entities to elicit pity.

As Kant suggests, the degree of pity felt is impacted by the disproportionate nature of suffering.¹⁷¹ This is why an image of a brutalized child garners a greater public response than that of a massive war between armed units. The intrinsic vulnerability and innocence that is assigned to childhood simplifies the issue at hand, and neutralizes one's ability to feel pity. For these images of suffering children to be effectively political they must not only be humanized and personal but be resolute in that they are representations of larger instances of suffering. The pity felt for a specific child or circumstance must be transferred to the larger issue. A degree of anonymity must be maintained so the viewer can see this child as interchangeable with any child that they may personally know.¹⁷² There is a careful balance to be held when using images of suffering children as a political tool.

169 Arendt 85-89 Arendt, Hannah. *The origins of totalitarianism*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1973.

170 Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering Morality, Media, and Politics* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 11.

171 Kant 12

172 12

The use of children in news and media tends to simplify the complexity of conflict and shock the viewer, making the face of suffering children a major political tool. This practice has been a part of photojournalism and reporting for many years with varying degrees of success and morality. Steve McCurry's Afghan Girl featured in National Geographic, Kevin Carter's Pulitzer prize winning image of the starving Sudanese child featured in the New York Times, and Huynh Cong Ut's Napalm girl are three of the most well known photographic depictions of global crisis and humanitarian concern. Images of suffering children are employed by news stations in insidious ways to manipulate emotional responses. In nearly all contexts children are considered to be inherently innocent, which allows the media to rely on these images for an emotional response. This reliability is the reason images of children have become a widely employed political tool.

The reliability of this visual tool is manipulated to make a wide range of arguments which contradict one and other. An image of a war torn child can become a compelling argument for a cease fire. While the same image can reveal the inhumanity of the villainous figure which caused the child's suffering. This can then lead to a demonization, the creation of an enemy, and cause for combat to 'protect the innocent'. The 'what if this was your child?' rhetoric can manipulate the emotions of distant others to create support for intervention. Either side of the argument is at a disadvantage if they do not address the death of children and the other side does. Sontag finds that, a viewer's response is determined by the text which accompanies a photograph.¹⁷³ This allows news stations and journalists to manipulate their viewers responses to the same image. Images of suffering children are deployed to bolster political arguments, and they continue to be effective in persuading Western publics.

¹⁷³Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 29.

The Sudanese child's exposed and emancipated body became emblematic of poverty and starvation in Africa. The Napalm girl became one of the most well known visuals of the atrocities of the Vietnam War. The Afghan girl is different in that the image allows her story to the viewers imagination. This image is most relevant to my discussion of child refugees in news and other media because of the girl's identity.



The Afghan girl's piercing eyes became the emblem of the Soviet occupation in Afghanistan. The girl was living in a refugee camp in Pakistan at the time the photograph was taken. Her tattered hijab frames her face, forcing the viewer to return their gaze back to her eyes. This image is effective in the way it confronts the viewer, bringing everything she represents into the consciousness of the viewer. The girls anonymity becomes the strength of the photograph in that she represented all displaced Afghans.

The article written by Debra Denker which accompanied Steve McCurry's photograph of the afghan war told a powerful personal story intertwined with a historical and political background to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the subsequent refugee crisis which drove a quarter of the country's population into Pakistan and Iran. In April of 1978, a coup brought a Marxist regime to power in Kabul, leading to an armed resistance shortly after. In 1979 thousands of Soviet troops invaded the country, claiming to have been invited under the terms of a 1978 friendship treaty. By the time the article and photograph were published 100,000 soviet troops were deployed. The 1985 article aligned with the United Nations in calling for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan.¹⁷⁴ In an interview many years later, the Afghan girl recalls Steve McCurry taking her photograph. She also recalls her anger and the stranger photographing her for the first time. The image of the Afghan girl tells the story of twenty-three years of war, 1.5 million individuals killed, and 3.5 million refugees.¹⁷⁵ She became a symbol of innocence, which clarified the argument against the Russian government. Her photograph will serve as a historical reference to photographs of refugee children throughout the proceeding pages.

The first selection of pictures I will discuss is representative of the typical depictions of Syrian refugees on mainstream news outlets. The second selection of photographs discussed in this chapter deviate from normative depictions. Press photographers are not traditionally known for their aesthetic compositions. Their photographs are more often than not regarded as a document or proof.¹⁷⁶ Within this chapter I will first discuss the typical representation of Syrian refugees in news and media. Then, I will discuss some exceptions that focus in more on aesthetic

174 Cathy Newman, "Afghan Girl." *A Life Revealed*, April 1, 2002. Accessed March 13, 2015.

175 Cathy Newman, "Afghan Girl." *A Life Revealed*, 2002.

176 Monika Bednarek, and Helen Caple, "Why do news values matter? Towards a new methodological framework for analysing news discourse in Critical Discourse Analysis and beyond," *Discourse & Society* (2014): 91.

quality as a way to enhance the document, and add emotion. A strong aesthetic understanding can conjure up a greater public response to the subject associated with the image. Within this chapter I will refer to news and media liberally as any sort of publications newspaper, magazine, journal, television program, or reporting website.

Images of migrating masses are one of the most common depictions of the Syrian refugee crisis. Division and separation are necessary components for the people identified as unfortunate to maintain that mass identity.¹⁷⁷ A successful image will make the spectator feel responsible in some way for the suffering, or at least compel them to take action. The rhetoric and visualization of refugees as a flood overflowing the Syrian borders is commonly used by nearly all news media sources. CBS news focuses on the border, the migration, the destruction, and violence in their photo series, 'Syrian refugees flood into Turkey.'¹⁷⁸ These images report the news story with a basic news approach that does not take note of the experience of Syrian refugees.

For instance one of BBC's recent stories begins with a photograph of a howling woman holding a hurt child. The image reveals no specific details but the composition invokes the Pietà. By using images that imitate religious scenes, news providers are able to gain empathy from viewers. This familiar imagery is easily understood, and therefore widely distributed due to the general public's religious literacy. The Pietà has been a theme throughout the history of Christian art. The image depicts the Virgin Mary supporting the body of the dead Christ.

The article is entitled "Syria crisis: Assad holds on in war without end". This title identifies the Assad as the reason compelling the displacement, which has now been displaced by rhetoric surrounding ISIS. Either way, this type of discourse draws a clear line between a

177 Monika Bednarek, and Helen Caple, "Why do news values matter? Towards a new methodological framework for analysing news discourse in Critical Discourse Analysis and beyond," *Discourse & Society* (2014): 13.

178 <http://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/syria-refugees-flee-isis-flood-into-turkey/14/>

villainous force and victims. This type of story sells, and is easy to comprehend but the political reality is far less cut and dry. This visual depicts refugees but leaves them nameless and decontextualized. The news story identifies the villain but leaves out this child's and woman's identities, and leaves them without agency. The article does not comment on the specifics of the circumstance, making both figures disenfranchised victims. The article villainizes Assad, and call on Western audiences to feel sympathy for the mother depicted. This visual of a grieving parent presenting their dead or dying child to a distant spectator is a convention intended to mobilize a military intervention in response to the regime's attacks.¹⁷⁹ The article does not allow the subjects to vocalize their perspectives or concerns.



The CBS news image below is a typical example of the way news sources create an anonymous, blanket identity for Syrian refugees.¹⁸⁰ The image does not include much detail about the experience of displacement, or about the background of those depicted. The image fails

179 http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/why-syrias-images-of-suffering-havent-moved-us/2013/09/13/30407f98-1bb3-11e3-8685-5021e0c41964_story.html

180 <http://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/syria-refugees-flee-isis-flood-into-turkey/15/>

to create a dramatic narrative, but it also does not really document any particular event or life. This type of photograph does not really broaden audiences understanding of the Syrian refugee crisis. The anonymous shadowed bodies of the supposed refugees, keeps pity at bay. This makes the photograph about the situation, not the people. While the photograph certainly does not exploit the personal suffering of refugees, it sheds the refugees depicted of their identity. The shadowed figures could be any refugee, which does little to go deeper into personal narratives of displacement.



The next image below of sprawling tents is from a recent Wall Street Journal article . This image serves as the journal's representation of Syrian refugees.¹⁸¹ This image and the prior CBS News images use generalizations, to pull away from the identity of those impacted. These images maintain distance, and contribute to the dehumanizing visual rhetoric surrounding Syrian refugees in the news. The photo of a refugee camp suggests that the presence of the refugee

¹⁸¹ Albayrak, Ayla. "Outlook Darkens for Syria Refugees in Turkey." The Wall Street Journal. December 26, 2014. Accessed March 12, 2015.

matters more than the individual refugees. Refugee camps have become symbolic of a loss of human dignity and hope.



The aerial images of the Zaatari camp in Jordan reveal rows of dusty trailers and tents. These images have become one component of imagining the reality of the Syrian war. These iconic images of war and displacement contribute to the humanitarian and political discourse. The other most widely recognized photographic depictions of the Syrian war are of suffering children, many being refugees. Images of the chemical focus on the inhumanity of the Syrian conflict, while the aerial shots of the camp capture the scale. These two different perspectives piece together outsiders' perspectives on the Syrian crisis.¹⁸²

The photographer and media source play a very important role in filtering the images presented to the public, thus controlling public perception of Syrian refugees. There is a threshold, which determines what stories and images make in into the news.¹⁸³ Some factors which determine a story or photographs presence in news coverage are timeliness, proximity,

¹⁸² Beehner, Lionel. "Heed Syria Refugee Crisis: Column." USA Today. September 8, 2013. Accessed February 17, 2015. <http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2013/09/08/syrian-refugees-us-military-action-column/2783105/>.

¹⁸³ Monika Bednarek, and Helen Caple, "Why do news values matter? Towards a new methodological framework for analysing news discourse in Critical Discourse Analysis and beyond." *Discourse & Society* (2014): 23.

consonance, and superlativeness.¹⁸⁴ News stations and papers often have an affinity for negative stories. A common phrase in journalism suggests that, 'If it bleeds, it leads.' This is indicative of the value of negativity in news and media.¹⁸⁵ This concept is what defines the visual discourse concerning the plight of Syrian refugees. Their stories are considered newsworthy because it is seen to have a destabilizing effect that reaches beyond their own lives, into issues of international relations.

Political violence pushes its victims into other countries, and transfers responsibility to governments and societies of the nations in receipt of these displaced peoples. The receiving countries have been developing a new and frequently negative rhetoric about newcomers and asylum seekers. As I mentioned in the historical preface of this thesis, refugees are often perceived as a combined threat to national identity and to economic security. The line is blurring between people forced to leave their homes because of violence and those who face illness or starvation based upon the disarray of Syrian society.

The refugee crisis has been widely reported on due to the effect of the crisis. It has and will continue to have impacts on a global scale.¹⁸⁶ This means that the lives of refugees in Syria are newsworthy because they hold some degree of 'relevance' to the lives of viewers. By continually focusing on the same negative aspects of events in Syria and surrounding areas, the

184 Monika Bednarek, and Helen Caple, "Why do news values matter? Towards a new methodological framework for analysing news discourse in Critical Discourse Analysis and beyond," *Discourse & Society* (2014): 28.

185 Monika Bednarek, and Helen Caple, "Why do news values matter? Towards a new methodological framework for analysing news discourse in Critical Discourse Analysis and beyond," *Discourse & Society* (2014): 26.

186 Monika Bednarek, and Helen Caple, "Why do news values matter? Towards a new methodological framework for analysing news discourse in Critical Discourse Analysis and beyond," *Discourse & Society* (2014): 28.

news is reinforcing narrow, preconceived views that do not reach beyond numbers and policy decisions.¹⁸⁷

When governments and societies uphold policies based on solidarity and human understanding, they are able to prevent the victim blaming that can be displaced onto refugees in their new contexts. By creating a clear, positive image of refugees the media is best able to combat indifference and negativity. Indifference can be regarded as an act of injustice by omission. Solidarity helps to halt the tendency to see the world solely from one's own perspective.

Refugees often become a part of global rhetoric concerning crisis and war, pushing the individual humans out of public consciousness. Many news stations try to combat this issue with imagery of individual refugees and their stories. Regardless of personal politics greater amounts of audiences are attracted to a story if it is personalized, which is often achieved through the visual aspects of a news story.¹⁸⁸

Journalists and news reporters become responsible for articulating stories of personal identity in a way that empowers. While viewers should not rely on the photojournalist as a fair-minded witness, this is something to strive for.¹⁸⁹ Responsible media sources should present the news in its larger context by avoiding generalizations, including the everyday difficulties refugees face, not just the issues that they present to the international community. Refugees are often referenced in terms of their impact on the international system, and the strain that they place on host countries. The discussion of refugees as a 'flowing' entity includes discourses

187 Monika Bednarek, and Helen Caple, "Why do news values matter? Towards a new methodological framework for analysing news discourse in Critical Discourse Analysis and beyond," *Discourse & Society* (2014): 28.

188 Monika Bednarek, and Helen Caple, "Why do news values matter? Towards a new methodological framework for analysing news discourse in Critical Discourse Analysis and beyond," *Discourse & Society* (2014): 29.

189 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 35.

about 'spillover' into other countries. Refugees are regarded as a problem in need of solving. Many would guess that solving the issue entails humanitarian aid but there is little discussion surrounding the daily needs of a refugee. Refugees should have their point of view represented fairly by the media and not silenced by the discussion of policy making and money raising. Refugees, asylum seekers and displaced people have a right to communicate. They cannot exercise this right through many mainstream media outlets.¹⁹⁰

Many News websites are a mixed bag of photographs; some personalized and unique, others falling into traditional conventions. A major problem with New's websites framing of the Syrian refugee crisis is that it is framed solely in terms of life in refugee camps, and do not challenge themselves to show the varied experiences of Syrian refugees. As I have shown there are many vague, unrepresentative, misrepresentative, and inaccurate portrayals of Syrian refugees in the media. Within this following section I will discuss more accurate, varied depictions of Syrian refugees found within mainstream news and media. Accurate portrayals of refugees call on the media to break the silence of indifference and to overcome the temptation of sensationalism and support instead a new ethical vision for a just and accurate understanding of today's massive involuntary population movements.

A number of Mainstream news websites including CBS News and Washington Post cover traditional narratives of the Syrian crisis but have also made strides to use photographs to help the public engage with the personal stories of displacement. The Washington Post has created a page entitled, "Refuge", which tells the stories of eighteen refugees both through narratives and photographs. This series was photographed by Linda Davidson, who also does other

190 Monika Bednarek, and Helen Caple, "Why do news values matter? Towards a new methodological framework for analysing news discourse in Critical Discourse Analysis and beyond," *Discourse & Society* (2014): 29.

photographic stories for the Washington Post. In order to breakdown the size and complexity of the refugee crisis stemming from the Syrian conflict, she captured 18 personal stories. This is in contrast to more typical news representations of nameless and faceless refugees that focus on numbers and political implications. This photo series takes a more all encompassing approach, which acknowledge the diversity within the category of 'Syrian Refugees'.¹⁹¹ The Washington Post attempts to break down the impersonal rhetoric of Western media when discussing refugees. These images and stories have of course been carefully selected, which reinforces some stereotypes but others break from the traditional narratives surrounding mass displacement and child suffering.



I have chosen the photograph, and story of Mouneer Kalthoum to discuss because of its deviation from normal framings of the refugee experience. Kalthoum's story is striking because he is an employed, adult male who sews to survive. He is displaced from Aleppo, and is one of

¹⁹¹ Sullivan, Kevin, and Linda Davidson. "Refuge: 18 Stories from the Syrian Exodus." Washington Post. January 1, 2013. Accessed November 12, 2014. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/syrian-refugees/story/refuge/>.

the thousands of Syrian refugees living in Istanbul. The image of Kalthoum featured on the right shows the long houred, working realities of life post displacement. The Washington Post discusses his past career as a contractor with a decent salary, and a number of his own employees. Including Kalthoum, Many of the Syrian men employed at the sewing shop have university degrees, and had prosperous jobs in Syria. These types of stories are relevant because they show that ultimate suffering and death are not the only problems faced by Syrian refugees. Displacement alone presents a number of issues such as a loss of all material goods, family, and livelihoods. Turkish workers are generally paid more than twice what the Syrians earn.¹⁹² Kalthoum is still responsible for paying the rent for an apartment, which houses eleven of his family members.

This narrative, like the others that compose the Washington Post's photo essay series use quotes from those depicted. This provides a degree of agency that is not present in traditional news stories. This allows refugees to advocate for themselves, and personally describe the interruption of their lives. For example, Kalthoum's opinion is quoted saying, "My life doesn't exist anymore" and that, "My future is lost, but I am worried about my children's future. I feel like I can do nothing for them, and it's awful."

Images of Syrian refugees have garnered widespread attention and recognition for many photojournalists. The work of a photojournalist is to convey their vision and experience to a distant audience. Sontag describes journalists as professional, specialized tourists.¹⁹³ Multiple photojournalists from the Associated Press have won the 2013 Pulitzer prize in breaking news photography for their coverage of the civil war in Syria, many of these images depict

192 Sullivan, Kevin, and Linda Davidson. "Refuge: 18 Stories from the Syrian Exodus." Washington Post. January 1, 2013. Accessed November 12, 2014. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/syrian-refugees/story/refuge/>.

193 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 18.

displacement and suffering.¹⁹⁴ I have selected a few of these highly acclaimed photos, to analyze some of the political and photographic tools that I have previously outlined.



Photojournalist, Manu Brabo, captured the image above near Dar el-Shifa hospital in Aleppo in October 2012. It depicts an anonymous Syrian man crying over the body of his son. The boy was killed by the Syrian government forces. The anguish of the father and the limpness of the boy's body emulates the iconography of the Pieta, similar to the BBC image of the weeping mother. The familiarity of this triangular, parent-child formation ties it to the suffering of Christianity, regardless of the religion of those depicted. Christianity may have had no presence in the reality of this photo, however it is quite possible that it had to do with the photographs selection, presentation, and intended audience. Brabo's image follows Western aesthetics of suffering.¹⁹⁵ This target audience might very well be Christian. There is a sense of urgency associated with the classic Christian ideal of the Good Samaritan.¹⁹⁶ The father's lack of eye

194 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2013/apr/16/pulitzer-prize-winning-coverage-syria#/?picture=407280783&index=1>

195 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 80.

196 Lilie Chouliaraki 119

contact suggests that he is unaware of being caught in camera, giving the perception of authenticity, which is constantly in question. The man's anguish and the boy's bloodied body testify to the father's despair. The realism used in this photograph places it into an ethically questionable zone. On one hand the image is a documentation of an event but it also capitalizes on the shock value of the imagery.



Muhammed Muheisen has also gained recognition for this image of a maimed child. The image above is of ten year old Abdullah Ahmed, who suffered burns in a Syrian government air strike. These events led his his family to flee their home. The image depicts Ahmed outside of his family's tent at a refugee camp for Syrians in the village of Atmeh. The child becomes the epitome of a spectacle of pity. His misfortune is photographed to bring guilt to those more fortunate, in hopes of mobilizing a response from the international community. The spectator's relationship with the child in this image is activated by the feeling of discomfort evoked by his helplessness. This photograph serves as a documentation of the physical suffering of many

refugees, young and old. A survey found that one in fifteen Syrian refugees in Jordan has been injured as a result of the war, and one in thirty refugees in Lebanon.¹⁹⁷ While deeply concerning, the photograph does not cross over into the territory of shocking. The photograph was not taken at the moment of suffering, or of the open wounds immediately following. This photograph simply presents the boy's situation, which is not unique to him but common amongst Syrian refugees.



Rodrigo Abda depicts a family escaping from fighting between Free Syrian Army fighters and government troops in Idlib. This photograph's composition immediately draws the eye of the onlooker to the family transitioning out of the shadows. The bleak skyline adds drama and narrative to the image. The composition, lighting, and mood of the photograph strengthen the message attached to it.

197 Skinner, Marcus. "The impact of displacement on disabled, injured and older Syrian refugees." *Revista Migraciones Forzadas* no. 47 (September 2014): 39-40. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 11, 2014).

Images that follow the conventions of art can gain more respect and 'legitimacy' for that reason. Turning suffering into art holds a higher perception of morality, than images with less character and aesthetic integrity. The agendas behind these less beautiful images are usually easier to recognize, and delegitimize the image, and unfortunately the experience of the refugee. There is something pleasurable in seeing suffering, this is in some way made more acceptable if the image itself is aesthetically pleasing.

Sontag suggests that poorly composed photographs hold a certain power by making the event of suffering seem coincidental, and not staged. She describes this as an anti-art style. She finds that these images are widely regarded as more authentic, and less manipulative.¹⁹⁸ I find that this is still employed by news stations, however I find that there has been a shift towards a preference in aesthetically pleasing photographs. The beauty of an image lessens the viewers awareness of spectatorship, it gives the image another purpose apart from exploiting another's suffering.

Sontag recognizes suffering's role in art history and aesthetics.¹⁹⁹ I believe that this is another reason beautiful images of suffering are regarded as more successful. In mimicking famous iconography, and creating a balanced composition photographers are able to gain praise for an image's content and beauty. Sontag does note the dual powers of photography as documents and works of visual art.²⁰⁰ I find that an image which contains both aspects makes a stronger case for what the image is used to argue. A photograph does no longer need to lack in aesthetic quality to gain legitimacy, there are other ways to convey an ephemeral moment of urgency. The use of active figures is one such convention employed to suggest that the

198 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 27.

199 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 41.

200 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 76.

photograph is not staged. This tool is what makes Abda's photograph above particularly convincing, and seemingly less manipulative.



The next photograph I have selected is by Manu Brabo. In his image above he pictures displaced Syrians waiting for food near an NGO charity kitchen in a refugee camp near Azaz. This image sheds some light on the reality of NGO sponsored camps. Most NGOs are unwilling to display the disparity of child and adult alike. This image is common, which helps onlookers to feel less manipulated. This occurrence is not an extreme circumstance, it just highlights the everyday plight of the Syrian refugee. It tells a more individualized narrative of life in a refugee camp, rather than trying to depict a general image of the Syrian conflict. Thorough, individual stories provide agency, while still reporting on the crisis. Individualized images and stories inherently exclude the stories of others, however if these stories focus on a variety of demographics, they can do more to help Western audiences understand the plight of Syrian refugees than generalized depictions of the population as whole. Although one individual can not signify the reality experienced by all refugees, that one individual will be able to convey more

specific information than an article based on numbers and quotes from UN officials. Likewise a personal image can provide more information to the viewer about life after displacement than an nondescript image of tents.

Age and gender analysis shows that working-age men are bearing the brunt of the exposure to risk of injury. This is partially related to their role in the fighting, but also due to their responsibility for retrieving food and water. Some Syrian men are also responsible for returning to Syria to check on their family's property and assets.²⁰¹ This image shows a few of the many faces of the displaced men from Syria. Brabo's photograph focuses on a demographic of refugees less common in comparison to more favorable images of displaced women and young children. The men's reaches grasping at the air serve as a symbolic plea for help to the international public. The photo also emphasizes the role of humanitarian support in refugee support. This news photograph emphasizes the contextualization of refugee-hood in terms of humanitarian relief, which is further discussed in chapter three.

201 Skinner, Marcus. "The impact of displacement on disabled, injured and older Syrian refugees." *Revista Migraciones Forzadas* no. 47 (September 2014): 39-40. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 11, 2014).



The last photograph that I have selected from this series was taken by Manu Brabo. It captures Syrian refugees crossing from Syria into Turkey from the Orontes river. Again, this image gains legitimacy because it makes no attempts to caricaturize the Syrian refugees depicted, or force them into a mold. The family's nice clothing sheds light on the other class of refugees, less commonly depicted. Many of the Syrians forced from their homes were not poor, and many were in fact affluent. Many of these higher socio-economic families had to leave everything behind. However these refugees are representative of Syria's skilled workforce. These families have been resettling elsewhere, and have continued to work. These refugees are not as commonly depicted because they are not readily available to photograph by NGOs. This image can be seen as a document, in comparison to the images that I discussed earlier in this chapter.

Four in five refugees are women or children.²⁰² To some extent, this statistic helps legitimize the news' abundant usage of child imagery in the context of the Syrian conflict. As discussed in the context of the Afghan girl earlier in this chapter, the unease felt by the spectator

202 <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/53be84aa4.pdf>

in viewing images children in the context of war is central to the new's control over the emotional use of refugees. The innocent child is a key symbol of humanitarian discourse, it calls for the intervention of the adult. This plays into the dynamic of the adult gaze.²⁰³ These images of children are less vulnerable to fatigue of horrific images because of the absolute innocents assigned to children, and the absolute moral obligation felt by adults to save children, in addition to their distance. Western audiences know relatively little about displaced Syrian children, so it easy to presume their innocence. These children pose no threat to Western families.

While there have been many poignant and respectful images of Syrian refugees in the news since the start of the conflict, these images are not as frequent as those which perpetuate misconceptions. A major problematic framing of Syrian refugees has to do with the lack of concern for their personal experiences, and overshadowing focus on ISIS and Assad. This is why ABC news, among many other news sites focuses on children, because of their non controversial nature. This type of content in non political, it helps to further separate refugees from ISIS in the eyes of the public.

Even dramatized images and news stories of Syrian displacement have faded away from public attention, and have been replaced with images of Islamic State militants. While the problems persist, the media has to keep up the pressure and support for Syrian victims. The media reflects and influences public opinion, which allows the media to comprehend the best way to mold societies perspectives and concerns.²⁰⁴

The shift in news coverage toward ISIS is unsurprising due to shock fatigue towards issues of suffering, and America's visual rhetoric towards terrorism. The latest depictions of

203 Karen Wells, "The melodrama of being a child: NGO representations of poverty," *Visual Communication* 12, no. 3 (2013): 285.

204 Tomasi, Silvano M. 1992. Today's refugees and the media. *Migration World Magazine* 20, (5): 21.

refugee migration is characterized as 'fleeing ISIS,' rather than 'fleeing Assad.' This National Geographic image below is part of a recent photo series by John Stanmeyer depicting the most recent influx of Syrians escaping ISIS, across the Turkish border. I National Geographic's images in this chapter because they report news events.²⁰⁵ This photo series focuses on some of the traditional symbols of displacement; mother and child. However the series serves as more of a documentation of displacement, rather than a dramatized story of terrorism and victimization. The article touches upon ISIS but is centered around the experience Syrian refugees, and the visuals reflect this. In this photo series National Geographic employs photographs as documents, in a way closer to that of Azoulay than traditional news outlets. Azoulay regards the photograph as a document, which she tries to consider biases in order to interpret what a photograph captures.



National Geographic's approach to photography focuses on realism and naturalism.

National Geographic, like many other publications, rely on a documentary mode of representing

²⁰⁵ Johnson, Scott. "Photographer Captures Tens of Thousands Fleeing ISIS, Entering Turkey." National Geographic. September 21, 2014. Accessed March 1, 2015.
<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/09/1409021-syria--turkey-refugees-islamic-state-pictures-photography/>.

suffering in its images. By taking a realism approach to photography, magazines and papers can assuage concerns of manipulation. While a photograph never accurately depicts reality, the less it relies on symbolism and emotion, the less skeptical spectators become. This is not to say realism is the only way refugees should be represented, or that it makes them more ethical. Naturalistic photographs give onlookers the perception that the image, article, and publication are reputable.

National Geographic's seemingly natural images are further legitimized by the magazine's use of aesthetics. As was the case with the Afghan girl, National Geographic images exemplify a high degree of skill. Respect for the photography can translate into respect for the news source and the associated story. Images of beauty are less likely to elicit scrutiny and delegitimization because their aesthetics make them seem less political and controversial.



The National Geographic article details, the “influx of many middle class people wandering in wearing slacks and dresses and jackets, even carrying elegant handbags.” The photographer describes this visual, as the moment he realized that this could become anyone's reality, including his own. This type of realization is absent from mainstream rhetoric

surrounding pity.²⁰⁶ By providing the testimony of the photographer, the article is strengthened and the photograph is legitimized. By including his insight, National Geographic acknowledges the relationship between photographer and subjects. This relationship is widely unrecognized, and many publications attempt to erase any allusion to the presence of the photographer. By contextualizing his photograph with his words, it sheds light on a relationship which is normally invisible to the spectator.

The news has tried to force many Syrians into prior contexts of pity, which involve poverty and starvation. The story of Syrian displacement is ultimately about loss. Many Syrians do not fit into the mold of emaciated bodies, which should not minimize their suffering. It should instead have the effect described in this article, it should help viewers to relate. This is the kind of suffering Western audiences should be able to understand, where as many other forms of institutionalized suffering and impoverishment are unrelatable. This is not to suggest that sympathy should only be given in relatable circumstances, however National Geographic's ability to embrace this aspect of Syrian displacement is a strength. In discussing the Syrians fleeing ISIS, the article details that, "there was a perpetual influx of men, women and children from all walks of life."

While there are few personalized images of, and direct quotes from refugees, the article references a number of specific stories from the most recent influx of Syrian refugees. Then there are images included in the article that serve more as a snapshot of an event. The photograph below serves as a record or document of the act of forced migration. This depiction of crossing the Turkish-Syrian border does not serve to further dramatize the experience of displacement.

206 Johnson, Scott. "Photographer Captures Tens of Thousands Fleeing ISIS, Entering Turkey." National Geographic. September 21, 2014. Accessed March 1, 2015.
<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/09/1409021-syria--turkey-refugees-islamic-state-pictures-photography/>.



Similar to National Geographic, Times takes a more artistic approach to photographic reporting. The image below is from December of 2013, and depicts two boys in the Za'atari refugee camp. The boys are carrying their daily ration of bread from the World Food Programme. James Nachtwey from TIME magazine took this photograph. He specializes in documenting wars, conflicts and critical social issues.²⁰⁷ He uses his aesthetic talent to contribute to a narrative about life as a child in a refugee camp. Different aesthetic approaches in the delivery of news images can provide a greater sense of legitimacy to the image itself, and the story attached. The photographer offers up certain deductions to the viewer.

In conclusion of this chapter, I would like to acknowledge the diversity of images employed to record and represent Syrian displacement. I find that traditional news outlets tend to fail in depicting refugees in a responsible way. They tend to irresponsibly present refugees in a way that disenfranchises them, exploits them, and uses them to strategically manipulate spectators. In some ways news stations have become travel channels of to satisfy a privileged

²⁰⁷ Nachtwey, James. "Syrian Refugees by James Nachtwey." Time. January 23, 2014. Accessed February 17, 2015. <http://time.com/3399392/syrian-refugees-by-james-nachtwey/>.

audience's thirst for suffering. While I do not promote exploitative uses of photography, I acknowledge that depicting individual refugees is not the intent of most major news media sources, and that these narratives can become mundane and contribute to compassion fatigue. They value the ability of images to mobilize governments and militaries, over their ability to reveal the perspectives and needs of the displaced. This is problematic because the mainstream visual discourse of Syrian refugee-hood is monopolized by humanitarian regimes and media representation. Having this type of control demands a degree of responsibility. While the images discussed in the later half of this chapter are flawed in some ways, they are a step away from traditional visual discourses of homeless children, limp bodies, and faceless masses. Decontextualized photographs of cruelty and misery have led spectators to concerns and suspicions. The more individualized photographs capitalize on these attitudes of distrust towards generalized narratives in order to share the voices of the displaced. Images of large scale cultural destruction, massive numbers of refugees, homeless children, and now ISIS, have become the facades of the Syrian crisis within the context of Western media. Massive numbers and emotionally striking visuals have narrated the Syrian crisis thus far.

Chapter Two

Sharing Refugee Statuses

Phrases like 'its worth your time' beckoning a response, just a click of a mouse, a like of a picture. This is one of the ways humanitarian organizations employ social media, guilting onlookers to venture from their news feeds onto humanitarian websites. To compete with the constant stream of images, those advocating for political or social causes must put forth their most provocative image. With seconds to grab the attention of as many onlookers as possible, it is necessary to create the perception of the picture perfect refugee. This process reinforces stereotypes, and further strips displaced Syrians of their agency.

The visuals and stories spread on the internet mold the fears, and formulate the publics' reality of Syrian displacement. Syrian refugees have become mass mediated spectacles on global, social media platforms. Stemming from the findings in chapter one, this chapter sets out to discuss how online media further desensitizes the public to images of suffering, while also gaining awareness. This chapter explores social media as a tool that could bring about agency for Syrian refugees, or further misconceptions. This chapter also explores if 'moral agency' has a place on Facebook. I discuss the ways in which social media can contribute to the process of returning agency and authenticity to refugees, and how social media can reinforces negative practices of picture sharing.

In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Sontag takes note of the unlimited ability to doctor or manipulate images.²⁰⁸ This practice has become even more prevalent in photographs shared on social media because there is no specific organization or company to be held responsible for image alterations. A photograph shared by a social media user requires no merits or skill. As a

208 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 58.

result of social media, new visualizations of the human experience have radically transformed societies social understanding. While some images reach beyond typical depictions, many photographs on social media fit comfortably into orientalist stereotypes. The most and least accurate images of refugees become subject to public opinion through social media, which helps gage the gap between reality and perception.

The images discussed in this section may align with those presented in Chapter One and Three of this thesis because news entities and humanitarian organizations greatly contribute to the online rhetoric and visual discourse concerning Syrian refugees. However this chapter's primary focus is to analyze what social media as an intermediary can accomplish for the rights and representation of Syrian Refugees, as well as how it has contributed to their detriment and suffering. I will discuss how social media has led to the advertisement of humanitarian concerns for public attention, and how this has created a new ethical dialogue about emotional persuasion.

Much of Sontag's "On Photography" is very relevant to the discussion of representation on social media. Sontag suggests that there is a natural human appetite for pain and degradation.²⁰⁹ I find that this affinity becomes more commonplace as a result of the mass of violent images that can be found on the internet. This attraction is not rare in any way, sadism is common in mass culture.²¹⁰ Distant and decontextualized images of violence and suffering lead to a sense of helplessness and passivity that dulls feeling.²¹¹ Sontag concludes that attention is limited towards news images, and I find that this short attention span becomes even more

209Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 97.

210Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 100.

211Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 102.

problematic for social media campaigns.²¹² Photography has become a mass art form, meaning many practicing photographers do not practice it as an art. Sontag indicates that the photograph has become a utility in our cultural power-dynamics: it is mainly a social rite, a defense against anxiety, and a tool of power.²¹³ Facebook and Instagram have caused further increases in amateur photography. Social media allows massive amounts of people to become involved in cultural experiences in far away places. This provides people with the opportunity to radically revise their understandings of what is possible or desirable in terms of social and political change.²¹⁴

Social media perpetuates the colonial gaze between Western audiences and distant sufferers, in this case Syrian refugees. The colonial gaze integrated into the imagery of Syrian refugees on social media websites generalizes the population with orientalist and over simplified narratives. The colonial gaze further distances the relationship between the spectator and the refugee, perpetuating issues of indifference and desensitization that I have already identified as problematic. The reason this discourse continues is because it gains attention by making the typical Western individual feel complicit in distant suffering because they are 'comfortable.' The spectator's complicity in the Syrian crisis creates the desired effect of mobilization and action but leaves many Syrians misrepresented and silenced. Social media rhetoric tends to reinforce the Western legacy of power exertion.²¹⁵

212 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 106.

213 Maria Popova, "Aesthetic Consumerism and the Violence of Photography: What Susan Sontag Teaches Us about Visual Culture and the Social Web," Brain Pickings RSS., Accessed November 13, 2014, <http://www.brainpickings.org/2013/09/16/susan-sontag-on-photography-social-media/>.

214 Maria Popova, "Aesthetic Consumerism and the Violence of Photography: What Susan Sontag Teaches Us about Visual Culture and the Social Web," Brain Pickings RSS., Accessed November 13, 2014, <http://www.brainpickings.org/2013/09/16/susan-sontag-on-photography-social-media/>.

215 Chouliaraki, L. "Post-humanitarianism: Humanitarian Communication Beyond A Politics Of Pity." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 13, no. 2 (2010): 111.

The discovery and representation of information on human rights abuses through photographic forms of realism is central to most human rights work. Nearly all humanitarian organizations have a social media presence. Human rights activists and organizations serve as “collectors, filterers, translators, and presenters of information regarding human rights violations.”²¹⁶ Human rights activists deploy media in order to produce social change.²¹⁷ The purpose of circulating humanitarian images of refugees is to generate political action. Political action can be achieved through direct pressure on governments to change their policies, or through the mobilization of individuals on a grassroots level.²¹⁸ This type of activism makes use of traditional media techniques around celebrity and publicity.²¹⁹ The production, circulation, and distribution of photograph of displacement on social media outlets is dictated by the consumerist nature of social media. Some human rights activists effectively use social media activism, while others perpetuate problematic discourses that silence refugees.

Employing abstract universal discourses with photo journalistic realism creates the impression that the information is simply fact. The inclusion of photographic proof creates the illusion of transparency.²²⁰ When humanitarian organizations or news outlets present their findings to the public in this way, they are able to appear credible. In the case of humanitarian online discourse, this visual rhetoric perpetuates the perception of impartiality. Photographs helps legitimize social media user’s assertions about distant suffering.

This form of human rights media utilizes symbols, images, and stories of suffering that emphasize distance. Online humanitarian discourse is dependent upon the construct of “other,”

216 (Keck and Sikkink 1998 3).

217 McLagan 606

218 McLagan 606

219 McLagan 605

220 Stanley Cohen and Bruna Seu, *Knowing enough not to feel too much: Emotional thinking about human rights appeals* (Rutgers University Press, 2002), 518.

their need, and moral worth. This process creates a temporary connection between Western audiences and “others,” which is enough for the disadvantaged spectacle to become a political project. Mass mediated spectacles of suffering tend not to facilitate permanent emotional engagement. After an extended amount of time viewing an image indifference and empathy subside.²²¹ To combat the mass repetition of shocking images present on social media, human rights activists use explicit framing devices that use specifically targeted information to provoke action.²²²

Visuals of bloodied, possessionless Syrians simplify the refugee conflict for the spectator at the expense of refugees. As I touched upon in chapter one, there are preconceptions regarding the class and socioeconomic status of displaced Syrians. The depiction of all Syrian refugees as inherently poor follows past models of spectator-victim relations. Mainstream visualizations do not reflect the diversity of the displaced demographics. Women, and disadvantaged or vulnerable groups such as the disabled and elderly are underrepresented and silenced by mainstream discourses on social media outlets.

What does it mean to “like” an image of a Syrian Refugee? The act of liking on facebook and similar social media websites quantifies suffering. The commodification of suffering is a result of social media’s ability to mass produce images, and the tendency to market images. The competitive marketing of images, and their accompanying text leads to further dramatization of the refugee narrative. The constant reframing of the Syrian conflict and Syrian refugees on social media amplifies the deprivation of agency for those visualized. Social media can be used to control and compact representations of individuals, or entire groups of peoples- especially the

221 Susan Moeller, *Compassion fatigue: How the media sell disease, famine, war and death*, (Psychology Press, 1999), 2.

222 McLagan 606

voiceless. Social media also elevates the level of compassion fatigue in regard to images of suffering.²²³

The recent global spread of electronic and new digital technologies has transformed the way in which social movements organize their public relations. Social movements, organizations, and businesses alike participate in an online discourse of 'image politics'. This use of the photograph has become increasingly central to the ways in which political claims are being made.²²⁴ By spreading a compelling image, social media users are able to get their attached message out to broader audiences.

Whereas sharing an image of a refugee with a spectator's own emotional response is more analogous to traditional forms of speaking as a form of action, the action of liking commodifies suffering. As mentioned in the literature review of this thesis, speech is seen as one of two primary mobilized responses to visuals of suffering. Social media platforms provide users with the ability to comment on an issue, and have their opinion instantly and widely known. Users are able to disseminate information regarding a cause with which they align or disagree with. By prescribing solutions in addition to images of displaced Syrians, human rights media are able to avoid treating them as a commodity to be consumed. However some users and humanitarian organizations fall into commodifying refugees and their suffering, essentially making their suffering into propaganda.

Often voyeuristic, outside photographers and journalists select the stories that dominate the narrative of life as a displaced Syrian woman. These stories are often distorted, and receive disproportionate coverage and sharing, which perpetuates Western spectator's stereotypes of

223 Susan Moeller, *Compassion fatigue: How the media sell disease, famine, war and death*, (Psychology Press, 1999), 2.

224 McLagan 605

distant refugees. Widely shared generalizations about Syrian women, are detrimental the the lived experience of these women. There is a great disconnect between online representations and offline realities for Syrian women in Jordan. The dominant social media representations generalize the Syrian identity and ignore relevant political and social contexts. In contrast, most refugee families are becoming more protective of their daughters after arriving in Jordan. For example, social media has experienced a great deal of stories about forced marriage in the context of Syrian displacement. However there have been relatively few forced marriages in exchange for money between Syrian women in Jordan and Jordanian men. There has been approximately ten documented cases in Za'atari camp. With the camps efforts, now there are almost no forced marriage cases in exchange for money. This example reflects the problem with generalized stories spreading across social media. The quantity and frequency at which these types of stories are seen creates this false idea that many Syrian families are marrying their daughter off for money.



There is no coverage or attention towards how women want to be assisted. This also applies to Syrian women's lack of control over how they are visualized on social media. Displaced mothers have also been left voiceless in the debate surrounding how to deal with Syrian children traumatized by war. By denying Syrian women agency, aid organizations are unable to assist them in the best way possible.

Alhayek looks at flaws in mainstream representations, and how Facebook campaigns 'speaking' for individual women silence them. It discusses how these depictions orientalize Syrian women, and marginalize those that do not fit this imagery. Feminist online depictions focus on Western concerns over Syrian women rather than the activism, strength, and courage of Syrian women. There is a double marginalization in online forums regarding Syrian refugee women. Such marginalization is caused by the hierarchical power relations that dominate mainstream online feminist activism. Western feminist discourse has focused on instances of force marriage and child marriage, and neglects a variety of other issues plaguing Syrian women such as sexual assault, life in combat, and lack of health services for pregnant women. This makes some voices heard, and forces others into marginalization. In the case of Syrian refugee women's issues, the voices that are heard belong to those who have economic and educational privileges, or fit into typical paradigms of women's issues. This often leads to a process of a self-orientalizing discourse.²²⁵ This further highlights the invisible suffering and resistance of refugee women from underprivileged economic and educational backgrounds.

In her article, *Double Marginalization: The Invisibility of Syrian Refugee Women's Perspectives in Mainstream Online Activism and Global Media*, Alhayek identifies the RNC

²²⁵ Alhayek, Katty. "Double Marginalization: The Invisibility of Syrian Refugee Women's Perspectives in Mainstream Online Activism and Global Media." *Feminist Media Studies* 14, no. 4 (2014): 696-700.

campaign as an organization responsible for producing self-orientalizing discourse that mirrors the same elements of the Western hegemony. Mainstream representations tend to marginalize voices of underprivileged refugee women.²²⁶ Western feminists, distant from the realities of life in refugee camps, dominate discourse and advocacy 'on behalf of' Syrian women. Images and articles, which promote the voices of underrepresented refugees would help to better inform social media users.

Many refugees are in need of immediate health care, which is evident from the plethora of images of battered Syrians. However, many of the deaths incurred by refugees are slow rather than the result of militant conflict as the media might suggest. The frequency at which images of bloodied bodies contextualized by the atrocity of Assad or ISIS are shared, take away from more common forms of suffering experienced by refugees. For instance, one survey found that half of surveyed refugees are affected by impairment, injury and psychological distress. The dispersal of more visuals of figures who represent physical and health issues could help raise public awareness as the the severity of the issue.

The experience of displacement can be worsened by impairments. For individuals with impairments, adapting to a new environment without their support structures can be difficult. For some refugees it is an incredible struggle securing proper access to medical services. Survey teams have reported that those with intellectual impairments and their families have faced the most extreme challenges. The study also looked into the difficulties associated with daily activities such as feeding, bathing and dressing oneself. The results show that 60 percent of older Syrian refugees face these daily challenges. Of elderly refugees, 70 percent reported at least one

226 Alhayek, Katty. "Double Marginalization: The Invisibility of Syrian Refugee Women's Perspectives in Mainstream Online Activism and Global Media." *Feminist Media Studies* 14, no. 4 (2014): 696-700.

impairment. Older people are also almost twice as likely as children to have intellectual impairments.²²⁷ This statistic makes emphasizes how disproportionately social media and humanitarian campaigns focus on the suffering of children.

It is unclear exactly how many displaced Syrians are affected by impairment, which makes it difficult for humanitarian organizations to respond effectively and represent them accordingly. This means that many impaired Syrians go without support, or mention. The injuries sustained by many refugees require long-term physical rehabilitation and psychological support. There is limited availability of physical rehabilitation. The long-term injuries of many refugees will impose a great strain on the health systems in Jordan, Lebanon and ultimately Syria. The Assad regime has stated that injured refugees returning will be counted as part of the anti-government resistance, which leaves millions of Syrians without access to medical support. Access to health care is far too expensive for many refugees, especially those living in Lebanon. Some refugees in Lebanon stated that they could not afford the cost of transport to health centres, or the required contribution to their hospital bills.

Syria's transient and gypsy populations are marginalized in both relief efforts and online discourse. Gypsies are often victimized for not picking a side in the Syrian domestic war. The Assad regime and the rebel opposition groups have all targeted the gypsies with violence. Half a million Syrian gypsies have moved to Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt. Syrian gypsies have been forced out of their own tented communities into government controlled camps. Around fifty to sixty tents belonging to Syrian gypsies were burned down causing them to be deported back to Syria. The article puts forth the thesis that, "If the people who live on the streets without decent

227 Skinner, Marcus. "The impact of displacement on disabled, injured and older Syrian refugees." *Revista Migraciones Forzadas* no. 47 (September 2014): 39-40. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 11, 2014).

food and shelter once led a life similar to ours, we may feel worried because someday we may end up like them. But if somebody tells us they are a Syrian gypsy, we can feel relieved because the gypsies are out of our emotional reach.”²²⁸



The image above accompanied the article bringing attention to the injustice against Syrian gypsies. The image is not particularly powerful or exploitative. The caption does not note the boy's names. They are identified as 'Syrian refugee children', the caption does not specifically identify the boys as gypsies. The image is lighthearted in comparison to the content of the article. This is an instance of how a photograph could enhance the impact of an article, and help a reader to visualize the individuals discussed throughout the article.

Social media users share articles and links to campaigns they are in support of. Social media has caused the technologization of political action. Central to online campaigns is the simplicity of their proposals for action. Onlookers are made to feel that they are making a

²²⁸ Akagunduz, ulku ozel. "Plight of Syrian Gypsy Refugees Being Ignored." *Today's Zaman*. February 28, 2015. Accessed March 5, 2015. http://www.todayszaman.com/national_plight-of-syrian-gypsy-refugees-being-ignored_373818.html.

difference with just 'a click their mouse'. Social media makes it easier than ever to speak out against social injustice, sign petitions, and donate to causes. The technologization of action significantly simplifies the spectator's mode of engagement with the humanitarian cause. The use of the internet as a vehicle for public action, simplifies the spectators relationship with the distant suffering. The internet provides an instant intervention, and speeds up the response of emotion fatigue.²²⁹ The immediacy of contemporary consumer culture has crossed over to the moral responses of humanitarianism.²³⁰

Social media serves as the ultimate tool for shaping public opinion, as it contains persuasive components from commercial, humanitarian, and news discourses. In a way social media tells the public what they should feel in response to images. Images become legitimized by the organizations backing them, rather than the content of the image or the story of the refugee. Humanitarian aid pages are dependent on their international reputation to set their photographs, and related cause apart.²³¹ This is a move away from typical moralistic approaches towards brand recognition. In this way, social media has built a venue for the marketing of suffering.²³²

The act of branding suffering abandons the traditions of visual realism and grand emotion that I discussed in the previous chapter. This practice capitalizes on the assets and reputation of established organizations to gain more viewers, and achieve their goals. This type of imagery embraces the public's' nature of consumption. This type of appeal further reinforces the need for

229 (Bennett, 2003)

230 Chouliaraki, L. "Post-humanitarianism: Humanitarian Communication Beyond A Politics Of Pity." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 13, no. 2 (2010): 117.

231 (Slim, 2003: 8–12).11

232 Chouliaraki, L. "Post-humanitarianism: Humanitarian Communication Beyond A Politics Of Pity." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 13, no. 2 (2010): 118.

refugees to fit into a certain mold. The perfect refugee becomes necessary, so that an organization can better market their cause.

This type of visual rhetoric and instant gratification has been labeled as post-humanitarian communication. Central to post-humanitarian action is a new reliance on the judgement of the individual. The post-humanitarian visual device is dependent upon the viewer's understanding of an organization's ideals and political stance, as well as the issue at hand. This imagery calls for solidarity, rather than grand emotions of pity and guilt. The post-humanitarian style has the potential to move away from exploitative images but is vulnerable to critiques of commodification.²³³

Social media has the potential to engage individual users in new forms of solidarity activism, which could be less manipulative, to the extent that their support is contingent upon their understanding. Online campaigns capitalize on the concentration of eyes fixated on social media platforms. Having an online presence has become essential, and having a wide reaching and powerful online presence can pay off, both figuratively and literally. Of course it is easier to garner donations with the click of a mouse but social media outreach can also connect like minded individuals around a central cause. Online media illuminates proximity as a requirement for a social or political movement. This is particularly relevant in connecting Syrian activists with activists from other nations. Social media could help adjust the power relations between spectators and distant others by placing them on a level playing field, where there is an exchange of ideas and images without the mediation of a humanitarian organization or news station.

233 Chouliaraki, L. "Post-humanitarianism: Humanitarian Communication Beyond A Politics Of Pity." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 13, no. 2 (2010): 119- 121.



Amnesty International

Mohamed and Bahri, 4 year old twins who fled Syria's conflict, now living happily in Sweden > <http://bit.ly/173Cq6b>

Join our call asking more governments to open to Syria > <http://bit.ly/173Cq6b>



By including visuals of refugees who have successfully restarted their lives, Amnesty International is able to show that life as a refugee does not have to be a dark and tortured visual. This visual goes in an opposite direction from the shock visuals normalized in online humanitarian discourse. This photograph returns agency and authenticity, while showing solidarity. It acknowledges the problem and the need for mobilization without exploiting refugees. Amnesty's photograph and accompanying text pay attention to an atypical visualization of Syrian refugee children. These boys have relocated to Sweden, they appear healthy, and comfortable. Amnesty actively has chosen this visual because it is not uncommon, and it helps the onlooker visualize a relatively successful instance of displacement. This image returns to our contemporary ideal of childhood, safe and settled, and does not further exploit children suffering

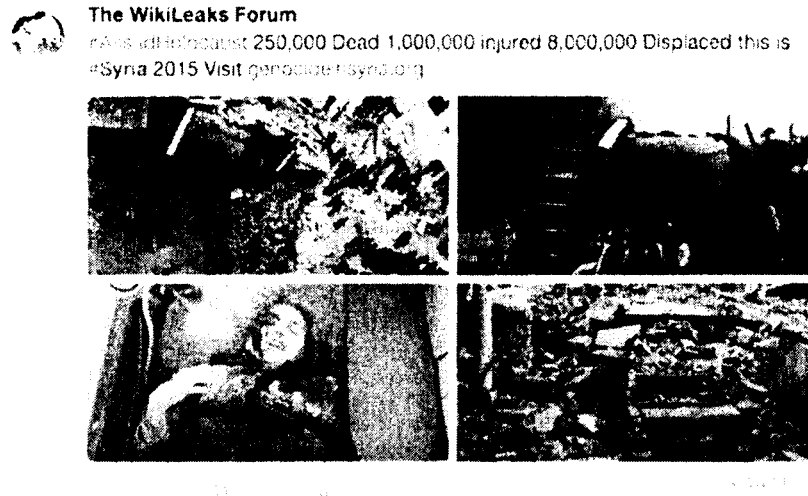
in refugee camps.²³⁴ Displacement is an issue on its own, without further dramatizing the perception of Syrian refugees as a whole. This image however, is not typical of mainstream social media rhetoric or imagery.

Images that challenge stereotypes and monumentalized or generalized narratives are only found on specific pages, preventing them from reaching the public which needs them most. Social media has become the best venue to advocate for marginalized refugees and perspectives because there is no one government, company, or organization controlling the images on social media platforms. The issue is that individuals without a complex understanding of the Syrian crisis are not seeking out Facebook pages or websites of organizations which deviate from their perspective. A nuanced understanding of Syrian displacement can be found on social media websites if users know where to look.

The dialogue in response to typical depictions of Syrian refugees problematizes social media as a venue for the dissemination of accurate information. Mainstream rhetoric depicts all refugees as anguished victims of war in need of saving. As I suggested in chapter one many news providers are vague yet decisive when drawing the lines between refugees, rebels, and members of the Islamic State. The media also portrays mass suffering while being ambiguous as to the perpetrator or the solution. Online banter underneath photographs of Syrian refugees debate whether Assad or ISIL are to blame. On twitter the hashtag, #assadholocaust has been used to redirect the public's attention to the atrocities committed by the Syrian regime, in light of the wide news coverage of ISIL. The hashtag is frequently posted with shocking visuals of bloodied

²³⁴ Karen Wells, "The melodrama of being a child: NGO representations of poverty," *Visual Communication* 12, no. 3 (2013): 288.

Syrians. This is an example of how the use of hashtags can connect related articles and images for onlookers concerned about a specific issue.



It is commendable that social and political movements have made use of hashtags as a way to connect for over a cause and spread awareness. The trouble is that social media also perpetuates the sharing of inaccurate information and images which objectify refugees. The focus of these images is on powerlessness. Sontag finds that powerless figures often go unnamed in captions.²³⁵ The photograph above is an instance of this dehumanization and decontextualization. The bloody body becomes analogous to the other images of destruction. She comes to represent Syria but remains nameless. By leaving her anonymous the Twitter user inadvertently objectifies her. She becomes a commodity that can be ‘shared’ and ‘liked’.

Figures such as this become fetishized. They do not reflect individual human bodies with identities. This ties back to the literature review’s discussion of pornographic spectatorial photographs of suffering. As Sontag notes, an image becomes particularly aggressive without landscape.²³⁶ The ruined, upclose ‘landscape’ in the photograph above becomes testimony of the

²³⁵Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 78.

²³⁶Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 64.

Syrian government's destructive policies.²³⁷ The image above draws parallels between Syrians and their land, they become interchangeable.

Al Jazeera English

Four years after the start of Syria's civil war, millions have fled their country. Around 1.5 million now live in Lebanon, of which an estimated 300,000 are without refugee status. Many work skilled jobs without contracts.
<http://ajc.10/8ghk>



'Offices of theft' target desperate Syrians

Secretive online firms are offering to help Syrians get coveted visa appointments at the German embassy - for a fee.


Like Comment Share 100 100 100 100


This image, like the one before it, features a desolate, war town backdrop. Sontag notes that there is a certain beauty found in a battle-scape.²³⁸ However this image is somewhat unrelated to the article's content. The article attached to this image does more in terms of refugee advocacy than the image itself. Without refugee rights and citizenship, many Syrians go without worker's rights, leaving them underpaid and unprotected. Articles such as these get at the core of refugee specific issues. Social media posts are almost always accompanied by an image, which can strengthen the appeal of the article. However images can not match up with their attached

237 Ariella Azoulay, *From Palestine to Israel a Photographic Record of Destruction and State Formation, 1947-1950* (London: Pluto, 2011), 87.

238 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 75.

articles. Some articles can provide agency to refugees, and simultaneously use an image of nameless, bloody refugees. An image, article combination can do certain things well, while simultaneously contributing to the disenfranchisement of refugees.

 **B²AR**
Real heroes: #WhiteHelmets volunteer force offers aid to friend & enemy in war-torn #Syria. Support: whitehelmets.org @SyriaAid Def

 **The Syria Campaign**



The White Helmets - Hope in the Darkness
by The Syria Campaign @TheSyriaCmpgn

When the bombs rain down in Syria, the White Helmets rush in. These unarmed volunteers risk their lives daily to help anyone in need. Tell donor governments to fund their life-saving work now.

[View on web](#)

Social media has also become a way for social media users to give praise to the organizations they are in support of. In my survey of recent twitter posts using #Syria, I found an abundance of posts promoting the 'White Helmets'. These volunteers are unarmed and neutral, their helmets become a symbol of impartiality and compassion amongst the many images of violence and suffering. Their website is particularly effective in providing spectators to make a tangible difference. The website lists a variety of items used by the White Helmets and lists their

prices, allowing website visitors to donate specific items. Items range from safety goggles to a Defibrillator.²³⁹ By providing spectators with a stake in the conflict, they no longer feel helpless and as a result they do not become as fatigued towards the conflict. This is one of the many ways organizations can innovate fundraising through social media.

The United Nations World Food Programme recently held a 72-hour campaign following cuts in food assistance. The organization urges social media users to donate online. The organization also asks donors to make their profile pictures on social media outlets the logo of the campaign.²⁴⁰ The practice of changing ones Twitter or Facebook profile picture to an image of solidarity expresses collectivity. These types of political and social campaigns are effective in reaching larger audiences. Larger audiences are able to generate a greater degree of societal awareness. However these campaigns risk making refugees into a monolithic spectacle void of agency. This type of social media activism reduces solidarity to a simple gesture. I argue that this form of solidarity can be too simple, and insincere. While the gesture symbolically gives the user's identity to the cause, it does not beckon the user to gain a thorough understanding of a cause. Online activism and visual advocacy on human rights media outlets risk becoming commonplace, and easy to scroll past.

Sontag finds that "photographs alter and enlarge our notions of what is worth looking at and what we have a right to observe." I find that this sense of visual entitlement is perpetuated by social media use, and the constant stream of images available to users. Sontag also writes that our current use of photographs gives onlookers the sense that they hold the whole world in their heads in an anthology of images. Social media use can be seen as a form of violence, and the

239 "Hope in the Darkness." The White Helmets - Hope in the Darkness. Accessed March 13, 2015.

240 "United Nations News Centre," UN News Centre, December 3, 2013, Accessed March 13, 2015.

internet as an extension of battle grounds. This type of social media use allows users to assert themselves into the conflict.²⁴¹



The image above details crowds of Palestinians lining up for UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) food parcels. This has emerged as an icon of the Syria conflict, and it has been displayed simultaneously in New York's Times Square and in Tokyo's Shibuya district. This photographic display is a component of the UNRWA social media campaign. At the peak of the campaign, UNRWA was able to get into Yarmouk and distribute hundreds of food parcels to civilians. This campaign utilized the #LetUsThrough hashtag, which generated over 38.5 million social media impressions and reached over 26 million people. This hashtag was meant to express solidarity and demand humanitarian access to the restricted area. The UN estimates that there are 10 million people in Syria who are in need of assistance.

The UNRWA campaign was backed by the UK-based HOPING Foundation, which secured support for a joint UNRWA-HOPING statement backed by 30 celebrities and figures

²⁴¹ Maria Popova, "Aesthetic Consumerism and the Violence of Photography: What Susan Sontag Teaches Us about Visual Culture and the Social Web," Brain Pickings RSS., Accessed November 13, 2014, <http://www.brainpickings.org/2013/09/16/susan-sontag-on-photography-social-media/>.

from the world of arts and entertainment. These included Alfonso Cuarón, who won the Best Director Oscar for *Gravity*, but also Hugh Grant, Emma Thompson, Annie Lennox, Sting, Peter Gabriel, Bryan Adams, Stephen Frears and Ken Loach. Other celebrities also actively tweeted in support of the campaign.²⁴² While these efforts can raise awareness, they employ journalistic uses of celebrity to make the cause intriguing to a wider audience. While this may broaden the audience, it also diminishes the identity and agency of refugees by shifting focus to celebrity identities.

Another downside to the politicization of social media, is the growing presence of online terrorist organizations. ISIS and other groups are on social media because some social media users are attracted to their violence, or at least curious about it.²⁴³ ISIS's social media strategy is to use propaganda to gain wider recognition, elicit fear, and recruit fighters. Twitter accounts providing live updates are used to exaggerate the group's strength and capabilities. There have been a large number of pro-Isis tweets from social media users in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and other Gulf countries. Common hashtags for ISIS supporters are #Baghdad_is_liberated and #Iraq_is_liberated. Views, likes, and shares- negative or positive- legitimize the perception of ISIS as a global threat.²⁴⁴

242 "UNRWA's Iconic Syria Image to Go up in New York's Times Square and in Tokyo's Shibuya District | UNRWA." UNRWA. March 19, 2014. Accessed February 17, 2015. <http://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/press-releases/unrwa's-iconic-syria-image-go-new-york's-times-square-and-tokyo's-shibuya>.

243 Goodman, H. "'SNL's' Skit Did More to Defeat ISIS Than Any Bombing Campaign. Satire Destroys Extremist Ideology." The Huffington Post. March 2, 2015. Accessed March 9, 2015. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/h-a-goodman/snl-isis_b_6782684.html?utm_hp_ref=media&ir=Media.

244 Faisal Irshaid, "How Isis Is Spreading Its Message Online," BBC News. June 19, 2014, Accessed March 10, 2015.



The image above is from a pro-ISIS twitter account.²⁴⁵ ISIS intends, and counts on Western audiences to overreact to videos of violence and cause paranoia. SNL's ISIS skit was a prime example of how satire can highlight the insanity that fuels ISIS to commit its atrocities. Goodman of the Huffington Post argues that, satire can destroy the foundations of terrorist recruitment methods because laughter can cause someone to reconsider acts of violence. Goodman's article argues that, "Satire, unlike a bullet, can actually kill an ideology." The skit points out the absurdity of viewing ISIS as an existential threat to the United States.²⁴⁶

Social media has become the new grounds for waging war, and watching war. Social media users are provided with a new and evolving spectatorial experience. Social media can be an inclusive network for social activism, while simultaneously providing users with

²⁴⁵ Faisal Irshaid, "How Isis Is Spreading Its Message Online," BBC News. June 19, 2014, Accessed March 10, 2015.

²⁴⁶ Goodman, H. "'SNL's' Skit Did More to Defeat ISIS Than Any Bombing Campaign. Satire Destroys Extremist Ideology." The Huffington Post. March 2, 2015. Accessed March 9, 2015. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/h-a-goodman/snl-isis_b_6782684.html?utm_hp_ref=media&ir=Media.

information about ISIS recruitment. Twitter journalism, profiles of solidarity, and shared refugee statuses have created a complex web of social interactions surrounding the Syrian conflict.

Chapter Three

Picturing and Politicizing Aid

Humanitarian organizations set out to advocate on behalf of refugees but in the process many forget or neglect to consult with those they are advocating for. In this chapter, I use images and information to argue that, like news organizations, humanitarian organizations contribute to the misrepresentative and disenfranchising images of refugees. Photographs are selected by a specific organization in order to send a conclusive message about refugees and their organization. These organizations, not unlike the media, are interested in mobilizing efforts. While the media may call for military action or sanctions, these organizations call for financial support. I also argue that, the market economy drives humanitarian organizations. This competitive dynamic leads to the dissemination of manipulated, simplified, decontextualized, and dramatized photographs. Within this chapter I will outline the delivery process of humanitarian aid, the political implications of aid, and the challenges facing humanitarian organizations in order to set a backdrop for the discussion of humanitarian visual discourse. I then, move into a discussion of specific images, and how different photographic approaches achieve different impacts on both the international community and the refugees, themselves.

Humanitarianism can be defined as the duty to ease human suffering unconditionally.²⁴⁷ The ideals of humanitarian aid are as follows; neutrality, impartiality, and independence.²⁴⁸ We will soon discover that these ideals become hard to standby in the context of Syria. The humanitarian community has been placed in a situation in which it is difficult to successfully and

247 Linda Polman and Liz Waters, *The Crisis Caravan: What's Wrong with Humanitarian Aid?* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010), 7.

248 Linda Polman and Liz Waters, *The Crisis Caravan: What's Wrong with Humanitarian Aid?* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010), 2.

impartially disburse aid. The morality and ethics of humanitarian aid are placed in a position of compromise due to the actions of the Syrian regime and rebel forces. It is near impossible to visualize refugees and their relationship with INGOs.

Humanitarian communication can be described as the way transnational actors convey and engage in universal ethical claims. This rhetoric revolves around concepts of common humanity, global civil society, human suffering, and pity.²⁴⁹ Early examples of humanitarian communication rely on a documentary mode of representing suffering in its plain reality.²⁵⁰ Similar to cultural and creative industries, humanitarian communications employ symbols, which they use in hopes of creating a response.²⁵¹ These visuals aim at establishing a strategic emotional relationship between a Westerner and a distant sufferer with a view to propose certain dispositions to action towards a cause.²⁵² Oxfam's 1956 mother-child visual complex was at the start of the classic imagery of the 'ideal victim'.²⁵³

In 2013 the UN's refugee chief, Antonio Guterres, referred to the Syrian crisis as "the worst humanitarian disaster since the end of the Cold War."²⁵⁴ Global spending on humanitarian relief has been recorded at 22 billion dollars.²⁵⁵ This is a 24 percent rise from 2012.²⁵⁶ The UK and US have been the top donors of humanitarian aid, followed by Turkey who has become the

249 Chouliaraki, L. "Post-humanitarianism: Humanitarian Communication Beyond A Politics Of Pity." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 13, no. 2 (2010): 107.

250 Chouliaraki, L. "Post-humanitarianism: Humanitarian Communication Beyond A Politics Of Pity." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 13, no. 2 (2010): 111.

251 (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011: 9)

252 Chouliaraki, L. "Post-humanitarianism: Humanitarian Communication Beyond A Politics Of Pity." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 13, no. 2 (2010): 109.

253 Chouliaraki, L. "Post-humanitarianism: Humanitarian Communication Beyond A Politics Of Pity." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 13, no. 2 (2010): 110.

254 Elizabeth Dickinson, "Shadow Aid to Syrian Refugees," *Middle East Report* no. 272 (2014): 37.

255 "Global Humanitarian Aid Spending Soars to Record High," *The Guardian*, June 25, 2014, Accessed March 13, 2015.

256 "Global Humanitarian Aid Spending Soars to Record High," *The Guardian*, June 25, 2014, Accessed March 13, 2015.

third largest donor through its relief projects aimed at Syrian refugees living inside Turkey.²⁵⁷ The Syrian crisis has generated large amounts of humanitarian funding from donors in Gulf states. Kuwait increased its humanitarian spending in 2013 by 2,315 percent.²⁵⁸ As more actors continue to become part of Syria's complex web of assistance, it is vital to improve transparency of financial resources and the ability to effectively target populations.²⁵⁹

The cost of the crisis has been felt by some of the poorest countries in the region. Donor budgets have been unable to keep up with the growing needs of refugees.²⁶⁰ Approximately 12.2 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance within Syria, 4.6 million of those people are located in hard to access areas.²⁶¹ There are still significant gaps in regards to the humanitarian needs of Syrian refugees.²⁶² These shortcomings have led to the flow of alternate financial resources circulating in Syria, and other impacted areas.²⁶³

The United Nations has been working in conjunction with many international and local aid organizations, from Oxfam to more specific organizations like Save the Children to Caritas Jordan. These organizations have began many projects within Syria and bordering nations to help alleviate suffering but still have many short falls. However many aid organizations remain competitive against others, creating an environment absent of cooperation. This competition between organization can be seen in the way they manage public relations and picturing

257 "Global Humanitarian Aid Spending Soars to Record High," The Guardian, June 25, 2014, Accessed March 13, 2015.

258 "Global Humanitarian Aid Spending Soars to Record High," The Guardian, June 25, 2014, Accessed March 13, 2015.

259 "Global Humanitarian Aid Spending Soars to Record High," The Guardian, June 25, 2014, Accessed March 13, 2015.

260 Elizabeth Dickinson, "Shadow Aid to Syrian Refugees," *Middle East Report* no. 272 (2014): 37.

261 Brooks, Julia. "Syria's Arbitrary Denial of Consent Keeps Aid from Reaching Syrians in Need." ATHA. December 4, 2014. Accessed March 13, 2015.

262 Brooks, Julia. "Syria's Arbitrary Denial of Consent Keeps Aid from Reaching Syrians in Need." ATHA. December 4, 2014. Accessed March 13, 2015.

263 "Global Humanitarian Aid Spending Soars to Record High," The Guardian, June 25, 2014, Accessed March 13, 2015.

humanitarian aid. There is no transparent or centralized system for finding out what organizations are providing services where. The competitive nature of humanitarian aid organizations leaves gaps in the dispersal of aid. This is an issue which has yet to become part of the picture of humanitarian aid.

In the search for the best conditions, many refugees migrate from place to place. Many Syrians are forced to migrate due to increasingly hostile attitudes of host states. In November 2013 an opinion poll in Jordan found that 71 percent of respondents said they no longer wanted to host the Syrians.²⁶⁴ Each time a family moves they have to re-register with the UN in order to receive vouchers. This process can take weeks, which leaves many families without benefits for far too long. This is where many alternate donors step in, and supply aid. The prevalence of informal aid groups suggest the insufficient nature of UN-coordinated assistance.²⁶⁵ Many Syrians have become the beneficiaries of this shadow aid system that operates outside of any government or official relief agency. Hundreds of start-up charities and regional donors have built parallel networks that supply aid. These newly established charities, regional donors and local NGOs have put tens of millions of dollars into refugee relief efforts.

While these additional projects seem to be effectively administering their resources, there are many implications because of their unofficial nature. These organizations often have biased policies in their delivery of aid and leave many others in despair. This inequity often fuels conflict and resentment between different groups of Syrians, but also disadvantaged citizens native to host countries holding refugees.²⁶⁶ These uncoordinated projects also have the tendency to overlap, resulting to gaps in the delivery of aid.

264 Elizabeth Dickinson, "Shadow Aid to Syrian Refugees," *Middle East Report* no. 272 (2014): 42.

265 Elizabeth Dickinson, "Shadow Aid to Syrian Refugees," *Middle East Report* no. 272 (2014): 36.

266 Elizabeth Dickinson, "Shadow Aid to Syrian Refugees," *Middle East Report* no. 272 (2014): 36.

There is a philosophical clash between Western UN registered and these alternate organizations. In the controlled environment of refugee camps, all occupants are meant to get comparable aid to one and other. The camps utilize a voucher system that allows each refugee family to buy the other items that they most need. Inequalities among refugees inevitably arise, however this is limited by the UN's policy regarding universal aid. The UN has prohibited aid groups from giving any assistance that is not universal to all occupants. Western NGOs attempt to operate on a level playing field, spreading benefits to as many refugees as possible.²⁶⁷ These alternate organizations often donate based upon family ties, associations, and commonalities. Orphans, widows, the elderly are considered the most in need of aid when it comes to Islam based organizations.²⁶⁸ However this distrust has become irrational, causing every Muslim organisation that enters Syria to be viewed through the lens of terrorism. This places charity workers at risk, and prevents the delivery of medical supplies, food packs and other aid, which are donated to hospitals in the rebel-held north.²⁶⁹

While NGOs and other donors claim images of Syrians in refugee camps, they disregard their potential relationship to images of corruption, violence, and terror. Aid is a necessary component of crisis relief for Syrian refugees, however their images are both misleading to the public and deprive Syrian refugees of agency. The Dispersal of aid in Syria has recently led to concerns about transparency and alternate sources of money in the region.

A major concern is that foreign donations fuel not only the Assad regime, but also terrorist actors. Foreign currency brought in and exchanged by aid workers and journalists brings more

267 Elizabeth Dickinson, "Shadow Aid to Syrian Refugees," *Middle East Report* no. 272 (2014): 37.

268 Elizabeth Dickinson, "Shadow Aid to Syrian Refugees," *Middle East Report* no. 272 (2014): 39.

269 Hooper, Simon. "UK-Syria Aid Viewed through 'lens of Terror'" *Al Jazeera English*. Accessed February 18, 2015. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/03/uk-syria-aid-viewed-through-lens-terror-2014312905890256.html>.

money into the Assad regime.²⁷⁰ In 2014 the UN adopted resolution 2170, which condemns what is referred to as “gross, systematic and widespread abuse” of human rights by the Islamic State in Iraq. This resolution has called upon all UN Member States to act to suppress the flow of foreign fighters, financing and other support to Islamist extremist groups in Iraq and Syria.²⁷¹ This has helped to limit ISIS’s access to humanitarian aid funds and supplies, however new sources have risen. Over the past few years ISIS’s support came from wealthy donors in the Arab Gulf States, including Kuwait, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. It has been implied that this support had some degree of approval from the governments mentioned.²⁷² Dozens of registered charities in Kuwait offer aid abroad.²⁷³ Kuwait has been financing and organizing charities in support of Syria’s many rebel groups.²⁷⁴

In July of 2014, the UN Security Council authorized humanitarian access to Syria for cross-border and cross-line operations. This authorization has increased aid flows into the country. These operations have been facilitated by UN OCHA through the Turkish Red Crescent and local NGOs. However, large areas of the country under ISIS control remain inaccessible. This lack of aid also fuels ISIS by contributing humans. ISIS has taken advantage of the lack of outside assistance by providing basic services to those in the territories under siege. By preventing the supply of humanitarian aid the group reinforces the dependence of civilians on the services it controls.²⁷⁵ Control over civilians provides ISIS with legitimacy and power.

270 Linda Polman and Liz Waters, *The Crisis Caravan: What's Wrong with Humanitarian Aid?* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010), 129.

271 "Security Council Adopts Resolution 2170 (2014) Condemning Gross, Widespread Abuse of Human Rights by Extremist Groups in Iraq, Syria | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases," UN News Center. August 15, 2014, Accessed March 13, 2015.

272 Josh Rogin, "America's Allies Are Funding ISIS," *The Daily Beast*, June 14, 2014, Accessed March 13, 2015.

273 Elizabeth Dickinson, "Shadow Aid to Syrian Refugees," *Middle East Report* no. 272 (2014): 38.

274 Josh Rogin, "America's Allies Are Funding ISIS," *The Daily Beast*, June 14, 2014, Accessed March 13, 2015.

275 Julia Brooks, "Syria's Arbitrary Denial of Consent Keeps Aid from Reaching Syrians in Need," *ATHA*. December 4, 2014, Accessed March 13, 2015.

Initially, the Western strategy was to starve the regime and feed the opposition. This proved detrimental to Syrians in need of assistance, and has been confused by the growing presence of ISIS. The thought was that sanctions would weaken the regime, and encourage Syrians to revolt against it.²⁷⁶ Providing assistance to IDPs in Syria requires an acknowledgement of the regime, which legitimizes the Syrian government. This has been an issue for some donors avidly against the Assad regime.²⁷⁷

In Syria, the conflict is everywhere and many combatants do not respect the medical neutrality of humanitarian aid organizations. Many of the hospitals in Syria do not display Red Crescent emblems to help prevent its discovery and inevitable destruction.²⁷⁸ The World Health Organization reported that 57 percent of Syrian public hospitals have been damaged. Only 36 doctors remained in Aleppo, this shows just how sparse access to medical care is in certain areas of the country.²⁷⁹ At least 20 Red Crescent volunteers have been killed while helping others.

The Syrian government restricts entry to critical areas, denies cross-border assistance from humanitarian organizations, and monopolizes the distribution of aid through Damascus.²⁸⁰ The U.N. and non-governmental organizations working with the regime within Syria are restricted by the regime in terms of their access to those suffering in areas controlled by rebels. The regime has targeted independent aid workers, hospitals, and other public health facilities in rebel areas. International humanitarian law requires the consent of the state for relief operations to take place.

276 "Analysis: Donors Not Walking the Talk on Humanitarian Aid to Syria," IRINnews. September 19, 2012, Accessed March 13, 2015.

277 "Analysis: Donors Not Walking the Talk on Humanitarian Aid to Syria," IRINnews. September 19, 2012, Accessed March 13, 2015.

278 Samer Attar, "The Assad Regime Continues to Restrict Humanitarian Aid for Syria," Washington Post, October 25, 2013, Accessed March 13, 2015.

279 Samer Attar, "The Assad Regime Continues to Restrict Humanitarian Aid for Syria," Washington Post, October 25, 2013, Accessed March 13, 2015.

280 Samer Attar, "The Assad Regime Continues to Restrict Humanitarian Aid for Syria," Washington Post, October 25, 2013, Accessed March 13, 2015.

States also have an obligation to allow and facilitate humanitarian aid to civilians in need. The UN Secretary General has deemed Syria's refusal an "arbitrary" denial of consent that is in violation of its obligations under international humanitarian law. Few international organizations, most notably Doctors Without Borders, has attempted to circumvent Syria's restrictions by engaging in cross-border operations to reach populations in restricted areas.²⁸¹ Syria is the most dangerous place in the world for aid workers right now.²⁸² Of course the discourse of images produced by aid agencies do not include images of dead aid workers. There is also no way to visualize the absence of aid in these restricted areas. The absence of these images places the authenticity of other images on humanitarian aid in question.

The latest issue with the flow of aid into Syria is sustainability, more than 1.7 million Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt will be facing hunger this winter. A funding crisis has forced the UN's World Food Program to suspend food vouchers to hundreds of thousands of refugees.²⁸³ WFP was unable to secure the 64 million dollars that it needs to support Syrian refugees in December. Severe funding shortfalls have already led the UN body to reduce rations within Syria. This shortfall will have a devastating effect on the lives of more than 1.7 million people.²⁸⁴ The sustainability of these alternate, non UN affiliated organizations is also of concern. Many projects are dependent upon donations from individual donors, which can cease at any moment, leaving beneficiaries to suffer.²⁸⁵

281 Julia Brooks, "Syria's Arbitrary Denial of Consent Keeps Aid from Reaching Syrians in Need," ATHA, December 4, 2014, Accessed March 13, 2015.

282 George Russell, "UN Aid Program in Syria Firmly Linked to the Assad Regime," Fox News, August 26, 2013, Accessed March 13, 2015.

283 "1.7m Syrian Refugees Face Food Crisis as UN Funds Dry up." The Guardian. December 1, 2014. Accessed March 13, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/01/syrian-refugees-food-crisis-un-world-programme>.

284 "1.7m Syrian Refugees Face Food Crisis as UN Funds Dry up." The Guardian. December 1, 2014. Accessed March 13, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/01/syrian-refugees-food-crisis-un-world-programme>.

285 Elizabeth Dickinson, "Shadow Aid to Syrian Refugees," *Middle East Report* no. 272 (2014): 41.

Aid organizations simplify their work down to 'helping those in need', while the reality on the ground is actually much more problematic. Absent from these photographs is the complexity of issues which accompany the delivery and dispersal of aid. As we have discussed, the delivery of aid in war and conflict zones is much harder than any aid organization lets on. There is usually a negotiation practice and a toll to be paid for entering into parts of war zones.²⁸⁶ The rebel held areas of Syria are no different. There is no access to rebel-held areas without a payment of sorts, usually as large of portion as possible. While the price of entering different areas of Syria is currently unknown, it is typical for leaders of rebel groups in other nations to walk away with anywhere from 15 to 80 percent of the humanitarian aid being delivered.²⁸⁷ Using the proceeds gained by humanitarian organizations, war factions are able to sustain themselves and buy support. Within 'humanitarian territories' aid workers are able strike deals with who ever they see fit. It is up to their own discretion if they choose to negotiate with the leader of a dangerous faction. The details of these negotiations are widely unknown because of the competitive interest of aid organizations. Humanitarian aid organizations do not share this information with each other because it would inevitably taint their public perception.²⁸⁸

The public relations departments of these aid organizations need to make their imagery as sympathetic and simple as possible in order to maintain their reputation. The photographs that represent different competing organizations cannot let onto the complexity of aid delivery in Syria. This is why images of young children and mass suffering are two of the most common

286 Linda Polman and Liz Waters, *The Crisis Caravan: What's Wrong with Humanitarian Aid?* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010), 95.

287 Linda Polman and Liz Waters, *The Crisis Caravan: What's Wrong with Humanitarian Aid?* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010), 96.

288 Linda Polman and Liz Waters, *The Crisis Caravan: What's Wrong with Humanitarian Aid?* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010), 97.

depictions of Syrian refugees. It simplifies the issue for donors. Help is needed, and their organization is ready to supply it.

The complexity of issues associated with humanitarian aid such as lack of neutrality, the death of aid workers, and the fueling of warring factions, are invisible in the visuals produced by humanitarian organizations. At times, humanitarian depictions of refugees are on the verge of being propaganda, using smiles of relief to gain donations. When organizations choose to show a glimpse of reality it is often exploitative in nature, and still does not reveal the entire reality of the refugee crisis occurring in Syria and neighboring nations. In the following paragraphs I will discuss a number of visuals used by different humanitarian aid organizations that work with Syrian Refugees.

The Red Cross and the Jordanian Red Crescent work collaboratively in the delivery of aid to Syrian refugees. The International Red Cross was established in 1863, and it follows the basic rules of humanitarian aid; neutrality, impartiality, and independence.²⁸⁹ The Red Cross is acknowledged as the most prominent of all Western humanitarian aid organizations²⁹⁰ 1The Syrian Arab Red Crescent is the main agency for implementing U.N. relief programs. According to the U.N., the funds are used for aid supplies and assistance, which is handed out as best the U.N. can on a non-partisan basis.²⁹¹

Syrian Arab Red Crescent has faced significant pressure from the Syrian government. They have been accused of partiality in aid delivery and a lack of independence, two of the three components that are mandated of humanitarian aid organizations. Adherence to these principles

289 Linda Polman and Liz Waters, *The Crisis Caravan: What's Wrong with Humanitarian Aid?* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010), 2.

290 Polman, *The Crisis Caravan: What's Wrong with Humanitarian Aid?*, 2.

291 George Russell, "UN Aid Program in Syria Firmly Linked to the Assad Regime," Fox News, August 26, 2013, Accessed March 13, 2015.

are a legal requirement. Adherence to the humanitarian principles is a necessity, any perceived loss of legitimacy or consent on the ground can increase security risks for aid workers. At least 40 SARC volunteers and 7 Palestinian Red Crescent volunteers have been killed while carrying out their duties in Syria since the beginning of the conflict. The actions and perceptions of all humanitarian aid organizations are crucial to their ability to effectively provide assistance.²⁹² This is why presentation of the organization in their work is such tricky business. The visualization of such organizations needs to satisfy all parties involved in the crisis, and the international public.

The Red Cross and Red Crescent have consistently used images of Syrian refugees that feature their personnel and supplies as propaganda of sorts. For example, the Red Cross's webpage, *In pictures: Syrian refugees in Jordan*, only features images that contain the iconography of the Red Crescent or the Red Cross.²⁹³ The image below features two children from a refugee camp in Jordan. Both are featured smiling with their boxes of Red Cross supplies.²⁹⁴ The image is effective in associating the services of the Red Cross with the happiness of Refugees. The image offers donors the chance to bring happiness to refugees. This type of imagery mobilizes donors because it replaces the imagery of a "hopeless conflict" with appreciative faces. To some degree this humanizes the cause of the Red Cross for those removed physically and psychologically from the vast Human Suffering in Syria. Children have always been the face of humanitarian relief programs because it is easy for donors to identify with. The issue with this image of Syrian children is that they are not representative of a majority of Syrian children, however this may be less destructive than exploiting images of children suffering

292 Julia Brooks, "Syria's Arbitrary Denial of Consent Keeps Aid from Reaching Syrians in Need," ATHA, December 4, 2014, Accessed March 13, 2015.

293 "Syria Crisis." IFRC. Accessed February 17, 2015. <http://www.ifrc.org/syria-crisis>.

294 "In Pictures - Syrian Refugees in Jordan." IFRC. Accessed February 17, 2015. <http://www.ifrc.org/news-and-media/news-stories/middle-east-and-north-africa/jordan/in-pictures---syrian-refugees-in-jordan/>.



While the Red Cross features more positive propaganda oriented photographs on their website, many other humanitarian aid organizations depict refugee children as dirtied and suffering. These images are more analogous to the images of Kevin Carter and Steve McCurry that were discussed in Chapter One. The United Nations (UN) uses many images of children, some more haunting than others. The UN plays a large role in forming the public perception of the Syrian refugee crisis, and the identity of refugees. The United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) uses photographs of refugees for both online and fieldwork reports.

On the websites main page, the UNHCR features an image of a dirtied child, wrapped in a blanket with a piercing stare directed at the viewer. The photograph, like the previous Red Cross photograph, allows the viewer to see that the UNHCR has done its job, and delivered a warm blanket to a refugee. However this image is different in that it hones in on the guilt of the

international population. This more negative approach is perhaps more effective in that it exploits human suffering to gain a greater emotional response. There are problematic details that go unacknowledged in 'positive' image appeals. NGOs are Not For-Profit organizations, but at the same time they are dependent on their ability to raise funds. This dependency is reinforced by the scarcity of resources and fierce competition for money donations.²⁹⁵ There are problematic links between NGOs and local regimes.

Does it matter that the exploitation is well intentioned? As I discussed in Chapter One, many onlookers are desensitized to images of war and suffering, which creates a need to show the most provocative image. The use of suffering children is less taboo than showing bloodied bodies but achieves much of the same effect. The goal is to shock and guilt the viewer enough to persuade them to donate. The image suggests that without the support of the UNHCR that this child would not even have a blanket.²⁹⁶ The message is that donating is the least you can do. The spectator also gains relief from donating, they rid themselves of guilt by showing solidarity with their money. Sontag argues that sympathy is a proclamation of innocence.²⁹⁷

295 Orgad, S. "Visualizers of Solidarity: Organizational Politics in Humanitarian and International Development NGOs." *Visual Communication*, 2013, 295.

296 "Help Syrian Refugees This Winter," UNHCR, Accessed March 13, 2015.

297 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 102.



UNHCR also makes their images more relevant to a wider audience of viewers by adding a reference to a person of elite status, Angelina Jolie. Images of Angelina Jolie crouched amongst young Syrian children makes the image more 'newsworthy' than an image of the children alone. The familiarity of her face, make her words regarding the crisis more relevant to Western viewers. The worth of the photograph is increased because it has relevance because it is depicting both a massive crisis and an elite figure.

The rhetoric of saving can be construed as interventionist and condescending in some contexts, including humanitarian discourse. Humanitarian agencies have traditionally represented refugees as helpless and lost. The politics, power, and ethics involved in humanitarianism are part of a broad discussion, in the following pages I will discuss the way these interplay and create issues for Syrian refugees. Humanitarian institutions are key intermediary institutions in that they receive money from spectators and forward this money or the effects of this money to

the refugees.²⁹⁸ This seemingly neutral relationship can be hampered with in a myriad of ways.²⁹⁹ The images released by organizations providing relief to Syrians are carefully selected, some using more ethical criteria than others. The humanitarian movement over the past century and the addictive use of the camera present new concerns about the visualization of suffering.³⁰⁰



Amnesty international also uses an image of a young child, juxtaposed with a desolate background. The headline with this image reads, The world's pitiful response to the Syrian refugee crisis.³⁰¹ The article continues on to discuss the shortcomings of the international community's efforts in the refugee crisis. It is intended to shame the international community as a way to mobilize greater efforts. The child sits on cinder blocks staring out into nothingness. The gaze of the little girl brings the viewer into her position to consider the conditions of a childhood in a destitute refugee camp. This image, like the one produced by UNHCR, feature children in an

298 Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering Morality, Media, and Politics* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 17.

299 Boltanski, *Distant Suffering Morality, Media, and Politics*, 17.

300 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), ch. 5.

301 "The World's Pitiful Response to Syria's Refugee Crisis." Amnesty International. December 5, 2014. Accessed February 17, 2015. <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/world-s-pitiful-response-syria-s-refugee-crisis-2014-12-05>.

empty environment, emphasizing that the current humanitarian effort is simply not enough, that more is still needed.

Recently there has been a shift in focus from child-saving to child-rights, which appeals more on peoples sense of justice than their emotions.³⁰² This acknowledges the new distaste spectators have for emotional appeals that Chouliaraki details. I believe that images coinciding with this new way of thinking about child refugees, will help organizations move away from exploitative and disenfranchising, photographic practices.



Another branch of the United Nations has defined the refugee crisis in Syria with perhaps the most iconic image of the entire conflict. The has United Nations Relief and Works Agency UNRWA has achieved an universal response in an image showing the multitude of refugees lining up for their food rations. This image is effective because it emphasizing the quantity of refugees, and places them against the backdrop of rubble and destruction. Images of mass need are another visual tool that has historically been utilized by INGOs and other aid organizations. The trail of refugees disappears into the horizon, sending the message that current support is inadequate. While this image could discourage individual donors by making them feel helpless, it challenges

302 Karen Wells, "The melodrama of being a child: NGO representations of poverty," *Visual Communication* 12, no. 3 (2013): 277.

donors on the international scale. The magnitude of need featured here expresses how pertinent humanitarian aid and relief is. The picture is active in that it chooses to show refugees waiting for the onlookers support, rather than receiving it or suffering in its absence. The photograph calls for action. By showing refugees seeking help, rather than on the brink of death, it suggests that it is not too late to relieve the suffering. While the image is overwhelming, it still manages to call the UN and international community to action.

Showing the destruction of a location is a way in which a photographer is able to represent the massive scale of a conflict. Image reports on the Syrian conflict in particular have contained images of damaged and destroyed cultural heritage sites parallel to images of refugees. The level of destruction, migration, and death reinforces the necessity of humanitarian aid. This approach steps away from other photographers' approaches of personalizing the conflict. Instead, these types of photographs attempt to show the viewer that the level of need is so great and extreme that identity and proximity are irrelevant. This image shown below reveals no individualizing features that unite or diversify the mass of refugees. This representation consigns refugees to their bodies, transforming them into a mute and faceless entity.³⁰³ This is reinforced by the lack of eyecontact and acknowledgement towards the camera, this allows the viewer to emotionally disengage. Although emotional disengagement may not be entirely problematic if onlookers are driven by their sense of justice.

303 Rajaram, Prem Kumar. 2002. "Humanitarianism and Representations of the Refugee." *Journal Of Refugee Studies* 15, no. 3: 247. *SocINDEX with Full Text*, EBSCOhost (accessed February 23, 2015).



Some other aid organizations take a more artistic approach with their philanthropic photographs. Save the Children foundation often uses photojournalists to document the current situation of life as a Syrian refugee. Again, it is impossible to capture the diverse demographic of refugees in just a few stills but photojournalist Moises Saman manages to capture and emphasize the issue with children living in depravity. In his series *No Where People, The Refugees of Syria*, Saman captures the stillness and the captivity of life as a child in a refugee camp.³⁰⁴ His photographs are narrative in comparison to those used by the Red Cross. For example, the photograph below focuses in on the analogous nature of the young boy and the chicken. The image is very ephemeral and momentary, and in that sense it becomes more authentic. The Save the Children Foundation did not set up this scene. In a way the absence of blue blankets and humanitarian workers emphasizes the family's need. While some of the photographs in the series are still voyeuristic in nature, as a whole they move beyond the organization's agenda.

304 Saman, Moises. "Nowhere People, The Refugees of Syria." PhotoPhilanthropy. Accessed February 17, 2015. <http://photophilanthropy.org/gallery-posts/nowhere-people-the-refugees-of-syria/>.



The context of this image also contributes to its ability to better represent Syrian refugees. The series takes a comprehensive approach to capturing the lives of refugees in Syria and elsewhere. Each image in the series is accompanied by a description including names and locations, to help personalize their lives. The text then goes on to connect the refugees to their larger context. For example, the description of the image above ends by saying “About 130 Syrian Kurdish families live in this improvised settlement awaiting the establishment of a formal refugee camp.” This is similar to the multi-semiotic news approach which I discussed in Chapter One. Image and text contribute to a narrative in ways that the other form of information could not.

In order to attract viewers, the photographer uses an aestheticization³⁰⁵ of the circumstances in this refugee camp in Iraq. Images exist on two levels; denotative and connotative. Denotative refers to the literal aspects of a photograph, the who, what, where, and other circumstances. Then, connotative describes the treatment of the photograph as an object.

305 Monika Bednarek, and Helen Caple, "Why do news values matter? Towards a new methodological framework for analysing news discourse in Critical Discourse Analysis and beyond," *Discourse & Society* (2014): 28.

This has to do with the selection of the photograph, composition, and construction as dictated by aesthetic standards.³⁰⁶ This image pays more attention to photography on a connotative level than those produced by the Red Cross, which align more with the aesthetics of advertising photography.

Photography, like any other art, is typically divided into the categories of applied and fine arts.³⁰⁷ Images produced by humanitarian aid organizations typically fall in line with the former. These photographs serve a utility or function for the organization, these images become a representation of their cause. Saman's photographs are unique from the others that I have selected in that they take more pleasure in the aesthetics of photography. Photographs with a greater aesthetic quality are thought to better serve their original function.³⁰⁸

The photographer and the publisher working for aid organizations often assume the agency that belongs to the Syrian refugees. They project their own perceptions on to the photographs that they take, select, and contextualize. Only a degree of authenticity in a photograph can be achieved because the image itself is not a window into a specific event. A photograph used by a humanitarian aid organization holds a biased perspective. A photograph can be regarded as a document, however as was discussed in the literature review, photographs are inherently skewed from reality.

The images used by humanitarian aid organizations positions viewers to react in

306 Monika Bednarek, and Helen Caple, "Why do news values matter? Towards a new methodological framework for analysing news discourse in Critical Discourse Analysis and beyond," *Discourse & Society* (2014): 30.

307 Monika Bednarek, and Helen Caple, "Why do news values matter? Towards a new methodological framework for analysing news discourse in Critical Discourse Analysis and beyond," *Discourse & Society* (2014): 92.

308 Monika Bednarek, and Helen Caple, "Why do news values matter? Towards a new methodological framework for analysing news discourse in Critical Discourse Analysis and beyond," *Discourse & Society* (2014): 93.

the interest of the organization. Humanitarian visual discourse is dependent upon privileged donors. Currently privilege is used to manipulate onlookers' emotions of guilt. An acknowledgement of privilege could present a clearer picture of the relationship between displaced Syrians and onlookers. The component missing from most humanitarian photographs is the voice of the displaced. Including individual voices and photographic representations would allow humanitarian organization to move away from tactics of exploitation. a better understanding of refugees will lead to more responsible uses of the camera.

Humanitarian images are unique in that they are not distinctly used to report news or advertise. The images used by humanitarian aid organizations incorporate aspects of both fields. While images used by humanitarian aid organizations are informative like images in the news, they also are produced in the hopes of not only gaining attention but donations as well. Images reveal an organization's stance and perception of the crisis.³⁰⁹ Using a photograph is a way to share informational content without saying the organization's message outright.³¹⁰ The images I have discussed in this chapter are a visual representation of humanitarian aid organizations, rather than refugees.

309 Monika Bednarek, and Helen Caple, "Why do news values matter? Towards a new methodological framework for analysing news discourse in Critical Discourse Analysis and beyond," *Discourse & Society* (2014): 93.

310 Monika Bednarek, and Helen Caple, "Why do news values matter? Towards a new methodological framework for analysing news discourse in Critical Discourse Analysis and beyond," *Discourse & Society* (2014): 58.

Chapter Four

Moving Beyond The Picture Perfect Refugee:

Returning Agency and Reforming Photographic Practices

The objective of this chapter is to determine if agency can be returned to displaced Syrians through photography, and if so how can humanitarian and media institutions make their practice of photography more responsible. I begin this chapter by introducing and discussing a selection of art projects, some using photography. I use these artisanal images to discuss the aesthetics of displacement comparatively. I then move on to discuss photography's distinct issues as a medium. I end the chapter by making some suggestions regarding the practice of photographing refugees in a more responsible manner. I will explore the ways Syrians could alter public perception, and how photographers and organizations could provide an opportunity or platform for refugees to express their sense of self. I argue that art can play a central role in breaking the cycle of oppression and misrepresentation. By returning agency to Syrian refugees, they would be able to bring about change on their terms and have a consequence in social, legal, and political realms. Listening and providing a venue for self-representation is vital to providing refugees with the support that they need. The imagining of life as a refugee cannot continue to be dominated by Western, voyeuristic perspectives.

It is not necessary to always depict a refugee as a dignified figure because that is not always the most informative depiction. An informed public is largely contingent upon the availability of a variety of photographs representing different subjects and different perspectives. However there is a need for more photographs depicting refugees as figures of resilience and

strength. There is too great of an emphasis on photographs of refugees as passive victims. Diversifying the types of refugees depicted will help Western publics move away from the interventionist rhetoric of saving.

While a majority of photographs depicting Syrian refugees are of women and children, few are empowering, which indicates that there is not enough attention being placed on advancing the interests of women and children, or that figures of empowerment are not worth visualizing. A responsible viewer would likely be motivated by visuals of empowerment, not just images of suffering. Displaced women and children are already vulnerable, exploitative photographic practices further harm them.

There are some projects independent of media and competitive organizations, that aspire to give agency back to the Syrians displaced by the conflict, including women and children. Projects like these are integral to stabilizing the photographic narrative in Syria. The photograph below, and the accompanying article are important because they normalize and advance the voices of distant and displaced.



In September, American photographers Robert Fogarty and Benjamin Reece, photographed Syrian refugees living in a camp in Jordan. The image above is of Huda. She lives in the Zaatari refugee camp in northern Jordan. She is 11, and a few years ago she was burnt when her house in Syria was hit by a bomb.³¹¹ The message is simple, and is not contingent upon their suffering. The photographs do not accomplish much politically but that is not the objective of this project.

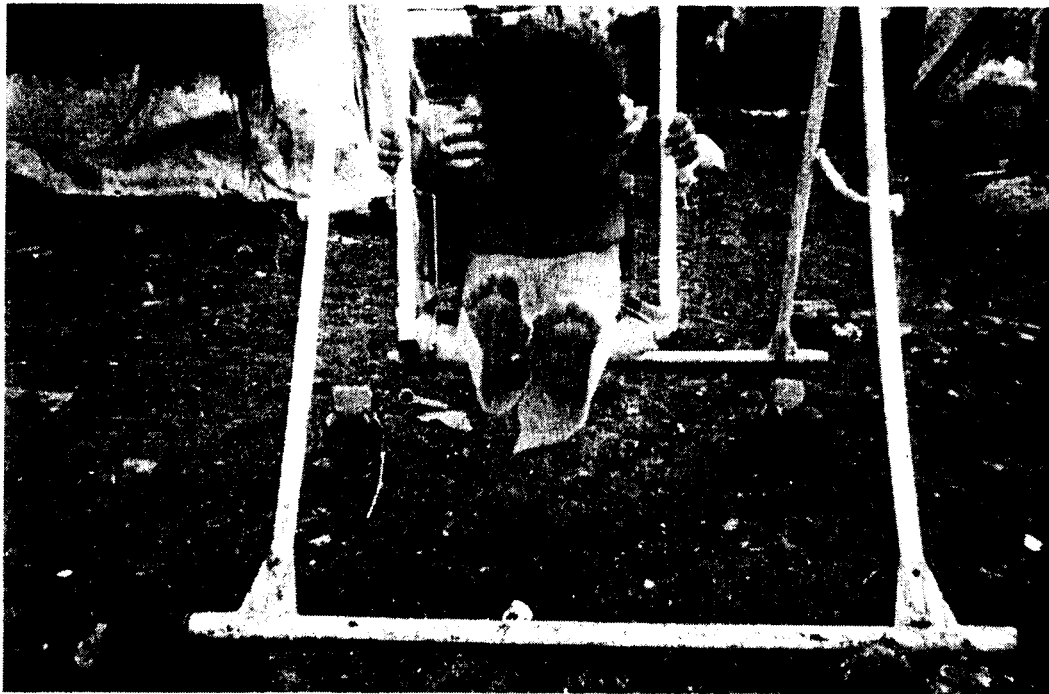


These images were a branch off project from Fogarty's Dear World project, which contained similar images of displaced people from New Orleans. The idea is to capture peoples messages, struggles, and hopes to family, friends and strangers through photography. If these messages were not infused into photography, they most likely would have gone unheard by Western publics.

As a part of another in-camp photography project, a group of Syrian children living at Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan are taking part in a three-month photography project designed to

311 http://www.buzzfeed.com/tasneemnashrulla/11-heartbreaking-messages-from-syrian-refugees-to-the-world?sub=2667182_1792020#.pvgXmXOgW

help them recover from their post-traumatic stress. Agnes Montanari, a French photographer, is teaching the children how to use disposable cameras. She is also demonstrating such techniques as framing, using light and storytelling. She states that, “the whole point of the programme is for the children to tell about their life in the camp as a way for them to create memories” and that, “their lives here have to have a meaning.” The photography project is one component of UNICEF’s wider psychosocial support strategy for working with children who have experienced extreme stress.³¹² Post-traumatic stress disorder is prevalent among refugees, especially children.³¹³ UNICEF’s project uses photography as a therapeutic practice.

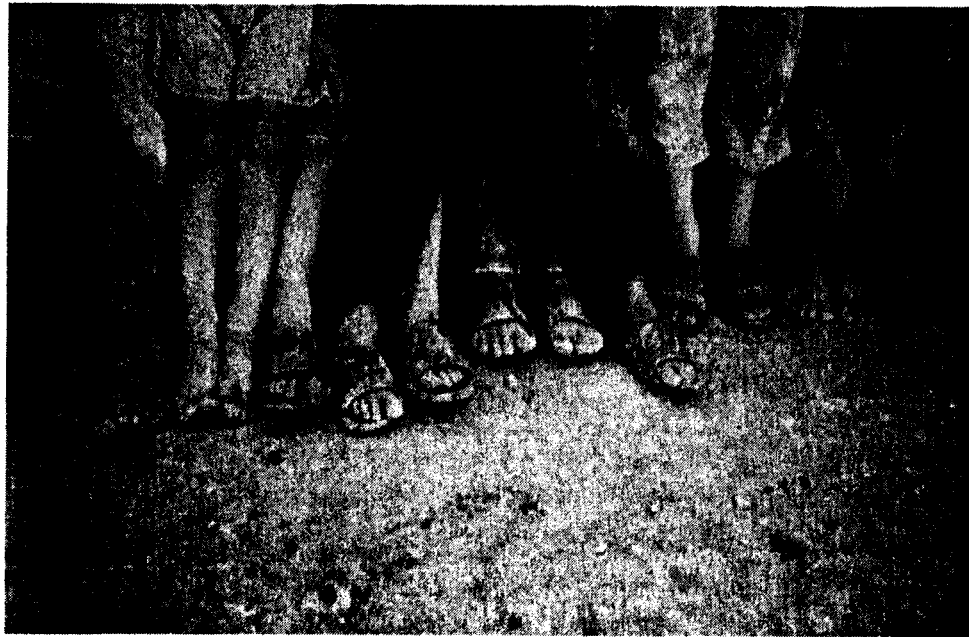


Photography as an art and a political tool has the ability to empower refugees. The narrative of the Syrian conflict is currently dominated by experts from Western nations, it would

312 Fricker, Toby. "For Young Syrian Refugees in Jordan, Photography Is a Record - and an Outlet." UNICEF. April 18, 2013. Accessed February 17, 2015. http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/jordan_68803.html.

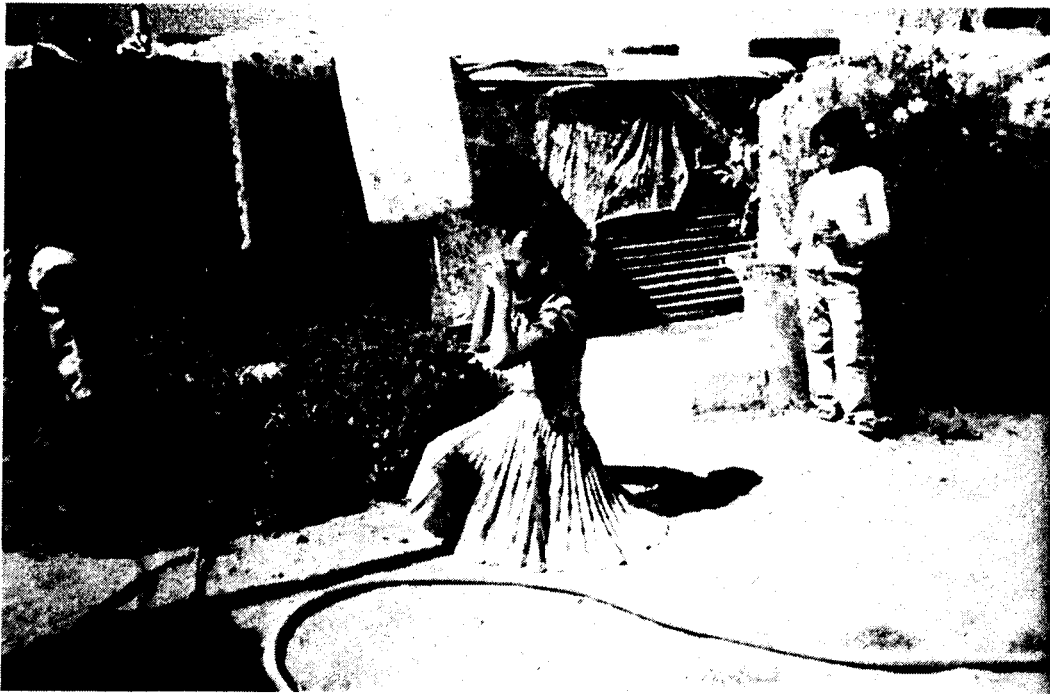
313 Caroline Moorehead, *Human Cargo*. (New York: Random House, 2009), 267.

be commendable for a more inclusive use of subjects, photographers, and journalists. This is what the following three images set out to do. The image above by Gharam Hussein al-Amr from al-Delhimiyeh camp in the Bekaa Valley uses no melodramatic conventions to convey the hardship of being a refugee as a child. The child looks down, refusing the onlookers gaze, depriving the viewer of the desired picture perfect refugee. The child's emotion is not exploited, there is no smiling face making her relatable, or dense mourning eyes begging for help. This image represents the mundane day to day life in a refugee camp. As the child swings, her future is hanging in the balance.



The photograph above was taken by Sarah al-Ahmed in Mashrea al-Nadaf camp as part of a UNICEF project focused on empowering displaced children. An article covering this photography project revealed that the refugee children sold their cameras. They thought of the camera as a way to gain food rather than as an opportunity to express themselves. The Image Festival Association, UNICEF, and the Zakira camp worked together to document this approach

to photography as a way to understand the perspective of displaced children. These images document the same deplorable living conditions as photographs from prior chapters which exploited displaced children.



The image above is also part of UNICEF's initiative. This photograph by Fatima al-Hamidi was taken within the al-Fareej camp. This project culminated in an exhibition displaying this photograph, along with other photographs taken by displaced Syrian children. The target audience was not altogether different from that of previously discussed images but these photographs use aesthetics and art to mediate a connection, rather than symbolic ploys. There is no longer an intentional juxtapositioning of the realities of the spectator and sufferer. These photographs are not about the Western onlookers, their approval, or their political response. The images may be employed to motivate a political response, however the intention and gaze of these images deviate from the photographs of my earlier chapters. The concept of having refugees photograph themselves is not a new. The Jerusalem Fund Gallery in Washington DC

exhibited photographs from the Lahza project, which contained the works of the young Palestinian artists. The idea is to see what displaced children are seeing, sometimes children have the ability to show us beauty in unlikely places.³¹⁴

Not all visual projects that include refugees in the process are quite as successful. For example, "The Inside Out Side Project" fails to understand the complexity of displacement, and the refugee's relationship to the spectator. The website states that, "The goal of this project is to find an unusual and compelling way to connect you with the Syrian children who need your help. Images of refugees in the media generally don't help us make the emotional connections to these distant and foreign people that lead to action. We know there is a problem because, despite the media coverage of the Syrian war, humanitarian aid organizations still don't have the resources they need to help the refugees."³¹⁵ The project identifies perceptions of 'otherness' as the issue at hand and positions the viewer as a reasonable, parental figure. However the need to see Syrians in the spectator's context is ultimately problematic. This website focuses on establishing an emotional connection by 'humanizing' the refugees, however spectators should already understand the humanity of refugees and should be motivated based on the grounds of justice.

This leads me to ask, is there a clear distinction between an image with a aesthetic value versus a manipulative image? As discussed in the literature review, photography as a medium is held to a higher expectation of honesty and realism. This has lead to a double standard in the art world, which adversely impacts the way publics understand photography. The properties of photography become further problematized when photographing suffering.

³¹⁴ Noah Gimbel, "The Refugee Child Photographers," *Foreign Policy In Focus* 4: 2011, *Political Science Complete EBSCOhost* (accessed January 22, 2015).

³¹⁵ "Mosaic - The Inside-Outside Project," The Inside Outside Project, Accessed March 13, 2015.

The desire to visualize conflict and suffering is natural. Art is a way to record and comment upon the plight of refugees. Photographs depicting suffering are held to a higher degree of ethics and morality than other art forms because it can appropriate the faces of distinguishable human beings. Some spectators find that when it comes to depicting suffering that a photograph is to a painting, as a documentary film is to a fictional film. I find this problematic because photography is dependent upon performativity and framing, it is not simply a recording mechanism, and neither is a documentary film.

Sontag points out the ironic difference in evaluating photographs as compared to other art forms, "A photograph...is judged as a fake when it turns out to be deceiving the viewer about the scene it purports to depict," whereas "a painting is a fake if it was attributed to the wrong artist. However Sontag does find that "being educated by photographs is not like being educated by older, more artisanal images."³¹⁶ I find that although both are representations and documents, photographs can not hide behind technique or abstraction as easily. Sontag identifies the dual powers of photography as the ability to "generate documents and to create works of visual art." She remarks that these properties have produced some remarkable exaggerations about what photographers ought or ought not do."³¹⁷ These properties are often regarded as contradictory, however both properties can also help inform the other.

316 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 46.

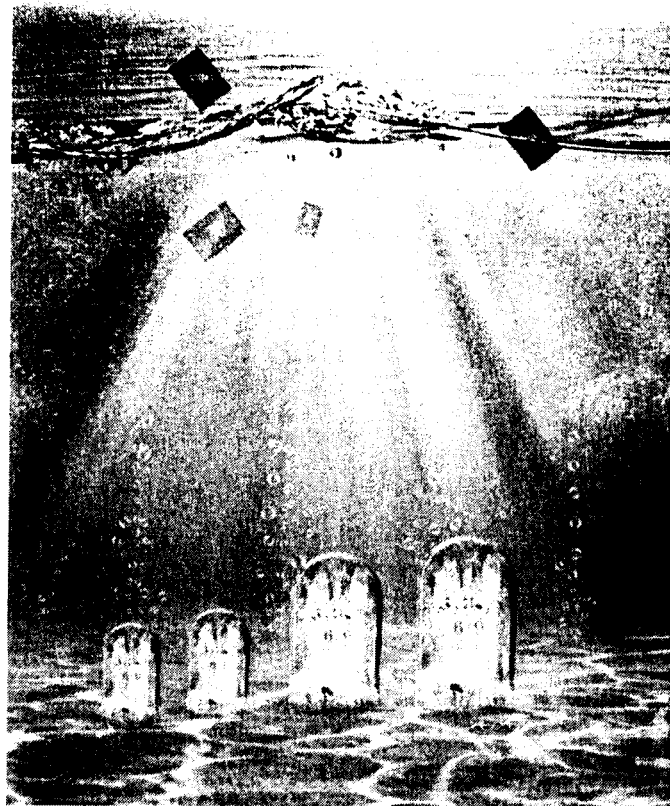
317 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 76.



WithSyria

Banksy's art for the #withSyria campaign, commemorating the third year of the Syrian conflict, was greeted with praise, much different from the varied responses of indifference and scepticism towards photographic depictions of the conflict.³¹⁸ This leads me to ask, is solidarity easier to express and except under the guise of spray paint? Banksy's work commenting on and interacting with the broken landscapes of both Palestine and Syria have been praised by Western publics. What is different about the photograph? Banksy, like the photographs throughout this thesis, uses imagery of children, loss, violence, and suffering. The figure of the child is supposed to elicit the same response of empathy as photographs, for example the little girl in the Amnesty International photograph featured in Chapter One.

318 Warren, Rossalyn. "Banksy Has Updated His Famous 'The Girl With The Balloon' Artwork To Stand With Syria." Up Worthy. Accessed March 13, 2015.



While Banksy's art is acclaimed, other art forms do fall into difficulties depicting refugees and their suffering. The image above is part of a BuzzFeed article, which compiled a list of images that depict "The Reality Every Refugee Faces."³¹⁹ The image above depicts death and victimhood but it somehow is easier to viewers to accept because it is not regarded as a document. It commemorates the death of refugees who drowned on a boat fleeing to Europe, something that a photograph could convey. I argue that photographs are prized because of their ability to visualize realities, whereas other art forms are appreciated for expression and emotion:

³¹⁹ "16 Different Ways To Show The Reality Every Refugee Faces." BuzzFeed. January 9, 2015, Accessed March 13, 2015, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/thesyriacampaign/16-visuals-that-show-the-reality-every-refugee-fac-oz3>.

the very qualities that photographs are criticized for. The refugees represented in the image above become their deaths. They are objectified, and visualized at grave stones.

The BuzzFeed article referenced above was being shared by social media users endorsing the use of art to express the 'realities' of refugee life. Most art forms are welcomed to describe their subject matter with feeling and emotion, while photography is required to focus on seeing, not feeling. The presence of feeling is written off as a manipulative ploy. In many cases the gaze of the photographer is to be concealed, while the gaze and perspective of the painter is welcomed. All art is bias. The perspective of the artist, and the producer of the image are always present. Many paintings throughout history have been used for propaganda by governments. The use of photographs as a reporting or recording mechanism is what allows some spectators to forget that the photograph, no matter the quality, is art, a representation.



The portrait above, entitled “My Grandmother” is from a story covered by NPR on the art of a Syrian refugee depicting Syrian refugees.³²⁰ NPR writes that, “the artist Mohammed Al-Amari, who fled Syria last winter, uses his paints and pastels to capture the lives of refugees and to remember the country they left behind.” Al-Amari and his wife, and their new baby, live in Za’atari Camp. Waiting and worrying is a major theme in his work. I think that this subject is not covered nearly enough in mainstream photographic depictions of Syrian refugees. Understanding the stagnant nature of displacement is important, to understanding the refugee experience. Photographic depictions tend to focus on moments of action, which are visually compelling but they are not the only way to visualize displacement.

The NPR article states that the International Relief and Development has supported the artists with supplies and a place to work. So far camp artists have painted murals on the sides of canvas tents and staged four gallery shows. This program is commendable for supporting a community around art. However the dynamic of this art is easy to accept and praise because the artist is a refugee, like his subjects and his medium of choice is not capable of recording in the way a camera can. He can not appropriate their bodies into his work in the way that a camera is able to, and for that reason it is easier to recognize his work as a representation of a person. As this article suggests, the visualization of displacement can be for local populations, or outward reaching.

It is important to reject visual narratives of ‘freeing’ refugees from the grip of terror or the oppressive regime. This rhetoric sensationalizes the violence and displacement that is occurring, and generalizes the details of the photograph. By emphasizing acts of violence and suffering, those distributing the photograph are able to motivate irresponsible viewers. A responsible viewer would take the time to listen to the photograph and contemplate the

³²⁰ “The Art Of Syrian Refugees Sends A Message. Is Anyone Listening?” *NPR*. NPR, 1 Mar. 2015. Web. 13 Mar. 2015.

photograph. A more reflective engagement with a photograph is essential to creating a public which calls for more responsible and informative images. The consumption and endorsement of responsible photographs will eventually alter the way photographers photograph and distributors contextualize photographs. Both the viewer and distributor must recognize the power of the photograph, and insure responsible using and viewing practices.

A more inclusive approach to visualizing refugees is achievable and desirable. A wider diversity of images, subjects, and perspectives is in the best interest of the subjects, those producing the image, and those viewing the image. Projects focused on the aesthetics of photography can neutralize the political situation, and empower refugees. However this is not the only way to represent refugees. Images of suffering should not be excluded from the visual discourse surrounding displacement because that is a major component of the refugee experience, it just is not the only component. Controversial photographic material can be used responsibly as long as it serves justice to those depicted. It is undoubtedly difficult to photograph someone's suffering without being exploitative, however the visual approach as well as the context of the photograph can help an image of suffering to be powerful and compelling without depriving the subject of agency.

Many have taken a turn at imaging the people of Syria since the eruption of civil conflict, some have been more successful at representing the displaced than others. I define a photograph's success in terms of how responsible and respectful it is. So why does agency matter so much? Are the actions of governments and NGOs which alleviate Syrians more important than an accurate portrayal of refugees? Many refugees are silenced by well intentioned efforts, and left out of the dialogue regarding their rights and visual portrayal. It is possible and desirable to provide Syrians with avenues for agency, both visual and otherwise, because it

shows comprehensive solidarity. The desire to feed and house Syrians, somehow seems less sincere upon depriving them of their autonomy.

Conclusions

In conclusion of this thesis I will review the problems identified throughout this paper, and end with potential solutions which draw upon the positive qualities of photography as a medium for representing displacement. In this thesis, I have outlined the ways that news, social media, and humanitarian organizations can oppress Syrian refugees, and exclude them from prominent discourses around displacement. The act of displacement is inherently alienating, and the current culture of refugee photography serves to further alienate those depicted. Orientalism, misconstrued advocacy, and capitalism all play a role in the problematic constructs which oppress Syrian refugees by stripping them of their ability to communicate with international publics.

In Chapter One, there was a discussion of both the normative and problematic practices of Western news empires. The photographs produced by various news media organizations represents a varied range of ethics and understanding in regards to displaced Syrians. It became clear that these images are not focused on the individual's experience, if the images are of a single figure they are decontextualized, leaving the refugees represented disenfranchised. The refugee is a symbol of political conflict, which transcends the context of Syria. News organizations heavily rely on this symbolism, which has made visuals of refugees less moving to Western publics. These symbols are used to elicit and manipulate the emotions of the spectator. This manipulation identifies how the camera lies and deceives based on opinion and circumstance.

I concluded this chapter in determining that a history of manipulated and dramatized images have created a culture of compassion fatigue in which there is a competition to produce

the most moving image. Shocking, saddening, aesthetically pleasing, and conscious assuaging are some of the categories of photographs that news organizations employ to move viewers. Moving viewers is key to the regime of Western news media. News organizations must constantly engage the public to maintain control over public opinion, perception, and understanding. This frenzy over power and control is at the detriment of Syrian refugees. This process leads to a process of commodification and dehumanization.

In Chapter Two it became clear that the issues presented in chapter one are perpetuated by the widespread use of social media as a news source. The acts of 'sharing' and 'liking' images of refugees completes the process of commodifying refugees and their suffering. These actions numerically tally up social media users empathy. This creates an environment of competition between different organizations with an online presence. This competition drives organizations to produce the most powerful images of refugees. Many organizations find images of a shocking or motivational nature have the most power over social media users. These practices reinforce stereotypes, and silence refugees.

While overexposure in its current form has become problematic, a more responsible use of photographs being distributed at this high of frequency could greatly promote social justice, an understanding of privilege, and a more comprehensive understanding of Syrian displacement. This could drastically improve public awareness, and be used as an educational tool to promote a more conscious global community. A move away from manipulative imagery, will help normalize responses to photographs promoting awareness of political and social injustice. A use of photographs on social media which respect their subjects could be a catalyst for the way refugees are depicted and understood all together.

Then in Chapter Three, I presented images and information which suggests even humanitarian organizations contribute to the misrepresentation of refugees. While many humanitarian organizations set out to advocate on behalf of refugees, many forget or choose not to consult with those they are advocating for, resulting in misguided portrayals. Humanitarian organizations are not immune to the constructs that influence news reporting. The market economy also drives humanitarian organizations. Humanitarian images are 'forced' to compete for donations, which has resulted in the dissemination of manipulated, simplified, decontextualized, and dramatized photographs. While the funds raised by these images provide needed services to refugees, they further disenfranchise refugees. It seems that the organizations protecting refugees are also contributing to their vulnerability.

Currently privilege is used to manipulate onlookers' emotions of guilt. Instead a simple acknowledgement of privilege, in both rhetoric and photograph, could present a clearer picture of the relationship between displaced Syrians and onlookers. This would allow humanitarian organization to move away from tactics of exploitation. The component missing from most humanitarian photographs is the voice of the displaced. Instead of silence, a practice of listening could result in deeper and more comprehensive depictions. By understanding the subject, a photographer and organization will be better able to present their audiences with a more responsible photograph. An endorsement of local depictions would also help to reframe the way publics view refugees. These measure could help refugees transcend the parameters of being visual instruments of policy.

In my final chapter, we looked at some images that tried to return agency to refugees with varying degrees of success. From this chapter I advocated that a more comprehensive approach to visualizing refugees is achievable and desirable. A wider diversity of images, subjects, and

perspectives helps the subjects, those producing the image, and those viewing the image. We find that projects focused on the aesthetics of photography can neutralize the political situation, and empower refugees. However it is also important to understand that photographs of refugees should not exclude suffering or controversial material if used responsibly.

A responsible approach to photographing the displaced would encompass a reprioritization of the forces driving humanitarian and journalistic photography. By valuing refugees for their perspective and input, rather than their ability to generate funds for other refugees, news and humanitarian organizations will be able to pull away from exploitative practices. While issues of competition will remain, it is the public's responsibility to only consume and respond to images that respect refugees, and their sensitive situation. Responsible photographs will aid in dismantling the systematic exclusion of marginalized refugees from discourses regarding displacement. Photographs can help to dismantle problematic international norms, the same way refugees challenge deeply rooted issues in the global state system.

Through this thesis I have demonstrated issues with current social constructs that mandate the use of exploitative images of Syrian refugees. The displaced Syrians will undoubtedly be photographed for years to come. As Syrians, and the global community move forward in an attempt to end the Syrian conflict it is important to use photography in a respectful way, which acknowledges its power as a political tool. As many have realized, photography has the potential to give agency to those silenced by the conflict. By taking a more inclusive approach to photographing displacement, photographed refugees will have more agency and a wider variety of refugees would be photographed.

A more diverse set of subjects, photographers, and photographs will help combat issues of marginalization. Truly effective images do not just demand relief, they aspire to transform the

economic and political structures that can provide the vulnerable with a better social reality.³²¹

While it is not the only way to photograph a refugee, I find that it is important to create more photographs of refugees which frame them as strong survivors. Focusing on resilience instead of victimhood makes it easier to avoid exploitative practices. The key concerns for helping refugees are safety and dignity, this should be reflected in how we photograph refugees more often.

Photography has the ability to move masses of people in a way that words and numbers can not. By acknowledging this power, organizations and individuals will be able to participate in a more respectful practice of photography, which involves respect for the subject. A contemplative act is a more responsible response to viewing photographs of displacement. This allows spectators to avoid snap judgements and assumptions. It is also the responsibility of the publisher or producer of the photograph to avoid generalizations and ambiguity. If you are using an image to aid your message it should be explained as a way to make an image more accessible. Coherent, inclusive, comprehensive, and tolerant photographs can help raise public awareness without causing fear or disinterest. The rapid dissemination of photographs, makes it more important than ever to understand the political and social implications of the photograph. The search for and the consumption of the picture perfect refugee must end.

³²¹ Lilie Chouliaraki, "Post-humanitarianism Humanitarian communication beyond a politics of pity," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 13, no. 2 (2010): 113.

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