

Communicating Distant Suffering Through the Camera Lens:
A Study of AP News Images of the Syrian Civil War

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Xu Zhang

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my twin brother Chen “Frank” Zhang, the one whom I love most and have most in common with. I forever cherish his brotherhood and appreciate his friendship. His kindness, love, generosity, determination, and optimism forever guide my life. He taught me how to be a kind person; He demonstrated me hopefulness during the time of difficulty; He showed me patience and tolerance. Whenever I needed help, he always gave me his unconditional support and love. Because of him, I am able to accomplish what I have accomplished. At the moment of finishing my PhD journey, here is what I want to say to my dear brother, Chen “Frank”:

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examined *The Associated Press (AP)* news photographs of civilian suffering in the Syrian civil war using a visual framing approach. By doing a quantitative content analysis on 1,309 *AP* news images of suffering civilians and refugees, this study revealed that at a denotative level of visual framing, *Daily Life*, *Rescue/Recovery*, *Human Reaction to Suffering*, *Journey*, and *Celebrity Visit* were the five most prominent themes in *AP* visual coverage of humanitarian issues caused by the Syrian civil conflict. A qualitative semiotic analysis was further conducted based on the results from the content analysis in order to decipher visual framing devices used by *The Associated Press (AP)* at the connotative and ideological levels. Six identified visual frames from the semiotic analysis indicated that old visual tropes of humanitarian images, which are grounded upon stereotypical representations of distant suffering, are still prevalent in the news media today. Semiotic analysis also suggested that the *AP* visual coverage enacted various forms of moral disposition, such as compassionate care toward suffering and indignation towards perpetrators (e.g., the al-Assad Regime). However, they did not provide an ideal means of provoking a cosmopolitan form of sympathy as they highlighted the victimhood and cultural otherness of suffering Syrians, while privileging the emotions and actions of Western politicians and celebrities. In addition, semi-structured interviews with eight press photographers who had covered human suffering in times of war were conducted for the purpose of enhancing the research findings from the visual analysis.

Keyword: Syrian civil war, distant suffering, framing analysis, *The Associated Press*

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Chapter I

Introduction

The Syrian civil war has spanned more than nine years, from 2011 to the present. One of the devastating effects of this war has been the large death toll that has resulted from the violent conflict involving both Syrian domestic sectarian forces as well as influential foreign powers. From March 2011 to April 2020, more than 380,000 people have been reported killed, including over 115,000 civilians (France 24, 2020). In addition to the loss of lives, the Syrian civil war has also caused the largest migrant crisis across Europe and the Mediterranean Sea since World War II. More than 6.7 million Syrians have been forced to flee their country since 2011, plus 6.1 million have been displaced from their homes but remain trapped in Syria (USA for UNHCR, 2020). Without a doubt, the Syrian civil war represents one of the most violent, destructive, and intractable conflicts in recent human history. As the UNHCR High Commissioner Filippo Grandi once put out in a statement, “Syria is the biggest humanitarian and refugee crisis of our time, a continuing cause of suffering for millions which should be garnering a groundswell of support around the world” (UNHCR, 2016).

From the public’s viewpoint, the news media play a significant role in constructing the death and pain in war and conflict scenarios (Azoulay, 2008; Cottle, 2008; Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017; Griffin, 2010). The media have the power to set up a conflict agenda, frame the conflict, shape the people’s understanding of others’ suffering and pain caused by an ongoing armed conflict, and may further influence reactions to those sufferings (Silverstone, 2007). As Seaton (2005) has pointed out, human suffering appearing in the media is able to generate feelings, shape sensibilities, and mobilize emotions. It can affect the people in many different ways—“perhaps compassion in the case of victims of a disaster; perhaps a change in political opinion in

the case of victims of a military conflict” (p. 89). The ways in which language and image combine to tell the story of distant suffering, or in Chouliaraki’s (2008) words, “the aesthetic quality of mediated representation” (p. 838), are inextricably connected to the moral stance toward suffering that the media present to audiences. Given the critical role of news media in informing the public about global risks and suffering and further shaping the moral relationship between audiences and distant others (Chouliaraki, 2006, 2013b; Joye, 2010), this dissertation sets out to examine the visual news coverage by the Western mainstream news wire service, *The Associated Press* (AP), of the human suffering caused by the Syrian civil war.

Specifically, this research looks at the news imagery of the casualties, destruction, and displacement caused by the Syrian civil war. News photographs documenting ordinary Syrians’ lives in the horror and shadow of the war are included in the analysis. Using a framing approach, this study seeks to explore and understand how Western mainstream news media visually constructed the distant human suffering of the Syrian civil conflict through the camera lens. One overarching research question is asked: During a 9-year period (2011-2019), how has AP visually framed the suffering of ordinary Syrians caused by the Syrian civil war? To answer this question, a quantitative content analysis based on a predefined coding procedure and codebook is used to examine news photographs of human suffering caused by the Syrian civil war, as published on the AP website (<http://www.apimages.com>). A semiotic approach was then followed to qualitatively analyze news images based on the quantitative findings. In addition, in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of press photography of war and human suffering, the researcher also conducted in-depth interviews with eight experienced press photographers who have been to different wars and conflicts (including Syria) as either staff photojournalist or freelance photographer for mainstream Western wire services (*The Associated Press* and *Reuters*).

This mixed-methods design allows the researcher to comprehend how a major Western news wire, *The Associated Press*, constructed the distant human suffering caused by the Syrian civil war through the medium of photography. Editorial choices concerning how the suffering is portrayed in news (frame, representation, camera angle, etc.) are daily journalistic routines that carry certain norms as to “how the spectator should relate to the sufferer and what ‘we’ should do about the suffering” (Chouliaraki, 2006, p. 3). This study further explores how the Western news media have politically and ethically shaped the relationship between the spectators and far-away “others” presented in news photographs documenting the Syrian conflict.

Rationale for the Dissertation

The Syrian civil war has not only caused an unprecedented level of devastation and human loss in the Middle East but also affected migrants’ movement across Europe. News media across the world have devoted extensive coverage to Syria’s civil war and have produced various media discourses regarding the conflict (Zhang & Luther, 2019). Specifically, according to the European Institute of Peace (2016), terrorism and conflict have been most frequent themes presented in news media across the globe. The report also suggests that although the Syrian civil war has been a tremendous humanitarian disaster, the large death toll and human suffering caused by the conflict had accounted for only 3% of global news coverage.

Some research on the news media coverage of the Syrian civil war has focused on different aspects of the conflict. For instance, Seo and Ebrahim (2016) examined how the Syrian government and oppositional groups promoted their propaganda messages on social media during the conflict. Greenwood and Jenkins (2015) studied how Syria’s civil war was visually presented in both news and public affairs magazines. They concluded that international news events like Syria were often portrayed in episodic news frames, with a focus on violence. Cozma and Kozman

(2015) examined how American newspapers, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, covered the international community's reaction to the Syrian regime's use of chemical weapons against its own citizens in August 2013. The researchers found that despite a tremendous loss of human lives due to the chemical weapon incident, the selected newspapers mainly adopted a *conflict* frame that emphasized the disagreement between major international players in their news coverage, whereas *human interest* and *morality* frames were barely presented. Using a transnational comparative approach, Godefroidt, Berbers, and d'Haenens (2016) researched how international news agencies reacted to the chemical weapon attacks in Syria. They found that *nationalism* was one of those most frequently adopted news frames across France and the United States. Furthermore, Medzihorsky, Popovic, and Jenne (2017) analyzed how the United Nations Security Council members framed the Syrian civil war in their respective speeches. The study found that how each nation addressed Syria depended on their foreign policies toward it. Meyer, Sangar, and Michaels (2018) examined the influence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on media during the Syrian civil war. Through an interpretative analysis of NGO output and media coverage, the authors concluded that in a highly volatile and dangerous conflict setting where the government source had lost its credibility, the NGOs were highly influential in shaping media accounts of "evolving conflict dynamics, key events, and actor culpability for social deviant behavior such as the killing of civilians or the use of chemical weapons" (p. 164). Although these academic studies have touched upon the case of Syria's civil conflict, none of them has made the catastrophic human suffering caused by the war itself a central point of investigation.

In addition to studying politics and conflict regarding Syria, scholars across various fields have extensively examined the news media coverage of the 2015 refugee crisis across the European continent caused by Syria's civil conflict. For example, Smith and Brown (2020) found that news

from English sources tended to portray Syrian refugees as either helpless, passive victims who desperately needed others' help or as unwelcome intruders who were engaged in criminal and illegal activities. By comparing well-known national news media to tabloid ones, Greussing and Boomgaarden (2017) analyzed six Austrian newspapers' representation of refugees and asylum seekers within a one-year period, from January 2015 to January 2016. The study revealed that possessing little background information on refugees' situations, the Austrian press mostly portrayed refugees and asylum seekers as a threat to national security and a burden to the local economy. Georgiou and Zaborowski (2017) systematically studied how mainstream newspapers in eight European countries had covered the refugee crisis from 2015 to 2016. They found that although the press coverage had shown sympathetic tones toward refugees and migrants, newspapers across Europe had overall depicted refugees and migrants as either vulnerable victims or dangerous outsiders to European nations. In another comparative study, through a content analysis of 1,200 European newspaper articles about the 2015 refugee crisis across eight European countries, Chouliaraki and Zaborowski (2017) concluded that the mainstream news in Europe had marginalized the voices from refugees and reinforced the existing hierarchies of the European political spheres. This hierarchy of voice further led to a "triple misrecognition of refugees" (p. 630) that firmly kept them outside the sphere of "our" communities of belonging. These studies have demonstrated that the mainstream news media in Europe mainly portrayed Syrian refugees in a stereotypical manner—passive, nameless, vulnerable outsiders who can also be a threat to local society. Nonetheless, with a focus only on Europe and Syrians who sought asylum abroad, they did not provide a holistic view of media on human rights issues pertaining to the Syrian civil war. Given that massive displacement (Malteser International, 2019), a large human death toll (Human Rights Watch, 2019), and dire living situations for civilians inside Syria (Doucet, 2015)

were major human rights issues caused by the conflict, there is much need for a systematic examination on how the mainstream news media outside Europe have covered different aspects of human rights issues related to Syria's conflict, especially visual analysis.

To fill the research gap, this dissertation specifically analyzes *AP*'s visual coverage of human suffering caused by the Syrian civil war. The main research goal is to examine how the Western mainstream news media visually portray distant human suffering in a recent, ongoing, large-scale civil conflict. To achieve this research objective, this study deciphers visual patterns and storytelling techniques used by *AP* photojournalists in constructing the reality of human suffering caused by the Syrian civil conflict. In so doing, this study aims to find out how the vulnerability of distant others is constructed in Western mainstream media and how such a depiction could further construct the relationship (politically and ethically) between "us" (spectators of the news images) and "them" (far-away others who suffer from the Syrian civil war).

Among different types of news representations, news pictures have a special power and capacity to draw the public's attention to a particular time, place, or a given event and issue (Perlmutter, 1998), especially during times of misfortune. As Zelizer (2011) has once pointed out, "traumatic events received targeted but limited photographic coverage, often reduced to circulation of certain memorable images" (p. 61). For instance, a news image that triggered public outrage depicted the body of three-year-old Syrian boy Aylan Kurdi found on Turkey's Bodrum Beach in September 2015, which was widely distributed in mainstream media as well as on social media (Visual Social Media Lab, 2015). Another news image of a wounded, dazed Syrian child who survived a Russian/Assad regime airstrike in Aleppo was shown in the news and shared thousands of times on social media (Sanchez, 2016). These two iconic news photographs of the human suffering caused by dire situations in Syria have captured the horror and inhumane nature of an

ongoing armed conflict. They play a significant role in attracting international attention to the complex and brutal conflict in Syria. Images like these, which depict extreme human tragedies, not only make good news photography but also generate emotional reactions among the public and could become part of a collective cultural memory that can be vividly recognized by generations (Cohen, Boudana, & Frosh, 2018; N. K. Miller, 2004; Perlmutter, 1998). They shape the public discourse on humanitarian issues. For instance, after photographs of Aylan Kurdi made headlines in the European press, media narratives in Europe shifted from “protect the country from refugees’ intrusion” to “help refugees” (Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017). These pictures have become evidence of the suffering and have invited audiences to experience moral compassion from a distance (Hoijer, 2004).

Hicks (1972) stated that a photograph reproduced in a newspaper, magazine, or book represented an abstraction of reality. With the invention of the commercial 35mm camera, journalistic photographers have long enjoyed “an almost synonymous relationship with truth and reality” (Creech, 2017, p. 1125). Since human beings are intensely visual creatures relying on vision as dominant sense (Fishman, 2017), most people tend to put intuitive trust in news images instead of investigating or questioning their authenticity (Newton, 2001). By performing the eyewitness role (Cookman, 2009), photojournalists help viewers to facilitate their sense-making of the world (Zelizer, 2010).

Specifically, as powerful communication tools, news photographs constitute a truly universal language in the world. Understanding images does not require the right upbringing or the right training (Hicks, 1972). News images cultivate a special relationship between viewers and the world inside the picture frame (Jewitt & Oyama, 2011). Visual images interact with viewers by implicating what attitudes viewers should take in response to portrayed subjects or events. Some

iconic images are even alleged to have crucial power to mobilize national opinions by capturing decisive moments in history (Dahmen et al., 2018). Since news images can become an almost “instantaneous metonym for victims of war and mass suffering” (Dahmen et al., 2018, p. 298), they are able to evoke empathetic responses toward those depicted suffering (M. Christopher, 2010; Slovic, 2007) by entering the memory galleries of viewers’ mind and affecting viewers at a deep, personal level. With this in mind, it is essential and meaningful to investigate the visual representation of human suffering in Syria’s civil conflict produced by photojournalists.

The focus of this dissertation is news images of casualty, destruction, and displacement caused by the Syrian civil conflict. Photographs about ordinary Syrians being trapped in their country and living in dire situations are included in this dissertation. The portrayed subjects in the analyzed news images are mainly the ones who suffered from Syria’s conflict, including ordinary Syrian citizens, displaced Syrians, and injured or dead soldiers. Based on a quantitative content analysis of these news images published on the official *AP* website (<http://www.apimages.com>) over a nine-year period from 2011 to 2019, this dissertation research studies how the Western mainstream news media have visually represented the human suffering of Syria’s civil conflict. The *AP* is selected because of its dominant position in providing foreign news coverage worldwide. It has a global staff of 3,700 employees working in 304 locations in 116 nations. *AP* also has 2,400 news gatherers around the world and 6 international editing hubs (Kumar, 2011). The organization covers newsworthy events around the world and produces a steady stream of news images to subscribed news organizations (Fishman, 2017). The *AP* is also renowned for its extensive, impartial, and influential war coverage. From the American Civil War, through the World Wars, to Vietnam and the recent War on Terror, the *AP* has been at the forefront of world events, delivering timely, newsworthy information to audiences both at home and abroad (Halberstam,

2007). With the internet, news articles and photographs produced by the *AP* have been able to reach global audiences.

The next chapter provides background information on the Syrian civil war. Then chapter 3 discusses the key theoretical concepts regarding human suffering and visual communication that undergird this dissertation research. Chapter 4 outlines specific research questions, and chapter 5 discusses the research method used in this research. Chapter 6 presents the research findings and results from the quantitative content analysis of news images and qualitative semiotic interpretations of examined images. Finally, chapter 7 discusses the possible implications of this research on mediated human suffering.

Chapter II

The Syrian Civil War

The son of former president Hafez al-Assad, Bashar al-Assad, came to power in 2000, as the leader of the Syrian ruling Baath party and the president of the Syrian Arab Republic. During his inauguration ceremony in Damascus on July 17, 2000, Bashar al-Assad claimed,

We must rid ourselves of those old ideas that have become obstacles. In order to succeed we need modern thinking...some people maybe believe that creative minds are linked to age and that they can frequently be found with old, but this is not quite accurate, some young people have strong minds that are still lively and creative. (Lesch, 2012, p. 4)

Bashar al-Assad was an advocate of information technology and economic modernization as well as the leader of an anti-corruption campaign under his father (Hinnebusch, 2011). By positioning himself as a modernizer, Bashar al-Assad vowed to take a different approach of running his nation and bring forth a Syrian style of democracy, in contrast to the old totalitarian state characterized by state-dominated yet stagnant economy, prevalent corruption, and political repression. Shortly after Bashar al-Assad became president, his economic policies led to an era of economic reform called Damascus Spring (Lesch, 2012).

Nonetheless, Damascus Spring did not last long once Bashar al-Assad started to realize that his regime power was being threatened by pro-democracy activist groups and different civil societal organizations (Terzieff, 2007). After the al-Assad regime reversed certain progressive policy decisions, Syria went back to that old authoritarian state with tight regime control on almost all spheres of society, including the press.

In December 2010, triggered by the self-immolation of a young, unemployed Tunisian young man on the street of Sidi Bouzid, a large-scale demonstration erupted throughout Tunisia, with people protesting economic hardship, corruption, and decades of autocratic rules (BBC News, 2013). The nationwide demonstration led to the resignation of the Tunisian president Ben Ali in January 2011. Soon after the Tunisian revolution, similar uprisings inspired by social media and civic engagement simultaneously spilled over into Egypt and Libya (Anderson, 2015). The political movements in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya have been called the Arab Spring or the Twitter Revolution (Khondker, 2011).

Under the influence of political movements in other Arab nations, in March 2011, at least 15 school children in the city of Da'ara, Syria, wrote "down with the regime" on the wall of their school, after they were inspired by a political slogan from the Egyptian uprising. All the school children were soon detained by the local authorities. The arrest of school children triggered an anti-regime rally and protest (Sterling, 2012). Instead of having dialogue with the protesters, the government decided to disperse the protesters with excessive force. The conflict between protesters and the government escalated on March 23, 2011, when government forces raided a mosque being used to provide medical treatment to those who got wounded during the protest (Human Rights Watch, 2011).

In March 2011, large-scale protests and demonstrations erupted in other key areas inside Syria, such as in the capital city of Damascus. The protestors demanded a more open political atmosphere as well as reforms in several key areas, including the justice system, health care, and the economy (Flock, 2011). The anger and frustration expressed by protesters were quickly spread by Syrian social activists using their mobile phones and social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Reuters, 2011).

President Bashar al-Assad imposed a tough stance on political uprisings. Despite the government's hard line, protests across the nation intensified. Video footage of protests and violence by government troops and law enforcements were posted on the YouTube and Facebook pages of Syrian opposition groups and civil activists (Lesch, 2012). In response to this new wave of anti-regime demonstrations, the Syrian government enforced its bloody crackdown on the protesters in the name of eliminating "terrorists" (Sinjab, 2013).

In the initial six weeks of the violent crackdown, almost 300 Syrians were killed (Bahrapour, 2011). The death dramatically increased half a year later. By September 2011, the act of violence carried out by the Syrian security forces and local police led to more than 2,600 people being killed (Shadid, 2011).

The death caused by government forces generated outrage against the Assad regime. In response to the situation, President Assad set a date for a dialogue with his opponents (Hassan, 2011). However, many opposition groups had determined that in a sectarian state like Syria, a dialogue could not possibly work with a repressive regime that persisted to crack down on protestors. After completely losing confidence and hope in their young president, more and more people joined opposition groups and protests (Sinjab, 2013). Soon, the peaceful demonstrations turned into vicious warfare between government security forces and opposition groups. In a country that has both regional and ethnic divisions, a few oppositional forces were formed under different banners, such as Free Syrian Army, Jaish al-Islam, and Jahat al-Nursa (Sorenson, 2016). Despite being fractured due to their different objectives, the groups unified under a common goal: the overthrow of the Assad regime.

The violence had quickly spread across the entire nation. By mid-2012, what was a small rebellion in March 2011 had expanded into a full-fledged civil war with no clear political solution

(Sorenson, 2016). Scholars have argued that this civil conflict resulted from the multi-sectarian structure of the Syrian society, as the Assad regime perpetuated ethnic and religious divides in order to ensure its own survival (Baczko et al., 2018). Particularly, as the head of a regime that is largely composed of ethnic minority Alawi, President Bashar al-Assad consolidated his power by enhancing the Alawi's predominance while restraining other ethnicities, such as the majority Sunni Muslims in their access to power (Hinnebusch, 2001; Sahner, 2014). In studying the Syrian civil war, Phillips (2015) has argued that instead of characterizing the Syrian situation as a sectarian war, semi-sectarian is a more accurate term to reflect the complex political identities in Syria, as Assad simultaneously promoted "a multi-layered ambiguous Syrian national identity" (p. 371).

The Syrian civil war also attracted outside involvement by nation-states, militias, NGOs, and hundreds of thousands of individuals (Sorenson, 2016). Initially, the local struggle between the regime and opposition was a mere representation of a broader proxy conflict between Iran (and its allies) and Turkey along with the gulf monarchies (Sahner, 2014). But after Russia began to be militarily involved in Syria and took the stance of upholding the Assad regime, a friction between Russia and the United States emerged with their respective allies, and the United States and Russia began to vie for geo-political influence in the region (Hove & Mutanda, 2015; Radin & Reach, 2017). This has added a renewed Cold War dimension to the Syrian civil war.

The dire situation in Syria has forced 5.1 million Syrians to leave their home country, resulting in a pouring of refugees into Syria's neighboring countries and further into Europe and North America (World Vision, 2017). According to Connor (2018), more than 5 million displaced Syrians live in neighboring countries in the Middle East and North Africa, including Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, and Turkey. In addition, Syrians have sought protections and asylum in industrial, well-developed European nations (Ostrand, 2015). With already one million displaced

Syrians in transit to Europe, the receiving European countries started to realize that an unprecedented influx of Syrian refugees had overwhelmed their national capacities (Sorenson, 2016).

Civil wars can be more deadly compared to warfare between nation-states because “they are more likely to involve civilians, and because the raw passions that often start and sustain civil wars can lead to particular brutality” (Sorensen, 2016, p. 43). In addition, as Wood and Kathman (2013) have pointed out, attacks on civilians have been used as a military strategy among both totalitarian regimes and insurgent rebels for achieving different strategic purposes. The Syrian conflict is defined by the Sunni-Alawite sectarian fault line and attacks on civilians (Hof & Simon, 2013). Years of relentless fighting has led to 511,000 deaths as of March 2018 (Human Rights Watch, 2019). The conflict in Syria has been widely considered as the worst humanitarian crisis in contemporary times (Collins, 2017).

The dreadful security and humanitarian situations have made Syria an unfriendly and dangerous place for media to cover. According to Salazar-Ferro (n.d.), Syrian and foreign journalists have been constantly harassed and targeted by Syrian government security forces, the rebel groups, and non-Syrian Islamist groups. From 2011 to 2019, 134 media workers have been killed in Syria (Committee to Protect Journalists, n.d.). The harsh working conditions inside Syria have caused a tremendous negative psychological impact on reporters who covered the country’s civil conflict. By studying the psychological well-being of war correspondents, Feinstein and Starr (2015) found that journalists in Syria were more likely to have higher rates of PTSD-related symptoms such as depression than their counterparts in other countries or regions.

Aside from safety issues, other challenging circumstances facing journalists in Syria are the access to key information and the accuracy of information gathered by journalists. In an

extremely restrained sectarian society that is accustomed to relying on rumor for information (Harkin, Anderson, Morgan, & Smith, 2012), the Syrian government imposed heavy-handed censorship and restrictions on domestic media and foreign correspondence, making the job of journalists more difficult (Salama, 2012). As Syrian native photojournalist who works for *Reuters* stated during his interview with the researcher, “The media was one of targeted fields during the Syrian revolution. There was no free press. There was no journalist there to cover the Syrian stories without making the narrative compatible with the regime’s rhetoric.”

With that being said, foreign journalists have been forced to choose from three options to tell the story of Syria: (a) following official voices in Damascus; (b) embedding themselves with rebel forces to get the information out, thus subjecting themselves to great danger and risk; or (c) relying on citizen journalists, social media activists, freelancers, and stringers to relay information (Johnston, 2017; Vandevordt, 2017; Wall & Zahed, 2015).

Following this background of the Syrian civil war, the literature review now examines the key conceptual and theoretical frameworks used in this dissertation.

Chapter III

Literature Review

Media and Human Suffering

Media representation of suffering. The meaning of *suffering* is so often associated with the concepts of *pain* and *human dignity* (Milton, 2013). Suffering is caused by severe distress that has a detrimental effect on personhood, and such distress could be a result of threat, major loss, or damage to one's identity (Anderson, 2015; Cassell, 1991). Apart from individuals, a group of people, a community, or even a whole society may experience suffering. Several major factors, such as social injustice, violence, natural disasters, or the devastating human consequences of a "failing state" could all lead to large-scale human sufferings (Moeller, 2006). According to Cottle (2008), the contemporary world confronts unprecedented global crises. By moving across geographical terrain and political territories, global threats such as forced migration, climate change, and global terrorism affect vast swaths of the world's population, with devastating effects.

Nowadays, in comparatively safe Western societies, the public observes human suffering at a distance and "is comforted by the thought that it is remote from our immediate experience" (Seaton, 2005, p. 50). Public perceptions of large-scale human suffering are usually mediated through gut-wrenching photographs, video footages, and texts in contemporary media. Photography, television, cinema, and the internet are not only common but also exclusive sources for the public to know about human sufferings in remote areas (Chouliaraki, 2013b; Cottle, 2008; Milton, 2013). Specifically, by presenting factual accounts about crises and issues relating to human life and welfare, mainstream media have long helped to raise public awareness of humanitarian crises (Bunce, Scott, & Wright, 2019).

Within the field of international communication, there is a rich body of literature that has explored the mediated representation of distant suffering (Boltanski 1999) to better understand the media's role in communication of remote crises and human misery. For example, Ploughman (1995) conducted a content analysis on media accounts of five international humanitarian disasters in the U.S. press: famine in Africa, tropical cyclones in Bangladesh, an earthquake in Mexico City, mudslides in Puerto Rico, and lahars in Colombia. A close examination of news articles in *The New York Times*, *Newsweek* magazine, and *Time* magazine revealed that print news media primarily emphasized dramatic events in their news coverage of disaster. Several themes, including ethnocentrically defined values of order, altruistic democracy, natural disorder, the power of technology and resources, and ineffective national leadership were evident in the coverage. Without providing sufficient historical context, the print news media coverage tended to "impose Western values, assumptions, prerogatives, and explanatory frameworks in their framing and presentation of disasters" (p. 320).

Myers et al. (1996) investigated the U.S. media coverage of Rwanda and Bosnia conflicts in 1994. The content and intertextual analyses were conducted to see how the press portrayed two civil conflicts through words and images. The researchers found that the news coverage of Bosnia did not escape the Cold War lens. The chaos in former Yugoslavia was depicted as a logical outcome of communism's failure and such a representation was cast into *the survival of the Cold War* frame. In the coverage on Rwanda, without citing African sources, Rwanda was portrayed as a place of endless tribal conflict. Such representation reinforced the deeply held notions of a savage and primitive Africa and further suggested a derogatory scripting of African people and their struggle. Overall, by implying that Bosnia had to be instructed by the Western world to "graduate

into mature development” (p. 41) and Rwanda should be pitied and helped by the West, the U.S. media established a binary opposition of “West versus the rest” (p. 41) in their news narratives.

By analyzing sources, metaphors, portrayals, agencies, and keywords, Wall (1997) studied the coverage of the 1994 Rwandan crisis in American news magazines. The author conducted an analysis of 38 full-length news reports about the 1994 Rwanda crisis in *Newsweek*, *Time*, *US News & World Report* news magazines and concluded that the overall coverage had oversimplified the complexity of the crisis. Specifically, Rwandan violence was simply portrayed as irrational tribalism. Biblical myths were used to depict people in Africa as unsophisticated, helpless, and pathetic. Neighboring African countries in the coverage were depicted just as violent and incapable as Rwanda. These one-dimensional representations had reinforced the stereotypical images of Africa. In comparison, only the West was portrayed as able to solve Rwanda’s problem. The distorted coverage provided little insightful information about the crisis and interpreted the conflict in Africa as “evidence of backwardness” (p. 131).

Philo (2004) investigated how TV news had influenced the British audiences’ understanding of the developing world. The author examined three different cases: TV coverage of the Rwanda refugee crisis in 1994, news coverage of the war in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), and TV news reporting of the whole developing world. The finding was that the TV news coverage of political conflict, war, and other events in the developing countries provided audiences with very limited contextual information. The images of the developing world produced by TV news were overwhelmingly negative. The British TV news accounts of the developing countries tended to focus on dramatic, violent, and tragic footages and images while giving very little explanations on the events.

Chouliaraki (2005) interpreted the *BBC* television footage of the Iraq War as a semiotic accomplishment that turned the bombardment of Baghdad into an eyewitness “spectacle of rare audio-visual power and intensity” (p. 148). By combining edited moving images with personal running narration from broadcasters (connecting verbal with visual text), *BBC* footage provided audiences with two types of witnessing of the war in Iraq: the passive seeing defined by the mechanical eye of the camera and the active saying accomplished through subjective narration and factual descriptions from journalists. Although this kind of footage brought the spectator to the scene of the suffering in the city of Baghdad closer than ever before, the camera positioning (afar and above) kept the spectators’ views simultaneously outside the street of Baghdad, the homes of Iraqis, and hospitals. In so doing, the footage made the spectator an onlooker of suffering and war from a safe and far distance. Although the footage itself did not violate the principle of objectivity, it failed to evoke geographical or emotional proximity between the spectator and the sufferer. By constituting the war and distant suffering through aesthetic appreciation derived from the horror of suffering itself rather than through emotion, the *BBC* footage denied humanity to the Iraqi sufferers by rendering their identity irrelevant in the public sphere of television. By posing constraints on “what can be heard, read, felt and known” (p. 156), the televisual sublimation suppressed emotional, ethical, and political issues behind the bombardment of Baghdad.

Joye (2009) used discourse analysis to examine the mediated representation of natural disasters that occurred in Australia, Indonesia, Pakistan, and the USA. The author’s aim was to explore how the discourse of hierarchy and inequality were manifested in news texts about distant suffering. In a study of nine news items broadcast on a public and commercial Belgian television channel in January 2006, the finding was that the news media presented different instances of distant suffering in different ways. Specifically, there was clear identification of victims, so

suffering in the West (USA and Australia) was depicted as comprehensible and close to the spectators. In contrast, the Indonesian disaster was presented as less relevant and deserved no cause for concern or action, which blocked the viewers' engagement with the distant sufferers. Pakistan sufferers were presented as distant others who were overpowered by forces of nature and were passively undergoing misfortune. The findings concluded that by producing a global hierarchy characterized by a Western-centered (Euro-American) world order, the Western news media normalized the inequality between the Global North and the Global South. The media representation of the distant suffering tended to consolidate such division that reflected the status quo of the contemporary world.

Balaji (2011) has argued that the news media's response to the Haiti earthquake reflected the radicalization of pity and "the privileging of a white view of the dark world as dysfunctional, childlike, and dependent" (p. 50). A rhetorical analysis of several news articles and commentaries on the Haiti earthquake in the U.S. media revealed that the Western media discourse had framed Haiti as a mediated spectacle, with reference to the helplessness of local Haitians and the charity efforts of Western celebrities. The news discourse in selected media texts emphasized chaos in the aftermath of the disaster and framed Black Haitian victims as homogenized, tragic, and dysfunctional. This mediated construction implied that Haiti was a dependent nation that desperately needed help from the West. The news media diminished the victims' values as human beings by portraying them as pitiful others. This kind of media discourse, as the author had pointed out, reflected an "I-other" binary that clearly differentiated between the victims of calamity and the spectators to the sufferers' tragedies from far away.

With a focus on digital witnessing, Chouliaraki (2015) analyzed how the U.K. press had remediated three instances of death in the post-Arab Spring conflict recorded by mobile phone

camera: Gaddafi's death portrait (2011), the Jihadist beheadings of a British aid worker (2014), and the mass killing of Syrian civilians (2013). Her qualitative analysis found that the U.K. press remediated three mediated deaths in different ways. Gaddafi's death was remediated in a *dehumanized* way. In the chaotic scene of violence against Gaddafi, visibility was given to the exposure of Gaddafi's mortally wounded body in the U.K. media. Being shown as "bare life" (p. 1368) deprived of its human dignity, Gaddafi's vulnerable last moment was presented as "a mere object of consumption to our own right to look" (p. 1368), with no respect to privacy. The accompanying descriptions, such as "End of Tyrant" and "Death of a Dictator" invited audiences to contemplate the destiny of other rulers of any despotic regime but without empathy toward Gaddafi's brutal death. In comparison, the decapitation of a British aid worker was remediated in a *hyper-humanized* manner. A unanimous narrative of commemoration in news coverage turned the dead British aid worker into an iconic figure with a specific identity and an emblem of universal values. His humanity was exemplified. The footage of dead Syrian civilians by gas attack was remediated as *suspended humanization*. The recontextualization of the mass killing in Syria, such as the close-up imagery of eight dead children, along with the headline "Now they are gassing children," did not tell any history or story about those dead. Although it stirred emotions, it failed to invite the audiences to relate to the victims to themselves as fellow human beings. Rather, it mobilized a sense of outrage toward the perpetrators. The findings of this study indicated that the remediation of mediatized death in the Western news media was indeed "an increasingly complex process that recontextualizes the narrative and affective orientations of such content in ways that render it morally relevant to Western publics" (p. 1373).

Joye (2015) investigated how Belgian television stations had domesticated international disasters in their coverage. The study aimed to address how news media can attribute a local sense

of relevance to global suffering by focusing on the journalistic strategy of domestication. A critical discourse analysis of 87 news items on international disasters broadcast by Belgian TV channels identified four major domestication strategies adopted by Belgian journalists in their news coverage of distant suffering. Specifically, in the mode of *emotional domestication*, the Belgian journalists tended to focus on human-interest stories that constructed a sense of emotional proximity between the spectator and the sufferer. By contrast, the second mode of domestication for the Belgian journalists was to relate foreign events to locals by outlining the potential implications or repercussions for the audiences at home. This strategy brought the distant event closer to the Belgian spectator but also implied dangers it might present to the locals. The third domestication strategy for journalists was to directly address the spectator with a call to donate money or to organize a charitable event. This strategy, with a focus on the question of “What has been done with our money?” (p. 689), portrayed the victims in need as less relevant than relief workers, NGOs, and donors. The final domestication strategy used by Belgian journalists was related to the format of the news broadcast as well as to narrative and technical practices. The use of metaphors and short illustrations in the news made the story of suffering comprehensible and accessible to Belgian audiences. Although these strategies portrayed the suffering of others as morally relevant and possibly leading to feelings of cosmopolitanism and identification, others’ suffering was still viewed from a Eurocentric point of view and thus failed to challenge the global power hierarchy dominated by the West.

A brief review of literatures on the media representation of distant suffering support what Moeller (1999) has once observed: instead of thoughtful and reflexive reporting, foreign news about suffering and misfortune in the Western media is so often characterized by formulaic coverage that tends to ignore the complexity of the issues. It generates the stereotypical images

that fit only into Western cultural interpretations. In so doing, the media representation of distant suffering implicates the power imbalance between the West and the rest of the world and further reflects the priorities and worldview of audiences in the Global North (Bunce et al., 2019; Tester, 2001). These observations lead to another strand of study in media and distant suffering, which revolves around exploring some determining factors and values that dictate such media coverage. For example, from a news routine perspective, Moeller (1999) has said that in the news industry, when space and time were expensive and were not infinite, regardless of how compelling or immediate a foreign crisis could be, journalists often had to condense all information into a selective and sensationalized package that resonated with local cultural familiarities so that the story could be fit in the news media coverage. Thussu (2005) has argued that distant human suffering remained a priority in news only when it was palatable for the audiences' sensational tastes. As Sontag (2003) indicated, the philosophy of "if it bleeds, it leads" ran the guideline of tabloids and 24-hour headline news shows.

In terms of newsworthiness, Wright (2004) studied the visual coverage of Afghan refugees by *BBC*, *Sky News*, and *Euronews* and found that dramatic sensation and connection to the West were dominant news values that determined which images about Afghan refugees were deemed newsworthy. CARMA International's (2006) report revealed that the West's key self-interest (whether Westerners were affected or if Westerners had donated to relieve a disaster) and economic impact were two important factors that determined the significance of a humanitarian crisis in the Western media. Joye (2010a) argued that the Global South struggles to get attention from the Western news media unless the suffering is severe or affects a large number of Westerners. He further stated that disasters and other instances of human suffering were essentially media-constructed events: they existed only when the media covered them. Moreover, cultural or

linguistic proximity is also perceived as a key news value that dictates the Western media coverage of distant suffering (Fishman, 2017; Hanusch, 2008).

The studies above demonstrated that the media coverage of event-driven news stories (e.g., distant suffering or foreign emergency) is indeed subject to a selective process guided by various levels of gatekeeping forces, such as news routines, different news values, and audiences' taste and interest (Fahmy, Kelly, & Kim, 2007; Livingston & Bennett, 2003). Under the influence of such a process, the Western news media coverage of distant suffering maintains and constructs a socio-cultural difference between "us" and "them" manifested through an unbalanced global power hierarchy characterized by "a division of the world in zones of poverty and prosperity, danger and safety" (Joye, 2010b, p. 598). Such difference communicated in the news media ultimately leads to another problem in the representation of distant suffering. That is, deeply rooted in colonial history or being driven by ideologies (Joye, 2009), the Western media tend to portray the victims of distant suffering in a dichotomous way: "worthy" victims who are very much like "us" (Westerners) deserve "our" attention, whereas those "unworthy" ones (ethnic others) who are not part of "our" society can be ignored (Hawkins 2002; Small & Loewenstein, 2003). This problem leads to discussing another line of research in mediated distant suffering, which takes social factors into account and deals with audiences, their possible reactions to human suffering, and compassion fatigue.

Compassion fatigue. It's been a long-held belief that the mediated representation of human suffering can evoke different types of emotional reactions from audiences, especially compassion (Hoijer, 2004; Huiberts & Joye, 2018; Kyriakidou, 2015), which might lead to different kinds of helping behaviors for alleviating suffering, such as making a donation (Small, Loewenstein, & Slovic, 2007). On the contrary, Tester (2001) argued that as a result of constant

exposure to the spectacle of dreadful events, misery, and suffering in the media, people stop noticing them because they feel they have seen too much. Left being exhausted by repetitive exposure to news reports, the public ceases to think that “anything at all can be done to help” (Tester, 2001, p. 13). This explains well what Moeller (1999) has discussed in her book—the phenomenon of “compassion fatigue” (p. 16). The overexposure of too much strident coverage with insufficient background and context exhausts audiences and leads to a diminishing public concern to human suffering and a lack of impetus to take actions to alleviate the suffering (Joye, 2015). Once compassion cannot be translated into actions, it fades away (Sontag, 2003). There are several possible explanations for what might cause compassion fatigue. The formulaic news coverage (Moeller, 1999) can be one of them. As shown in one recent study (Kogen, 2019), news stories presented distant suffering as either a unique, stand-alone, interesting state of affair that lacks historical background or as a human-interest story emphasizing a particular person or family suffering from an ongoing crisis or tragedy. Despite these stories bringing a human face into the coverage, they exclude solution-oriented information and leads to compassion fatigue due to relentless, hopeless information that is so upsetting that audiences think little can be done to help the situation. The reason for this kind of exclusion, according to Kogen (2019), is primarily due to journalists’ ethical concerns for an unbiased coverage and secondly because reporters themselves “cannot conceive of political solutions to complex problems of foreign suffering” (p. 9).

In addition to news coverage, distance, which could be cultural, geographic, or psychological, is another important cause of compassion fatigue (Engelhardt, 2015; Hanusch, 2008; Joye, 2009). For instance, by doing a focus group study, Kyriakidou (2014) found that geographic proximity played a key role in how audiences remembered the suffering presented in the news media and if they would develop compassion toward the victims of suffering. In another

focus group study, Huiberts and Joye (2018) noticed that the audiences “were far more capable of empathizing with mediated suffering” (p. 341) when they felt they were personally connected to the suffering. Such personal connection was based on a sense of cultural similarity, shared experience, or geographical proximity. This finding resonates with Seaton’s (2005) argument: People demonstrate the greatest compassion toward those with whom they can easily identify, so what greatly affects the audience’s development of compassion toward the suffering is whether the victims depicted in the news are people who are “very much like us” (p. 280). Furthermore, from a psychological point of view, Kamm (2004) pinpointed that it is hard for audiences to cultivate a sense of compassion when the victims of suffering are strangers rather than members of their own communities. One possible explanation for this phenomenon would be, in the words of Perlmutter (1998), that “...most people of any nation, tribe, or kinship group value far more the lives of their own countrymen than the lives of the enemy or the unknown others” (p. 28).

The studies above demonstrate that more media coverage of distant suffering might not lead more audiences or spectators to feel compassionate toward the vulnerable others from a distance. As Chouliaraki (2006) has pointed out, “Spectators do not possess “pure” emotions vis-à-vis the sufferers. Their emotions are in fact shaped by the values embedded in news narratives about who the ‘others’ are and how ‘we’ should relate to them” (p. 11). The performative power of media, according to Sontag (2003), has made some people’s suffering have a lot more intrinsic interest to audiences than the suffering of others. With this in mind, some difficult and apparently cynical questions can be asked here. For instance, as noted by Dayan (2007), since audiences can neither care more about the victims nor do something to alleviate their pain, what is the point for the media to turn audiences into echo chambers of others’ distant suffering? If the media have failed to recognize the unfamiliar others as part of humanity, how can media, or media discourse

of any kind, properly define the mediated relationship between the spectator and the sufferer so that such relationship can produce ethical norms reflecting “the discourse of common humanity” (Chouliaraki & Orgad, 2011, p. 342)? If contemporary media’s humanitarian narratives increase the moral distance between the spectators and those vulnerable, unfortunate others (Chouliaraki, 2006; Musaro, 2013) to account for the role of the media as a force of moral imagination in public life (Orgad, 2012), what could be possibly done so such distance can be closed and therefore the humanity of others can be constantly defined and negotiated in the mediated spaces? These questions lead to the discussion of two key theoretical terms in media and distant suffering research: mediation and proper distance.

Mediation. In his book *Globalization and Culture*, John Tomlinson (1999) argued that the use of media and communication technologies, particularly television and internet, can open up people’s life to a larger world by lifting them out of their own cultural and existential connection to their localities. Based on such a premise, he brought up the concept of *mediation*, which was understood as a “quasi-interaction” (p. 159) between people who lived far away from each other. In such interaction, the media actively sought to interpret and construct the meanings of communication. Using the example of a televised spectacle—the death of Princess Diana—Tomlinson stated that the mediated interaction was deeply “woven into the fabric of daily life experience for huge numbers of people” (p. 168). By connecting people with distant others in ways that “open up cultural horizons to other practices, values, and ways of life” (p. 170), mediation is morally and culturally responsible for “deterritorialization” (p. 151). In this sense, mediation is not only about transcending geographical distance by compressing time and space but also “the closing of moral distance” (p. 171) between faraway others by delivering a socio-cultural immediacy with the help of communication technologies’ high-velocity transmission.

Impressed by the ubiquitous presence of communication tools and technologies in the modern world, Silverstone (2002) conceptualized *mediation* as a transformative meaning-making process. His thesis explained that progressive media technologies, principally broadcast technologies in the 20th century, had enabled communication and meaning-construction processes (i.e., the process of mediation) because they have become increasingly central to “the ways in which individuals manage their everyday lives” (p. 761) and central in their capacity “to provide the symbolic resources and tools for making sense of the complexities of the everyday” (p. 762). Silverstone theorized the concept of *mediation* as a fundamental, uneven, and dialectical process “in which institutionalized media of communication (the press, broadcast radio and television, and increasingly the World Wide Web) are involved in the general circulation of symbols in social life” (p. 762) because the dominant or deeply entrenched meanings provided by the mass media are privileged and pervasive. Different social actors increasingly rely on the meanings of public life and accounts of the world constructed by the media to make sense of their own. As such, mediation largely influences how the world appears in everyday life, and as such, the mediated appearance of the world in turn defines one’s relationship to the other, especially the distant other—the other who only appears to “us” within the media.

Inspired by the work of political and philosophical theorist Hannah Arendt, Silverstone (2007) further proposed the idea of *mediapolis* in response to significant inseparable connection between the media and everyday life. The idea is illustrated as such:

The mediapolis is, I intend, the mediated space of appearance in which the world appears and in which the world is constituted in its worldliness, and through which we learn about those who are and who are not like us. It is through communications conducted through the mediapolis that we are constructed as

human (or not), and it is through the mediapolis that public and political life increasingly comes to emerge at all levels of the body politic (or not). (Silverstone, 2007, p. 31)

He explained that in *mediapolis*, the relationship between different social actors, the judgment of good and evil, the boundaries of what is human and what is not, and the practice of inclusion and exclusion were all dependent on media representations. Various forms of mass media and their produced representations establish ritualized and ideological consistencies that not only provide comfort and entertainment but also the taken-for-granted, embedded components of contemporary culture and social norms. Because the understanding of the outside world is highly dependent on mediated representations, such as narratives and images, mediation becomes inseparable in everyday life. The media ultimately connect or disconnect “us” from the others, position “us,” or enable “us” to position “ourselves.” In this dialectic, *mediapolis*, or a mediated space of appearance, does concern “our relationship to the different, the unfamiliar, the other” (Chouliaraki & Orgad, 2011, p. 341). Bearing this argument in mind, Silverstone further discussed the ethical implications of mediation. He wondered, since the media had extended reach and provided resources for an enlarged imagination of the world, had they also extended understanding and facilitated representative thinking and judgment? To address such an inquiry, he put forward an ethical proposal that began by recognizing others “through difference as well as through shared identity” (p. 47). Such ethics of care, according to him, was predicated on the concept of *proper distance*, which was referred to as “the more or less precise degree of proximity” (p. 47) required for mediated relationships of care, responsibility, and understanding. In the politics of the mediated world of otherness, distance is regarded as a moral category and becomes a critical resource in assessing how mediation can generate a sense of care or responsibility through the positioning of

others along the axis of proximity-distance (Chouliaraki, 2011). Applying such conceptualization to the media and distant suffering research, Orgeret (2018) found that the media could present distant suffering from a proper distance or a *required proximity* (Dayan, 2007) by telling the story with affective power and depicting the sufferer as sovereign agents with reflexive identity. In so doing, the mediation of distant suffering can invite the audience to imagine the others' misery in his or her own terms.

Being influenced by Tomlinson's (1999) teleology of mediation, Chouliaraki (2006) proposed an analytical approach called "the analytics of mediation" (p. 70) to study the various representations of distant suffering in television news. There were three analytical dimensions inherent in the mediated suffering: "*multi-modality*—the properties of language and image that construe the spectacle of suffering on screen," "*space-time*—the representation of proximity/distance to the scene of suffering," and "*agency*—the representation of action on the sufferer's misfortune" (p. 8). Using these dimensions, she closely studied news broadcasts on various instances of suffering around the world that appeared in *BBC World* and two other national European national channels, *NET* (Greek) and *DR* (Danish). The objective of such analysis, according to Chouliaraki, was to identify different genres of television news as a "regime of meanings" (p. 70). As a result, she found a hierarchy of suffering based on "three regimes of pity" (p. 8) manifested through three different genres of news texts. The bottom of the hierarchical model was what Chouliaraki called "adventure news." With a reliance on descriptive narratives, this category of news consisted of isolated and random events that restricted the spectator's proximity to suffering. The lack of agency in news dehumanized the sufferer and curtailed viewers' feelings of sympathy toward distant suffering. In so doing, such news stories failed to make an ethical demand on spectators to respond to the reported suffering. By contrast, "emergency news" was at

the middle of this hierarchy. With the presentation of visually and verbally complicated narratives that demonstrated increasing degrees of affective power, this news genre placed suffering “in the order of lived experience” (p. 119) and gave suffering a historical context. In the meantime, limited conditional agency was also granted to the sufferer. As such, this news genre made the sufferer relevant to spectators and thus increased the possibilities of the spectators’ action on the suffering, even though the sufferer was still presented as “others” (p. 11). What remained at the top of this hierarchical model was “ecstatic news.” This genre, exemplified by the news of the September 11th attacks, narrowed the proximity between the spectator and the sufferer by using sophisticated, multimodal, non-stop coverage that solicited the viewers’ moral disposition toward compassion and social action.

In this study, Chouliaraki defined the concept of *mediation* in relation to the capacity of the media to involve audiences emotionally and culturally with distant others. She concluded that the mediated communication of distant suffering such as news visuals and narratives could play an essential role to evoke the public’s emotion, extend the public’s ethical sensibility to those who suffer from a distance, and further legitimize the imperative to act on behalf of vulnerable others as the moral order of modernity (Chouliaraki, 2006). The key concept in her main thesis was called “the politics of pity,” which refers to “the ways in which various media and their semiotic resources produce meaning about the spectator-sufferer relationship in television” (p. 46). According to her, as “(re)production of the social relationship of viewing” (2006, p. 60), mediation is an important ethical and political power of contemporary life, which “mobilizes meaning in order to shape the conduct of particular relationships in terms of who connects with whom and who cares about whom” (p. 60).

In such influential work, Chouliaraki (2006) discussed the dilemma, or precisely speaking, the ethical dilemma of mediation, using her words, “the paradoxes of mediation” (p. 37). It involves two different sides of argument, pessimistic and optimistic ones, about whether or not technology-based media, especially television, is able to form a connectivity between places and people—or, in other words, the process of mediation initiated by mass media and prompted by “technical immediacy” (p. 20) can cultivate a disposition of care toward distant others through a mediated spectator vis-à-vis the distant sufferer relationship. Actually, a very similar issue—whether or not the media can bring the spectator and distant sufferer together—has been addressed by other scholars from a historical point of view. For instance, in the book *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics*, Boltanski (1999) proposed a typology of suffering based on an examination of three different genres of mediation of the 18th century: the novel, the political manifesto, and painting. He argued that different genres of media gave rise to different forms of emotional commitment and options for action in relation to the distant suffering. Specifically, the political pamphlet cultivates a sense of pity or compassion through indignation grounded on the condemnation of perpetrators or evil doers who inflict pain upon the distant others. This novel cultivates a sentimental, tender-hearted sympathy by presenting the unfortunate others’ gratitude at receiving help or care from benefactors. In sharp contrast, painting, which is considered as a form of “sublimation” (p. 115), contains or even suppresses the sentiment of pity by showing the horrible, grotesque visuals that depict the pain of distant others. These three sentimental proposals, which are based on the examination of artistic representation (painting) and fiction (novel), are groundbreaking. Nonetheless, without considering technology-based new media (such as television and the internet), they ignored a very important genre of mediation: news. In terms of mediating the distant suffering, what distinguishes the news from historical fiction or art is that

not only is news presented in different forms of media, usually contemporary hi-tech based ones that combine texts and visuals together, but also more importantly, it bears witness to distant suffering on the ground of professional journalistic values such as objectivity (Bunce et al., 2019; Chouliaraki, 2013b; Petley, 2003). With this being said, compared to old scholarship, the meaning of Chouliaraki's (2006) work lies in its significance of addressing "the paradox of mediation" (p. 37) or the ethical dilemma of mediation in the context of modernized televised news, which is an epitome of both "hypermediacy and immediacy" (pp. 41-42).

Based on the examination of televised news, Chouliaraki (2006) concluded that contemporary mediation is postmodern because it is defined by "an intense preoccupation with the image and a focus on the strategic intervention of visual aspect of our culture" (p. 54). The capacity of the visual image to present the distant suffering to the spectator and stage a meaningful reality in the world constitutes "the aesthetic reflexivity thesis of mediation" (pp. 53-69). Such significance of visuals foregrounds the next section of the literature review: Visual Communication.

Visual Communication

Photography and suffering. From a historical viewpoint, using photography to document human suffering can be traced back to as early as the 1880s, when journalists, missionaries, and reformers used photos in different forms of print media such as illustrated newspapers, books, and magazines to show different examples of human misery in the world (Fehrenbach & Rodogno, 2015). From then, a variety of humanitarian imagery rendered the meaning of human suffering and made it comprehensible for European and American audiences.

In contemporary modern days, inspired by the ideal of embracing humanism (Cookman, 2009), journalists so often turn to visuals to document different instances of human suffering in

times of crisis, dramatic events, and violence (Griffin, 2010; Zelizer, 2002). As a technology capable of collapsing distance between the viewer and the subject of suffering, photography tells a better story of suffering than words (Twomey, 2012). The creation and circulation of visual images of suffering, atrocity, and abuse so often raise the public's awareness of distinct humanitarian issues. As Moller (2010) discovered, art photography in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide reminds Western viewers of a humanitarian crisis that they had ignored when it took place.

Since visuals seem utterly real (Lippmann, 1922), some of those that depict extreme dire situations of human suffering have powerful impacts on the public and can potentially formulate collective memories for many generations to come (Debbie, 1991). For instance, through a thorough examination of several prominent images taken during different times of conflicts and political crises, Perlmutter (1998) claimed that images about prominent tragic events could trigger strong emotional reactions from the public: The Vietnam War (1954-1975), the Chinese pro-democracy movement (1989), famine in South Sudan (1990s), and the U.S. military involvement in Somalia (1993). These images were able to gain icon status and could be recalled by many generations. Similarly, by studying one iconic image taken during the Vietnam War—the *Napalm Girl*, N. K. Miller (2004) pointed out that the horrifying image of a nine-year-old South Vietnamese girl running naked down a road away from an airstrike led the American public to think about trauma, pain, and the injustice of war. In another study, Cohen et al. (2018) found that among many photographs across generations, only a handful such as the images of conflict and trauma that triggered the public's emotional reactions could be recognized and recalled so they became a part of the collective cultural memory.

Within cultural memory, the photographic evidence of human suffering, being translated via the mechanism of photography, offers viewers “a lens by which one might think through the problem of responsibility to others and the world” (Sliwinski, 2004, p. 157). In a recent study, Slovic et al. (2017) noticed that compared to mere statistics of the human death toll reported in the news every day, an iconic photograph of a young Syrian child Aylan Kurdi lying face down on a Turkish beach woke the world up for a brief time by bringing much-needed attention to many unfortunate victims of the Syrian civil war. Their study reinforces a familiar saying: “a picture is worth a thousand words.” In telling the stories about distant humanitarian disasters, the power of visual imagery lies in its ability to stir emotions and transform the public’s perspectives about life and the world.

Within academia, visual communication research has predominantly revolved around visuals of human interest (Fahmy & Alkazemi, 2017), such as homeless people (Radley, Hodgetts, & Cullen, 2005), hospital patients (Calain, 2013; Radley & Taylor, 2003), aid agencies’ humanitarian initiatives (Dencik & Allan, 2017; Musaro, 2011), atrocity (Dean, 2015; Twomey, 2012), and death (Hanusch, 2008, 2012; Karniel, Lavie-Dinur, & Azran, 2014; Seaton, 2005). Especially, studies on war photojournalism and the spectatorship of distant suffering from the gaze of Western spectators and/or Western photographers are omnipresent in the field (Mollerup & Mortensen, 2018). For example, based on an analysis of several photographs documenting the extremes of human suffering, Friday (2000) stated that the verisimilitude of photographic representation of real and profound human suffering signaled a deeper truth about the human condition in photos such as *Migrant Mother* (1936), *Murder in Hell’s Kitchen* (1940), *Omaha Beach* (1944), and *Accidental Napalm Attack* (1972). Such aesthetic visual truth, manifested through the photograph’s compositional and symbolic features, not only appealed to what Friday

(2000) called the “demonic curiosity” (p. 365) of Western viewers but also provided them with moral insight to contemplate the horrifying events presented in the visuals. In so doing, the photographic representation of profound human suffering established both visual and moral truth via its unique aesthetic qualities.

With a focus on the role of media images in constructing the concept of the *refugee*, Wright (2002) examined television news images of forced migration issues produced by the Glasgow Media Group. A detailed visual examination noted that the visual patterns and common elements in television news visual construction of refugees indeed conformed to some historical visual archetypes established in Christian iconography that were used to portray the subject of forced migration. By showing the pain of others in the Christian representation of suffering, televised news images helped viewers to find accord with the portrayed subjects so they could comprehend the complex refugee issues.

Cloud’s (2004) qualitative cultural study analyzed news images of Afghan people widely circulated on *Time* magazine’s website during the Afghanistan War (2001). Two sets of news images, *From Shadow to Light* and *Kabul Unveiled* were included in the analysis. The study found that news images circulated on *Time* magazine’s website portrayed Afghan men as dark-skinned, uncivilized, and dangerous religious fanatics and depicted Afghan women as helpless victims who were oppressed by the Taliban regime and needed rescue from their saviors (Americans). Specifically, in one image, the close-up view of one young Afghan woman sitting in a schoolroom at a desk, covered almost entirely from head to toe in a yellow burqa, conveyed a sense of the young woman’s desperation to learn despite the constraints of an oppressive culture. In another photo, one unidentified Afghan woman faced the camera but slightly turned away, which made her appear coy to viewers. These images offered American viewers a “surveying paternal gaze”

(p. 293), such as the victimized visual construction of Afghan women, establishing a binary opposition between “us” (modernized, superior American civilization) and “them” (pre-modern, inferior Afghan society). Instead of communicating a sense of shared humanity, solidarity, and peace, these visual representations reinforced the idea of “white man’s burden” (p. 285) and provided a set of justifications for the U.S. war against Afghanistan.

Konstantinidou (2007), studying the role of visual representations of death and grief in war, examined a series of photographs, *Wailing Father*, taken by the Greek press during the second Iraq war. The visual composition of different camera shot positions (medium close and long) had placed the crying Iraqi man in the middle of the framed area, surrounded by seven open coffins on the ground. With his wailing eyes shut and his arms lifted toward the sky, the photograph captured an extraordinary moment of grief and mourning. Such visual representation froze the subject’s personal grief and referred it to Christian iconography, such as the painting *Lamentation over the Dead Christ*. As the photo did not capture direct eye contact of the subject, the crying father was presented only as an informational piece about the war rather than as a suffering human being. The victim himself had been objectified into a conventional visual trope of the Oriental wailing father. His voice, history, name, and family had all been immobilized by the global infotainment system and the photographer’s gaze. Based on this observation, the author argued that instead of offering sufficient contextual information about the East, the Western visual discourse of the Orient conveyed the fantasies of the West via stereotypical visual representations of death, victimization, and lamentation of culturally distant others. Such a visual narrative appeared to re-establish the cultural, spatial, and temporal distances between Western viewers and the distant victims of war and further enhance Western superiority.

In another socio-semiotic study, Konstantinidou (2008) examined two cases of news photographs published by the Greek press during the second Iraq war—a single photograph named *The Soundless Cry of a Child* and a set of images called *Ali Abbas Story*, which were regarded as symbolic images of Iraqi suffering. Built into an anti-war discourse, the visual representation of Iraqi suffering in the Greek press presented the viewers a piece of factual, objective information centered on universal humanitarian moral values. The visual images of Iraqi suffering helped the Greek people to realize the cruelty of the Iraq war and to protest against it. Nonetheless, by presenting a severely wounded Iraqi boy in a posture of deep significance in Christian cultures and revealing the mutilation of an Iraqi orphan, the Greek news photographs depicted Iraqis as victims of “the cold mechanical eye of the camera” (p. 159) and objectified them under the Western gaze. The reassurance of otherness and “our safer social and political location” (p. 161) conveyed by the visual narratives of the Greek press re-established the cultural, spatial, and temporal distances between the victims of the Iraq war and the Greek (Western) viewers.

Gao (2011) reviewed several prominent photographs taken by Western photographers that documented China’s social suffering across a century, including the images of war atrocities, famine, and human rights violations during the era of the Cultural Revolution. He found that the human misery displayed in the images gave the Western photographers power to pierce into “very souls of the Chinese native” (p. 106). Specifically, in the Western gaze, the “very souls” of the Chinese natives were weak, sick, hungry, pathetic, and ignorant. By presenting “a typical transmutation of suffering experience in China” (p. 113), photographs of China’s social suffering were able to give insight into ignored, ordinary, native Chinese people and appeal for international sympathy and help. They further generated public memories that were sustained “beyond an

individual lifespan” (p. 120). Such memories constructed by photographs instilled a sense of historical consciousness in new generations.

In the context of Australian colonial history, Twomey and May (2012) studied the use of vivid photographic images of the sufferers in the Indian Famine (1876-1878). They found that along with race, identity, and imperial ideology, the deployment of explicit visuals of suffering in India played a vital role in fundraising efforts in Australia. Nonetheless, the famine images gave the Australian public truthful evidence of the Indian famine and implicitly emphasized the distance between “well-fed viewers” (p. 242) and starving Indian sufferers. Such distance urged the subscribers of the Australian philanthropic organizations to recognize the difference between themselves and the suffering Indians and prompted them to act to alleviate Indians’ calamitous fate based on “empire compassion” (p. 250).

Using the Holocaust as a reference point, Sloshower (2013) attempted to understand the meaning of bearing witness to human suffering through the use of photography. Based on the observation of four Holocaust photographs, he argued that bearing witness to human suffering was indeed a matter of ethical concern. By showing the imposed silence of the Holocaust, the underlying ideas and themes behind the factual truth about the human condition, and complete stories of portrayed individual subjects, the eyewitnessing efforts of the Holocaust photographs emphasized the representation of psychoanalytic truths and intangible aspects of human conditions. With a clear focus on the victims’ point of view, the Holocaust images set up an ethical standard for bearing witness to extreme human suffering through the use of photography.

Hutchison (2014) analyzed five front-page photographs of the Asian Tsunami of 2004 published in *The New York Times*. The objective was to understand how emotions conveyed by the visual representation of humanitarian disaster had shaped different courses of actions in world

politics after the catastrophe. The study found that the photographs of the Asian Tsunami closely focused on non-Western victims enduring appalling conditions and suffering visible emotional and physical duress. Being the central subject in every image, non-Western sufferers were portrayed as powerless, submissive victims who desperately waited for help from outside, especially from the West. The non-Western victims' raw emotions during their most vulnerable moments were explicitly shown in the visual coverage. In a sharp contrast, Western relief workers were depicted as autonomous rescuers who could save non-Western victims from calamity. The visual and emotional patterns manifested through this kind of clichéd photographic representation, according to the author, created a "significant humanitarian dilemma" (2014, p. 16). On one hand, they helped to generate humanitarian understandings and cultivated substantial solidarity from the viewers' perspectives. On the other hand, they reinforced colonial mindset-based cultural stereotypes of the developing world and people of color.

Graham (2014) explored humanitarian images documenting the conflict and atrocity in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) produced by the Western aid agencies and news outlets in the past century. The study aimed to check if there was any consistency on photographic forms and their surrounding text in the visual representation of the Congolese suffering. The study revealed that the early images about the Congolese suffering narrowly focused on individual subjects and their bodily abuses while systematically ignoring local and social contexts about depicted individuals. This visual representation enabled the viewers' compassion toward the subject's individual pain. However, the repetition of this visual form generalized a depersonalized unit that exemplified the scale of the atrocity committed upon the generic Congolese population. In comparison, another type of early humanitarian photograph relied on the text to bind meaning and emotion into a broader, inclusive visual frame. This visual form directly linked atrocity to the

individual in the photograph through the intentional framing of the image within a textual narrative. Even though this visual form provided “a semblance of visual evidence of a hard-to-communicate emotion” (2014, p. 151), the image’s resonance had been quieted by the word-based context. In sharp contrast, the contemporary photographs of the Congolese suffering focused on the subject’s self-representation instead of relying on the Western photographer’s gaze. These research findings indicate that what is visible and what remains hidden in the visuals of suffering are not simple reproductions of observed reality. Rather, they carry different personal, local, and political meanings.

Sociologist Kurasawa (2015) studied modern Euro-American iconographic repertoire. His analysis identified four ideal-typical visual conventions used by the traditional Euro-American visual representation of humanitarian crises. They were “*personification, massification, rescue, and care*” (pp. 22-26). Specifically, the convention of *personification* comprised visuals portraying a single subject (or a small group of subjects) in close-up shot. This type of representation conveyed intensity and depth of human suffering caused by a humanitarian emergency. The opposition of such convention was *massification*. This type of humanitarian visual convention presented “an undifferentiated corporeal mass” (p. 24) through the use of wide shots. Instead of focusing on one particular individual (or a small group), such visual representation pointed to a vast number of masses and did not distinguish one subject from another. The third visual convention was *rescue*, which consisted of visuals involving NGO staff or a celebrity attempting to save the lives of the sufferer. This kind of visual symbolized an unequal hierarchy that placed the Euro-American rescuer above persons of color who waited to be saved. It also sustained a “masculinist iconography grounded in the humanitarian aid worker’s visually constituted heroism” (p. 26). Last but not least, the convention of *care* regrouped pictures that depicted the interaction

between aid workers and victims of the humanitarian crisis. Although such a convention symbolized a feminine constitution of altruistic devotion to and care for the other, it naturalized the unequal hierarchy between Western caregivers and the non-Western people of color. Based on this analysis, Kurasawa argued that the meanings that humanitarian visuals constructed were dependent on not only their symbolic structure, indexical correspondence, and visual conventions, but also on how they were positioned and ideologically framed.

Grant (2017) studied humanitarian photographs of the people of the Congo Free State, the Aboriginal people of Australia, the minority community of Armenian Christians in Turkey, and the displaced refugees in Western Europe. A careful analysis of these photographs found that although the underlying principles of international humanitarianism had shifted from Christian values to the liberal internationalist ideals of human rights and development, the visual form of humanitarian photographs produced during two distinct humanitarian eras still remained the same. Four visual tropes—*nutrition, hygiene and medicine, gendered industry, and education*, which were established by missionaries during the first humanitarian era, continued to structure the photographs of the new humanitarianism. The established four visual tropes depicted the suffering individuals as primitive, powerless victims who needed to engage more in civilized industrial (Western) culture. The continuation of visual tropes of humanitarian photographs from the first humanitarianism era to the second one was partially due to the influence of religion. As the author observed, all humanitarian photographs produced in both eras had religious significance to them.

In her dissertation, Kotilainen (2016) systematically studied the position, significance, framings, and use of images on atrocity, war, and human suffering found in different eras—from the Enlightenment to the modern age—which are characterized by different humanitarian principles. By looking at the visual practices that constituted the Western spectatorship of

suffering, the study explored how various images of crisis, war, and suffering were arranged and used in contemporary Western humanitarian world politics. Specifically, the study examined the war imagery of the Persian Gulf (1990) and Yugoslavia, strategic communication imagery produced by the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, visually striking images of the Western world's enemies (Gaddafi, Osama bin Laden, and Saddam Hussein), and Syrian chemical attack images circulated in mainstream media and social media. A careful visual analysis indicated that the representational practices and arrangements depicting pain and crisis not only constructed wars and atrocities (thereby informing spectators of the distant suffering) but also legitimized the Western military operations and interventionist actions. Moreover, the humanitarian imagery reinforced the Western dominant international political hierarchy. Such hierarchy led to the recognition of globally conditional value of human life and the limited universality of humanity.

Chouliaraki and Stolic (2017) analyzed news images about refugees in European newspapers across five countries (Greece, Italy, Hungary, UK, and Ireland) during the 2015 refugee crisis in Europe. Their semiotic analysis proposed a visual typology of the crisis, each of which situated refugees within a different regime of visibility and claim to action. Specifically, the first visual regime was “*visibility as biological life*” (p. 1167). Under this regime of visibility, images depicted refugees as a mass of unfortunates who were subject to the humanitarian benevolence of the West. With a minimal context for the refugees’ suffering being offered, this regime situated refugees and the Western viewers in a relationship of “generalized pity” (Boltanski, 1999, p. 13). That is, by showing the massification of refugees, this visual regime placed the viewers into a monitoring role to see the suffering of refugees from a distance. The second visual regime was “*visibility as empathy*” (2017, p. 1168). This regime of visibility

privileged intimate snapshots of individuals or couples, such a crying child, a mother with her baby, or a rescue worker in action. Unlike the news frame *suffering as biological life*, the close-up perspective offered viewers a more humanized representation of refugees and encouraged a relationship of compassion and care. The third visual regime was “*visibility as threat*” (p. 1169). It relied on the racialization of refugees and simply amplified the difference between the refugees and the Europeans by accentuating refugees’ skin color and different clothing. Instead of generating sympathy, this regime of visibility mobilized public fear toward refugees. Next to it was another visual regime called “*visibility as hospitality*” (p. 1169), which involved the imagery of pro-refugee protests across Europe. Such visibility presented the local Europeans’ acts of hospitality and consequently formed a “politicized solidarity” (p. 1170), which undermined the refugees’ visibility as active political actors. The last identified visual regime was “*visibility as self-reflexivity*” (p. 1170). It focused on celebrity benevolence and social media graphics. The images of celebrities in support of refugees and the remediation of Tweets about the death toddler Aylan Kurdi attempted to humanize refugees through acts of co-presence and confession that expressed “our compassion” (p. 1171) toward the suffering refugees while ultimately overshadowing destitute refugees and displacing them in favor of “us.” The finding demonstrated that in addition to visualizing suffering, news photographs can mobilize various forms of moral responsibility toward distant suffering in mediated public life.

Kumarakulasingam (2019) focused on how Britain’s Channel 4 produced documentary series visualized the end of the Sri Lankan civil war. The study revealed that with a focus on massive atrocity, British documentaries’ visual conventions relied on “*corpus extremis*” (p. 496) to demonstrate heinous acts of cruelty that occurred during the Sri Lankan war. The visual representation of massive dead and imperiled bodies invited Western audiences to imagine the

distant others as the “body in extremis” (p. 508). By reducing complex war subjectivities to racialized positions of savage perpetrator and helpless victims, the visualization of the Sri Lankan war in British TV channel sensationalized the suffering in a postcolonial society while it legitimized the superiority of the Western international humanitarian order and Western audiences.

In sum, photographic representations of war, emergency, atrocity, and human suffering constitute Western audiences’ basic understandings of foreign events and the miserable fate of distant, misfortunate others. Such representations solicit empathetic emotions from the viewers and communicate a sense of humanity bonding (Griffin, 2010; Weikmann & Powell, 2019). By ethically shaping the relationship between those who watch and those who suffer in the image (Chouliaraki, 2015), photographs of distant suffering constantly remind Western viewers of the misfortune through which the distant unfamiliar others have undergone. Although images of distant suffering have been constantly trying to negotiate the meaning of common humanity by presenting vulnerability and evoking solidarity, the meanings they try to convey are not neutral. Through the use of stereotypical, deeply colonial visual tropes (Hutchison, 2014) and the reproduction of specific gazes (Graham, 2014), images of distant suffering reinforce a historical divide of viewing relations between affluent, safe Western societies and impoverished, dangerous developing worlds (Chouliaraki & Blaagaard, 2013). With this in mind, it is reasonable to say that photographic representation not only constructs reality but also offers the viewers an interpretation of reality. Such visual interpretation can be conducted only within certain kinds of frames (Butler, 2005). The following section of literature review addresses framing theory in the visual communication context.

Visual Framing. As one of the most prominent conceptual frameworks of mass media research, framing has been used in numerous studies to explore the media representations of

foreign emergencies and suffering, such as war (Aday, Cluverius, & Livingston, 2005; Dimitrova & Stromback, 2005), political unrest (Ha, 2017), and forced migration (Dimitrova, Ozdora-Aksak, & Connolly-Ahern, 2018; Ramasubramanian & Miles, 2018). This section addresses framing theory in communication research and its application in visual communication studies.

Scholarly work has tried to define the notion of framing at both micro and macro levels. By addressing the structure of experience individuals had at any moment of their social lives, Goffman (1974) articulated that human beings tended to perceive things based on certain frameworks. He defined the concept of the *frame* as the “schemata of interpretation,” which enabled individuals to “to locate, perceive, identify, and label” (p. 21) occurrence or information. From his perspective, the frame can be interpreted as the individuals’ conventional systems of beliefs held by a given society based on “a central element of its culture” (Goffman, 1974, p. 27). In a similar vein, Tuchman (1978) defined the *frame* as a socially shared, long-lasting organizing principle that governs the interpretation of events. It could turn nonrecognizable happenings or amorphous talk into a discernible event.

From a macro perspective, framing refers to “the way events and issues are organized and made sense of, especially by media, media professionals and their audiences” (Reese, 2001, p. 7). It implies the relationship among elements in a message (Maher, 2001). Framing can also be understood as a dynamic communicative process that includes frame building and frame setting (de Vreese, 2005). This process often involves salience and selection. Through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration, a frame for a given story functions as a central organizing idea for making sense of relevant events and suggesting what is important (Gamson, 1989; Tankard, Hendrickson, Silberman, Bliss, & Ghanem, 1991). As Entman (1993) has argued,

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. (p. 52)

Because of its unique functionality, framing is viewed as an effective tool for the news media and journalists to craft messages and convey certain ideas. According to Gamson and Modigliani (1989), by frequently paraphrasing, quoting different sources, and drawing ideas and language from other forums, journalists contribute their own frames and invent their own clever catchphrases based on a commonly shared culture with their audiences. Similarly, Pan and Kosicki (1993) perceived the news media frame as “cognitive device used in information in encoding, interpreting, and retrieving that is communicable and related to journalistic professional routines and conventions” (p. 57). According to them, framing is “a strategy of constructing and processing news discourse” (p. 57) that involves journalists, sources, and the audiences.

The news frame set up by journalists so often coheres to an established discourse that forms a way of reasoning that is culturally familiar with intended audiences. As Chong (2012) suggested, news frames that represent a consistent message, repeated over and over again, are likely to become embedded in public discourse and ingrained in the public imagination. By using different metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, and depictions, news media are able to set the frame in which citizens discuss the public events and thus affect the quality of civic debates on certain key issues (Tuchman, 1978). The newspaper editor Steven Smith (1997) admitted that choosing a frame for a story is one of the most important journalistic decisions because news frame provides a template for journalists to assemble facts, quotes, and other story elements into a news story and orient interpretations of the story for the audience (McLeod & Detenbe, 1999). Through framing tactics,

news media not only tell the public what to think but also are stunningly successful in telling them what to think about (McCombs & Ghanem, 2001).

In addition to outlining the contour of different social events for public debate, framing profoundly affects public perceptions of political responsibility for a given societal issue. According to Iyengar (1991), the media usually present news stories in either episodic or thematic frames. On one hand, the episodic frame places the public issue in concrete events and focuses on sensational dramas of individual perpetrators and victims, and in so doing, it leads viewers to blame individuals rather than politicians, policies, or societal factors. On the other hand, the thematic frame offers contextual information about the portrayed issue and thus attributes the responsibility to broad societal forces or institutions.

In sum, the news media frame is a structure of meaning, a central idea, an organizing principle, or a master narrative that journalists use to contextualize a topic, such as a person, event, or issue within either a textual or visual message transmitted to readers or viewers through the means of mediation (D'Angelo, 2017). It influences the way the audiences perceive the realities of certain events or issues.

In visual communication, framing refers to “the selection of one view, scene, or angle when making the image” (Coleman, 2010, p. 237). When photographers take pictures, it is impossible for them to capture the entire world in the frame of a photograph. Instead, they must select only part of the real world to be presented in a photo frame (Fahmy, Bock, & Wanta, 2014). In this sense, visual framing concerns “the material boundaries drawn around the still or moving images” (Kurasawa, 2015, p. 17) that help photographers to decide what is included and what lies beyond the camera. Because photographers always impose standards on what an image should look based on the selection of one exposure over another, photographs are indeed “as much an interpretation

of the world as paintings and drawings are” (Sontag, 1979, p. 6). Having said this, framing in visual communication also refers to the devices through which an image is presented to those who view it and the frames of reference through which they interpret it, such as camera positioning and different visual conventions (Kurasawa, 2015).

Understanding the framing mechanism in visual settings requires a sophisticated analytical approach. Rodriguez and Dimitrova (2011) articulated that visual framing can be conceptualized based on meanings conveyed by the image at four different levels: denotation, stylistic convention, connotation, and ideology. Specifically, at the denotative level, visual frames were identified by the objects and discrete elements were depicted in the visual, such as the titles, captions, inscriptions, and other textual descriptions accompanying the visuals. At the stylistic level, framing involved stylistic conventions and technical transformations used in visual representation, such as camera shot position, certain point of views, or gazes. At the connotative level, the ideas attached to the visuals, visual metaphors, and other contextual factors composed the visual frames. Lastly, at the ideological level, the interpretation behind stylistic and symbolic features of visuals constituted a visual frame. At this level, the questions such as whose voice was being heard or who was being represented in visuals were asked. In another study, Geise and Grimm (2013) identified visual framing on the basis of three visual structures: surface structure, meso structure, and deep structure. At the surface structure, images were viewed by their manifest content or characteristics, including stylistic characteristics such as camera shot position. At the meso structure, visual frames were identified based on quasi-manifest content of images, such as their symbolic meaning. The third level of deep structure focused on the latent content of images, such as the underlying values or viewpoints embedded in the image.

Images are regarded as effective tools for framing due to their special qualities such as iconicity, indexicality, and especially syntactic implicitness (Messaris & Abraham, 2001). By providing visual stimuli to the audiences, images convey a direct, imminent, and authentic sense of reality and can evoke different senses of emotion (Burns & Beier, 1973; Griffin, 2010; Rodgers, Kenix, & Thorson, 2007; Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011). Since the human brain mainly relies on visual cues to process information, most people have an intuitive trust of images than texts and words (Williams, 2006). Or, put in another way, most people tend to believe that images offer them “visual truth” based on “authentic knowledge directly derived from seeing” (Newton, 2001, p. 8). Furthermore, since processing visuals is less obtrusive and requires less cognitive load than processing words and texts (Hope, 2006), visual images influence the viewers’ deep, unconscious perceptions and could be extremely efficient in communicating a particular message, especially to young children and the least educated citizens (Newton, 2001; Williams, 2006; Zillman, Gibson, & Sargent, 1999).

Because news images are barely doubted by most viewers and readers (Perlmutter, 1998), they are frequently used by the news media and journalists to enhance the information contained in news stories (Abraham & Appiah, 2006; Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011). By deciding what pictures to take, how to take them (angle, point of view, cropping, etc.), and where to position them (Schwalbe, 2006), the news media can subtly but powerfully frame a story based on selected visual frames of reference. In the visual framing context, the presence (or lack) of an image and the content of news photographs from a large extent decide the interpretation of a news event (Fahmy, 2010).

Within academia, numerous visual framing research studies have been done to examine how the news media had used photographs to frame certain international events, such as political

unrest in the Middle East (Abdelrahim, 2018; Dastgeer & Gade, 2016; Greenwood, 2012), Hurricane Katrina (Fahmy et al., 2007), and the Gulf War (Griffin & Lee, 1995; King & Lester, 2005). Several studies have also focused on how the Western media (mainly the U.S. and the U.K. media) visually framed the War in Iraq (2003). Based on quantitative content analysis, these studies found that during the second Iraq war, the news media tended to adopt visual frames that promoted the prevailing government version of the events (Griffin, 2004). By generating a government-friendly master war narrative of victory and liberation (Fahmy, 2007; Schwalbe, 2006; Schwalbe, Silcock, & Keith, 2008) and using humanitarian-related photographs, the news media visual coverage of the second Iraq war reflected an American-centered perspective (Schwalbe, 2013) and legitimized a discourse of “humanitarian-led intervention” (Parry, 2011, p. 1188) based on the ideological message of “us versus them” (Rosas-Moreno et al., 2013, p. 13).

In addition to the Iraq war, scholars have studied other conflicts in the Middle East such as the Afghan War (Fahmy, 2010), the 2006 Lebanon War (Schwalbe & Dougherty, 2015), the 2008 conflict in Gaza (Fahmy & Neumann, 2012), and the most recent Syrian civil conflict (Greenwood & Jenkins, 2015; Mast & Hanegreefs, 2015; Pantti, 2013, 2015; Seo & Ebrahim, 2016). These studies mainly revealed that the *military conflict* and *human interest* frames dominated the news media visual coverage of war.

Apart from the conflict and war scenario, within the past decade, visual framing has also been used by a number of studies to explore the issue of forced migration. For instance, in a study focused on refugee issues in Australia, Bleiker, Campbell, Hutchison, and Nicholson (2013) examined how front-page images of mainstream Australian newspapers had framed asylum seekers. They found that news images frequently presented refugees in medium or large groups through a focus of boats. They also barely depicted individual asylum seekers with recognizable

facial expressions. This visual framing had contributed to a dehumanized visual pattern of refugees and reinforced a politics of fear. Similarly, Tirosh and Klein-Avraham (2019) examined how two Israeli newspapers had visually framed the asylum seekers in Israel. A qualitative analysis of 79 news images revealed that asylum seekers were visually framed as either imminent threats to society or victims who could barely influence the society. By using a variety of visual techniques such as using long shots or extreme long shots to capture asylum seekers from a top-down perspective and presenting the asylum seekers in a faceless, collective manner, Israeli news media turned the asylum seekers into people carrying “neither a unique collective memory nor life stories” (p. 381) and thus dehumanized them.

Visual framing research also found that the *human-interest* frame was frequently adopted by the Western news media to depict the 2015 refugee crisis (Zhang & Hellmueller, 2017). The *victim* frame (Amores, Calderon, & Stanek, 2019; Amores, Arcila-Calderon, & Gonzalez-de-Garay, 2020; Saric, 2019) was also used by the news media to capture the migrants’ transitory nature and their vulnerability (Greenwood & Thomson, 2019). The factors that can account for the selection of these issue-specific frames in visual news coverage are the political stance of the news media (van, Schaik, 2016) and ideology (Wilmott, 2017).

In conclusion, images play a key role in mediatized international events as they promote particular ways of understanding those events, what they are about, and who drives them (Ojala et al., 2017). Contrary to common belief, the photographic representations are never truly neutral and are subject to human choices (Keilbach, 2009). They need to be selected in a narrow frame to capture the complex social issues (Messaris & Abraham, 2001). Although journalists might have to follow the professional guideline of objectivity, by selectively choosing images to present

people and places in certain ways, they might yet convey a dominant visual frame to interpret the events (Fahmy, 2010).

Given the main conceptual frameworks outlined in this chapter, this dissertation research tries to examine how the photograph as a medium framed the stories about human suffering caused by the Syrian civil conflict. In so doing, this study intends to explore the meanings about the distant suffering rendered through such visual representation in line with the notion of mediation (Silverstone, 2007). Specifically, based on a visual framing approach, this study aims to examine how the properties of photography, or most salient characteristics of photography—its denotation, stylistic convention, and connotation—have mediated the stories about human suffering caused by the Syrian civil conflict. In other words, this study aims to examine the mediation of civilians' suffering through the form of press photography. In Syria's case, the al-Assad regime's power consolidation and military mobilization against civilians and opposition forces have led to a large scale of civilian death and displacement (Bhardwaj, 2012). Particularly, the intentional systematic targeting of civilians perpetrated by both government forces and Islamic extremist groups along with the destruction of healthcare provisions in Syria have resulted in the large death toll of vulnerable populations, including women, children, and the elderly (Gallagher, 2014). With this being said, the Syrian conflict provides an ideal case to study non-Western civilians' suffering in the news. As Dobos (2019) has illustrated, "non-Western civilians are too often the most vulnerable in wars and too often must endure numerous life-threatening situations that call for Western interest" (p. 646). Thus, Western people's empathy or efforts at assistance, such as holding demonstrations against the war, might impact on the well-being of suffering non-Western civilians in the war. Although it is arbitrary to say that all Westerners' actions would be determined by the representations of suffering in the news, witnessing a particular case of suffering in the news

might offer spectators in Western countries some directions to what moral stance to take in response to distant non-Western suffering (Chouliaraki, 2008). After all, most people in the West learn about the suffering of non-Western civilians mainly through the news imagery or video footage revealed on television or other forms of news media (Silverstone, 2007).

Moreover, the Syrian conflict is an ideal case to study mediated distant suffering from the critical spatial theory perspective (Sojia, 1989;1996) or post-colonial geography (Chouliaraki, 2008). As a form of media performance, the mediated representation of distant suffering is so often shaped according to where suffering occurs (Dobos, 2018). Therefore, it is crucial to introduce the concept of *imaginative geography* into the study of mediated distant suffering. Specifically, according to Edward Said's (1979) *Orientalism*, *imaginative geography* is a concept in association with the production and signification of images and ideas about distant places and others. By assigning meanings to distant places based on the dramatization of difference and distance between what is close to "us" (the West) and what is far-away, *imaginative geography* as a cultural ideology differentiates "our space" (the Western world) and other different parts of the world (Sharp, 2009). In the case of Syria, *imaginative geography* of mediated suffering in news indeed delineates the Syrian space as a chaotic, dangerous, and irrational Oriental place where civilians suffer because they want to emancipate themselves from an Oriental despot (Dobos, 2019). Studying the case of the Syrian conflict can enrich existing research on distant suffering by focusing on spatial context that shapes Western media representations of wartime suffering. This spatially sensitive approach can help the researcher to understand how *imaginative geography* shapes the media representations of war suffering, especially the performativity of pity by specifying the ways certain parts of the world should be (Bialasiewicz et al., 2007) and in doing so, actively reinforce the common features of that world outlined by *imaginative geography*.

Furthermore, based on the examination of civilian suffering in the context of the Syrian conflict, from a media sociology viewpoint, this study further explores a key ethical question: how mediation of distant suffering, in the form of photojournalism, enable and legitimize certain actions toward those who are far-away by proposing to viewers certain “dispositions to feel, think, and act” (Chouliaraki, 2008, p. 831) through forms of agency embedded in visual representations. With this being said, the following chapter, Research Questions, addresses each research question that pertains to the central investigation of this dissertation study: the mediation tactics of news photographs in constructing the meaning of distant suffering.

Chapter IV

Research Questions

Chouliaraki (2006, 2015) has demonstrated that as technologies change and progress, televised news, with a combination of vivid visual presentation (imagery and video footage) and journalistic narration, has shaped the public's sense of proximity and connectivity with distant others and produced a hierarchy in news on distant suffering. Such form of mediation, which is based on "the capacity of television's symbolic practices" (Chouliaraki, 2006, p. 187), is subject to a process of selection and symbolic particularization that prioritizes whose suffering matters to the West. Therefore, although television offers spectators a sense of proximity and intimacy, it fails to form a sense of cosmopolitanism. After all, according to Calhoun (2002), a cosmopolitan disposition is based on a sense of "global citizenship" (p. 873). It is understood as a public disposition toward vulnerable others driven by a moral imperative to act on distant others who do not readily belong to one's own community without the anticipation of reciprocity (Chouliaraki, 2013b).

As argued above, if technological mediation, which is epitomized by television, only captures "a symbolic bias in transnational news flows" (Chouliaraki, 2006, p. 197) that selectively shapes the connectivity between spectators and distant others, could it be possible to imagine an alternative form of mediation, such as photography and its related photojournalism, that can cultivate a sense of solidarity with distant suffering?

By studying the horrific images associated with disastrous events such as military brutality, death, and rape, Azoulay (2008) proposed that photography represents a close encounter between people and the camera. This encounter formulates a social relation that is built upon a mutual guarantee within a photographic contract between the photographer and the photographed. Such

social relation is not mediated through some sovereign force, since everyone with a camera can act as a photographer, regardless of one's citizenship, "as long as she or he is equipped with the necessary tools for producing photographs, interpreting them, and acting on what they disclose" (2008, p. 128). Therefore, photography is able to form a citizenry without sovereignty. Defined by this citizenry, human beings share a common praxis and a unified interest despite a heterogeneous history. The power of photography is thus not manifested through a technological instrument but rather through a civic contract of photography. This type of civic contract is no longer based on a traditional concept of sovereignty. Instead, it is based on a constitutional foundation and an ethical duty, as well as deterritorialized physical borders without any apparatus of exclusion. It creates a collective identity that is based on "each one's renunciation of exclusive ownership of his or her image and each one's willingness and right to be photographed and become a photograph" (p. 128). The civic contract of photography therefore is a global form of relation that is not subject to national regimes. It cultivates an ethics that "begins to sketch the contours of the spectators' responsibility toward what is visible" (p. 130).

Even though past literatures on photographic representation of distant suffering (e.g., Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017; Cloud, 2004; Konstantinidou, 2007, 2008) have indicated that some criticism had been drawn on humanitarian photography, such as the exploitation of suffering and commodification of sentimentalism and stereotypes, the medium of photography has played and will continue to play a significant role in articulating the discourse of humanitarianism and shaping spectators' imagination of distant suffering (de Laat, 2017). The power of photography and photojournalism lies in their capacities of communicating the idea of humanism (Cookman, 2009). With this being said, the present dissertation research aims to examine how photojournalists at the *AP* have framed stories about human suffering caused by the Syrian civil war through the most

salient characteristics of photography: its denotation, stylistic convention, and connotation. Based on this, the dissertation explores a key ethical dilemma of how the mediation of distant suffering, in the form of photojournalism, enables and legitimatizes certain actions toward those who are far away by providing viewers “certain dispositions to feel, think, and act” (Chouliaraki, 2008, p. 831) through forms of agency embedded in visual representations.

To achieve such a goal, this dissertation aims to decipher how salient attributes of photographic images produced by the *AP*—denotation, stylistic convention, and connotation (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011)—have mediated the stories about human suffering caused by the Syrian civil conflict based on a visual framing approach (Coleman, 2010; Entman, 1993; Fahmy et al., 2014; Kurasawa, 2015; Reese, 2001). Therefore, this dissertation research asks the following research questions:

RQ1a: Which visual themes were used in the *AP* news images in depicting distant suffering caused by the Syrian civil war?

RQ1b: How did visual themes change in the coverage of the *AP* on the Syrian civil war since 2015?

RQ2: In addition to Syrian citizens and refugees, who else was in the visual coverage of the *AP* on human suffering stories in relation to Syria’s civil conflict?

Specifically, RQ1b intends to look at how *AP* coverage has changed with regard to visual themes since the year of 2015. The main reason behind this investigation is related to Russian military intervention in the Syrian civil conflict. In the fall of 2015, Russia launched its air and naval military campaign to strike the targets of militant groups who fought against the Syrian government in order to uphold al-Assad’s regime (Trenin, 2016). Russia’s military efforts in Syria have shifted the strategic balance in the Middle East region and completely changed the course of

the Syrian civil conflict. Particularly, by allying with Syrian government forces, Russia's war machine has deliberately attacked civilian objects and infrastructures with explosive weapons including cluster bombs, which has resulted in massive human displacement and loss of lives (Human Rights Watch, 2020). With this being said, it is reasonable to assume that *AP*'s visual coverage might focus more on civilian casualties inside Syria as a direct result of bombings and shelling from the Syrian-Russian military alliance. Thus, by asking RQ1b, this dissertation aims to investigate if and how the main visual focus at the denotative level of visual framing has changed along with the situational change in the Syrian civil conflict since 2015.

Past research studies have found that the news media had so often portrayed victims of armed conflicts, mainly migrants and refugees, as a large group of people without reflexive identities (Tirosh & Klein-Avraham, 2019; Zhang & Hellmueller, 2017). Moreover, studies on psychology have shown that people are willing to expend greater resources to help the lives of identified victims than to save equal numbers of unidentified or statistical victims (Jenni & Loewenstein, 1997; Lee & Feeley, 2016). Speaking to this identifiable victim effect, Saric (2019) has argued that news images depicting individual victims with identifiable faces were more likely to arouse empathy and compassion than the ones that portrayed a large number of people without recognizable faces. Therefore, it is meaningful to ask the two following research questions:

RQ3a: Did the *AP* present the victims of the Syrian civil war, mainly Syrian citizens and refugees, as individuals with visible facial expression or as a group of victims without showing their facial expression?

RQ3b: Regarding the victims of the Syrian civil war, mainly Syrian citizens and refugees, what emotions did the *AP* convey in its visual coverage?

In visual depiction, an important category is distance signified by camera position (Fahmy, 2004). According to van Leeuwen (2001), when a subject is portrayed up close, the individuality of the subject is communicated, suggesting an intimate personal relationship with the subject. Therefore, the subject is more easily identified as “our group.” On the contrary, depicting subjects from far away creates an impersonal relationship between the subject and the viewer and suggests the depicted subjects as a stranger. Measuring the camera position used to depict Syrian citizens and refugees is very important. Therefore, the following research question is asked:

RQ4a: What camera position was most frequently used in the *AP* news images in depicting the victims of the Syrian civil war—mainly Syrian citizens and refugees?

In terms of stylistic pictorial convention, in addition to social distance signified by the camera, van Leeuwen (2001) explained that camera angle is also an important element for photographs to convey certain meanings. For instance, being depicted from above, below or at eye level, creates different symbolic relations between the depicted subject, the photographer, and the viewer. If the viewer is looking down at the depicted subject, the viewer will feel empowered in relation to the subject. If the viewer is looking up at the subject, the symbolic power is exercised over the viewer. By contrast, looking at the subject at eye level signifies a form of symbolic equality between the viewer and the subject. With that being said, this dissertation research asks the following question:

RQ4b: What camera angle did the *AP* use to depict the victims of the Syrian civil war—mainly Syrian citizens and refugees?

In the documentation of distant suffering, human rights violations, and war, the graphic images such as injury, death, or extreme violence are so often used in news coverage (Fahmy, 2010; Hanusch, 2012; Mast & Hanegreefs, 2015). In the Western media, foreign news about the

death and misfortune of others in the Global South is so often characterized by sensationalized coverage (Moeller, 1999). Studies of news and death have also argued that geographic distance along with cultural proximity play a significant role in determining to what extent the graphic images are being shown in coverage (Adams, 1986; Moeller, 1999; Walter, Littlewood, & Pickering, 1995; Wu, 1998). That is, the further away the death occurs, the more graphic it can be shown because of the lack of connection in audiences with those affected (Fehrenback & Rodogno, 2015; Hanusch, 2012). Since Syria is geographically and culturally distant from the US, graphic images are expected to be visible in the *AP* coverage. This leads to the following research question to be asked:

RQ5: Did the *AP* present any graphic images in its visual coverage of the distant suffering caused by the Syrian civil war?

Last but not least, based on examined denotation and stylistic conventions of visuals, this dissertation seeks to explore the meanings conveyed by the *AP* at connotative and ideological levels in depicting the distant suffering caused by the Syrian civil war. Therefore, the last research question is presented as the following:

RQ6: What visual frames were used by the *AP* in depicting the distant suffering caused by the Syrian civil war?

To answer the research questions above, this dissertation uses a quantitative content analysis complemented by a qualitative semiotic visual analysis approach. The overall objective is to examine the news visual framing techniques used by the *AP* in its images of distant suffering caused by the Syrian civil war.

Chapter V

Research Method

The present study investigates how the visual framing of distant suffering manifested itself in the *AP* visual coverage during a 9-year period of the Syrian civil war at the denotative, stylistic, connotative, and ideological levels (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011). Specifically, a quantitative content analysis is applied to this dissertation study to decipher visual themes and stylistic conventions presented in the *AP* news images about human suffering caused by the Syrian civil war.

With visual themes and stylistic conventions being identified by content analysis, a qualitative semiotic visual analysis is then followed to contextualize and interpret connotative and ideological meanings attached to the *AP* news images about distant suffering caused by the Syrian civil conflict. Through such approach, visual frames used by the *AP* at connotative and denotative levels can be identified and interpreted.

This chapter outlines the relevant literature to explain and justify the content analysis method and provides details on how to conduct content analysis on visuals, including the unit of analysis, sampling, definitions for each variable, coding procedure, and inter-coder reliability check. This chapter also provides justification for the use of semiotic analysis and delineates how it is used in this dissertation research. In addition, this chapter provides justification for in-depth interview used in this study.

Justification for Content Analysis

According to Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (2014), content analysis refers to a consistent, reliable, systematic way of analyzing news media content by using numerical numbers, assigning those numbers to variables studied in research, and interpreting statistical relationships between the

different variables. It “entails a systematic reading of a body of texts, images, or symbolic matter, not necessary from an author’s or user’s perspective” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 3). Bell (2011) has noted that doing content analysis is about making “the relative frequencies of visual representations of particular classes of people, actions, roles, situations or even events involve implicit or explicit classification and quantification of media-circulated content” (p. 10). It provides media scholars with generalizations about what is shown in the press based on observable, objective visual evidence. In context of visual analysis, Bell (2011) further specified that content analysis is “an empirical (observational) and objective procedure for quantifying recorded ‘audio-visual’ (including verbal) representation using reliable, explicitly defined categories, or values on independent variables” (p. 11). Therefore, visual content analysis is extremely helpful for scholars to assess the nature of visual content in the media (Heuer, McClure, & Puhl, 2011). Speaking to visual framing research, the strength of content analysis is reflected through the following: (1) it can answer the questions of who or what is presented in visuals and count the number of appearances of actors or themes using frequency analysis; and (2) it reduces the complexity of media content so the priority and salience of media content, bias, or historical changes in modes of representations can be assessed (Bock, Isermann, & Knieper, 2011).

Sampling

The Associated Press (AP). The present study selected *AP* as a media source to analyze news images about human suffering caused by the Syrian civil war. The *AP* is chosen because of its monopoly in the world news system. It maintains foreign bureaus and uses an extensive network of leased satellite circuits, submarine cables, and radio transmission to supply newspapers and broadcasters with up-to-the-minute information on foreign affairs 24 hours a day (Kumar, 2011; Wall, 2005). Moreover, the *AP* provides U.S. and worldwide clients with news and multimedia

content such as text, audio, video, graphics, and interactives and files 3,500 unique stories per month, covering global general news and current affairs (Rafeeq & Jiang, 2018). Its news stories reach more than one billion people every day, in print, broadcast, or online (Halberstam, 2007). It is considered the world's largest and most expensive wire service across the globe (Ricchiardi, 2008).

From a historical viewpoint, the *AP*'s impartial, influential war coverage has a long history that can be traced back to the American Civil War (Halberstam, 2007). Throughout its history, the *AP* has “fostered a dynamic and ever-changing relationship between technology and photography and this partnership allows all photographers to send their photos from one corner of the world to another in minutes” (Halberstam, 2007, p. 338). Along with *Agence France-Presse (AFP)* and *Reuters*, the *AP* is an international news agency (English language) that routinely produces original coverage of humanitarian crises and events (Scott, Bunce, & Wright, 2018). The prestige and influence of the *AP* can be also reflected by the fact that top U.S. media outlets use and publish *AP* wire photographs on a daily basis (Fahmy, 2004).

Furthermore, for the coverage of international events, a majority of news outlets around the world tend to use coverage produced by major Western wire services such as the *AP*, *AFP*, and *Reuters*, even in today's online media environment (Rafeeq & Jiang, 2018). As Paterson (2007) has indicated, in English-language online news, “discourse on international events of consequence within the global public sphere is substantially determined by the production practices and institutional priorities of two information services—Reuters and the Associated Press” (p. 63). Speaking to the visual coverage of international news, Fahmy (2005, 2010) found that in visual coverage of the 9/11 terrorist attack and the war in Afghanistan, news images of both English-language and Arabic-language transnational newspapers were selected from three main Western

newswire services: *AP*, *AFP*, and *Reuters*, particularly with a higher proportion of selection from *The Associated Press*. In a study on Western newswire services' visual coverage of the Sri Lankan civil war, Neuman and Fahmy (2012) have demonstrated that in the U.S. media market, newspapers heavily relied on the *AP* pool of visuals to tell stories in foreign soils since “immense financial cutbacks, a general lack of access, and the risks linked to the practice of embedded journalism on battlefields cause newspapers to shy away from on-site reporting” (p. 174). To accommodate the various needs of individual publications, wire services like *AP* provide a wide spectrum of images taken by their staff photographers and freelance stringers (Fahmy et al., 2007). These research findings underline the monopoly position of the Western newswires in terms of supplying foreign news coverage. In context of the Syrian civil conflict, as pools of photographs are made available to news outlets and subscribers around the globe (Fishman, 2017), *AP* images are extremely important to analyze because they are crucial in creating visual frames that audiences normally see in the news. They retain the gatekeeping power to set the visual framing of a particular event or issue, shaping public opinions, and influencing perceptions of news events (Bowe et al., 2019). Therefore, this dissertation research aims to provide a generalized outlook on the original visual coverage of the human suffering caused by the Syrian civil conflict, as produced by *AP* wire service (as opposed to analyzing photographs that are available in a few news media outlets covering the conflict).

Sampling Procedure. As described above, this dissertation research examines news images documenting human suffering caused by the Syrian civil war archived on *AP Images*. As a division of the *Associated Press*, *AP Images* serves as an essential source of editorial photographs of breaking news and the most important events worldwide taken by *AP* photographers (*AP Images Blog*, n.d.). With features such as intuitive search, infinite scrolling, and personal workspaces (*AP*

Images, n.d.), *AP Images* provides subscribed media outlets, professional image buyers, and potential commercial customers with instant access to *AP*'s editorial photos of breaking news (<http://www.apimages.com>).

The key search term for finding news images on *AP* website for this dissertation study is *Syrian civil war*. The sampling period for this study is from March 2011, when the civil unrest broke out in Syria (BBC News, 2019), to December 2019, when the intensified fight between the Syrian government and opposition forces in the Idlib province led to a large scale of casualties ("100 killed as fighting intensifies," 2019). Within this time period, *AP* news image pool (<http://www.apimages.com>) has archived more than 2,500 images related to the Syrian civil conflict, including images about civilian casualties, street demonstration, combat scene between different militant groups, weaponry, politicians' meetings, and elections.

Because this study exclusively focuses on the press photography of civilian suffering in wartime, images of combat scenes such as fighting, military equipment(s), weaponry, politicians' meeting, protest, and election in the pool of images are excluded from the sample as they are not the main focus of this study. Images that document the daily life of ordinary Syrian citizens and refugees, casualties, humanitarian aids, and rescues were selected from the pool of *AP Images* (<http://www.apimages.com>) within the sampling period. They were then downloaded and saved as PDF files. It should be noted that in addition to the caption, *AP Image* provides other metadata with regard to each photograph, including the date, location, source, photographer, and keywords.

Based on the outlined search criteria, this study collected 1,309 editorial news photographs taken by *AP* photographers (both staff and freelancers) that document stories about civilian suffering caused by the Syrian civil war over a 9-year period. The number of news images for each year being collected in this study is indicated as such: The year of 2011 (1), the year of 2012 (144),

the year of 2013 (316), the year of 2014 (117), the year of 2015 (169), the year of 2016 (237), the year of 2017 (121), the year of 2018 (58), and the year of 2019 (146). All news images were numbered from 1 to 1309, based on their publication dates.

The researcher analyzed all 1,309 collected editorial news images by using quantitative content analysis. The following sections (i.e., Unit of Analysis, Variables) discuss each variable used in quantitative analysis and how each of them was conceptualized in this study.

Unit of Analysis. In this dissertation study, the unit of analysis is entire news photograph of human suffering caused by the Syrian civil war. The captions accompanying each image are also closely examined.

Variables. *AP* images are coded based the following 13 variables (see Table 1): news image ID, publication date, photo's main visual depiction, main visual setting in the photo, main subject(s) in the photo, gender of Syrian citizens/refugees shown in the photo, number of Syrian citizens/refugees shown in the photo, main emotion of Syrian citizens/refugees shown in the photo, children/adult in the photo, graphicness, camera position, point of view (Syrian citizens/refugees), and point of view (other human subjects). The detailed descriptions for each variable are provided below.

The first variable, *news image ID*, represents each unique image's identification. In this dissertation study, each news image is given a number to distinguish one from another.

The second variable, *publication date*, is the information that indicates when the image was shot by the *AP* photographer. Metadata for each image in the *AP* archive provides this information.

The third variable, *main visual depiction*, measures what is being presented in *AP*'s news image in depicting the human suffering caused by the Syrian civil war. Using an inductive approach, news photographs were sorted to identify the visual themes that emerged organically

from the images. The following 12 visual themes are identified. They are human reaction to suffering (image appears to capture the emotions of subjects); fleeing/escaping (image depicts subject fleeing/escaping through the use of an action shot); destruction (image focuses on damaged buildings or debris from destruction without human presence); journey (image focuses on subject traveling by foot or vehicle or are waiting/being processed at a border station); daily life (image depicts the daily life of subjects); celebrity visit (image depicts foreign officials, celebrities, and/or professional performers visiting/interacting with Syrian citizens/refugees); receiving/waiting humanitarian aid (image depicts medical workers interacting with those injured); rescue/recovery (image focuses on individuals trying to rescue others or removing the dead); estimating/minimizing damage (image focuses on individuals inspecting damages or trying to minimize damages); objects (images focuses on an inanimate object); and other (“none of the above” categories apply to the examined photo).

The fourth variable, *main visual setting*, indicates the location in which a particular image took place. There are 11 categories that have been identified based on an inductive approach to sort out news images. They are Syrian town/village, Europe/North America, Syria’s neighboring country (Turkey/Jordan/Lebanon/Iraq/Palestine), religious site, graveyard, refugee camp/shelter, school, hospital/clinic/ambulance, border, shore/riverbank/beach, and unknown (the image setting cannot be identified).

The fifth variable, *main subject in the photo*, measures who is presented in each AP news image of human suffering caused by the Syrian civil war. It includes the following categories: not applicable (the image does not have a subject in it), Syrian citizen(s)/refugee(s) only, foreign celebrity(ies)/official(s) only (artist, movie star, band, professional athlete, etc. or officials such as a United Nations representative, country’s head of state, etc.), Syrian medical/aid workers only

(such as the Syrian Civil Defense Team, known as White Helmet, Syrian doctors), Foreign medical/aid workers only, military personnel/police only, more than one category (image presents more than one category listed above), and unable to determine (cannot identify who is in the image).

The sixth variable, *gender of Syrian citizen(s)/refugee(s) shown in the photo*, has four different categories: not applicable (no Syrian citizens/refugees are presented in the image), male only, female only, and males and females.

The seventh variable, *number of Syrian citizen(s)/refugee(s) shown in the photo*, measures whether Syrian citizens and refugees are presented as individuals or as a group. It has five categories: not applicable (no Syrian citizens/refugees in the image), individual, small group of 2-3, medium group of 4-14, and large group of 15 plus.

The eighth variable, *main emotion of Syrian citizen(s)/refugee(s)*, measures the facial expression of portrayed Syrian citizens/refugees in news images. It has the following categories: not applicable (no Syrian citizens/refugees presented in the image), negative only (anger, fear, anguish), positive only (happiness, gratitude), more than one emotion, and unable to identify (cannot identify the facial expression of the portrayed Syrian citizens/refugees). This emotional scale is developed based on the previous research on refugee studies (Zhang & Hellmueller, 2017).

The ninth variable, *children/adult in the photo*, measures if the news image presents adults or children or both. It has three different categories: adults only, children only, and adults & children.

The tenth variable, *graphicness*, measures if and how injury or death has been presented in the news images. Each of the following categories indicates different levels of graphicness from the least to the most: not applicable (no injury or death), implied death (coffins, body bags, blood

spill, or graveyard), fractional death (body parts of the dead being displayed), masked death (the image shows dead bodies clearly but without showing faces of the dead), unveiled death (the image shows a dead body with the face visible), and contorted death (the image displays dead bodies lying on top of each other in the street or in mass graves). This variable is based on a scale of visibility of death/graphicness developed from previous studies (Hanusch, 2008, 2012).

These listed variables measure the denotative content of *AP* news images of human suffering caused by the Syrian civil conflict. In addition to them, there are three variables that measure stylistic pictorial conventions of *AP* news images. They are camera position, point of view–Syrians, and point of view–others. The development of these three variables was based on previous research on pictorial conventions of visual images (Jewitt & Oyama, 2011; Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011).

The eleventh variable, *camera position*, has four different categories: not applicable (no human subjects being portrayed), extreme close-up shot (the shot is tight that the top of the head, chin area, or sides of head are cut off; the subject's face is the only main feature to appear), close-up shot (the photo shows the subject's entire face or the entire face and shoulders), medium shot (subjects are shot from a medium distance), and long shot (the photo shows the entire body of the subject while also showing the surrounding scene).

The twelfth variable, *point of view for those photos that include Syrians/refugees*, has five values: not applicable (no Syrians/refugees in the image), becoming the subject (the image is shot from the perspective of the subject), low angle (subject is presented as such that the viewer is looking up at the subject), eye-level angle (camera is at eye level, subject is shot straight on), and high angle (camera is positioned as such that the viewer of the photo is looking down to the subject).

The thirteenth variable, *point of view for those photos that include other human subjects*, has the same five values as the last variable. The difference is that this variable looks at human subjects other than Syrians/refugees presented in news images.

Inter-Coder Reliability Check. Three individuals were employed as coders. The coder training based on a pre-defined codebook was conducted before the inter-coder reliability check. The coders were trained together to ensure that all variables were understood and measured correctly. In order for the coders to tell the difference between each code, they were required to read the captions accompanying each news image that clarified specific details of the image, such as the subject and the main visual setting. Before conducting the test, three coders coded five images randomly chosen from the test sample. The coding of the five images among three coders were then calculated based on Krippendorff's alpha (Lombard, Snyder-Dutch, & Bracken, 2002) with the use of Recal2 (<http://dfreelon.org/utis/recalfront/recal2/>). The results indicated that all variables achieved acceptable results ($\alpha > .75$). They were main visual depiction ($\alpha = 1.0$), the visual setting ($\alpha = .80$), main subject ($\alpha = 1.0$), number of Syrians/refugees ($\alpha = .80$), gender of Syrians/refugees ($\alpha = .80$), main emotion of Syrians/refugees ($\alpha = .82$), children/adults ($\alpha = 1.0$), graphicness ($\alpha = 1.0$), camera position ($\alpha = 1.0$), point of view-Syrians ($\alpha = .80$), and point of view-others ($\alpha = .77$). After the coding of five images, three coders again discussed and reviewed codes for each variable based on the codebook prior to the formal test.

Then, 10% of images (128) was chosen from the sample population for an intercoder-reliability test based on a randomized probability sampling technique. The test yielded satisfactory results for all variables: main visual depiction ($\alpha = .88$), the visual setting ($\alpha = .92$), main subject ($\alpha = .89$), number of Syrians/refugees ($\alpha = .95$), gender of Syrians/refugees ($\alpha = .91$), main emotion

of Syrians/refugees ($\alpha = .86$), children/adults ($\alpha = .90$), graphicness ($\alpha = .84$), camera position ($\alpha = .81$), point of view–Syrians ($\alpha = .87$), and point of view–others ($\alpha = .84$).

Justification for Semiotic Analysis

In this dissertation research, quantitative content analysis examines the denotative content of visual images and their stylistic conventions. In addition to content analysis, this study uses qualitative semiotic visual analysis to explore meanings attached to *AP* news images of human suffering caused by Syria's civil conflict. According to van Leeuwen (2001), the semiotic analysis addresses two fundamental questions in visual studies: (1) what images represent and how; and (2) the hidden meanings of images, such as what ideas and values the people, places, and things are represented in the images. Jewitt and Oyama (2011) argued that the visual semiotic involved the description of semiotic resources, such as different points of view reflected through camera angle that signify the symbolic power relationships between photographed subjects and viewers, as well as imaginary social distance between subjects and viewers constructed by visual images' different camera shot positions. By contextualizing research results from content analysis, the use of visual semiotic approach in this dissertation study helps to investigate how *AP* news images have mediated the distant human suffering caused by the Syrian civil war through denotative visual contents and stylistic pictorial conventions of news images. Based on such an investigation, the researcher further explored different ethical propositions that the *AP* has proposed to viewers in terms of how to feel, think, and act toward suffering Syrians through the form of agency, symbolic social distance, and power relation between the depicted Syrians and viewers.

The researcher carried out a semiotic analysis of *AP* photographs that documented the daily life of ordinary Syrian citizens and refugees, casualties, humanitarian aids, and rescues. Specifically, at the denotative level, the researcher looked at who or what was being presented in

the news image. At this level, the researcher particularly focused on poses, activities, or interactions (if there is any) of portrayed subject(s) in the news image. Meanwhile, the researcher paid attention to camera angles and positions photojournalists used to portray those subjects, such as if the image subjects were depicted from at/above/below eye level or from the front/side/back. These dimensions allowed the researcher to assess the visual meaning embedded in news images. Based on different visual elements retrieved from analyses at denotative and stylistic convention levels, the researcher was further able to probe ideas and values associated with depicted subjects, things, and places in visual images.

Justification for Interviews

Apart from examining photographs, this dissertation employed semi-structured interviews to explore press photographers' experiences of covering human suffering in war and conflict scenario. Responses from professional press photographers enable the researcher to gain insight on war photography from journalism practice point of view.

Compared to other research methodologies, the interview technique can “enable researchers to understand the social actors' experience and perspective through their own stories and gathering information about things or processes that cannot be efficiently collected by other methods” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p.173). In this way, different meanings are best uncovered and explored through studying descriptions of phenomena in the words of the people being studied (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989). Although semi-structured interview engages interviewees with pre-outlined questions, it is an open process that allows new ideas to emerge during the interview process as a result of what the interviewees say (Canter, 2013).

Study Population. The National Press Photographer Association website was used to identify potential interview participants. This online platform archives the profile information of

visual journalists, such as their contact information and the organization for which they work. An invitation email to participate in the research study was sent to those visual journalists who have experiences in covering war and conflicts. The researcher also conducted several searches about prominent photojournalists who have covered civil war in Syria and won professional awards for their work, including Pulitzer Prize. Once those prominent photojournalists were identified, the researcher contacted each of them via their professional websites. The invitation email to participate in the study was sent to each identified photojournalist. In addition, with the help from one university professor who has professional connections to *The Associated Press* staff photographers, the researcher was able to contact staff *AP* photographers who have covered war and conflict. Through this process, eight press photographers agreed to participate in the study. Specifically, seven interviews were conducted via either Skype or Zoom from March 2019 to December 2020. All these seven interviews averaged from 45 minutes to one hour and 15 minutes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. In addition, one photojournalist agreed to do interview via email. Preset questions were sent and her responses to questions were collected.

Of the 8 press photographers interviewed, one is female and seven are males. Five of them have worked or are still working for *The Associated Press*. They are from the U.S., Spain, and Argentina. These six *AP* news photographers have significant experiences in covering the conflict. Two of them have extensively covered the war in Syria. In addition, one press photographer identified himself as citizen journalist as he was a Syrian citizen when he started to provide *Reuters* with photographs about the Syrian civil war. Currently, he is a staff photographer for *Reuters*. One American photographer is an award-winning independent journalist based in New Dehli, India and Beirut, Lebanon and is a contributing photographer with *the New York Times*. He has covered war in the Middle East, including Libya and Syria. The only female photojournalist participated in this

study works for *the New York Times* and has covered the conflict in the Middle East when she worked for *the Associated Press*'s Jerusalem bureau (See Table 2).

The interview questions focused on press photographers' career experiences of covering war and conflict, their understandings of news images of human suffering, their views on Western media's stereotypical news images of the non-Western world, and the journalistic principles with regard to shooting news images of human suffering that guide their works, such as how to handle graphic images. The main reason behind conducting interviews with press photographers is to supplement the research findings from both the quantitative content analysis and the semiotic analysis. The researcher believes that in addition to visual analysis, responses and insights from photojournalists are also much needed too as they could enhance the researcher's understandings on press photography of distant civilian suffering in wartime.

The following chapter, Results and Findings, presents statistical analysis from the quantitative content analysis to address the research questions. Qualitative semiotic analysis then follows to further contextualize the content analysis results.

Chapter VI

Results and Findings

Content Analysis

Overall Visual Theme. The study's first research question (RQ1a) asked what themes were presented in AP's visual coverage of distant suffering caused by the Syrian civil war. Overall, 12 overarching themes emerged from the coding of 1,309 AP photographs (see Table 3 and Figure 1). Among them, *daily life* comprised the largest group of images ($n = 529$, 40.4%) and focused on the daily life routines of Syrian citizens or refugees, such as casual talking, standing, preparing a meal, getting a haircut, learning in school, playing at refugee camp, and etc. The second most prevalent theme, *rescue/recovery*, consisted of 131 images (10%) that mainly featured individuals rescuing people from a damaged building, tending to the injured, or carrying away the dead or injured. Examples of this theme included the depiction of the Syrian civil defense team, known as the White Helmets, rescuing a wounded child from the debris of a ruined building. The third most dominant theme, *human emotional reaction to suffering*, contained 130 photographs (9.9%) that captured the emotions of depicted subjects, including depictions of Syrian citizens or refugees mourning their dead relatives, crying, smiling, being in shock, Italian medical workers mourning and expressing solidarity with Syria by holding candles, and a Syrian rebel soldier crying over his dead comrade. The fourth theme, *journey*, included 115 photographs (8.8%) that depicted Syrian citizens/refugees traveling by foot, motorcycle, car, bus, or boat. It also portrayed Syrian citizens/refugees waiting to be processed at a border station. The fifth theme, *celebrity visit*, contained 99 images (7.6%) that focused on foreign officials, such as Ban Ki Moon (the eighth Secretary-General of the United Nations), foreign celebrities (such as UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador and movie superstar Angelina Jolie), or performers (e.g., comedians) from outside

Syria (mainly European countries) visit and interact with Syrian citizens/refugees. The sixth theme, *destruction*, contained 75 images (5.7%) that depicted damaged buildings or debris from the destruction caused by the civil conflict. The seventh theme, *estimating/minimizing damage*, included 70 photographs (5.3%) that focused on depicted individuals inspecting damages or trying to minimize damages, such as the White Helmets aid worker extinguishing a fire and Syrians moving their belongings away from damages. The eighth theme, *receiving/waiting medical treatment*, comprised 67 news images (5.1%) that portrayed medical workers interacting with those injured, such as a Syrian child receiving an injection or an injured Syrian man receiving medical care from a doctor. The ninth theme, *objects*, contained 50 images (3.8%) that portrayed inanimate object such as a body bag, coffin, spilled blood in the street, graveyard, refugee tents, a makeshift living place, or the personal belongings of Syrian citizens/refugees. In addition, the tenth theme, *receiving/waiting humanitarian aid*, comprised 22 photographs (1.7%) that depicted Syrian citizens/refugees receiving or waiting to receive humanitarian aid such as water, food, medicine, or other life essentials. The eleventh theme, *fleeing/escaping*, which portrayed subjects fleeing or escaping from danger (a typical action shot), consisted of 11 images (0.8%). Examples of this theme included the depiction of a Syrian man trying to run away from an explosion caused by the airstrike and a Syrian family running away from the street fight between rebels and the Syrian army. The twelfth and smallest theme, *unconscious/dead bodies*, contained 10 photographs (0.8%), which specifically featured an unconscious individual subject or the dead bodies. Examples of these included the depiction of a severely wounded child lie lying in a truck with his eyes closed, two dead bodies lying face down in the street shot by photographers from a far distance, and a Syrian corpse illuminated by a flashlight.

Visual Theme Change over Time. Regarding visual themes, RQ1b of this dissertation sought to explore how *AP* visual coverage had changed since the year of 2015. A major turning point of the Syrian civil war was in September 2015, when Russia carried out its first airstrike in Syria (BBC News, 2019). The intervention from Russia significantly escalated the conflict and turned a civil conflict into a proxy war between the Russia-supported Assad regime and the US-backed opposition groups (Hove & Mutanda, 2015). Based on this turning point, this dissertation compared whether and how the visual theme had changed after the year 2015.

The chi-square statistical analysis indicates that there was a significant change in the visual theme of *AP* news images after the year 2015, $\chi^2(11) = 157.77, p < .0001$ (Table 4). Specifically, *AP* had more photographs depicting damaged buildings or debris from destruction after the year 2015 (64, 85.3%) than years from 2011 to 2015 (11, 14.7%). From 2011 to 2015, *AP* had 77 images (67%) focused on the travel of displaced Syrians. From 2016 to 2019, only 38 *AP* news images (33%) had featured displaced Syrians traveling or waiting at a border station. From the year 2016 to 2019, *AP* had more news images focused on rescue and recovery efforts made predominantly by the White Helmet (97, 74%) than from 2011 to 2015 (34, 26%). Another significant change in visual depiction was about the theme *estimating/minimizing damage*. From 2016 to 2019, 42 news images (60%) focused on individuals inspecting or trying to minimize damages (e.g., extinguishing fires), whereas from 2011 to 2015, only 28 news images focused on such a theme (40%).

Visual Setting. Apart from exploring visual themes, this dissertation research also explored the main visual setting of each *AP* photograph in depicting human suffering caused by the Syrian civil war. This variable identified the location in which a particular image took place. In total, 10 categories of image settings were identified from the coding process (see Table 5 and Figure 2). Among them, the most prevalent image setting was Syrian town/village (480, 36.7%),

followed by refugee camp/shelter (449, 34.3%), neighboring country (99, 7.6%), Europe/North America (72, 5.5%), school (69, 5.3%), hospital/clinic/ambulance (57, 4.4%), border (50, 3.8%), shore/riverbank/beach (24, 1.8%), and religious site (6, 0.5%). In addition, three photographs' (0.2%) visual setting cannot be identified based on available metadata provided by the AP archives.

In particular, the most prevalent visual setting for 529 photographs that used the theme *daily life* was *refugee camp/shelter* (270, 51%). Such photographs predominantly showed displaced Syrians' daily life routines inside a refugee camp. Examples included the depictions of Syrians engaging in various daily activities inside the camp such as walking around, standing, casually chatting with others, getting a haircut, filling canisters with water, doing laundry, or fixing a tent. The second most dominant visual setting for this group of images was *Syrian town/village* (98, 18.5%). In this setting, the visuals mainly depicted the normal life of Syrians who were trapped inside towns or villages during the civil conflict. Such visuals included examples depicting a Syrian family walking across the street piled with rubbish in Aleppo, a group of Syrian women waiting outside a bakery shop to buy bread, or a woman talking with her daughter at a house without a roof. The third most dominant visual setting in this group of images was *school* (63, 11.9%). These 63 visuals mainly depicted Syrian children learning or playing with others at either a formal or a makeshift school. In addition, 39 photographs (7.4%) depicted the daily life of displaced Syrians in Syria's neighboring country such as Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine. Overall, 18 visuals (3.4%) portrayed the life of Syrians who temporarily lived at the border between Syria and its neighboring countries. It is also worth noting that 37 photographs (7%) portrayed the life of displaced Syrians in either Europe or America, such as a Syrian family hanging out in a square in Italy, a Syrian chef running a restaurant in Germany, or a Syrian family preparing a meal at a hotel in Greece. Meanwhile, three images (0.6%) in this group depicted

Syrians practicing their religion at a mosque and one image (0.2%) presented a Syrian man with his children sitting on a long chair inside a hospital (see Table 6).

For 131 photographs that used the theme *rescue/recovery*, which depicted individuals trying to rescue others (also removing the dead, tending to the injured, or carrying away the dead/injured), the most dominant visual setting was Syrian town/village (111, 84.7%), followed by neighboring country (8, 6.1%), hospital/clinic/ambulance (6, 4.6%), and border (2, 1.5%). Also, less than 1% of images took place in the following settings: religious site, refugee/camp, and school (1, 0.8%). It should also be noted that the visual setting of one photograph (1, 0.8%) that used the theme *recovery/rescue* could not be identified (see Table 7).

For 130 photographs that used the theme *human emotional reaction to suffering*, which appeared to capture the emotions of subjects, the most dominant visual setting was Syrian town/village (59, 45.4%). This group of images included examples that depicted Syrians mourning their lost family or relatives or residents in shock after an airstrike. Overall, 23 visuals (17.7%) captured displaced Syrians' various emotional expressions in the setting of refugee camp/shelter, followed by neighboring country (21, 16.2%), Europe/North America (10, 7.7%), hospital/clinic/ambulance (7, 5.4%), and religious site (2, 1.5%). Meanwhile, the visual setting of two photographs (2, 1.5%) that used the theme *human emotional reaction to suffering* could not be identified (See Table 8).

It is also essential to know the visual setting for images that used the theme *journey*, which tended to focus on Syrians traveling or waiting to be processed at a border. In 115 photographs with the theme *journey*, the most prevalent visual setting was border (22, 19.1%). These 22 photos mainly depicted displaced Syrians waiting or being processed at a border station. The second most prevalent visual setting was Syrian town/village (21, 18.3%). Overall, 21 of such photographs

(18.3%) included examples that depicted Syrian citizens hopping on a vehicle to leave their hometown or riding motorcycles to move to a new place. Besides, 20 photographs (17.4%) depicted Syrians arriving at refugee camps and starting to move in. It should also be noted that another 20 visuals (17.4%) portrayed Syrians refugees arriving at a seashore or beach by boat. Meanwhile, 19 visuals (16.5%) depicted Syrians arriving in Syria's neighboring countries and 13 photographs (11.3%) portrayed Syrians arriving at airports in either Europe or America (see Table 9).

For 99 visuals that used the theme *celebrity visit*, the most dominant visual setting was *refugee camp/shelter* (85, 85.9%) and depicted foreign officials, UN representatives, or professional performers visiting and interacting with Syrians refugees at a refugee camp. This was followed by neighboring country (5, 5.1%), Europe/North America (4, 4.0%), school (3, 3%), and Syrian town/village (2, 2%). Last but not least, for 10 images that portrayed unconscious or dead bodies, the main visual setting was Syrian town/village (6, 60%). These six visuals exclusively depicted the severely wounded or dead individuals in the street of a Syrian town. The second dominant visual setting for this group of images was shore/riverbank/beach (3, 30%). Three of these visuals were about the illustrations of the lifeless Syrian child, Aylan Kurdi, on a Turkish beach that stirred public outrage around the globe (Fahmy, 2019). Also, one image (10%) depicted an unconscious Syrian boy lying in a truck after arriving at the Dar al-Shifa hospital in the city of Aleppo.

Subjects in the Photo. The second research question (RQ2) asked who else was in AP's visual coverage of human suffering stories in relation to Syria's civil conflict besides Syrian citizens and refugees (see Table 10). The results showed that in 1,309 photographs, 1,044 photographs (80%) had depicted Syrian citizens and refugees. Among them, 872 photographs

(66.6%) exclusively featured Syrian citizens and refugees and 171 photographs (13.1%) focused on the interaction between Syrian citizens and refugees with medical/aid workers or foreign celebrities and officials.

In addition, 89 photographs (6.8%) mainly portrayed Syrian medical doctors or the Syrian Civil Defense team, commonly known as the White Helmets. Overall, 20 photographs (1.5%) exclusively featured foreign officials or celebrities, such as the UN Secretary-General, the Italian prime minister, Pope Francis, and Hollywood star Angelina Jolie. Meanwhile, 17 visuals (1.3%) focused on military personnel or security guards. For example, these 17 images depicted Syrian rebel soldiers mourning the loss of their comrade in the street, Syrian government soldiers undergoing physical therapy in the hospital, Syrian rebel soldiers lying in a hospital bed for medical treatment, and Turkish paramilitary police officers investigating the scene before carrying the lifeless body of 3-year-old Aylan Kurdi from the seashore. Overall, 10 photographs (0.8%) emphasized foreign medical personnel or aid workers. Examples depict members of the Italian branch of *Medecins Sans Frontieres* (MSF) holding candles and standing outside in Rome to express their solidarity with the Syrian people. In addition, 129 photographs (9.9%) did not focus on any living subjects. Instead, 125 of them (9.5%) focused on an inanimate object such as a cellphone from a Syrian refugee, a notebook of one Syrian student, shoes in the mud, damaged buildings, and another four photographs (0.3%) focused exclusively on dead bodies.

Syrians in the Photo. Among all different groups of people portrayed, this dissertation research specifically examined how Syrian citizens and refugees were depicted in the *AP* visual coverage in terms of gender, age, and number because they were the main victims of the Syrian civil conflict. Results showed that in 1,044 photographs depicting Syrian citizens and refugees, 500 photographs (47.9%) focused on Syrians males and 226 visuals (21.6%) focused on Syrian

females. Another 318 images (30.5%) depicted both male and female Syrian citizens and refugees (see Table 11).

Speaking to the age of the portrayed Syrians, the results showed that among 1,044 photographs, 400 of them (38.3%) depicted adults, whereas 308 visuals focused exclusively on Syrian children (29.5%). Another 336 images (32.2%) featured children and adults together (see Table 12).

RQ3a asked did the AP present the victims of the Syrian civil war, mainly Syrian citizens and refugees, as individuals with visible facial expression or as a group of victims without showing their facial expression. In terms of numbers, 366 out of 1,044 photographs (35.1%) focused on individual Syrian citizens and refugees. Overall, 326 visuals (31.2%) depicted Syrians in a medium group (4-14). By contrast, 314 images (30.1%) portrayed a small group of Syrians (2-3). In comparison, only 38 photographs (3.6%) featured Syrians in a large group of more than 15 people (see Table 13).

The statistics showed that there was a significant association between the gender of Syrians and how they were presented visually in terms of numbers, $\chi^2(6) = 318.85, p < .0001$ (see Table 14). Specifically, among 500 photographs of male Syrian citizens and refugees, 240 (48.1%) of them portrayed individuals. Overall, 146 of them (29.3%) featured a small group (2-3) and 101 visuals (20.2%) focused on Syrian citizens and refugees in a medium-sized group (4-14). In comparison, only 13 photographs (2.6%) depicted Syrian citizens and refugees in a large group that consisted of more than 15 individuals. In 226 photographs of female Syrian citizens and refugees, photographs that focused on individuals were still dominant (126, 55.8%), followed by 69 photographs (30.5%) that featured a small group (2-3), 29 images (12.8%) that focused on a medium group of 4-14, and only 2 images (0.9%) that focused on a large group (more than 15) of

female Syrian citizens and refugees. In comparison, however, in 318 photographs that focused on both male and female Syrian citizens and refugees, the ones that focused on the medium group of 4-14 were dominant (196, 61.6%), followed by a small group of 2-3 (99, 31%) and a large group that comprised more than 15 people (23, 7.2%).

The statistical results also showed that there is a significant association between the age of Syrians and how they were portrayed visually in terms of numbers, $\chi^2(6) = 184.85$, $p < .0001$ (see Table 15). In 400 photographs of Syrian adults, 190 images (47.5%) focused on a single individual, followed by a small group of 2-3 (112, 28%), a medium group of 4-14 (20.8%), and a large group comprising more than 15 people (3.8%).

In 308 photographs of Syrian children, visuals that focused on individual children are dominant (49%). In addition, 81 photographs (26.3%) focused on a small group of children (2-3), followed by 73 (23.7%) images that featured a medium group of children (4-14). Only three photographs (1%) focused on a large group of children (more than 15).

In 336 images featuring interactions between adults and children, 25 photographs (7.4%) focused on individual Syrian children interacting with other adult characters. Examples included the depiction of one injured Syrian child interacting with medical workers and one Syrian child who was welcomed by a Jordanian aid worker at a refugee camp. Overall, 121 photographs (36%) presented a small group (2-3) of Syrians that consisted of both adults and children. These images were mainly the depictions of Syrian parent(s)-children interactions. In addition, 170 images (50.6%) focused on a medium group (4-14) of people that consisted of both Syrian adults and children. Also, 20 photographs (6%) presented a large group of Syrians (more than 15) that comprised both adults and children.

This dissertation research sought to examine if and how *AP* depicted the Syrians' emotions in its visual coverage. RQ3b specifically asked what emotions of Syrian citizens and refugees the *AP* conveyed in its visual coverage. This is crucial since they are the main victims of the Syrian civil conflict. The results showed that in 1,044 photographs depicting Syrian citizens and refugees, 470 of them (45%) did not clearly demonstrate any recognizable facial expressions of the portrayed Syrians. Overall, 372 photographs (35.6%) featured negative emotions of Syrians. In comparison, only 184 visuals (17.6%) displayed Syrians with positive emotions. It should also be noted that 18 images (1.7%) featured mixed emotions (both positive and negative) of portrayed Syrians (see Figure 3).

The statistical analysis indicated that there is a significant association between the gender of Syrians and their conveyed emotions in visuals, $\chi^2(6) = 48.25, p < .0001$ (see Table 16). In 500 photographs of Syrian male citizens and refugees, 258 (51.6%) of them did not clearly show emotions. Overall, 184 images (36.8%) showed negative emotions of Syrians. In comparison, only 55 (11%) photographs displayed positive emotions of portrayed Syrians. In addition, 3 images (0.6%) showed mixed emotions, consisting of both positive and negative ones.

By contrast, in 226 visuals of female Syrians and refugees, 86 of them (38.1%) displayed negative emotions and 76 images (33.6%) did not clearly show any emotions of the portrayed Syrian females. Overall, 60 images (26.5%) demonstrated positive emotions of depicted Syrian females. Meanwhile, 4 images (1.8%) showed both positive and negative emotions. Based on the statistical results, it is fair to say that when *AP* exclusively featured female Syrians as opposed to males, positive emotions were more likely to be shown in the visual coverage.

In addition, in 318 photographs that presented both male and female Syrians, 136 of them (42.8%) did not clearly show emotions of portrayed Syrians. Overall, 102 images (32.1%)

demonstrated a negative emotion. In sharp contrast, 69 photographs (21.7%) showed a positive emotion of depicted Syrians. Only 11 visuals (3.5%) showed both positive and negative emotions of Syrians.

Apart from gender, age is also significantly associated with emotions of Syrians presented in the visuals, $\chi^2(6) = 77.03, p < .0001$ (see Table 17). In 400 photographs of Syrian adults, 219 of them (54.8%) did not clearly convey any emotions of depicted Syrians, whereas 147 images (36.8%) showed negative emotions of Syrians, such as crying, frustration, or feeling of numbness. In comparison, only 34 (8.5%) showed positive emotions of portrayed Syrians.

In 308 news images exclusively focused on Syrian children, 110 of them (35.7%) did not clearly display the emotions of depicted children. Overall, 101 visuals (32.8%) showed Syrian children with negative emotions. By contrast, 92 images (29.9%) showed a positive emotion of Syrian children, whereas 5 images (less than 2% of visuals) demonstrated Syrian children with both positive and negative emotions.

In 336 photographs that showed either the interaction between an individual Syrian child and other people or presented both Syrian adults and children, 141 of them (42%) did not clearly show any emotions of depicted Syrians, followed by negative emotions (124, 36.9%), positive emotions (58, 17.3%), and mixed emotions (13, 3.9%). In sum, across all age groups, the *AP* visual coverage either failed to convey any emotion of the portrayed Syrians or predominantly showed Syrians' negative emotions.

Pictorial Conventions. RQ4a of this dissertation asked what camera position was most frequently used in *AP* news images in depicting the victims of the Syrian civil conflict—mainly the Syrian citizens and refugees. In visual depiction, camera position and angle are important categories since they signify the symbolic social distance and power relations between the

photographer, the viewer, and the portrayed subjects (Fahmy, 2004; van Leeuwen, 2001). The statistical results showed that in 1,044 photographs depicting Syrian citizens or refugees, the medium shot was the most frequently adopted camera position (519, 49.7%), followed by long shot (471, 45.1%), close-up (53, 5.1%), and extreme close-up (1, 0.1%; see Table 18). In photographs that used a medium shot, the portrayed Syrian citizens and refugees were presented from a medium distance. Usually, they were shown from the waist up. In photographs of long shots, the entire bodies of portrayed Syrians were shown as well as the surrounding scene. The symbolic social distance between the viewer and the portrayed Syrians signified by such a camera position was large. Images that used close-up shots featured the entire face or the entire face and shoulders of portrayed Syrians. By contrast, photographs of extreme close-up exclusively focused on the entire face of portrayed Syrians and key features of the portrayed face. Both extreme close-up and close-up camera positions symbolically signify an intimate relationship between the viewer and the portrayed Syrians.

The statistical results indicated that there is a significant association between the gender of Syrians and the social distance signified by the camera position, $\chi^2(6) = 40.74$, $p < .0001$ (see Table 19). In 500 images of Syrian males, long shot was the most commonly used camera position (251, 50.2%), followed by medium shot (222, 44.4%) and close-up (27, 5.4%). In 226 images of Syrian females, most were medium shots (135, 59.7%), followed by the long shot (69, 30.5%) and the close-up shot (21, 9.3%). One image (0.4%) focused on a Syrian female's face with an extreme close-up shot. The statistical results indicated that AP images of Syrian males were more likely to use long shots and less frequently to use close-up shot than images of their female counterparts.

In 318 photographs that presented both Syrian males and females, medium shot was still the most prevalent (162, 50.9%), followed by 151 images (47.5%) that used a long shot. In sharp contrast, only 5 of such images (1.6%) used a close-up shot.

The statistical results also demonstrated that there is a significant association between the age of Syrians and the social distance signified by the camera position, $\chi^2(6) = 21.99, p = .001$ (see Table 20). In 400 photographs of Syrian adults, 17 images (less than 5%) used a close-up shot, whereas more than 205 of images (50%) used a long shot. One image (0.3%) used an extreme close-up shot. In 308 photographs of Syrian children, 26 images (8.4%) used close-up shots. In 336 photographs that presented either the interaction between individual Syrian children and other people or the Syrian adults-children interactions, 10 images (3%) used a close-up shot. It is reasonable to conclude that *AP* photographs rarely used extreme close-up or close-up shots to create a symbolic intimate relationship between the viewer and the portrayed Syrians. By mostly using either a medium shot or a long shot, the *AP* visual coverage mainly constructed the symbolic social relationship between the viewer and depicted Syrians at an impersonal level (van Leeuwen, 2001).

RQ4b of this dissertation asked what camera angle the *AP* used to depict the victims of the Syrian civil war, mainly Syrian citizens and refugees. This research question is associated with the variable *point of view*. Regarding the *point of view* variable to frame the victims of the Syrian civil war—mainly Syrian citizens or refugees—1,044 photographs depicted Syrian citizens or refugees, and 606 of them (more than 50%) portrayed Syrians at an eye level, which symbolically constructed an equal relationship between the viewer and the depicted Syrians. Overall, 93 of them (8.9%) depicted Syrians from a low angle, giving them an impression of empowerment. More than one third—341 images (32.7%)—depicted Syrians from a high angle, which exercises symbolic

power over the portrayed Syrians. In addition, 4 photographs (less than 1%) depicted Syrians from their perspective, making the viewers feel like they are experiencing the Syrians' perspective. Examples of such visuals included the depiction of a Syrian man warming his hands. The camera angle was from his perspective and only his hands were shown. The camera angle variable was significant across different gender groups, $\chi^2(6) = 18.96, p = .004$ (see Table 21). Although equal eye level was the most commonly used camera angle, which is above 50% across three different groups (males, females, and both males and females), *AP* images mostly used high angles to portray Syrian males than their female counterparts.

Graphicness. RQ5 of this dissertation asked if *AP* presented graphic images in its visual coverage of the distant suffering caused by the Syrian civil war. Regarding this research question, the statistical results showed that in 1,309 images, more than 85% of visuals—1,133 images (86.6%)—did not show any graphic content. However, 176 visuals (13.5%) showed graphic content of injury or death. Among them, 113 photographs (8.6%) showed injury of the portrayed subjects. Although most of these visuals included the depiction of injured Syrian citizens, a few of them did portray the injured Syrian rebel soldiers. In terms of death, 36 visuals (less than 3% of images) showed coffins, body bags, blood spill, or a graveyard. Plus, 7 images (0.5%) displayed body parts of the dead, 10 photographs (0.8%) clearly showed the dead body but did not show faces of the dead, and another 10 images (0.8%) depicted the dead body with the face of the dead visible, which is considered the most graphic in this research study (see Figure 4). The images depicting death all focused on dead Syrian citizens or refugees, including the image of 3-year-old lifeless Aylan Kurdi on the Turkish beach.

Regarding 1,044 visual images that portrayed Syrians, the statistical analysis found a significant association between gender and graphicness in visuals, $\chi^2(10) = 51.73, p < .0001$ (see

Table 22). In 500 photographs of Syrian males, the number of images depicting injury (76, 15.2%) was proportionally higher than that of visuals that exclusively featured Syrian females (14, 6.2%). Meanwhile, 28 images of Syrian males (5.6%) showed different levels of visibility of death. Among them, 16 visuals (68%) displayed *implied death*, which showed the presence of body bags, coffins, or graveyards, such as a group of Syrian males mourning before a coffin during a funeral and two Syrian males mourning in a graveyard. One image depicted *fractional death*, which includes a display of body parts. This image is a depiction of male Aleppo residents along with the White Helmets carrying a victim of airstrike (body parts of the victim are shown). Three images out of 28 (10.7%) displayed *masked death*. Examples included Aleppo male residents working with the White Helmets to carry the body of a Syrian man (without his face being shown) following an airstrike by government forces. Eight out of 28 images (28.6%) showed *unveiled death*. Such visuals included the depiction of a group of Syrian males along with the White Helmets carrying the dead (with the face being clearly shown) caused by artillery shelling by Syrian government forces' exit from the mosque. By contrast, 4 out of 226 photographs of Syrian females displayed *implied death*. Examples included a depiction of a female Syrian refugee crying near the grave of her husband. In visuals that focused on both male and female Syrians, 12 images (3.8%) displayed injury. Five images (1.6%) showed *implied death*, which included the depiction of a Syrian family visiting the graveyard; a female Syrian refugee with her son grieved over the death of her husband.

Semiotic Analysis

RQ6 of this dissertation study asked what visual frames were used by the *AP* to portray human suffering caused by the Syrian civil war. In addition to coding for manifest visual elements (e.g., camera angle, distance; number/age/gender of subjects) through the quantitative content analysis of *AP* photographs, this dissertation study integrated a semiotic approach to decipher ideas

and values associated with those depicted people, places, and things manifested through 12 inductively identified themes (e.g., human emotional reaction to suffering, journey, daily life). Specifically, this study used visual semiotic analysis to explore the “hidden meanings of images” (van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 93) or interpretation created by the visuals. Such approach would allow the researcher to identify visual news frames reinforced through the selective representation of certain subjects and events in *AP* news photographs of the human suffering caused by Syria’s civil war alongside the verbal framing of photographs indicated in the caption. In so doing, this dissertation study further addressed the ethical role of news photography in public life today. That is, based on the meanings about distant suffering rendered through the visual framing, which is mediated by different characteristics of photography (e.g., denotation, stylistic convention, connotation), this study explored different kinds of ethical dispositions the press imagery had proposed to the viewers in terms of feeling, thinking about, and acting toward those who were experiencing the misfortune from far away—those whom the viewers have never seen in real life but only through the mediated form of press photography. Six visual frames were identified through conducting a conceptual-driven semiotic analysis on *AP* photographs based on the past literature on logics and historical norms reflected through the representation of distant ‘others’ in Western media (Boltanski, 1999; Chouliaraki, 2013b). The following part of this section explains each visual frame, discusses connotative meanings encoded by each frame, and the ethical disposition each frame proposed in terms of how the viewers of images might feel about the suffering presented in news images, as well as providing visual examples associated with each frame.

Suffering as Bare Life. Images that present extreme, acute suffering such as living in destitute conditions or being forced to migrate through visual depictions of non-Western, Syrian

bodies, and children's bodies belong to the category of *suffering as bare life*. For instance, Figure 5 shows an elderly Syrian man seated beside a little girl outside a temporary refugee camp. In this photo, the elderly man has minimal clothes on him. His right hand is reaching out to the toes of his right foot. The photo caption indicates that he had lost his toes during the Syrian civil war. According to his weary look, he does not have any intention to interact with the camera/photographer. The little girl seated beside him holds food-like stuff in both her hands while having no clothes to cover the upper part of her body. It seems that she has the intention to interact with the camera. Her facial expression suggested a sense of discomfort, hesitation, and frustration. In the photo frame, the photographer also captured the raw, harsh environment in which two individuals rested.

Figure 6 shows a picture of a Syrian female standing with her children at the entrance to their tent in a formal refugee camp. The woman's face is covered by a traditional Arab Niqab and her long robe clearly stood out in this image as unique symbols of her culture. Her five kids, dressed in different colors, are either sitting on the ground or standing and looking elsewhere. Using a long shot, the photographer showed the viewers of this image the surrounding scene of six Syrian individuals, which is a formal refugee camp established by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Without the demonstration of their facial expressions and individuality, such visual composition reduces the life of six portrayed Syrians—the mother and her five kids—to a simplistic, stereotypical visual trope of “living matter” (Chourliaraki & Stoic, 2017, p. 1167) subject to the humanitarian benevolence of the West-oriented international community.

Figure 7 presents a photo that focuses on a nameless Syrian refugee child who sits on the sandy ground at a temporary refugee camp. Sitting on the ground barefoot, with no clothes to cover

his upper body, the child's half-nakedness is fully exposed under the camera. His huddled sitting pose implies that he was experiencing a great level of discomfort at the moment (e.g., feeling cold) or he was simply upset by his living condition. Being presented as not interacting with the camera, his passive gaze suggested a sense of frustration, exhaustion, or even fear. Such a negative visual trope presented the vulnerability of a Syrian refugee child in almost the barest physical condition for observation.

In addition to the images presented above, photographs depicted a large group of Syrian refugees standing behind a fence to wait to cross the border on fragile dinghies and were within the visual frame of *suffering as bare life*. As shown in the four images of Figure 8, the main victims of Syria's civil conflict—Syrian refugees—are presented as a “mass of unfortunates” (Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017, p. 1167), signified by long camera angle shots. By massifying refugees and emphasizing Syrian refugees' desperate need to leave for a new place to survive, such a visual representation fails to communicate the individual humanness of Syrian refugees. Rather, this visual trope presents Syrian refugees as a herd of biological bodies struggling for their very own survival and thus dehumanizes them.

The last visual examples within the visual frame of *suffering as bare life* are shown in the Figure 9. Five images delineate a common visual theme: Syrian refugees waiting for or receiving humanitarian aid. Characterized by massification, Syrians in these four visuals have neither a name nor a personal story. According to the photo captions, they are simply referred to as “Syrian refugees,” “Syrian men,” “Syrian women,” or “Syrians.” Another commonality of these five visuals is derived from the pictorial convention of them: high camera angle in depicting Syrians waiting for or receiving humanitarian aid. Such stylistic convention symbolically casts Syrians in passive, powerless roles while empowering the spectators of images. Emotional expressions of

Syrians in these visuals suggest that Syrian refugees were either desperate, needy biological bodies whose survival is reliant on the aid from NGOs and international organization (e.g., UNHCR) or a mass of despair living in destitute conditions without independence and agency.

In sum, the visual frame of *suffering as bare life* routinely massifies or infantilizes the displaced Syrians. Relying on raw realism to portray human bodies of Syrians in destitute situations without too many individual features of them, such as their names, social status, and history, the visual frame of *suffering as bare life* victimizes depicted Syrians. In such a depiction, suffering Syrians were reduced to mere bodily creatures and thus remain passive, unaware, and quasi-human (Chouliaraki, 2013b). Such a visual representation is completely devoid of agency, will, and voice of portrayed Syrians. It places the sufferers as sub-humans whose lives are not registered to the order of “our humanity” (Kotilainen, 2016, p. 102). What ethical proposal does this kind of visual performativity entail? This visual frame, emphasized by its commonly used pictorial conventions (e.g., massification signified by long-shot camera position), situates the sufferer—displaced Syrians—and ‘us’ in a relationship characterized by what Boltanski (1999) referred to as “the politics of pity” (p. 13). Such a relationship is based on a standpoint of distance epitomized by either the stark contrast between pathetic, undeveloped, uncivilized bodies of suffering Syrians and civil, healthy bodies of spectators in Western societies (Chouliaraki, 2013a), or “the massification of a collection of unfortunates” viewed from a distance (Boltanski, 1999, p. 13). Signified by the “us-them” dichotomous relationship, the visual frame of *suffering as bare life* constitutes what Kyriakidou (2015) called “detached witnessing” (p. 226), which describes the suffering of distant others as something remote or utterly irrelevant to the spectators’ everyday lives. The empathic construction between the viewer and the sufferer is hardly established in this visual frame. With minimum contextual explanation, distant suffering presented through this

visual frame is ultimately perceived by the spectators of the West as more of a humanitarian emergency than of a prolonged civil war resulting from complicated societal factors such as the failure of international politics structured by the Western way of governance. By distancing the suffering and actually concentrating on how the spectators might feel about savage, inferior bodies depicted by the images as subhuman in need of help instead of centering on the suffering of the individual or groups presented in the images, the visual frame of *suffering as bare life* solicits a negative appeal enacted by a colonial mindset of superior, civilized Western society vis-à-vis uncivilized, barbaric, less developed “Third World others.”

Suffering as Sublimation. Visuals that objectively document the horror caused by the war (e.g., Syrians running away from a street fight, bombing; imagery that blatantly focuses on human body pain such as injury or death) belong to the frame of *suffering as sublimation*. For instance, four visuals in Figure 10 have shown moments when Syrians had to escape from a street fight or run for cover from an airstrike. Centered on the movement and actions of depicted Syrians, using long shot, photographers of these four images stunningly captured the horror caused by the war ordinary Syrian citizens had gone through. In these visuals, Syrians were presented as fearful characters who were in shock by what was happening to them. Their instinct reactions to the horror of war, marked by their movements of escaping an imminent danger around them, are clearly displayed in the visuals. The traditional Arab dressing on Syrian female characters such as long robe and hijab reveal the cultural identity of portrayed subjects and thus reinforce the stereotypical images of the Middle East region in Western eyes—a place where war and conflict never end. Meanwhile, the presence of armed gunmen in the street, the rubbles of ruined buildings underneath each Syrian’s step, the cloud of dust generated by aerial bombardment, and black smoke from far-away neighborhoods all signified chaotic situations in which Syrian citizens were trapped. The

captions accompanying each photograph such as “civilians flee from fighting after Syrian army tanks enter the northwestern city of Idlib, Syria,” and “...a Syrian man, right, runs for cover from a Syrian government forces air strike attack, in Aleppo, Syria” inform the image viewers about the main perpetrator who unfairly disrupted civilians’ peaceful life and instigated fear to them: Bashar Al-Assad’s authoritarian regime and his armed forces.

In addition to urgent danger and chaos that ordinary Syrians had experienced, the horror of Syria’s civil war is also manifested by the visual depiction of civilian casualties. Such representation in *AP* visual coverage presents straightforwardly the injury and death of Syrian citizens in graphic manner, and they seem aesthetically horrendous, as six images show in Figure 11. The top left image in the illustration shows a wounded man half-nakedly lying on the floor of a hospital in the city of Aleppo, Syria, while pointing his finger to the sky, as if trying to pray or say something. The image was shot from a high angle. Although the photo caption says the man is wounded, the man’s particular gesture, his chest wound, dripping blood from his forehead to his mouth, and the empty look in his eyes featured in the picture frame resemble key visual attributes of images of impending death and therefore construct an “about to die” moment (Zelizer, 2010). One might wonder: Was he properly treated in hospital? Did he die because of his wound? Clearly, no spectator of this image seems to know. Similarly, the bottom left image in the illustration is a shot of Syrian doctors trying to save the life of a severely wounded boy. What is visually impressive in this photograph is that the center subject of this image—the injured, half naked boy whose mouth and chest were stained by blood, lying down in a hospital bed surrounded by doctors, is photographed by a downward tilt shot. In so doing, the photographer not only recorded the unsettling moment the boy was experiencing but stunningly created a psychological impression of weakness and inferiority of the portrayed Syrian boy. In such horrific scenes, the boy’s extreme

body pain and helpless feeling, signified by his anguished look, are vividly presented to the viewers of the image. Meanwhile, the photo caption indicates that the boy's misfortune is indeed caused by a Syrian army sniper who took a shot at him.

Other four images in Figure 11 show the dead human body in different ways and therefore construct the horror of the war in a different aesthetic manner. The top-right image is a visual display of two dead bodies lying face-down on a street in one neighborhood of the city of Aleppo, Syria. Taken from a far distance with a high camera angle, two perished bodies in this picture are not easily identifiable at first glance since they are almost blended in with their surroundings. Such visual composition is devoid of any individualizing features of the two, such as their age and sex or their social status. To spectators of such images (most likely Westerners), the road sign written in Arabic indicates that this is the death from a remote foreign land. Rather than soliciting emotions, this visual representation creates a spectacle in the distance for viewers to watch, observe, and contemplate what death in a distant foreign land might look like. By contrast, the middle-left image is also a death scene in the street. However, the framing of death in this photo is totally different. Instead of shooting the photo from a far distance, the photographer of this image brings the death closer to the viewers by showing a visually and aesthetically appalling scene: two men carrying a bloody corpse of a civilian while there is a large blood spill in the street. An image like this directly invites the spectators to confront and feel the horror and inhumanness of war.

The middle-right image in Figure 11 is another presentation of death. In this photograph, four dead bodies contained in separate body bags along with dried spilled blood on the ground are shot from a high camera angle. Although the dead bodies are not directly shown, the close-up portrayal of body bags is equally disturbing and psychologically bone chilling. Facing such a horrendous scene, the viewers might wonder: Who are these people? What are their names? What

are their biological sexes? No one seems to know the answer to these questions, except the only information provided in the photo caption indicates that they were all killed in airstrikes carried out by warplanes of the Syrian government.

The last example of death in Figure 11 is about a Syrian corpse illuminated by a flashlight and then fixed in time by the camera, as the bottom-right image has shown. The caption of this photograph reads, “A man points a flashlight towards the body of a Syrian man killed by Syrian army shelling at a graveyard in Aleppo, Syria, Oct. 13, 2012.” The photo caption also explains that the image has won the 2013 Pulitzer Prize in Breaking News photography. The framing of death in this photo looks aesthetically stunning: Against an overall dark background (obviously, the photo was taken during the night), the flashlight held by the standing man directs the viewers’ attention to the dead. Instead of seeing a blood spill or the twisted face on a dead body, viewers see a relatively peaceful, calm body without displaying any obvious signs of body pain. According to Fishman (2017), this photograph should be viewed with great respect because it did more than just hint at death. As an ideal form of news, this photograph is valued for “shining a bright light on death” (p. 229), both literally and metaphorically.

The horror of war belongs to the frame of *suffering as sublimation*; either such horror is about innocent civilians running away from imminent and present danger or it is about human body pain. This frame resonates with what Boltanski (1999) called suffering as “sublime” (p. 115), which is a form of suffering that contains and even represses an initial movement of pity. Dismay, alarm, nausea, and compassion fatigue are possible feelings associated with distant suffering. Capitalizing on the aesthetics of horror, the sublime spectacle of intense human suffering is produced by visuals that accentuate the sufferers’ fear and extreme human body pain. Compared to the frame of *suffering as bare life*, which victimized the sufferers, the frame of *suffering as*

sublimation objectified unfortunate Syrians depicted in the image. The suffering Syrians' agency and dignity are completely stripped away. By viewing such visuals, the spectators confront an immediate reality: What they see is the horror produced by war. In this situation, according to Boltanski (1999), the primary quality of spectators is courage because they dare to cast their eyes on the unfortunate and directly face either the fear generated by chaotic, horrific scenes or the sufferers' graphic body pain without immediately turning their attention away. In other words, being exposed to gruesome photographs, the spectators allow themselves to be occupied with the horrific. Thus, they can be haunted by voyeurism and its implied sadism (Taylor, 1998).

Suffering as a Failed State. Still centralized on the misfortunes caused by prolonged Syria's civil conflict, the frame of *suffering as a failed state* involves imagery that focuses on damaged buildings, debris from destruction, and destitute situations of Syrian civilians living in their country, as Figure 12 has demonstrated. Among six photographs in the illustration, the top left one shows a street scene in the city of Aleppo, Syria. In this photo are two Syrian men sitting and randomly chatting in the street while pedestrians walk past a pile of garbage left on a roadside. Being shot from a long distance, the photographer tries not to interrupt the scene but shows spectators the ordinary life of Syrian citizens living in a country wracked by civil war. In a similar setting, the top-right image of the illustration depicts a Syrian family crossing a street piled with rubbish. What captures the viewers' eyes first in this photo is garbage piled in the street while the subject of suffering—one man holding his little child followed by another adult and two other kids, are placed off the center and remain almost trivial in the picture frame. In these two photos, the trash in the streets vividly describes unbearable chaos and misery in the Syrian city and connotes a meaning of bad living conditions with extremely low hygiene standards. As discussed in "Clearing Rubbish in Syria" (The New Humanitarian, 2013), the piled-up rubbish in many Syrian

streets has tremendously spurred a public health crisis for local Syrians: It can lead to a proliferation of disease when most hospitals are out of service due to a collapse of infrastructure and severe disruptions in the local health system caused by the civil war.

Two images in the middle of the Figure 12 are depictions of wrecked buildings and demolished infrastructure. The image on the left portrays a Syrian man walking between two blocks of destroyed buildings barefoot. Using the visual technique of leading lines, the photo's visual composition draws the spectators' eyes to the lonely Syrian man and the street lane that lies ahead of him, which is blocked by rubbles. The photo caption tells that the destruction is caused by heavy shelling by the Syrian army. Using different photographic techniques, the image on the right captures the moment of three Syrian women walking past their destroyed homes in a long camera shot. In addition to completely ruined buildings, the traditional Arab dress on three Syrian women stands out in this photo and connotes a meaning of foreignness (to Western viewers). The image caption says that this wreckage scene was caused by a Syrian government airstrike.

The bottom two images in Figure 12 constitute different scenes of Syrian civilians' life inside their war-torn country. The left one shows Syrian citizens receiving humanitarian aid from Russian soldiers in their hometown, and the right one is about one Syrian adult, along with a child, collecting nylon and plastic from the landfill to make ends meet. According to an independent Syrian journalist Sonia Ali (2020), picking through garbage to make a living has been a very common activity in northern Syria for most families who have lost means of making money. The social activities of Syrians depicted in the two photographs, whether it is receiving basic needs from the foreign military or searching through garbage to find valuables, indicate dangerous social phenomena spotted in Syrian cities: People live in poverty and have no proper means to sustain

themselves. They connote the meanings of inefficient local governance and a collapsed economy resulting from a prolonged civil conflict.

Compared to the frames *suffering as bare life* and *suffering as sublimation*, the visual frame *suffering as a failed state* does not focus on human pain of the suffering subject. Instead, it privileges visuals of destroyed buildings, demolished infrastructure, destitute conditions of Syrians living in their home country, and the presence of foreign troops. These visuals construct the picture of a poverty-stricken state governed by a corrupt government that bombs its own citizens while losing control over peripheral regions to outside foreign troops, which are clear indicators of a “failed state” (Call, 2008, p. 1495). Such a stereotypical representation of the “Third World,” the non-Western developing world, is articulated to “First World” Westerner onlookers through the visual frame of *suffering as a failed state*. This visual frame thus enlarges the distance between the spectators gazing from safety and suffering Syrians: People depicted in these images are not quite like ‘us.’ They do not live up to ‘our’ standards and they are not part of “Western global nobility” (Kotilainen, 2016, p. 160). Their trouble is fundamentally caused by their way of governance and inherent flaw of their social structure. That is why they are suffering.

Suffering as Innocent Vulnerability. Unlike the visual frames of *suffering as bare life* and *suffering as sublimation*, the frame of *suffering as innocent vulnerability* represents an alternative tendency in visualizing the dire situation that suffering Syrians have to face during the civil war. In this visual frame, individual victims, a sleeping infant, a parent with his or her child, and a rescue worker in action are pictured in close-up images, presented with the knowledge of personality, names and identity, as well as personal history. Instead of taking perspectives of distance, visuals categorized under the frame of *suffering as innocent vulnerability* acknowledges the uniqueness of portrayed suffering subjects as people, as human beings. The situation of

suffering subjects in this visual frame has also been presented through highly emotive images. For instance, Figure 13 is a news photograph of a female Syrian refugee saying goodbye to her relative at the International Organization for Migration office. Being presented in a close-up shot, a tear can be clearly seen on the cheekbone of the crying Syrian woman's left eye. The affection between the crying Syrian woman and her relative is signified by emotional hugs between the two. A sense of innocence in this photograph is connoted through inexplicable emotional pain that two women have to endure at that precious, private moment: without war, they don't have to experience this nonsensical, forced separation.

Figure 14 shows a photograph that won the 2013 Pulitzer Prize Breaking News photography. Photographed by *AP* Argentinian photographer Rodrigo Abd with an extreme close-up shot, the news image extraordinarily captures the devastating emotion of a Syrian woman named Aida. With a clear focus on Aida's face, her green eyes and the sharply defined outline of her right thumb are focal points of the image. Specifically, her crying eyes are framed by the fingers of her hand and the gauze bandage underneath a covering on her head. A tear can be seen on the cheekbone of her left eye. In addition, dried blood encrusts her face. Although her mouth is covered by her right hand and cannot be observed in the image, her eyes intensely convey a strong sense of emotional pain that the spectators might never have experienced in person. In this news photograph, Aida's victimhood is vividly connoted by her crying green eyes. She is given a unique identity and an explanation of her grief. According to the photo caption, Aida's pain is caused by the Syrian army shelling on her house, which resulted in the death of her husband and two children. She was severely injured but survived.

Figure 15 presents a grieving moment of a Syrian boy named Ahmed mourning his dead father, with tears streaming down his face. As the central subject of this photograph, Ahmed is

comforted by an older man, possibly his close relative, who is gently rubbing his head. The person who sits tight close on the left to Ahmed while holding Ahmed's shoulder is seen crying in equal distress, despite his face being partially obscured by the arm of the older man. Above and to the right of Ahmed, a young boy is seen peeking over Ahmed's shoulder at something, perhaps, and very likely, the dead body of Ahmed's father Abdulaziz Abu Ahmed Khrer. Ahmed's grieving face, placed in the center of the picture frame, signals an undeniable emotional pain of an innocent boy who just lost his father. The photo caption indicates that Ahmed's father was killed by a Syrian army sniper.

Figure 16 depicts another image of anguish. It shows a Syrian father crouching over the body of his son in the street. The boy is shoeless and half-naked. Blood stains and bandages on the boy's upper body allow the viewers to imagine extreme human body pain that the boy had gone through when he was alive. Although the father's facial expression is not clearly shown in the image, the acute emotional pain that he was experiencing is intensely translated via his extremely lowered head and tight hold of his son's body. The visual pattern of this photograph, according to what *AP* Spanish photographer E has explained during an interview with the researcher,¹ very much resembles a Western religious iconography created during the Renaissance era—the Pieta figure, which depicts the body of Jesus on the lap of his mother Mary after the Crucifixion. (A comparison of the two images is shown in Figure 16.) This is also the reason why he captured that traumatic moment with the camera: bearing clear resemblance with the Western cultural symbol, photographs depicting distant suffering like this are eye-catching to Western viewers. He thought such image would relate to the Western audiences, as he explained:

¹ The interview took place in 2019 via Skype. When E was asked about his work, he searched for this particular image and explained to the researcher why he took such an image.

I think this is the picture that can see a lot about the Syrian war. It's about father holding his dead son. It is a classical composition that resonates with Renaissance painting about Madonna. You see there is a suffering there. You see sadness and anger. It is so against the nature. I don't know. I am not the father. But I guess every father and mother, if they see this picture and think about that situation happens to them, cannot feel relief. This image got published a lot and I've received so many emails from people all over the world telling me that...I remember someone in the United States, he basically told me that he went to his job early morning, he was like checking the newspaper. Once he saw this picture, he took a day off to go back and be with his children. He felt like the need to do so. So, this is the picture that I think I've done something good to this world. By taking this kind of picture, you feel like photojournalism can work. This is important than many awards. This is the proper thing that we do.

In the same vein, four images in Figure 17 depict different dire situations of suffering Syrians, such as a Syrian mother holding her baby while waiting to cross the border to enter a refugee camp or a White Helmets rescue worker carrying an injured but alive child in his arms. The visual patterns and common elements of the four photographs conform to another visual archetype established in Christian iconography: *Madonna and Child*. (The comparison of four photos and the painting is displayed in Figure 17.)

Aside from appealing to Western religious iconography, the visual frame of *suffering as innocent vulnerability* also privileges individual portraits of individual Syrians, as three images in Figure 18 show. These photographs exclusively focus on individuals in close-up shots without showing too much of the surroundings or any background. The subject of such portraits looks directly into the camera. Therefore, the interaction between the depicted subjects and the photographer naturally extends to the interaction with the viewers, forcing the viewers to directly

encounter the individual subjects rather than seeing them from a distance. At the same time, the photo caption gives the viewers contextual information about portrayed Syrian individuals, including their names and personal stories. In these three photos, according to the captions, each individually depicted child does not have access to proper education due to prolonged civil conflict.

The photographs belong to the visual frame *suffering as innocent vulnerability* connote not only the mere innocence of portrayed Syrian civilians but also their innocence tarnished and corrupted by a cruel, violent world in which they live. As opposed to the visual frame of *suffering as bare life*, which massifies and dehumanizes the suffering subject, the visual frame *suffering as innocent vulnerability* inherently humanizes suffering Syrians through various individualization techniques, such as using close-up snapshots and informing viewers the unique story about each depicted sufferer. Moreover, by bearing close resemblance with Western religious iconography, visuals under this frame reduce the distance between Western viewers and the portrayed suffering Syrians. It thus encourages a relationship of compassion and care, yet still reminds the viewers at distant safe environments of the suffering Syrians' otherness: They are fundamentally different from 'us' in sense of culture and their life experiences. Such ambivalent agency, according to Chouliaraki and Stolic (2017), ultimately forms a moralizing response toward the suffering Syrians, which could momentarily inspire "affective responses of guilt" (p. 1169) but ultimately remain unstable and fleeting.

Suffering as Tender-Heartedness. The visual frame *suffering as tender-heartedness* centralizes on the suffering individuals as the focal point of visual images. Unlike other two visual frames that also mainly focus on suffering Syrians—*suffering as bare life* and *suffering as innocent vulnerability*—this visual frame dismisses the practice of showing the suffering subjects as passive

victims. Instead, it involves imagery that presents the suffering Syrian as hopeful, resilient, and smiling individuals in realistic surroundings, as what five photographs in Figure 19 have depicted.

In Figure 19, the top-left image is a portrayal of one 11-year-old Syrian refugee girl named Amal Fawwaz raising her hand to answer her teacher's question in a makeshift tent classroom. As the focal subject of this image, Amal's head is covered by a colorful hijab. While pictured as not directly interacting with the camera, her optimism and confidence can be signified by her smiling face in profile and upright sitting posture. Being photographed from a low angle, she looks imposing and empowered. This visual composition connotes a meaning that despite studying in a temporary makeshift tent classroom, Amal is not bothered by such harsh conditions at all. Instead, she is optimistic and determined to learn.

The top-right image in Figure 19 portrays a Syrian boy posing for a photo in the snow outside. Against the backdrop of white snow, his red coat plainly stands out in the picture. He leans on the snow behind him with his arms wide open. In this relaxing posture, he is directly looking into the camera and is gently smiling to the photographer. His interaction with the photographer naturally extends to an interaction with the viewers. The photo caption says that the boy is living in his tent at a refugee camp in eastern Lebanon. Snowfall as a powerful winter storm has devastated the region, causing the death of some Syrian refugees. Such a visual pattern and element connote a sense of pure innocence of the portrayed child and his positivity despite facing harsh living conditions. Similarly, the image in the middle of the illustration shows a different pose of Syrian children living at a refugee camp. Using different visual techniques, a group of Syrian children flashing V-signs together while smiling at the camera is photographed from a high angle. In this photo, Syrian children are dressed in different colors. Some of them seem extremely happy.

Their V-signs and happy faces are clear indicators of their pure innocence and positivity. At least they are not fully aware of (or have completely ignored) the harsh reality of displacement.

The bottom-left image in Figure 19 visually tells a story about a Syrian refugee artist named Lina Mahameed living in Amman, the capital city of Jordan. In this photo, Lina is wearing a hijab. She directly smiles at the camera while holding a color portrait that she drew. Behind her is a large portrait of a mosque. In addition to Lina's sincerity and kindness signified by her happy face, the photographer clearly wants to draw the viewers' attention to her artistic talent by demonstrating her work in the photo.

The bottom-right image of Figure 19 portrays a young Syrian girl named Nujeen Mustafa holding a copy of her published book while sitting in her wheelchair. In this photo, Nujeen is individually presented as a happy, confident, and graceful young woman. The photo caption says that the image was taken at the Frankfurt Book Fair in Germany and the book Nujeen holds is an autobiography about her incredible journey from Syria. The book that she wrote pictured in the image connotes the meanings of resilience and optimism.

Still relying on photorealism, the frame *suffering as tender-heartedness* rejects the imagery of the sufferer as a victim. Rather, it presents the sufferer as an independent person with dignity and agency. In such a visual frame, the suffering Syrians are photographed in a personalized manner, usually with names and personal stories. They attend school, write a book, work, and actively interact with the photographer. Even in fragile living conditions, they still try to improve their situations by striving for a better-quality life and fully developing their potentials with firm self-determination and hope. These images, according to Syrian native press photographer B, showed suffering Syrians "overcome the sorrow and sadness and try to put all the pain behind them." Such visuals constitute what Chouliaraki (2013b) called the "positive appeal" (p. 61),

which aims to empower the sufferers and give them a voice. With a clear focus on positive, hopeful scenes and individual identification, the visuals of *suffering as tender-heartedness* aim to evoke warm-hearted sensations in the spectators by bringing the “distant suffering” Syrians closer to the spectators based on similarities between ‘us’ and ‘them.’ That is, instead of being injured, on the verge of dying, or passively waiting for the aid, the suffering Syrians depicted in the photo are very much like ‘us’ in terms of shared life experiences. They therefore belong to the same register of humanity with the spectators viewing from safety and distance.

What forms of moral responsibility does the frame of *suffering as kindheartedness* call for? As Kotilainen (2016) pointed out, presenting the suffering subjects of dire situations in hopeful and joyful scenes risks the danger that the spectators might fail to recognize the reality of those who suffer from misfortune because of similarity and identification with the distant individuals. Such a misleading illusion might create a sense that those depicted in the image are happy and are just like us and thus they don’t need too much help from ‘us.’ Furthermore, the representation of the distant others as being just like us falls into a moral fallacy described by Silverstone (2007) as *the immorality of identity*: By presenting the distant suffering strangers as being just like us, although benignly, “we refuse to recognize not only others are not like us, but that they cannot made to be like us” (p. 173). The refusal to accept differences indicated by such cultural neo-imperialism ultimately leads to a resistance to fully recognize and value the distant sufferers by subjugating their otherness to the spectators, or precisely speaking, the Western discourse of identity and agency (Chouliaraki, 2013b).

Suffering as a Self-reflexive Performance. News imagery of celebrity benevolence, Western leaders, citizens, NGOs expressing their solidarity with Syria, and artistic drawings of toddler Aylan Kurdi, belong to the visual frame of *suffering as a self-reflexive performance*.

The imagery of celebrity benevolence, characterized by “show business aesthetics” (Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017, p. 1170), is exemplified in Figure 16. Four photographs in Figure 20 are about Western celebrities, politicians in support of displaced suffering Syrians—Angelina Jolie and the members of British Royal family, including the Prince of Wales (Prince Charles) and his wife The Duchess of Cornwall. In these four image examples, a focus has been given to the celebrity figures. They are depicted in refugee camps, speaking to the public, taking a walk, or directly interacting with displaced Syrian families or children. Specifically, Angelina Jolie, who is a Hollywood superstar and an icon of popular culture, has long been serving the role of appointed United Nations Commissioner for Refugees Goodwill Ambassador since 2001 and is one of most active celebrities in the field (Chouliaraki, 2013b). As a British royal family member, The Duchess of Cornwall supports over 90 charities as Patron or President (The Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall, n.d.). Her husband, Prince Charles, is the very first U.K. Patron of the International Rescue Committee, which is a cross-national organization dedicated to humanitarian missions of helping those who are affected by conflict and disaster (Refugee Week 2020). As prestigious figures who are passionate about charity work, celebrities photographed in the images clearly articulate their personal disposition of caring, feeling, and acting toward suffering Syrians, transferring symbolic capital from them to those nameless, destitute sufferers and thus might raise the viewers’ awareness of the distant sufferers. Their actions depicted in photos, according to Chouliaraki (2013b), manage to communicate “aspirational performances of solidarity for all to share” (p. 80). That is to say, these celebrities have presupposed their moral dispositions of care toward suffering Syrians. They act to alleviate suffering because they believe that the proposition of helping others is true and should be considered as an existing virtue. Thus, these celebrities’ public should also believe in the same and act accordingly to help. The aspirational performance

of depicted celebrities therefore not only articulates the voices of institutions that they are delegated (notably in the picture, the United Nations) but also the suffering Syrians living in refugee camps. It brings together the social relationship of humanitarianism between charitable organizations, sufferers, and the public. In terms of aiming to bridge the gap between sufferers and the spectators, what problem could the show business of celebrity benevolence cause? Indeed, the role of celebrity humanitarianism has been drawing criticism due to its very nature of aspirational performance: It conceals the fact that humanitarianism policy, usually initiated by the organization to which celebrity figures are delegated, is much more sophisticated than the simple message of effortless efficiency promoted by celebrities (Chouliaraki, 2013b). Moreover, celebrity advocacy in humanitarian efforts proposes a moral disposition of “feel for the celebrity’s feelings for the feelings of the sufferer” (Chouliaraki, 2013b, p. 103). In the co-presence of celebrities and sufferers, with unequal attention given to the former, the public’s disposition to feel and act toward the latter might be temporary, fleeting, and cannot be sustained long enough because it was inspired by celebrities. It ultimately runs the risk of prioritizing celebrities’ own emotions and actions instead of the cause they advocated for and more importantly, those in need. Therefore, humanitarian celebrities in news photographs could intensify the gap between the viewers of images and those depicted who endure the distant suffering.

Apart from the visualities of celebrity benevolence, images of Western citizens standing in solidarity with Syrians and artistic drawing of the suffering scene are also examples of self-reflexive performance that aims to enact moral dispositions of compassionate care by raising the public awareness of distant suffering (Figure 21). The top-left image of the illustration shows a flash mob organized by an international medical NGO Médecins Sans Frontières (in English, Doctors without Borders) expressing solidarity with Syrian people in Rome, Italy. The top-right

image of the illustration is a portrait of smiling volunteers of a British-originated charitable organization, Project Paddington, which is dedicated to sending teddy bears to refugee children with notes of welcome and support (Refugee Week, n.d.). Obviously, the message connoted by such visuals shows that ‘we,’ as Westerners, do care about suffering Syrians in a distant worn-torn country. Presented in different aesthetic visual properties, the bottom-left image is about the drawing of drowned three-year-old refugee Aylan Kurdi on a wall near Main River in Frankfurt, Germany. Similarly, the image on the bottom right featured a mural in Germany showing the drowned refugee Aylan Kurdi alive and laughing while surrounded by teddy bears. These news images present the viewers with the re-visualization of the original death scene of Aylan Kurdi. With an attempt to humanize suffering refugees, these photos represent another form of the Western narrative that aims to show compassion with suffering Syrians.

Suffering Syrians were absent from the images. Rather, the mere presence of Western NGO workers or the artistic representation of painful suffering replaced the actual suffering of Syrians. The voice of suffering Syrians is fundamentally displaced in favor of ‘our’ voice.

Images under the frame *suffering as self-reflective performance* use different aesthetic visual representations—celebrity benevolence, NGO workers’ solidarity, artistic expression to raise the public’s awareness of Syrians’ misfortune in distant lands, and artistic expression to communicate compassion and solidarity with their suffering. By relying on celebrities’ emotional appeals and echoing a message that the suffering Syrians are worthy of our attention simply because the general Western public feels this way, the visual frame *suffering as self-reflective performance* transforms the spectators from caring about the human vulnerability of sufferers depicted in news images to developing a disposition of narcissistic solidarity grounded upon Western emotions. As a consequence, the suffering others presented in the visuals become tools

exclusively for ‘us’ to evaluate ‘our’ moral compass and feel good about ‘ourselves.’ This, according to Chouliaraki (2013b), ultimately produces the “ethnocentric cosmopolitanism” (p. 186), which over-humanizes the benefactor who lies at the center of Western economic and cultural power while systematically dehumanizing the distant non-Western sufferer who already lies outside of such power and visibility. Ultimately, it leads to an irony of solidarity.

In sum, using a semiotic approach, this study identified six frames in the *AP* visual coverage of distant human suffering caused by Syria’s civil war. Moreover, as this Results and Findings chapter has delineated, various forms of moral responsibility toward the suffering depicted in the image were also discussed in the semiotic analysis. The next chapter, Discussion, interprets and describes the significance of the research findings. It explains new understanding of the mediated representation of distant human suffering, addresses the limitation of this study, and points to new directions for future research.

Chapter VII

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this dissertation study was to examine the visual coverage of the human suffering caused by the Syrian civil conflict. After conducting a content analysis of editorial photographs archived on *The Associated Press* website, from March 2011 through December 2019, there was semiotic analysis done on the same sampling of photographs for identifying visual frames of distant suffering and further exploring their connoted meanings. Semi-structured interview with eight press photographers was followed to explore the press photographers' understanding of news images of human suffering caused by war and conflict. The ultimate goal of this study was to figure out what contemporary media representations, in the form of photography by a news wire service, has told viewers about one of the most devastating human suffering within a decade—the Syria's civil conflict—and how such mediated representation of human suffering has invited us to see, understand, and feel about those who suffer in distant as well as ourselves in relation to those of distant others.

In the content analysis of photographs, findings show that *AP* published different photographs depicting the human suffering caused by Syria's prolonged civil conflict. This is noted in the overall theme of the photographs. Archived images analyzed in this study served as a visual record of the Syrian civil conflict. They constructed different social realities about the conflict created by the *AP* news wire service. Such comprehensive visual record reflects what female photojournalist G told the researcher about the purpose of photojournalism, as her words marked as the following: "A photojournalist's mission is to inform those who are not present of events taking place. You must cover a traumatic event the way you would any other – find the telling moments, details and overviews of it. Each image should convey the who/what/when and

where of the situation.” From this perspective, *AP*’s archived news images are capable of informing the public around the world about traumatic moments during the Syrian civil war.

The results of the content analysis suggest that in terms of visually reporting news about human suffering caused by Syria’s civil war, *AP* visual coverage mainly included five types of images: (1) the daily life of suffering Syrians, (2) rescuers in action, (3) human subjects’ emotional reaction to suffering, (4) displaced Syrians traveling from one place to another, and (5) humanitarian efforts initiated by politicians or celebrities. Among these visuals, images depicting the suffering Syrians’ daily life were deemed as the most newsworthy items in *AP* coverage. They accounted for 40.4% of the entire visual coverage. In such photographs, Syrians were shown in their everyday environments, engaging in different kinds of social activities in spite of living under destitute conditions, such as preparing a meal at a temporary refugee camp or having conversation with family members at the rooftop of a destroyed building in Syria. Although some of these photos presented the Syrians as positive, happy human beings with full agency and triggered warm-hearted feelings in the viewers, a majority of such visuals portrayed Syrians as passive individuals who had lost control over their own fate. They connoted the meanings of displacement, destitution, and victimization. This is understandable as the prolonged Syrian civil war has caused a significant loss of human lives and massive displacement. Press photographers in frontline are with intention to document the misfortune that Syrians had to go through during the war. For instance, one native Syrian photojournalist B, who identified himself as a citizen journalist when he was providing *Reuters* with press images of Syrian civil war, spoke to the researcher about his photographic work during his interview:

So, what I try to tell from photograph [is] I want to show the people [in Syria]
face these deadly machines and how they try to adopt and continue their lives. I

like to cover daily stories. This is the most thing that I like to do during my journey of photojournalism.

He further said that he wanted to use his camera to tell honest stories about people around him, especially those vulnerable ones. By showing the vulnerable moment of suffering ordinary Syrians, photojournalists participated in this study stated that they aim to inform the audiences about the real situation in Syria, especially about what happened to ordinary people. Another *AP* photojournalist F, who went to Syria for his assignments several times believed that even though stories about human suffering in Syria made him extremely sad and emotional, he needed to be strong and prepared because it was important for photojournalist like him, as he illustrated, “even though it is dangerous, it is complicated to be there, to go to these conflicts., Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Venezuela, you know, I still think it is important to cover. It is necessary for photojournalists to cover. We still need to cover these places. We still need to tell the rest of the world what’s going on there, you know.” Based on these insights from press photographers, it is comprehensible to see that *the Associated Press* prioritized news images of suffering Syrian’s daily life as most newsworthy ones in its visual coverage.

Images portraying rescue workers in action accounted for 10% of the *AP* coverage on human suffering caused by the Syrian civil war. Rescuers featured in these photos were Syrian citizen themselves; members of Red Cross from neighboring countries (Turkey, Lebanon); and predominantly speaking, the White Helmets—also known as the Syria Civil Defense—which is a humanitarian organization that comprises more than 3,000 volunteers operating in opposition-held areas of Syria (Holland, 2018). The White Helmets depicted in the visuals were running into the scene after the Syrian army’s shelling or the government’s airstrike, digging into the rubbles of ruined buildings using tools and their bare hands to search for survivors. They also helped bury the dead. Grounded in these visual representations, the White Helmets rescue workers’ heroism

was visually constructed. Meanwhile, the guilt of the al-Assad regimes for carrying out attacks on innocent victims was also implied through each photo caption. In doing so, news images centered on the theme *rescue/recovery* situated the roles of protagonists and antagonists in their semiotic structure: The White Helmets who operate in rebel-controlled areas were heroes dedicated to save lives whereas the al-Assad regime was the main perpetrator that caused the loss of innocent Syrian lives. Al-Assad regime, who is a strong opponent against the U.S. policies towards Syria and West-centered world order, has been framed as an ultimate evil force solely responsible for causing the dire humanitarian situation in Syria. By conveying this antagonist role, the visual theme *rescue/recovery* connotes a deeper meaning about the Syrian conflict: innocent Syrian civilians are brutally ruled and repressed by an Oriental despot and their self-rescuing efforts are brave and emancipating (Dobos, 2019). This meaning again fits into the narratives of orientalism (Said, 1979; 1989).

Images depicting *human emotional reaction to suffering* constituted almost 10% of AP visual coverage. A majority of them were about the depictions of Syrian civilians grieving over their dead family members during funerals, crying due to injury or forced separation with their relatives, or being shocked after the Syrian government military attack. By using close-up shots of a single subject or a group of subjects, visuals depicting suffering Syrians' emotional reactions portrayed Syrians in the role of victims of a humanitarian emergency caused by armed conflict. Such images, according to one retired AP photographer A, who has covered different armed conflicts, not only captured a moment of agony and pain that suffering Syrian civilians had gone through, but successfully showed "the essence of inner souls" or "broken souls of the people."

The visual representation of victims' plights symbolically reflects the intensity and depth of suffering that Syrians have experienced. The crying child or injured woman displayed in visuals

served as ideal innocent victims (Moeller, 2002) whose articulation of vulnerability and innocence mobilized a sense of sympathetic feelings in the viewers. Meanwhile, by attributing the cause of Syrian citizens' misery to the Syrian government in the photo caption, such visual representations highlight the al-Assad regime's guilt for the attack on civilians. This can lead the viewers to feel indignant toward the perpetrators who caused the misery of suffering Syrians portrayed in the visuals and thus constitutes "the topic of denunciation" (Botlanski, 1999, p. 57), which means that by viewing the misfortune from far away, the spectators' pity toward sufferers transformed to indignance and anger toward the perpetrators of suffering.

Journey was another large theme category. The 115 photographs in the category account for about 9% of the entire visual coverage. By showcasing Syrians on the move, whether by foot, wheel, or water, or to be processed at the border station, these images highlighted the transitory nature of Syrian refugees and their unfortunate displacement. Mostly focused on an undifferentiated corporeal mass on the move with long shots, the visual representation of *journey* belongs to a "realist aesthetic genre aiming to reflect an observable reality in a sober, unadorned, and 'objective' manner" (Kurasawa, 2015, p. 24). Such representation therefore further enhanced the gap between portrayed suffering Syrians and the viewers.

Celebrity visit was a prominent visual theme in *AP* visual coverage as well. Reflected in images that featured the presence of political figures or celebrities—mostly Euro-American White—or their interaction with suffering Syrians at refugee camps, celebrity figures' emotion and actions were prioritized because of their unique individuality, which can be easily distinguished from the ordinary in public life. Embodied in an orientalist discourse of "white man's burden" (Kipling, 1899), images of celebrity visits visually inscribed an unequal relationship between European, White public figures possessing the agency for care and compassion toward

the suffering Syrians who were portrayed as passive, vulnerable, and helpless. Such stark contrast, according to Chouliaraki (2012), perpetuates historical power relationships between Western missionaries and indigenous locals—the latter, represented as a specific Western project and calling, deprived of power and their own voices (Yrjola, 2009). Furthermore, in the visual theme of *celebrity visit*, European politicians, white celebrities, and the head of the United Nations (who is not a non-white but represents a Western-dominated world order) were featured as people who aimed to offer needed humanitarian assistance to suffering Syrian civilians through either their own individual philanthropic work, certain government bodies, or Western NGOs. This finding resonates with studies on conventional visual tropes of humanitarian photographs (Cloud, 2004, Kurasawa, 2015). That is, by casting white Europeans into the “savior of humanity” role, the visual theme *celebrity visit* symbolizes a hierarchy that places white Europeans and their surrogates above the people of color and further normalizes the unequal, imbalanced relationship between the West and the Global South.

The content analysis found that in the *AP* visual coverage, the dominant visual theme was changed after the year 2017. Starting in 2018, *AP* photographs tended to shift focus from displaced Syrians living in refugee camps to the impact of civil war on major cities, such as ruined buildings and the White Helmets’ search and rescue efforts. As the war progressed, what was deemed newsworthy for media changed accordingly, indicating that the battle launched by the Syrian Army in the rebel-held region had intensified by the end of 2017 (Syria Civil War Facts, 2020).

In visual storytelling of human suffering caused by the Syrian civil war, *AP* coverage included news images that featured specific inanimate objects, such as refugee camps, cell phone screens showing the photo of dead Syrians, and Syrians’ shoes in the mud. These metonymic images denoted the suffering of Syrians, evoking a representation of portrayed Syrians as cultural

“others” whose life experiences are different from that of the spectators who viewed from a safe distance.

It is worth noting that in 1,044 *AP* news images that portrayed the major victims of the Syrian civil war—Syrian citizens and refugees—around 35% of them focused on individuals. These photographs were in clear contrast to the photographs of groups. Past research studies (Saric, 2019; Slovic et al., 2017) have found that the use of photographs emphasizing individuals is likely to produce the single-victim effect, evoking compassion in viewers. In the images showing personalized adults and children, these individuals were mostly presented as sole subjects in destitute surroundings such as standing in refugee camps or walking down the road in ruined cities while crying. Such a visual representation conveys a discourse of victimization. It should also be noted that female Syrians are more likely to be featured in such a visual trope of individual victimhood than their male counterparts. Meanwhile, in terms of the age of depicted Syrians, images of individuals are the most prominent ones in both adult (47.5%) and children (49%) groups.

One important variable that this research study focused on was emotions of portrayed Syrians demonstrated in the *AP* visual coverage. The finding from content analysis shows that most *AP* news images presented the negative emotions of Syrians. This applies to all different gender (male, female) and age (adult, children) groups. The negative emotion of Syrians presented in visual coverage connoted the meaning of victimhood. Moreover, among all news images that depicted Syrians, 45% of them did not clearly show Syrians’ emotion. The absence of clear, demonstrable facial expressions of depicted Syrians signifies a dehumanizing visual pattern that frames Syrians’ plight, dire as irrelevant to the viewers, and is therefore less likely to generate a compassionate response (Bleiker et al., 2013).

In terms of social distance between the viewers and portrayed Syrians signified by the camera position, the content analysis used in this dissertation study has found that almost half of the visual images on suffering Syrians (49.7%) used medium-shot camera positions, which signified a social, impersonal symbolic relationship between the viewers and suffering Syrians in the image (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Also, most *AP* news images used an eye-level angle to depict suffering Syrians, signaling an equal symbolic relationship between the viewers and the suffering Syrians in news photographs (Fahmy, 2004; Jewitt & Oyama, 2019; van Leeuwen, 2001).

This dissertation study explored whether and how graphic news images have been used in *AP* visual coverage on the distant suffering caused by the Syrian civil war. The content analysis results indicated that graphic news images accounted for nearly 14% of the overall coverage. Graphicness is measured by several indicators such as injury, coffins, body bags, and the dead body with the face made visible. News images portraying the injury of suffering Syrians were most common. Meanwhile, several photographs depicted the scene of Syrians grieving over their dead ones, signified by the grave, body bags, or a coffin. The images that show extreme graphicness, which is indicated by *unveiled death* (the dead body with the face made visible) were rare in *AP* visual coverage. Such research findings resonated with what Fishman (2017) found about major types of images that photojournalism includes in the visual storytelling of human suffering, such as witnesses or mourning survivors, or a closed casket, or entirely shrouded bodies. In addition, it is worth mentioning that a relatively small number of graphic news images in *AP* visual coverage contradicted past research findings regarding images of death and injury in the Western media (Hanusch, 2008, 2012; Seaton, 2005; Zelizer, 2010), which indicated that news images are more likely to show the death of non-Westerners than that of Westerners. Apart from a small number of graphic news images, this study found that when *AP* photographers needed to portray the dead

bodies, they often turned to long-shot camera positions, which did not reveal too many graphic details about corpses of dead Syrians. This can be seen in the visual examples of two dead bodies lying face down in the street, shot from a long distance, and the picture of a dead 3-year-old Syrian toddler Aylan Kurdi lying on the beach, also taken as a long shot. Therefore, it is fair to say that *AP* coverage showed restraint in presenting graphic news images. As stated on the *AP* website, this practice can be explained by high *AP* news ethical standards, which aims to protect the news subject's privacy, identity, and decency (Associated Press, n.d.). Regarding the use of graphic images, the in-depth interview with press photographers conducted in this study indeed offered some insights from journalism practice point of view. For instance, Spanish photographer F, who worked for *the AP* and had extensively covered the war in Syria, especially the city of Aleppo, illustrated his concerns about graphic images during his Syria assignment:

When you see 60 people running to hospitals, bleeding, their arms hanging just by skin, it is too difficult to not make a graphic picture. In that situation, everything is graphic. The nice thing there is to show the whole picture of the brutality without being too graphic.

His response indicated that when the press photographer has to face graphic scene, if it is impossible to avoid, being creative about not showing too much graphic is important. Moreover, regarding the graphic images, *The AP* photographer H, who spent 12 years of his career as photojournalist and served in leadership role at *AP* editorial desk for 13 years, explained to the researcher about where the line should be drawn:

It is that balance between wanting to inform the viewers without shocking them to the point when they look at the picture. So, the graphic images, they need to be effective images. They need to work. Another thing that influences the image often is geography, which is where you were distributing images. What we found was different

parts of the world has different tolerance for violence, different tolerance for graphic images. So, in the Arab world, or in the Middle East, or in the Mediterranean, or perhaps in parts of Latin America, the tolerances for those images are much higher. People have more appetite to see very bloody images, very disturbing images whereas in the United States, the tolerance for those images are more often lower. So, sometimes, when we look at the selection of images, we would say, okay, let's send these to this part of the world, let's send these to other part of the world. But increasingly, these things are also influenced by whether or not the media outlet has a human being on their side, making decisions, or whether it is automated feed. Sometimes, what would happen, the AP... I remember the case was Yahoo News, when Yahoo News was still a big thing, but I guess it still is. Yahoo feed was automated so any pictures we send could automatically or would automatically appear on Yahoo site and by extension appear on people's smartphones, on their computer screens. So, we were sort of directly publishing to the people in those cases whereas in other cases, you get on the NYT, you knew that there was a photo editor who was looking through the picture and making the selection based on what their needs were. So, part of them were geography, part of them were customer type. But what was important was even for the audiences who have larger appetite for violent pictures, even with those audiences, we did not just send out gratuitously violent pictures, pictures not only violent but meaningful or meaningless rather.

Aside from a quantitative content analysis, this study also used a semiotic analysis to examine the connotative meanings of distant suffering in the Syrian civil war, as published in *AP* photographs. The use of a semiotic approach identified six distinct visual frames about suffering: suffering as bare life, suffering as sublimation, suffering as a failed state, suffering as innocent vulnerability, suffering as tender-heartedness, and suffering as a self-reflexive performance. The semiotic analysis also found that some visuals taken by *AP* photographers bear clear aesthetic

resemblance to the Christian iconography of love, grief, and sacrifice. In doing so, *AP* visual coverage tends to evoke the viewers' compassion (mostly Western viewers) toward suffering Syrians in images.

Six identified news frames, grounded on a wide range of visual themes, delineate a comprehensive picture of distant suffering caused by the Syrian civil war and inform viewers about dire, miserable situations of vulnerable Syrians who are affected by the war. Nonetheless, by highlighting the victimhood and cultural otherness of suffering Syrians, as well as by privileging the emotions and actions of White politicians and celebrities, *AP* photographs did not provide an ideal means of appealing to conscience and provoking empathy. The images of suffering Syrians in their moments of need and pain are ultimately insensitive and exploitative. By portraying suffering Syrians as passive, negative, needy subjects who painfully suffer in a failed state ruled by a brutal regime and desperately need help from the outside—especially from Westerners or from West-governed international institutions such as the United Nations—news photography of distant suffering in the Syrian civil war did not constitute a proper distance between the viewers and the suffering Syrians. This proper distance is important because it “preserves the other through difference as well as through shared identity” (Silverstone, 2007, p. 47). Rather, by emphasizing the differences of Syrians (e.g., their cultural appearance such as clothing, unique suffering experience, and a failed state in which they live), *AP* news photographs of distant suffering in the Syrian civil war perpetuate the traditional media stereotypes of the Middle East and Orientalism (Konstantinidou, 2007, 2008) and thus invoke a privileged audience who view the images from a safe distance (Szorenyi, 2009).

It is worth pursuing questions related to why news images of distant suffering always center on the themes of victimhood and otherness. Media have long known that rather than good

news, suffering, especially suffering that takes place somewhere interestingly exotic, sells (Moeller, 2002). In news sections on international affairs, striking but essentially negative news images about Africa, Asia, and the Middle East are more likely to be run by news media. Social crises and pain in those regions, according to Moeller (2002), have been commercialized so distant suffering becomes “infotainment” (p.35) or just another commodity consumed in the news, which ultimately dilutes and even distorts the Western public’s understanding of a crisis. As an important part of media nowadays, by emotionally and morally appealing to global audiences, images of suffering have been commercialized and are taken up into the processes of global marketing and business competition (Kleinman & Kleinman, 1996). Photographs that tell stories about an exclusive event, especially the negative aspects of an event or issue are more likely to be selected by news outlets in today’s increasingly competitive media market (Caple & Bednarek, 2016).

News images are more than a commercial commodity. They are also an integral part of cultural production consumed by viewers every day. In today’s profit-driven, market-oriented media environment, news images of distant suffering have also been routinely appropriated in global popular culture (Boltanski, 1999). The media representation of distant others’ suffering is very much rooted in a cultural representation of the non-European, peripheral world observed from the vintage point of the West (Said, 1985). Particularly, with regard to the Middle East, media representations reinforce the Western image of that region perpetuated in the West: primitive, different, and dangerous, and characterized by an esoteric religion (Said, 1989). Culturally speaking, because old images and visual tropes that historically depicted the non-Western, colonized world resonate with the Western viewers’ imagination and expectations of those depicted places and people, they are more likely to be sold and circulated in news media. These old visual tropes further influence today’s journalism practice with regard to documenting foreign

affairs in less-developed regions. As American photojournalist C who has covered the war in Libya and Syria observed,

“We all have a huge body of images in our head because most of us learn stuff by looking at other pictures. The pictures are always in the past. We learn this field through history. So, those pictures, when you started out, when you are beginning your career, you’re seeing those pictures maybe in a subconscious way, trying to recreate images to tell story that is in front of you.”

In a similar tone, *AP* photographer H who has served at an *AP* photo news editorial desk in a leadership role explained his understanding of negative visual tropes and representations of distant others in less developed regions to the researcher from a cultural standpoint:

I think historically, there is some validity to that criticism because one of dynamics that happen traditionally was because of difficulties in taking pictures, sending pictures, the equipment was quite specialized, laborious process. In many cases, it requires somebody with enough training and expertise to be sent to do that work. They might or might not speak the language of that the country they were working in. They might not understand the history or culture of the country they were working in. They might or might not have their own personal prejudices and biases about what is going on. So, I think in many years, there was a form of you might call it, cultural colonialism, or cultural imperialism, or visual colonialism, where things were viewed by the people who are not from that society. So, as a result, it was easier, often for those people to objectify the subjects of their imagery, portray them in a way that they would not do if it were people from their own culture. I think that is very true.

From these responses, it is reasonable to argue that although the *AP* news photographers took photographs of suffering Syrians that reinforced traditional stereotypical images of the Middle East region, they might have done so in a subconscious way. In covering the Syrian civil

conflict, the exclusive chance of witnessing a particular case of suffering and their own understanding of culture and history of the region are perhaps two important factors that drove photographers to point their cameras at suffering civilians during their most vulnerable moments. From the point of view of the photographers, focusing on such suffering might help them to exclusively capture significant moments, and further sell their news images.

Because such practice might encourage voyeurism and fetishization, it is important to outline a few guidelines for photojournalism practices in order to tackle the dilemma of constantly repeating old visual tropes that encourage a colonial gaze. One practical solution is to get in close with people whom the photojournalists aim to cover and find a common ground. American photographer D, who has spent 17 years of his career at *the Associated Press* covering conflicts in Nicaragua, Bosnia, and Somalia, always looks for the common ground between the subjects he photographs and himself. He believes that getting to know the subjects and establishing a rapport with them can benefit photographers in many ways, including finding an unusual story angle and telling a human story that goes beyond the old visual tropes and clichés about the people and region.

Another practical solution is the usage of local photographers who might add different perspectives to the visual story. As AP photographer H has indicated, "...At some point, as the technology became more accessible, what you then begin to see is more local photographers. If you look at the map now, vast majority of photographs produced for the AP, Reuters, or AFP are taken by the people from those countries, from those regions. So, as a result, there is a less of tendency to dehumanize, and objectify the people in pictures, because there was more relationship between the photographer and the subject, as a result of who the photographer is."

It should be noted, however, that using local photojournalists by no means completely excludes the possibility that photographs that reinforce old, stereotypical visual tropes will be

produced. After all, the production of foreign news images is highly influenced by a complicated visual gatekeeping process that involves different factors including culture, economics, and audiences (Schwalbe, Silcock, & Candelllo, 2015). Therefore, the practices of local photojournalists could still be influenced and driven by corporate offices and market demands, which tends to emphasize on negative and sensational appeals in visual coverage. Nevertheless, local journalists are important in foreign news production. As Hamilton and Jenner (2004) have pointed out, because foreign locals have unique access to information that Western news media outlets might not have and they also possess sufficient knowledge and understandings of the local context, they are able to add different perspectives to foreign news coverage. Especially in conflict situations, such as in Syria, in which the access to information is very limited, local sources can be extremely useful. In order to wrestle against traditional, old visual tropes, the usage of local photojournalists should not be only limited to image production processes (e.g., taking photographs). Local photojournalists should also be given more leeway in the editorial process of news image selection so that their unique takes on news images can be appreciated. In fact, Wall and Zahed (2015) found in their study that through a joint framing and shared gatekeeping process, the collaborative news clips co-created by professional news organizations and citizen journalists were able to tell the story of the Syrian conflict at deep, personal level.

In addition to reinforcing stereotypical images, many news images depicting innocent Syrians' injury and death indeed accentuate the guilt of al-Assad regime's attack on civilians. These findings illustrate that the contemporary humanitarian imagery not only indicates the sufferer within the global hierarchical order defined by the West but also encourages viewers to interpret the war as a moral clash between good and evil, rational and irrational, and humanity and barbarism (Cloud, 2004). The research findings on pictorial frames support what Butler (2005)

found about photography and war: Images not only register facts but also interpret realities through frames that carry and implement certain purposes. Therefore, the war imagery can be understood as performative, in the sense that through prevailing narratives constructed by various framings of these images, the visualization of war and human suffering plays a defining role in validating and delimiting what the viewers see and know about the reality of combat and atrocity (Parry, 2010).

This research is the first study that systematically examined news images about the Syrian civil war produced by a major news wire service. It did so by using quantitative content analysis to examine pictorial conventions and denotations of news photos about the Syrian civil war. It further used semiotic analysis to decode values and meanings related to human suffering in news images. The findings from both quantitative and qualitative analyses contribute directly to the literature on photojournalism in war/conflict scenario as well as media representations of human suffering at a distance. By investigating how news photographs of civilian suffering in the context of Syrian civil war invites spectators (mainly from the West) to see, feel, and potentially act on distant suffering based on distinct visual tropes and representations, this dissertation argues that the relationship between contemporary media and the world is not only at an economic and technological level, but also fundamentally at an ethical level. As Silverstone (2002, 2007) has once pointed out, institutionalized media of communication create deeply entrenched, symbolized meanings of social life for all members in the society. Media and its representations, to a large extent, define the moral relationships between social groups. As the world today becomes even more interconnected and the press in each country expands its global reach due to the technological advancements, scholars have argued for a global media ethical standard that connects citizens of the world to a global public sphere, which is less parochial but more cosmopolitan (Berglez, 2013;

Ward, 2010). In doing so, they theorize, for example, that in times of crisis and suffering, media could act as a force for cosmopolitan empathy.

The research findings from this study on identified visual frames have indicated that in reality, due to the demand of capitalism, mass media are far from cultivating a sense of cosmopolitanism in communicating distant suffering and crisis. Rather, suffering in the news media is still a spectacle or infotainment in the name of commercial profit (Borer, 2012). The visual representation of humanitarianism is still very much grounded in old visual tropes that reinforces an unequal political and cultural hierarchy that prioritizes the West, while dehumanizing and marginalizing the Global South. Human life becomes conditional, and the universality of human rights becomes limited. Having said this, questioning and critiquing rationalities and taken-for-granted norms and practices behind current media representation of the non-Western distant suffering, such as framing devices, remain as one of many important research priorities for media and mass communication scholars.

Chapter VIII

Limitation

This research study is not without limitations. In terms of studying visual framing based on a semiotic approach, this research has taken the caption accompanying each photograph into consideration in the coding process to determine the content of news imagery at a denotative level. As van Leeuwen (2001) has pointed out, visual semiotics addresses the question of representation: what/who do images represent? In other words, at the denotative level of framing (Dimitrova & Rodriguez, 2011), the researcher needs to figure out “the analogic and indexical attributes of images” (p. 53), mainly who or what is being depicted in images, as images provide a one-to-one correspondence between what is being captured by the camera and what in reality exists. Captions accompanying each news image added by news editors or journalists are descriptive external texts about the picture (Perlmutter, 1997). They provide researchers with accurate information about what or who exactly is being presented in the picture. It is helpful for the researcher to consult with the caption in order to decipher what or who is exactly being represented in the news image given the complicated nature of the Syrian conflict, especially when a news image presents multiple different social actors in one frame or depicts a complex scene. As this study’s visual framing analysis is based on a four-tier model (Dimitrova & Rodriguez, 2011), it is crucial for the researcher to get information about the content of news image at a denotative level right before analyzing the visual framing at a connotative and ideological levels. Captions enhance the meaning of visuals. For deciphering the connotative and ideological meanings of news images, consulting with the captions help the researcher during the analysis stage to understand how visual content at a denotative level has been interpreted by the photographers or photo editors because external texts along with visuals add to the framing power too. However, it should be acknowledged that the

approach of integrating captions into visual analysis is debatable, as some would argue that the caption can alter or modify the meaning of the picture (Kerrick, 1959). Future visual communication research should perhaps delve into how to approach captions accompanying news pictures from a methodological point of view, especially in visual framing analysis.

It should also be acknowledged that the researcher's own perceptions and understandings of the Syrian civil war might have influenced the interpretation of the visual images of civilian suffering, especially during the qualitative semiotic analysis of the images. Nonetheless, despite the potential influence of the researcher's own reading of case of Syria, it should be noted that the qualitative analysis of the visual images in this dissertation is from a large extent driven by past studies on distant suffering and existing theoretical frameworks of mediation and imaginative geography.

The researcher could have approached the study better if the study not only examined the news images on the *Associated Press (AP)* website, but also how the *AP* news images of civilian suffering in the Syrian civil war have been used and contextualized by other legacy media in their own news stories. This could have offered the researcher a holistic view on how news photographs have been integrated into the news texts. In addition, the researcher could have systematically investigated the functions of captions accompanying each news image. As Perlmutter (1997) has pointed out, as external descriptive texts added by either journalists or news editors, captions accompanying each news photograph have different functions, including illustrating what is in the news images or embellishing the information about the photograph through affective language. Therefore, studying those functions could have helped the researcher to better understand the entire meaning-making process of news photographs in telling stories about distant human suffering.

The study examined photographs from one American news wire service, *The Associated Press*. As research findings from semiotic analysis and in-depth interviews with press photographers have indicated, although *AP* has recruited both Western and local Syrian photojournalists to shoot news images during the conflict, visual news frames such as *suffering as bare life* and *suffering as sublimation* dehumanized suffering the Syrian civilians by encouraging a colonial gaze reflected in old humanitarian photography. Future research should aim to understand how certain visual frames are constructed and selected regarding humanitarian photography in war-torn regions. To address this concern, a study that delves into the institutional culture of *The Associated Press* (*AP*) is needed. This kind of study can rely on an ethnographic approach such as field observations of the newsroom operations and in-depth interviews that tap into the decision-making processes of photojournalists and photo editors.

Future research studies could also include other major Western news wire services such as United Kingdom-based *Reuters* and France-based *AFP* to make comparisons of visual coverage. Moreover, given the global nature of suffering and the changing geopolitical situation, it would also be meaningful to examine news photographs from non-English, Arabic news sources. Cross-national and cross-cultural comparisons can add more depth and insights into the study of humanitarian photography in times of suffering.

The current study analyzes the visual frames and tropes used by *The Associated Press* (*AP*) in its visual representation of civilian suffering in the Syrian civil conflict. How these visual frames and tropes affect audiences' reactions and perceptions of suffering remain relatively unstudied. More empirical evidence on audiences is much needed in future research on media and distant suffering.

Finally, the rise in digital and social media usages has reconceptualized the notion of media audiences. Compared to traditional legacy media, little is known about the role of new media with regard to digital witnessing of distant suffering. Many empirical questions can be asked here. For instance, what role do online-based new media play in relation to witnessing distant suffering? How have specific news photographs or texts about distant suffering that originate from legacy media have been used and remediated in social media? To what extent do new communication technologies empower people in disaster situations to act on distant suffering or even their own suffering? These questions are clearly worth considering in future empirical research on mediated representations of distant suffering.

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Appendices: Tables and Figures

Appendix A: AP Images Coding Guidebook

Note: the letter before each variable corresponds with the column label in the Excel coding sheet.

- A. ID number:** start from “1”
- B. Publication date:** month/day/year: e.g., 01/01/2020
- C. Photo’s main visual depiction:** 1) human emotional reaction to suffering 2) fleeing/escaping 3) destruction 4) journey 5) daily life 6) celebrity visit 7) receiving/waiting humanitarian aid 8) receiving/waiting medical treatment 9) rescue/recovery 10) estimating/minimizing damage 11) objects 12) other
- D. Main visual setting in the photo:** 1) Syrian town/village 2) Europe/North America 3) neighboring country (Turkey/Jordan/Lebanon/Iraq/Palestine) 4) religious site 5) graveyard 6) refugee camp/shelter 7) school 8) hospital/clinic/ambulance 9) border 10) shore/beach 11) unknown
- E. Main subject(s) in the photo:** 0) not applicable 1) Syrian citizen/refugee only 2) foreign celebrity/officials only 3) Syrian medical/aid workers only 4) foreign medical/aid workers only 5) military personnel/police only 6) more than one category listed above 7) unable to determine
- F. Gender of Syrian citizen(s)/refugee(s) shown in the photo:** 0) not applicable 1) male only 2) female only 3) males & females
- G. Number of Syrian citizen(s)/refugee(s) shown in the photo:** 0) not applicable 1) individual 2) small group of 2-3 3) medium group of 4-15 4) large group of 16 +
- H. Emotions of Syrian citizen/refugee(s) depicted in the photo:** 0) not applicable 1) negative only 2) positive only 4) more than one emotion 4) Unable to identify
- I. Children/adult in the photo:** 0) not applicable 1) adults only 2) children 3) adults & Children
- J. Graphicness:** 0) not applicable 1) injury 2) implied death 3) fractional death 4) masked death 5) unveiled death 6) contorted death
- K. Camera position:** 0) not applicable 1) extreme close-up shot 2) close-up shot 3) medium shot 4) long shot
- L. Point of view (Syrian citizens/refugees):** 1) becoming the subject 2) low angle 3) eye-level angle 4) high angle

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself as a photographer.
 - a. What intrigues you as a photographer?
 - b. In your view, what's the difference between a photographer and a photojournalist?
 - c. Why do you want to become a photojournalist?
2. How do you decide what to cover in your photographs during traumatic news events?
3. In your reporting career, in covering war/conflict, have you taken any images of human suffering, such as a wounded child? Please be specific
4. How do you feel about covering human suffering? /Describe what sort of emotions you feel when covering human suffering in traumatic news events?
5. Through your images, what do you hope to convey about human suffering?
6. In terms of the photographs of traumatic news events, how would you determine the newsworthiness of a news picture?
7. As a professional photojournalist, when you witness and report on human suffering, are you more of a dispassionate observer or a person who wants to offer some help to alleviate suffering?
8. In today's online media environment, because everyone has a smart phone that can take a picture, does this mean everyone can be a photojournalist?
9. From your career point of view, what's the biggest challenge that photojournalism as a profession is facing today?
10. What's your career advice for young generation who are inspired to be a photojournalist?

Table 1. List of Variables

Variables	Conceptualization	Operationalization: Categories Identified^a
Photo's main visual depiction	What's being presented in news photographs	12
Main visual setting in the photo	Location in which a particular image took place	11
Main subject(s) in the photo	Who is presented in the <i>AP</i> news image	7
Gender of Syrian citizens/refugees shown in the photo	Gender of Syrian citizen(s)/refugee(s)	4
Number of Syrian citizens/refugees shown in the photo	Syrian citizens/refugees presented as individual or as a group	4
Main emotion of Syrian citizens/refugees shown in the photo	Facial expression of portrayed Syrian citizens/refugees in the news image	4
Children/adults in the photo	If the news image presents adults or children or both	3
Graphicness	If and how injury or death has been presented in the news image	6
Camera position	What camera shot is used	4
Point of view (Syrian citizens/refugees)	Viewer-subject symbolic relations	5
Point of view (Other human subjects)	Viewer-subject symbolic relations	5

a. These categories were identified, based on an inductive approach.

Table 2. Information for Press Photographers

Name (Initial)	Nationality	Gender	Years of experience	Conflicts covered	News outlets affiliated
A	U.S.	Male	25 years	The Gulf War, conflict in Afghanistan; local conflict in Thailand	The Associated Press
B	Syria	Male	9 years	The Syrian civil war	Reuters
C	U.S.	Male	8 years	War in Libya; The Syrian civil war	The New York Times
D	U.S.	Male	17 years	Conflicts in Nicaragua, Bosnia, Somalia	The Associated Press
E	Spain	Male	9 years	The Syrian civil war (won Pulitzer Prize)	The Associated Press
F	Argentina	Male	20 years	The Syrian civil war (won Pulitzer Prize)	The Associated Press
G	U.S.	Female	25 years	9/11 Terrorist attack and its aftermath in Afghanistan and Pakistan; war in Iraq; war in Kosovo	The Associated Press & The New York Times
H	US	Male	25 years	civil war in El Salvador; the U.S. invasion of Panama; Persian Gulf war	The Associated Press

Table 3. Overall Visual Theme

Theme	N	%
Daily life	529	40.4
Rescue/recovery	131	10.0
Human emotional reaction to suffering	130	9.9
Journey	115	8.8
Celebrity visit	99	7.6
Destruction	75	5.7
Estimating/minimizing damage	70	5.3
Receiving/waiting medical treatment	67	5.1
Objects	50	3.8
Receiving/waiting humanitarian aid	22	1.7
Fleeing/escaping	11	0.8
Unconscious/dead bodies	10	0.8
Total	1309	100

Table 4. Visual Theme Change over Time

Visual Theme	2011-2015		2016-2019		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Human emotional reaction to suffering	83 _a	63.8	47 _a	36.2	130	100
Fleeing/escaping	10 _a	90.9	1 _b	9.1	11	100
Destruction	11 _a	14.7	64 _b	85.3	75	100
Journey	77 _a	67.0	38 _b	33.0	115	100
Daily life	363 _a	68.6	166 _b	31.4	529	100
Celebrity visit	53 _a	53.5	46 _a	46.5	99	100
Receiving/waiting humanitarian aid	15 _a	68.2	7 _a	31.8	22	100
Receiving/waiting medical treatment	38 _a	56.7	29 _a	43.3	67	100
Rescue/recovery	34 _a	26	97 _b	74	131	100
Estimating/minimizing damage	28 _a	40	42 _b	60	70	100
Objects	29 _a	58	21 _a	42	50	100
Unconscious/dead bodies	6 _a	60	4 _a	40	10	100
Total	747	57.1	562	42.9	1309	100

Table 5. Visual Setting for All Photographs

Visual Setting	N	%
Syrian town/village	480	36.7
Refugee camp/shelter	449	34.3
Neighboring countries	99	7.6
Europe/North America	72	5.5
School	69	5.3
Hospital/clinic/ambulance	57	4.4
Border	50	3.8
Shore/riverbank/beach	24	1.8
Religious site	6	0.5
Unknown	3	0.2
Total	1,309	100

Table 6. Visual Setting for Photographs that Used the Theme Daily Life

Visual Setting	N	%
Refugee camp/shelter	270	51.0
Syrian town/village	98	18.5
School	63	11.9
Neighboring country	39	7.4
Europe/North America	37	7.0
Border	18	3.4
Religious site	3	0.6
Hospital/clinic/ambulance	1	0.2
Total	529	100

Table 7. Visual Setting for Photographs that Used the Theme Rescue/Recovery

Visual Setting	N	%
Syrian town/village	111	84.7
Neighboring country	8	6.1
Hospital/clinic/ambulance	6	4.6
Border	2	1.5
Refugee camp/shelter	1	0.8
School	1	0.8
Religious site	1	0.8
Unknown	1	0.8
Total	131	100

Table 8. Visual Setting for Photographs that Used the Theme Human Emotional Reaction to Suffering

Visual Setting	N	%
Syrian town/village	59	45.4
Refugee camp/shelter	23	17.7
Neighboring countries	21	16.2
Europe/North America	10	7.7
Hospital/clinic/ambulance	7	5.4
Border	6	4.6
Unknown	2	1.5
Total	130	100

Table 9. Visual Setting for Photographs that Used the Theme Journey

Visual setting	N	%
Border	22	19.1
Syrian town/village	21	18.3
Refugee camp/shelter	20	17.4
Shore/riverbank/beach	20	17.4
Neighboring country	19	16.5
Europe/North America	13	11.3
Total	115	100

Table 10. Main Subject

Main Subject	N	%
Syrian citizens/refugees only	873	66.7
Foreign celebrities/officials only	20	1.5
Syrian medical/aid workers only	89	6.8
Foreign medical/aid workers only	10	0.8
Military personnel/police only	17	1.3
More than one category	171	13.1
Inanimate object	125	9.5
Dead bodies only	4	0.3
Total	1309	100

Table 11. Gender of Syrian Citizens/Refugees

Gender	N	%
Male	500	47.8
Female	226	21.6
Male and Female	318	30.6
Total	1044	100

Table 12. Age of Syrian Citizens/Refugees

Age Group	N	%
Adults only	400	38.3
Children only	308	29.5
Children and adults	336	32.2
Total	1044	100

Table 13. Number of Syrian citizens/refugees

Number of Syrian Citizens/Refugees	N	%
Individual	367	35.2
Small group of 2-3	313	30.0
Medium group of 4-14	326	31.2
Large group of 15+	38	3.6
Total	1044	100

Table 14. Gender and Number of Syrians

Gender	Individual		Small group of 2-3		Medium group of 4-14		Large group of 15+		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Male	240 _a	48	146 _b	29.2	101 _c	20.2	13 _{b, c}	2.6	500	100
Female	126 _a	55.8	69 _b	30.5	29 _c	12.8	2 _{b, c}	0.9	226	100
Male and female	0 _a	0	99 _b	31.1	196 _c	61.6	23 _c	7.2	318	100

Note: $\chi^2(6) = 318.85, p < .0001$.

Table 15. Age and Number of Syrians

Age	Individual		Small group of 2-3		Medium group of 4-14		Large group of 15+		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Adults only	190 _a	47.5	112 _b	28	83 _c	20.8	15 _{a, b, c}	3.8	400	100
Children only	151 _a	49	121 _b	26.3	73 _b	23.7	3 _b	1	308	100
Adults and children	25 _a	7.4	121 _b	36	170 _c	50.6	20 _{b, c}	6	336	100

Note: $\chi^2(6) = 184.85, p < .0001$.

In the category *adults and children*, 25 photographs depicted the interaction between an individual Syrian child and other people, such as a medical worker or a foreign celebrity or official.

Table 16. Gender and Emotions of Syrians

Gender	Negative Only		Positive Only		More Than One Emotion		Unable to Identify		Total	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Male only	184 _a	36.8	55 _b	11	3 _b	0.6	258 _a	51.6	500	100
Female only	86 _{a, b}	38.1	60 _b	26.5	4 _{a, b}	1.8	76 _a	33.6	226	100
Male and female	102 _a	32.1	69 _{a, b}	21.7	11 _b	3.5	136 _a	42.8	318	100

Note: $\chi^2(6) = 48.25, p < .0001$.

Table 17. Age and Emotions of Syrians

Age	Negative Only		Positive Only		More Than One Emotion		Unable to Identify		Total	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Adults only	147 _a	36.8	34 _b	8.5	0 _b	0	219 _a	54.8	400	100
Children only	101 _a	32.8	92 _b	29.9	5 _{a, b}	1.6	110 _a	35.7	308	100
Adults and children	124 _a	36.9	58 _a	17.3	13 _b	3.9	141 _a	42	336	100

Note: $\chi^2(6) = 77.03, p < .0001$.

In the category of *adult and children*, photographs either depicted the interaction between individual Syrian child and other characters (e.g., medical workers, foreign officials/celebrities) or presented both Syrian adults and Syrian children.

Table 18. Camera position for depicted Syrians

Camera Position	<i>N</i>	%
Extreme close-up	1	0.1
Close-up	53	5.1
Medium shot	519	49.7
Long shot	471	45.1
Total	1044	100

Table 19. Social Distance and Gender of Syrians

Gender	Extreme Close-Up		Close-Up		Medium Shot		Long Shot		Total	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Male only	0 _{a, b}	0	27 _{a, b}	5.4	222 _b	44.4	251 _a	50.2	500	100
Female only	1 _{a, b}	0.4	21 _b	9.3	135 _b	59.7	69 _a	30.5	226	100
Male and female	0 _{a, b}	0	5 _b	1.6	162 _a	50.9	151 _a	47.5	318	100

Note: $\chi^2(6) = 40.74, p < .0001$.

Table 20. Social Distance & Age of Syrians

Age	Extreme Close-Up		Close-Up		Medium Shot		Long Shot		Total	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Adults only	1 _{a, b}	0.3	17 _{a, b}	4.3	177 _b	44.3	205 _a	51.2	400	100
Children only	0 _{a, b}	0	26 _b	8.4	162 _{a, b}	52.6	120 _a	39	308	100
Adults and children	0 _{a, b}	0	10 _a	3	180 _a	53.6	146 _a	43.5	336	100

Note: $\chi^2(6) = 21.99, p = .001$.

In the category of *adult and children*, photographs either depicted the interaction between individual Syrian child and other people (e.g., medical workers, foreign officials or celebrities) or presented both Syrian adults and Syrian children.

Table 21. Point of View and Gender of Syrians

Gender	Becoming the Subject		Low Angle		Eye-Level Angle		High Angle		Total	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Male only	3 _a	0.6	40 _a	8.2	297 _a	59.4	160 _a	32	500	100
Female only	0 _{a, b}	0	27 _b	11.9	145 _b	64.2	54 _a	23.9	226	100
Male and female	1 _{a, b}	0.3	26 _{a, b}	8.2	164 _b	51.6	127 _a	39.9	318	100

Note: $\chi^2(6) = 18.96, p = .004$

Table 22. Gender of Syrians and Graphicness

	Injury		Implied Death		Fractional Death		Masked Death		Unveiled Death		Total
Gender	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>
Male	76 _b	15.2	16 _{a, b}	3.2	1 _{a, b}	0.2	3 _{a, b}	0.3	8 _b	1.6	500
Female	14 _a	6.2	4 _a	1.8	0	0	0	0	0	0	226
Male/Female	12 _b	3.8	5 _{a, b}	1.6	0	0	0	0	0	0	318

Note: $\chi^2(10) = 51.73, p < .0001$.

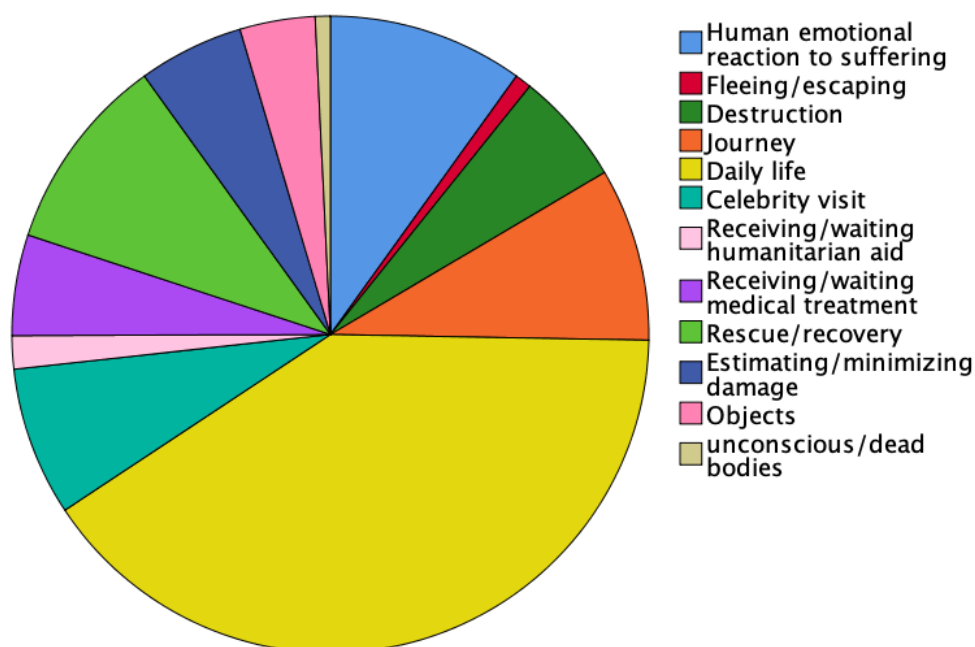


Figure 1. Overall Visual Theme

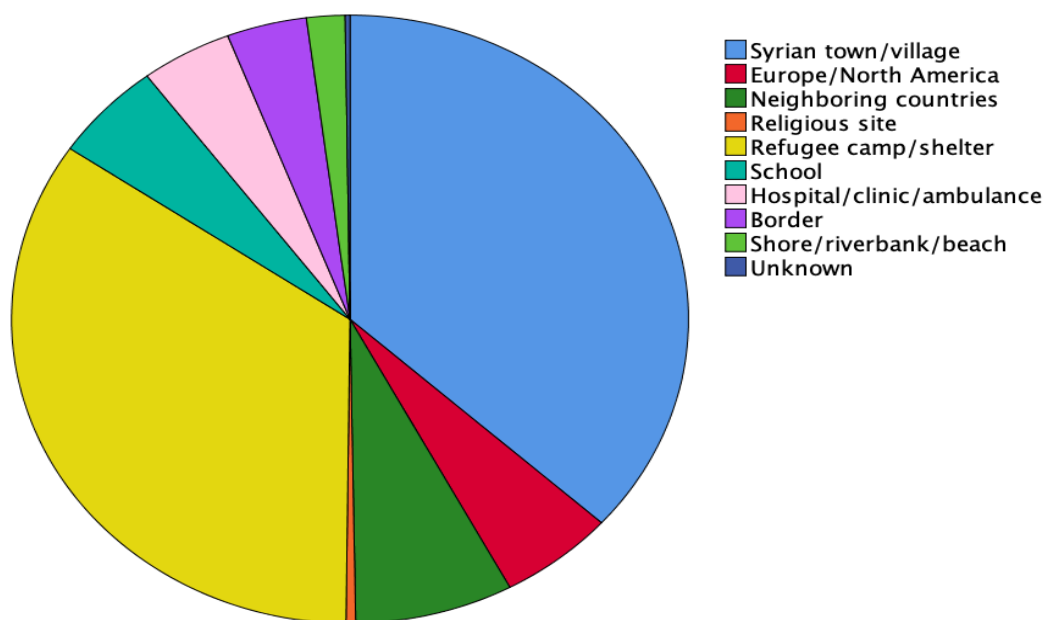


Figure 2. Visual Setting

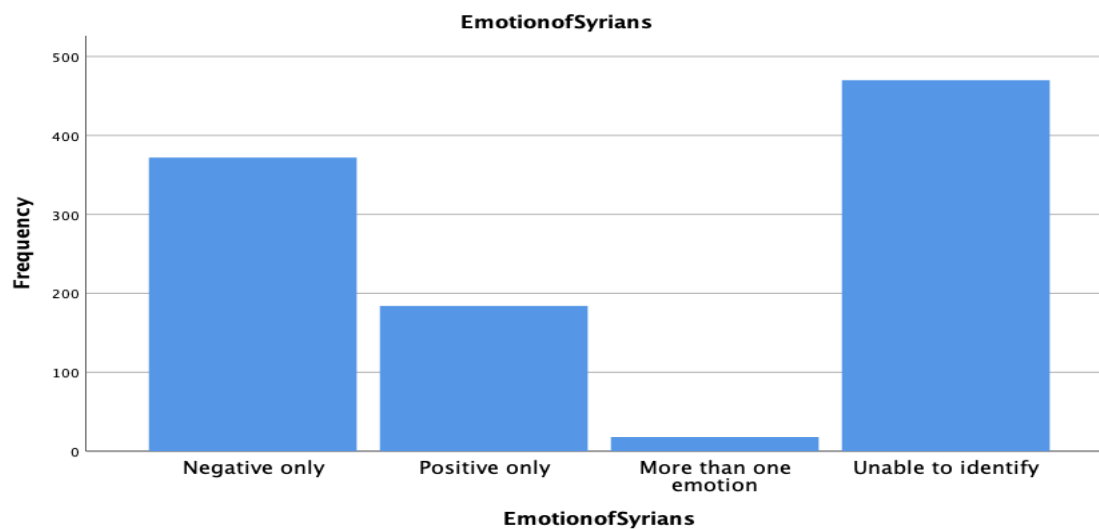


Figure 3. Emotions of portrayed Syrians

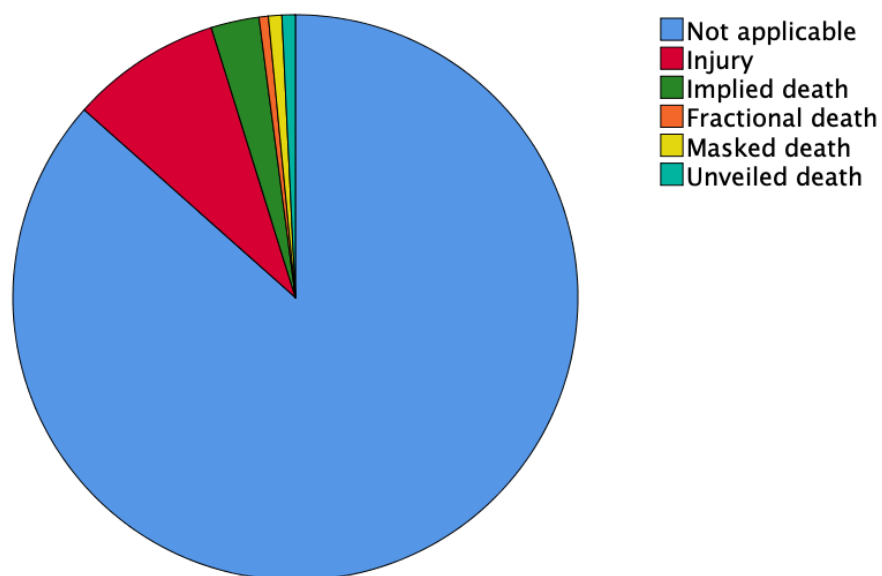


Figure 4. Graphicness



Figure 5.

In this Wednesday, Sept. 11, 2013 photo, a Syrian elderly man who lost his toe during the civil war rests under shade, at a temporary refugee camp, in the eastern Lebanese town of al-Faour in the Bekaa valley, near the border with Syria. They are a few of Syria's refugees in Lebanon, driven out of their homes by a civil war that has killed more than 100,000 and displaced millions. (AP Photo/Nariman El-Mofty)



Figure 6

In this Thursday, Aug. 2, 2012 photo, a Syrian refugee and her children stand at the entrance to their tent in the Zaatari Syrian Refugee camp, in Mafraq, Jordan. Jordan is host to the largest number of Syrian refugees at 142,000, including hundreds of army and police defectors and leaders in the rebel Free Syrian Army, fighting in the civil war that erupted in March 2011. (AP photo/Mohammad Hannon)



Figure 7

A Syrian refugee sits on the ground at a temporary refugee camp in the eastern Lebanese Town of Al-Faour, Bekaa valley near the border with Syria, on Wednesday, Sept. 11, 2013. Lebanon is a tiny country that shares a porous border with Syria, and has seen cross-border shelling, sectarian clashes and car bombings in recent months related to the civil war raging next door. The country of 4.5 million already is already host to nearly 1 million Syrian refugees. (AP Photo/Hussein Malla)



Figure 8.

Top left: In this Wednesday, Sept. 24, 2014 file photo, Syrian refugees wait for permission to enter Turkey at Yumurtalik crossing gate near Suruc, Turkey. With the Syrian civil war in its fourth ruinous year, there is no end in sight, hundreds of thousands are dead, and millions have been displaced. The U.S.-led coalition against the Islamic State group, after more than a month, is limited to airstrikes and has not dislodged the radical group from a single major town it controls in Syria or Iraq. (AP Photo/Burhan Ozbilici, File)

Top right: In this June 14, 2015, file photo, Syrian refugees cross into Turkey from Syria over and through a hole on the border fence in Akcakale, Sanliurfa province, southeastern Turkey. Marking a tragic milestone, the United Nations said in a statement on Thursday, July 9, 2015 that over 4 million Syrians have fled to other countries since the outbreak of civil war in their country more than four years ago. (AP Photo/Lefteris Pitarakis, File)

Bottom left and bottom right: Syrian refugees arrive on the beach, crossing the sea from Turkey to Lesbos, some 5 kilometers south of the capital of the Island, Mytelene on March 18, 2016 in Mytelene, Greece.

Every day, depending on the weather conditions, dozens of migrants' boats, the dinghy, end up reaching the shores of the Greek island, Lesbos. The Greek Coast Guard picked up another dinghy and brought the refugees to the port of Mytelene. (Sipa via AP Images)



Figure 9.

Top left: In this photo taken on Monday, Aug. 13, 2012, Syrian refugees gather for food aid in Dumez refugee camp in Dahuk, 260 miles (430 kilometers) northwest of Baghdad, Iraq. Syrian Kurds who fled their country's civil war have mixed feelings about a future without Bashar Assad: They hope to win a measure of autonomy after the fall of the regime, but fear chaos and the rise of Islamists could instead make their lives worse. (AP Photo/ Khalid Mohammed)

Top right: Displaced Syrian men wait for food near an NGO charitable kitchen in a refugee camp near Azaz, Syria, Oct. 23, 2012. This image was one in a series of 20 by AP photographers that won the 2013 Pulitzer Prize in Breaking News Photography. (AP Photo/Manu Brabo, File)

Middle: In this Monday, Dec. 10, 2012 photo, Syrians who fled their homes struggle to get pillows and blankets distributed at a camp for displaced Syrians, in the village of Atmeh, Syria. This tent camp

sheltering some of the hundreds of thousands of Syrians uprooted by the country's brutal civil war has lost the race against winter: the ground under white tents is soaked in mud, rain water seeps into thin mattresses and volunteer doctors routinely run out of medicine for coughing, runny-nosed children. (AP Photo/Muhammed Muheisen)

Bottom left: Syrian refugees wait to receive plastic cover for their tents at a refugee camp in Zahleh town, Bekaa valley, east Lebanon, Thursday, Jan. 8, 2015. Snow fell in the Middle East as a powerful winter storm swept through the region, killing at least two Syrian refugees in Lebanon and forcing thousands of others who have fled their country civil war to huddle for warmth in refugee camps. (AP Photo/Hussein Malla)

Bottom right: Syrian women wait in line to receive winter aid as UN General Assembly President Mogens Lykketoft visits Zaatari refugee camp in Mafraq, Jordan, Wednesday, Jan. 20, 2016. Lykketoft visited Zaatari refugee camp in northern Jordan on Wednesday to "get better knowledge of the size of the problems" there, as Syria's five-year-old civil war drags on. Lykketoft is also scheduled to meet with Jordan's King Abdullah II and other Jordanian officials during his stay. (AP Photo/Raad Adayleh)



Figure 10.

Top left: Civilians flee from fighting after Syrian army tanks enter the northwestern city of Idlib, Syria, Tuesday, Feb. 14, 2012. Syrian government forces renewed their assault on the rebellious city of Homs on Tuesday in what activists described as the heaviest shelling in days, as the U.N. human rights chief raised fears of civil war. (AP Photo)

Top right: People flee during a missile attack in the quarter Ansari in Aleppo, Syrian Arab Republic, 30 March 2013. (Photo by Thomas Rassloff/picturealliance/dpa/AP Images)

Bottom left: In this February 27, 2014, file photo, provided by the antigovernment activist group Aleppo Media Center (AMC), which has been authenticated based on its contents and other AP reporting, shows a Syrian man, right, running for cover from a Syrian government forces airstrike attack, in Aleppo, Syria. Nearly four years since it began, Syria's civil war has defied all diplomatic attempts to broker a peaceful resolution and the fierce fighting still goes on daily, though it has taken a back seat to the rampage in the region by Islamic State militants. (AP Photo/Aleppo Media Center, AMC, File)

Bottom right: A family escapes from fierce fighting between Free Syrian Army fighters and government troops in Idlib, northern Syria, March 10, 2012. This image was one in a series of 20 by AP photographers that won the 2013 Pulitzer Prize in Breaking News Photography. (AP Photo/Rodrigo Abd, File)



Figure 11.

Top left: A wounded Syrian man lies on the floor of Dar El Shifa hospital while pointing his finger to the sky in Aleppo, Syria, Thursday, Oct. 4, 2012. The border violence between Turkey and Syria has added a dangerous new dimension to Syria's civil war, dragging Syria's neighbors deeper into a conflict that activists say has already killed 30,000 people since an uprising against President Bashar Assad's regime began in March 2011. (AP Photo / Manu Brabo)

Top right: Two dead bodies lie on a street in the Saif al-Dawlah neighborhood of Aleppo, Syria, Sunday, Jan. 13, 2013. The revolution against the Syrian regime started in March 2011 with peaceful protests but morphed into a civil war that has killed more than 60,000 people, according to a recent United Nations estimate. (AP Photo/Andoni Lubaki)

Middle left: A man helps carry the dead body of a civilian killed after a mortar attack in the Saif al-Dawlah neighborhood of Aleppo, Syria, Sunday, Jan. 13, 2013. The revolution against the Syrian regime started in March 2011 with peaceful protests but morphed into a civil war that has killed more than 60,000 people, according to a recent United Nations estimate. (AP Photo/Andoni Lubaki)

Middle right: Bodies of people killed in air strikes carried out by warplanes of the Syrian government lie on the ground at a makeshift hospital in the rebel-held town of Douma, Eastern Ghouta, Syria, 20 February 2018. At least 50 civilians were killed in the fresh government air strikes on the rebel stronghold. Photo by: Samer Boudani/picture-alliance/dpa/AP Images

Bottom left: Syrian doctors try to save the life of a boy, shot by a Syrian Army sniper, at Dar El Shifa hospital in Aleppo, Syria, Thursday, Oct. 4, 2012. The border violence between Turkey and Syria has added a dangerous new dimension to Syria's civil war, dragging Syria's neighbors deeper into a conflict that activists say has already killed 30,000 people since an uprising against President Bashar Assad's regime began in March 2011. (AP Photo/ Manu Brabo)

Bottom right: A man points a flashlight towards the body of a Syrian man killed by Syrian army shelling at a graveyard in Aleppo, Syria, Oct. 13, 2012. This image was one in a series of 20 by AP photographers that won the 2013 Pulitzer Prize in Breaking News Photography. (AP Photo/Manu Brabo, File)



Figure 12.

Top left: In this Tuesday, Sept. 11, 2012, photo, Syrian men chat while others walk past a pile of garbage left on a roadside in Aleppo, Syria. The days are still hot across the fertile plains of northern Syria, but at night there is a hint of a chill an ominous harbinger of winter's approach and the deepening of the humanitarian crisis gripping a country wracked by civil war. (AP Photo/Muhammed Muheisen)

Top right: A family crosses a street piled with rubbish in Aleppo, Syria, Saturday, Jan. 5, 2013. The revolt against President Bashar Assad started in March 2011 began with peaceful protests but morphed

into a civil war that has killed more than 60,000 people, according to a recent United Nations recent estimate. (AP Photo/Andoni Lubaki)

Middle left: A man walks between destroyed buildings after heavy shelling by regime forces in Aleppo, Syria on August 28, 2014. (Photo by Karam Almasri/NurPhoto/Sipa USA) (Sipa via AP Images)

Middle right: Syrian women walks past homes that were destroyed from government airstrikes, at Jabal al-Zaweya village of Sarjeh, in Idlib, Syria, Monday Feb. 25, 2013. Syria is ready to hold talks with the armed opposition trying to topple President Bashar Assad, the country's foreign minister said Monday, in the government's most advanced offer yet to try to resolve the 2-year-old civil war through negotiations. (AP Photo/Hussein Malla)

Bottom left: Local residents receive humanitarian aid from the Russian military in the town of Al-Rastan, Syria, Wednesday, Aug. 15, 2018. The Russian Defense Ministry said Wednesday it is coordinating efforts to help Syrian refugees return home and rebuild the country's infrastructure destroyed by the civil war. (AP Photo/Sergei Grits)

Bottom right: Syrian citizens collect nylon and plastic from the landfill. (Photo by Amer AlMohipany/NurPhoto) (Sipa via AP Images)



Figure 13.

A Syrian refugee says goodbye to a relative at the International Organization for Migration office before some refugees board a bus to Beirut International Airport for a flight to Germany after being accepted for temporary resettlement, in Beirut, Lebanon, Thursday, Oct. 10, 2013. The dozens of Syrians heading to Germany on Thursday were the second batch of the 4,000 refugees that Germany has accepted to receive on two-year visas while Syria remains mired in a two-year civil war that has killed over 100,000 people, displaced 5 million within their own country, and prompted another 2 million people to flee the country as refugees. (AP Photo/Hussein Malla)



Figure 14.

A woman named Aida cries as she recovers from severe injuries after the Syrian army shelled her house in Idlib, northern Syria, March 10, 2012. Aida's husband and two children were killed in the attack. This image was one in a series of 20 by AP photographers that won the 2013 Pulitzer Prize in Breaking News Photography. (AP Photo/Rodrigo Abd, File)



Figure 15.

In this Thursday, March 8, 2012 file photo, Ahmed, center, mourns his father Abdulaziz Abu Ahmed Khrer, who was killed by a Syrian Army sniper, during his funeral in Idlib, north Syria. A new report by the British charity Save the Children documents atrocities in Syria's 18-month-old civil war that have left thousands of children dead and many more traumatized. (AP Photo/Rodrigo Abd, File)



Figure 16.

In this Oct. 3, 2012 file photo, a man cries while holding the body of his son, killed by the Syrian Army, near Dar El Shifa hospital in Aleppo, Syria. United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, speaking from U.N. headquarters on Thursday, July 25, 2013, raised the death toll in Syria's 2 1/2 year civil war to more than 100,000, up from nearly 93,000 just over a month ago. (AP Photo/Manu Brabo, File)



Figure 17.

Top Left: A Syrian woman, who fled her home due to fighting between the Syrian army and the rebels, holds her child, while she and others take refuge at the Bab Al-Salameh border crossing in hopes of entering one of the refugee camps in Turkey, near the Syrian town of Azaz, Thursday, Aug. 23, 2012. Thousands of Syrians who have been displaced by the country's civil war are struggling to find safe shelter while shelling and airstrikes by government forces continue. (AP Photo/Muhammed Muheisen)

Top Right: In this Friday, Sept. 7, 2012, photo, Syrian Fatimah Abdullah, 29, who fled her home in Marea 15 days ago, due to Syrian government shelling, sits next to her 4 days old twin Ahmad and Bayan, who were born in a Turkish hospital and brought back with her to the border where they take refuge at the Bab

Al-Salameh border crossing, in hopes of entering one of the refugee camps in Turkey, near the Syrian town of Azaz. The days are still hot across the fertile plains of northern Syria, but at night there is a hint of a chill an ominous harbinger of winter's approach and the deepening of the humanitarian crisis gripping a country wracked by civil war. (AP Photo/Muhammed Muheisen)

Middle: Duccio's Madonna and Child.

Bottom left: In this Wednesday, Sept. 5, 2012 photo, Amjad Al-Saleh, whose family fled their home in Marea 11 days ago due to Syrian government shelling at their house, is comforted by his mother as he suffers from food poisoning, as they take refuge at the Bab Al-Salameh border crossing, in hopes of entering one of the refugee camps in Turkey, near the Syrian town of Azaz. Syria's uprising was not destined to be quick. Instead, the largely peaceful protest movement that spread across the nation slowly turned into an armed insurgency and eventually a full-blown civil war. More than 130,000 people have been killed, and more than 2 million more have fled the country. Nearly three years after the crisis began, Syria's government and opposition are set to meet in Geneva this week for the first direct talks aimed at ending the conflict. (AP Photo/Muhammed Muheisen, File)

Bottom right: 22 July 2019, Syria, Maarat al-Numaan: Members of the Syrian Civil Defence, also known as 'White Helmets', carry an injured but alive child from the rubble of a collapsed building following a reported air strike by pro-regime forces. According to activists and a monitoring group, at least 27 people were killed in air-strikes allegedly conducted by Russian warplanes, amid denial from Moscow. Photo by: Anas Alkharboutli/picture-alliance/dpa/AP Images



Figure 18.

Left: In this Tuesday, July 29, 2014 photo, Syrian refugee Mohammed Ghassan, 8, poses for a picture at Zaatari refugee camp, near the Syrian border, in Mafraq, Jordan. More than 2.8 million Syrian children inside and outside the country — nearly half the school-aged population cannot get an education because of the devastation from the civil war, according to the U.N. children’s agency, UNICEF. That number is likely higher, as UNICEF can’t count the children whose parents didn’t register with the United Nations refugee agency. (AP Photo/Muhammed Muheisen)

Middle: In this Tuesday, July 29, 2014, photo, Syrian refugee Malak, 9, poses for a picture at Zaatari refugee camp, near the Syrian border, in Mafraq, Jordan. More than 2.8 million Syrian children inside and outside the country — nearly half the school-aged population — cannot get an education because of the devastation from the civil war, according to the U.N. children’s agency, UNICEF. That number is likely higher, as UNICEF can’t count the children whose parents didn’t register with the United Nations refugee agency. (AP Photo/Muhammed Muheisen)

Right: In this Tuesday, July 29, 2014, photo, Syrian refugee Samah, 5, poses for a picture at Zaatari refugee camp, near the Syrian border, in Mafraq, Jordan. More than 2.8 million Syrian children inside and outside the country — nearly half the school-aged population — cannot get an education because of the devastation from the civil war, according to the U.N. children’s agency, UNICEF. That number is likely

higher, as UNICEF can't count the children whose parents didn't register with the United Nations refugee agency. (AP Photo/Muhammed Muheisen)



Figure 19.

Top left: Syrian refugee, Amal Fawwaz, 11, right, raises her hand to answer her teacher's question in a makeshift tent class at an unofficial refugee camp on the outskirts of Amman, Jordan, Wednesday, Jan. 22, 2014. Peace talks intended to carve a path out of Syria's civil war got off to a rocky start Wednesday as a bitter clash over President Bashar Assad's future threatened to collapse the negotiations even before they really begin. Later this week in Geneva, Syria's warring sides will sit down for their first face-to-face meeting since the conflict erupted. (AP Photo/Mohammad Hannon)

Top right: A Syrian boy poses for a photo in the snow outside his tent at a refugee camp, in Zahleh, Bekaa Valley, east Lebanon, Wednesday, Jan. 7, 2015. Snow fell in the Middle East on Wednesday as a powerful winter storm swept through the region, killing several Syrian refugees in Lebanon and forcing thousands of others who have fled their country civil war to huddle for warmth in refugee camps. (AP Photo/Hussein Malla)

Middle: Syrian refugees pose for a photo as flashing v-signs at an unofficial refugee camp on the outskirts of Amman, Jordan, Wednesday, Jan. 22, 2014. Peace talks intended to carve a path out of Syria's civil war got off to a rocky start Wednesday as a bitter clash over President Bashar Assad's future threatened to collapse the negotiations even before they really begin. Later this week in Geneva, Syria's warring sides will sit down for their first face-to-face meeting since the conflict erupted. (AP Photo/Mohammad Hannon)

Bottom left: In this Thursday, Jan. 7, 2016 photo, Lina Mahameed, a Syrian artist and refugee from Daraa, holds a color portrait she drew of one of the people killed in the Nov. 13 attacks in Paris by the Islamic State extremist group, next to a photo of the victim she downloaded from the Internet, in Amman, Jordan. Mahameed hopes to send her portraits to the victims' families to show that "their tragedy is like our tragedy." Mahameed said they fell victim to the same fanaticism that killed her 16-year-old son Yasser at the beginning of Syria's civil war. (AP Photo/Sam McNeil)

Bottom right: The young Syrian national Nujeen Mustafa with a copy of her book 'Nujeen - One Girl's Incredible Journey from War-Torn Syria in a Wheelchair' at the Frankfurt Book Fair in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, 20 October 2016. Mustafa travelled some 5,600 kilometres in her bid to escape the Syrian civil war and find a safe haven. Her account of the journey has been published by HarperCollins in English and nine other languages. (Photo by: Susann Prautsch/picture-alliance/dpa/AP Images)



Figure 20.

Top two: Actress and UN refugee agency envoy special envoy Angelina Jolie talks during a visit to a Syrian refugee camp in Azraq in northern Jordan on Friday, Sept. 9, 2016. She is calling on the international community to end the protracted Syrian civil war and increase support for refugees across the region. Five years into the Syrian conflict, she said brutal violence rages while the UN Security Council remains divided on a political solution. (AP Photo/Ahmad Alameen)

Bottom two: Princess and Duchess in Jordan. The Prince of Wales and Duchess of Cornwall during a walking tour through the King Abdullah refugee camp in northern Jordan, near the Syrian border, and which houses just under a thousand people from the civil war-torn Syria. Picture date: Wednesday February 13, 2013. The Royal couple are on the first leg of a tour of the Middle East taking in Qatar, Saudi Arabia and

Oman. See PA story ROYAL Jordan. Photo credit should read: John Stillwell/PA Wire URN:16031444
(Press Association via AP Images)



Figure 21.

Top left: Flash mob organized by Médecins Sans Frontières to demonstrate its solidarity with the Syrian people in Rome, Italy on December 6, 2016. (Photo by Matteo Nardone / Pacific Press) (Sipa via AP Images)

Top right: Migrant crisis. (left to right) Project Paddington volunteers, Mags Kelly, Sian Thomas, Joy French and Nicole Brown with their teddies, as a campaign launched five days ago to encourage youngsters to donate their teddies to refugee children has gone international, leaving the trainee vicar and mother-of-three, Joy French, who set it up "humbled and shocked". Picture date: Tuesday September 8, 2015. Ms French, 39, who set up the Project Paddington campaign after seeing photographs of three-year-old Aylan Kurdi drowned on a Turkish beach, thought her Facebook initiative would be a small-scale venture in Sheffield, where she lives. See PA story POLITICS Migrants Bears. Photo credit should read: Dave Higgins/PA Wire URN:24032287 (Press Association via AP Images)

Bottom left: Graffiti showing drowned three-year-old refugee Aylan Kurdi on a wall near the river Main in Frankfurt, Germany, Monday, March 21, 2016. (AP Photo/Michael Probst)

Bottom right: A new mural of drowned refugee Aylan Kurdi, by graffiti artists Oguz Sen and Justus Becker, at Osthafen in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, 4 July 2016. After the previous picture was daubed with slogans, the new image shows a living, laughing Aylan surrounded by teddies. Photo by: Boris Roessler/picture-alliance/dpa/AP Images

Vita

Originally from China, Xu “James” Zhang received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Journalism from Inner Mongolia University. Prior to pursue his graduate studies in the U.S., he worked as a news reporter in his hometown radio station for a year. He knew he wanted to attend graduate school and study mass communication. He attended Texas Tech University and received his Master of Arts degree in Mass Communication. During his time at Texas Tech, he was fascinated by academic research in communication and media studies. Upon graduation, he chose to attend the University of Tennessee, Knoxville to pursue a Doctor of Philosophy in Communication and Information with a concentration in Journalism and Electronic Media. He has taught the following courses in his graduate career: Introduction to Creative Media, Multimedia Reporting, Media Law/Ethics, and Media Ethics. His research interest includes humanitarian journalism, social media, media law and ethics.