

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

LIVES IN MEDIATED LIMINALITY:
CONDITIONAL HUMANITARIANISM AND COLLATERAL
SUFFERING

by
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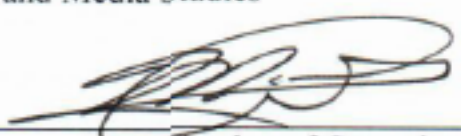
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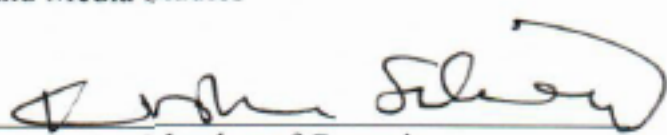
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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This study explores the photographic engagement of mainstream news media with migrants, immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers (often referred to as sufferers throughout the study) since the beginnings of the Syrian conflict and throughout the mass movement of people to Europe in 2015. Eschewing prevalent focus on negative representations, it investigates problematic ‘human-centric’ discourses on the plights of vulnerable people. It explores how a human-centric discourse, widely assumed to be of noble goals and concrete remedies, can be as problematic as a dehumanizing one. Grounded in the concepts of biopower and shared precariousness, the study examines a selective approach images take in visualizing suffering, and analyzes the assumptions they make about deservingness. It argues that specific tropes images use participate in a discourse that presents sufferers as bare lives stripped of their agency, unrecognized unless they bear the marks of suffering. Such process transforms human suffering into a spectacle in which the needs of the liberal spectator with humanitarian sensibility take precedence over those of sufferers. This human-centric discourse thus contributes to perpetuating the conditions of suffering by failing to honor the universality humanitarianism upholds or to cater to the populations it claims to protect.

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So here you are

Too foreign for home

Too foreign for here

Never enough for both.

Ijeoma Umebinyuo, Diaspora Blues, Questions for Ada

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Refugeedom and suffering have surged as compelling topics in political and cultural debates about human rights and humanitarianism, as thousands of people crossed from the Middle East and North Africa to Europe in 2015, searching for a haven from predicaments of war, poverty and persecution. German Chancellor Angela Merkel's decision to take refugees detained in Hungary (Horn, 2015) on September 5, 2015 foreshadowed a mass movement of Syrians, Iraqis, Afghans, Eritreans and many others towards Europe. Prompted by expectations of a decent life, a global discourse of compassion, and Germany's humanitarian policy, people have since risked their lives in overcrowded boats and unsafe life jackets to settle eventually in refugee camps where the most basic human needs are often lacking (Kotsireas, Nagurney & Pardalos, 2015).

Since the body of three-year-old Alan Shenu (Demir, 2015) washed ashore in Turkey, images depicting the plights of refugees flooded the media. A discourse on transnational solidarity and humanitarianism coalesced, calling for a global response to a crisis that has implications for lives and policies. Human rights organizations mobilized to

address an alarming reality, as people drowned at sea for an imagined future where a legal status was thought to solve the problems caused by war or structural violence. Faced with its magnitude, global news outlets found themselves compelled to address the unfolding social, cultural, economic and political consequences of the crisis. The media featured stories of individual refugees when these were interesting enough to call the attention of a distant viewer. Others spoke of ‘swarms’ trying to ‘break in’ (Elgot, 2016), ‘masses’ and ‘crowds’ under variegated discourses, ranging from hate speech against so-called ‘Islamic invaders’ or ‘ISIS infiltrators’ to over-hyped sensationalism and public sympathy. Images of refugees entered in discourses of fear, compassion, support, outrage, and dismay. The media presented viewers with extensive, selective, human-centered, and culturally problematic accounts. The overall picture was dissonant: at times, refugeedom was constructed as hopes of desperate populations for a lukewarm welcome; at others, it was portrayed like an ominous tide threatening Western democracies and destabilizing a normalized cultural chasm between an imagined East and West. Hyperbolically termed an ‘exodus’, the movement of people towards Europe invokes academic discussions about the role of visual media coverage, discourses of inclusion versus exclusion, pressing needs of uncatered-for populations and problems of humanitarianism in the modern state. The magnitude, the human dimension, the motives, the consequences, and the political concerns not only make the phenomenon fodder for media attention, but also fertile material for studying how the discourse images of suffering perpetuate is not secondary to the practice of humanitarianism, but rather constructive of humanitarian practices and actions towards alleviating human suffering.

Mediated coverage has so far participated in a human-centric discourse on sufferers in which it questioned interventionist policies whether in favor or against their inclusion. There has been a commonsensical belief that visualizing suffering provides a gateway to its eradication – in Susan Sontag’s words, “photography as a shock therapy” (2003, p. 9). This study explores how the human-centric discourse, widely assumed to be of noble goals and concrete remedies, can also be dehumanizing. The extensiveness of coverage, in terms of time, space and depth, does not necessarily imply the dominant discourses employed do not position the sufferer asymmetrically vis-à-vis the viewer, the photographer, the policy maker, or the human rights activist. Nor does the engagement with refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants and migrants, for whom the collective acronym RASIM is used in some studies (KhosraviNik, Krzyzanowski & Wodak, 2012; Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008), rule out conventions of culture, age, gender, ethnicity, citizenship, religion, class or skin color when images strive to show the human face of tragedy. This study endeavors to demonstrate that the road to ‘visibility’ is fraught with terms and conditions. To qualify as a full-fledged sufferer under this discourse, deserving of recognition to a distant beholder, worthy of protection against violence or exposure to evitable death, and hence worthy of rights, aid, asylum, employment, healthcare etc., certain criteria should be met. These criteria cater more to the needs of politicians, average viewers, and humanitarian organizations than they do to the needs of the suffering subject in question. Exploring the different contexts in which images engage with sufferers, the study discusses common tropes that make them candidates of a gut wrenching or a heart-warming story worthy of humanitarian intervention.

The study argues that the visual discourse on sufferers in human-centric media images casts refugees in constructs that cater to, revolve around, and are constitutive of a viewer with a liberal humanitarian sensibility. The media are spaces where visibility of suffering is amplified, reduced, or even occluded. To condition depictions of suffering subjects upon the needs of the viewer is to strip them off their agency and limit their power to speak or feel in their own right. When we privilege the viewer's perspective at the expense of the sufferer's subjectivity, we demand that the latter present himself/herself in certain frames so as to win validation or make a statement of deservingness. Doing so casts the sufferer in an apologetic frame. The *apologetic sufferer* is a mediated trope that capitalizes on specific frames in which the victim constantly justifies his/her need for protection to an assumed viewer. The notion suggests that the viewer would not acknowledge victimhood of sufferers unless suffering is performed and defended. Suffering is therefore made salient through at least one aspect of the sufferer's construction, as in images of vulnerable women, unaccompanied minors, child victims, wailing men etc. These constructs assume truths framed in such a way as not to contest the viewer's notions of a worthy, ideal, legitimate, salvageable victim. Failure to operate within that frame leaves the sufferer outside aesthetic visibility. The discourse these tropes undergird foregrounds certain types of sufferers and occludes others through a process of classification. Through techniques of visibility (Mirzoeff, 2011), sufferers endowed with certain characteristics are separated from others and presented aesthetically in stories or images that look appealingly interesting to read about and to look at. These images assume to the viewer that suffering is confined within specific tropes. I call those sufferers who are left outside aesthetic visibility *collateral sufferers*: ones whose pain does not even qualify

to be part of the spectacle. When images bear apologies, they assume that the viewer demands them, thus transforming suffering into a spectacle and a commodity. The study questions the concept of universality with which humanitarianism is associated and the principles of equality it constantly claims. It argues that the humanitarian discourse certain images subscribe to compromises the notion of shared precariousness and the presumed visibility sufferers enjoy is contentious and does not necessarily yield recognition. While the experience of suffering and refugeedom is and should be liminal, temporary, and necessarily entailing subsequent normality, the practice of humanitarianism becomes a site of exploitation where human suffering is commodified and liminality of suffering normalized and perpetuated.

Humanitarianism is often equated with justice and equality, yet international humanitarian response to wars and crises has been politicized and has focused more on how to manage migration (Hyndman, 2000). Images can apparently carry noble messages, but their depiction of the refugee moment can also be controversial and subject to critique. It is therefore compelling to explore how images upholding a humanitarian discourse can be part of a larger and more problematic engagement with human suffering that results in practices of inequality. While ‘human-centric’ images often assume that recognition of suffering takes place when the suffering subject is made visible to distant viewers, this study shows that images claiming to humanize suffering can be as well dehumanizing or can participate in a discourse that privileges specific types of sufferers and marginalizes others. To do this, the research examines photographs of suffering throughout the Syrian conflict in mainstream news media, using images that are selected mainly from international photo agencies and that gained their iconicity during this period.

This study aims to make an academically useful contribution to the literature on humanitarianism in refugee studies. Taking a different approach to portrayals of disenfranchised categories in society, it is removed from the dualism of positive and negative representations. The study focuses on portrayals that are hegemonically presented as positive and widely received as so. The analysis of these portrayals departs from a critique of the assumption that such constructs contribute to bettering the lives of sufferers. It is also critical of humanitarianism, a huge concept that rests on premises so noble that they can be perceived as indisputable and a concept that is often mistakenly equated with justice and equality. The study further discusses a new wave of displacement that only took place two years ago and has attracted the attention of the media and the world. Another important aspect about this study is that it demonstrates not the typically perceived inherent transformative power of images as in studies of media effects, but rather how assumptions images make and normalize can be constitutive of humanitarian and political action and thus should be critically assessed. Representations shape concepts of deservingness and therefore have implications for living people, thus the visual constructs that need to be questioned most are those that most appear to be truths taken for granted.

A. Biopolitics and Shared Precariousness

Two theoretical insights are vital to this study: biopolitics, as explored in Agamben's *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, and shared precariousness, as conceptualized in Judith Butler's *Frames of War*. The concepts of biopolitics and precarity both involve the politics of life and death and are concerned with the marginalized and the

unprotected. For Agamben, the [refugee] camp is the ‘state of the exception’ – the space that symbolizes a realm in which the sovereign exercises power over human subjects. The notion of the camp permits an analysis of the ways in which power assigns value to certain lives and treats them as human beings with legal and political rights, while excluding others as mere bare lives. Butler’s notion of shared precariousness recalls the lack of regard to life in the biopolitics of the camp, the border, or the liminal physical and imaginary space in which power constrains the suffering subject and denies her/him the necessary conditions to become a political being. The two concepts inform the analysis of images of sufferers during the Syrian conflict.

The nexus between life and politics invites us to examine how differential human-centric discourses on sufferers evoke the biopolitical dimension of their living condition. Theoretical insights on biopower allow us to explore the encounter between life and politics in discussions of suffering, human rights, inclusion and exclusion, xenophobia, immigration policies, ethical responsibilities, healthcare, terrorism and the myriad controversies that surround a reality that needs to be addressed and brought back to normal. As a general concept, biopower refers to the ways in which conditions of life itself enter into political calculation. The tents, the camps, the boats, the areas within and beyond the borders exemplify the spatiality where biopower thrives. For Agamben (1998), the camp exemplifies the absolute political space where sovereign power faces pure bare life. It is also the biopolitical paradigm of modern societies, where the sovereign power decides who deserves inclusion and who does not. Introducing a rereading of Foucault, Agamben (1998) differentiates between *zoē* (natural or biological life) and *bios* (political life) and further introduces the concept of the state of the exception. The latter, as Simon Turner (2005)

describes it, is “a temporary space that is related to the concept of a threat towards the stability of the political order” (p. 312). Agamben (1998) argues that the modern state has united biological life with political life – that “the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power” (p. 11) and that this sovereign power can determine the limits of vulnerability of bare bodies in cases of emergencies, refugee crises or detention. Refugeedom exemplifies the structure of the exception, where laws are suspended and bare lives are implicated with this suspension (Agamben, 1998). Refugee lives are confined to a zone of exception, where they become natural bodies aspiring to inclusion within the political sphere. These bodies are not qualified political beings and may not become so even when they have physically crossed the borders or left the camps.

The refugee life is an example of the encounter between political power and human vulnerability. It is where the conditions of human life are bound up with decisions and actions of sovereign power. Alan Shenu exemplifies how the exercise of power assigns value differentially to victims of war. Alan’s name was misidentified as Alan al-Kurdi, i.e. Alan the Kurd (Khouri, 2015). Although he was at the center of media attention since his image began to circulate, the oblivion in which his name and identity have fallen are most telling of how ‘human-centric’ discourses can assign the victim to a zone of invisibility. The countless victims of wars pass unnoticed the way Alan’s name did. Few iconic images remain to remind the viewer that other children die in the same way. Alan’s image has become a generalizing frame, just as the name ‘the Kurd’ suggests. Yet what makes Alan’s image iconic must not be taken for granted, because whatever contributes to selectively portraying certain lives as grievable must be questioned.

While Alan's case calls attention to the unjust omission of other afflicted children and adults, and Syrians and non-Syrians, his symbolic image bears witness to a moment where biopolitics, as Campbell and Sitze (2013) note, becomes equivalent to thanatopolitics. After the Canadian government allegedly refused his family's application for asylum ("Canada denies Alan," 2015), the media held Canadian authorities indirectly responsible for his death. In personal testimonies, refugees have similarly tried to justify their demand for protection, arguing that the only alternative to their legalization is death. The centrality of biopolitics in refugee studies becomes salient when the denial of protection becomes equivalent to a death sentence or a direct exposure to death. Yet images that establish a link between denial of protection and exposure to death do so in subtle, limited ways that hardly permeate to the structural roots of tragic life conditions. These images do not question the regimes of care out of which these bodies are left. The concept of bare life sheds light on the ways the exercise of biopower can render certain bodies isolated symbols of pain, severed from their histories – ones whose lives are unrecognized and death goes unnoticed.

The notion of the universality of suffering finds roots in Judith Butler's theory of precarity/precariousness. For Butler (2009), all human beings share the same precariousness. In Agamben's terms, they are bare lives, vulnerable to death due to their mortal nature. Precarity, however, is the vulnerability imposed on human beings and the ensuing social and political conditions: the denial of the right to protection against various forms of violence. This means the conditions that make bodies vulnerable or immune to vulnerability are not inherent in their mortal nature but established through the social constructs in which discourse and language are deeply enmeshed. These social constructs –

or conventions – include, but are not limited to, race, class, ethnicity, religion, gender, country of origin, and skin color. To provide a different social ontology, Butler (2009) argues that all lives must qualify as valuable. The dependence of protection or denial of life on social conditions compels us to reconsider human beings in light of their shared precariousness. A precariousness that is independent of social constructions must therefore constitute the qualification that places human beings on an equal footing to one another. Shared precariousness, therefore, permits the validation of humans as political beings (Butler, 2011). The universality of suffering thus implies that we regard sufferers as equally vulnerable, injurable and deserving of protection on the presumption that precarity enacts the need for protection. Within this framework, it becomes legitimate to ask whose presence among refugees matters in the media, whose life is more grievable and how the notion of the ‘morally legitimate suffering’, which I will later expound, relates to the discourse on mediated suffering.

At the core of practicing humanitarianism and catering to its broad and abstract egalitarian claims is the exercise of power – the pervasiveness of authority, the privilege to use and renounce violence in its traditional, structural, and symbolic forms. Humanitarianism in practice is intrinsically biopolitical. Human practices foster power over bodies and allow their containment, control and provision (or denial) of means of survival. The concept of biopolitics has been used as a framework for studies discussing the relation between vulnerable social categories and the state (Zannettino, 2012; Ticktin, 2011b; Mckee, 2010, Fassin, 2001, Agamben, 1998). The state of the exception, as discussed in Agamben (1998), describes the structure that governs the conditions in which these categories live – a structure that humanitarianism reinforces in camps established to cater to

their needs. Camps are spaces that help understand how sovereign power enacts laws and differentially grants rights to citizens and people seeking refuge. The camp represents a site of exception located at the same time inside and outside sovereignty. It where the status of the subject remains incomplete, pending validation, and where the power of the sovereign is constantly perpetuated (Prem Kumar and Grundy-Warr, 2004). Humanitarian work involves intervention in the basic conditions of life; and since this intervention targets certain categories and leaves out others, assuming that universalization is true to its promise is too optimistic and utopian in essence.

Certain images that attempt to bring the human face of the Syrian refugee crisis into light reinforce the biopolitical order of the camp. They demonstrate how lives are distributed over zones of inclusion and exclusion, and worthiness and expendability. The assumptions images make assign worthiness of protection and rights to the subjects they visualize, thus omitting those outside visualization from the systems of humanitarian care. These images do not contest the techniques humanitarianism uses in the prioritization of certain categories but rather reinforce a contentious hierarchization of victimhood.

CHAPTER II

RESEARCH DESIGN

Throughout the Syrian conflict, certain images gained iconicity while circulating as portraits of war. They became sites where discussions of humanitarianism and politics converged. These images are instances where the symptoms of war become more visible, albeit briefly. They are icons specific to a particular context, meaning system, and a historical moment. Alan Shenu iconized the failure of humanitarian work and refugee regimes to protect children. Boat pictures spoke of the enormity of the crisis and the impotence international community demonstrated in addressing the root causes of suffering. The iconicity of the Pope's washing migrants' feet (Grovier, 2016) stemmed from the very authority he represents and from the involvement of non-Catholic migrants in the ritual. Justin Trudeau's welcome campaigns at Canadian airports (Zerbisias, 2015) and Angela Merkel's 'selfies' with refugees in Berlin (Gallop, 2015) iconized an inflated manifestation of sensibility to human needs in the liberal world. What is troublesome is that the images often derive their iconicity from elements that fall outside suffering, while claiming to revolve around the suffering subject. The sufferer alone does not often qualify to make a picture iconic. When the German Chancellor takes selfies, the Pope washes feet and the Canadian PM helps children wear winter coats, the media take these ostensible acts of kindness and transform them into iconic images. In the image of the boat people (Sestini, 2014), it is the enormity of the mass movement, coupled with the dangers it suggests to host nations, that gives the image its iconic character. Many migrants drowned in the

Mediterranean attempting to reach Europe after this incident, but they did not have the opportunity to avail of converging factors that made pictures of the boat, Trudeau's acts of kindness, Merkel's down-to-earth attitude and others iconic.

Images are intrinsic to understanding social conditions. As mediated constructs, images involve the producer, the author, and the very content of the visual message. Rose (2012) argues that visual materials can be interpreted at three sites: the site of *production*, the site of the *image*, and the site of *audiencing*. These sites are crucial for understanding images because they involve technologies, compositional elements, and social, political and cultural relations in which the image, the producer and the viewer are embedded (Rose, 2012). Visual studies consist of a range of approaches that focus on the visual and its relation to the social condition (Ball & Gilligan, 2010), and use visual materials in the pursuit of evidence for research questions (Rose, 2013). A critical approach to visual culture takes images and other visual materials in serious consideration with due attention to their context, but also independently in such way as not to reduce them to context. Recently images have been used increasingly in qualitative research (Rose, 2013; Prosser, 2005). The growth in the use of such methods is attributed to the hyper-visibility of mass culture (Rose, 2013) and technological changes. Images have gained ground as a basis for research because they have the ability to describe the 'ineffable' (Rose, 2013), and reveal mechanisms undergirding depictions often taken for granted (Knowles & Sweetman, 2004).

The study uses iconology to examine the way specific mediated images of Syrian and non-Syrian refugees participate in a problematic discourse even when they focus on the humanitarian aspect of the crisis. Both Semiology and iconology can be used as visual methodologies. They are methods that question representations and meanings images make

through analysis of intricate elements – what Leeuwen (2004) calls the visual lexis of images. Semiology rests on the notions of *denotation* – the identification of who and what is being depicted, and *connotation* – the meanings, ideas and values associated with the subject being depicted. The method takes the sign as its object of analysis – its basic unit – in relation to the ‘signified’ (the object being depicted), the ‘signifier’ (the image associated with the signified) and the ‘referent’ (what they refer to in the real world) (Rose, 2012). However, iconology transcends “the territory of signs, signals and communication” (Belting, 2005, p. 304) and draws more on historicity of the image (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2004). Icons must not be confused with signs because they are not merely representational tools that establish a relation between a signifier and a signified. W. J. T. Mitchell (1986) argues, “Images are not just a particular kind of sign, but something like an actor on the historical stage, a presence or character endowed with legendary status, a history that parallels and participates in the stories we tell ourselves about [...]” (p. 9). Iconology and iconography both mean the study of images, but the two terms are not interchangeable, since iconology is the process of interpreting the identifications made through iconography at a deeper and broader cultural level (D’Alleva, 2005). Iconology is the analysis of the icons in relation to the culture in which they are embedded.

In his promotion of iconology as a visual research method during the 1980’s, W. J. T. Mitchell (1986) discussed a pictorial turn in the field of social sciences, pointing out the power of images and their inherent ability to speak for themselves without resort to language. He emphasized the importance of the pictorial turn as compared to the linguistic turn in understanding the social condition. Delving into the aesthetical, he explored the way studying iconicity can enlarge sociological epistemology. Images, even when still, are not

inanimate objects but animated actors that make assumptions, suggest conventional structures, and shape perspectives through which one can make meaning of the world. Images are not clones of the objects they depict, nor do they manifest a monolithic relation with them. The relation of the image to the original is rather a complex landscape determined by context, historicity and the overall ideological constructs in which the image, the viewer and the medium are embedded. The iconic power in images is a conveyor of experience (Bartamański & Alexander, 2012; Jay, 1994). Downplayed and ignored in the logocentrism of modern Western culture (Bartamański & Alexander, 2012), icons stand as actants that have the volitional characteristics of a subject or constitute the source of an action (Latour, 1993; Kurasawa, 2012; Giesen, 2012). Iconic power brings both the aesthetic surface and the discursive depth into question (Bartamański & Alexander, 2012), bridging the old dualistic understanding of subjects and objects, persons and things. Iconic images do not mirror the unmediated world captured in them; they are rather “the sort of sign that presents a deceptive appearance of naturalness and transparency, concealing an opaque, distorting, arbitrary mechanism of representation, a process of ideological mystification” (Mitchell, 1986, p. 8). Images invite us to take them seriously, understand their underlying meanings, and explore the ways in which they can affect our interpretation of the world. Media are the environment where iconic images thrive. “If images are life-forms, and objects are the bodies they animate, then media are the habitats or ecosystems in which pictures come alive” (Mitchell, 2005, p. 198). The focus on the media as a fertile ground for the burgeoning of images underscores the usefulness of iconology in understanding what images are and how they suggest particular structures in acculturated ways.

Refugees are protagonists of a liminal life psychologically, socially and politically. They stand on the threshold between an old and a new life but are not entirely in either one. In this liminal space, their identities reshape, their needs change and their lives operate in uncertainty. Images of suffering people depict the intricacies of this liminal life, but often shift focus to depictions of their lives after they have obtained legitimate stay in a new country. Liminal and post-liminal spaces, however, are not physical places and the lives of liminal beings do not necessarily transition to integration after settlement, although, as Malkki (1992) notes, the primary remedial action taken to redress this liminality is a spatial one, as in the establishment of camps, dubbed euphemistically 'shelters'. Certain images produce simplistic portrayals of sufferer's lives as carefree, suggesting that a chapter of pain has ended and a rosy life has begun, reducing their complex needs to paperwork and relocation, and assuming they have reaggated in a new present. The study brings these depictions into question and analyzes images of suffering people in transition and after arrival to undo an assumed link between settlement and eradication of suffering. It discusses how certain elements in the constructs of sufferers are gradually obscured as the image draws to a pre-constructed ideal audience.

The images this study is based on are selected from news and photo agencies that provide materials for international news outlets. My first encounter with these images was through international storytelling news channels such as AJ+ and Now This, which post image-based content directly to social media. The images were broadly shared on social media such as Facebook and Twitter and also figured in stories by mainstream media that use social media platforms to enhance their readership. These include The Daily Mail, Al Jazeera, The Huffington Post, NBC News, The New York Times, Time, BBC and others.

The recurrence and spreadability of these images imply that the discourses in which they participate are accessible to consumers around the globe. Most of these images foreground controversial tropes of suffering I discuss in the analysis. While the study does not claim that these images represent the entire visual rendering of suffering in mainstream media, it certainly draws upon a collection of key representations and tropes that are predominant. The first step was to look for images of refugees in which controversial tropes were salient. For example, a number of images celebrated the white savior (and the saved), such as those of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, or celebrities like Angelina Jolie and Salma Hayek visiting refugees. For every trope, the image that was most recurrent and mostly reflected a controversial trope was selected for analysis. The total number of images initially considered to discuss these tropes was 65. Although the tropes were overlapping for many of the images examined, the dominant trope was discussed for each. Eleven images revolved around the *white savior and the saved*, ten on the *feminized male/wailing father*, seventeen on the *ideal child victim*, six on the *faceless sufferer*, three on *apologetic victims*, seven on *salvageable women*, eight on *collateral sufferers/normalized liminality*, and three on *commodified suffering*. Ten images were eventually selected to discuss the eight tropes or conditions that reinforced a problematic engagement with suffering. Some of these images circulated as iconic images of the Syrian war. Most of the selected images were widely shared in their specific contexts. For example, Justin Trudeau's picture with the child (Denette, 2015) gained media coverage in the in the context of Canada's open policy towards refugees. The image of the wailing father (Etter, 2015) 'went viral' on social media as a symbol of suffering and was used in the context of Germany's similar compassionate policy. Image search of 'refugee children' always returned the image of children refugees at

al-Za'atari camp (Mitchell, 2013). The boat picture (Sestini, 2014) was also widely shared on social media as paradigmatic of the enormity of the refugee crisis. Cristiano Ronaldo's picture with the Syrian boy on the football pitch (Perez, 2015) made it to international news sports media in the context of celebrity news and in an attempt to highlight the sports club's charitable efforts. The images of mothers and children (Palacios, 2015; Isakovic, 2016) were among many examples in which women were constantly portrayed in distress with their children whether in the Syrian conflict or in other conflicts around the world. Finally, while the image of two Sudanese men (Morenatti, 2015) did not necessarily go viral, it was one of the less common images – in terms of individualizing African migrants – that captured the daily lives of people at Calais camp¹ in a period during which they only gained episodic visibility but less sympathetic engagement. Most of the selected images were from AFP, Reuters, AP, Getty Images and Polaris, all of which operate on an international scope and on whose supply of photographs the media heavily rely. The images described above were selected out of a number of other images, but these in particular were either widely shared or represented as prototypical examples of suffering in conflicts.

The study draws on images that circulated between 2011 and 2016 and acquired their iconicity within these brief historical contexts. Although the Syrian crisis started in 2011, it is 2014 that saw unprecedented numbers of applications for asylum by Syrians, Iraqis, and Afghans in Turkey (“2015 UNHCR country operations,” 2015), an increase that paved the path for migration to nearby Europe. The year 2014 also saw the displacement of Yazidis from northern Iraq upon the Islamic State's invasion of Mount Sinjar, an episode of suffering that mass migration to Europe in 2015 overshadowed later. In 2015, the iconic

¹ The French Authorities evacuated Calais camp on in October 2017 (Lima & Nossiter, 2016)

image of drowned Alan Shenu circulated in global media, bringing the discussions of refugees at the political and humanitarian levels to the fore (Laurent, 2015).

This study critiques assumptions of human-centric, liberal discourses often celebrated for foregrounding the human dimension of suffering people. It makes a statement about the need to examine taken-for-granted human-centric portrayals of ‘Othered’ categories in ways that are more critical. It problematizes human-centric constructions that are so absorbed in serving broad calls to morality that they fall short of giving voice and catering to vulnerable categories. It also questions whether these discourses perpetuate subtle or overt discrimination. Furthermore, the use of visual materials as a primary object of analysis raises important questions about the role of images in understanding the human condition and the claims to their power as instigators of action or change. The research asks questions about the role of memorable, affect-based photographs in shaping notions of deservingness towards refugees. Problematic discourses that images construct about vulnerable peoples and the implications these discourses have on humanitarian and political decisions need be examined given the images’ iconicity and spreadability. Such discourses can alter the average viewer’s perceptions of suffering or influence his/her views on whether and why the production of vulnerability should be addressed. The aim is to investigate images and to examine how they help us understand how human-centric discourse, as part of a broader hegemonic liberal discourse, constructs suffering. By analyzing aspects of visual culture that can challenge or participate in certain problematic discourses about suffering, I contribute to a body of knowledge about refugeedom in mainstream media and its relation to humanitarianism and social justice.

CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on suffering and its importance in politics and humanitarianism are large and multifaceted. Images of suffering are embedded in a problematic humanitarian discourse that perpetuates a biopolitical order in which sufferers' lives are made objects of exceptional authoritative measures. In this section, I discuss scholarly engagement with suffering through multiple but overlapping topics, drawing on research in media studies, anthropology, human rights law, and visual culture. Studies show that the legal frameworks supposed to ensure universal protection against all forms of human suffering are flawed at the core, as they have failed to cater to refugees outside the European context, or refugees who are victims of structural violence. This exclusionary institutional universality contributes to a differential distribution of deservingness, and establishes a hierarchization of victimhood by capitalizing on the visualization of ideal victims only. I also explore studies on images that promote a culture of spectatorship and a culture of charity that efface political responsibilities towards suffering subjects. Such images, studies show, perpetuate the liminality of suffering and bolster a liberal discourse that regards suffering as a compelling part of a global venture towards democracy and the establishment of justice. The first section of the literature review discusses studies that examine the concept of humanitarianism in general. The second section explores common tropes and conditions that the media capitalize on in their coverage of refugee issues and examines the way they

claim to uphold the principles of humanitarianism. The third part offers a critique of humanitarianism in the specific context of the Syrian crisis.

A. Humanitarianism: An Unfulfilled Promise

Entrenched in the conditions of survival, humanitarianism is biopolitical in essence. Redfield (2013) discusses the political realm in which humanitarian missions operate. Located at the nexus between the political and the biological – political rights and provision/denial of means of survival, humanitarian practice remains flawed. Although they claim to end war, humanitarian missions like the Red Cross, he argues, tend to civilize conflict. *Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)*, for example, with its provisional interventions governed by the logic of emergency, has failed to honor its optimistic claims to provide protection for people’s rights and dignities, thus exercising “minimal biopolitics” through denunciation, brief interventions in long-lasting conflicts, and mere designation of the ways in which states must work (p. 21). Humanitarianism thus becomes a form of temporary remedy, a short-lived relief from symptoms of inequality that falls short of addressing the causes enrooted in the histories of sufferers or alleviating the concerns they have for an uncertain future. The logic of emergency, the morphine-like intervention that appeases pain but does not neutralize it, and the selective interventionist decisions that prioritize certain conflicts and relegate others, compel us to dismiss the association of humanitarianism with equality. Human-centric images of suffering that mainstream media widely circulate do not digress much from this discourse. These reinforce a therapeutic rhetoric in their thematic focus on the current conditions of life instead of the context that produced them, the right to

mere survival instead of the right to life in its fullest measure, the momentary enjoyment of visibility instead of recognizing occluded historicity under regimes of care. As MSF interventions address life briefly, chiefly in its moments of danger, and assign differential values to conflicts and lives, human-centric images hierarchize suffering of human beings wrestling with a laborious transition from survival to full recognition socially, politically and culturally. Their visual constructions reduce suffering to a frozen moment in time, before and after which little seems to matter.

In September 2015, a video of Hungarian police officers, in helmets and hygiene masks, lobbing food across a barrier at a crowd of refugees at the Hungarian borders, circulated on news media and received wide indignation. Disturbing in every respect, the dehumanizing sight of nameless bodies stampeding to catch food rations invoked images of concentration camps. The video could be an example of Agamben's notion of the state of exception in which human lives are not disposed of, yet deprived of all that makes them full-fledged political beings. They are not allowed to leave, they are separated from their food providers, and their bodies are closely surveyed. In their defense of the practice, the Hungarian authorities argued that their goal was to contain rioters rebelling against the law (Smith-Spark, Damon & Martinez, 2015). While practices of the Hungarian authorities stood out, on the one hand, as a stark example of degradation and violation of human dignity, Germany, on the other hand, remained, since German Chancellor pledged to take in refugees in 2015, a promised land for sufferers trudging towards the good life. According to many of them, Hungary and Germany are incomparably different (Hartocollis, 2015). Yet a closer look beyond touching welcome signs at German borders and airports reveal similar disciplinary practices. At government shelters, known as *heime*, lack of a clearly outlined

refugee status, slow processing of asylum applications, overcapacity, forced relocation, hunger strikes, work restrictions, compulsory residence requirements and deportation have been reported (Hawley and Wilder, 2013). In both examples, the production of bare life is a common practice.

1. Inadequate Legal Frameworks

A closer look into the legal frameworks that foster the protection of refugees reveals shortcomings unaddressed to date. Whether these are an outcome or a cause of the current state of affairs, they undoubtedly reinforce a flawed political engagement with sufferers and highlight gaps in claims to their recognition. The most important international legal instrument for refugees – the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees– emerged from the need to address suffering within the European context in the wake of World War II. Sharma (2015), who revisited the Convention to assess its universality, argues that although the instrument was derived from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it excluded refugees outside Europe, including for example stateless refugees in the aftermath of genocides that took place upon the partition of India and Pakistan. The Convention further failed to meet the challenge of rising numbers of other categories such as internally displaced and stateless people. This legal gap theoretically exempts humanitarian bodies, such as UNHCR, from legal consequences when faced with crises outside the purview of the Convention. As a result, the concept of universality becomes defective under the very international legal instrument that is supposed to guarantee it. Humanitarian legal frameworks do not ensure provision of unconditional aid to suffering peoples. Betts (2013) argues that there are normative and

institutional gaps in the frameworks of response to vulnerable peoples when their vulnerability “falls outside the conventional understanding of persecution”, which allows politics rather than law to shape response and legitimize necessary aid (p. 4). People from states like Zimbabwe, Somalia, Libya, and Haiti were left out of the refugee regime although they do qualify as refugees from a human perspective. Fassin & D’Halluin (2007) explain that asylum seekers in France are required to submit evidence of the psychological traumas they suffered in their claim to become legitimate refugees in light of changes in the desirability of immigration. The extortion of evidence from the bodies of sufferers to obtain political protection, they argue, is one way to exercise biopower. These examples show that humanitarian practice is legally flawed, selective and does not live up to its claims of universality.

2. Exclusionary Universality

Because the values humanitarianism promotes are universalizing, it is not easy to critique humanitarian discourse as the case is in addressing negative representations, racism or xenophobia. Fassin (2013) questions what it means for policies and actions to be decided in the name of humanity and humanitarianism, arguing that the logics of urgency that humanitarianism imposes sometimes efface history, decontextualize suffering, and render discourse more about humanitarian action than about the actual suffering body. Stein (1981) also rejects the assumption of a generalizable refugee experience or the existence of a homogenous category with similar circumstances to which a uniform response can be provided. Similarly, the human-centric discourse on refugees often produces a universal sufferer, but it does not demonstrate inclusiveness or sensitivity to historicity. Improving

policies that cater to refugees' varying needs requires discourses that do not efface outsiders' socio-cultural differences and historicity, nor represent them as people who are no different from the cultures in which they settle. In their study of the media discourse on Hazara Afghan refugees, Rodan and Lange (2008) explain that representing outsiders as no different from host populations in terms of whiteness, multiculturalism and cultural affinity, even within a humanizing frame, elides indispensable socio-cultural differences. Critical discourse needs to eschew celebratory discourses of similarity and sharedness that appeal to emotions and do little to accommodate local needs.

In humanitarianism, the suffering body is the primary object of care, yet actions in the name of humanity do not always center on the sufferer. Sometimes the noble values of humanity infringe upon individual needs. Rescue efforts precede victims, figures obscure identities, and relief projects conceal unaddressed tragedies. Victimization becomes an essential trope and the distinct voices of sufferers are lost in the vast universalizing claim to human rights. Leslie Butt (2002) describes the "suffering stranger" in humanitarian work as the iconic figure "whose experiences are presented in truncated first-hand accounts of suffering in order to validate broader theoretical aims" related to global morality (p. 1). The images and accounts of the suffering stranger are more concerned with the claims of global morality and international humanitarianism than they are with the actual suffering of the disadvantaged and with the need to make their voices heard. The category of the universal sufferer becomes morally superior to individual stories (Fassin and d'Halluin, 2007). This falsely suggests less need to look into personalized accounts of sufferers, less need to encounter with concrete tragedies and less demand for need-sensitive approaches. Englund (2005) argues that "interventions which build on the idea of universal humanity often

convey contempt for concrete situations [...] engaged universals are possible only when the humanitarianism of victimhood gives way to a respect for the diverse subject positions from where claims can be made” (as cited in Malkki, 2007, p. 336). A humanizing discourse concerned with claims of global morality also suggests that intervention is a moral and ethical requisite rather than a legal one prompted by justice and equality (Zarowsky, 2000). Using refugeedom as a universal category strips refugees of their historical character (Malkki, 1996), where they become nameless vulnerable individuals unable to testify to the conditions in which they live and to express the varying needs that they have.

Tailoring humanitarian intervention to accommodate global morality in ways that dehistoricize refugees has implications for regimes of care – the “set of regulated discourses and practices grounded on this moral imperative to relieve suffering” (Ticktin, 2011a, p. 3). These arguments are not alien to the constructions of refugees in mainstream media. Those who come from Somalia, Eritrea, and Syria do not flee their homes for the same reasons, nor do they have the same needs in the countries they dream of settling in. They are culturally diverse, belong to different ethnicities and religions, and need to be recognized as individuals rather than masses of dependent categories. Some of them are educated, others cannot read or write; some are young and looking for work, others are too old to be productive; and most importantly, some could afford the journey, while other have stories that remain untold. The images of suffering human beings captured in impoverished camps in the cold of winter do not tell us who these people were before they ended up there. “One Simple Design Idea Could Help Thousands of Migrants” (Simrin, 2016) is a title I came across looking for stories about refugees: A young pretty woman poses for the

camera in a white coat that happens to be a three-in-one bag-tent-jacket (Hartley, 2016). There is something problematic about perpetuating the idea that this is what refugees need – a survival kit – and suggesting that a proclivity for charity is all it takes to meet those needs. Reducing the humanitarian discourse to appeals and donations transforms pains into a spectacle and nurtures what Sontag (2003) terms the “culture of spectatorship” (p. 105). Building on these arguments, this study questions human-centric depictions that rely on ethical considerations in outlining the needs of bodies under the state of the exception and in suggesting action in the name of global morality.

In spite of legal shortcomings, there is no doubt that the humanitarian discourse has positive implications for policies and political decision-making, but that does not imply that the category of humanity is not unproblematic, nor does it provide ready-made answers to the problematic issues laid bare by the notion of shared precariousness. As Haraway (1995) states, “The global and the universal are not pre-existing empirical qualities; they are deeply fraught, dangerous and inescapable inventions” (p. xix). Even in the discourse on humanity and humanitarianism, the presumption that all lives are equally valuable reaches problematic points in which the universality of suffering and practices of difference are pitted against each other. For Feldman (2012), who studied Palestinian refugees living under relief, discussions of humanitarianism need address not only the politics of life, the ways people live or die, but also the politics of living, i.e. how these bodies survive under the regimes of care. Feldman argues that humanitarianism is a discourse, in which images of refugees are used to encourage compassionate engagement, and a practice, in which forms of intervention, such as medical aid, educational support, development and capacity building, are exercised. Historically, humanitarianism has lacked the universality it claimed

on many occasions, namely when the suffering subject was located outside the cultural frames of the West. The repression of certain peoples was omitted from visibility due to imperialist competition (Fanon, 1963). For example, although the Sétif massacre in 1945 Algeria was committed before the Nuremberg trials, the victims were hardly spoken of and are hardly remembered as recognition of suffering entered into the considerations of imperial geopolitics of the West (Williams, 2016). Williams also questions humanitarian practices in other cases where oppressed groups were excluded from protection, as in Amnesty International's withholding support from Nelson Mandela and the black community upon their decision to harness violence in pursuit of civil rights, and as in the impunity that violence against the LGBT community was met with in 1990's Mexico.

On the intrinsic failure of humanitarian discourse to live up to its universal claims, Fassin (2010) also argues that humanitarianism is both a “moral discourse” and a “political resource” (p. 239). While the former suggests the illusion of equality, it is in the details of the latter that controversy unfolds. Common sense suggests that humanity is universal and inclusive of all human – sometimes nonhuman– beings. With refugees, universalizing discourses become more salient. Malkki (1995 a) argues that there is a “tendency to universalize the ‘the refugee’ as a special ‘kind’ of person not only in the textual representation, but also in their photographic representation” (p. 9). A closer look, however, reveals relativist practices. For example, claims to the exclusion of certain categories from the political sphere can use humanity as a counterargument, suggesting, through politics of fear, that refugees pose a threat to the right of host populations to employment, to protection against infringement and potential crime, etc. In this sense, humanity becomes both an object of care and a threat to its very self (Feldman & Ticktin, 2010). Certain

individuals are included while others are disqualified based on the constant claim to action in the name of humanity. Those who are vulnerable and whose vulnerability is imprinted on their bodies are seen more deserving than those who are vulnerable but cannot prove it. In the name of humanity, those who are waiting in camps, those who could not afford to leave their countries and those who applied through legal routes are lumped into the category of the universal sufferer. Practices of difference urge us to question whether action in the name of humanity is always mindful of the right of all vulnerable beings to inclusion and equal treatment and whether the process of humanization, as a broad title, settles the controversies that dehumanization creates. Globalizing claims to morality are therefore inadequate and the internationalization of humanitarianism projects universal solutions that pay little regard to intricately different contexts. Touching on the core problem of universalism, Ignatieff (1984) argues:

“The problem is not to defend universality, but to give these abstract individuals the chance to become real, historical individuals again, with the social relations and the power to protect themselves... The people who have no homeland must be given one; they cannot depend on the uncertain and fitful protection of a world conscience defending them as examples of the universal abstraction Man” (p. 52-53).

Therefore, humanitarian discourse is flawed unless it is entrenched in need-sensitive action and practice. If inclusion is a set of claims that only the viewer can feel and experience in a brief mediated moment of suffering, and if inclusion does not transcend ethical boundaries to pervade a system bristling with inequalities, bare lives will continue to be outside recognition, objectified for brief moments of celebratory altruism. As Abbas

(2010) argues, the notion of inclusion must be entertained as “justice as admission” (p. 23): the admission and recognition of suffering that liberalism has left out of calculation.

3. Crippling Support, Absent Agency

Claims to inclusion under liberal humanitarianism often operate by isolating, excluding and privileging (Shklar, 1989), but humanitarianism also positions the sufferer as an ‘Other’ who lacks agency. This fetishized transnational universalism obscures the accounts of suffering as seen by the sufferer. Suffering must be thus defined through the sufferer’s experience and told from the sufferer’s perspective and not as accounts of hegemonic liberalism (Shklar, 1989).

Hyndman (2000) argues that UNHCR aid efforts in Somalia and Kenya position the refugee as a subaltern. She describes humanitarianism as “colonialism of derision” that has transformed into “colonialism of compassion” (p. 44). Certain humanitarian practices, she argues, like headcounts, involve people with a political status who register individuals whose lives depend on humanitarian categorization. For Hyndman, humanitarianism perpetuates a state of dependency in which the refugee cannot do without its material assistance. The existence and the life of beneficiaries are conditioned by the support they receive, but this support is never enough to empower them to continue on their own. Humanitarian discourse defines the history of the sufferer. Outside humanitarian intervention, the sufferer does not exist.

How does humanitarianism, a concept embedded in the ideals of altruism and respect for human needs, become an act of taking instead of giving? The temporariness of humanitarian intervention, its involvement in the momentary biological needs of victims

and its concern with achievements and final reports reinforce the dependency of the sufferer through episodic campaigns that rely on media coverage of conflicts. In her famous essay '*Can the Subaltern Speak?*', Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1994) argues that the attribute of inferiority and subordination, constituted in the term 'subaltern', denotes an invariably similar positioning of the white male as superior, powerful, and exclusively capable of ending miseries of women who are hidden, oppressed, abused and denied freedoms the white subject prides to have achieved. Lila Abu-Lughod (2002) furthers this discourse in her powerful book *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*, bringing the rescue narrative of the white male savior into light again within the context of the war on terrorism and the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan. Abu-Lughod explores the U.S. political discourse on the 'need' for military intervention in Afghanistan to liberate Afghan women from the Taliban's oppression. The U.S. discourse, according to Abu-Lughod, appropriated human and women's rights to justify war and to frame it as the only way to end the women's misery. Marnia Lazreg (1994) also discussed the way French colonizers similarly employed the trope of saving Algerian women from their 'misogynist' societies. The problem with the salvation trope, argues Abu-Lughod (2002), is that while it claims saving women from one condition, it does not make sure they are provided a new and a better one. Images of helpless-looking women with children in their arms position the humanitarian sensible viewer as a potential savior, suggesting that an act of sympathy or a 'click to donate' might better the lives of people afflicted by wars. Such images produce the trope of the salvageable woman-and-child, which confines the female victim of war to a state of passivity in which the viewer can only imagine her emancipation through humanitarian assistance.

4. Humanitarianism as Fodder for Liberalism

In her discussion of humanitarianism under liberalism, Asma Abbas (2010) speaks of the loss of senses, our being taken with the aesthetic encounter so much that we forget the suffering of the living in the contexts of imperialism, colonialism and liberalism. Humanitarianism is embedded in a liberal discourse directed towards autonomy and individualism, entrenched in a fetishized obsession with progress and economic development that, while it engages with human suffering, tends to obscure its roots. Abbas argues that liberal modernity demands that for every performance of justice be a performance of suffering in return, and that this demand compels us to understand not whether suffering within the realm of the political is present or absent but rather how this suffering is materialized into voice and representation. The political, she argues, is not limited to the epistemic but is entwined with our aesthetic experience with it – with the engagement of our senses and their assessment of it. The role of ethics, aesthetics, and politics is central to studying how suffering is represented and spoken for in liberalism. “The experience of suffering deserves to be (acknowledged as) the subject of politics in a way that does not relegate it to being an object or event harnessed merely as injury, identity, or other currency in liberal politics.” (p. 30). Her argument centers on the need to acknowledge suffering independently of the effects of representation and to avoid transforming suffering into an object from which the liberal sensorium demands voice in order to recognize. This challenges the molds in which the sufferers must cast themselves for the act of recognition to take place. Liberalism, she argues, favors certain voices of

suffering, which in turn infringes upon the meaning of suffering and the deservingness of the suffering subject.

Exploring alternatives for the ways suffering is regarded under liberalism, Judith Shklar (1989) calls for what she terms the liberalism of fear. It is a liberalism of fear because it caters to those who are wronged by injustices, fear, insecurity and inequality and because it addresses the suffering of common people rather than operating in perfectionist claims to morality. It is negative politics, negative liberty in essence. She argues that liberalism is engaged with suffering so long it pertains to the political, laws and the state. Under the cherished invention of autonomy, pain becomes a by-product of progress; it is rendered condonable since it can be molten into the machinery of productivity. Furthermore, liberalism embraces notions of abstract global morality at the expense of individualized suffering. For Abbas (2010), “Liberal structures, whether utilitarian or not, share the conceit that a “natural” economy of pain and pleasure, and of suffering and activity, exists, and that their only role is managing their (re)distribution within society” (p. 22). When the liberal viewer witnesses mediated suffering, he/she processes inequalities as by-products of war, as a collateral damage of a painful labor that would eventually lead to the establishment of justice. Witnessing humanitarian intervention with refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, the poor etc. from countries such as Eritrea, Sudan, Syria, and Afghanistan, the viewer associates their suffering with the political regimes they live under and perceives humanitarian intervention as a way in which liberalism seeks to rectify their problems. When representatives of European Union delegations and celebrity ambassadors of international organizations visit camps and promise to do their best to help solve their problems, the viewer is reminded that the sufferers’ problems are external to the ideals of

liberalism, that the latter's intervention is part of their struggle to become full-fledged political beings.

To account for discourses honed or truncated to make suffering look valuable, worthy of care and sympathy for the liberal sensorium, it is also useful to draw on Mary Douglas's notions of purity and danger. Douglas (2003) discussed the concepts of symbolic 'dirt' and 'purity' in the contexts of the differences between primitive and modern cultures and how these relate to the broader concepts of social order and disorder. The system of purity and impurity ensures the stability of the social structure as a whole. Impurity is "matter out of place" (p. 36), a symbolic manifestation of anomalies that challenge the existing ordered relations. Douglas argues, "Any system of classification must give rise to anomalies and any given culture must confront events which seem to defy its assumptions" (p. 40). Refugees, in this vein, represent a disruptive symbolic danger to a social order that does not resemble theirs. Malkki (1992), who discussed similar notions of order and disorder, explains how refugees are treated as aberrated categories (Malkki, 1992) in the purity of the new setting to which they aspire to relocate. They are racialized, alienated and objectified as unsuitable to be rooted in new places. Certain images suggest that sufferers do not affect the purity and order of their new setting. These are images that evoke affinity and familiarity in a liberal viewer sensible to humanitarian needs, such as images of unprotected women and children, or happy families who have settled after a life-threatening journey. Images of masses of refugees walking in deserted lands are, however, less appealing. They are uninterestingly recurrent and banal although they represent suffering that equally deserves attention. To accommodate images to the preferences of an ideal liberal viewer by removing their aesthetic impurities relegates the suffering subject in

importance and favors the viewer's gaze, disregarding what these impurities mean and how they help us understand suffering from the sufferer's perspective.

Under a broad and loose liberal discourse, the values of humanitarianism become a site of exploitation. The Othering of sufferers becomes a process intrinsic to its practices. Humanitarianism in liberal philosophy consists of the sense of morality towards those who are in need. It comprises the two notions of universalism and individualism: the obligation to help versus the need to minimize the implication for the self (Every, 2008). In addition to these, binaries such as "reason versus emotion", "practicality versus idealism", and "moderation versus excess" (p. 212) are involved. Within these binaries, the moralistic concept of humanitarianism can be co-opted to justify the exclusion of sufferers from the regimes of protection instead of achieving inclusionary goals. Faced with the compelling needs of others, individualism, practicality, moderation and reason can legitimize denial of recognition on grounds that the Other can pose a threat to the self. The tropes used in the images discussed exemplify the effects of the tension between universalism and individualism under liberal humanitarianism. While certain images suggest the need for a transnational humanitarian intervention in the name of humanity, the same images encourage a process of exclusion using tropes that alienate sufferers and normalize their suffering into mere byproducts of war that only humanitarian ideals can afford to fix.

a. The Problem of Equality

"Humanitarianism is viewed as the core virtue in immigration and refugee law. When we label a law as humanitarian, we label it as good, fair, or just. But humanitarianism and justice are not the same" (Dauvergne, 1999, p. 620). Although there is a tendency to equate the practice of humanitarianism with attempts at establishing justice and equality,

humanitarianism and justice are not interchangeable categories. Dauvergne questions the usefulness of liberal philosophy, the common framework used in countries where sufferers seek refuge, in providing an adequate ground to care. Relying on humanitarianism to cater to populations who are situated outside the political realm does not provide answers to questions such as ‘on what basis must refugees be accepted?’ and ‘what is the number of migrants needed for a national immigration policy to be described as just?’ (Dauvergne, 1999). Dauvergne’s uncertainty about the adequacy of humanitarianism and liberalism triggers questions about the volatility of global morality as a framework capable of minimizing precarity. For Dauvergne, humanitarianism thus becomes amoral. This means changes in the way these people are treated do not account for commonly held standards of justice and equality under liberalism. Take the shift in Germany’s policy towards Syrian refugees in 2015. First, Germany decided to exempt Syrian refugees from the Dublin Regulation in August 2015 (Kallius, Monterescu, & Prem Kumar, 2016), namely the right of the host country to deport refugees to the European Union country in which they had arrived first; and second, the decision to reinstate the Regulation. Germany’s second decision came upon a deal with Turkey to accept one Syrian from Turkey in return of one illegal migrant returned to Turkey (Kingsley & Rankin, 2016). In the absence of standards to assess whether morality goals have been served, humanitarianism remains the paradox of itself: It fails to honor the claims liberalism preaches. The act of serving a person in need comes at the expense of exposing the life of another to the lack of protection, both exercised in the context of liberal policies. Dauvergne (1999) demonstrates that while immigration policies in Western democracies take a humanitarian form, their exercise is often at conflict with equality. When a wailing father is photographed as finally

emancipated from fear and suffering in a host country, or a child is accommodated in a home thanks to the intervention of a charitable celebrity, the viewer is led to believe that equality has been served. When images promote the idea that the more one donates, the lesser the toll for refugees will be, or that if images create moral outrage, need-sensitive policies will be developed, the viewer is encouraged to believe a misleading cause-effect relation between acts of humanity and ostensible emancipation from suffering.

B. Media and Suffering

The humanitarian discourse on suffering draws the limits between valuable and disposable lives. It presents certain sufferers as more grievable than others. As Butler (2009) notes, the “differential distribution of grievability across populations has implications for why and when we feel politically consequential affective dispositions such as horror, guilt, righteous sadism, loss, and indifference” (p. 55). Media discourses are implicated in the biopolitics of the refugee crisis. They are where identities of refugees are constructed and normalized, where human beings are sorted into categories: refugees, migrants, asylum seekers, vulnerable children, helpless women, suffering others, or others ‘just like us’. While all these categories fall within a human-centric frame, each one of them offers a different perspective to identity and gives a different social meaning to human plights. The linguistic and discursive categories often taken for granted affect bodies in different ways and have implications for sufferers. “Humanitarian categories provide people with a ground from which to act and make claims – and sometimes create an opportunity for refusal. Humanitarian language can shape these claims, producing a

confluence of discourses of obligation and compassion, of need and right” (Feldman, 2012, p. 168). In her study on Palestinian refugees, Feldman discusses how categories shape the aid refugees receive from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA) and how they have consequences for the ways in which refugees experience their lives while governed by these categories. Categorization contributes to a differential distribution of worthiness, which has consequences for the lives of people within and outside these categories. Images are not mere spaces in which suffering is made visible to the world, but ways in which suffering is defined and outlined and through which humanitarian assistance is shaped to those who are portrayed as the most deserving. This section reviews literature about the media’s role in the differential distribution of worthiness. It begins with a background on the transformation of the refugee image in the media. Then it discusses the notions of the ideal victim, the apologetic sufferer, and how the framing of victims in specific constructs produces a culture of spectatorship in which the portrayal of human suffering fails to serve the subjects humanitarianism claims to save and protect.

1. Reframing of the Refugee Image in the Media

Over the past 65 years, the construct of the refugee in the media has evolved. Johnson (2011) argues the image of the refugee has undergone reframing. As the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees was being promulgated in 1951, dominant media images represented refugees as proud, defiant, graceful, heroic political individuals, often anti-communist. Decolonization, the Chinese Communist Revolution and the Algerian civil war prompted people to move from the Global South to avoid

persecution. The discourse on refugees at the time promoted a humanitarian image of industrialized states who blamed displacement on communist policies. Gradually, the frame of the refugee shifted into an individual from the third world cast in images of poverty, such as vulnerable children and women escaping violence. Displaced in huge numbers, refugees, as Johnson also argues, were regarded as human beings fleeing environments in which conditions were antithetical to democracy and modernity and removed from the political conditions in the Global North. This evolution produced a difference in the framing of refugees under three patterns of transformation: racialization, victimization, and feminization. The reframed image contributed to shaping public imagination about ‘Others’, and thus contributed to shifting response from integration and settlement to repatriation and tight border controls (Johnson, 2011). The image of the third world refugee participates in a discourse that produces knowledge through frames that act as gatekeepers. They include and exclude, allow recognition or deny it. The study attempts to demonstrate how images of sufferers reinforce such discourse, reproducing categories that correspond to different levels of worthiness.

2. Distribution of Deservingness

The principles of democracy hold that all suffering must be, recognizable, recognized and held sacred (Campbell & Sitze, 2013). Whether we are faced with images of children who have lost their families on their way to Europe or single men who have chosen to leave their siblings back home, this assumption compels us to recognize both examples without being selective. The difference between images of families spending the night in the cold and those of boat survivors taking ‘selfies’ should not make an argument

for misrecognition. Media discourse, however, reveals the contrary. In one example, the media reported that international organizations, such as the United Nations, have invested efforts in conducting surveys about the educational levels of refugees. One survey found that most refugees (around 86%) are young and either have a high school diploma or a university degree (Besheer, 2015). Such examples suggest entry points on how deservingness should be distributed. They also transform the discourse from one that centers on refugees to one that prioritizes the needs of host nations. Images that frame sufferers in apologetic frames assume, in subtle ways, that certain age categories are worth keeping or that the educated are more valuable. Discourses that celebrate the ability of refugees to fully integrate in new social structures, and promise their presence would not challenge the integrity of the western norms or weigh as a burden on the economy, are addressed primarily to a spectator whose worries are placed in a position superior to those of the migrant. The refugee is thus tacitly presented as a danger to the purity of the new sphere.

3. Ideal Victims

Not all suffering bodies are constructed as morally legitimate, for moral legitimacy depends on historical, social, political, cultural and economic contexts (Ticktin, 2011a). Ticktin argues that the morally legitimate suffering body is one whose pain is recognizable and constitutes the “primary subject of care” (p. 3). Suffering bodies become morally legitimate when they do not need to justify their status. Bearing the prints of violence, they outline perfect frames for a humanitarian discourse. Humanitarianism draws examples from categories constructed as vulnerable, foregrounding dichotomies in our imaginings of

individuals who merit recognition versus those who do not: children vs. adults, women vs. men, physically impaired vs. able-bodied, old vs. young, non-Muslims vs. Muslims, etc. Humanitarian discourse relies on moral legitimacy to justify the need for impelling care. Children, women and elderly people are target categories of humanitarian aid. Media campaigns of humanitarian organizations draw on their images because they assume such images attract donations. Crying infants in their mothers' arms, frightened children stepping out of boats, anxious women without men, freezing people wrapped in foil blankets, and old men or women carrying heavy bags are among the most common protagonists. They make ideal victims: those categories that acquire the status of a victim readily after suffering a crime (Christie, 1986). The ideal victim is constructed as the most precarious because he/she effortlessly constitutes an emotionally charged frame. Ideal victims are often children, the elderly, and more recently homosexuals— but also others who can be granted this status depending on their social and cultural contexts (Geer, 2007).

Images of children in their mothers' arms are prevalent almost in every conflict. Wright (2002) contends that in photographers' practices and editorial policies, there is a proclivity to choose predictable images that conform to already established patterns of acceptability. Such images speak more to liberal sensibility than does a dark-skinned African migrant in Calais wearing a Chicago Bulls cap and carrying a piece of paper in which he says he needs a home (Huguen, 2015). This man has left the traces of violence back home; he has lost the proof of his vulnerability to what Boltanski (1999) describes as the power of imagination in the spectator's encounter with the sufferer. Building on Adam Smith and David Hume, Boltanski argues that the viewer tries to fathom the pain in which the sufferer lives but does not imagine himself to be in his/her place. He explains that

suffering is not what the spectator understands from the voice of the sufferer, but is rather the outcome of what the spectator has represented to himself *about* that suffering. Suffering is mediated at a cognitive, affective and moral level, and so remains confined within the limits of the spectator's imagination.

The assumption that certain categories deserve humanitarian intervention only because they are perceived universally and stereotypically as vulnerable *is* problematic because it omits other vulnerable categories from discourse, suggests that recognizability is conditioned by socially constructed perceptions of vulnerability, and naturalizes a foundational biopolitical order. Kibraeb (2003), for example, shows that humanitarian focus on women and children stems from an underlying false assumption that refugees are mostly female-headed households who lost their male providers in conflict. Rejecting generalization, Kibraeb criticizes the failure of humanitarian organizations to recognize that family headship is not a fixed or a cross-cultural construction, and argues that such assumptions can be misleading for humanitarian relief efforts. Depictions that constantly resort to scarred childhood and distraught motherhood at the hands of a heartless brown male fighter construct the viewer as a liberal sensible citizen in a modern democracy whose ethical responsibility towards vulnerable categories in afflicted parts of the world is constantly questioned.

Ideal victims of conflict also obscure victims of poverty and structural violence. Refugees from Eritrea, Somalia, Iraq, Lebanon and other countries have also attempted crossing to Europe in search of better socioeconomic rights. These, Betts (2010) notes, fall outside the refugee regime, namely the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Betts uses the term *survival migrants* to describe vulnerable people externally

displaced “because of an existential threat to which they have no access to domestic remedy or resolution” (p. 362). Survival migration encompasses vulnerable people who escape war, but also others who flee structural violence often caused by political inadequacy. In light of a lack of appropriate terminology to encompass all people who left their lands because of an imposed vulnerability (Betts, 2013), the term ‘survival migrants’ is very close to meeting the principle of shared precariousness. Theoretically speaking, it incorporates the right to protection on the basis of human rights under the international human rights law (Betts, 2013) and consequently the right against repatriation. Yet Betts’ encompassing term is only theoretical, for the refugee regime does not cater to all survival migrants.

Institutional mechanisms for addressing their needs are furthermore lacking. The selectivity in the notion of the ideal victim stands in contrast to the universal concept of survival migration. Images of Syrian refugees appear superior to those of their Eritrean, Iraqi, Afghan, or Somali counterparts. Syrians demonstrate more moral legitimacy: they are victims of a raging war in which brutal groups take part. Non-Syrians do not convince the viewer enough of their suffering because the concept of state fragility, the failure or unwillingness of states to provide for their citizens (Betts, 2013), is still not a legitimate motive for protection under refugee regimes. Omission in mediated images echoes the failure of legal frameworks to include sufferers within the refugee regime, which, according to Betts, has not evolved to accommodate the changing motives for displacement. Rather than challenging hegemonic portrayals of suffering, images risk perpetuating inadequacies of the existing refugee regime.

The construction of the ideal victim is often endowed with the *punctum*. In photography, Barthes (1982) uses the term to denote the element that stands out and

bruises, pierces, pricks and is poignant to the viewer regardless of its embeddedness. It is the unique detail that arrests viewers and engraves the image in their memory. Yet the punctum is difficult to locate and it is this difficulty that makes it powerful. As Barthes (1982) puts it, “What I can name cannot really prick me. The incapacity to name is a good symptom of disturbance” (p. 51). The *studium*, however, is not as unique. It is like the characteristic of a journalistic picture that one looks at, reacts to briefly but does not remember after a while. Mediating specific constructs that have the characteristic of the punctum and omitting everyday death that passes unnoticed raises questions about why some categories are regarded as exceptional while others are not. It tells us that mediated death is morally superior to non-mediated death, and that mediated death remembered through pictures is still superior to death put into words. This uneven distribution of deservingness reveals discrepancies in the engagement with different victim categories and obscures communities that do not fall within the refugee regime at the legal, political or humanitarian levels. Questioning the unequal engagement with refugee lives, Malkki (1995) discusses maximized focus on displacement as opposed to emplacement. She argues that emplacement, the choice sufferers make to stay, is neglected and rarely spoken of in refugee regimes. She poses critical questions about the relevance of communities left behind to the overall response to devastated populations and their deservingness to be equally incorporated under the regimes of protection. People left behind legitimize the suffering of those who leave. They embody the face of tragedy that is hardly visible to the world (Malkki, 1995). They are legitimate sufferers obliterated from humanitarian and political recognition. They are not ideal victims.

4. Apologetic Sufferers

Out of the notions of the ‘ideal victim’ and ‘the morally legitimate sufferer’, this study explores how human-centric depictions mostly construct the refugee person as what I shall refer to as the *apologetic sufferer*. An apologetic sufferer is a trope that represents pain and justifies why the sufferer deserves to be saved from it. The apologetic sufferer is presented as a body that begs for acknowledgment, a body that is vulnerable by default. It is a body that bears signs of weakness and is therefore ‘salvageable’. Age, gender, health status among other factors contribute to the making of this frame. Each of the images discussed in the analysis section has at least one sign of weakness that appeals to liberal sensibility, yet this frame denies recognition of sufferers who fall outside of it, as I will show in the discussion of sufferers at Calais camp, who are portrayed as people whose pain is collateral, secondary and not necessarily worthy of being addressed.

One of the examples media briefly iconized was Refaai Hamo (Stanton, 2015), a Syrian refugee who settled in Michigan in early 2016 after a lengthy asylum application process. A 55-year-old man with a PhD and a benign stomach cancer, Hamo’s recognition as a worthy sufferer, an ideal victim who fits the definition of a vulnerable male, is deeply embedded in a biopolitical discourse. His health condition was key to his visibility, for biological conditions of immigrants and asylum seekers enter in political discourse and become a social condition (Ticktin, 2011b). Another recent example that reveals the nexus between biology and politics in immigration policies is France’s introduction of DNA testing in 2007 to allow or deny access of people who request family reunification with their siblings (Ticktin, 2011b). As the body is the site of truth, Ticktin discusses how vulnerability to death guarantees social life and how life-threatening biological conditions

become a permit, a resource which the Other uses to try to belong to the political. Under modern humanitarianism, the immigrant-to-be is treated as a “non-Enlightenment, pre-modern subject, whose biology – not words – is legible” (p. 153-154). Images as those of Refaai Hamo call these practices into visibility. They present the liberal viewer with an accomplishment to take pleasure in – a humane act to pride oneself over. The frame is simplistic: When a once successful man of value to society was left homeless and ill, the ideals of liberalism gave him a second chance. This second chance rhetoric celebrated in ideals of charity needs also to be addressed for eliding the root causes of inequality.

Furthermore, the suffering subject, constituted in individuals like Refaai Hamo, reinforces an apologetic discourse in his construction as a male whose impurities associated with an imagined East have been removed. Hamo’s frame is removed from Orientalist perceptions of the Middle East. In his photograph featured on the *Humans of New York* blog (Stanton, 2015), Hamo poses neatly for the camera, wearing a suit and a tie and thoughtfully cupping his clean-shaven face in one hand. Hamo became known as the Scientist. His story inspired American actor Edward Norton to set up a fundraiser for him. President Barack Obama described him as an inspiration. He was invited to attend the State of the Union address. In brief, he was idealized as a deserving victim. Like Alan Shenu, Hamo has what it takes to be embraced by the liberal viewer: He represents the flipside of Orientalist stereotypes of the Middle Eastern man. The study explores trends that idealize specific constructs of refugees, namely those that distant spectators can resonate with: those which the liberal gaze legitimizes. It discusses how certain tropes privilege the viewer at the expense of the sufferer and cater to the viewer’s voyeuristic needs. These tropes assume that the need to prove morality has been served takes precedence over the

needs of the suffering subject. While these images have often gained popularity and empathy from viewers across the globe, they remain guilty of stripping individuals of their cultural belonging, decontextualizing their suffering, erasing their historicity and deracializing them to gain the validation of a distant viewer.

5. A Culture of Spectatorship

The images of Alan Shenu, Refaai Hamo and others raise questions about what photographs achieve and whether affect is a precursor for change. Sontag (2003) argues that punctum does not entail action, that the depiction of suffering in the most affective ways does little to save sufferers from their suffering. “To designate a hell is not, of course, to tell us anything about how to extract people from that hell, how to moderate hell’s flames” (page 114). Alan’s image circulated widely but it did not tell us why his family left their home; nor did it tell us about other families who have washed ashore. Sontag’s insights offer us an understanding of the meaning of others’ suffering, of the extent to which the depiction of suffering cannot help bring it to an end. At the very best, the image of the drowned boy reportedly prompted the Canadian government to offer his father Canadian citizenship (Toksabay, 2015), but this itself raises controversy about the value of precarious lives and the share of violence bodies need to pay to transition from being vulnerable to being protected. After all, what does responding to one case of suffering achieve for the suffering of all other cases that it symbolizes? In this vein, the study explores the ways images paint suffering and call attention to its existence. It questions the tacit assumptions that images – and viewer’s engagement – can lead to a possible recognition or inclusion.

Over the course of the Syrian conflict, celebrity advocacy emerged as a trend in humanitarian campaigns. Chouliaraki (2012) rightly calls this trope the theatricality of humanitarianism. However genuine the efforts of a famous person might seem, there is always a tinge of commercialization when celebrities are involved in human suffering. Raising awareness, garnering international support, or highlighting untold tragedies does little but suggest ethical courses of action to an already constructed audience (Chouliaraki, 2012). For Chouliaraki, this “voyeuristic altruism” (p.17) constitutes an inauthentic theatre of pity where the celebrity speaks for the suffering subject. It suggests that the suffering of the subject alone is not epistemically or aesthetically adequate. Similar images that emerged during the Syrian conflict show that portrayals of altruism often precede the ‘other’ whom they claim to serve. We have seen Angelina Jolie, Special Envoy for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), counsel refugee children whose faces we can barely see, or carry an infant of a woman whose eyes look up in expectation (Tanner, 2012). In another campaign, Salma Hayek hugs a refugee girl in a refugee camp in Lebanon (Rich, 2015). The pictures, which ostensibly revolve around the refugee subject, are but a reminder of a third world woman who, as Mohanty (1988) notes, cannot speak for herself, a woman who lacks the power to control her life, and needs to be defended by someone else. That someone is in most cases the Western woman.

To observe suffering from a distance and to feel pity does not make the conditions of the sufferer any better. The politics of pity and the politics of justice, argues Boltanski (1999), are not the same thing. The encounter between the viewer and the sufferer often operates within politics of pity, which Boltanski, in his book *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics*, builds on Hannah Arendt’s work on the relation – or the nonrelation –

between pity and justice. In the politics of pity, two premises are key. First, the viewer separates the sufferer from the non-sufferer in order to distribute pity deservedly. Second, the viewer engages with suffering as a spectacle. He/she observes, contemplates but does not try to change or take action. Thus, the viewer is a “pure spectator” (p. 27), an individual who is engaged in the action of looking but whose object of looking is completely independent from him/her. Boltanski argues that the engagement of the spectator with suffering involves multiple responses/discourses, such as *denunciation* of an ill-treatment, *indignation* at an act of injustice, or *accusation* of a culprit. For Boltanski tenderheartedness is a sympathetic emotion associated with pity, either in relation to a persecutor or in relation to a benefactor. This means when the spectator sympathizes with distant suffering, he/she either feels that someone/something (a system or an individual) is responsible for the misery of the sufferer (indignation through the sufferer’s resentment) or he/she feels gratitude towards someone/something that has provided help to the sufferer (gratitude through the sufferer’s appreciation) (Boltanski, 1999). This process feeds into an overall culture of spectatorship, in which hegemonic tropes of suffering participate.

In a study on the politics of refugeedom in the context of the Syrian crisis, Kallius, Monterescu and Prem Kumar (2016) demonstrate how the engagement with Syrians and non-Syrian immigrants in Hungary takes place in a depoliticized framework that effaces the conditions legitimizing their requests to freedom of movement towards potential host countries. In this framework, migration becomes a privilege rather than a right. Established practices, they argue, reinforce binaries of citizenship-refugeedom through the exercise of vertical politics in which agency rests solely with the state. State practices also reinforce binaries of politics-humanitarianism. They further explain how humanitarianism and

horizontal solidarities fail to construct refugees outside the frame of helpless, passive recipients of aid. Charity, which is one way of practicing humanitarianism, becomes a mere therapeutic humanitarian intervention. These binaries, they posit, provide a distorted account of violence, one that dehistoricizes, decontextualizes and depoliticizes narratives of people whose lives are conditioned by provision of aid. In the same vein, Fadlallah (2009) argues that mainstream media discourse on humanitarianism and transnational solidarity that global capitalism has shaped constitutes a hegemonic neoliberal approach that employs compassion and care towards vulnerable Sudanese/African refugees through charity rather than political and legal entitlements. While this discourse claims justice for refugees, it confines Sudanese/African refugees to the frame of the care-needing Other and constructs them as disruptive of order and national integrity. The images of refugees that this study discusses similarly promote a discourse of charity that suggests sufferers need the intervention of humanitarian agencies for their liminal condition to come to an end.

Ticktin (2011b) rightly argues that humanitarianism is not a “blueprint form of intervention” (p. 151). Since the fall of welfare in the United States, charity has emerged as a one of the interventionist approaches to help the marginalized and the disenfranchised. Yet resorting to charity to solve problems of systematic violence and institutionalized inequality pose many questions about the stability, viability and utility of episodic acts of giving. Charity is intrinsically problematic because its logic of emergency occludes deeper political problems, addresses only the tip of the iceberg and leaves roots and causes outside calculation. Charity, in its consumerist and commercialized appropriation, contributes to a global neoliberal hegemony (Kapoor, 2012) and nourishes what Guy Debord (1983) famously termed the society of spectacle. NGOs heavily rely on infotainment to the extent

that the improvement of people's lives becomes an object of spectacularization, without which transnational humanitarian NGOs, such as MSF or Save Darfur Coalition, are unable to remain operational and attract funding (Kapoor, 2012). Charity is problematic because it perpetuates a feeling of gratification that unburdens the spectator from the ethical responsibilities towards the disenfranchised. As Taylor (2010) puts it, "The very urgency with which you the viewer/listener are asked to respond is the very thing that will prevent you from recognizing the causes (objective violence) of the scenario you are witnessing" (p. 179). Furthermore, charity engages with suffering in an ethical approach rather than a political one. When benevolence replaces political rights, humanitarian work becomes exclusionary because the boundaries of ethics are loose. When the spectator looks at images of refugees receiving sweaters, blankets, ration packs, or toys, he/she internalizes humanitarianism as voluntary acts of curative properties, but he/she rarely notices the extent to which agency of receivers is obscured. Harell-Bond (2002) discusses that the relation between UNHCR workers, for example, and refugees is asymmetrical and that the practice of charity is controversially donor-oriented rather than refugee-oriented. Charity places humanitarian workers in an uneven relation with refugees who become passive receivers of means of survival within the context of an already disempowering spatiality that is the refugee camp. Discussing controversial practices under humanitarian missions, Beneduce (2008) also argues that recognizability and subjectivities of aid receivers are often compromised in practices of humanitarian workers themselves. Aid workers' unconscious symbolic violence – as termed in Bourdieu's writings, their "invisible violence" through acts of indifference and nonresponsiveness justified through legal constraints (p. 516), their 'othering' – often-racist – approach to clandestine migrants from

Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia are a reflection of the contradictions that tarnish the idealism with which humanitarianism is equated.

In addition to its optimistic rhetoric, utopian claims and abstract idealism, modern humanitarian discourse is further flawed with its reliability on humanitarian sensibility. It is implicated with sentimentality that falls short of constructing a clear coherent notion of what humanity is (Festa, 2010) and what defines the human. For Festa, the category of humanity is elastic, broad, unstable and incapable of sufficiently elevating the sufferer to a fully political status. Furthermore, sentimentality does not cater to the victim as much as it does for sympathizing spectators. The act of witnessing suffering takes precedence over the position of the sufferer. As Festa notes, whether the subaltern is able to *feel* rather than *speak* becomes a legitimate question in analyzing the vertical relation between the sufferer and the spectator. Therefore, studying mainstream images of refugees is useful to examine discourse that thrives on celebrating the notion of universality, on harnessing sentimentality to communicate suffering, and on perpetuating the primacy of the spectator's gaze through depictions that do little to address the needs of sufferers.

Exclusionary practices are not alien to the mediated discourse on suffering of people who have sought refuge in the West over the past years. Initial observations reveal differential engagement with Syrians and non-Syrians. Further examination seeks to reveal how images perpetuate this discourse and how age, gender, skin color, appearance, spectators, among other considerations, become variables that legitimize or rule out recognition of equally afflicted communities. Images of African refugees gained less attention and were portrayed in different frames. Sestini's boat picture of people from Africa (Sestini, 2014), for example, constructs them as hordes, masses, swarms – a frame

that has implications for the way their suffering is perceived. The modern representations of boat people often suggest a global threat to identities of people living in distant prospective destination countries (Pugh, 2004), as in the current wave of migration that transcended distances, border controls, and conditions of air travel from third world countries to Schengen-armored Europe. In a sad yet ironic tone, Pugh uses the expression ‘drowning not waving’ to describe people who are framed in masses. He discusses the politics of securitization that surrounds the discourse on migrant masses in a globalization trend that upholds freedom of movement and mobility. Images that reinforce this discourse often provide electoral fodder for politicians, rationales for biopolitical border control policies, comfort for a distant guilty viewer, or brief sympathetic/ambivalent engagement with people of color. The differences between the discourse and the practice of universality prompt us to question the assumptions human-centric images make when they enter the field of visibility.

C. Images of the ‘Syrian Refugee Crisis’

When the photograph and the video of Omran Daqneesh, a child pulled from the rubble following an airstrike in Aleppo on August 17, 2016, circulated in international news media (Raslan, 2016), the world was reminded of the ongoing horrors in Syria. CNN anchor could not hold her tears as she read the news (Saul, 2016). The picture was shared, used as profile pictures on social media, appropriated into animation, and photoshopped into a version of the boy sitting on a table between Barrack Obama and Vladimir Putin as they negotiated international politics. Another boy becomes an icon in the course of the

Syrian war, but the image tells nothing of the war itself, of the reasons children were made to suffer and of what needs to be done to end their plight. What viewers did not see in the video is an older girl covered in dust and blood sitting in the same ambulance (Getty Images, 2016) but who failed to qualify as iconic. Two days later, another child, Omran's elder brother, Ali, died from severe wounds in the hospital. People in conflict live continuously in suffering, yet they are only acknowledged when an ideal story or image is good enough to become visible. These images demonstrate how demanding humanitarian sensibility is vis-à-vis sufferers when the opposite should be the case. They exemplify how much a sufferer owes the viewer for the latter to see and recognize his/her pain. It takes a lot of pain, a perfectly timed photo, a viewer-friendly victim frame, and a myriad of other factors to promote a victim into a legitimate sufferer. Even then, images do not necessarily help end the everyday atrocities that challenge universal ideals of humanitarianism. Human-centric images that promote selectivity in practices of humanitarianism are complicit in perpetuating a vicious circle in which suffering is made visible, intervened in briefly, but never eradicated.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS

This part analyzes images selected from different international photo agencies that circulated in news media and constituted a site for discussion during the refugee crisis. In what follows, I argue that certain human-centric images reinforce problematic discourses in visualizing suffering of different categories of sufferers. I explore common tropes in images of human suffering and analyze inhumane conditions that they perpetuate. The tropes of *the white savior and the saved*, *the feminized male / the wailing father*, *the ideal child victim*, *the salvageable woman* and *the collateral sufferer* participate in a humanitarian discourse that practices inclusion and exclusion of victims under regimes of protection based on considerations removed from the notions of shared precariousness. Portraying sufferers as victims whose emancipation necessarily happens at the hands of a white savior shifts the focus of the viewer from the real conditions of the sufferer to the achievements of the savior and the liberal humanitarianism he/she represents.

The tropes of the white savior and the saved as well as the salvageable woman/child perpetuate rescue narratives and present suffering in a commercialized frame that transforms human tragedies into mere commodities. They demonstrate how the focus on transnational humanitarianism and global morality can compromise the needs of sufferers or serve political gains. Outlining worthiness within constructs that appeal to liberal humanitarian sensibility marginalizes those who suffer yet do not belong to the ranks of ideal child, feminized, or elderly victims. While the suffering of children and women

deserves to be communicated to the world, certain tropes risk transforming their tragedies into commodities for purposes that have little to do with minimizing suffering. Ideal child victims and wailing men demonstrate how apologetic representations can reinforce the spectacularization of suffering and relegate other types of sufferers, whom I call *collateral sufferers*, into nonexistence. When the ideal victim's pain is portrayed as worthier, collateral sufferers are omitted from the viewer's understanding of worthiness. They are represented as insignificant, faceless bodies, which naturalizes refugeedom and normalizes a state of liminality. Under the process of humanization, other images encourage the normalization of refugeedom as a condition external to the idea of the self, the nation, and the present. These images present the refugee as a person from an imagined past, whose pains are a consequence of failed dictatorships that fall outside liberalism. The refugee in these images is portrayed as a victim of anomalies that can only be rectified through humanitarian intervention. However, failure of politics that genuinely addresses the needs of sufferers remains out of question. Precarity in these depictions is framed as incidental or as a mutation of the normal order of things in a liberal society, but never as systematic or symptomatic of a broader political and humanitarian failure. These images assume that remedies lie in intervention rather than prevention. They suggest that by humanitarianism we can save lives, but they do not imply why lives have to reach a stage where they need to be saved in the first place.

A. The White Savior and the Saved (figure 1)

Since he took office in October 2015, Canadian Prime Minister of the Liberal Party Justin Trudeau has shown a compassionate policy towards the Syrian refugees, pledging to accept 25000 Syrians by the end of February 2016 (“Canada meets target,” 2016). Trudeau has gained special media attention since his election; he formed a gender balanced cabinet, pledged support to help solve climate change, promised to address the cause of missing indigenous women, showed support to legalizing marijuana etc. (McKernan, 2015). Trudeau owes his popularity not only to his stands on respect for diversity and rebuilding ties with indigenous people (Mas, 2015), but also to his charismatic personality, young age and handsome looks. Trudeau embodies the image of a visually impeccable modern liberal man. He is white, young, successful, and an avid advocate of women and minority rights.

In image 1, Trudeau takes a humanitarian initiative in going personally to greet a number of Syrian refugees at the airport to hand them warm winter coats. He stands face to face with a girl who is in her father’s arms. The girl is in pink pants and a pink blouse jacket and has a white chamomile flower crown on her head. The father is smiling, but his face is only half-visible. The main protagonists of the photograph, from a camera angle, are Trudeau and the girl. A man in the background in a yellow high visibility vest looking to his left only tells us the people are in a securitized area. Trudeau smiles at the little girl. Raising his eyebrows and bending a little bit forward, he looks at her in the eyes, touching her pink blouse jacket with his finger and expecting her to say something or smile back. The father looks at her in a similar way, as if waiting for his child to say something or make a gesture, but she only gives an innocent look a child would to a stranger. The elements so far discussed are the performing subjects, the depicted actions they take, their appearances, profiles and the spatial and temporal context in which they operate. Taken at face value, the

image suggests that a liberal democratic government representing one of the politically powerful states in the world is making serious efforts to help Syrians affected by war. It also shows that Canada, represented by Trudeau, not only cares about children's rights to protection within its territories but also those in the distant Middle East. At the individual level, the gesture presents Trudeau as a compassionate man, aware of children's needs and humane in every respect. What the viewer clearly sees is Trudeau's face: a fatherly attitude, a stretched-out hand, and a supporting look. The image further demands the viewer to recognize Trudeau as the subject of primary importance. After all, an image of the father and the child with another man not as publicly known as Trudeau would be banal. It would only evoke what Barthes (1993) calls a general "polite interest" in an image (p. 27).

Juxtaposing a smiling white person with child and an approving man cast as brown and from the third world, establishes an uneven power relation between a man of authority and a bare life. Making Trudeau part of the image gives it more iconicity than does the presence of a refugee family. The image is more iconic because Trudeau is part of it. Trudeau, a public persona who represents liberalism, is pictured in action offering help to a Syrian family that not only needs protection but also asks for it by applying for asylum. Focusing aesthetically on him in the way he poses assumes that the audience has more interest in Trudeau than in the family. It suggests that the viewers would appreciate his gesture, praise his humanitarian policy, and support him on grounds of his compassion. The image also sends a message to supporters of anti-immigration policies that the incoming refugees are but innocent children in need of protection rather than dangerous terrorists or Islamist extremists. But the relation is also reminiscent of an imperialist discourse on the primacy of the white subject. It emphasizes a dominant trope that suggests the white man

has the responsibility to protect victims in the third world. It also recalls Abu Lughod's notion of "moral crusaders" (2013, p. 202) or the messianic savior in which the white man assumes the responsibility to intervene to mend the historically broken pieces of an imagined East. The child's and the father's poses are passive; they are framed in need and in expectation of Trudeau's action. The voice of the sufferer gives way to the gaze of the savior, producing a recurrent image that has been over-consumed in celebrity advocacy trends and electoral campaigns. This relationship constitutes an immaculate, appealing representation, in which the sufferer's gaze does not disrupt the aesthetic misrecognition that has taken place.

The absence of suffering is key. There are smiling faces, neat clothes, a flower tiara, and a kind Prime Minister. Trudeau's hand iconizes the white man's humanitarian and political support of the vulnerable third-world subject. Pain, dust and signs of violence are absent, as though ugliness has been trimmed and polished from the frame to appeal to a viewer tired of drama and thirsty for a happy ending. The subject's voice is unheard – or misheard – in a dualistic approach to photographic work that relegates the subject and foregrounds the needs of both the photographer and the viewer.

To better understand the aesthetic elements that make the image pleasing for the beholder, it is useful to look at the signs through aesthetics of ugliness and conversely what makes their alignment 'beautiful'. Rosenkranz and Haubner (2011) define ugliness through categories of amorphousness, asymmetry, and disharmony, the latter of which is relevant to this image. The encounter between Trudeau and the sufferer (the child) at the airport demonstrates nuances in the notion of disharmony. While disharmony is one category of ugliness, it can appear beautiful when the conflict "occurs between unified esoteric

differences by their justified collision” (p. 108). The third world refugee is an outsider to the viewer, but the aesthetic encounter/unity between Trudeau and the child elides differences. Discourses on nationness and fear of strangers assume that the refugee poses danger to the integrity of the nation. They cast incoming people as others whose responsibility must be shouldered elsewhere, in the countries they belong to or through humanitarian NGOs established to provide help. In these discourses, the third world citizen and the white man belong to two differently imagined worlds. However, in a discourse on liberal humanitarianism and establishment of human rights that has thrived in the age of globalization, the image frames the encounter between the two subjects as harmonious when it honors promises of global morality. It has a soothing effect for the liberal viewer’s process of moral witnessing. The aesthetic encounter translates into epistemological assumptions about the experience of the sufferer upon contact with the western male. The image encourages the spectator to confuse the harmonious encounter between the sufferer and the intervening white subject with the establishment of justice, promotion of equality, and the end of suffering. Visualizing the powerful white male in the first place, the child in the second, and concealing the third world male from the public gaze project an imperialist discourse that appropriates humanitarianism in paternalistic discourses about an imagined East. It also allows the practice of selectivity in the distribution of deservingness based on problematic categories of gender and age. Furthermore, the idea of comfort at the end of a long journey controversially suggests that the hells of war end at airport terminals, where survival migrants automatically enter the frames of visibility –and consequently – recognition. Aesthetically speaking, the sufferers in these images generally look neater, happier and more satisfied. The aestheticization of suffering, however, does not erase the

remnants of places the migrant has fled. It does not, at the very least, unpack the baggage of needs they have as refugees and the needs they *will* have as immigrants in a new cultural context they might not manage to embrace. It sweeps their subjectivities under the broad rug of humanitarian principles because addressing their specific and individually different needs is something that necessitates more than an approval of an asylum application or launch of a charitable initiative. Their predicaments become fodder for media attention, an ephemeral spectacle of appropriated suffering, an object at which one gazes and through which one practices moral witnessing. Ignatieff (1985) argues that morality claims embedded in the visualization of suffering Ethiopian children to Western audiences in quests of charity and provision of care amount to “promiscuous voyeurism” (p. 57). He also contends that the concept of global morality such representations reinforce is “brutally short” (p. 58) and loses international engagement once another story captures the attention of media and politics. These representations, which are intended to transcend distances and reach unconcerned viewers, he argues, “lay bare the interstellar moral distances that a culture of visual images conjures away with its cruel mime of immediacy” (p. 58).

What remains of the human face of tragedy if Trudeau is cut out of the picture? Why are there requisites for images to become iconic? And why do images of suffering need to become iconic for the suffering subject to gain recognition? These are questions to consider in assessing the way we perceive deservingness and how it must be distributed. Framing suffering has political consequences and is intrinsic to the practice of humanitarianism.

B. The Feminized Male, the Wailing Father (figure 2 & figure 3)

Images of sad narratives that ended with happy sufferers arriving to destination countries were common in the coverage of the Syrian crisis. Among these are those of Pope Francis with 12 families he rescued from a detention center in Lesbos and welcomed in Rome (Cocozza, 2016), ‘the Scientist’ Refaai Hamo with his son and daughter who settled in the U.S. and many other families of whose suffering the viewer sees only the final chapter. Iraqi Laith Majid’s story as told and visualized in the media proceeded in the same manner. Photographer Daniel Etter (2015) took the photo of Laith for the New York Times as the man landed in Kos after crossing from Bodrum in Turkey in a rubber boat (Figure 2). Laith stands at the center of the photograph – crying as he carries his daughter in one arm and hugs his son with the other. The father’s tears speak of a collusion of fear with relief. The facial expression is heartbreaking. The children’s faces are invisible. The people in the background are blurred, but one can tell they are other passengers picking up belongings from a boat. The colors of the image are dim, which gives it a sorrowful tone.

The image of Laith and his family is different from that of Trudeau. It captures a sad moment in the life the refugee has to go through in the process of fleeing war. It exposes the way conflict renders people – and more specifically children – powerless and vulnerable to death at sea. The image does not only provoke a general interest in the viewer because of its colors, timing, figures, actions or the Syrian conflict in general but is also endowed with the quality of the punctum: The tears of a scared, confused, helpless father bruise the viewer and render the image one of the iconic images of the Syrian conflict.

The image of Laith, whose name and background story did not gain the same attention as did the briskness of a frozen moment of a wailing father, circulated on social media and acquired iconicity in a timeframe where discourses of sympathy and fear burgeoned around the human face of the Syrian conflict. The aim of discussing this image in particular is not to analyze what elements constitute the punctum as much as it is to discuss how such punctum, which contributes to making the photograph iconic, can undergird a problematic discourse about the concept of deservingness and can challenge the idea of the performativity of suffering.

My entry point to understanding the relation here between deservingness on the one hand, and culture, gender and age on the other is to suggest imagining figure 2 without the daughter and son and figure 3 without Majid's family so as to highlight the role of children in the image. The presence of children maximizes affect. Although one does not see their faces, their legitimizing role as vulnerable categories creates part of the punctum. The image participates in a hegemonic discourse that produces normative forms of sympathy. It also alienates the subject, cast as typically brown, male and from the third world, from the frames of humanitarian universality by linking his recognizability to a social role (father) and a legitimizing agent (children). As previously mentioned, Johnson (2011) argues that, historically, human-centric constructions of refugee images, namely those of UNHCR, have shifted from the heroic, persecuted male to the helpless pitiable female or feminized subject. The image of the wailing father underscores this shift, in which the refugee in cultural imaginaries has not only been feminized, but also racialized when cast as a third world citizen, victimized and portrayed as helpless, wailing and unable to afford to protect his family. This contributes to the depoliticization of the refugee subject, in that it suggests

that Laith and whom he symbolizes are subjects without agency, need protection and cannot take care of themselves, inherently vulnerable and thus should not be allowed to new countries on grounds of preventive policies.

In his anthropological work on rituals, Victor Turner (1969) discussed the concept of liminality as a transitional phase between two symbolic stages where structural norm and form are waived temporarily. Turner discussed the concept in his seminal work on rituals performed by Ndembu tribes of Zambia. Liminality involves the withdrawal from the structure, in which ordinary life with its governing rules and norms is suspended. Refugeedom is a state of liminality in which refugees stand “betwixt and between” two lives (p. 107): the life that war or violence prescribed and that in which they seek reaggregation with normality. Sufferers do not wish to return to places where their suffering began, but at the same time, they have not yet remedied from the plights that forced them to leave in the first place. However, images of settled refugees sometimes suggest liminality ends with arrival in host countries. Against this process, the analysis addresses assumptions of reaggregation in which refugees are pictured as satisfied, thankful, and integrated.

The refugee experience is often portrayed as liminal, impure (Douglas, 1999), outside the national order of things (Malkki, 1992). The image in figure 2 operates in the limen, where the sufferer is still in a state of lack of belonging to a place. He can neither return to his country nor integrate in a new one. The image in figure 3 suggests the contrary. The missing members of the family rejoin the father to form a complete frame. Despair gives way to happiness. A melodramatic structure is resolved and the viewer is left with the illusion/impression that the liminal state is over. At the heart of this suggestion is a process of dehistoricization – the total elision of the conditions in which the sufferer has

lived and still does. The image in figure 2 makes an assumption to a half-guilty viewer that people are suffering, but the second image relieves him/her of the burden of morality now that he/she realizes the family has already received help. The perfectionism of abstract morality overshadows needs, twists and alters a genuine encounter with real suffering through cultural, political, and technological filters, and represents suffering in monolithic, hegemonic ways. In this abstract morality, embracing ideals of respect for diversity precede the genuine needs of the diverse; the details are lost in broad, quixotic, self-assuring formulations of reality in distant parts of the world; and “a self-aggrandizing multiculturalism neuters and evacuates the politics of class, race, and gender” (Abbas, 2010, p. 73). The image of the family enters in dialogue with the viewer’s wishful thinking, creates links between ongoing suffering in the world and the accomplishments liberalism will eventually offer, making chaos appear creative. It promotes a conditioned visibility that entails a conditioned response. As Abbas (2010) notes, “our care constructs its objects monolithically and only the speech that responds to us counts as speech; or when others serve as faithful illustrations of our moral conundrums or successes” (p. 73). Therefore, making certain constructs visible blinds the viewer from what lies beyond the image, making certain voices audible – intentionally or unintentionally, and muzzling voices that strive to be heard. Inclusion, therefore, incorporates exclusion from the aesthetic, but also from the political.

C. The Ideal Child Victim (figure 4)

Children make ideal victims, as does the trope of the wailing father. Children are regarded as inherently vulnerable. Hegemonic humanitarian discourse capitalizes on their visualization to highlight the human costs of war and to encourage donations. Children and women are often portrayed together. They are usually collapsed into one vulnerable category, an “undifferentiated whole” (Johnson, 2011, p. 1032). Certain constructs of refugee children promote a problematic discourse when they are portrayed in aestheticized frames that cater to the spectator’s eye, elide the real conditions in which they live, and obscure the root causes of their suffering.

Figure 4 shows children posing for the camera at al-Za’atari camp in Jordan (Mitchell, 2013). Six children dressed in humble winter clothes, three of whom wear open shoes. Their feet and pants look dirty. In the blurred background are tents fastened to the ground and other people standing. So far, the conditions evident in the image suggest these children must be living in misery. However, they are smiling cheerfully to the camera and raising their hands in V-signs. According to UNHCR data, al-Za’atari camp, which was set up in 2011, hosts more than 79,000 refugees distributed almost equally between males and females (“Syria regional refugee response,” 2016). Conditions in the camp are reportedly miserable: no electric supply, not enough space to sleep, and no signs of imminent settlement. The image of smiling children, however, suggests the contrary.

As Boltanski (1999) argues, the viewer responds to images of distant suffering through politics of pity, showing a tenderhearted emotion that links their condition to a benefactor or a persecutor. The image suggests a link to a benefactor – that someone/something has provided them the help they need. The sight of smiling children evokes a tenderheartedness the spectator derives from their gratitude towards the

person/thing that made them smile. The spectator might assume that the photographer has just given them a gift, that an NGO has just delivered donations, or that being photographed is enough to make these children happy. When the spectator sees gratitude in their looks, he/she no longer perceives them as precarious individuals and no longer thinks about the causes that led them to live in a camp. The response of the spectator ends there. Therefore, the viewer needs to see vulnerability performed as suffering to recognize it.

The exotic is attractive. Images of children from an imagined different world and time provoke interest. These children are part of an internationally recognized conflict that has gained attention because of its implications on people's movements from the Middle East and North Africa to Europe. There is pleasure in looking at happy children who are smiling in spite of their living conditions – a pleasure that nears the definition of the sublime. However, the gaze towards the sublime bears controversial questions about why we look and what the ways in which we look mean and entail. Children in a refugee camp dressed in dirty clothes, wearing flip-flops on a dirt road in winter must have more to say about their life in a camp than a heartwarming smile and a victory sign. The photographer knows what life these children lead. His encounter is epistemological, but also moral. What remains of the moving subjects is a frozen picture in time that translates the moral encounter to the viewer but leaves all details behind. The image aestheticizes suffering, poverty, statelessness, and homelessness.

In their examination of slum tourism in South and Southeastern Asia, Dovey and King (2012) discuss the tourist's gaze when visiting slums, drawing connections to the notions of the beautiful and the sublime. For Burke (1958), the beautiful and the sublime have different meanings; the first delights the beholder, but the second creates pleasure

through an encounter with the unknown. The sublime is the pleasure derived from the perception of fear, threat, thrill, danger, but only if under the condition of safety from them (Kant, 1974). These are children in dramatic conditions; the mere sight of them in real life creates pain, compassion, and fear for one's own children. It also creates guilt feelings when the viewer considers his/her moral responsibilities towards the most vulnerable and the most in need of care. As soon as these images start to overwhelm the viewer, his/her most dissonant feelings collude with their smile. The alternative it offers creates a sense of comfort. Cognitive dissonances no longer subdue the viewer. The children's smiles, coupled with their defying V-signs, suggest that their pain is not as exaggerated as the viewer would imagine. The viewer is resituated from a discomfort to a comfort zone, where the condition of safety is met and the sublime is left to please. The smile alienates responsibilities and leaves room for the *jusissance* of innocent children smiling in spite of war. The image does not seem hard to look at if we compare it with a picture of a crying unaccompanied migrant child. The smile creates a punctum, which transforms the picture into an attraction for an outsider's voyeuristic gaze. This voyeurism produces an aesthetic engagement with suffering that compromises one's moral sense of what should be recognized within the category of humanity. It also suggests to self that the current state of affairs is incorrigible, a by-product of war, or a collateral damage.

The problem with this picture is that behind its appealing form there is suffering that deserves to be presented as something that belongs to the sufferer and not the viewer. The smile of a child is naturally appealing, but it becomes disturbing when it gains attention at the expense of the difficulties children refugees face. It is also disturbing to portray children as in harmony and satisfied with their surrounding environment, which is a camp they were

forced to move to because of war. When this image becomes iconic, it also becomes legitimate to ask how this extensive focus on children as *the* ideal victims elides other equally wronged categories. It is also legitimate to argue that unless suffering is performed as a spectacle, response in the form of recognition and intervention will not take place. This unrecognized suffering will be merely collateral.

D. The Faceless Sufferer (figure 5 & figure 6)

A second prizewinner of 2015 World Press Photo, Italian photographer Massimo Sestini took the boat picture in figure 5 while on an Italian government search-and-rescue mission 25 kilometers from the Libyan coast (“Rescue Operation,” 2014). The boat was rescued shortly after. The image is taken from a helicopter (see figure 6). Refugees look small and distant in colorful clothes. They are so many that the boat is barely visible. Crammed in a small space, many of them look up in an apparent call for rescue. One of them waves his hand calling for help as the boat sails beautifully through the dark blue sea, leaving a white trail of waves behind. The image is paradoxically poignant and beautiful.

If there is a visual rendering of what the term *boat people* is, this must be one of the most telling. The term was first associated with migrants/refugees from South Vietnam who tried to reach South Asian countries and has since been used to refer to people who flee wars, political persecution, poverty and other forms of violence by sea. The term *boat people* and its visual representation are equally problematic because they deindividualize the refugee subject. Confining the discursive construction of human beings within one term and a boat image relegates them to insignificant bare lives with no histories, subjectivities,

agency, or rights. This process challenges the supposed universality of humanitarianism, whereby all suffering people deserve to be helped, protected, given a place to live, and ensured viable conditions of safety and emotional and economic security.

Representing people in masses also informs biopolitical measures and anti-immigration policies. Refugees are cast as numbers flocking towards liberal countries. The trope of the faceless sufferer goes in parallel with what Douglas (2003) terms symbolic dirt that poses an existential threat to the purity and integrity of the nation. All of these refugees look similar. No distinguishing features define them except their skin color and clothes. Cast as immigrants from a different world – and a different time, they are reminiscent of, and derive their iconicity from images of other boat people, such as those of 1978 Indochina, Indonesian boat people heading to Australia and other less visible people such as the Rohingya boat people of Myanmar. The trope of the faceless sufferer suggests that the causes of their movement are one and that the needs they have are the same.

Representing migrants in ostensibly apocalyptic masses also defies the normative perception of foreigners as small numbers and minorities. Images of refugees flocking in boats disrupt the “we-making process” Appadurai (2006, p. 50) discussed in his essay *Fear of Small Numbers*. Appadurai discusses how identity and self are constructed versus the Other, how people mobilize cultural differences to outline their identity and the resulting dynamics of inclusion vs. exclusion, purity vs. danger, and disruption vs. national integrity. The amalgamation of individual subjects into a collective category in the use of written or visual frames suggests that identities may be exposed, stability threatened, and a wholeness rendered incomplete if they are ever allowed into new countries. The people looking upward inside the boat are men, mostly of color; they are waving in a desperate call for

help to be saved from a looming drowning. The image suggests that the dominant homogenizing stereotype of the African migrant is not misrepresentative of reality. It makes many assumptions. For example, these are migrants who risked their lives in a boat because they could not afford to reach Europe by other means. Consequently, they will continue to need the economic support of the countries in which they are allowed to settle, unless they are otherwise repatriated to their home countries, where their humanitarian burden can be externalized behind borders and where similar ‘others’ can shoulder their responsibility. The process of Othering is at play, where the colonial gaze isolates the other in the past, in another place, even when the other is in the present. As Lippard (2003) notes, “One of the hegemonic devices of colonialism (postcolonialism is hardly free of it either) has been to isolate the Other in another time, a time that also becomes another place — The Past — even when the chronological time is the present” (p. 346). These men are cast in the same molds, as beings coming from a “timeless” Orient (Said, 1978). The loneliness of a cramped boat at sea waiting to be rescued might invite the viewer to look and sympathize, but it is also alienating. The lack of contact with individual faces separates the spectator from the sufferer. The irrationally cramped boat makes the migrant’s exposure to death look like a self-inflicted pain. Furthermore, the context of rescue efforts in which boat images gain their visibility and iconicity suggests that saving sufferers from imminent death is a generous moral act of humanity by European governments rather than an indicator of a larger humanitarian and political problem.

What further characterizes this image is the aerial view from which it was captured. This view produces a discourse controversial in at least two ways. First, the image of suffering is aesthetically appealing. The position of the photographer, who appears in

another picture fastened to a helicopter while he takes the picture (figure 6) (“Massimo Sestini,” 2014), allows a romanticized, aesthetic outcome (the deep blue against the vibrant colors of men’s clothes). The physical distance between the photographer and the subjects further recreates and accentuates the distance between the refugee’s suffering and the viewer. Kozol (2014) contrasted the problematic aerial imperial view and the downward looking gaze in U.S. drone warfare with a close, intimate engagement with human plights. These visual perspectives, she argues, reproduce a narrative of rescue that operates within vertical binaries of East and West, saviors and victims, whites and people of color, charities and beneficiaries etc. All of this takes place in a humanitarian context that eschews politics as a field intrinsic to the existence and the eradication of suffering, and renders the dysfunction of the global economic system out of calculation in addressing victims of structural violence (Pugh, 2004).

E. Apologetic Victims (figure 7)

If deindividualizing sufferers leads to their dehumanization, individualizing them is not always a therapeutic intervention. As mentioned earlier, the hierarchization of victims, even in discourses that pay attention to faces, names and identities, render humanitarianism at the level of policies, practices, legal texts and media representations an unfulfilled moral claim.

In figure 7, a girl wearing a yellow hooded rain poncho looks gently into the camera, holding a cardboard paper sign bearing the words, “We are humans like you” (Isakovic, 2016). The girl stands among other people. Another person carries another sign.

What does the focus on a child girl say about the notion of the worthy victim? And what does the content of the sign say about the position of the sufferer with respect to an assumed viewer?

Violence, according to Delanty (2000), is not only a political and ethical question, but also a cognitive one conditioned by cultural, social, and historical considerations. So is the concept of a victim. Our notions of who is a worthy and a deserving victim changes across space and time. Some victims are regarded as more 'victims' than others. Their suffering is recognized, met with compassion, and made the object of humanitarian care. Others suffer, but their conditions are locked completely outside recognition. They are relegated to subjects whose suffering is, for example, the outcome of their own actions. Flawed humanitarian and political practices appear to have nothing to do with the conditions in which they live. The violence they sustain passes ephemerally in the imaginaries of society because it is isolated and cast as individual and disconnected from structural and political violence. Unworthy sufferers are obscured from the visible realm. They do not have what it takes to qualify as victims. Not only do they lack attention, but their bodies are also considered unworthy of humanitarian recognition because they are cast as alien to notions of deservingness for the pre-assumed viewer. But the sacredness of human lives must not be conditioned by time or space, cultural or national conditions. To claim that humanitarianism is inclusionary of all suffering, the notion of shared precariousness must recognize all forms of violence and must include all sufferers regardless of the ways they are cast.

The camera loves child victims. A child in worn-out clothes, a child in tears, or a child refugee makes an ideal victim. The media amplify children's worthiness by engaging

with them as newsworthy. This is because they receive more attention and invite more compassion and indignation (Hoijer, 2004). For Jiwani (2011), race, gender, and sexuality are indicators for the extent to which the state and the media regard a victim as worthy. Ideal victims comprise children, women, and elderly people, while terrorists and young men are considered less ideal or unworthy (Christie, 1985; Hoijer, 2004). For Wanzo (2008), the “difference between idealized victims and others demonstrates which discourses make victims legible to the state or media” (p. 114), hence visibility is shaped by volatile constructs of race, ethnicity, gender etc. Jiwani (2011) explains that the profile of recognizable victims must be consistent with the frame of the salvageable innocent. To be considered worthy, victims must invite a compassionate gaze and consequently construct the viewer as the ultimate savior.

“We are humans like you” is a truism so obvious that it does not require justification, but stating the obvious in this context is a way the sufferer hopes to challenge a presumed willful blindness on the part of the gazing world. The sufferer situates herself in an apologetic position, looking up into our eyes, adjuring us to see her pain, to let her in on grounds of philanthropy, altruism, and humanity. Her voice, which she communicates through imploring words and sympathy-seeking looks, wants to assert her worthiness, detach her from the hegemonic stereotypes associated with her culture, and make a touching plea to the world to recognize her vulnerability. The problematic aspect in this construction is the apologetic discourse the sufferer often propagates, the alibis she has to present for not being a putative criminal, the continuous proof of humanness she is required to submit in search for her recognition.

Victims of discrimination and inequality often strive to prove their worthiness to the world, and their efforts invite us to question why the victim needs to do so and to whom this justification is often addressed. For example, in 2014, the rise of ISIS was followed by a wave of bombings and attacks in Europe and the U.S. Among these were the Charlie Hebdo shootings in January 2015, the bombing in Brussels on March 22, 2016, Paris on November 13, 2015, San Bernardino, California on December 2, 2015, and Orlando shootings on June 12, 2016. Political and media discourses on security threats gave rise to anti-Muslim sentiments in the U.S. and Europe. Electoral campaigns relied on scaremongering tactics, such as U.S. Presidential candidate Donald Trump's call for banning Muslims from entering the United States (Pilkington, 2015). An apologetic social media trend ensued, where, for example, blindfolded Muslims had themselves filmed while they offered free hugs to passersby in an express, unnecessary affirmation of Muslimhood and rejection of terrorism ("I'm a Muslim," 2015). They pleaded validation of their humanity by asking whether people trusted them 'in spite of' their religion ("Blindfolded Muslim man," 2015). The Orlando Nightclub shootings, which coincided with Ramadan, prompted Muslims in New York to organize prayers outside the shooting location in order to denounce senseless violence on behalf of the Muslim community ("New York Muslims," 2016). Muslims donated blood, started fundraisers and made public statements to prove their solidarity ("American Muslims send a powerful message," 2016). These are examples where communities that feel targeted or excluded from the social fabric try to prove their right to inclusion. This apologetic rhetoric is also prevalent in mainstream discourse on the right of refugees to receive help in new countries. Campaigns calling for the acceptance of refugees use the values of humanity as an argument. Human centric images also focus on

the vulnerability of the refugee subject to justify why he/she should be protected. Other images, such as those that present the refugee as a productive person (a professor, an athlete, a teacher etc.) follow the same rhetoric. Although these images portray refugees as not necessarily vulnerable, they are problematic because they link their deservingness to factors outside suffering itself. These images do challenge the hegemonic frame of the modern time refugee but they also suggest that those who deserve help are those who prove they are more useful to their new environment. Thus, deservingness does not come as a natural result of being human or exposed to suffering, but is rather a conditioned privilege that comes at a cost.

The image of a child appealing to humanity in search for her basic human rights of food, shelter, and a safe place to live is an example where suffering must be performed to be recognized. It suggests that humanitarianism with its broad universalizing claims *is* the answer and the road to saving vulnerable children from the horrific conditions of war. It assumes that a sympathetic look, a generous action, or a charitable campaign might give these children what they need. It further exposes a gap in humanitarianism, a deep flaw in the refugee regime under liberalism, where the only legible thing about the sufferer is her biology (Ticktin, 2011b). This image reveals the cost of war for children but excludes other categories who cannot afford to display their vulnerability and those whose vulnerability or worth is not necessarily legible to humanitarian sensibility.

F. The Salvageable Woman (figure 8)

This part will discuss the trope of the salvageable woman as another ideal victim that caters for the liberal viewer's notion of deservingness. The image of a woman carrying her child has the relentless power to attract a wandering camera lens, evoke universal sympathy, or create moral indignation. A manifestation of naked vulnerability and deplorable helplessness, the image of distressed motherhood does not cease to be the hallmark of visual representation of suffering in war, famine, diseases, and natural disasters.

Many images of women and children gained historical iconicity. Examples of these are Da Vinci's *Pietà*, Dorothea Lange's *Migrant Mother*, Alfred Eisenstaedt's miserable mother and child in the wasteland of 1945 Hiroshima, Werner Bischof's hungry mother and son in 1951 Province of Bihar (India), Don McCullin's twenty-four-year-old breastfeeding mother and her child in Biafra Nigeria 1989, and McCullin's exhausted mother and child at the border of India and Bangladesh, 1971. The images of women and children together convey the most harrowing aspects of war because they represent atrocity manifested in the conditions of the most vulnerable. These images never cease to claim their precedence over others. But what does the focus on the 'heartbreaking' images of children in their mothers' arms specifically in the Syrian refugee crisis say about the representations of Middle Eastern women in the context of a conflict in which radical ideologies and frantic extremism have thrived and presumably threaten the most celebrated ideals of modern liberalism? What does a truncated family from which a masculine subject has been omitted, intentionally or unintentionally, say about the regarding of the refugee's pain when the family is cast as belonging to a different culture, particularly an imagined East?

The relation between the mother and child is universal. It resonates with sympathizers around the world, yet the meaning making of a woman and child image – a woman who wears a veil (figure 8) – in the political context of the Syrian conflict, the migration crisis, the electoral race in the United States, Turkey’s attempts to join the European Union and its location as a crossing to Europe, historical chasms between the East and West, the rise of ISIS and the West’s discourse on radical Islam, invites us to consider this representation within its political, cultural and humanitarian contexts.

The woman in figure 8 is identified as a Syrian mother. She has fled Syria and hopes to reach Europe. She is wearing a veil, not looking straight at the camera because she is more concerned with protecting her child whose face she has drawn to hers in a tender protective manner. What is distinguishable in this image is outweighed by the absence that it incorporates. The image assumes that the photographer has pointed towards this particular representation as the complete manifestation of pain. It assumes that subjects excluded from the frame do not embody suffering or do, but do not invite a moral response. I am more concerned in this image and in similar images specifically with the absence of the masculine subject. The systematic relegation of the male subject into the ranks of sufferers who are unworthy of visual recognition in the first place and moral and political recognition in the second delegitimizes the frame from which he is excluded even when the objective is to shed light on the atrocities and the unremitting pains of war. As Abbas (2010) argues, “When a certain premium on representing suffering hammers both the suffering and the sufferer into a prescribed form, this representational imperative itself becomes an ascetic ideal that violates rather than honors, even in the most fervent attempts at justice” (p. 74).

The image of a child and a mother evokes sympathy, but it also reproduces hegemonic constructs of femininity as feeble and unable to protect itself. Pictures of women and children have become defining images of the refugee subject as they, Johnson (2011) argues, fall within the feminization trope of the refugee. UNHCR, the primary entity concerned with the protection of refugees, has intensely used the images of women and children to represent the modern time refugee. While women and children suffer immensely in conflicts and do need to be addressed in humanitarian policies, representing the woman as a weak subject suggests that she has no political agency.

The hierarchization of vulnerability is not only a characteristic of human-centric images but is further institutionalized in humanitarian aid regimes. In UNHCR policies and practices, vulnerability is defined through prescribed categories related to age, sex, marital status, health condition and so on. For example, Turner (2005) lists twenty categories of vulnerability UNHCR used in registration processes at Lukole refugee camp in Tanzania where Burundian refugees settled. These include acronyms such as UAM (Unaccompanied Minor), SP (Single parent) or double vulnerability categories such as SP/MD (Single parent/mentally disabled). The prevalent images of suffering capitalize on the visualization of these categories although these categories fail to cater to every survival migrant who falls outside their conventional constructs. They reinforce exclusionary practices as basis for humanitarian intervention. To suggest a hierarchy in victimization based on prescribed notions of vulnerability, eschewing violence that fails to leave a physical or psychological trace on the sufferer's body, or find its path to frames of visibility because of prescribed notions of victimhood, denies the whole concept of humanitarianism its assumed

universality. This image is another example of the way portrayals of vulnerable categories play a role in defining categories worthy of humanitarian intervention.

What are the cultural processes that make images of Syrian women and child migrants outweigh other victims who live under the same conditions, but do not make it to the ranks of worthy sufferers? A subaltern refugee from the hells of Middle East, with all its associated ideas of patriarchy and oppression, the woman speaks through the voice of the other. Her suffering is channeled through the spectator's conception of what the suffering a helpless woman cast as a third world female with a child looks like. The imprint of suffering is visible in her daughter's downcast eyes. We do not see her male partner either because he is not present or because he was not meant to be. This recurrent frame selection suggests first that the inclusion of the male subject, if at all present, would mar the impeccability of the image; second, it may assume that male subjects are most probably the ones taking part in warfare and consequently are unworthy of being framed or treated as victims.

The image involves more than one problematic aspect. It is recurrent in similar forms and different contexts, spreadable across media, effective in terms of spectator's moral response. However, from a cultural perspective, the rescue trope it perpetuates depoliticizes suffering women by suggesting that performing vulnerability is a guarantee to recognition. At the humanitarian action level, it also has implications for the distribution of humanitarian response across genders and age groups (Kibraeb, 2003).

G. Collateral Sufferers, Normalized Liminality (figure 9)

Among the many images that I have looked at in search of visual representations of migrants, I came across very few ones that highlight the liminal conditions in which non-Syrians continue to live. The Syrian crisis drew renewed attention to the Calais camp, controversially referred to across the media as the ‘Jungle’ (Harker, 2016), a frame that suggests the human beings who live there are beasts or tribes from an imagined past. At Calais, thousands of human beings hope and dream of reaching the UK and other European countries but cannot.

Since the opening of the camp in 1999, lives of asylum seekers in Calais have been stuck in liminality. The camp survived decisions of French authorities to close it permanently in 2001 and 2002. But people continued to arrive in boats while European authorities continued to invest millions of dollars in security measures against letting them in (Collins, 2015). The UK had deployed the so-called National Barrier Asset to prevent infiltration of immigrants and potential ‘suicide attackers’ who happened to be originating from Eritrea, Pakistan, Syria, Iran, Sudan, Albania, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Nigeria and Bangladesh (“Who, What, Why,” 2015).

One of the first symptoms of a problematic media engagement with the refugees/migrants/asylum seekers in Calais camp is the name that the place has acquired over time in the last 17 years. As Collins (2015) notes, the camp was first referred to as “the so called ‘Jungle’” then it slowly became referred to as ‘the Jungle’ with no quotation marks. Normalizing dehumanization in language use and erasing signs of humanity in visual representations of Calais refugees are equally salient. Most of the images that the search ‘Calais refugees’ returns on Google image search are those of tents – amalgamations of miserable, squalid and scattered makeshift homes. There are no faces, no human

presence, no identities – only puddles of mud, piles of garbage, signs and banners, and aerial views of ‘before and after’ photos that depict an apocalyptic transformation. At best, when the faces begin to appear, they come in masses of people standing in lines, or gathering to protest a security procedure. The gaze of the disciplinary power, as Foucault puts it, is always present, supervising their bodies, their movement and their entire existence. Power in Calais renders freedom unnecessary, dangerous, and antithetical to that of the liberal spectator. Refugees are confined to a state of exception. The burden of their humanity is ascribed to anything but the states they aspire to reach. These people are not counted as victims because they do not enjoy the privilege of calling the Syrian war theirs or the full right to avail of its visibility to claim their basic human rights. They are victims of another form of violence that does not belong in the stipulations of international conventions on refugees. Their misery is framed as circumstantial, merely accidental, blamed on anything but the failures of the economic and political systems around the world. Their subjectivities are relegated to figures and currencies with which western countries shape their immigration policies.

In spite of the visibility that refugees gained in the past two years, immigrants from African countries remained invisible, and their recognition contingent on the extent to which their presence and numbers in Calais posed a looming threat to French authorities. They appeared in news about imminent evictions, illegal crossing on lorries, jumping aboard speedy trains, arrival or blocking of aid convoys, or implications of ‘the Brexit’ vote in the UK. Their suffering was collateral, secondary, marginal. They rarely appeared as individuals with names, voices, stories, pasts, histories, or future aspirations.

Among the few individual images of survival migrants across which I came is an image of a Sudanese man seated in a plastic chair (Morenatti, 2015). Another man, a migrant like him, gives him a haircut while the Sudanese man looks in a mirror he is holding (figure 8). The scene is set in open air against a greenish landscape, tarnished by a pile of trash in the background and a trash bin in the foreground. Their gaze downcast as we look, there is no interpersonal, eye-to-eye contact with the spectator; the two men are there to convey a condition in which the sufferer lives. Tents are surprisingly not part of the image. Instead, bushes perpetuate the spectator's conception of an already constructed 'Jungle'. The two men appear relaxed, worryless, in harmony with their surroundings. The act of hair cutting suggests that the status quo is the new normal, severed from a past condition or a reaggregation with a new future. Spectators know the men are in a liminal stage, struggling to go about their day-to-day lives, but they do not see enough individual suffering or signs of vulnerability that compromises their sense of morality. The serenity of the image transforms the context into a normalized one. The spectator starts to believe that liminality is no longer suspending life in its basic forms. Liminality becomes the new normal and the spectator is left with the comfort that death is not something they encounter every day: these men look healthy and are able to take care of one another.

Liminality, in Turner's (1967) theory of ritual, is the state of being in between two structural states, "an interstructural situation" (p. 93). Stuck in liminality, refugees are neither citizens, nor naturalized immigrants. They live in suspension, awaiting a light at the end of the tunnel, living off a humanitarian intervention policy, but aspiring for a political recognition that transfers them across a physical and an existential border beyond the impositions of the state of the exception. Behind constructions of nameless human beings

are historical subjects with identities. They try to break up the bleakness of a camp, defy negative representations, but also totalizing referents and categories through which political beings elsewhere lump them in. These migrants, hardly refugees, are at once inside and outside the state, in a zone where laws are designed to discipline them into containment but do not promise them freedom. The severity or lenience with which they are treated and governed depends solely on the ethical and moral sense of the policewomen and men dispatched to control them (Agamben, 2000). This state of exception becomes quasi-permanent rather than a temporary disposition. Transition becomes a way of life. At Calais, there are restaurants, a theatre, a bookshop named 'Jungle Books', WiFi, churches, and mosques (Allen, 2015). The normalization of temporariness, refugeedom, and liminality enters visual discourse, too. Images reinforce the conjecture that the new normal is a refugee to be contained, controlled, but also helped to survive liminality. Migrants in Calais personify the paradoxes of the humanitarian regime, where the practice of humanitarianism serves to meet the day-to-day needs of survival in the micro sense, but perpetuates the flagrant shortcomings, the crippling inadequacies of political regimes that have failed to end the tyranny of the state of exception. Refugees for UNHCR, as Turner (2005) notes, are bare lives in need of means of survival until their issues are resolved. UNHCR is part of a humanitarian, yet paternalistic endeavor to manage these mostly undocumented inhabitants. Refugees are people who have lost their cultures and political identities, like "loose atoms with no norms to guide them" (p. 323) and by creating a moral environment where subjects do not transcend the construction of innocent victims, humanitarian discourse falls short of the universal claims it upholds. Humanitarianism in this sense, in rendering these humans

biological beings, becomes the patchwork with which politics covers up its failures to honor basic human rights to life, domicile, country etc.

H. Commodified Suffering (figure 10)

Not only is refugeedom cast as a normalized liminal condition, but the suffering of the refugee is also often transformed into a commodity that obliterates the needs of sufferers. In September 2015, a Hungarian photographer working for the Hungarian national television was caught on camera tripping Osama Abdul Mohsen, a Syrian refugee as he was carrying his child at the border area of Rözke (“Hungarian camera woman,” 2015). The video was widely shared on social media. Users showed sympathy with the father and child and condemned the photographer for her act of inhumanity, which cost her her job and prompted her to apologize (Nolan, 2015).

The story did not end here. One week later, news reported the arrival of Abdul Mohsen and his son Zaid in Barcelona, where the father was later offered the opportunity to join a football coaching academy (“Tripped refugee heading to Spain,” 2015). A month later, the seven-year old Zaid met his idol, football player Cristiano Ronaldo, on a football pitch in front of thousands of spectators ahead of a game in the Spanish football league, while his father and elder brother watched from the stands. This came as part of a PR campaign in which Real Madrid Football Club pledged a million U.S. dollars to help refugees who had arrived in Spain (“Cristiano Ronaldo meets Syrian boy,” 2015).

In figure 10, the internationally venerated sports entertainment idol, and one of the players renowned for his charitable initiatives outside the pitch, walks beside Zaid, smiling

restrainedly, as the boy looks overwhelmed with joy, clapping his hands next to him. The player puts his hand around the boy's head, as if to lead him, in a fatherly attitude. The caption, as written by photographer Sergio Perez from Reuters, introduces the boy as a Syrian refugee – without mentioning his name, referring to the tripping incident and describing his smile as he stands next to the player before the match. Adding more sensationalism to the already emotional picture, Reuters opens up the article with a statement about a Syrian boy whose dream has come true: “The dream of a seven-year-old Syrian boy, who along with his father was tripped up by a Hungarian camerawoman while being pursued by police, has come true. He met his football idol Ronaldo” (“Cristiano Ronaldo meets Syrian boy,” 2015, para. 1).

One of the troubling aspects of the image of a famous person who selected a Syrian child to use in a charity event is the appropriation of suffering for unabashedly commercial ends. What is more troubling is that whether the spectator is unaware of the corporate motives behind such appropriation or knows but chooses to turn a blind eye, the feelings that sensationalism in this type of discourse evoke overshadow the real problems of refugees on grounds that one visible case has been resolved. The reader is led to perceive that the suffering was there, but he/she is left to imagine the severity of the suffering. The spectator can tell what the family – the father at least – has gone through on his way to Europe – because the spectator has probably seen the video in which he was kicked. However, the rest is left to the imagination. Meanwhile, there is no interest in the personal accounts of suffering the family has to offer, and no demand to know what kind of violence prompted the family to leave. The viewer's expectations are shaped and at the same time met within this frame: a child was suffering, but he eventually fulfilled his dream. The

spectator is led to overlook the realities of a distant place called the Middle East. The history and the subjectivities of the sufferer are quarantined in an imagined past.

Monetizing human values and transforming suffering into a commodity, as Kleinman and Kleinman (1997) note, is one way where the experience [of the sufferer] is “remade, thinned out, and distorted” (p. 2).

The image of the football player bears many assumptions about the European man and the third world vulnerable human being. It assumes that it is by foreign intervention of a European upper class, rich white man that the consequences of war on children are erased. It also assumes that the problems of the child do not transcend the frames set forth by the construction of the image. Here we have a child who has always dreamt of meeting his football idol in person and the latter gave him this opportunity. The image implies that the boy’s needs have been met. The real needs of the family are not part of the image, not even aesthetically. The presence of the football player also overshadows that of the boy, whose image alone would not, in this setting, make sense on a football pitch. The boy acts as a supporting object that legitimizes claims of a public persona to acts of morality and love for charity. The image does not revolve around the suffering subject because it relegates his suffering to an assumed past. It perpetuates the idea that suffering disappears once the third world citizen lands in the liberal world. Although the father was the main protagonist in the tripping incident, to which only the presence of the son gave an appealing dimension, the father is later omitted from the frame. The human value assigned to individuals who suffer equally therefore varies according to marketing demands. A PR campaign about a generous sports club would rather opt for a third world child to promote the club’s and the player’s image than a third-world male. At this point, the egalitarian

principle of equal distribution of grievability, which Judith Butler (2009) so ardently advocated, is compromised. It is overwhelmed by a sensationalist construction of suffering that falsely assumes justice is eventually served. The image further assumes that other children who are equally suffering will find their savior, through similar humanitarian interventions. By polishing the image of the suffering child in refugee camps of Turkey, Jordan, temporary shelters in Germany, or children who still live in conflict zones, the image gives the spectator a sense of moral relief derived from witnessing pain under the shelter of safety. The act of moral witnessing thus becomes a form of entertainment (Kleinman & Kleinman, 1997) and the appropriation of suffering becomes a profitable venture instead of a selfless act of humanity. The club gains more visibility, enhances viewership, attracts more advertisement bids, and boosts the sale of sports kits through the use and commercialization of human tragedies. As Kleinman and Kleiman also note, the sight of suffering, which the spectator does not go through, gives him/her enhanced moral status. They parallel this inflated moral superiority with the view of barbarism in Africa in the late nineteenth century that led to a justification of colonialism on grounds that intervention was not a right as much as it was an act of kindness. Looking at this image, the liberal spectator assumes that he/she has just stretched his/her hand generously to save these people from their selves.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

As the question of disenfranchised populations of sufferers, referred to as refugees, immigrants, internally displaced persons or asylum seekers etc., continues to unfold, research is further needed to examine how media intervention can (or cannot) be a variable in their lives. Other studies can build on the results of the present research to examine the complex relation between suffering, the media, politics and humanitarianism in other geographical contexts, such as the reported forced movement of Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar to refugee camps in South Bangladesh (Solomon, 2017). The concepts of deservingness can be examined and compared/contrasted in relation to the Syrian refugee crisis that is known to have gained a lot of visibility in comparison to other conflicts. Separate studies can be dedicated for an in-depth examination of each of the tropes mentioned above, thus focusing on children, women, men, people of color or any social categorization of sufferers and how the media portrayed it. Further studies can also look into the media engagement with Calais camp before and after its demolition to paint a better and more informed picture of areas of interest to the media and mediated humanitarianism in light of the displacement and uprooting of thousands of sufferers in and outside the camp.

The analysis of images prevalent in mainstream media demonstrates that to qualify as iconic, the image of a sufferer must contain aspects that cater to the needs of an ideal audience but do not necessarily need to revolve around the specific needs of the sufferer, the root causes of suffering or the ways in which suffering can be brought to an end. The images discussed, if assembled, would make up a sensational handbook on how to save the world, the tropes being answers to what and whom the compassionate spectator should sympathize with. The handbook would provide readymade answers to simplistic questions such as *'how does an average refugee look like?'*; *'which refugees need help the most?'*; *'how to change a refugee's life in a single step?'* *'how to donate to make a difference?'* etc. The images provide a totalizing view into the world and give the spectator the illusion of empowerment. They reduce the plights of less fortunate people into something that, however complicated, can be solved in a single click.

In the trope of the white savior and the saved, visualizing the suffering of the refugee becomes the means by which the white savior himself gains visibility and becomes the primary protagonist in suffering. This trope constructs the viewer as a spectator whose interest in refugees is conditioned by the presence of the savior and maintained by the unfolding of a melodramatic narrative. In this structure, the viewer is aware that suffering existed before the image but does not see traces of it. Instead, the intervention of the savior and the satisfaction of the sufferer represent the climax and the denouement of the narrative, before which the exposition of the events that caused suffering are not considered equally important.

The trope of the feminized sufferer, expressed in the image of the wailing father, establishes additional conditions for deservingness of visibility. These conditions cast

refugees in passive, helpless frames and demonstrate how the image of the refugee has in fact changed from the heroic to the feminized (Johnson, 2011). They also show that the image of the refugee male does not qualify to be a legitimate victim of conflict or poverty unless other elements that cater to liberal sensibility intervene.

Like feminized victims, other tropes show that images of children are the most affective. They are the ideal version of a salvageable refugee. So are mothers, whose prevalent portrayals as distraught and powerless construct the audience as saviors through the mere act of witnessing from afar. The capitalization on women and children alienates other victim categories that equally need not only the attention of a distant viewer but also the intervention of organizations and regimes that rely on images of suffering to address those who are most in need of care.

Other problematic tropes construct the victim as apologetic, in which the image presents the refugee as conditionally worthy of recognition depending on his/her age, emotional state, gender, appearance, education etc. This trope suggests that the sufferer owes the viewer something for the mere fact of being in pain. It further assumes that the act of witnessing suffering of the wretched brings suffering to an end. It places a burden on sufferers to prove that they are vulnerable and consequently worthy.

The tropes of the collateral and the faceless sufferer demonstrate that even when the suffering of certain victims – mostly those cast as from Africa – becomes iconic and telling of their conditions at Calais camp, certain images still portray them as collateral sufferers who can only gain marginal and conditional visibility. These victims do not earn their visibility because of their actual suffering, be it due to poverty or conflict, but because of the threat they pose for the countries they attempt to enter. They are but supporting actors

in the spectacle of the ‘refugee crisis’, the concern over whom fluctuates depending on the extent to which suffering becomes too loud for host countries to ignore.

The images of sufferers at Calais camp further assume that for African migrants, the condition of being in a camp and waiting for a chance to enter Europe *is* the normal. These images, and the stories they tell, give the viewer the impression that no intervention can save them from their conditions because their problems are a result of their failing governments and not of a highly visible and atrocious war like the one raging in Syria.

When suffering is packaged in ways that appeal to liberal sensibility, it is legitimate to ask why recognizability comes at a price and how the commodification of people’s pain contributes to the perpetuation of the wretched conditions in which they live. Visualizing suffering is important, not because images are intrinsically emancipating or that witnessing suffering behind a screen adds something to the lives of people who suffer, but because they act as indicators for the distribution of deservingness within humanitarian regimes and so have implications for processes of inclusion and exclusion.

While these tropes tailor suffering in aesthetic forms that are limiting and exclusive, they also present the needs of the spectator as packaged and invariable. They assume that this rendering of suffering is what the spectator needs to see. By resorting to hegemonic tropes that reproduce suffering aesthetically in similar controversial ways, images not only obscure the voice of the sufferer, but also reduce the spectator’s needs in witnessing suffering to mere entertainment. These tropes surrender the spectator’s agency as they do the sufferer’s. The portraits of war thus define the elements of an ‘acceptable’ sufferer, but also pre-construct their beholders as homogenous and equally depoliticized.

In his book *Empire of Humanity*, Barnett (2011) argues that “humanitarianism is a creature of the very world it aspires to civilize; from the days of the abolitionists to today’s peacebuilders, humanitarian action has been lodged somewhere between the present day and the utopian. Humanitarianism is not one of a kind but rather has a diversity of meanings, principles, and practices; all humanitarians share a desire to relieve unnecessary suffering, but agreement ends there” (p. 221) Barnett likens some markings of humanitarianism to an Empire that exercises power over the sufferers it is supposed to protect.

Between the utopian claims that undergird principles of humanitarianism and the practices entrenched in a reality governed by political interests, the disenfranchised sufferer remains a being in liminality, suspended from regimes of protection but given enough to survive. He/she becomes a *Homo Sacer*, a mere bare life in relation to the power of the humanitarian and political regimes. In Butler’s egalitarian vision of a new kind of community where corporeal precariousness sets the base for the right to protection, the practice of humanitarianism remains short of ensuring inclusion of lives outside the norms of liberalism, rendering claimed universality exclusionary and protection selective. This study has discussed how human-centric images that visualize suffering do considerable work in perpetuating the marginality of lives that fall outside the frontiers of the sovereign, allowing conditioned recognition removed from the notion of the performativity of suffering.

As the construction of the refugee has evolved over the past 65 years, i.e. since the adoption of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees in 1951, legal frameworks have failed to ensure human rights for populations that fall outside Europe. Victims of

structural violence, environmental catastrophes caused by climate change, and displacement from the Global South remained unaddressed. The representations of sufferers in mediated images do not cater to these sufferers' needs either. As Johnson (2011) notes, the construct of the refugee has degraded in representation, from the heroic proud family to the depoliticized powerless heart-rending woman and child figure. Images circulating in mainstream media participate in a troublesome discourse that affects humans whose lives depend on humanitarianism these images claim to uphold. They aestheticize suffering, poverty, persecution, and political violence; they transform them into commodities that appeal to pre-constructed viewers. Destitute children portrayed as happy, homeless families portrayed as finally settled, apologetic sufferers, old educated men fleeing the hells of war are constructs of ideal victims. These are victims that the media portray as worthy of recognition, deserving of humanitarian intervention, privileged in their status as sufferers. The focus of humanitarian policies and human-centric images on specific constructs of sufferers at the expense of others who are left out because they cannot afford to foreground the miserable conditions in which they live renders humanitarianism in practice intrinsically flawed. Humanitarianism is both ambivalently "circumstantial and universal" in relation to the ethical values it claims to uphold (Barnett, 2011, p. 11). This humanitarianism caters differentially to varying constructs of suffering. The hierarchization of victimhood and the privileging of what Ticktin (2011a) calls the morally legitimate sufferer reinforce a biopolitical order that exercises its power over bare lives.

Images discussed in this study promote a trend that perpetuates a culture of spectatorship, where suffering transforms into a spectacle performed to the liberal humanitarian ethos. The spectacle of suffering and humanitarian intervention demands that

suffering be performed in action in order for the world to grant it recognition. Charity performs in this spectacle, suggesting that temporary, therapeutic interventionist practices are a permanent solution to human suffering. Images like these take from the sufferer more than they give, and render him/her equivalent to a subaltern: voiceless, powerless, inherently vulnerable, and constantly in need of care.

Humanitarianism, as a set of practices, policies and representations in visual culture, becomes thus a site of exploitation, where the needs of spectators are privileged at the expense of the thousands of lives omitted from regimes of protection. The result is lives confined to a state of exception, sufferers provided for the needs to survive but not the needs to live fully, to speak, and to act as full-fledged political beings. The humanitarian media discourse becomes, as Barnett (2011) argues, a matter of care and control, in which sufferers remain stuck in a limbo of liminality that they can neither liberate from nor embrace.

Images of suffering matter because they are intrinsic to humanitarianism. The way in which images hierarchize victimhood reflects the same hierarchization in humanitarian interventionist practices and is also a platform from which humanitarianism distributes worthiness. These images mirror practices of exclusion in humanitarianism and at the same time encourage privileging certain victims at the expense of other disenfranchised people. Images outline the limits within which humanitarianism should operate. To provide a genuinely considerate portrayal into the lives of sufferers, images may want to break from the patterns that are hegemonically believed to be appealing. Images need to be as crude in their constructs as is the agglomeration of makeshift tents in a refugee camp at a border, severed from the imagined preferences of pre-constructed viewers and free of celebrated

triumphs of interventionist saviors. The sufferer needs to be portrayed in ways that challenge what Wright (2002) calls patterns of acceptability because victims do not always look like victims and they do not owe the spectator anything for not fitting in an imagined construct and at the same time have every right to be acknowledged as such. Images need to give victims of institutional and structural violence increased visibility. These are people who are often viewed as trespassers on the tragedies of others who make use of the suffering of war-afflicted people to stealthily gain access to benefits they are not entitled to. Images need to challenge the idea that only war should be urgently addressed and to illustrate, quantitatively and qualitatively, how the abrupt death of one person in an airstrike in one part of the world is no less worthy than the slow death of another in a shanty town elsewhere. Furthermore, images should present a more diversified portrayal of a sufferer. Instead of painting the sufferer as a passive, eternally dependent, near-pitiful human being, a better alternative would be a more in-depth engagement with their normal lives prior to the liminality of refugeedom, which can provide a genuine humanization of their stories instead of perpetuating a bitter moment of humiliation they would be struggling to overcome. If human-centric images strive to show the human face of tragedy, then in that quest their primary function must be to portray all sufferers as equally precarious. Instead of participating in a hegemonic discourse that reproduces precarity and perpetuates the condition of refugees as bare lives, images are expected, at the very least, to refrain from portraying people as subhuman whose performed vulnerability is their only ticket towards recognition.

APPENDIX



Figure 1: Prime Minister Justin Trudeau greets 16-month-old Madeleine Jamkossian, right, and her father Kevork Jamkossian, refugees fleeing the Syrian civil war, during their arrival at Pearson airport in Toronto on Friday, Dec. 11, 2015 (Denette, 2015).



Figure 2: Laith Majid, an Iraqi refugee, broke out in tears of joy, holding his son and daughter, after they arrived safely in Kos. The group crossed over from the Turkish resort

town of Bodrum and on the way their flimsy rubber boat, crammed with about 15 men, women and children, lost air (Etter, 2015)



Figure 3: Europe says OXI (2015, September 7). The photo of the weeping father clutching onto his children, as they survived the deadly crossing and arrived on the shores of Greece, touched the hearts of millions around the world. Today he arrived safely in Berlin and is able to build a new future for him and his family [Facebook post]. Retrieved on 8 August 2016

<https://www.facebook.com/EuropeSaysOXI/photos/a.1681903648696778.1073741828.1681857028701440/1708942532659556/?type=1&theater> .



Figure 4: Children pose for a picture as Syrian refugees go about their daily business in the Za'atari refugee camp on February 1, 2013 in Za'atari, Jordan. Record numbers of refugees are fleeing the violence and bombings in Syria to cross the borders to safety in northern Jordan and overwhelming the Za'atari camp. The Jordanian government are appealing for help with the influx of refugees as they struggle to cope with the sheer numbers arriving in the country (Mitchell, 2013).



Figure 5: Italian navy rescues asylum seekers traveling by boat off the coast of Africa on the Mediterranean, June 7, 2014 (Sestini, 2014).



Figure 6: Massimo Sestini, Italy, Rescue Operation, General News, second prize singles (“Massimo Sestini,” 2014).



Figure 7: No description. (Isakovic, 2016).



Figure 8: A Syrian mother hugs her child after they arrived from Turkey at the Greek island of Lesbos on an overcrowded inflatable boat in October 2015 (Palacios, 2015).



Figure 9: A Sudanese migrant gets a hair cut at a camp near Calais, Thursday, Aug. 6, 2015 (Morenatti, 2015).



Figure 10: A Syrian refugee boy who was filmed being tripped by a camerawoman as he fled police in Hungary with him, smiles as he stands next to Cristiano Ronaldo before the Spanish first division soccer match against Granada at Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid, Spain. (Perez, 2015).

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