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The Use of Images During the Syrian Refugee Crisis

Christine Ayad

COMM 460: Seminar in Digital Rhetoric

University of Mary Washington

March 11, 2017 marked seven years of the ongoing Syrian Civil War. The unrest began when peaceful protests by Syrians, calling for the removal of dictator Bashar al-Assad, were violently suppressed. As Syria enters into its seventh year of conflict, the numbers are looking more and more bleak: 450,000 deaths, over a million injured, and more than 12 million displaced from their homes.[1] As the conflict intensifies, the world looks on.

Like the Arab Spring uprisings before it- the Tunisian and Egyptian Revolutions- social media has played a vital role in the Syrian War. Footage and images of the war are disseminated across the internet, daily. A simple search of "The Syrian Civil War" on Google renders 17,500,000 results. There are millions of pictures and videos online showing every gory detail of the conflict, and all of them are at our fingertips; it can all be accessed from the comfort of our homes. We can scroll through our Facebook feeds, watching a cute cat video ten seconds after sharing the image of Alan Kurdi's body washed up on the shore of a beach.

Most of the images we see flooding our social media timelines have been taken by professional photographers paid to document the Syrian refugee crisis. However, photojournalists are not the only ones taking pictures of the conflict and the Syrian's journey to freedom. In fact, because of the dangerous conditions, few journalists are assigned to Syria.[2] With no one other than themselves to document their story, refugees have turned to social media to share their stories. However, the images and status updates they post are not used for the sole purpose of sharing their plight with the world, although that is a vital role of the photographs.

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[1] Jazeera, Al. "Syria's civil war explained from the beginning." News | Al Jazeera. April 27, 2017. http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/05/syria-civil-war-explained-160505084119966.html.

[2] Lewis, Helen. "The Screams of the World." *Nieman Reports* 70, no. 1 (Winter2016 2016): 30-35. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*, EBSCO*host*.

The pictures are also used by Syrians to reassure the family and friends they left behind that they are safe. They can also provide a source of hope for other Syrians still at the beginning of their journey.

Media images play a central role in shaping public perceptions of the refugees and their plight. It is the goal of this paper to highlight some of these perceptions. My primary research question is as follows: How do images of Syrian refugees affect public perceptions of the Syrian refugee crisis? To answer this, I will analyze differences between photojournalistic images and amateur images (taken by the refugees themselves) of the Syrian refugee crisis. This will allow me to analyze how the media portrays the refugees versus how the refugees choose to portray themselves. Throughout my analysis, I pose a second question: Has the availability of graphic content of the Syrians' plight on social media numbed audiences to their tragedy? My analysis of the use of photography during the Syrian refugee crisis will examine, not only the public perception, but also the public response to the images, highlighting whether the multiplicity of graphic images has increased or decreased sympathy for the Syrians.

Over the course of seven years, millions of pictures have circulated on the internet and social media of the Syrian refugee crisis. The rhetoric used in each image makes a unique argument which shapes the viewer's attitudes on the issue. Throughout this paper, I argue that digital images portrayed in the news tend to create distance between the viewer and the refugee, whereas images taken by the refugees themselves help viewers identify with the Syrians. Therefore, images taken by the refugees create more sympathy for their plight as opposed to photojournalistic images, which often leave out the context behind the story being told in the photograph.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The best-known definition for rhetoric is given to us by Aristotle, who classifies rhetoric as "the art of persuasion." Historically, the concept of rhetoric was only applied to speech; a sentiment echoed by Socrates and Plato, alike. Kenneth Burke expands the definition of rhetoric: "Wherever there is persuasion, there is rhetoric. And wherever there is 'meaning,' there is 'persuasion.' Food, eaten and digested, is not rhetorical. But in the meaning of food there is much rhetoric, the meaning being persuasive enough for the idea of food to be used, like the ideas of religion, as a rhetorical device for statesmen"[3]. Like Aristotle, Burke links rhetoric with persuasion. However, he expands the use of rhetoric outside the realm of speech. He applies the concept to anything with persuasive power or that creates meaning.

Fast forward to contemporary society, speech is no longer the prominent form of communication. Ideas and arguments can be communicated through images, videos, texts, and other media. Thus, we begin expanding rhetoric beyond only what is spoken and written to images and media. This leads us to the concept of digital media. Douglas Eyman defines the term as the application of rhetorical theory to digital texts and performances, ranging from memes to vlog posts[4]. Arguments no longer need to be made in person with a physical speaker and audience. Today, we can spark an entire revolution virtually, within minutes.

I define digital rhetoric as the art of using various modes of media to inform, inspire action, or invoke emotion in the audience. While I argue that digital rhetoric uses multiple forms of media, for the purposes of this paper, I specifically focus on the use of online images as a form of digital rhetoric during the Syrian refugee crisis.

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[3] Eyman, Douglas. "Defining and Locating Digital Rhetoric." *Digital Rhetoric: Theory, Method, Practice*. N.p.: U of Michigan Press, 2015. 1-37.

[4] Ibid., 2.

Walter Benjamin argues that images now come to us instead of us going to them, which has made us lose critical thinking skills and become alienated. He believes that an image is merely a replication of the original, making it inauthentic.[5] However, digital images allow for speedy dissemination of information and serve as a way to raise consciousness about certain issues. Most importantly, as will be highlighted in this paper, they are used as a tool for social justice. We are witnessing another step in the democratization of art. As evident throughout the Arab Spring, citizen journalism has played a vital role throughout the revolutions; it is no longer left in the hands of professionals alone.

While theorists, like Benjamin, argue that the public discourse of the 20th and 21st centuries do not allow for contemplation, DeLuca and Peeples argue that these technological advancements produce different forms of intelligence and knowledge. In *From Public Sphere to Public Screen: Democracy, Activism, and the "Violence" of Seattle,* they highlight the shift from linguistics to picture, from meeting in person to engage in public discourse to engaging in conversation behind a screen in different locations and time zones.[6] Being corporately owned, the public screen can be restricting. However, TV amplifies voices, enabling one person to reach millions. Images are important not because they represent reality, but because they create it.

DeLuca and Peeples write that media culture "produce fabric of everyday life, dominating leisure time, shaping political views and social behavior, and providing the materials out of which people forge their very identities."[7] The "public screen" is where people gather to

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[5] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in Illuminations, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 1-26.

[6] Kevin Michael DeLuca and Jennifer Peeples, "From Public Sphere to Public Screen: Democracy, Activism, and the 'Violence' of Seattle," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19 (2002): 125-151

[7] Ibid., 127.

form public opinion. In the case of the Syrian refugee crisis, images circulated online shape public attitudes about Syrians. Images are also used to hold corporations and governments accountable for their unjust actions. These images grab our attention because of their emotional content.

Nowadays, attention is scarce. According to Lanham, in the digital age, the overwhelming amounts of information we receive on a daily basis has led to a scarcity of human attention.[8] Attention is the capital in our information economy. We try to get more of it. To decide what is worth our attention, we must filter all the information we receive. Lanham identifies this filter as rhetoric. The rhetoric of information in the digital age is the style or the packaging that makes it more appealing, through which we filter which information is desirable and which is not. In the case of the Syrian refugee crisis, highly emotional context is what grabs and maintains our attention, due to their shock factor.

Jihane Salhab and Paul Slovic write about the importance of images in times of war and crisis. Slovic, in *Psychological Numbing and Genocide*, writes that psychological numbing may result from our inability to appreciate losses of life as they become larger.[9] In concert with this idea, Salhab states that when there are photographs, a war becomes "real." She argues that we live a world that has become hyper-saturated, therefore, we need powerful images to grab and maintain our attention.[10] To wake us up from our information coma.

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[8] Richard A. Lanham, "Stuff and Fluff," in *The Economics of Attention: Style and Substance in the Age of Information* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 1-42.

[9] Slovic, Paul. "Psychic Numbing and Genocide." *PsycEXTRA Dataset*, 2007, 79-95. doi:10.1037/e718332007-003.

[10] Salhab, Jihane. "Alternative vs. Mainstream Media: The Case of Syrian Refugees' Crisis." *Current Trends in Publishing (Tendances de l'édition): student compilation étudiante* 1, no. 2 (2014). University of Ottawa Library.

Certain images linger in the minds of viewers and shape their emotional attitudes. According to Roland et al. in their journal article *The Visual Dehumanisation of Refugees,* media images play a central role in framing how refugees are publicly perceived and politically debated.[11] In their research, they found that images of large groups tend to dehumanize the refugees. Expanding on this idea, Susan Moeller writes that too much harping on the same set of images, without sufficient context and background, exhaust the public in her article *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death.[12]* She argues that people become tired of pouring money into crises that never go away.

It is clear that the dynamics of war and conflict are evolving rapidly with the onset of cameras and photography. The war is no longer just on the ground. It is on our phone and computer screens. We are able to follow along and join the refugees on their journey from war to freedom. Social media and photography have immense implications for the future of social justice and movements.

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[11] Bleiker, Roland, David Campbell, Emma Hutchison, and Xzarina Nicholson. "The Visual Dehumanisation of Refugees." *Australian Journal of Political Science* 48, no. 4 (December 2013): 398-416. doi:10.1080/10361146.2013.840769.

[12] Moeller, Susan. "Compassion Fatigue." *Media Studies Journal* 15, no. 1 (Spring/Summer2001 2001): 108. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*, EBSCO*host*.

ANALYSIS

The Controversy

Three-year-old Alan Kurdi's body washed up on the shore of a beach in Turkey after he drowned in the Mediterranean Sea on September 2, 2015 as his family fled from Syria.[13] Turkish journalist snapped an image of the boy's tiny lifeless body, face down in the sand (pictured left). An image that made global headlines, prompting international responses. Omran Danqeesh became a symbol for Aleppo's suffering at five-years-old when he was pulled out of the rubble in his house following an airstrike on August 17, 2016.[14] He was rescued with his parents and siblings, but his older brother (10 years old), Ali, died on August 20 from the injuries he endured.[15] Footage of the rescue and an image of Omran in the back of an ambulance taken by local activists (pictured right) went viral in just a few hours, awakening the world to the very real trauma endured by Syrians on a daily basis.

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[13] Berenson, Tessa. "The Child Who's Become a Symbol of Europe's Migrant Crisis." *Time*, September 3, 2015.

[14] Katz, Andrew. "The Night Omran was Saved." *Time*, August 26, 2016.

[15] Ibid.

But, is it immoral to look at such images? Do we take away their dignity by using their tragedy as a source of "entertainment"? There is ongoing controversy over the ethics of viewing graphic images of Syrian refugees' pain, like those of Alan Kurdi and Omran Daqneesh. Liz Sly, the *Washington Post*'s Beirut bureau chief, responds to this controversy by saying, "Perhaps we're violating their dignity by not publicizing them and having them die in silence, in the dark."[16] Julian Reichelt, editor in chief for *Bild*, a German magazine, received backlash after the magazine printed images of Kurdi's body on its back page. In response to the criticisms, he said, "We must force ourselves to look. Without pictures the world would be more ignorant, the needy even more invisible, more lost…Photographs are the screams of the world."[17] Therefore, it is my opinion that it is our duty to look at these photographs, to view them with open minds and hearts. Without these images the story of the Syrian plight would be incomplete, their voices silenced.

Part of the power of images is that they show moments of pain and suffering that are usually hidden from our view. They may be difficult to look at, but they are too important to ignore. Audiences need to ask themselves what their motivations are for looking at the photographs in the same way media must assess why they are posting them. Graphic images like the ones shown above only work if the reader wants to know more about the story behind them, instead of indifferently turning the page.

When there are photographs, a war becomes "real." Susan Sontag makes a claim that "images of the atrocious" are necessary for contemplation as they "acknowledge the existence of the incorrigible."[18] However, another layer to the controversy of these images is the bias with

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[16] Lewis, Helen. "The Screams of the World." *Nieman Reports* 70, no. 1 (Winter2016 2016): 30-35. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*, EBSCO*host*.

[17] Ibid., 31.
[18] Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. S.l.: Picador, 2017.

which we view them. Have we come to recognize the pain of some while ignoring that of others?

Michael Shaw, a clinical psychologist and founder of the Reading the Pictures Blog discusses the idea of the "western gaze," which he describes as a process by which deaths and disasters are unconsciously split into those that matter more and those that matter less. Therefore, evidence of violence and dehumanization in images may not be the only reason individuals place greater value on certain pictures while ignoring others. Elie Fares, a Lebanese doctor, voiced this concern on his blog, *A Separate State of Mind*, comparing global response to the Paris attacks on November 13 versus the bombing in Beirut on November 12, just a day before:

> "When my people died…There were no statements expressing sympathy with the Lebanese people…Obama did not issue a statement about how their death was a crime against humanity. When my people died, no country bothered to light up its landmarks in the colors of their flag. Their death was an irrelevant fleck along the international news cycle, something that happens in those parts of the world."[19]

Fares voices a concern that attacks in certain parts of the world do not receive the same level of media attention. There seems to be a certain level of bias when it comes to which pictures we place value on. In other words, we use different filters when looking at different images. In the context of the Syrian refugee crisis, it is possible that we have come to belittle their suffering in comparison to the suffering of others.

The final layer of this controversy relates to the medium through which we look at these pictures. For most Americans, these images of war appear on their social media feeds. This

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[19] Elie, Fares E. "From Beirut, This is Paris: In a World That Doesn't Care About Arab Lives." *A Separate State of Mind*, November 15, 2015.

allows for viral dissemination and easy sharing of the photographs. However, the medium becomes controversial when one can read an article about the image of a Syrian boy whose legs were blown off following an airstrike and then proceed to take a BuzzFeed quiz on which pizza topping they are, ten seconds later. Social media allows us to scroll through an endless stream of posts, each fighting for our attention. Our ability to shift back and forth between graphic images and entertaining videos takes away from the power of the images. It makes it harder to identify with the Syrian refugee plight. Furthermore, it has made us numb to these tragedies taking place around the world.

Photojournalistic Versus Refugee Pictures

Most professional images of the refugees showcase them in masses coming to land on boats or in distress (shown above). This frequent visualization of refugees in masses gives the impression that the groups are invading a place. Roland et al. mention an Australian study of refugee/asylum seekers which stated that only 2% of images depicted individual asylum seekers with clearly recognizable features.[20] Social-psychological studies revealed that close-up portraits

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[20] Bleiker, Roland, David Campbell, Emma Hutchison, and Xzarina Nicholson. "The Visual Dehumanisation of Refugees." *Australian Journal of Political Science* 48, no. 4 (December 2013): 398-416. doi:10.1080/10361146.2013.840769.

are the type of images which evoke compassion from the viewers.[21] This explains why the image of Kurdi and Danqeesh garnered more media attention than typical images of Syrians on boats.

The typical visual patterns featured in the professional Syrian refugee photos frame them as a problem such that the refugee crisis is seen not as a humanitarian disaster that requires a compassionate public response, but rather as a potential threat to national security and border control. Many of the photos are used to employ a politics of fear when it comes to deciding on policy dealing with the Syrian refugee crisis. Many of the images put the refugees in the light of illegal immigrants. Given their Arab decent, they are also often talked about as terrorists. It seems as though they are arriving illegally by boat rather than by way of a controlled migration program. They also create a common misconception that all refugees arrive by boat, where in reality some of them come by plane as well. These images tend to create negative public attitudes about the refugees.

A viewer may never directly comprehend the pain experienced by a victim, but practices of visual representations make the emotional issues at stake a collective, societal issue.[22] Showing individual suffering and sharing their personal story has a humanizing effect. They are powerful because of their explicit emotional appeal. A single person's suffering evokes sympathy in viewers. A crowd of faceless people does not evoke the same level of compassion that a close-up of a single refugee would. Small and Loewenstein claim that "people react differently toward identifiable victims than to statistical victims who have not yet been

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[21] Ibid.

[22] Dauphinée, Elizabeth. "The Politics of the Body in Pain: Reading the Ethics of Imagery." *Security Dialogue* 38, no. 2 (2007): 139-55. doi:10.1177/0967010607078529.

identified."[23] A photograph of an individual in any given disaster is more effective than accounts of millions at risk or dying from a specific crisis. We are more likely to make a donation for a single person rather than a large group because we feel more connected to them. Putting a human face to suffering is seen as a key component in gaining viewer's attention, which is, in turn, essential to trigger not only some form of empathetic response but also a desire to act.[24] This is especially important when considering that a mass of 'Arab-looking' men is connected with a fear of terrorism.

With the frequency of international crises over the last few years, it has become routine to thumb past the pages of news images showing wide-eyed children in distress. Susan Moeller discusses this concept of our developing numbness to tragedy:

> "The first time a reader sees the advertisement he is arrested by guilt. He may come close to actually sending money to the organization. The second time the reader sees the ad he may linger over the photograph, read over the short paragraphs of copy and only then turn the page. The third time the reader sees the ad, he typically turns the page without hesitation. The fourth time the reader sees the ad he may pause again over the photo and text, not to wallow in guilt, but to acknowledge with cynicism how the advertisement is crafted to manipulate readers like him- even if it is in a 'good' cause."[25]

Media overstimulates and bores us at once. When problems seem impossible to fix- the Syrian refugee crisis- our attention wanders off to the next news story. Moreover, it is hard to sustain

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[23] Small, Deborah, and George Loewenstein. "Helping a Victim or Helping the Victim: Altruism and Identifiability." *The Journal of Risk and Uncertainty* 26, no. 1 (2003): 5-16. Kluwer Academic Publishers.
[24] Slovic, Paul. "Psychic Numbing and Genocide." *PsycEXTRA Dataset*, 2007, 79-95. doi:10.1037/e718332007-003.
[25] Moeller, Susan. "COMPASSION FATIGUE." *Media Studies Journal* 15, no. 1 (Spring/Summer2001 2001): 108. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*, EBSCO*host*.

concern for a single issue over years, like the Syrian War. Karen Elliot of *The Wall Street Journal* said, "I find *The Post* and *The Times* extremely difficult to read. All of them to me are like reading chapter one over and over, or like they're opening the book in chapter 13."[26] Too much emphasis on the same type of images without sufficient background exhausts the public, so they lose interest; they reach "compassion fatigue." It can sometimes feel like we are listening to a record stuck on replay.

Research suggests that we are more likely to help someone in need when we 'feel for' that person. And so, even though Syrian refugee pictures circulated online may have highly emotional content, they have become passé. They need to regain our attention. The way to do this is by zooming in past the crowd of faces on boats to the persons inside them. Stories of individual victims unleash a tidal wave of compassion and humanitarian aid.

In *Psychic Numbing and Genocide,* Slovic conducted a study where individuals were given the opportunity to contribute up to $5 of their earnings to Save the Children. In one condition, participants were asked to donate money to help an identified victim, five-year-old Rokia in Africa. Those individuals contributed more than twice the amount given by a second group that was asked to donate money to help save millions of African children in hunger.[27] It is clear that people are more willing to provide humanitarian aid when they feel a personal connection to the victims (i.e. knowing her name and story).

News outlets and hired photojournalists are less likely to form those connections than activists and refugees themselves. Both alternative and mainstream media are necessary in disseminating information to the public. The former mostly focus on hot topics that conform to

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Slovic, Paul. "Psychic Numbing and Genocide." *PsycEXTRA Dataset*, 2007, 79-95. doi:10.1037/e718332007-003.

the interests of the owners of the media corporations. Furthermore, these media corporations take into account the interests of the political elite as well. The latter, due to their lack of such obligations, can maneuver more freely in dealing with popular topics that interest the public and may be ignored by mainstream media.[28]

A terrific example of such alternative media is the Facebook page, Humans of New York. The page shares personal stories of New York citizens accompanied by pictures of the individuals. However, the group had a segment that highlighted Syrian refugees aimed at sharing their *individual* stories. Images and posts like these create an increased sense of sympathy by the viewers, because they feel as though they are personally connected with the refugee. In the example below, we hear the personal story of Muhammad's journey in his own words. It is true

Humans of New York
Page Liked · September 26, 2015 ·

"Before leaving for Europe, I went back to Syria to see my family once more. I slept in my uncle's barn the entire time I was there, because every day the police were knocking on my father's door. Eventually my father told me: 'If you stay any longer, they will find you and they will kill you.' So I contacted a smuggler and made my way to Istanbul. I was just about to leave for Europe when I received a call from my sister. She told me that my father had been very badly beaten by police, and unless I sent 5,000 Euro for an operation, he would die. That was my money to get to Europe. But what could I do? I had no choice. Then two weeks later she called with even worse news. My brother had been killed by ISIS while he was working in an oil field. They found our address on his ID card, and they sent his head to our house, with a message: 'Kurdish people aren't Muslims.' My youngest sister found my brother's head. This was one year ago. She has not spoken a single word since." (Kos, Greece)

(2/6)

Like   Comment   Share

335K   Top Comments
105,046 shares   23K Comments

Write a comment...

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[28] Salhab, Jihane. "Alternative vs. Mainstream Media: The Case of Syrian Refugees' Crisis." *Current Trends in Publishing (Tendances de l'édition): student compilation étudiante* 1, no. 2 (2014). University of Ottawa Library.

that social media "has intensified the speed of communication and obliterated space as a barrier for communication."[29]

The Syrian refugee crisis has introduced the world to a new phenomenon in journalism: photos taken by the refugees themselves as they make their journey out of Syria via apps like Instagram. We are witnessing a huge leap in reporting. Although citizen journalism is not a groundbreaking development, refugees using their smartphones and social media to document their journey as it happens is revolutionary. The amateur snapshots allow us to join them as they journey out of their homeland into overcrowded refugee camps and travel miles on foot. We also get to join them in their victories, whether it's the joy of overcoming an obstacle or reaching their final destination. This is also a huge difference that can be found when comparing the images taken by refugees to those taken by journalist. It is common for the news media to only show the devastating side of the story, by only highlighting the poverty and pain of Syrians. The refugee selfies tell a different story. They showcase the small victories. They allow refugees to take control of their personal stories.

Syrian refugee use of social media has received a lot of criticism and backlash. An article posted by the UK site Express, criticized the Syrian refugee selfie. In response to an image of Syrian refugee boys taking a selfie upon arrival to a refugee camp (shown above), the author wrote, "Indeed this bunch of asylum seekers- laughing as they take a group selfie on the Greek beach where they just landed- could be any gang of mates ready to whoop it up on a booze fueled sunshine holiday."[30] The author assumed that the boys must not be truly suffering if they are able to smile and take pictures. As if disadvantaged individuals must be in constant misery in order to be suffering.

It seems as though we have an obsession with what we think 'victims' should look like. To find beauty and happiness amidst trying times does not invalidate suffering. On the contrary, it represents the strength of the refugees to find hope and joy during difficult times. Refugee selfies do not invalidate their suffering. However, these images taken by the refugees' personal phones humanizes them to the rest of the world.

Refugee selfies allow for Syrians to take control of their story and show their side of it. These images are their way of showcasing their personal victories and hardships as well as reassuring the family they left behind of their safety. However, owning a phone increases the controversy over the legitimacy of their suffering. The question often posed is, how can "poverty-stricken" individuals own smartphones?

@thatbillokeefe posted a meme (pictured below) criticizing a refugee for using an expensive smartphone to document her journey, implying that her plight is somehow less valid

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[30] "Migrant crisis: Are these happy young men really timid souls fleeing war and persecution?" Express.co.uk. September 10, 2015. http://www.express.co.uk/news/world/603511/Migrant-crisis-refugees-take-selfie-photo-Greek-boat-Lesbos-Syria-war.

because she can afford the device.[31] There is a response made by @steveatmguy which reads, "we're being told these are 'poverty-stricken' people. If you don't see the irony, I can't help you."[32] These comments and posts assume that all refugees escaped because they were poor. However, Syrians have been displaced by war. That includes teachers, doctors, and lawyers alike. Furthermore, their smartphones serve as a lifeline to communicate with their loved ones whom they left behind, navigate their way through foreign lands, and post real-time updates of their journey and useful information for other refugees.

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[31] Bill. "Poverty stricken Syrian migrant takes selfie with her $600 smartphone. pic.twitter.com/7T8TI7W6KZ." Twitter. September 05, 2015. https://twitter.com/thatbillokeefe/status/640216875163631616?lang=en.
[32] Ibid.

The images posted by the refugees themselves on their social media accounts and those which are circulated over the internet are filled with nuance. While they humanize the refugees, by allowing them to take the wheel in sharing their journey, they also serve to discredit their plight. Whether it is because they may be smiling in their photos or because they own smartphones, it gives the perception that their situation isn't as dire as the media makes it out to be. On the other hand, they allow for the average individual to connect with the refugees on a more personal level, whereas professional photojournalistic images tend to distance the two. Therefore, images that show individual refugees and share their personal stories are more successful at igniting sympathy in the viewer, but the controversy surrounding them serves as an obstacle that must be overcome.

IMPLICATIONS

Osama Aljasem, a 32-year-old music teacher from Deir al-Zour, Syria says, "I would have never been able to arrive at my destination without my smartphone. I get stressed out when the battery even starts to get low."[33] Smartphones play an essential role in the Syrian refugee journey for more than one reason. Without it Mr. Aljasem would not have been able to find his way to safety. Smartphone maps, global positioning apps, and social media have become vital.[34] Aljasem's phone "held photographs, his only connection to the life he once lived."[35] It is their way to stay connected with the world, their families, and their past.

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[33] Brunwasser, Matthew. "A 21st-Century Migrant's Essentials: Food, Shelter, Smartphone." *New York Times* , August 25, 2015.

[34] Liempt, Ilse Van, and Judith Zijlstra. "Smart(phone) Travelling: Understanding the Use and Impact of Mobile Technology on Irregular Migration Journeys." *International Journal of Migration and Border Studies* 3, no. 2-3 (2017). doi:10.1504/ijmbs.2017.10001444.

[35] Brunwasser, Matthew. "A 21st-Century Migrant's Essentials: Food, Shelter, Smartphone." *New York Times* , August 25, 2015.

As tens of thousands completed their journeys, they shared their stories on social media. Many migrants take selfies upon arrival on the Greek island Kos, a common route, to prove that they made it. These images stand in stark contrast to professional photojournalistic ones. They are raw, unedited (aside from social media filters) shots of the refugee journey. They are often much more personal than the photos taken by journalists because the refugees are the ones controlling the angle, frame, lighting, etc. of the image.

In this way, the rhetoric of refugee images differs from that of professional photographers. Refugee images tend to humanize them to the public by offering a more personal depiction of their journey. They share moments of happiness and victory along with their times of struggle and suffering. Their images provide a more complete view of their journey- both the good and the bad.

Photojournalistic images, on the other hand, tend to focus on the devastation and pain of the refugees. It is also important to note that with professional images, we are often offered multiple versions of the same picture. For example, there are many different angles offered of Alan Kurdi's body in the sand. Moreover, there is also another image of a policeman carrying Kurdi's body off the beach. The different versions of the same event tell a different story. In the image of Kurdi's body being carried, we are given the impression that the refugees are receiving humanitarian aid and support. We are not given the same impression when looking at the image of Kurdi's body alone in the sand. Each image makes a different argument that is unique to the choices made by the photographer.

Photographs in the news may offer us multiple perspectives of the same story, but they still distance us from the refugees in cases when we are looking at masses of Syrians. Selfies taken by the refugees themselves establish a more profound connection. The emotional appeal

offered in these images increases our sympathy for their plight. We are able to look into their eyes and see their faces. We can recognize a distinct human with recognizable features, not a blur of faces on a boat or in a camp.

The Syrian refugee crisis began with a revolution, but ended up revolutionizing modern citizen journalism. The portability of smartphones has allowed for the migrants to document their stories and share them on the global stage. Mobile technologies and smartphones have the potential to increase migrant mobility and give them more autonomy over their journey. We have seen the importance of images in social movements, but now we are seeing their power in social crises.

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