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Victims’ representation in humanitarian campaigns.
The case of the Syrian crisis.

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Abstract

This dissertation tackles the representation of Syrian victims in three different NGO campaigns: Save the children “Most shocking second a day” video, Islamic Relief “The children of Syria” campaign and lastly WithSyria campaign. In fact, the purpose of this paper is to firstly present the critics around humanitarian images and appeals, secondly to identify whether the representation of Syrian victims in the campaigns mentioned above embody any innovative and new ways of portrayal mainly based on Chouliaraki’s study on post-humanitarian communication. Actually, a shift in the representation of victims in appeals took place which moved from “shock” images which were condemned for dehumanizing and victimizing the subjects and “positive” images criticized for glossing over the misery of the suffering to a less emotion oriented style of appeals which favors low-intensity engagement and follows the development of social media and technology, thus commodifying the action, rendering it unable to go beyond the playful games that these new appeals offer. This shift in fact appears in the campaigns analyzed in this paper, where the NGOs have resorted to a click of a mouse type of engagement and use playful games such as optical illusions and hyperreality to provoke solidarity with the distant Syrian suffering. On the other hand, these recent campaigns have also used more “traditional” ways of representation, in which women and children remain the main focus of charities and idiom of suffering and misery and have proven that melodrama is still necessary to provoke emotions and calls for solidarity.

Key words: humanitarian communication, images, post-humanitarian communication, innovation, Syria, NGO.
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Introduction:

As a Syrian woman affected by the Syrian crisis and having direct contact with victims of the war, I believe humanitarian communication has as much responsibility as humanitarian assistance to respect the dignity of the people as the basic and central principle of humanity, when attempting to represent people affected by a crisis and notably by the Syrian one.

The Syrian war started in 2011 and is now entering its 5th year. According to the European Commission, it is the world’s largest humanitarian crisis since WWII (Echo 2015) and is categorized as a crisis with an L3 magnitude, the highest magnitude according to UNOCHA’s criteria. In addition, UNHCR has declared the Syrian crisis operation as the largest in the agency’s history with the highest number of internal displacement in the world with 7.6 million Internally Displaced People (IDP) and 4 million Syrian refugees residing in neighboring countries (see annex for map).

Despite the magnitude and severity of the crisis, the Syrian war has become protracted, provoking donor fatigue, hence resulting in a sharp decrease of funding over the past two years (The National, June 27 2014; The Guardian, January 15 2014). According to UNOCHA’s numbers, in 2013 the total funding received for the Syrian crisis covered only 71% of the overall needs such as health, water hygiene and sanitation, shelter, protection and others (ACAPS, SNAPS, December 2012-June 2015) and in 2014, the total funding received covered even less with only 58% of overall needs. As for 2015, only 23% of the required funding has been covered until now (see reference for updated numbers). In order to respond to the challenges of underfunding as mentioned above, humanitarian organizations use different means of communication: fundraising, as a mean of raising funds as well as to guarantee various sources of income in order not to be dependent on one donor (Benthal 1993, p.57); advocacy, as a “long-standing commitment to furthering and upholding humanitarian principles and action, and to defending, either privately or publicly, the cause of vulnerable people and victims of conflicts or other disasters” (Davey, Blondel 1999, p.1) campaigns, as a “communication activity to connect different stakeholders such as policymakers, foreign governments, civil service, partner

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1 http://www.unocha.org/where-we-work/emergencies
2 http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e48e676.html
organizations, the media and the public with the cause and work of the NGO” (Orgad 2013, p.6) to address these challenges. In fact, humanitarian communication has been used as “a mode of public communication that […] aims at establishing a strategic emotional relationship between the Westerner and a distant sufferer with a view to propose certain dispositions to action towards a cause” (Chouliaraki 2010, p.109).

However, for decades, humanitarian agencies have been struggling to define a responsible way of communication in which victims of crisis are represented through images (still or moving) and narratives. In fact, many media scholars and media scientists have criticized the way victims are represented in humanitarian images mainly as helpless and stereotyped. Thus, as a response to the critics, some humanitarian agencies such as Save the Children have attempted to use innovative methods to represent distant suffering, which Chouliaraki calls “post-humanitarian communication” (2010). In fact, the author suggests a move from emotion-oriented style of appealing recognized as “shock” images which are denounced to dehumanize the sufferer (Benthall 1993; Lissner 1979) and “positive” images condemned to estheticize and gloss over the misery of the suffering (Lidchi 1999; Smillie 1995) to post-emotional styles of appealing which break away from pity and privilege a short-term and low-intensity form of agency, not stemming from an intellectual agenda but rather engage the spectator with temporary practices of “playful consumerism” (Chouliaraki 2010, p.107) and favors “effective activism of effortless immediacy” (idem, p.108).

Though Chouliaraki has focused her analysis on recent appeals of Amnesty International not related to the Syrian crisis, the innovative shift she mentions must be explored then to other campaigns to assess whether humanitarian organizations are really entering an era of post-humanitarian communication characterized by less emotions and ironic styles of representation, in which representation is understood as ”the use of language and image to create meaning about the world around us” (Sturken and Cartwright 2009, p.12). The Syria crisis has been mainly represented by the media, NGOs, UN agencies and others, however, in response to the underfunding mentioned above, there is a need to question whether NGOs, understood as “an organized entity that is functionally independent of, and does not represent, a government or State” (UNOCHA, 2008) and “organizations devoted to humanitarian and human rights causes, a number of which have official consultative status at the United Nations.” (Idem, 2008) are adapting their public appeals to emphasize new techniques/clichés/messages to balance the
public so-called indifference and donor’s fatigue towards the Syrian war. Therefore, critics around humanitarian images and appeals and innovations should be identified and analyzed notably those which represent Syrian victims.

In fact, the focus of this paper is on humanitarian appeals for two main reasons: first because Chouliaraki’s study on innovation was centered on humanitarian appeals, therefore following the same direction would seem of added value in terms of analysis and second in order to identify whether these campaigns have an impact on the public in terms of funding and awareness raising.

1. What are the main critics around humanitarian images (still and moving) of the 20th and the 21st century?
2. Does the representation of people affected by the Syrian crisis embody new ways of portraying victims in NGO campaigns? If they do, how?

Hence, to answer to this objective, this paper will identify the main critics and changes around humanitarian images (still and moving) of the 20th and the 21st century. It will then analyze the representation of people affected by the Syrian crisis in humanitarian campaigns and identify whether these appeals embody innovations and new ways of portrayal. These include the following: Save the Children’s “Most shocking second a day” campaign, Islamic Relief’s “The children of Syria” campaign and finally the #WithSyria campaign led by the street artist Banksy, the actor Idris Elba and the rock band Elbow along with a coalition of 130 humanitarian and human rights groups in order to support the third anniversary of the Syrian conflict. For the purpose of this paper, a comparative approach between those three campaigns will be used in order to identify innovations in the representation of Syrian victims. Interviews with the concerned humanitarian organizations will also be conducted for the gathering of more information related to the purpose, conception and intended impact of these campaigns.

This paper will be divided into three main parts: the first part will tackle the available literature regarding the representation of victims in humanitarian communication and images, the second part will present a discussion around the three Syrian campaigns mentioned earlier and finally the last part of this paper will be a conclusion incorporating the main findings of the discussion and areas for future research.
Part 1. Literature review:

For the purpose of this literature review, 50 sources were identified: mostly books and articles from academic journals. The literature shows that writings tackling images and humanitarian communication started taking place in the 20th century and mostly in the 21st century with very few before. The studies were mostly written by media scholars, historians, psychologists, and professors in social sciences/sociologists, scholars in anthropology and visual arts. This rising interest in humanitarian images in the 20th century seems to be paralleled with the first use of images of war atrocities in the 20th along with an increased awareness of humanitarian images’ impact in the representation and perception of suffering mainly in the 21st century.

Chapter one. The rise of humanitarian communication.

1.1. History.

According to Gorin, “la qualification d’un événement […] reste dépendante d’une visualisation nécessaire pour exister aux yeux de l’opinion publique, à tel point que certaines crises humanitaires souffrent d’un déficit d’attention et de visibilité et sont d’ailleurs qualifiées de “crises oubliées” par les humanitaires eux-mêmes.” (2009, p.149). In fact, NGOs have struggled since the 19th century to represent victims of humanitarian crises to create an emotional bond between beneficiaries and viewers/donors in order not to fall into the “forgotten crisis” category (Gorin 2014).

In effect, throughout history and notably during the 19th century, images were found to be essential to raise awareness and mobilize the public to intervene during humanitarian emergencies. However, despite this rising interest, there is still a lack of historical studies on this century-long form of representation, this concern has only emerged in these last years. In her studies on colonial atrocities, Twomey examines the evolution and relationship between the photography of atrocity and the humanitarian movement (2012). In fact, her article focuses on three different moments: the Indian Famine in 1876-1878, the Bulgarian atrocities in late 1870’s and the campaign to reform conditions in Belgian Congo between 1903 and 1913. According to Twomey, the late 19th century was dominated by the language of “atrocities” in public discourses which was associated with a culture of sentimentalism that stimulated a new understanding of the suffering body and therefore prompted a great concern for humanitarian interventions as well as a fascination of pain.
In addition, as mentioned by the author, the Bulgarian campaigns established a new way of discourse regarding atrocities and was typical in introducing new forms of humanitarianism not by using images but rather by the usage of graphic textual descriptions of the victims’ bodies. On the other hand, for the Indian Famine, Twomey discusses how it introduced the practice of displaying shocking images of suffering bodies in order to evoke humanitarian action as “the aid and action designed to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain and protect human dignity during and in the aftermath of man-made crises and natural disasters, as well as to prevent and strengthen preparedness for the occurrence of such situations” (Global Humanitarian Assistance). It was considered as a better representation of suffering than words and was perceived as breaching distance between viewers and victims. Finally, regarding the campaign for Congo reforms, it was essential in a way that it incorporated both concepts of atrocities and photography together for public campaigning.

Another groundbreaking period for humanitarian communication was during the Ukrainian famine in 1921-1922. This period was the first mediatized campaign which mobilized the world through images of children dying of hunger (Gorin 2011). This type of campaign also took place during the Spanish Civil war (1936-1939) and during WWII in which images of dead children and concentration camps were displayed respectively in order to call for help (Gorin 2009). These images have become the absolute icon for suffering. Since then, the humanitarian sector has developed a strong relationship with the media. The immense power of mass media and marketing methods was used by humanitarian agencies to report disasters and stimulate the consciousness of Westerners, which provided unprecedented opportunities to raise money as well as ethical dilemmas in terms of prioritizing fundraising and development strategies (Benthall 1993).

Finally, pictures of the hungry African child appearing first during the Biafran war in 1967-1970 was also unprecedented, which presented an esthetic *mise-en-scene* of humanitarian action in which stereotyped images of suffering emerged, in order to emblematize or denounce a cause (Gorin 2009).

1.2. Ways of representation and critics.

During the late 20th century and beginning of the 21st century, studies tackling humanitarian images and the representation of suffering have emerged in the literature, though focusing on
specific schemes of representation and contexts, but without a historical perspective. In fact, one major breakthrough regarding the debates around images is Susan Sontag’s book *Regarding the pain of others* (2003) in which the author examines how war imagery is open to manipulation and interpretation. She claims that in order to understand suffering and atrocities, one must look at them. In fact, images have an incredible veracity to the human mind and are the basis for empirical truth despite the fact that these images are first filtered by the image-taker and interpreted in a way that follows the viewer’s own experience and context of viewing which all play part in deriving the meaning of an image.

Actually, to better understand how images are interpreted by viewers, Stuart Hall describes a model of communication which he calls “Encoding-Decoding” model in which he explains how meaning is encoded by the sender and decoded by the receiver (1993). The author goes further by analyzing how the encoded meaning of a message is biased by the sender’s own ideals and views and how the receiver decodes the same meaning based on his/her own views and beliefs as well, therefore causing a miscommunication between sender and audience. To decode a meaning, Hall defines three positions audiences/receivers take during communication:

- “The dominant-hegemonic” position (1993, p.101) where the receiver and the sender are working under the same cultural biases and assumption. This position generates no to very little miscommunication.

- “The negotiated position” (1993, p.102) where the audience is familiar with the cultural and societal views and is able to decode the meaning within these parameters, however he/she is also able to interpret the message based on his/her personal views and beliefs, hence creating an unclear message.

- “The oppositional view” (1993, p.103) is when the receiver can decode the message the way it was meant to, but based on his/her own beliefs, the audience interprets another unintended meaning.

1.2.1. Women and children.

There has been an important focus on critics and analysis around images of suffering, notably those of women and children, by scholars from sociology, media and psychology. NGOs have been extensively criticized for using images where individuals or masses, hungry and victimized staring blankly for a pitying audience far away, are portrayed to prompt emotional responses in viewers from pity, sympathy, empathy, sadness to anger, indignation and compassion as the
“sympathetic consciousness of others’ distress together with a desire to alleviate it” (Merriam-Webster) as a mean to provoke donations and capture attention (Malkki 1996; Campbell 2004; Cohen 2001; van der Gaag & Nash 1987; Moeller 1999). Actually, the iconography of fundraising appeals displaying a close-up photograph of a single child not older than 10, looking directly into the camera have been criticized for inciting sympathy for passive suffering rather than support for active struggle (Burman 1994; Moeller 1999; Ruddick 2003).

In effect, the psychologist Erica Burman (1993; 1994), tackles the issue related to the portrayal of children in humanitarian appeals. In her articles, the author explores how the use of images of children from the Third World is central to the idiom of charity appeals and maintains an emotional interest. In fact, the author states that children appear to be the focal object onto which attention is drawn and that they have become the main signifiers of a distress as well as typical recipients of aid. According to Burman, the popularity of these images lay in the way childhood has come to represent innocence, truth, nature, spontaneity and dependence and so the image of a hungry child functions as the general icon of hunger and therefore as an index of need. She also adds that children are used to mobilize paternal feelings to protect and care for children. For her, childhood also functions as a commodity and is therefore mobilized to promote market goods.

However, Burman criticizes these images by asserting that these children are abstracted from their historical, political and cultural location and by affirming that these children appeals reproduce the colonial paternalism where the adult/Northerner offers help to the infantilized – South. She also adds that these appeals are dehumanizing not only to the children, but also to their families and cultures who are represented as failures and responsible for the plight of these children and rendered as passive receivers of Western aid.

In effect, the author uses “Disaster pornography” to express the representation of children in humanitarian appeals where the child is fetishized and in which the underlying and broader causes of these circumstances do not appear (1993, p.246). Finally, Burman comments on the gendered distribution of childhood, where the child category is represented by the “girl child” (1993, p.5); the image of the child is therefore feminized.

In addition to children, women also seem to be prevalent in humanitarian images. In his study on refugees, Prem Kumar Rajaram cites Malkki who argues that women and children are dominant in humanitarian images because they embody a certain imagination of powerlessness, for children as much as for women, and do not look like “dangerous aliens” in the Westerners’ eyes.
(1995, p.11). In fact, Malkki also adds that these representations objectify refugees’ experiences in the sense that refugees are not represented as individuals, whether individualized women or children as active strugglers but rather as a group removed from their historical context and are left solely with their biological aspects as a mute body in order to reinforce the idea of a “universal victim” (idem, p.252).

1.2.2. The religious iconography.

The analysis of the representation of women and children, and of victims in general, is also deeply rooted in religious values and artistic imagery. Wright notably addresses the role of the media images in constructing the concept and representation of refugees and states that in fact many of these images follow a “standard” that conforms to patterns already established in Christian iconography (Wright 2010; Gorin 2009). Hence, Wright argues that the media images in fact replicate the religious “Madonna and Child” portrait to represent children and women, which reoccurs with regularity and thus giving it a broader secular appeal.

Wright goes about the religious iconography in a broader direction in the sense that it does not only apply to women and children but also to the representation of an entire refugee community. According to him, refugee images follow three classifications:

- The first is under the Old Testament where a couple or a small group is represented in a state of degradation, nakedness and isolation. These images are derived from Adam and Eve’s expulsion.
- The second falls under the New Testament, derived from the “Flight to Egypt” images where people are displaced but not necessarily destitute, they are portrayed with few possessions accompanied by a means of transport.
- Finally, the last goes under “Exodus”, where a mass movement of people is portrayed which suggests the presence of a pursuer.

On the other hand, the religious iconography is contested by Gregory Paschalidis (2003). He suggests that the “iconography of predicament” is based on Christian traditional iconography is limiting and reduces the diversity and variation of the photographic records of disasters and therefore distorts its recognition.

These critics have not only been addressed to images portraying women and children, but were also directed towards humanitarian images in general mainly by media scholars, sociologists, psychologists and others in the late 20th century, however more in the 21st.
1.2.3. Negative critics on humanitarian representations

The plethora of these images were condemned to ultimately leave the spectator indifferent and weary; it is called “compassion fatigue” (Moeller 1999) or the “desensitization and emotional burnout, as a phenomenon associated with pervasive communication about social problems” (Kinnick et al. 1996, p.687). As a result, in order to maintain audience’s interest and attention, humanitarian agencies tended to resort to more sensational and compelling images of humanitarian crisis.

These compelling images tend to reproduce stereotypes that rely on severely criticized patterns. One of the main critics is the colonial and dependency relations of power which were attacked for displaying the traditional starving child and were pushed to call for a long-term commitment to structural change through the education of donors rather than attracting them by sentiments and feelings of guilt (Vestergaard 2013).

The consequences of this colonial gaze give these images a misleading view of the developing world as infantilized, passive, helpless, demanding and pathetic; asking for help from those with the capacity to intervene (Lidchi 1999; Suski 2009). Therefore, children portrayed alone without any features of their culture, history and community, are rendered as part of the humanity as a whole and not as a child affected by political circumstances (Burman 1994; Ruddick 2003).

The critics on children portrayed alone and decontextualized from their community, history and culture went further by accusing such images of abuse to be sadistic and have been condemned for being promiscuous and indecent as well as pornographic and voyeuristic and make the representation of the suffering body perceived as rape and perversion (Halttunen 1995). In fact, Halttunen likes to call this representation as a “pornography of pain” (1995, p.303-334) where there is a “pornographic spectatorial imagination between disgust and desire’ towards the subject” (Chouliaraki 2010, p. 110) and where the subject is fetishized, which links back to the “Disaster pornography” mentioned by Burman previously (1993, p.246).

The pornographic, infantilized and decontextualized representation of victims in images seems to have exceptions depending on the victims’ background. In effect, Johnson identifies a shift of representation of refugees (displayed by UNHCR) from heroic and individual refugees to a nameless flood of poverty stricken by women and children (Johnson 2011). In effect, this shift occurs among pictures of refugees from the North and those from the South where European refugees after WWII are represented as families, with mainly male individuals and identified as
part of an industrialized world as opposed to images of refugees from the South during the Cold War captured as masses of people, poor, unidentified and victimized in which the image of women and children prevails (Johnson 2011).  

However, in regards to the critics on humanitarian communication and images, some authors seem to have taken a different position.

1.2.4. Positive critics on humanitarian representations

In studying instrumentality in humanitarian communication, Nolan and Mikami have taken a different angle. According to them, ethics delimits “reflexivity” in humanitarian communication rather than informs it and highlights the tendency for humanitarian ethics to be treated as a pre-given ideal that is compromised by the realities of humanitarian practices. Thus, the authors argue that both humanitarian ethics and practice are mutually informing and there should therefore be greater consideration regarding influences that contribute to the ethics and to humanitarian communication which include governments, competitor NGOs, media and different forms of marketing.

Following the same idea as Nolan and Mikami, Vestergaard discusses how for the past 40 years there was a shift of power from humanitarian organizations to external stakeholders as news media, beneficiaries and donors which left humanitarian agencies lacking autonomy and leaves their appeals in “a moral and political vacuum” (2013).

External factors contributing to the representation of victims seem not to be the only influences that explain the victimization of people affected by a crisis as defined by the “absence of political agency by setting a political voicelessness in a refugee representation” (Johnson 2011, p.15). Paschalidis discusses additional inherent features of victims which affect their representation in humanitarian communication. In fact, in order to justify the usage of images of atrocities, the author differentiates between martyrs and victims (2003). In effect, he states that martyrs are heroes, they are people who are remembered and represent the nobility of a national idea. On the other hand, victims are, unlike martyrs, not remembered, they are no heroes and are not a source of pride but rather a source of indignation and frustration. Due to this differentiation, humanitarian discourse becomes articulated around victims and uses these images to show the

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6 An extensive literature on ethics of the media and images is available, such as Manzo, Benthall, humanitarianhealthethics blog and others, however for the purpose of this paper, ethics will briefly be tackled in the discussion as part of the campaigns analysis.
invisible, notably women, children and foreigners and “to make visible that which is unseen, on account of being distant, fundamentally unsayable, unable to be fully articulated in discourse” (2003, p.13).

“To make visible that which is unseen” (Paschalidis 2003, p.13), Wells reaffirms the potential of the melodrama mode to display the social inequalities and generate visceral emotional reactions which produce solidarity and enables the spectator to identify with the suffering subject. She also argues that the melodrama mode is central in its moral legibility and thus she opposes its criticism of being a substitute of politics with compassion and asserts that compassion is as critical for solidarity as is the political understanding of the structural causes of any social inequalities and injuries (2013).

To further justify the use of victimized images, Graham focuses on the photographic space between the photographer and the subject by analyzing pictures from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (2014). According to the author, the photographer does not simply steal the subject from his or herself; the individual’s identity is already inscribed upon her/him and thus the photographer is merely describing what has been already inscribed. She also adds that this space creates interactions and negotiations regarding representation between the photographer and the subject in which the latter is in fact actively engaged and therefore his/her complex politics and political agency as “the capacity to act and to be heard, it is the ability to have an impact both upon one’s own life and upon the lives of others” (Johnson 2011, p15) are respected even in the most victimized images (Graham, 2014).

War photography and photojournalism have also generated controversies in regards to the victimization and aestheticization of images. One of the famous war photographers to be criticized was Salgado Sebastião (Moore 2013). He was one of the first to produce estheticized photographs of suffering in his project with MSF, “Sahel: Man in Distress from 1984 to 1985” during which he took photographs of drought in parts of Chad, Ethiopia, Mali, and Sudan. In effect, Salgado’s photographs are known for picturing suffering in an esthetic, romanticized and hyperdramatic quality and was highly criticized for that. This project created many debates and was condemned by many authors including Chouliaraki to “take attention away from the content of suffering as a painful reality for somebody out there in the world” (2006, p.50). On the other hand, Moore (2013) seems to take an opposite stand by arguing that these photographs do offer a social context, and individualize the subject and whose position seem to be supported by Strauss
who states that “Salgado did not photograph passive victims, and pity does not suffice” (1991, p.99). Those opposing views and critics around war photography show first that the aestheticization of suffering is inherent to photojournalism, especially for famous war photographers such as Salgado and James Nachtwey. Secondly, the major problems with images is their inherent lack of capacity to fully contextualize the subjects they represent, therefore building individualization of victims through images becomes, although incomplete, another way to create a narrative of suffering.

Finally, the individualization of victims in images seems insufficient in order to represent suffering and provoke emotions. In fact, Small and Weinstein (2003) talk about the “Identifiable victim effect” in which identifiable victims stimulate more powerful emotions than statistical victims where identifiable victims are certain victims and statistical victims are probabilistic ones.

Chapter two. 21st century humanitarian communication, innovation and post humanitarian communication

To respond to the critics around humanitarian images, humanitarian agencies have resorted to new and innovative ways of representation.

2.1. Post-humanitarian communication and critics.

Chouliaraki seems to be one of the first authors to tackle the issue of innovation in humanitarian communication and to identify new and specific ways of representation in humanitarian appeals through the analysis of specific humanitarian campaigns, hence for the purpose of this paper we will be using Chouliaraki’s main findings as an analytical grid for the material of the discussion. In fact, Chouliaraki identifies a “post humanitarian communication” (2010, p.108) in which she suggests a move from emotion-oriented style of appealing recognized as “shock” images which are denounced to dehumanize the sufferer (Benthall 1993; Lissner 1979) and “positive” images condemned to estheticize and gloss over the misery of the suffering (Lidchi 1999; Smillie 1995) to post-emotional styles of appealing which break away from pity and privilege a short-term and low-intensity form of agency, not stemming from an intellectual agenda but rather engage the spectator with temporary practices of “playful consumerism” (2010, p.107) and favors “effective activism of effortless immediacy” (2010, p.108).
In order to show this shift, Chouliaraki analyzes three different appeals in terms of their esthetic quality and their moral agency: World Food Program (WFP) “No food diet” (2006) campaign and two of the Amnesty International appeals, “Bullet. The execution” and “It is not happening here but now” (2006, 2007).

Regarding the esthetic quality, the author discusses the “multi-modal juxtaposition” features of those appeals which is the “contrast between different elements of each campaign’s meaning-making system” (2010, p 115) categorized in three different parts:

- **Verbal and visual modes** in which the talk provides a different framing for the visual in order to **ironize** the Western’s cultural habits against the struggle of the South and to create a degree of self-consciousness and self-contemplation.

- **Visual forms and content** to create a sense of **hyperreality**

- **Textual and physical space** which is what Bakhtin calls “chronotopic reversal” (Bakhtin 1986, p.10-59) which plays on **optical illusions** between textual and physical space to blur the boundaries between the spectator and the sufferer and “refers to the reversal of the categories of space and time, where the imagery of distant suffering comes to haunt some of the most banal spaces of our everyday life: the neighborhood street or the bus stop”. (Chouliaraki 2010, p.116).

In fact, in order to apply such model, the usage of white models or bodies seems to become more prevalent in campaigns; notably MSF campaigns portraying white chests with sutures shaped into words7 (Nouvet 2013) or another campaign promoted in Switzerland in which there is a representation of white, Swiss models inflicted by the “typical” suffering of the South in an attempt to move away from stereotyped victims and create a proximity between the West and the South8 (de Laat 2013).

As for the moral agency, Chouliaraki focuses on two characteristics of those campaigns which are the “**Technologization of action**” and the “**de-emotionalization of the cause**” (2010, p.117).

Essentially, the “technologization of action” features the simplification of action which is “understood in the context of engagement and consisting of three analytical dimensions: understanding/awareness, talk, action” (Madianou 2012, p.5) and engagement of the viewer by solely clicking the mouse which has dual dimensions: first, the development of technology and

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7 http://humanitarianhealthethics.net/2013/04/25/images-that-cut-into-you-co-msf/  
8 http://humanitarianhealthethics.net/2013/05/08/donor-solicitation-quagmire/
Internet which have become the mean for public action and second the “de-emotionalization of the cause” dimension of those campaigns, which embodies the absence of explanation on the importance of the action. Therefore, unlike previous styles of appeals, this style abandons the concept of universal morality and communicates instead the organization’s brand. Hence, this style of appeals is what Chouliaraki describes as post-humanitarian communication which presents low-intensity campaigns and detached from grand emotions, characterized by playful games and technological imagination in which guilt, heroism and compassion reappear not as politics of pity but rather as a space in which the spectator has the potential to self-inspect and reflect on him/herself and to have a personal judgment of the cause for action as well as to provide him/her with instant gratification. Therefore such campaigns call for personal action rather than a collective one.

These types of campaigns are criticized for their commodification of the suffering which follows a market logic of branding instead of defending a political vision of social change and justice (2010, p.119). They are also condemned to be unable to go beyond this playfulness and lack “moral education”, thus reducing humanitarian communication to a narcissistic discourse in which the self becomes the measure of the sufferings. This narcissistic and playful discourse has also been condemned in Save the Children’s child sponsoring campaigns (Zarzycka 2015) and the Canadian Red Cross campaign “Choose what moves you” (Nouvet 2013). In fact, these campaigns which follow the post-humanitarian model, were criticized for being unable to present the structural inequalities of the suffering nor to go beyond games and playfulness and were also condemned for setting a parental relationship while at the same time calling for donors and viewers as right-bearing and independent individuals whose generosity and tenderness will save the lives of children, thus rendering their actions as narcissistic and self-contenting.

Finally, one important campaign highly representative of the post-humanitarian communication mode is “Kony 2012” notably for its full potential to bring human solidarity through its power to use technology and social media (Engelhardt et al. 2014). “Kony 2012” is in fact considered as the fastest spreading online video ever produced created by an NGO called Invisible Children in order to denounce the atrocities committed by a warlord named Joseph Kony in Northern Uganda. Despite its powerful potential to bring people for a common cause, “Kony 2012” was highly criticized notably for its lack of explanation and simplification of the war and the context in Northern Uganda, as well as its lack of presentation of the villages and the people affected by
Kony’s atrocities (Hickman 2012). It is also accused of replicating the neo-colonial discourses in which the Westerners are heroes and the Africans are helpless victims. Finally, the video was criticized for promoting naïve and short-sighted solutions, such as the support from the US Army, but also for its low-intensity, low-commitment as well as its low-impact form of political engagement given through the social networking sites such as sharing the video, buying the action kit or putting up posters (Christensen 2011). These actions is what Chouliaraki describes as “mobilizing a momentary activism but do so at the expense of cultivating a deeper understanding of why humanitarian action is important” (2012, p.76), which are typical in online media activism where they preserve the global inequalities rather than challenge them (Dean, 2010).

“Kony 2012” has created controversies on whether it is truly conveying cosmopolitanism or not defined as “cosmopolitan outlook and sensibility opens up space of dialogical imagination in everyday practice” and involves “the capacity to see oneself from the perspective of cultural others and to give practical effect in one’s own experience through the exercise of boundary-transcending imagination” (Beck 2006, p.89). In effect, some authors such as Hoijer (2004) believe that this video calls for discourse of “global compassion” in which there is “a moral sensibility or concern for remote strangers from different continents, cultures and societies” (2004, p.514), whereas others such as Madianou (2012), believes that despite its emphasis on moral responsibility and care for the distant suffering, “Kony 2012” is not a cosmopolitan campaign. The author notes that the call for action in the video is “not embedded in an understanding of the suffering and a moral orientation towards distant others” (2012, p.13) and many of the proposed actions for the spectator are focused towards one’s own peers and are thus more oriented towards a communitarian “us” than a cosmopolitan “them” (Madianou 2012).

2.2. “Intimacy at a distance” and critics.

Another mode of representation used by humanitarian agencies in response to the critics seems to appear, it is the “intimacy at a distance” mode of representation (Orgad 2014). This mode of “intimacy at a distance” attempts to “naturalize” the constructed relations and overcomes the non-reciprocal character of the relation between viewer and beneficiary by drawing on images of mutual and authentic character such as “being there”, “sitting under a tree” and “going on a journey together” (Orgad 2014) and produces a “win-win” situation where audience and
beneficiaries are both benefiting (Chouliaraki 2013). However, these modes of representation have been denounced for being standardized, similar and highly predictable (Cohen 2001; Dogra 2013). According to Illouz, this standardization weakens the nearness and broadens the gap between viewers and beneficiaries (2007).

2.3. Other ways of representation and critics.
MSF has also attempted to apply innovative ways of representation, notably in their campaign “Urban Survivors” (Silva Gama et al. 2013). This campaign seems to be a novel effort and a pivotal moment not only for MSF but also for the entire humanitarian community in sense that this campaign is the first to portray specific persons in need, along with the portrayal of their particular needs.

However, in spite of those efforts, “Urban Survivors” is denounced for the abduction of agency of the subjects represented in this campaign. In fact, due to this phenomenon, the subject has no room to be interpreted in any other way apart from the way that the portraying agent has already fixed her/him thus limiting the subject to an inert object under appreciation rather than an agent (Silva Gama et al. 2013).

Finally, the literature review seems to show, to my knowledge, a poor analysis of NGO campaigns and a greater focus on humanitarian images. This lack of analysis could be explained by the fact that when attention was given to victims’ representation in the 20th century, the focus was mainly on images (due to their rise during this period of time) and remained the same in the attempt to show evolution and changes in that matter, hence the poor concentration on NGO campaigns more specifically.

Part 2. Discussion:
Since the beginning of the Syrian war in 2011, more than half of the population is in need of humanitarian assistance with 12.2 million people in need inside Syria and 4 million refugees in neighboring countries (Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and Iraq). In fact, humanitarian needs from all sectors are absent: needs in health, education, water hygiene and sanitation, livelihood and food security, protection, shelter and non-food items (ACAPS, SNAPS, December 2012-June 2015). Thus in 2015, the humanitarian community pledged for funding of around 8 billion dollars,
however the funding requirements have not been met, with only 26% of the money covered. To respond to the lack of funding, humanitarian agencies have resorted to different strategies, either through fundraising campaigns such as the ones produced by Save the Children\textsuperscript{10}, UNHCR\textsuperscript{11} and Islamic Relief\textsuperscript{12} campaigns, or advocacy and awareness raising campaigns such as ICRC to promote the protection of civilians and International Humanitarian Law\textsuperscript{13} and others (Please see footnotes below for examples). Hence, for the purpose of this paper, three campaigns were chosen for analysis: “Most shocking second a day” video of Save the Children, #WithSyria campaign and finally “The children of Syria” Islamic Relief’s campaign. Those campaigns were chosen for several reasons: “Most shocking second a day” video was chosen mainly for its viral capacity but also for its mother agency, an international Western/English non Faith-Based NGO representing victims coming from the South, in this case Syrian victims; #WithSyria campaign for the large number of agencies working in coalition as well as the participation of celebrities notably Banksy and the Idris Elba and finally Islamic Relief’s campaign for the profile of the agency, an Islamic Faith-Based NGO. These organizations were chosen purposefully for their diverse origins and profiles, thus attempting to create, as much as possible, a more illustrative analysis of Syrian victims in humanitarian appeals as well as a more meaningful comparison between them.

Interviews with staff from the concerned NGOs were attempted in order to gather more information regarding the purpose, the making and the intended impact of these videos. However, due to their limited resources and workload, only two interviews were conducted (Please find below in annex the interview questions): one with Save the Children’s Marketing and communications Manager, Ms. Vishnee Sauntoo; and one with International Rescue Committee (IRC) Policy and Advocacy Officer Mr. Luke Brown for the #WithSyria campaign. IRC participated in the campaign however they were not the main agency involved in its organization.

Kindly note that the analysis of these three campaigns followed the analysis grid of images based on Chouliaraki’s article Post-humanitarianism Humanitarian communication beyond a politics of

\textsuperscript{9} https://fts.unocha.org/pageloader.aspx?page=special-syriancrisis
\textsuperscript{10} Fundraise for Syrian children campaign with a goal to raise 150 000 dollars http://www.savethechildren.org/faf/home/default.asp?ievent=1091398
\textsuperscript{11} Time to act campaign 2014 http://timetoact.unhcr.org/campaign/
\textsuperscript{12} Stand up for Syria campaign 2014 http://www.islamic-relief.org.uk/campaigns/stand-up-for-syria-campaign/
\textsuperscript{13} Syria: even wars have limits 2015 https://www.icrc.org/en/document/syria-even-wars-have-limits
pity (2010) because as mentioned earlier Chouliaraki seems to be the first author to challenge innovations in humanitarian communication and to determine novel ways of portrayal and trends of representation in humanitarian appeals by selecting and analyzing specific humanitarian campaigns.

2.1. Conception of the campaigns.
Save the Children “Most shocking second a day” video, Islamic Relief “The children of Syria” and #WithSyria campaign all deal with one crisis in common, the Syrian crisis. Despite their common topic, each campaign has attempted to represent the Syrian war and its victims in different ways and for different purposes.

2.1.1. Save the children “Most shocking second a day” video.
Unlike the two other campaigns, “Most shocking second a day” campaign, produced in May 5th 2014 and made by the creative agency Don’t Panic, takes place in London, UK where a war, like the Syrian war, begins. In fact, the campaign’s goal is to commemorate the third anniversary of the Syrian conflict and aims at bringing the reality of the situation in Syria to London by depicting a second of each day in the year of a young typical English girl’s life and documenting the day to day horrors of the war on the child’s previously comfortable life, who by the end of the film is shown living in a refugee camp14. The video ends with “Just because it isn't happening here doesn't mean it isn't happening” in order to encourage the English audience to identify themselves and relate better with the terrible impact of the Syrian war on the lives of the Syrian children. According to Ms. Vishnee, the film’s main driver is to raise awareness about the Syrian war among the English audience in a way that would be creative and that would resonate better to the public, hence the transposition of the war to the UK. However due to its very high publicity, Save the children have eventually decided to add a fundraising element to the video which is actually shown by a small box on the upper right hand side of the video with “US: text SYRIA to 20222 to donate $5” and “UK: text SYRIA to 70008 to donate £5” and then by “How you can help” box which leads to Save the Children Website in order to donate. Also, according to the interviewee, Save the Children’s primary objective was to create a feeling of shock in the public and make the audience want to share the video through social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter or blogs. Ms. Vishnee claims that the best way to create awareness would be

14 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBQ-loHfimQ
to share the video and affirms that when charity appeals include donations or petitions, the public becomes less interested in the cause. The latter statement from Ms. Vishnee reaffirms what Chouliarak criticizes in her article, the commodification of the action centered on the development of technology and social media.

1.2. #WithSyria campaign.

#WithSyria campaign was produced in March 12th 2014, led by street artist Banksy along with the rock band Elbow, in coalition with 130 humanitarian and human rights groups and narrated by the famous actor Idris Elba marks as well the third anniversary of the Syrian conflict by featuring Banksy’s famous 2002 image of a girl holding a red balloon, flying away from the horrors of the Syrian war. According to Mr. Luke, the campaign aims at raising global solidarity with the Syrian people and raising awareness in the hope that the public would pressure their governments to fund the humanitarian response, to end the violence and protect civilians and to find a political solution to this war but also to make the public better understand why their governments are already funding the Syrian crisis. According to the interviewee, this campaign was created for several reasons including the lack of humanitarian access at that particular time, the UN Security Resolution 2165 which had not passed yet and needed to be passed, the lack of funding and the fear that the Syrian war would be forgotten. In addition, the campaign also comprised a revised version of Banksy’s girl which was projected in more than 35 different countries and called for series of vigils to be held around the world. Moreover, the film includes a message claimed by the actor Idris Elba, “Will you stand for Syria” which aims at creating a moment by sharing the hashtag #WithSyria on Twitter and other social media outlets and by calling for vigils to show to the Syrian people that the world had not forgotten about them. “Will you stand for Syria” message was meant to be broad enough in order to

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15 Banksy is a British anonymous street artist known for his graffiti art through which he criticizes contemporary issues related to politics, consumerism, terrorism as well as the status of art and its display. Through his work, the graphic style of displaying children, soldiers, cops and celebrities, he has created a personal signature which makes him immediately identifiable. https://www.artsy.net/artist/banksy

16 Elbow is a British rock band created in 1992 known for their songs which balance between political matters mainly related to UK and personal ones. http://elbow.co.uk/

17 Such as Amnesty International, Care, Save the Children, International Rescue Committee, Islamic Relief, Oxfam and others.

18 Idris Elba is an award winning British actor mainly known for his role as Nelson Mandela in Mandela: Long walk to freedom and for his role in the series Luther. http://www.biography.com/people/idris-elba-21429871

19 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2VVoCxdm7T8
accommodate and unify all of the 130 organizations involved in this campaign despite their different mandates as well as to reach a larger public (interview with Mr. Luke, August 5, 2015).

2.1.3. Islamic Relief “The children of Syria” campaign.

Finally, the Islamic Relief’s campaign, “The children of Syria” produced in June 18th 2014, takes place in Syria and neighboring countries in which the lives of the Syrian victims and the reality of the war and its impact of the Syrian population are depicted. In fact, contrary to the other two campaigns, Islamic Relief campaign is explicitly a fundraising campaign in which calls for donations are overtly mentioned during the Islamic holy period of Ramadan during which helping the other is a ritual. Finally, the discourse in this video seems to differ from the other two. Actually, Islamic Relief as an Islamic Faith-Based NGO, uses a religious cause and speech to call for donations by stating sentences like “Islam teaches the upmost regard for the rights of the child, as each child is a gift from Allah to be nurtured and protected” and “We can double your donations this Ramadan, Insha’Allah” thus primarily targeting a more religious, Muslim audience.

2.2. Analysis of the campaigns

2.2.1. Portrayals of people

In all three campaigns, children and women seem to be the main subjects throughout the videos. In effect, they all represent children not older than 15-16 years old who are victims of the war, whether fictional as the one in Save the Children’s campaign or real as in the other two. Also, all of them use a cropped frame in which only the upper body of the subjects is represented whether during the entire video such as in Save the Children’s one or during specific moments for the other two. In effect, the use of such cropped frame aims at focusing on the facial expressions of the subjects in order to induce compassion and empathy in the viewers and attempt to create proximity between the audience and the subjects by better understanding the impact of war on those victims.

Actually, the presentation of such subjects does not offer any innovation in the representation of victims in humanitarian communication. These images, in the 21st century, are still the idiom of charity appeals and classical aid recipients and remain the focal body to draw attention onto as signifiers of pain and suffering. In fact, as shown by these campaigns, humanitarian

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20 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q1mWhjz6wDE
communication still exposes children to arouse paternal feelings to safeguard and care for children, thus rendering them as a commodity to sell market goods (Burman 1993, 1994). In addition, the representation of mother and child notably in Islamic Relief campaign seems to lack innovation and conforms to the religious iconography mentioned by Wright, the “Madonna and child” portrait where the mother carries her child on her lap and close to her chest. This religious iconography also appears in the video by presenting the mother and child in a state of degradation and isolation derived from Adam and Eve’s expulsion portraits, thus affirming what Wright claims.

Finally, the gendered distribution of childhood, the “girl child” as mentioned by Burman (1993, p.5) seems to still take place in campaigns, however to a lesser extent. In effect, #WithSyria campaign starts by a girl holding a balloon whose face is the focus of the video, although a boy is shown for a much shorter period of time. As for “Most shocking second a day” video, Save the Children had decided to display a girl as the main character because of her acting skills and not due to her gender (interview with Ms. Vishnee, July 31, 2015). On the other hand, Islamic Relief takes also another stand on this issue in which it does not focus on female figures and displays throughout its campaign both boys and girls.

2.2.2. Music/sounds and color/lightening of the campaigns.

As for the music and sounds used in the videos, each campaign uses a different auditory style and method. In its video, Save the Children does not use any music as a background but rather focuses on sounds related to war such as the news on the radio or the TV, bombs, shelling, airstrikes, gunshots and screams of the people in order to show the evolution of events and recreate the environment of war, thus placing the audience in the shoes of the distant Syrian suffering. However, in #WithSyria campaign, there is a melancholic/melodramatic song playing in the background, a song by the rock band Elbow aligned with the topic of the video, hope, and the graphics which represent children being carried to the sky by red balloons by singing parts of the song such as “Carry both of us, carry her, carry me” and “from the place we were born, to the land of the free, carry both of us, carry her, carry me”. As for the Islamic Relief campaign, the auditory background takes two different aspects: the beginning of the video starts with an action like, suspense kind of music during the introductory part of the video in order to draw the spectator into the video and then the music switches into a melodramatic mode to stimulate emotions and retain the interest of the audience throughout the video. Lastly, the switch to the
melodrama mode in “The children of Syria” campaign is briefly cut during the part in which Islamic Relief presents the aid it provides to the Syrian victims; the music becomes faster and less melodramatic in order to give a sense of emergency and show the positive impact of Islamic Relief’s assistance on the victims. In effect, the auditory background of these campaigns confirms that the melodrama mode is still used, hence proving its necessity to generate emotional reactions and display the social inequalities and consequences of the Syrian war thus producing solidarity and allowing the spectator to identify with the distant suffering subject (Wells 2013). Finally, regarding the colors and the lightening used the campaigns, “Most shocking second a day” video’s lightening becomes more and more dim throughout the video again in order to emphasize on the devastating impact of the war on the life of the child depicted in the campaign which is meant to represent the lives of all Syrian children affected by the war in general. As for the #WithSyria campaign, there is a contrast of colors between the greyish colors of the campaign and the red balloons to shed light on the existence of hope for all children of Syria through these balloons.

2.2.3. Post-humanitarian communication or not?

Save the children “One second a day” campaign follows a typical post-humanitarian communication modal, thus reaffirming Chouliaraki (2010). In fact, the campaign uses one of the three forms of “multi-modal juxtaposition” (2010, p.115) the “chronotopic reversal” (Bakhtin, 1986, p10-59). This “chronotopic reversal” is put in place by playing between the physical and the textual space in order to generate an optical illusion by creating a fictional war in London, similar to the Syrian war, and following the evolvement of events and impact of this war on a typical English, white, blond young girl. Like the MSF campaigns displaying white sutured chests and typical Swiss individuals inflicted by the “typical” suffering of the South (2001, 2005 respectively), Save the Children uses the same method in order to diverge from the typical, stereotyped victim and create proximity between the English and the Syrians by diminishing the boundaries and the distance between them. As for the form of action suggested in the video, the click of a mouse to donate money without any further explanation on the specific needs, importance of engagement and action and on the significance of social change, is emblematic of what Chouliaraki describes as “Technologization of action” and the “de-emotionalization of the cause” (2010). This simplification of engagement detached from emotions and which obeys to the development of the Internet and a market logic is representative of the commodification of
the suffering where it lets down the cause behind the action, the social change and the political vision and focuses rather on the brand of the NGO, in this case Save the Children. The promotion of the brand appears not only through the mode of the video but also in their page directed from the small box indicating “How you can help”, where the hyperlinked “find out more” leads to another page offering more information on the work of Save the Children rather than providing additional information related to the Syrian war and the importance of action. One could push further and criticize the campaign for its lack of respect for human dignity by using suffering as a mean to boost the agency’s image and promote its activities, without any explanation on the significance of these activities and viewers’ long-term commitment to the political, social and structural changes on the lives of the victims.

Thus, we can say that “One second a day” campaign is illustrative of post-humanitarian communication characterized by being unable to go beyond the playful games of creating optical illusions, where feelings of guilt and compassion are evoked as a mean of self-inspection and self-reflection in order to provoke a personal judgement on the causes of action and provide instant gratification through a simple and quick click of the mouse, hence lacking universal morality and moral education. This self-reflection induced by the games and the illusions of transposing the Syrian war into the West, leaves the action as narcissistic and thus reducing it to a communitarian one rather than a cosmopolitan one where the self rather than the other becomes the center of engagement and change (Madianou 2012).

On the other hand, “The children of Syria” campaign, as opposed to “One second a day” campaign, does not seem to use any “multi-juxtaposition” modal in the sense that it does not display any irony, nor any hyperreality nor does it attempt to create any optical illusions. In fact, in its video, Islamic Relief tries to convey the reality of the context and the impact of the war on the lives of the Syrian people. In order to give a better understanding of the situation and make it more comprehensible to the public, the organization uses several methods: it puts numbers of dead children into perspective by using school buses in order to highlight the gravity of the death toll of children in Syria by making it more visual and practical to the viewers. In addition, what the agency makes sure of is to portray the environment where the victims of the Syrian war are living in by showing the destruction of homes, schools and hospitals, rubble and tents isolated and in the middle of the desert. Also, what Islamic Relief ensures, which is absent from the other two campaigns, is to actually give a name and a voice to the victims and be able to share their
stories and their specific needs. The ability to show the specific needs of specific persons is quite similar to the “Urban Survivor” project produced by MSF. However, although “Urban survivors” images were criticized for its abduction of agency where the subject under appreciation has no room to be interpreted in any other way apart from the way that he/she is portrayed by the agent, thus reducing him/her to a passive object rather than an agent (Silva Gama et al. 2013), “The children of Syria” was able to surpass this by giving a voice and space to the victims to express their experiences, thoughts, feelings and needs. On the other hand, what the video was not able to provide is a call for action that goes beyond the click of a mouse, as shown by this campaign which urges viewers to donate money through the click of the mouse on the “Donate now” box.

In addition, Islamic Relief seems to have fallen into the trap of representing Syrians as victimized and helpless persons waiting for external aid/Islamic Relief’s aid to come and save them. In fact, this depiction of Syrians exhibits an image of power imbalance and dependency between aid agencies and Syrians affected by the war, hence displaying them as pathetic and demanding individuals. Through this representation, Islamic Relief has missed to illustrate Syrian individuals as thinking persons who have their own hopes and lives and are, like any persons affected by a crisis, the first responders and usually the first partners of humanitarian organizations.

Finally, #WithSyria, like “Most shocking second a day” video, is another campaign representative of the post-humanitarian communication. It also uses one of the forms of multi-modal juxtaposition, which plays with visual forms and content to create a sense of hyperreality by adding an additional fictional layer to the horrible reality of the Syrian war, the red balloons and the children flying away from the war holding those balloons. The call for action used in this campaign is also highly illustrative of the post-humanitarian communication: the “Will you stand for Syria” expressed in the video without any further and deeper explanation on the types of action and their importance as well as its usage of low-intensity actions through social media, technology development and internet to mobilize solidarity by inviting viewers to write the hashtag #WithSyria on social media, thus commodifying the action. This type of engagement asserts Chouliaraki and shows that in the 21st century humanitarian communication does involve viewers in brief practices of “playful consumerism” (2010, p.107) and favors “effective activism of effortless immediacy” (idem, p.108) and instant gratification. #WithSyria campaign, like Save
the Children’s, fails to promote long-term commitment and structural change while still
displaying the suffering of Syrians, as a result ineffectively respecting the dignity of the subjects.

2.2.4. Intimacy at a distance?

“Sitting together under a tree” (Orgad, 2014) relationship as a mean of representation in the
campaigns seems absent in all three of them as there is no depiction of humanitarian workers
with beneficiaries in the same shot in which NGO workers and victims are portrayed as two sides
together, “under a tree”, in the same difficult situation and projecting an egalitarian and one-to-
one relationship between them which seems to oppose Orgad’s findings.

As for “Being there” kind of relationship between audience and beneficiaries in which
beneficiaries are seen as intimates sharing the same space with viewers (Idem, 2014) is in fact
displayed in Save the Children’s video by transposing the Syrian war onto English space, hence
creating physical proximity and attempting to bring both sides closer to each other, reaffirming
the author’s conclusions.

Finally, “Going on a journey” (Idem, 2014) relationship between NGOs and the audience as a
mode of representation in images in which the journey is primarily constructed on education
where NGOs are educator and viewers are receptors seems lacking in all three campaigns.
Actually, as discussed earlier, these campaigns rely on social media to call for action as they
provide quick and easy options (click of a mouse), leaving behind any explanation on the
importance of political and social change brought by viewers’ engagement, thus disapproving
Orgad’s results and analysis.

2.3. Impact of the campaigns.

The reactions and critics following the production and launching of “Most shocking second a
day”, “WithSyria” and “The children of Syria” campaigns seem to originate mainly from the
media. So far, there has been no deeper criticism and analysis of these campaigns from any
scholars or academics thus leaving the media critics seem limiting and incomplete.

2.3.1. Save the Children “Most shocking second a day” video.

Among the three campaigns, “Most shocking second a day” video seem to have taken most of
the attention from the media. In fact, compared with the other two campaigns, it has gathered the
highest number of views on YouTube, around 50 million views until today and was mentioned
by several magazines, newspapers, websites and blogs. Actually, most of these media sources viewed the campaign as mostly shocking, striking and unsettling and all agree that the video was able to generate unprecedented buzz for the agency across the Web. According to Visible Measures and Drum magazine (June 2014, March 2014 respectively), the campaign scored viral win and was by far the most successful campaign Save the Children was able to produce as well as one of the most popular Community and Activism campaigns of all time by reaching Top of the Viral Chart and gaining 1.6 million views on its first day as well as breaking the 20 million views on its fifth. Also, Drum Magazine (2014) and Time Magazine (2014) claim this campaign to be a novel way and a growing trend used by humanitarian agencies to represent the plight of the distant suffering by creating circumstances that viewers can relate to, therefore reducing the distance between the audience and the subject. Actually, Ms. Vishnee stated that the outcome of the film was incredible and beyond expectations in terms of views, shares and media work around it. According to her, the video received 10 million views within the first 48 hours worldwide, more people subscribed to Save the Children’s YouTube channel with 14 000 subscription, which represents a 600% increase in subscriptions, 300 000 Likes and 118 000 shares on YouTube. These numbers include only YouTube, without taking into account the shares via Facebook, Twitter, blogs, news wires and magazines. In terms of public awareness follow up, the interviewee mentioned a Save the Children’s piece of research called Brand Tracker in which, every month, some questions are asked to the public (2000 members) related to the types of charities they are aware of, whether they would support and donate to Save the Children on the long term, their reactions and type of actions they would engage in after watching the video and are finally requested to share the video. The answers to these questions were, according to Ms. Vishnee, positive in terms of the public’s trust in Save the Children as a humanitarian agency and understanding of the film. She added that in fact the public’s demand for more information on Save the children’s work as well as on the video and the Syrian crisis increased. Ms. Vishnee also complemented that another way to follow up on the impact of the video is in terms of its longevity in the sense that after more than a year of the film’s release, some people are still sharing and viewing the film. Finally, to ensure that “Most shocking second

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21 Time magazine, the Dailymail, Express magazine, Business insider, The Washington post, Visible Measures media blog, Slate magazine’s culture blog, AgencySpy website which gathers all media related updates, The Telegraph, The Independent, Drum magazine and FairSay which works with the world's leading campaigns to increase their effectiveness and others.
a day” is a good representation of the conflict in Syria, Save the children shared the campaign with Syrian children in Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan in order to have a feedback. The interviewee confirmed that the children thought it was a very good and true representation of the conflict and its impact on children’s lives. In terms of money raised, the interviewee had no information on the amount of funds raised.

In fact, Ms. Vishnee’s feedback on the public’s reaction to the campaign seems to focus mainly on the buzz it has generated on social media, which seems to be a key indicator for the monitoring of the campaign’s success to reach its goal. This is actually confirming Chouliaraki’s argument on the commodification of action obeying to the development of internet and the use of social media as a mean of effortless and immediate engagement resulting in instant gratification and characterized as the “Technologization of action” and “de-emotionalization of the cause” (2010). The interviewee reaffirms the power of social media on modern campaigning when asking members of Brand Tracker to share the video once they have answered the questions set by the agency which fails to involve viewers in a deeper manner but also by Save the Children’s lack of monitoring on the actions taken up by viewers which are unrelated to social media, and which go beyond the awareness raised as a result of watching the video but rather focuses on actions taken up by audiences challenging social and political change related to the Syrian crisis.

To better understand the causes behind this success, Richard Roaf (the Director of Alter Eco Communications) from FairSay gives an explanation to why the campaign received so much attention. According to him, the three main reasons are first its capacity to incite an emotional connection between the viewer and the subject, who can easily be identified with and the second is due to the title which arouses the curiosity of the people as to why the video is shocking and because it does not disclose its charity appeal nor its topic, in this case the Syrian conflict, it is able to reach out to a larger audience, not only the one already engaged in the cause. In effect, Ms. Vishnee also confirmed the impact of the video’s title which was able to attract an audience with little knowledge on the Syrian crisis, notably younger viewers. Finally, the third reason is its launching method which included social media channels. However, despite its buzz, Richard Roaf questions the campaign’s genuine success in reaching its intended end and criticizes the video to be lacking the chance to engage the viewers in a deeper way and opposes Ms. Linda McBain, the Digital Marketing Manager at Save the Children, who claims that:
"We wanted the video to put a fresh light on the conflict and reach a new audience who may not fully understand what is happening and give them a new perspective on the reality of the lives of millions of Syrian children and their families affected by the fighting. For me, the true value of the video will be measured over the longer term – keeping awareness high and increasing engagement with our follow up Syria campaigns."

2.3.2 #WithSyria campaign.

Compared with “Most shocking second a day” video, #WithSyria campaign provoked less intense reactions and viral capacity from viewers and the media and gathered around 190 000 views on Youtube. Despite its reduced views and viral capacity, the campaign still attracted attention from multiple media sources. In fact, #WithSyria campaign seemed to have received more criticism than Save the Children’s one. According to Marc Lynch (professor of political science and international affairs at George Washington University and director of the Institute for Middle East Studies and the Project on Middle East Political Science), who criticized the campaign in the Washington Post (March 14, 2014) by denouncing the campaign for its lack of capacity to change people’s attitudes toward the Syrian war, notably Americans’ attitudes, as well as its lack of capacity to offer concrete and specific actions to the public. However, as mentioned previously, Mr. Luke states that the message was meant to be simple and large enough in order to unify the different agencies working in #WithSyria campaign and attempt to attract a large public worldwide. The simplification of the message is actually disputed by Dogra (2012) who acknowledges that the latter is hard to avoid, however the author finds the assumption of presenting viewers as a homogenized mass problematic, notably among the British public, and challenges this idea by conducting small interviews with a non-representative section of the public and denounced such generalizations as untrue. Hence the author argues that NGO campaigns should be able to go beyond forming a simple “human” bond between viewers and sufferers and instill greater understanding of global poverty among Westerners.

In addition, the revised girl figure created by Banksy portrayed with a veil also raised serious criticism notably from the Lebanese blogger, Hisham Ashkar (2014). In effect, the blogger denounces Banksy’s work and all organizations working in the campaign for being ignorant, orientalist and stereotyping and to fall into the trap of displaying egocentric perceptions of the

Finally, he also adds that this image reinforces discrimination and stigmatization of the other. On the other hand, according to Mr. Luke, the veil girl’s image was meant to be tailored for different audiences and show cultural sensitivity notably in Muslim countries where vigils took place.

Finally, according to the interviewee, an important outcome of #WithSyria campaign was its contribution in regards to the UN Security Council’s Resolution 2165 which was passed a few months later. Another positive result was the ability of #WithSyria campaign to be able to actually capture a moment and create a significant profile in social media notably in terms of number of tweets on Twitter. The interviewee also added that the campaign was able to increase political commitment from governments to increase funding appeals to Syria and the region. However, Mr. Luke asserts that the campaign failed to end the conflict and incite policy change.

2.3.3. Islamic Relief campaign

In regards to “The children of Syria” campaign, as to my knowledge, did not receive much attention from viewers nor from the media (Western and Arabic media), with only 7769 views on Youtube and no mentioning of this video in the media. Unfortunately, interviews with Islamic Relief were not possible due to their lack of resources.

**Conclusion:**

This dissertation has attempted to identify innovations and new ways of portrayal of victims of crisis, notably victims of the Syrian war in humanitarian communication by analyzing three different NGO campaigns: Save the children “Most shocking second a day” video, Islamic Relief “The children of Syria” campaign and #WithSyria campaign. In fact, these campaigns have shown novelty in the depiction of Syrian victims, which seems to follow a post-humanitarian model, hence reaffirming Chouliaraki’s study (2010). Actually, these campaigns demonstrate a shift from emotion-centered style of appeals of displaying “shock” and “positive” images denounced for dehumanizing and victimizing the suffering subject as well as for estheticizing the struggle and misery of the suffering to a new style of appealing, no longer oriented toward emotions and pity but rather favors a short-term and low-intensity form of action and agency and engages the spectator with temporary practices. These temporary practices appear in those three campaigns in the form of a click of a mouse and utilize the development of technology, social
media and internet to raise solidarity, awareness and money. Therefore, once again, these campaigns confirm Chouliaraki’s analysis on the commodification of action which follows a market logic and centered on social media, while giving up any explanation on the importance of action and social change.

However, these campaigns have shown no innovation notably in the choice of the subjects represented in these videos. In effect, women and children seem to remain the focus and emblem of suffering and misery in humanitarian communication and continue to be the main recipients of aid. In recent campaigning, they are still exposed to viewers in order to stimulate paternal feelings and arouse solidarity. In addition, it seems that the usage of the melodrama mode in humanitarian appeals appears to be present still in the 21st century charities hence attesting its necessity to generate emotional reactions and display the social inequalities and consequences of crisis on the affected population, in this case the Syrian population in order to allow the spectator to identify with the distant suffering and provoke solidarity.

As for the impact of these campaigns in terms of awareness raising, it seems that these appeals were able to raise awareness, understanding and engagement among the public, notably among young viewers as well as to increase commitment from governments to fund the Syrian crisis and find political solutions to the war. On the other hand, these campaigns lacked the capacity to induce further policy changes, protect civilians and attempt to end the war.

In terms of fundraising, these campaigns fail to show their impact on donor fatigue and their capacity to raise money notably Save the Children and #WithSyria campaigns as their primary intend is to incite engagement and awareness among viewers rather than collecting funds, in addition to the lack of information on the amount of money raised eventually from these appeals. Nonetheless one could assume that funds are still lacking in general, as shown by UNOCHA’s numbers presented previously. Hence, although it would take another study to show more the financial aspect of campaigns, it would have been more beneficial to choose exclusively fundraising campaigns in which their ability to raise funds could have been more thoroughly tackled and analyzed.

Finally, it seems that studies in humanitarian communication focuses only on one side, the side of humanitarian agencies and their representation of victims of disasters. However, studies tackling the victims’ own representation in images seem to be lacking from the available literature. In fact, further research on the active participation of subjects in their own
representation in humanitarian images by providing the appropriate equipment, skills and space for the subject to be able to depict him/herself and others’ suffering seems of importance and added value to the literature. Hence, these images produced by the victims could become a new area of analysis and comparison between NGOs representations of suffering and the victims’ own representation of suffering.
ANNEXES

Map of Syrian refugees in neighboring countries

http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php

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**Interview questions**

1- What were the reasons that made you produce this campaign? For example, was it in reaction of the low funding for Syria?

2- What was your process when deciding on how to portray or represent the subjects in your campaign? Why did you choose to represent them in a certain way and not another?

3- What were the reactions you intended to provoke in viewers?

4- How did you decide on the type of action to call for?

5- What was the outcome of your campaign? How did you follow up on the impact of your campaign? Was it up to your expectations (in terms of money or in terms of public awareness)?

6- If you think it did not reach your intended outcome, why do you think it did not? How did you tackle this issue?
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