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VISUAL THEATERS OF SUFFERING

CONSTITUTING THE WESTERN SPECTATOR IN THE
AGE OF THE HUMANITARIAN WORLD POLITICS

ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

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Visual Theaters of Suffering - Constituting the Western Spectator in the Age of the Humanitarian World Politics

Visual images picturing suffering of others are in many ways forceful; they move their spectators emotionally and politically. Images of wars, crisis and suffering communicate humanity, the peril it is in, as well as the need to protect it and to alleviate suffering. Emotive images of bodily suffering affect the understanding of not only the immediate crisis they depict but of the surrounding world, the position of the spectators of the images, as well as the position of the spectated (suffering) others.

This is a study into the position, significance, framings and utilization of images of atrocity, war and human suffering within the evolution of the ideas of a shared human community and humanitarian discourse. The *visual theaters of suffering* are approached within a historical perspective from the times of the Enlightenment onwards, focusing particularly on the era of Western lead *humanitarian world politics* of the recent decades. The thesis asks, how images of suffering presented within a humanitarian frame have historically been communicating apprehensions of a shared humanity whilst reflecting the political preconditions of their era. And how images of distress and crisis in the more contemporary international political and media contexts are framed and used within the Western sphere, and how they are communicating the prevalent humanitarian ethos of their time. The dissertation focuses on visual practices that constitute namely the *Western spectatorship* and *Western spectator* of suffering, and thus the practices that through visual representations of suffering, war and conflict constitute, produce and reproduce conceptions of international politics, the West and the Rest and hierarchies of humanity.

Humanitarianism, especially in the more contemporary political settings, is approached as an influential (*unconscious*) *ideology*. Emotive images of suffering are perceived as emotionally driven *theatrical tragedy arrangements* through which the ideological apparatus of humanitarianism addresses and invites its audiences to see the spectacles of global suffering in certain contextual, politically and ideologically constructed and governed ways.

Firstly the history of visual humanitarian communication from the mid-eighteenth century until 2000s is mapped out. Through the mapping out of the imagery, the positions and framing of images of human suffering within the evolution of the humanity and humanitarianism discourses and changing notions of life seen as worthy of protection and rights are analyzed. Secondly, through four divergent, contemporary and empirically orientated

cases, it is analyzed how various images of crisis, war and suffering/non-suffering are arranged and utilized in the contemporary settings of Western humanitarian world politics. In the contemporary setting, images of conflict, war, natural catastrophes and refugeeness are discussed, and the differences of the representation of Western suffering vis-à-vis non-Western suffering are analyzed as a *theater of proof* of the conditional nature of humanity. Topical Western visual war branding efforts—strategic communication of the NATO Afghanistan operation—are analyzed from the point of view of the legitimizing narratives of contemporary Western war. Also the visual narratives of the Western enemies—Muammar Gaddafi, Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden—in the context of Western humanitarian international politics are scrutinized. And finally, the positions of social media images of contemporary war within international politics—namely the images of the Syrian 2013 Ghouta chemical assault—are analyzed.

The thesis shows how visual humanitarian communication, the representational practices and arrangements of images of pain and crisis, have during history reflected, as well as constructed, the predominant thinking on humanity, the perils it faces and the available means to protect life from these perils. It is concluded that in addition to mediating distant atrocities and informing the spectators of the need of help, images of war and suffering are contemporarily often used in the branding of military operations and legitimation of interventionist actions, as well as utilized as strategic enablers in foreign political settings in times of crisis. Moreover, it is argued that the humanitarian imagery of today has become a central arena of communicating the world order, and further of indicating the status of the sufferers within the global hierarchy of humanity, and thus manifesting the globally conditional value of (human) life and the limited universality of humanity.

The study includes 24 collage illustrations into which some of the key visual images discussed in the study are compiled.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Kuvat muiden kärsimyksestä vaikuttavat katsojiinsa monilla tunteisiin vetoavilla ja poliittisilla tavoilla. Kärsimyksen kuvat kertovat ihmisyydestä, sitä uhkaavista ilmiöistä sekä elämän suojelun ja kärsimyksen helpottamisen tarpeesta. Yksittäisten kriisimielikuvien muokkaamisen lisäksi kuvat vaikuttavat käsityksiin ympäröivästä maailmasta muovaten katsojiensa käsityksiä omasta ja muiden asemasta globaalissa järjestyksessä.

Tämä tutkimus keskittyy sotien-, kriisien- ja kärsimyksen kuvien asemaan, käyttöön ja kehystykseen ihmisyyden, ihmisoikeus- ja humanitaaristen diskurssien kehittymisen konteksteissa, eli tarkastelee *ihmisyyden visuaalisia teattereja* historiallisessa perspektiivissä. Tutkimus tarkastelee kärsimyksen kuvien asemaa laajenevan ja muuttuvan läntisen humanitaarisen diskurssin ja ihmisoikeusdiskurssin osana, ja kartoittaa sitä miten kuvien esityskäytännöt ovat heijastelleet sekä rakentaneet aikansa käsityksiä elämän suojelun tarpeesta ja oikeuksien arvoisesta elämästä. Tarkastelu alkaa valistusajalta 1700-luvun puolivälistä keskittyen nimenomaan viime vuosikymmenten, läntisen *humanitaarisen maailmanpolitiikan* aikakauden läntisiin kuvakäytäntöihin. Tutkimuksen keskiössä ovat kriisien kuvien esittämisen käytännöt viime vuosikymmenten kansainvälisen politiikan kontekstissa sekä se, miten kuvat muodostavat nimenomaan läntistä katsetta ja *läntistä katsojaa*, näin ollen heijastellen ja rakentaen kansainvälisen politiikan ja ihmisyyden hierarkioita.

Humanitarismi, varsinkin lähivuosisikymmenten kansainvälispoliittisissa yhteyksissä, käsitetään tutkimuksessa *alitajuisena ideologiana*. Kärsimyksen kuvien esityskäytäntöjen nähdään muodostavan *teatraalisen tragediamuodon*, jonka kautta humanitaarinen ideologia puhuttelee ja kutsuu katsojiaan näkemään globaalit kärsimyksen spektaakkelit kontekstuaalisilla, ideologisesti ja poliittisesti rakentuneilla ja hallinnoiduilla tavoilla.

Tutkimuksen ensimmäinen osa kartoittaa humanitaarisen kuvaston käyttöä valistusajalta 2000-luvulle saakka analysoiden kuvaston asemaa kehittyvän ja muuttuvan ihmisyyden- ja humanitarismidiskurssin yhteyksissä. Toiseksi, neljän erilaisen, empiirisesti suuntautuneen 2000-luvun tapauksen valossa analysoidaan sodan, kriisien ja kärsimyksen kuvien asemaa ja käyttöä nykyisen läntisen humanitaarisen kansainvälisen politiikan yhteyksissä. Tutkimuksessa analysoidaan kuvia viimevuosien sodista, terrorismista, luonnonkatastrofeista, epidemioista ja pakolaisuudesta sekä käsitellään länsimaisten ja ei-länsimaisten ihmisten kärsimyksen kuvallisen esittämisen käytäntöjä ihmisyyden arvon *todistamisen teatterina*. Tarkastelun kohteena ovat myös läntisen nykysodan visuaaliset markkinointi- ja legitimointinarratiivit ja Nato-johtoisen Afganistanin operaation strategisen kommunikaation kuvat. Viimeaikaisten lännen

kansainvälispoliittisten vihollisten – Muammar Gaddafin, Saddam Husseinin ja Osama bin Ladenin – kiinniotto- ja rankaisukuvastoja käsitellään humanitaarisen maailmanpolitiikan kontekstissa. Ja viimeiseksi tarkastellaan nykysodista levinneiden sosiaalisen median kuvien asemaa kansainvälisessä politiikassa, Syyrian Ghoutassa elokuussa 2013 tapahtuneiden kaasuisukujen kuvien käytön avulla.

Väitöskirja osoittaa, miten humanitaarinen visuaalinen viestintä, kärsimyksen ja konfliktien kuvien esittämisen käytännöt ja asetelut ovat historian saatossa heijastelleet sekä muokanneet vallitsevia käsityksiä ihmisyydestä, arvokkaasta elämästä ja sen rajoista, elämän suojelun tarpeesta, ihmisyyttä uhkaavista vaaroista sekä niistä käytännöistä, joilla elämää voidaan suojella. Tutkimus osoittaa, että kriisitiedonvälityksen lisäksi kärsimyksen visuaalisia representaatioita käytetään nykytilanteessa laajasti muun muassa legitimoitaessa interventionistista kansainvälistä politiikkaa, markkinoitaessa sotilasoperaatioita, ja niihin vedotaan usein kriisiaikojen poliittisessa retoriikassa. Tämän lisäksi tutkimus esittää, että kriisien ja kärsimyksen nykykuvastot ovat nykyisin keskeisiä läntisen maailmanjärjestyksen kommunikoinnissa. Kuvien esityskäytännöt ilmentävät kuvien kohteina olevien kärsijöiden asemaa ihmisyyden globaalissa hierarkiassa havainnollistaen globaalisti epätasaisesti jakautunutta ihmisyyden arvoa.

Tutkimus sisältää 24 kuvakollaasia, joihin tutkimuksessa käsitellyt keskeiset kuvat on koottu.

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In Helsinki, on a grey and windy October Sunday 2016
Noora Kotilainen

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1 INTRODUCTION: INVESTIGATING THE POLITICAL THEATERS OF MEDIATED SUFFERING

1.1 SPECTATING THE SUFFERING OF OTHERS

Contemporary Western followers of ever more frantic paced media flows and consumers of foreign news have grown accustomed to seeing suffering bodies of distant individuals mediated for their awareness on daily bases. Although the majority of spectators of representations of suffering on average have never first-handedly witnessed mass-atrocity or all-embracing human suffering, nevertheless seeing the despair of others is an everyday experience, quintessentially constituting conceptions of the surrounding world. But why are followers of media and politics continuously placed as the spectators of distant, unknown suffering others? And what effects do images of atrocity and distress have on in particularly the Western apprehensions of humanity, the surrounding world—and of international politics?

This a study into the position, significance, framings and utilization of images of atrocity, war and human suffering within the evolvement of the ideas of a shared human community and humanitarian discourse historically and particularly in the era of Western lead *humanitarian world politics*¹ of the recent decades.

Visual images of suffering bodies are powerful; they are often read in an instant and work partly on subconscious, culturally driven levels, according to historically formed customs. Moreover images of suffering others stick with us—they haunt us. Visual representations of suffering bodies arouse strong emotions; fear, pity, compassion, will to help, indignation, sense of threat, sorrow, will to retaliate. Because of the very dramatic and connotative, emotionally charged nature and mode of communication, images of suffering obtain great power. Analytically assessing—or furthermore questioning—the motives of the presentation and framing of images depicting the most intimate and tragic moments of distant fellow humans might feel heretical, even heartless. Thus, in everyday settings the emotional and moral education embedded in the dramatic images, as well as the politically driven assemblage of images of suffering often tend to remain beyond critical assessment.

¹ By humanitarian word politics I refer to Western military interventionist politics, rationalized by the protection of human rights and safeguarding lives in distant corners of the world, has come to play an increasingly essential part in the legitimization of Western international political aspirations in the post-Cold War era. Humanitarian world politics remains as one of the key terms used and referred to through out this study. See: **Aaltola, Mika:** *Western Spectacle of Governance and the Emergence of Humanitarian World Politics*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009; **Barnett, Michael:** *The International Humanitarian Order*. Routledge, Oxon&New York 2010.

Visual humanitarian arrangements enclose and address their spectators on daily basis in multimodal and often highly political manners. Images of crisis and suffering tell of the shared fate of all living creatures as vulnerable and precarious, thus they communicate humanity, the peril it is in and also the need to protect it and alleviate the suffering. These powerful images affect our understanding of not only the immediate crisis they depict but of the world surrounding us, our own position, as well as the position of (the suffering) others in it. The representational patterns of visualized suffering create global and political hierarchies. The arrangements of such images thus construct and direct our understanding on protectable life, human rights, their endorsement and downfall. (Mainstream) media heavily relies on dramatic crisis imagery at times of conflict in order to mediate faraway events into the awareness of distant spectating audiences. Visualized suffering provides and suggests routes to intervening in the situations inflicting suffering and is, thus, commonly used by humanitarian actors and organizations. Moreover images of violence and suffering are habitually utilized in political settings; namely at times of conflict and war and within international politics.

The starting point of this study is the desire to gain deeper understanding of the position visual images depicting and mediating suffering have historically had on the apprehension of the shared universal humankind bound together by (bodily) vulnerability within the formation of the modern Western humanity/humanitarianism discourse. And in light of history, this study moreover sets to analyze the contemporary Western discourse of protection of humanity, human rights, humanitarian system and humanitarian politics—and ‘humanitarian war’—through visual representations.

Throughout this study I repeatedly refer to the “West”, as well as the “Rest” — the “non-West”. This is because at the focus of this study are also the visual practices that constitute namely the *Western spectator* and the Western spectatorship of suffering, and thus the practices that through visual representations of suffering, war and conflict constitute, produce and reproduce conceptions of international politics, the West and the Rest and of hierarchies of humanity.

The construction of ‘our fellow feelings’ for the suffering others has been an interest of analytical consideration probably for as long as there has been human civilization. The conception of empathetic feelings towards one’s neighbor is at the heart of any religion. Cosmopolitan feelings and moral ties towards distant others and the others of the human kind have been considered at least from the time of antiquity. Also, solidarity and moral sentiments towards the suffering distant others have undeniably always been communicated through emotive visual representations. Such representations have been abundant throughout history: in religious bearings (the crucified body of Jesus Christ communicating mercy through suffering), in visual art and popular culture, as well as in more straight forwardly political

affiliations, such as official dissemination of information and propaganda, especially in times of conflict. An important modern culmination point in regards to visually mediated humanitarian communication is habitually dated to the times of the Enlightenment, when the preconditions of communication as well as a generalizing and popularizing apprehension of a shared humanity with *rights* became a center of attention in Western societal philosophy.²

Over the past few decades, quite a lot of attention has been given to the analysis and critique of the ethics of representation and the (theatrical) display of humanitarian imagery. Within relevant research, the ways in which the suffering of the distant, usually non-Western others have been visually presented and mediated for Western spectators have been widely scrutinized. Most of the research literature in this field has been concentrating on the functions and ethics of visually representing the pain of others³; the uses of the images of suffering by (international) humanitarian organizations (NGOs)⁴ and the use of images of crisis and suffering in and by the media.⁵ Within this line of research, the effects of visual representations of distant suffering on cosmopolitan solidarity, on the role of images in the construction of global hierarchical relations, on the ethics of representation, as well as on the impact of divergent representational modes on humanitarian work and appeals have been discussed in a variety of scholarly

² **Smith, Adam:** *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 1759. (Filiquarian Publishing, LLC, 2007) **Burke, Edmund:** *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of the Sublime and Beautiful: And Other Pre-Revolutionary Writings*, Penguin Classics, New York, 1998; **Voltaire, Candide**, Penguin Classics, 2001 (1759); **Kant, Immanuel:** *Critique of Judgement*. Hackett Publishing Company, Cambridge, 1987 (1790.) See also: **Sliwinski, Sharon:** *Human Rights in Camera*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2011; **Halttunen, Karen:** *Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture*. *American Historical Review*, Vol. 100, April, 1995, 303-334.; **Orgad, Shani:** *Media representations and the Global Imagination*. Polity, Cambridge, 2012; **Neiman, Susan:** *Evil in Modern Thought. An Alternative History of Philosophy*. Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 2002.

³ **Sontag, Susan:** *Regarding the Pain of Others*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York, 2003; **Sontag, Susan:** *On Photography*. Penguin London, 1979 (1977); **Scarry, Elaine:** *The Body In Pain. The making and unmaking of the world*. Oxford university press, New York, 1985; **Linfield, Susie:** *The Cruel Radiance. Photography and Political Violence*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2010; **Dauphinee, Elizabeth:** *The Politics of the Body in Pain: Reading the Ethics of Imagery*, *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 38, No. 1, 2007; **Picturing Atrocity. Photography In Crisis**. Batchen, Geoffrey, Gidley Mick et al. (Eds.) Reaction Books, London, 2012; **Butler, Judith:** *Frames of War: When is life grievable?* Verso, London, 2009

⁴ **Chouliaraki, Lillie:** *The Ironic Spectator. Solidarity in the age of Post-Humanitarianism*. Polity, Cambridge, 2013; **Cohen, Stanley:** *States of Denial, Knowing about atrocity and suffering*, Polity, Cambridge, 2001.; **Kennedy, Denis:** *Selling the Distant Other: Humanitarianism and Imagery-ethical dilemmas of Humanitarian Action*. The journal of humanitarian assistance, 2009; **Käpylä, Juha& Kennedy, Dennis:** *Cruel to Care? Investigating the Governance of Compassion in Humanitarian Imagery*. *International Theory*, 6/2, 2014, 255-292. **Malkki, Liisa:** *Speechless emissaries. Refugees, Humanitarianism and dehistoricization*. *Cultural Anthropology*, 1996, 11/3, 377-404; **Humanitarian Photography. A History**. Fehrenbach, Heide&Rodogno, Davide (Eds.), Cambridge University Press, New York, 2015.

⁵ **Moeller, Susan, D:** *Compassion Fatigue. How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death*. Routledge, New York, 1999 ; **Boltanski, Luc:** *Distant Suffering. Morality, Media and Politics*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999. ; **Chouliaraki, Lillie:** *The Spectatorship of Suffering*. Sage, London, 2008. 34; **Orgad, 2012.**; **Zelizer, Barbie:** *About to die. How news images move the Public*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2010.; **Campbell, David:** *Horrific Blindness. Images of Death in contemporary Media*. *Journal for Cultural Research*, 8/1, 2004, 55-74. **Disasters and the Media**. Pantti, Mervi, Wahl-Jorgensen, Karin. & Cottle, Simon. Peter Lang, New York, 2012.

work. Also, the historical formation of the connection between visual humanitarian representations and humanitarian/human rights paradigms and humanitarian politics have been somewhat scrutinized in research.⁶ The political power and international workings behind the images of suffering presenting distant crisis and vulnerable others to Western spectators and policy makers has also been scrutinized.⁷ Perhaps most renownedly the international political power of atrocity images has been scrutinized in the context of the “Vietnam War syndrome”⁸ and the “CNN effect” theories,⁹ as well as more lately somewhat touched upon, for example, within the “Al Jazeera effect”¹⁰ debate. These analytical theories have debated whether the mediated revelatory images depicting the distress of (non-Western) others have imposed interventionist pressure or even forced their view upon (Western) foreign policy towards humanitarian crisis situations and conflicts in global crisis areas.

Western military interventionist politics, rationalized by the protection of human rights and safeguarding lives in distant corners of the world, has come to play an increasingly essential part in the legitimization of Western international political aspirations in the post-Cold War era. In consequence of the recent developments, it may be argued, images revealing and visualizing the distress of distant others have feasibly become a more important and convenient political tool for Western international political actors. The historical and political development leading to the current situation, in which humanitarianism and international power politics have been amalgamated, has been an issue of growing academic interest. The implications of Western humanitarian world politics and military humanitarianism at the level of international politics as well as the effects of this development on organizational humanitarianism have been scrutinized

⁶ **Sliwinski**, 2011; **Orgad**, 2012; **Zelizer, Barbie**: *Remembering to forget. Holocaust Memory through the Camera's Eye*. University of Chicago Press, 1998; **Sontag**, 2003; **Butler**, 2009; **Campbell, David**: *Atrocity, Memory, Photography: imaging the concentration camps of Bosnia – the case of ITN versus Living Marxism*, Journal of Human Rights Vol. 1/ nr 1, 2002(1.),1-33 (A); **Campbell, David**: *Atrocity, Memory, Photography: imaging the concentration camps of Bosnia – the case of ITN versus Living Marxism*, part 2. Journal of Human Rights, Vol 1, nr. 2, 2002 (2.), 143-172(B); **Cottle, Simon**: *Global Crisis Reporting. Journalism in the Global Age*. Open University Press, Maidenhead, 2009.

⁷ **Hansen, Lene**: *How Images make World Politics: International icons and the case of Abu Ghraib*. Review of Intrnational Studies. 41/2, 2015, 263-288; **Saugmann Andersen, Rune**: *Remediating Security. A semiotic Framework for Analyzing how Video Speaks Security*. PhD Dissertation, Department of Political Science, University of Copenhagen, 2015.

⁸ **Hallin, Daniel C**: *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam*. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1989 (1986); **Perlmutter, David**: *Photojournalism and Foreign Policy. Icons of outrage in International Crisis*. Praeger, London, 1998 ; **Chomsky, Noam & Herman, Edward, S**: *Manufacturing Consent. The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. Pantheon Books, New York, 2002 (1988).

⁹ **Robinson, Piers**: *The CNN Effect. The Myth of News, Foreign Policy and Intervention*, Routledge, London, 2002. ; **Giboa, Eytan**: *The CNN Effect: The search for a Communications theory of International Relations*. Political Communication, 22, 2005, 27-44.

¹⁰ **Seib, Philip**: *The Al Jazeera Effect: How the New Global Media Are Reshaping World Politics*, Potomac Books, Washington DC, 2008; **Seib, Philip**: *Real-time diplomacy: Politics and power in the Social media era*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2012.

extensively in contemporary scholarly research.¹¹ Nevertheless, relatively little attention has been given to the Western (governmental) political framing and representation of the suffering/non-suffering of humans within the contemporary visual humanitarian theatrical arrangements. Likewise the global political—even imperialistic—features embedded in Western media representations and presentational practices governing the depiction of the suffering of distant others, as well as the non-suffering of some others, has been relatively scarcely addressed in research literature.¹²

Moral sentiments aroused by visual arrangements of human suffering, as well as by humanitarian visual communication and by global humanitarian politics, have been studied and approached from a multitude of perspectives and angles. But what interests me deeply is *how images of suffering have historically been communicating a widening apprehension of a shared humanity whilst reflecting the political preconditions of their era, and how images of suffering, crisis and wars in the more contemporary international political context are framed and used within the Western sphere, and how they are communicating the prevalent humanitarian ethos of their time*—and this has not been extensively touched upon in research.

Therefore, this work firstly maps out the history of visual humanitarian communication from the times of the Enlightenment onwards, all the way to the contemporary times, by mapping out, analyzing and collecting some of the key events in Western visual history into collage illustrations. Through the mapping out of the imagery, the position and framings of images of human suffering within the evolvement of the notions of a shared humanity and life worthy of protection as well as within the evolvement of the humanitarian discourse are analyzed. Secondly, through four divergent, contemporary and empirically orientated cases, which I shall outline shortly, I shall analyze how various images of crisis, war and suffering communicate the topical ethos of humanitarian politics, and how images of suffering/non-suffering are used and utilized in the contemporary settings of Western humanitarian world politics.

I see humanitarianism, especially in the more contemporary political settings, as an influential (*unconscious*) *ideology*, and I perceive emotive

¹¹ **Aaltola**, 2009; **Douzinis, Costas**: *Human rights and the Empire. Political Philosophy of Cosmopolitanism*. Routledge-Cavendish, New York, 2007; **Humanitarianism in Question. Politics, Power, Ethics**. Barnett, Michael& Weiss, Thomas, G. (Eds.) Cornell University Press. Ithaca, 2008. **Barnett**, 2010; **Belloni, Roberto**: *The Trouble with Humanitarianism*. Review of international Studies. 2007. vol.33, 451-474; **Chandler, David**: *The Road to Military Humanitarianism: How the Human Rights NGO's shaped a New Humanitarian Agenda*. Human Rights Quarterly 2001/23, 678-700, 683- 85. **Chandler, David**: *From Kosovo to Kabul and Beyond*. Human Rights and International Intervention. Pluto Books, London, 2006 (2002); **Fassin, Didier**: *Humanitarian Reason. A Moral History of the Present*. University of California, Berkeley, 2012; **Duffield, Mark**: *Development, Security and Unending war. Governing the World of Peoples*, Polity, 2007, Cambridge ; **Fox, Fiona**: *New Humanitarianism: Does it Provide a Moral Banner for the 21st Century?*, Disasters, 25/4,2001,275-289; **Rieff, David**: *a Bed for the night. Humanitarianism in Crisis*. Simon and Shuster, New York, 2003. **Barnett, Michael**: *Empire of Humanity. A History of Humanitarianism*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2011.

¹² **Butler**, 2009; **Kennedy&Käpylä**, 2014; **Cottle, Simon**: *Global Crisis Reporting: Journalism in the Global Age*, Open University Press, Berkshire, 2009

images of suffering as an emotionally driven *theatrical tragedy arrangement* through which the ideological apparatus of humanitarianism addresses and invites its audiences to see the spectacles of global suffering in certain contextual, politically and ideologically constructed and governed ways. Analyzing the aspects of visual representations of human distress, exemplified through the metaphor of visual humanitarian theater, is at the heart of my inquiry into visual humanitarian communication throughout this study.¹³ Therefore, by following *Judith Butler*, I endeavor “to learn to see the *frame* that blinds us to what we see.”¹⁴ In other words, I seek to deconstruct—through contextual analyses of different types of politically constructed and utilized humanitarian imageries—what kind of messages the arrangements of the images of human suffering/non-suffering tell of the humanitarian politics of their time.

In the contemporary setting (chapters 4-7 of this study) images of conflict, war, natural catastrophes and refugeeness are discussed, and the differences of the representation of Western suffering vis-à-vis non-Western suffering are analyzed. Topical Western visual war branding efforts—strategic communication of the NATO Afghanistan operation—are analyzed from the point of view of the legitimizing narratives of contemporary Western war. Also the visual narratives of the Western enemies—Muammar Gaddafi, Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden—in the context of Western humanitarian international politics are scrutinized. And finally, the positions of social media images of contemporary war within international politics—namely the images of the Syrian 2013 Ghouta chemical assault—are analyzed.

The study includes numerous collage-illustrations—in chapters 2, 4, 5, 6 and 7—into which some of the key images discussed are compiled. The illustrations provide the reader a view into the material of the study—the imagery and visual arrangements discussed and analyzed in the course of the study—and, moreover, they aim at giving a more comprehensive and accumulative visual perspective into the visual arrangements of images of suffering in historical settings and particularly within the Western media in recent years. Collage as a visual art form strives to create a new whole, by assembling different visual material together. Likewise, the illustrations in this study seek to visualize more than just the sum of the individual images collaged together. Thus, the collage-illustrations do not only aim at sentimentously bringing together images discussed in the study, but moreover seek to show the segmented, collage-like and cumulative nature of images of suffering.¹⁵

In this introductory chapter I shall outline the framework of the study and define the concepts used in the course of the study. I shall describe the

¹³ As the metaphor of theatricality follows this study throughout on a theoretical and conceptual level, I will get back to the theatricality of mediated suffering in more depth in the chapter three of this study.

¹⁴ **Butler**, 2009, 100.

¹⁵ **Rancière, Jaques**: *The Emancipated Spectator*. Verso, London, 2011, 25-30 ; I will get back to this later in the chapter 1.6. See Also, **Särmä, Saara**: *Junk Feminism and Nuclear Wannabes. Collaging Parodies of Iran and North Korea*. Academic dissertation, University of Tampere, 2014.

position and significance images of suffering in the formation of the humanity discourse. The politics of humanitarianism and spectatorship of suffering images are discussed. I shall furthermore explicate how visual representations are read and analyzed in their representational contexts. And finally I shall describe the outline and the structure of the study in more detail.

1.2 SPECTATORSHIP OF SUFFERING AND COMPREHENSION OF A SHARED HUMANITY IN NEED OF PROTECTION

Susan Sontag has noted that seeing suffering bodies of distant, foreign others mediated for our awareness is an essentially modern experience.¹⁶ The conception, that by witnessing mediated representations that tell of the pain of others a compassionate relation between the sufferers and spectators is created, lies at the core of modern humanitarian thinking. *Sharon Sliwinski* and *Karen Halttunen* argue that, as the Western Enlightenment thinking in the mid-eighteenth century centered on pondering upon humanity and the shared human community in need of protection from pain and disaster, concurrently visuality in humanitarian context became central. Ever since, the spectatorship of suffering—the visual mediation of distant pain, seeing the suffering of others, and sentimental spectatorial sympathy—has remained central to the humanitarian discourse, and has evolved hand in hand with the development of (Western) humanitarian notions.¹⁷

Today Westerners spectators continuously encounter the corporal suffering of distant fellow humans in emotion-arousing media representations. During the past months I have spectated starving and bleeding Syrians from newspaper images, and witnessed mutilated bodies of strangers in televised news of several foreign conflicts and catastrophes. While reading the online news on Western ‘humanitarian’ military interventions in the Middle East, I have encountered terrifying images of victims of war and terror. Distressed bodies of distant strangers—drowned refugee children on European beaches and victims of terror attacks in France, Kenya, Turkey and Iraq—have permeated my view while browsing the social media, whether I wanted it or not. Furthermore, visual appeals of humanitarian organizations daily catch our eye in various conjunctions: in the communication of the relief organizations, in the TV charity shows, even when drawing money from the cash machine we encounter needy faces of the global less fortunate. Especially today—during the age of ever more frantic media environment and the increasingly visible standing of humanitarianism also in political settings—seeing the suffering of others is a growingly vital part of the Western public life. Through viewing images of crisis and

¹⁶ **Sontag**, 2004, 16.

¹⁷ **Sliwinski**, 2011, 17-56; **Halttunen**, 1995. See also: **Orgad**, 2012.

suffering we encounter the turbulent world surrounding us, get informed, undergo sentiments, produce judgments, react to the pains and atrocities experienced by others and are sometimes even moved into action in order to alleviate the suffering of unknown distant others.

The predominant view is that the pain of others is often more tangible for the distant spectators, when witnessed through visual representations showing the suffering of others in a bodily manner, than when encountered through mere words. An image of a body in pain cannot be easily disregarded, since a vulnerable body can be seen to represent that which is shared by all living creatures: something we all have, and something we all may lose. It is commonly thought that witnessing the suffering and bodily precariousness of others awakens us to see the value of human life and the relevance of humanitarianism, and that realizing the pain of others facilitates the apperception of a shared human existence. On one side of the coin, there is suffering and, on the other, humanitarianism. The epiphany of humanity is, thus, predominantly negative and often emerges from witnessing pain and despair of others.¹⁸

This emphasis on corporal, visualized vulnerability is at the heart of our understanding of humanitarianism. Seeing visualized representations of suffering others constitutes the way solidary bonds between us (the spectators) and the others in despair are formed.¹⁹ Thus, images depicting another individual's pain aimed at creating such bonds may be called *humanitarian images*.²⁰ In order to stimulate the moral sentiments of distant onlookers, visual representations of the corporal pain of others are—and have been for centuries—constantly mediated for the awareness of spectators by a multitude of actors and methods. Actors trying to inform and morally educate the distant spectators of the pain and distress of others—the pioneers of human rights struggles, humanitarians, religious agents, artists, journalists and political quarters—have all done this in varying ways throughout the course of history.²¹ Furthermore, today images vividly exhibiting the suffering of distant others play an increasingly important role in world politics: they are commonly referred to in political rhetoric and habitually used in political proclamations as explicating and legitimating political actions aimed at suffering individuals and turmoil areas.

¹⁸ **Smith**, 2007 (1759), 9-11; **Sliwinski**, 2011, 1-15; **Linfield**, 2010, 34; **Sontag**, 2003; **Butler**, 2009, 1-32; **Butler, Judith**: *Precarious life. Powers of Mourning and Violence*. Verso, London, 2004; **Scarry**, 1985.

¹⁹ **Halttunen**, 1995, 303-334; **Chouliaraki**, 2013, 26-27; **Scarry**, 1985; **Linfield**, 2010, 39-40.

²⁰ Humanitarian image and visual humanitarian communication are terms I shall use throughout the study, when pointing to images mediated/framed with a humanitarian intent or to images pointing out despair, pain, human rights violations or the need of help. What makes an image of despair humanitarian is the mode of its framing, addressing and contextualization. When an image is mediated and presented, in order to convey a message of not only pain but also of its alleviation, I consider it to be a humanitarian image. Humanitarian images do not necessarily depict suffering; they might even show how the need of help has been fulfilled.

²¹ **Sliwinski**, 2011.

One of the major starting points of this study is the centrality of visualized pain—and spectatorship of images telling of the pain of others—for the humanitarian discourse, its historical evolution and status today.

1.3 THE POLITICS OF HUMANITARIANISM AND HUMANITARIAN WORLD POLITICS

In everyday thinking humanitarianism is often understood as an aspiration and practice of neutrally and altruistically attending to the needs of those in despair and pain, as a practice of doing good. But the practices of helping those in need—particularly in the global context—are inseparably linked with power and often they can be seen to operate on highly hierarchical bases. Instead of an altruistic aspiration to help and do good, humanitarianism can be seen as an influential system of political power relations and global hierarchies.²² The practices of global humanitarianism and human rights aspirations have fluxed according to surrounding political, societal and cultural atmosphere. Western humanitarily framed intentions and actions towards the rest of the world have a centuries-long history, particularly exemplified by the *colonial system*. The institutionalization of humanitarianism and the safeguarding of human rights have further accelerated especially after the Second World War.²³

The concept of power, in a study concerning politics, humanitarianism, global hierarchies and international relations is central. In the study of international politics, as Barnett and Duvall suggest, power should be understood through a lens of multiple conceptions, as compulsory, institutional, structural, and productive. In this study, I from time to time point to someone or something as having power over something/someone, as well as to institutions as powerful or using their power. And thus point to power as a compulsory and institutional resource.²⁴ On the other hand power in this study is also understood as discursive power in the Foucaultian sense. *Michel Foucault* saw power differently from the liberal theories, in which power has been traditionally understood as a resource, influence or an ability to get others to do things. For Foucault power is not a thing, but a relation: power is everywhere. Power operates not only as a property of state power or at the hands of the sovereign or the patriarch, but it is exercised at all levels of social relations, and is present at every level of social body. Thus power is

²²Barnett, 2010; Douzinas, 2007; Duffield, 2007, *Hyvän tekeminen ja valta*, Johansson, Frank (Ed.): Gaudeamus, Helsinki, 2013.

²³ See for example: Barnett, 2011.

It is worth noting here, that throughout this study I use terms and expressions such as, “civilize”, “full-fledged humans”, “subhuman”, “evil”, “adolescent”, “immature” etc. as I refer i.a. to hierarchical roles of the Westerners and the non-Westerners. I usually do not mark these terms with quotation marks, since I think that it is clear that I am not claiming the true nature of these characterizations, but using them as rather metaphoric sense and restore to their usage since they stem from the stereotypic Western thinking dividing the global “us” and “them”.

²⁴Barnett, Michael & Duvall, Raymond: *Power in international Relations*. International Organization, 59/1, 39-75, 2005.

not only repressive, but also productive; it does things.²⁵ Therefore, in this study power is understood as multifaceted phenomena, and I seek to pay attention to power in its different forms.

As the visual constitution and reproduction of the West is at the focus of this study, also the political and cultural differentiation or even opposition—the West and the Rest—is one of the major starting points of this study. I am well aware of the distinctions and hierarchical positioning, cultural meanings and political ramifications of using the terms West and the Rest—or non-West, us and them, bring about and cause.²⁶ But, since this historical and political division of power is very much alive and determining of how the world is apprehended (especially in international political settings), I find resorting to the use of the term West in a study concerning international relations and global hierarchies regardless relevant.²⁷

By West I do not only refer to the geographical northern entity comprising of Europe and North America. By referring to West I point to the historically and culturally formed distinction and demarcation of the *Occident* (West) vis-à-vis the *Orient* (the East or non-West). Historically the distinction of the West and the Rest has been commonly traced to the Antique—Greek and Rome—and the differentiation has formed along the lines of ‘civilized’ Western world/‘non-civilized’ Eastern ‘barbarians’, and is often strongly built on stereotypical representations of the other. This distinction is often still today traceable and very much alive in cultural conceptions, political notions – and representational practices of images of suffering others. Moreover, the West in the contemporary international political setting often refers to political orientation and military power, as well as the identity associated with “Western values”, democracy, humanism, human right, development and liberalism. Thus, by West I rather point to the culturally, politically and historically produced entity—or the idea of—the West. And understand the West thus primarily as a historically and politically formed concept, community of identity, elusive and ever changing notion, which is over and over again constituted through cultural and political practices.²⁸

²⁵ See for example: **Foucault, Michel**: *Society Must be Defended, Lectures at the Collage de France 1975-76*, Bertani, Mauro& Fontana, Alessandro (Eds.), Picador, New York, 1997; **The Foucault Reader**. Rabinow, Paul (ed.) Penguin Books, London, (1984) 1991.

²⁶ As a Finn by nationality, a spectator and an analyzer of encircling representations of suffering of others, and as a scholar, the composer of this study, I myself can be defined as a Westerner. Therefore, I recognize my self as a part of the “West”, and I cannot to certain degree escape the Western gaze and my own culture bound position as a spectator of these representations. Thus I also from time to time refer to the West as “us”, whilst, on the other hand, I refer to the non-West as “them” or the “other”.

²⁷ **Ibid.**

²⁸As the West can be seen as a community of identity, by the West, I—in the contemporary setting—for the most part point to the political entity of North America, Europe, Australia, and other nations, regimes and communities that identify themselves as being Western. On the concept, definition, formation, politics and history of the West, see for instance: **Hall, Stuart**: *The West and the Rest. Discourse and Power*. In *Formations of Modernity*. Gieben, Bram & Hall Stuart (Eds.) Polity Press, Cambridge, 1992; **Gress, David**, *From Plato to NATO: The Idea of the West and its Opponents*, Free Press, New York, 1998; **Enduring Western Civilization: The Construction of the Concept of Western Civilization and its ‘Others’**. Federici, Silvia (Ed.), Preger, Westport, 1995; **Mikander, Pia**: *Westerners and Others In Finnish School textbooks*. University of Helsinki, Institute of Behavioral sciences, 2016.

The contemporary *humanitarian system*²⁹ poignantly exemplifies global power relations, as it typically gravitates from the global north, i.e. Western countries, towards the global south, the Non-West. As *Costas Douzinas* points out, global humanitarianism is based on a sentimental narration in which the roles of the arrangement are habitually fixed according to the global (again, not meaning only geographical, but rather cultural and political) hierarchy and conventions embedded in the workings of the global humanitarian apparatus. Thus the roles are most commonly fixed into two opposites: the potent Westerners helpers, and the weak helped, habitually non-Westerner sufferers.³⁰ This is not only a contemporary arrangement, but also in the colonial times the ‘civilizing’ endeavors gravitated from the Western sphere towards the non-Western world.³¹ Because of this, dominant representational practices of humanitarian images are practically invariably based on globally hierarchical mediation arrangements: the corporal pain of non-Western individuals is predominantly presented to mainly Western audiences, who gaze at the suffering of the precarious others from distance and from the relative comfort of safe societies and homes.³² Thus, the representational practices of humanitarian imagery forcefully create global and political hierarchies, which for a significant part determine how the Western spectators perceive (and have perceived) their own status and the status of the others in the global world. Due to the hierarchal power relations embedded in the global humanitarian machinery and the representation practices of images of suffering within the humanitarian political frame, humanitarian images often wound up presenting the world as divided into diverse strata of humanity: helpers and the helped, us and them, the ‘full humans’ and the ones struggling to gain access to the protection (of their rights), the spectators and the spectated. This is why particularly the visual constitution of the (contemporary) Western spectator is also at the focus of the inquiry of this study.

In recent decades the number of humanitarian aid organizations has mushroomed enormously especially after the end of the Cold War era, and the societal standing and visibility of organizational humanitarianism particularly in the public life of the Western sphere have concurrently

²⁹ By the ‘humanitarian system’ it is predominantly pointed to the humanitarian non-governmental organizations, and the international committee of Red Cross –system and The United Nations (UN). As the UN Organization Unicef defines it: *The international humanitarian system is not a formal structure. It includes a wide range of agencies and organizations as well as various mechanisms and processes which together aim to support and protect all those affected by an emergency.*

But moreover, within the humanitarian system, I place the ample field of state humanitarianism and developmental aid. And in some terms furthermore, in the more contemporary setting, I see the more politicized field of humanitarianism, exemplified in the recent decades also by Western humanitarian political actions, also military involvement in crisis zones legitimized by humanitarian rationale, belonging to the system. I see the humanitarian system moreover also as a form of structural (bio)power and governance, since it is, firstly highly globally hierarchical, and secondly predominantly (from the Western point of view) aims at intervening into the lives of the global others. See for example: **Barnett**, 2010; **Douzinas**, 2007; **Duffield**, 2007.

³⁰ **Douzinas**, 2007, 52-89.

³¹ See for example: **Barnett**, 2011.

³² **Douzinas**, 2007, 84-89.

increased.³³ Moreover, over the past decades, humanitarianism has risen from an activist endeavor at the margins of international politics into a prominent status in world political settings. Organizational humanitarianism and downright political, interest-based humanitarily framed interventionist state aspirations have increasingly merged. Today, safeguarding human rights and humanitarian objectives serves as one of the most prominent manifestations of Western international political agenda and of the *international community*.³⁴ Furthermore, the humanitarian frame has also risen into a prominent role in Western interventionist world politics, and contemporarily humanitarian objectives and rhetoric play a central role also in (Western) military engagements and even wars.³⁵ I refer to these contemporary Western world political aspirations and the logic of international politics as *humanitarian world politics*.

As the relation between emotive images and humane emotions is close, and the status of the images of human suffering and despair is central to humanitarian communication, reading and analyzing visual representations presented in the (political) context of humanitarianism unveils the practices and ethos of humanitarianism. But how do I free the messages of the images

³³ The amplified visibility and prominence of humanitarian organizations, in the western public life, is due to the increase in the number of humanitarian organizations. Concurrently divergent humanitarian through causes and appeals have gained more visibility. But moreover because of the renewed marketing strategies of humanitarian NGO's - celebrity humanitarianism concerts and other entertainment based action. Contemporarily one may make a donation to a humanitarian organization while drawing money from the cash machine, parting at a concert or by adopting a "god child" from a Third World country. **Barnett**, 2011; **Barnett& Weiss**, 2008; **Chouliaraki**, 2013; **Kennedy**, 2009; **Yrjölä, Riina**: *The Global Politics of Celebrity Humanitarianism*. Academic Dissertation, Jyväskylä Studies in Education, psychology and social research, 498, 2014.

³⁴ The term or phrase 'international community' is often used within international relations. It at its simplest refers to a somewhat inclusive group of governments and peoples of the world (such as the General Assembly of the United Nations), and is particularly in contexts such as human rights, when a somewhat mutual consensus on such issues is highlighted. But very often the term has been seen as actually referring to the leading Western powers and their strategic global interests. (See for example: **Chomsky, Noam**: *The Crimes of the 'Intcom'*. Foreign Policy, September 2002.) The history of international community also links to the emergence of global humanitarianism, Western colonialism as well as international law. **Koskenniemi** sees that the international law – aiming at 'civilizing' the world, and thus for a large part revolving around Western liberal ideas of civilization and humanitarianism – has occupied as a major function in the formation of the 'international community'. See: **Koskenniemi, Martti**: *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations. The Rise and Fall of International Law 1870-1960*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001. **Barnett** sees that in colonial times (1800-1945) West defined the values of the international community in terms of the ideology of humanity and Christian religion. During the era, liberal and religiously inspired humanitarians set out to nurture new kinds of compassion and accepted new responsibilities towards the distant suffering others, by civilizing the objects of the help (individuals as well as states and areas) in order to alleviate their suffering. Barnett sees that the major humanitarian watershed, i.e. the founding of the Red Cross and the ICRC movement as well as the Geneva Conventions, is also founded on and reflect the Eurocentric ideas of international community and are inspired by the expanding Christian fellowship as means of rescuing the fallen. (**Barnett** 2011, 30); See also: **Feher, Michel**: *Powerless by design: the age of the International Community*. Duke University Press, Durham, 2000.

³⁵ **Aaltola**, 2009; **Belloni**, 2007; **Barnett**, 2011; **Chandler**, 2006; **Douzinis**, 2007; **Fassin**, 2012. Moreover, in addition to the amplified visibility of humanitarian benevolence also the western humanitarian turn in international politics, as well as the militarization of humanitarianism within the recent years, have worked to amplify prominence and visibility of humanitarianism in the everyday lives of western citizens. See for example: **Douzinis**, 2007, 79.

from the “constraints of the situation at hand”³⁶ or how do I endeavor to “see the frame that blinds us to what we see”?³⁷ This is what I shall discuss next.

1.4 READING THE INTENDED ADDRESSING OF THE HUMANITARIAN IMAGES

First of all, in this study I perceive and handle the pictures presented within the humanitarian frame as visual representations: as interpretations and readings of reality. Visual representations do more than just show ‘reality’: they reflect the values, attitudes and political, social paradigms and discourses of the time and place, as well as the frames of their presentation and reading. Furthermore visual representations also participate in the construction of their objects. When analyzing the messages of images, pictures are *read* just as texts are read and spoken words are interpreted, although, there are differences between reading text—symbolic letters and textual word—and reading images, which consist of objects and visual signs. A child can name and narrate images far before being able to read text; natural signifiers, such as ‘a building’ or ‘a human’ can be detected in visual images in an instant. Thus, even a child without the skill to read texts can read an image and see the details in it. But this does not mean, that a young child with no perception of the surrounding culture could read an image in all its richness. Reading the multi-layered messages in images acquires cultural awareness and a multimodal approach.³⁸

My aim is to deconstruct and decode the messages of the images and, thus, to interpret the meanings of the images. At the first level of the reading I identify and observe details and other visibly apparent subject matter— or what *Erwin Panofsky* calls the *natural* subjects. Thus I pay attention to the objects in the images: the background, material surroundings, housing, the people and their gestures, how they are dressed, how they act and what they look like. Also up to a certain level I take into account other dimensions of the photograph; the composition, framing and, for instance, the color, when I see this is of relevance. When looking at pictures at the second level—which Panofsky calls *iconographical* analysis—the ‘conventional meaning’ of the picture is read: an image depicting an airplane hitting a tower in a city is recognized as a picture of the 9/11 World Trade Centre attacks and a veiled woman showing her inked fingertip in front of a crowd is recognized as an Afghan woman who has voted.³⁹

³⁶ The whole quote: “Learning Depends upon freeing the message from the constraints of the situation at hand.” **Barthes, Roland:** *Camera Lucida*. Vintage Books, London, 2000 (1980.)

³⁷ **Butler**, 2009, 100.

³⁸ Basics of the workings of visual representations and of reading visual images, see, for example: **Visual Culture: a Reader**, Evans, Jessica& Hall, Stuart (eds.), Sage, London, 1999; **Rose, Gillian:** *Visual Methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual Material*. Sage, London, 2012.

³⁹ **Panofsky, Erwin:** *Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art*. In **Panofsky, Erwin:** *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History*. Doubleday Anchor Books, New York, 1955, 26-54.

But for understanding the images and their messages, the significations and meanings to be read in their time, place and context, this is not enough. Going beyond this, quite an apparent, although culturally alert, visual level is, according to Panofsky, called *iconological* interpretation. Iconological reading attempts to analyze the significance of the subject matter within the culture that has produced it. At this level questions such as ‘why is this event pictured in this way?’ and ‘what meanings does an image contain in its historical/ cultural/political contexts?’ are asked. Thus through iconological interpretation a deeper, cultural level of an image is unveiled and the historical meanings, cultural connotations and attitudes present in the image, characteristic of their era of presentation, are taken into account and analyzed.⁴⁰

Iconological interpretation is thus concerned with the intrinsic meanings of the image; the underlying principles that reveal the basic attitudes of the frame of its presentation, that is, the period in time, or an ideological, cultural or religious point of view, the spirit of an era or of a group, a world view, a *zeitgeist*.⁴¹ On an iconological level, for example, an image of a voting Muslim woman, dressed in a traditional burka showing her ink stained finger, when published and circulated by the Afghan NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in 2011 and targeted to address predominantly Western audiences can be seen to communicate the effectiveness and the women’s rights orientation of the Western military presence in Afghanistan. In this context the image may be read to depict a liberated Afghan woman using her deserved political rights, and the message of the image may be seen to communicate the emancipation of Afghan women by humanitarian-militarized Western help, and thus to prop up the international Afghan military operation and its legitimation. Thus, reading the contextual meaning of the image also requires knowledge and understanding of the cultural codes and overall (political, historical) situation in which it is produced, /presented and interpreted.⁴²

However, what is furthermore relevant is that all pictures may be signified and read in multitudes of manners. Depending on the presenter, the place of presentation, and other contextual framings—such as naming, captions, accompanying texts, positioning, layout etc.—as well the *gaze*⁴³ of the spectators, the very same image placed in a different settings may signify completely opposite things.⁴⁴ The image of a voting Afghan woman discussed

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ **Panofsky, Erwin:** *Studies in Iconology*, New York, 1939, 3–31; **Burke, Peter:** *Eyewitnessing. Uses of Images as Historical Evidence*. Reaktion Books, London, 2001, 34–37.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Gaze* is a term used by *Jacques Lacan*, and concerns the different viewpoints or different culturally varying ways in which different groups look at things. It can be perceived that there are different gazes: a “tourist gaze”, a “male gaze”, a “western gaze” or a “colonial gaze”. By this it is meant, for example, that, from the viewpoint of the scientifically educated Western secular woman things perhaps look different than from the viewpoint of an African male peasant. **Lacan, Jacques:** *Seminar Eleven: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. W.W. Norton and Co., New York, 1978.

⁴⁴ **Barthes, Roland:** *Image Music, Text*. Fontana Press, London, 1977, 17, 30.

earlier may in another context signify—and be targeted and intended to mediate—a story of a woman out of her rightful place violating tradition and religion and behaving in a manner unbefitting a traditional Muslim woman. This could be the reading of the image of the Muslim woman who has casted her vote, for example, within the communication of the *Taliban*, targeted to address domestic, mostly religiously conservative populations of Afghanistan. Thus, reading images in their contextual dispositions—taking into account the presenter, the (intended) audience, the time of presentation and positioning—reveals different, ambivalent meanings and messages that may be loaded onto a single image.

Therefore—although phrases such as ‘an image tells more than thousand words’ are commonly reiterated—it is noteworthy to bear in mind that images are endlessly ambivalent —and moreover silent. As especially images of suffering, war and bodily human distress and destruction are frequently referred to as powerful, influential and even politically potent, nevertheless visual images in them selves are *mute*, as *Roland Barthes* reminds us.⁴⁵ Even the most horrific of images cannot solely form an argument. Photographs do not have a narrative coherence; and thus they cannot activate us, tell stories of politics or make us understand the suffering of others by themselves. As *Sontag* explains it: if images are to move us politically, it is only because they are presented within the context of relevant political consciousness.⁴⁶ And even if photographs of crisis and suffering often constitute a focal setting for informing and baring witness to tragic far-away events and act as an arena for contemplating the suffering of others, as *Sontag* further reminds us, they cannot solely create a moral position or act as instruments of political standpoints as such. But, if there is an “appropriate context of feeling and attitude,” dramatic images may move us in forcefully political ways. Thus, what is relevant for reading emotive images of pain, distress and discomfort within the humanitarian discursive frame is that “while a photograph cannot create a moral position” they may—and often do—work to “reinforce an existing one.”⁴⁷

The context of presentation, the naming, captions and the overall positioning *frame*⁴⁸ the image. The context loads and adds cultural, historical and ideological meanings into silent images.⁴⁹ Thus images of wars, catastrophes and pain presented within the humanitarian frame may address their viewers in multitudes of ways, but, when carefully analyzed in their contexts, they can be seen to invite particular readings and ways of looking. Images of pain and distress presented within the humanitarian frame are habitually arranged in organized, purpose-oriented and somewhat conventionally fixed ways, which invites the spectators to see them in

⁴⁵ *Barthes*, 1977, 15-31.

⁴⁶ *Sontag*, 1977,17; see also *Butler*, 2009, 67.

⁴⁷ *Sontag*, 1977, 17; *Sontag*, 2003, 80-84.

⁴⁸ See: *Goffman, Erwin: Frame analysis: an essay on the Organization of Experience*. Harper&Row, London, 1974.

⁴⁹ *Barthes*, 1977, 25-27, 39; *Butler*, 2009, 63-65.

particular ways. Thus, images within a discourse are habitually framed and intended to welcome certain readings—and emotive reactions. I see that humanitarian images, presented within the Western humanitarian discursive settings and frame are predominantly read according to the principles and norms of the predominant humanitarian thinking descriptive of the era. Thus, at the core of my approach to the investigation and interpretation of the messages and meanings of images and the ways in which they address their spectators is the need to take into account their multifariously contextual character.

Nevertheless, I must underline that in this study I am not interested in how individual spectators encounter, read, or feel when facing or how they react to these images. Not everybody reacts in the same way when facing horrors others experience, even if they would be embraced and enclosed by a culture that highlights the centrality of human rights, or by an international political system, which revolves around humanitarian ethos and legitimation. As said, images are ambivalent and may articulate even contradictory significations, depending on the context, thus also their reception is always contextual and ambivalent. What an image or a collection of images and their accompanying texts in their representational contexts in the end articulate to individual spectators, rather depends on the spectator, than what she looks at.⁵⁰ Claiming to investigate or trying to find out individual reactions—or even average reactions and sentiments—at face of such images would be an impossible task with the tools available. Therefore, I do not aim at finding out how an individual spectator receives, reacts to or reads an image. Researching reception apart from being tricky, is not what interests me, nor would it even serve the purpose in finding out what I have set out to investigate. Rather I am interested in how the images are *intended* to address their (intended) audiences in their discursive, historical, political and ideological contextual settings of presentation. As *Quentin Skinner* argues, identifying the intention of a text is equivalent to the knowledge of the meaning of the texts. Thus, I see that what is essential in deconstructing the messages of images and identifying their contextual meanings, is aiming to interpret the identifiable *intention* of the image in its presentational context, and the reading suggested by the humanitarian discursive frame.⁵¹ Reading the images in their contextual settings and identifying their intended messages and meanings are at the core of my method throughout this work.

⁵⁰ See for example: **Barthes**, 1977, 46-47.

⁵¹ On the relevance and the process of identifying the *intentions* (of the writer) in interpreting the meanings of texts, see: **Skinner, Quentin**: *Motives, intentions and interpretation of texts*. *New Literary History*, 1971, 3/2, 393-408, 404. See also **Barthes**, 1977, 32-51.

1.5 INTERPRETING THE AMBIVALENT, REFERENTIAL, INVISIBLE AND FLOWING IMAGES

What is endlessly intriguing in analyzing images is precisely their ambivalent and ambiguous nature. As visual images are emotive and powerful, yet mute and ambivalent in their function, they are—more so than textual accounts—inclined to be contextually signified and addressing their audiences as well as read(able) in multitudes of ways. The strong emotive quality of images of pain and despair is vital for their functionality and for their central position within humanitarianism. Humanitarianism and humanitarian politics are essentially fuelled by emotional politics. The powerful utilization of emotions is perhaps most evident when it comes to the presentation of visual images of wars, crises and suffering in political contexts. Compassion towards the distant other is the principal emotion deployed within humanitarian politics, but images of pain moreover arouse multitudes of other feelings, such as a sense of urgency, a will to act and to intervene, but also sorrow, shame, guilt, indignation, anger and outrage, even a will to retaliate. The functioning of the humanitarian discourse and system is dependent on the powerful emotions brought on by the imagery of pain and distress.⁵²

Images moreover contain more connotative, culturally and historically structured content than written text or spoken words. Thus their reading and signification often works on a partly subliminal level and for large parts their interpretation banks on naturalized, even stereotypical ways of thinking. As well, visual arrangements often reveal even unintended, culturally driven messages, which habitually tell more off the presenter than of the objects of the images or of the events they portray. This content—cultural residue—is often revealing of the attitudes, cultural codes and subconscious ways of thinking of the actor presenting the images as well as of the intended audience. As humanitarian images most often depict distant individuals in foreign settings, they often rely on rather stereotypical forms of presenting and picturing ‘the others’ formed according to cultural attitudes and customs. Thus visual arrangements often reveal aspects of rigid ways of understanding the world, as well as hidden political aspirations, which would not be easily articulated aloud in verbal and textual accounts but, nevertheless, frequently surface in visual communication.⁵³ This sort of knowledge is extremely intriguing for a researcher interested in politics, power and ideological constellations. Therefore, while reading the images I also bring forth and analyze these traits of unintended or latent information, which reveals cultural/political dispositions of the presenter/arranger or the images.

Furthermore, production and circulation of photographs is often conditioned by a set of social codes and norms, which restricts and limits not only the reading of images but also their presentation. Images are habitually

⁵² See: **Käpylä & Kennedy**, 2014, 255-292 ; **Nussbaum, Martha**: *Upheavals of Thought: The intelligence of Emotions*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2001, 354-400.

⁵³ **Burke**, 2001, 124-128; **Barthes**, 2000, 111-121.

taken of certain events and in certain ways, and pictures of certain instances are presented in particular ways, and, moreover, images are habitually read in rather rigid ways.⁵⁴ Interestingly, emotive and often dramatic images of pain and crisis often point back in time, they refer to historical horrors and events and are thus often read through—and sometimes even intentionally framed so that they encourage a reaction—in historically and culturally formed, conventionally accustomed ways. Arrangements of photos of atrocity are often formed according to collective ways of remembering the past. The historical conventional and customary ways of presentation not only form the arrangements and ways of presenting images of crisis and suffering but also commonly intend to direct the reactions of the spectators and to frame contemporary atrocities and political events in particular, often historically familiar ways. For example, the reiterated references to the iconized Holocaust images can be identified as such a famous, iconic imagery, often used in the context of topical suffering images, which are then often conventionally arranged to model Holocaust imagery and, therefore, also reacted to in similar ways. Thus photographs, especially images of pain and atrocity, have socially and historically ‘preferred meanings’ and entail collective culturally and politically formed ways of reading and perceiving.⁵⁵ Therefore, while reading images, the conventional, much used ways of presenting must be identified, detected, and taken into account in analyzing and interpreting the messages, significations and contextual meanings of images.

In addition to the perhaps unintended cultural traces embedded in the images, also what *is not pictured* in images—what is left out of them, framed invisible and what is not seen as appropriate to picture in visual representations—is central in investigating the political arrangements of images. What is not seen, or is scarcely seen, is as relevant as what is seen, or overtly in sight. The unseen, sometimes even the hidden aspects bring forth the limits of showing, seeing, imagining, and understanding. The unseen creates narratives, just as the pictured does. What is framed out of the images makes the viewer simultaneously both focus and ignore, to imagine and confine, to be compassionate and evasive. What is pictured and what is not pictured is politically and culturally governed, and these arrangements of seeable/non-seeable create the frames in which we encounter the pain of others, humanitarianism and Western international political aspirations and actions.⁵⁶ Therefore, in the course of this study I will, in addition to analyzing what is pictured and how it is pictured, also take into account and analyze the

⁵⁴ **Shapiro, Michael:** *The Politics of representation: Writing Practices in Biography, Photography, and Policy Analysis.* University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1988. 128, 149-150; **Kennedy&Käpylä,** 2014, 260-262.

⁵⁵ **Zelizer,** 1998; **Käpylä&Kennedy,** 2014, 255-292; **Campbell,** 2002, (B).

⁵⁶ On the politics of invisibility see for example **Butler,** 2009. 63-100; **Sontag,** 2003; **Caspers, Monica& Moore, Lisa:** *Missing Bodies. The Politics of Visibility.* New York University Press, New York, 2009. Identifying what is perhaps missing from images describing an event or a phenomena also requires culturally, politically and historically alert mind, and moreover knowledge of the time, place and other significant settings.

'blind spots' of relevant imagery and observe the un-pictured. By observing what is framed out of the realm of visual *representability*, in the context of the humanitarian representational frame, I intend to find out about the frames and limits of picturing and to draw into open the visual(lized) boundaries of humanity.

Furthermore, what is particularly important to keep in mind when analyzing images of crisis and their meanings—especially within the frantic mediation tempo of the topical social media era—is that images constantly move, circulate and *flow* from one context into another, gathering new positionings, significations, messages and meanings along the way. (Global) flows of images—shifts from one context to another, from the local level to the international, even global level, from the social media to the mainstream media, from organizational settings to high-level political proclamations, from news connections into internet memes, and so on and so forth—constantly construct new meanings and produce different significations of the images in their uses and reuses. The messages of flowing (mute) images cannot be frozen, as the significations of images constantly flux and alternate. Thus, I see that the process of meaning creation happens in the diverse realms of the political constantly producing new perceptions of the world we live in, affecting political decision-making, offering a variety of ways in which they can be used within the frame of humanitarian international politics. I will pay attention to the flows of images in the course of this study, and also seek to develop further the idea of *flowing images* and the analysis of the nature of humanitarian *image flows* in the contemporary setting.⁵⁷

Additionally, as indicated, in this study I am particularly interested in the 'Western gaze,' or in how humanitarian images are arranged by their presenters, and how they are intended to be perceived by their intended Western audiences. But I must add that as an analyzer of the images (and as the person who has chosen the material of the study), as an academic scholar, a Finn—i.e. as a citizen of a nation that generally identifies with the Western political realm—and as a private person with her own political and moral points of view and preferences, I recognize that my own culture-bound and political position as a spectator, and as an analyzer of the images. Thus, when analyzing the images I seek to assess the objects of my analysis on a number of levels. Firstly, I use the hermeneutic approach, through which I seek to understand what messages the images are seeking to deliberately convey in their contexts of presentation. Secondly, I employ an analytically and politically alert gaze through which the contextual political meanings of the images may be revealed. Thirdly, I take a culturally critical view through

⁵⁷ Particularly in the Chapter 7 I shall pay attention to the contemporary image flows in the context of visual social media mediation of images of war.

which I seek to go beyond the naturalized cultural readings of the images and to question and critically assess their political and discursive meanings.⁵⁸

1.6 THE STRUCTURE AND OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

As said, in addition to the contextual and flowing qualities of humanitarian images, in the contemporary settings, images of pain, war and distress often work on highly referential bases and frequently point to history.⁵⁹ I became aware of this first hand in the course of my study into the contemporary status of humanitarian images. I first started my investigation into the contemporary arrangements of humanitarian images from the Afghan War imagery in 2010-2011 (chapter 5 of this study).⁶⁰ Whilst conducting this study a question arose in between the lines repeatedly: how have the presentational practices and modes of utilization of humanitarian images altered and evolved within the recent years and what has changed? I soon understood that in order to gain a fuller understanding of the contemporary status of images in humanitarian settings, the images of crisis and suffering must be reflected against a wider historical frame. As these aspects have not been comprehensively dealt with in one work before (as noted above), I felt it was necessary to map out the visual history of humanitarianism.

Thus, before investigating the uses of images of atrocity, pain and crisis in recent years and contemporary settings, I shall give an overview of the history of the relations of visual images of pain, of their representation and mediation practices, and of the evolvment of the ideas of a shared humanity and of the changes in the concepts of humanitarianism over the past 250 years in **chapter 2**, “A History of Humanitarianism and Visual Images of Pain.”

I start the mapping out of the history of mediated visual representations of suffering, of the ideas of a shared human kind, and of the need to protect humans from peril from the times of the Enlightenment, in the mid-eighteenth century. I start following the visual trail of (global) humanitarianism from the representations of human suffering produced of the 1755 Lisbon earthquake. From this event onwards—which has been seen as a turning point in the international mediation of humanitarian visual representations⁶¹—I continue to map out and introduce the role of visual representations in widening the scope of the humanity in need of protection

⁵⁸ But this said, I must underline, that I do not claim strict objectivity—which in my view is not even possible. As I act as the analyzer of the images, the conclusions made are mine, they arise from my theoretical dispositions, my choices of material, my arrangement of text and they cannot to a certain degree refrain to reflect me as an actor and a writer of this study.

⁵⁹ **Campbell**, 2002(A and B); **Käpylä&Kennedy**; **Zelizer**, 1998.

⁶⁰ An earlier version of chapter 5 was published by the Finnish Institute of International Affairs in August 2011. See: **Kotilainen, Noora**: *Humanitarian soldiers, colonialized Others and Invisible Enemies. Visual Strategic Communication Narratives of the Afghan War*. The Finnish Institute of International Affairs Working Paper 72.

⁶¹ **Sliwinski**, 2011; **Orgad**. ; See also **Neiman**, 2002.

through divergent images, which I see as *iconic*⁶² within the evolution of the humanitarian/human rights paradigm. I shall, for instance, stop to contemplate the position of images in the abolition fight, the role of early war photography in widening the scope of protectable life, and the uses and significations of suffering images in colonial surroundings. Further, I shall analyze the uses of revelatory brutal war images within the early twentieth century pacifistic movement and introduce the position of the Holocaust images within the institutionalizing system of the protection of humanity and the role of the Vietnam War images in creating anti-war sentiments as well as the fluxing visual representational practices of organizational humanitarianism. Furthermore, I shall discuss the 1990s CNN effect thesis of the increased influence of mediated images of suffering on foreign policy and the visual practices of representing the end of the century Western war at the Persian Gulf (1990) as well as the role of images in the wars in Yugoslavia.

As said, in addition to mapping out the historical status of visual images within the evolution of the ideas of humanity and humanitarianism, the second chapter gives a historical backdrop to the later analysis of the more contemporary images of pain within the changing discourse and practices of global humanitarian politics. The historical overview of the images is presented before the more comprehensive introduction of the theoretical and methodological choices of this study in chapter 3, because many of the theoretical choices of the work, as well as central questions dealt with later in the course of this study, for a large part arise from the historical arrangements, patterns, traditions and modes of utilizing images of suffering over the past centuries and decades within the humanitarian frame. Furthermore, the second chapter predominantly draws from relevant research on the issue and is, thus, less empirically orientated than the following chapters 4-7.

As indicated, after the tour of the history of humanitarianism and visual images of human precariousness and distress, in **chapter 3**, I shall elaborate on my theoretical and methodical approach to the subject, largely grounded in the questions and patterns that arise from the historical uses of suffering images within the humanitarian frame. In chapter 3 “The Arrangement and Spectatorship of the Humanitarian Tragedy Theater” I shall explain how humanitarianism contemporarily functions within the Western sphere as an influential *unconscious ideology*, addressing its viewer-subjects through emotive visual representations of pain. In addition, I shall introduce more broadly the arrangement and operation of global humanitarian *theatrical*

⁶² By iconic is often meant that such images are much used and circulated, familiar to many and well known, even famous. These sorts of images are often displayed in cover illustrations and news contexts. They circulate fast in different mediums and gather multitudes of different utilizations in various contexts. They are reproduced across a wide range of media, in relation to different genres and topics. Such images are thus widely known, as well as remembered and frequently referred to. See **Perlmutter, David**: *Photojournalism and foreign policy. Icons of outrage in international crisis*. Praeger, Westport, 1998, 11-20; **Hariman, Robert & Lucaites, John, Louis**: *No Caption Needed. Iconic Photographs, Public Culture and Liberal Democracy*. University of Chicago Press, 2007, 27

arrangements that I see as taking the form of a theatrical *tragedy* play, which addresses and invites the spectators of the play to see the images and their arrangements in multitudes of politically constructed ways. I shall as well open up the way the images and image types dealt with in the subsequent chapters have been selected as *thick images*, descriptive of their time and context.

Chapters 2, 4, 5, 6 and 7 include illustrations that compile some of the discussed key images into new images, collages.⁶³ The function of these illustrations is firstly to give the reader a concise view into the material discussed, and moreover to illustrate the arrangements of the images and indicate their narrative nature. The illustrations of the history chapter 2 (illustrations 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4) visually narrate the historical evolution of the ideas of humanity from the mid-eighteenth century until the 1990s, and thus aim to give an outline of the imagery used in humanitarian settings during this time period. Moreover, also the chapters that deal more with the contemporary visual (media) representations include several collage illustrations. Particularly while spectating current crisis and enfolding events, we habitually face a rather sporadic and coincidental view into the suffering of this world. Thus the aim of the illustrations included in the chapters 4–7 is also to provide a more comprehensive and accumulative visual perspective into the imagery and visual arrangements discussed and analyzed.

Therefore, in addition to merely compiling the imagery discussed, the aim of the collages is also to bring together perhaps a more revealing viewpoint into how the images of war and pain are utilized and framed in the contemporary setting. Therefore the illustrations, like visual collages aim to do, create a new whole, by assembling different visual material together. They show the sporadic nature of images of suffering as encountered by their spectators, but also concurrently visualize the segmented, collage-like, historically and thematically cumulative nature of images of suffering.⁶⁴ Thus the illustrations are more than just illustrations in the conventional meaning of the word. They are a part of the study, in the sense that the images displayed are selected from the visual material of the study, and further, because they illustrate the nature and representational practices of the discussed *theaters of suffering* through a visual form. In practice the collage-illustrations were compiled so, that I explained the cases at hand and my study on them to my friend, graphic designer *Karoliina Isoviita*, and pinpointed the key thick images discussed in the study, which I saw relevant to be included in the collages. After this, Karoliina used her artistic freedom and skill in assemblage of the images, after which we discussed the collages, and when required together further worked up the collages. Thus, the collage-illustrations are not “my art”, but rather artistic works created by

⁶³ Also, by following the links provided in the bibliography, the reader may go and see more relevant visual material on the internet.

⁶⁴ *Rancière*, 2011, 25-30. See Also, *Särmä*, 2014.

Karoliina, which are guided by my scientific work. They aim at bringing together the material of the study, and providing a cumulative view into the historical and contemporary uses of images of suffering and atrocity and representational practices.

Chapters 4-7 may be perceived as contemporary acts at the humanitarian tragedy theater of suffering. They exemplify how images of suffering, precariousness and the pain of others in contemporary settings are presented for (Western) spectators in various divergent humanitarian conjunctions. Each of these acts shed light on different aspects and sides of humanitarian visual communication and contemporary humanitarian politics.

Chapter 4 “Emotional Theaters of Proof: Humanity’s Conditionality in Humanitarian Images” is the first empirical chapter dealing with the contemporary role of images within humanitarian world politics. The main questions of this chapter arouse during the analytical process: Why are Western media representations abundant with images of distant, non-Western suffering bodies, but vulnerable Western bodies are scarcely seen? How differently non-Western suffering is presented, and how the presentation of images of Western suffering is politically and culturally governed and controlled vis-à-vis the images of non-Western bodily suffering? Why is this and what kind ramifications do these predominant representational practices have on the Western notions of humanity and its value and on the practices of protecting humanity from its perils, and? That is, how do images of suffering constitute the Western spectator and how do the predominant representational practices thus influence the Western interventionist political acts humanitarily legitimized and targeted towards crisis areas in the global south?

Following *Bruno Latour’s* notion, I depict the visual representational practices, openly presenting the corporal pain of others—and effectively hiding the pain of some others—as a *theater of proof* in which the conditions of being included in humanity and being worthy of such humanity are globally and politically negotiated.⁶⁵ In this fourth chapter divergent visual media representations of non-Western suffering, circulating in the Western publicity, are juxtaposed with the presentation and governance patterns of Western suffering and Western-inflicted suffering. Through this examination of crisis, war and suffering images I analyze not only the representational patterns of images of suffering but also the ethos of conventional Western global humanitarianism and the predominant Western apprehension of life worthy of protection and rights constituted by the representational practices of images of suffering, crisis, terrorist violence, sickness and refugeeness.

In **chapter 5** “Humanitarian soldiers, Colonialized Others and Invisible Enemies,” I examine how the NATO-led *International Security Assistance Force* (from here on the ISAF) functioning in Afghanistan has presented its actions in its *strategic communication imagery* uploaded on the social

⁶⁵ **Latour, Bruno:** *The Pasteurization of France*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1988, 85–86.

media photo-sharing platform *Flickr*.⁶⁶ The chapter investigates what kind of means, messages and narratives the Western military strategic communications machinery used in its self-presentation in the time period of 2008-2011. I see that these images are foremost presented in order to convince and address the domestic, mainly Western publics, of the desirability of the Afghan-ISAF operation. This chapter analyzes how the “Afghan war of images”—the fight to win over the minds and hearts of Western populations—was fought on the visual arena and how the Western-dominated operation presented itself to predominantly Western audiences.

In addition to opening up the intended messages of the images presented by ISAF, chapter 5 also brings to the fore any unintended narratives embedded in the images. Thus, by analyzing visual materials, the chapter goes beyond the official justifications that are tailored to explain and legitimize the war in Afghanistan. Through analyzing the strategic communication images, currently dominant discourses and ways of perceiving ourselves, the “others” and the world emerge. I examine what these images tell us about the politics, values, morals, and attitudes of their time and about the world order they are presented within. The visual narratives embedded in the images create a picture of how “we Westerners” want to see ourselves as moral agents and international actors. Through unravelling and deconstructing the visual narratives of today’s war I shall bring to light a clearer picture of the resources, messages and narratives used to address the Western viewers, in order to see the conflicts of today in certain ways.

In **Chapter 6** “Picturing the Inhuman Evil Enemies: The Dark Side of the Humanitarian Narrative” I set out to analyze the visual construction and arrangement of evil in the contemporary Western humanitarian frame.⁶⁷ In recent years, visually striking imagery describing the enemies of the contemporary Western order have extensively circulated in the Western political publicity and media. The threat to the Western way of life, to the international order, human rights, and to the humane ethos held sacred by the West has often taken a visual human form. Primarily *Muammar Gaddafi*, *Osama bin Laden* and *Saddam Hussein* have served as such highly visual contemporary enemy characters. Each of these leader figures have, all in their own turn, served as the embodiments of *evil* opposed to Western *good*. These men and the regimes/organizations they represent have been the targets of military operations of Western and Western-minded coalitions during the times of the War on Terror and humanitarian war. In addition to mapping out the visual arrangements of contemporary Western evil, I shall

⁶⁶ An earlier version of this study was published as a working paper by the Finnish Institute of international affairs, August 2011. See: **Kotilainen, Noora:** *Humanitarian soldiers, Colonialized Others and Invisible enemies. Visual Strategic Communication Narratives of the Afghan War*. The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Working Paper 72, August 2011.

⁶⁷ An earlier (Finnish language) version of this chapter was published in *Journal Kosmopolis*. **Kotilainen, Noora:** *Muammar Gaddafi, Saddam Husseinin ja Osama bin Ladenin vihollisspektaakkelit humanitaarisen maailmanpolitiikan kuvastimina*. *Kosmopolis* 2-3/2012, 29-53.

in this chapter engage with the very core of topical Western humanitarian world politics and with the contemporary Western political self-identity built upon the notion of the West as a global, moral humanitarian savior.

The final empirically orientated **chapter 7** “A Social Media Effect? Syrian Chemical Attack Images in Mainstream Media and International Politics” investigates the contemporarily articulated ‘social media effect’ by analyzing the flows of contextual significations and different utilizations of the social media originating images produced of the August 21st 2013 chemical weapons attack in Damascus, Syria. Firstly, the chapter introduces the historically constructed *causality claim* of “the more we see, the more we react” on the political power of atrocity images. After this I analyze the *image flows* in the social media era by investigating the meanings the images gathered while flowing from the local social media level to the global level, as well as the signification process of the images within mainstream media’s journalistic remediation. I investigate how the images were used by the (Western) mainstream media, how they were named and framed in their new contexts. I trace how some images and stories came to at the time signify and define the situation in Syria for Western spectators. Further, by making a brief detour by presenting the uses and significations the images gathered from the Russian mainstream media, I juxtapose Western representational practices with Russian ones and unveil the prevalent contextual and ideological framings of social media images in mainstream media’s journalistic remediation.

Secondly, I observe how the images telling of the suffering of the Syrian people operated in the international political debate on the situation of Syria. I examine how the images were referred to and used in political argumentation and in the rhetoric rationalizing and legitimating the Western response to the situation—namely the planned targeted military operation against the Syrian leader al-Assad. Through the case of the Damascus chemical weapons incident I also draw attention to the novelty that the uses of amateur images and visual social media mediation potentially bring to the conventional practices of representing distant suffering. The analysis of the Syrian case deconstructs and enables the drawing of conclusions on the global (Western) uses of social media and amateur images of crisis and suffering.

Chapter 8 “Conclusions: The Necessity of Non-Western Hamartia for the Humanitarian Hierarchy” concludes the study and reiterates the research results by combining the preceding analysis of the divergent realms of visuality, world politics and humanity. Also further questions and possible new directions and roadmaps for future investigation are briefly outlined.

2 A HISTORY OF HUMANITARIANISM AND VISUAL IMAGES OF PAIN

2.1 INTRODUCTION: FOLLOWING THE VISUAL TRAIL OF CALAMITY

This chapter engages with the historical evolution, settings and stages of visually mediated suffering from the times of the Enlightenment to contemporary era. The chapter follows the visual trail of humanitarianism and protection of human lives through visual representations of bodily pain and despair. By following the history of mediating images depicting the pain of others, I map out the evolution of efforts at building up solidary bonds between humans created by images of pain and conflict.

What led me to investigate these particular visual episodes discussed in this chapter is the fact that many of these episodes are recurrently taken up when contemporary images of crisis, war, pain and humanitarianism are discussed. These historical stopovers have been designated as watersheds or kind of visual nodal points in the evolution of the thinking on humanity and its protection. Some past events shine more brightly, because someone has already shed light on them. That is, also previous scholarly work on these instances directed my attention to these particular cases, and thus I have largely followed the visual trail opened up before me. This also means that the episodes could have been selected differently, that they by no means all-encompassingly represent ‘all there is to say’ on the matter. Rather, the function of this chapter is to give a historical perspective into analyzing the contemporary relations of visual images, humanitarianism and recognition of humanity, and to provide a background for analyzing the uses of images of suffering, wars and crises in contemporary settings. In the course of writing the later chapters 4 to 7—to which this chapter also works as a backdrop—it became evident that the reoccurring surfacing of these episodes and nodal points in the history of humanitarian visual communication points towards conventional and established (perhaps canonized) ways of seeing the history of atrocity and its picturing, but moreover proves the significance of these imageries for the contemporary public imagination on the topic. Thus I apprehend the imageries discussed in the historical chapter 2 also as *thick*, in multitudes of ways; I argue that they describe the ethos and spirit of their time in emblematic ways, and by scrutinizing them in their contextual settings, many things on the discursive settings enfolding them maybe extracted.

I shall start this journey from the Enlightenment era and its altered thinking on humanity, empathy, and regard for the pain of the others, which has been pinpointed as a watershed in the history of wide-ranging emotive visual communication on such matters. I have chosen the 1755 Lisbon

earthquake, which has been marked as the first mass media event related to a distant catastrophe and seen as having greatly influenced the emerging discourse of a shared *humanity* in need of protection, as the starting point.⁶⁸ I then continue by tracing the relations between witnessing mediated visualized suffering, humanitarian emotions, as well as the apprehension of humanity and the developments in the ideas on the protection of humanity at the time of the emergence of the revolutionary ideas of the *rights of the man* in the late eighteenth century.

From this groundwork of modern Western humanitarian ideas, the need to protect humanity and the status of visual images within the humanitarian paradigm, I move forward in time and take a look at the uses of visual representations of suffering at the age of *imperial humanitarianism*, following the categorization of “humanitarian ages” by Michael Barnett.⁶⁹ I shall introduce the emerging abolition fight and the visual strategies used by the abolitionists in widening the boundaries of apprehending humanity in need of rights and protection. After this I shall exhibit Francisco Goya’s drawings *Distasters of War* as early anti-war images aiming at addressing their viewers in a humanitarian mode. After this I shall introduce the horrific scenery of the battlefield of Solferino (1859), which led Henri Dunant to sketch what has become a constitution for the modern ideas of universal humanitarianism and obligation to (neutrally) help those in despair. From the 1840s onwards photography has been used to depict suffering inflicted by war. I make a short inquiry into the first war photos of the US-Mexican war, Crimean and US Civil War, as well as investigate the mode in which the late nineteenth century photographic representations of suffering in the colonies addressed their Western viewers. After this I shall outline the uses of images of pain in various locations of the First World War and take a look at the presentation of atrocity images in pacifistic settings.

From here I shall take a leap into the era of *neo-humanitarianism*⁷⁰ and the post-World War setting and move on to the late 1940s to open up the effect Holocaust images had on the ideas of universal humanity, institutionalization of human rights and understanding of the need to protect humanity in peril. After this, I shall walk through the post Second World War evolution of humanitarianism and the position of images in mediating distant suffering from the post-World War era onwards all the way to the end of the Cold War. I shall trail the uses, presentational practices and significations of images describing distant suffering within the latter twentieth century organizational humanitarianism and also introduce the uses and effects of the Vietnam War images in the television era.

⁶⁸See: **Sliwinski**, 2011, 35-47; **Halttunen**, 1995; **Neiman**, 2002, 238-250; **Orgad**, 2012, 57-63.

⁶⁹Barnett introduces his typology of humanitarian ages-imperial humanitarianism, neo-humanitarianism, and liberal humanitarianism- in *Empire of Humanity. A History of Humanitarianism*. See: **Barnett**, 2011.

⁷⁰**Barnett**, 2011.

Finally, I shall present the more contemporary setting of the age of *liberal humanitarianism*⁷¹ characterized by altered, expanded and politicized humanitarian sector and engage with the visual presentational practices of distant suffering and need for help within this frame. Further, I shall open up the CNN effect thesis of the 1990s, examine the visual presentation of the Gulf War and analyze the more contemporary effects of politicized humanitarianism and Western interventionist international politics on visual representations of wars and crises.

So, let me start from the history, without which the present day remains incomprehensible.

2.2 VISUAL IMAGES OF PAIN AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT EMERGENCE OF THE IDEA OF UNIVERSAL HUMANITY

In his 1759 book *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* Adam Smith depicts compassion for the suffering of others as one of the “original passions of human nature.”⁷² Compassion towards the suffering other is undoubtedly as old as human culture. Nevertheless, the emergence of the idea of a universal humanity, as a shared fragile condition of all humans who need to be safeguarded by humans themselves, is commonly dated back to the times of the Enlightenment. The idea that our compassionate reactions towards the pain of others are aroused by visual records of pain, which allow us to imagine a shared universal fate as a human kind, has been enduring ever since the times of the Enlightenment and is, still today, at the core of humanitarian communication.⁷³

2.2.1 REPRESENTATIONS OF LISBON EARTHQUAKE STIMULATING A SENSE OF A SHARED HUMANITY

It is remarkable, that Adam Smith wrote his seminal work on empathy towards the suffering others in the aftermath of the 1755 disastrous Lisbon earthquake. On the 1st of November 1755 Lisbon, an important power and trade center in the world of the era and, at the time, the fourth biggest city in Europe, was horrifically destructed by an earthquake and ensuing tsunami and fires. The destruction of a Western center and an emblem of European colonial power devastated the minds of both intellectuals as well as the wider

⁷¹ **Ibid.**

⁷² **Smith, Adam:** *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Filiquarian Publishing, LLC, (1758) 2007, 9.

⁷³ **Sliwinski**, 2011, 35-47; **Orgad**, 2012, 57-63; **Burke**, 1998; **Smith**, 1759 (2007); **Voltaire**, 1759 (2001); **Kant**, 1790(1987); **Picturing Atrocity**, 2012; **Zelizer**, 1998; **Arendt, Hannah:** *On Revolution*, Penguin books, New York, 1990 (1963) **Scarry**, 1985 ; **Neiman**, 2002; **Butler**, 2004; **Butler**, 2009; **Linfield**, 2010; **Halttunen**, 1995.

public of the era and gave rise to ideas of a shared humanity through (visual) testimony of the suffering of distant others.⁷⁴

News of the earthquake spread rapidly for the era and provoked previously unseen reactions. Compassionate reactions were unprecedentedly wide-spread and charitable. Material help flowed to Lisbon from all main European powers. The aftereffects of the quake were reportedly felt from the coast of Africa all the way to the farthest north.⁷⁵ Perhaps partly because the trembles were felt by almost everyone in such a wide area, also the story of the Lisbon distress gave rise to exceptional curiosity and reached an audience of unparalleled size. The public was hungry for news on the sublime catastrophe. The pain and distress of the inhabitants of Lisbon were mediated around the then acknowledged 'civilized world' (i.e. Europe and the New World) in unprecedented speed and intensity.⁷⁶

European public at the time was often illiterate, and means of mediated communication differed greatly from our era. At the time religious representations, such as broadside psalms printed on broadside and sang in churches, were a popular way of mediating information of distant catastrophes, famines and wars to the often illiterate congregations. A Finnish priest *Abraham Achrenius*, affected by the devastation and witnessing its aftereffects as the surface of the River Aura rose by the force of the quake taking place thousands of kilometers away, wrote a broadside song in 1756 informing his congregate of the Lisbon catastrophe. He describes the earthquake as disastrous and tragic, but links the timing of the quake (All Saints' Day) and other signals related to it with a prophetic frame, explaining the disaster as a warning and a sign of godly punishment. Achrenius—as many of his contemporaries—saw the devastation as a prognostication for the people who had distanced themselves from God.⁷⁷ Although a compassionate reaction was generally called upon toward the suffering of the Lisboans, at the same time popular religious representations resorted to the idea of providence and often stressed the catastrophe as a sign of godly anger and a warning to Europeans for their sinful way of life.⁷⁸

The Lisbon devastation was also a much-reflected theme in non-religious Enlightenment literature. The seismic shift that destroyed the city of Lisbon can be also recognized as a watershed marking an end to the earlier prevalently religious worldview. *Voltaire* wrote about the catastrophe in

⁷⁴ **Sliwinski**, 2011, 35-47; **Neiman**, 2002, 238-250.

⁷⁵ **Sliwinski**, 2011; **Orgad**, 2012, 57-58.

⁷⁶ **Sliwinski**, 2011, 35-43.

⁷⁷ **Achrenius, Abraham**: *Sijtä hirmuisesta ja surkiasta maanjärityxestä. Lisabonin maanjärityxen ajanmerkeist caxi wastudest syyscuusa lisättyä Wirttä wuonna 1756.* Turku, 1756.

"Sijtä hirmuisesta ja surkiasta maanjärityxestä, Lisabonin suuresa pääcaupungisa Portugalin waldacunnasa: josa, maanjärityxen, walkian, ja weden cautta, nijn äkistä caupungi huckuis, että cuudenes osas hetkee, muurit ja tornit maahan langeisit, ja wijsi kymmendä tuhatta ihmistä, sangen surkiasti cuolettin [etc]. Wijmeis pyhään miesten päiwänä eli 1. p. marras cuusa 1755. Ynnä muitten ajan merckein cansa, cuin samoina aicoina tapahduit monesa waldacunnasa [etc]. Sen syndisen mailman waroituxexi, ja herätyxen ylös kehoituxexi, cocon pandu, ja cahdexasa wirresä präntijn annettu wuonna 1756."

⁷⁸ For more on the religious responses see: **Sliwinski**, 2011, 39-44; **Orgad** 2012, 58-63.

Candide (1759), and quite the opposite to the view from the religious quarters of the era, saw the devastation as a sign of a forfeit and of the non-existence of divine providence. This idea, pointing to the secularization of the conception of the humanity, can be seen to be at the core of the Enlightenment's rethinking of compassion, the human kind, and of secular moral obligation of humans towards the suffering others. Moreover, Voltaire in his *Poem on the Lisbon disaster: An enquiry into to the maxim whatever is, is right*, stresses the innocence of the victims of the disaster and emphasizes the meaninglessness of their suffering, in polarity to the religious thought of providence. He writes:

"What crime what sin had those young hearts conceived / That lie, bleeding and torn, on mother's breast / Did fallen Lisbon deeper drink of vice / Than London Paris, or sun light Madrid?"

Tranquil spectators of yours brothers' wreck / unmoved by this repellent dance of death / Who calmly seek the reason of such storms / Let them but lash your own security / Your tears will mingle freely with the flood.

*Are you so certain of the great eternal cause / That knows all things and for itself creates / Could not have replaced us in this dreary clime / Without Volcanoes seething 'neath our feet?"*⁷⁹

In his poem he contrasts the suffering of the undeserving victims with the merry and carefree state of the distant spectators and, thus, points to the unfair relationship between the victims and the spectators. Voltaire's poem can be seen to evoke sensations of *guilt* in the spectator and, therefore, invite the reader to imagine himself in the setting of horror and pain.⁸⁰ Voltaire's writings on the catastrophe mark a shift away from divine judgment and towards the notions of individual, of undeniable human worth stemming from witnessing violations of humanity's integrity; they stress a need for moral sentiments and reactions towards the suffering of others and invite the readers to experience emotions of compassion.

Visualized Bodily Pain, Compassion, and the Pain Induced Ideas of Humanity

Although the event precedes the era of daily newspapers, a rich culture of secular print communication thrived at the time. Pamphlets and visual eyewitness accounts of the destruction were printed, sold and circulated widely. The representations of the devastation were not only textual but countless visual images of the destruction of Lisbon and of the pain of the

⁷⁹ As quoted in **Orgad**, 2012, 60-62.

⁸⁰ **Sliwinski**, 2011, 44; **Orgad**, 2012, 61-62.

victims were produced and circulated in the publicity of the era; several of which have also survived the centuries. In addition to fine art and paintings, engravings and woodcuts picturing topical events were at the time popular and sold at markets and beerhouses. These images were affordable even to the working class and they also reached the often illiterate masses and infused the imagination of diverse segments of societies. As the accounts of the event, including visual images describing the horrors of the victims, were extensively circulated, *Sharon Sliwinski* has described the Lisbon disaster as first calamity mediated on a mass scale: the first modern mass media event to a distant catastrophe.⁸¹ (Artistic representations of the Lisbon earthquake see Illustration 2.1, at the end of this subchapter)⁸²

In the case of Lisbon the images—or *seeing* and visually witnessing the suffering of others—held a central position. The significance of the visualization of the suffering of others was, reputedly, for the first time so essential to the mediation of a distant crises.⁸³ In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, as said written in the aftermath of the Lisbon disaster (1759), Adam Smith writes about the constitution of our *fellow-feeling* for the suffering other:

*How Selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from except the pleasure of seeing it. Of this kind is pity or compassion, the emotion which we feel for the misery of others, when we either see it, or are made to conceive it in a very lively manner.*⁸⁴

Smith here points to *seeing*, or *conceiving in a lively manner*, as a starting point of developing a compassionate relationship between the spectators and the distant sufferers. He continues that we can only conceive what the other goes through by placing ourselves in the situation of the sufferer by the force of our *imagination*. With the help of imagination evoking representations and through the impressions of our own senses we may, according to Smith, place ourselves in the situation of the sufferer and, thus, conceive of ourselves as enduring the same torments. “We enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker

⁸¹ *Sliwinski*, 2011, 36-38.

⁸² Included in the illustration 2.1 is a Czech broadsheet, entitled “The true story of the disastrous earthquake in Lisbon...”. It was published in 1755 in Prague, but is incorrectly dated 1750. Actually this artistic illustration bears no resemblance to the city of Lisbon. A timely and relatively accurate written report on the disaster, was however, attached. See: *Historical Depictions of the 1755 Lisbon Earthquake*, Nisee, University of California: <http://nisee.berkeley.edu/lisbon/>. The other artistic representation of the Lisbon catastrophe included in the illustration is a 1755 copper engraving the events by an unknown artist. The original is in Museu da Cidade, Lisbon.

⁸³ *Sliwinski*, 2011, 35; *Orgad*, 2012, 58-63; see also *Halttunen*, 1995.

⁸⁴ *Smith*, (1759), 2007, 9.

in degree, is not altogether unlike them”. Smith continues: “That this is the source of our fellow-feeling for the misery of others, that it is by changing places in fancy with the sufferer, that we either to conceive or to be affected by what he feels”.⁸⁵

Smith points to the centrality of bodily and visual dimensions in evoking our imagination, and, later, many others as well have seen a visual record of a body in pain crucial to forming a solitary bond between the pain-stricken and the spectators gazing from distance. Also many other Enlightenment thinkers, for instance *David Hume* and *John Locke*, saw a link between seeing and empathy toward the suffering of others, and emphasized the primality of vision for sympathy. Thus the birth of “spectatorial sympathy” has been located in the Enlightenment era.⁸⁶ A fragile body can be seen as something that bounds all living creatures together, and thus the ability to imagine the pain of another living creature often stems from a bodily encounter. All humans have experienced pain and discomfort, and therefore we can all imagine a violation of our bodily integrity and relate to corporal suffering of others. An injured body points out for us—in the most realistic way possible—what may happen to us all: a body is what we all have and may lose, and thus it is the utmost thing shared by all living creatures.⁸⁷ This emphasis on perceivable bodily pain, visually demonstrated and mediated for the awareness of distant spectators, is still today at the core of the humanitarian communication. It serves as a focal component in (media) representations of distant crises, and thus it is central in constitution of imagining ourselves and the “others” in this world, and it is thus also pivotal to foreign politics and international relations.

Smith explains that the base of compassion is situated in the ability to imagine and reflect on the distress seen in the bodies of others and in our own bodies by the help of imagination. He states that: “in looking at the sores and ulcers which are exposed by beggars in the streets, they (the spectators) are apt to feel an itching or uneasy sensation in the correspondent part of their own bodies”.⁸⁸ Like Locke, also Smith remarks that this observation is so obvious, commonplace and mundane that not much proof is needed to back the claim. Whilst the claim might seem arbitrary, our ability to detect the pain of another by his/her bodily expressions has today also been proven by brain research. Recent findings show that visually witnessing the pain of others actually affects the spectators at a bodily, corporal level. Modern studies have demonstrated that when encountering visually detectable bodily pain in another person, areas in the spectator’s brain—mirror neurons, the mirroring system and mirroring mechanisms—activate, which enables us not

⁸⁵ **Smith**, (1759) 2007, 9-11.

⁸⁶ **Halttunen**, 1995, 304-308.

⁸⁷ See: **Halttunen**, 1995; **Chouliaraki**, 2013, 26; **Scarry**, 1985; **Linfield**, 2010, 39-40; **Butler**, 2009, 1-5; **Butler**, 2004, 19-23.

⁸⁸ **Smith**, (1759) 2007, 10-11.

only to react to the pain of others but also to stimulate the body state of others in our own bodies.⁸⁹ Just like Smith argued three hundred years ago.

Further reflecting on the nascent tradition of humanitarianism and its impact on contemporary thinking, for example, also *Judith Butler* writes about bodily precariousness as a shared condition of all (human) life. Recognition of life and the similarity of all living beings through an encounter with a body (in pain) is a central part of constituting social obligations towards others. Becoming aware of the precariousness of all lives is to recognize the social dimension of sustaining life—one's life is always in some sense in the hands of others. Precisely because all living creatures (humans as well as other animals) are precarious—vulnerable in a bodily manner and may suffer pain and die—it becomes necessary to care for these beings so that they could live. And thus, often only under conditions in which the loss of life would matter, the value of life appears. The shared nature of our being as bodily precarious creatures extends our obligation to the others like us, who might even be unknown, distant and remain anonymous to us.⁹⁰ Perceivable bodies in pain and precariousness thereby are fundamental to the ideas of not only a shared humanity but to humanitarianism, the aspiration to uphold and save the lives of others.

As *Shani Orgad* and *Sliwinski* remark, the focus of the popular visual representations of the Lisbon disaster was neither to picture the event in realistic terms nor to work as an accurate portrayal of the destruction but rather to vividly represent large-scale destruction of human lives in general terms. Illustrations concentrating on the massive scale and horrific nature of the pain and suffering of the victims were to mediate a sensation of horror, to elicit fascination and a sense of pity in their spectators and, therefore, to visually invoke an idea of a shared humanity. The emphasized bodily suffering of individuals in the images of the Lisbon quake seems to suggest a reading that this kind of destruction could well be experienced by any of the spectators, by any human. By their concentration on the corporal suffering of individuals and the agonizing destruction caused by the violent event, the images underline the universality of the experience of pain, and they stress the collective experience of suffering as a shared human condition. Thus, they create an experience of a shared fate of all humans—with bodily fragility and vulnerability—and, by doing so, they lead the spectator to imagine a universal human community, which is bound together both by pain and in compassion for the suffering of our own kind.⁹¹ Thus, seeing the pain of others—in the ways it was encountered through the popular representations of the Lisbon catastrophe—does not only give the spectators the ability to

⁸⁹ See for example: **Saarela, Hlushchuk** & et al.: *The Compassionate Brain: Humans detect intensity of Pain from another's Face*. *Cerebral Cortex* January 2007,17: 230–237; **Damasio, Antonio**: *Self comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain*. Vintage, New York, 2012.

⁹⁰ **Butler**, 2009, 1-15. From this, as Butler adds, does not necessarily follow, that we want to or will protect all vulnerable life. On the contrary. She points out, that apprehending lives as precarious is not necessarily followed by the decision to protect them. See also **Butler**, 2004.

⁹¹ **Sliwinski**, 2011, 30; **Orgad**, 2012, 59.

identify with the agony of the sufferers and to actually feel their pain in their own bodies but, moreover, it gives the opportunity to imagine a larger entity of humanity bound together by collective moral bonds. (For popular representations of the Lisbon catastrophe see illustration 2.1.)

The Enlightenment representations of the Lisbon tragedy can be seen to create a space for a secular idea of singular humanity in the minds and eyes of distant spectators. The circulation of emotion evoking representations of the distant event created a community of mediated suffering between the sufferers and the audiences. By these representations, it can be argued, an idea of a shared human community, early notions of humanitarian obligations towards distant suffering others, and, moreover, ideas of universal human rights were created in the imagination of the distant witnesses of the calamity. To borrow a phrase from Hannah Arendt, the secular worldview partly launched by the Lisbon disaster unveiled the shared and vulnerable condition of all humans; “the abstract nakedness of being nothing but human”.⁹² As the disaster gave birth to the ideas of human rights and individual humanity of all people, it also made clear that in a secular worldview and in the absence of god, nothing—but we ourselves—safeguards us from violations of our bodily integrity and from the defilement of these rights.

What is remarkable and perhaps unprecedented in the representational style of the Lisbon disaster is, that the representations of the contemporaries—visual as well as, for example, poems and other textual representations—seem to be focused on the *experience of the audience* faced with the records telling of the suffering others. In addition to being the first disaster comprehensively mediated on this scale, the destruction of Lisbon might have been the first mass disaster in the reporting of which the emotions the accounts evoked in *us*—the distant witnesses of the event—were accentuated. Although a compassionate reaction was generally called upon, nevertheless the victims of the disaster—the suffering objects in the images—were often quite blatantly blamed for their sinful way of life and, thus, often seen, to a certain extent, to be deserving the “punishment from above”. Therefore the suffering objects were partly presented as being different from the safe and happy onlookers; presented as *others*.⁹³

Thus the Lisbon disaster can also be seen as the first global humanitarian event belonging to the register of *politics of pity*. *Hannah Arendt* differentiates between compassion and pity by outlining that, on the one hand, within the register of compassion action is carried out in the presence of the suffering, who are nearby and within the reach of our natural gaze, without being accompanied by representations that aim at generality. Pity, on the other hand, is felt when the spectator is a happy person, not immediately concerned, touched and faced with the suffering of the other, but gazing from distance and through mediated, represented knowledge.

⁹² **Arendt, Hannah:** *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Schocken Books, New York, 2004, 383.

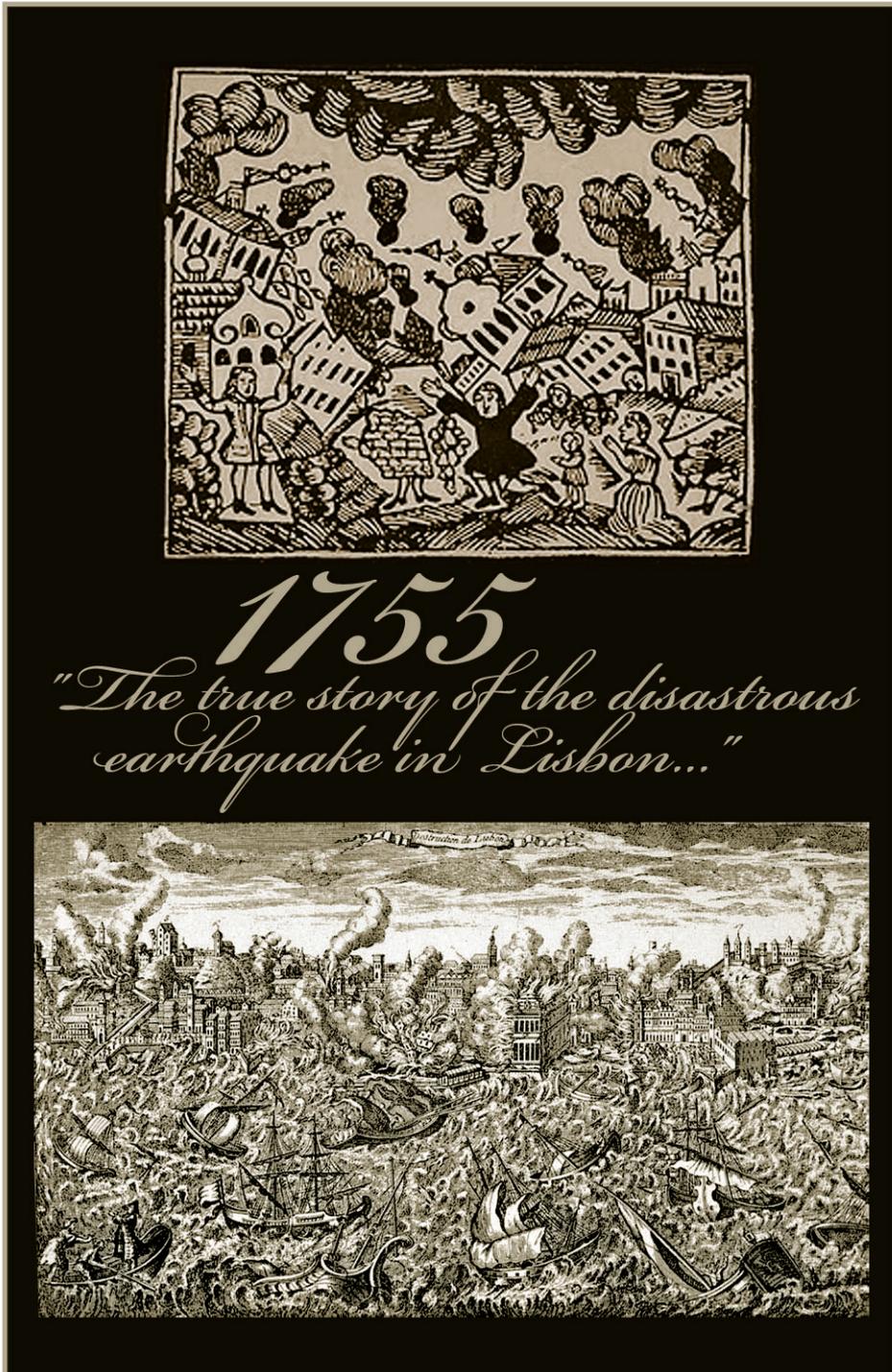
⁹³ **Orgad,** 2012, 60. See also **Halttunen,** 1995, 309.

Thus, in the case of pity, action cannot be taken immediately, but only indirectly, and the suffering has to be communicated and represented — mediated—into our knowledge. The essentiality of representation and generalization that inevitably occurs, when moving from the local setting to the global level, adds further political and hierarchical dimensions to the arrangement between the sufferer and the spectator.⁹⁴

Thus, Lisbon also signifies a turn from the register of compassion towards the politics of pity, and it further shows the way to the forthcoming global representational practices and arrangement of humanitarianism and humanitarian images. The emotions these (visual) representations aroused in their spectators, gazing from distance and safety, became the moral of the humanitarian story, and the *theatrical setting* of mediated suffering came to emerge. Thus, the style of representation, the eminent standing of iconic, thick visual material, as well as the arrangement of roles, and the hierarchical relationship between the humanitarian spectators and the suffering objects in the representations of the Lisbon disaster, to a large extent, resemble the ways in which images of distant suffering address us today in humanitarian communication and exemplify how the roles of the *humanitarian play* are assembled also in the contemporary humanitarian communication, or the “humanitarian theater”.⁹⁵ Thus, I argue that the foundations of the ever since prevalent representational practices of mediating distant suffering were created in the face of the ruins of the city of Lisbon. The Lisbon catastrophe, its mediation, the reactions and the discussion it stirred can be seen as a starting point of modern thinking on humanity, of humanitarianism and (visual) humanitarian communication.

⁹⁴ **Arendt**, 1990 (1963), 85-89.

⁹⁵ **Orgad**, 2012, 60; **Halttunen**, 2015; see also **Chouliaraki**, 2013, 27-32, & **Boltanski**, 2000. I will get back to the themes of humanitarian narrative, roles and humanitarian theatricality in more detail later in the course of this chapter, and especially in chapter 3. The idea of the theatricality of humanitarian visual communication is one that will permeate the whole study.



Chapter 2. Illustration 2.1.

2.2.2 THE REVOLUTIONARY RIGHTS OF MEN

When looking at the Enlightenment discourse on humanity—partly generated by the Lisbon disaster—it becomes clear that the starting point for the ideas of a common humanity and human rights is in the recognition of the other as a human. And in the recognition of the rights of men as rights of the *other*, who has been denied these rights. Thus, vulnerability, suffering and destruction of human lives are central to generating the notions of protection of humans from these perils. And just as the destruction of Lisbon gave rise to the apprehension of the precariousness of life, we often still today know and recognize human worth and human rights only by witnessing their downfall.

The ways in which the representations sprouting from the Lisbon disaster presented the catastrophe and addressed their audiences allowing the imagining of a common humanity worthy of protection, which gave a push to an extensive reformulation of the ideas and imagination on humankind with rights. A couple of decades later, the power of aristocracy and monarchy was radically challenged both in the New World and in Europe. What was only sketched out a few decades earlier by philosophers, was at the end of the century politically asserted in the radically novel declarations of independence and the “Rights of men”, in the United States and France. Thomas Jefferson formulated the “Rights of men” in 1776 Declaration of Independence: *We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men were created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.* In 1789 the French proclaimed in the article 1. of the *Declaration of the Rights of man and citizen*, drafted by the marquis Lafayette, that *Men are born and remain free and equal in rights.* In contrast to the US declaration, the French declaration does not mention church, king or nobility but refers to *natural, inalienable and sacred right of man.*⁹⁶

These ideas, jubilantly declared and printed on the ceremonious sheets, did not come out of the blue, but they had their base on the over-all rethinking of humanity and its protection by Enlightenment thinkers. Although often at the time, politics in reality did not even try to hold the declared rights in honor—as the revolution in France ended in terror and bloodshed, and later the French constitutions and declarations were very differently formulated—the declarations gave a push to reimagining humanity and paved the way for what could be imagined for the future. As the declarations of that time were all but all-inclusive—and openly disregarded the rights of the insane, children, some religious minorities, slaves, incarcerated, racialized groups, and of course women—they, just as the previous formulations of a shared humanity evoked by the Lisbon catastrophe, set the stage for the future of human rights and protection of humans. As *Lynn Hunt* acknowledges, to *declare* is to publically and

⁹⁶ **Hunt, Lynn:** *Invention of human rights. A History.* Norton, New York, 2007. See **Hunt** for the entire declarations.

formally state the condition of things; it is a public act of telling how things are, or perhaps even more how they should be. Thus, the early declarations of human rights paved the way to widening the scope of what can be imagined and apprehended as life worthy of protection.⁹⁷ Thus, the emerging human rights ideas and the care for the pain of others opened new spaces for the further evolvement of ideas of humanity, humanitarianism, caring for the pain of others and for attempts at alleviating it.

2.3 PICTURING ATROCITY IN THE AGE OF IMPERIAL HUMANITARIANISM

As noted above, the emerging discourse of humanity and the ideas of the protection of humanity stem from Enlightenment thinking, and the birth of (global) humanitarian communication can be located in the representations inspired by the Lisbon disaster. But typically the starting point of modern, organized humanitarianism is located at the turn of the eighteenth century and the emergence of the abolition movement in Britain. The new century brought out to the open new forms of compassion for the suffering distant others. Following the typification of Michael Barnett on the ages of humanitarianism, the time period from about 1800 to 1945 may be called the age of *imperial humanitarianism*.⁹⁸

Barnett apprehends humanitarianism and its evolvement as driven by three major forces: the force of *destruction*, the force of *production* and the force of *compassion*. Barnett argues, that in this time period destruction was brought upon people by the forces of great power wars and colonialism, and *commercial* production relied on the subordination of the colonies. As these forces destroyed local sense of community, compassion drawing from the ideas of Western-based '*civilization*' encouraged individuals to imagine new more universal and global obligations to other humans. The colonializing West defined the values of the international community in terms of the ideology of humanity and Christian religion. During the era, liberal and religiously inspired humanitarians set out to nurture new kinds of compassion and accepted new responsibilities towards the distant suffering others, by civilizing the objects of the help (individuals as well as states and areas) in order to alleviate their suffering. Barnett sees that the major humanitarian watershed, i.e. the founding of the Red Cross and the ICRC movement as well as the Geneva Conventions, is also founded on and reflect the Eurocentric ideas of international community and are inspired by the expanding Christian fellowship as means of rescuing the fallen.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Hunt, 2007, 113-116.

⁹⁸ Barnett, 2011

⁹⁹ Barnett, 2011, 30, 49-94. On how international law influenced this development, see also Koskenniemi, 2001.

In the age of imperial humanitarianism relief activity was still mostly a private matter. But for instance, in the abolition fight the antislavery activists tried to get countries to engage in the fight for humanity and in the alleviation of suffering. Nevertheless, it was only after the First World War that governments and state actors more widely adopted new kinds of responsibilities in order to care for the vulnerable and became involved in humanitarian action, creating international humanitarian organizations such as the *High Commissioner of Refugees*.¹⁰⁰

During the era of imperial humanitarianism both the means of mediating information and producing images took major leaps ahead. At the start of this era the sole means of visually communicating and mediating suffering into the awareness of distant spectators were paintings, drawings and engravings. Whereas, at the end of the era, mechanical means of reproducing and mediating visual images—along with the emergence of photography in the 1830s—had already changed the outlook of Western publics on the suffering of distant others in spectacular ways. In the following paragraphs I shall engage with the evolvement of humanitarian ideas and the position of images of suffering and pain in this historical process.

2.3.1 REPRESENTING AND SPECTATING THE SUFFERING OF SLAVES

In the eighteenth century world order, freedom of humans, as we now know it, was rare. As a matter of fact slavery was ubiquitous, and it has been roughly estimated that three quarters of all people alive were under some form enslavement. The rising living standards of the populations of the Western colonial powers and the globalizing Western world order were dependent on the enslavement and forced work of others. Majority of African slaves were working in Africa ensuring the colonial power and wealth, and African slaves were shipped shackled and chained to the New World by millions. On top of this, African slaves were also shipped to many parts of the Arab world. Likewise, the Ottoman Empire enslaved other peoples, and Russian serfs—majority of the population—were exploited and owned by their masters. Millions of farm workers in India and in other parts of Asia lived in outright slavery. At the time the ideas of liberation of all humans from the shackles of forced labor and slavery seemed far-fetched and unattainable. In the eighteenth century most citizens of Western colonial empire found the idea of ending slavery not only unimaginable in terms of the economic system but also if not undesirable then realistically unachievable and perhaps even utopic. Nevertheless, in the late 1780s London—the capital of a colonial empire—the ideas of freedom of men and

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

abolition of slavery were forming and gathering public resonance in unforeseen rapidity.¹⁰¹

Thus, for a good reason, the start of the history of humanitarianism is often located at the birth of the British antislavery movement emerging in the 1780s. *Adam Hochschild* dates the early abolition movement in Britain as the first time in history, when a large number of people became outraged over someone else's rights—and, moreover, over the rights of people of another color, distant people of another continent.¹⁰² Therefore, the abolition movement is remarkable in the evolvment of human rights thinking and in widening the scope of who can be understood as belonging to humanity and, moreover, to humanity in need of protection and rights. The emerging humanity and human rights thinking of the era, marked by an unprecedented willingness to see all humans as capable of reason and, thus, born with some natural rights, played a major role in the anti-slavery movement.¹⁰³ In addition to the broadening secular thinking on humanity stemming from Enlightenment ideas, new religious doctrines created novel possibilities for seeing even distant others as belonging to humanity. Evangelical protestant religious sects, abundant among the abolitionists, particularly Quakers, saw all humans as God's children and, therefore, preached that they should be treated with equal respect and decency. Among the religious thinking dominant amongst abolitionists, slavery and treatment of slaves was seen as inhumane and as barrier to the spiritual awakening of the slaves. Indeed, many antislavery leaders of the time were not so much against the system of colonialism or even slavery as such but against the terrible treatment of slaves and the lack of Christian instruction provided to the slaves, which they also saw as obstacle to the conversion and thus salvation of the slaves.¹⁰⁴ Thus, rather than an anti-colonial mindset, it was evangelical religious thinking, emphasizing conversion and salvation of all humans, that played a central role in the abolition movement.

Nevertheless, widening of the scope of who could be perceived as a human entitled to rights was central to the birth of abolitionist movement. As Judith Butler writes, lives must be apprehended as lives before they can be regarded as injured or lost grieved and mourned over, and demanded to be protected.¹⁰⁵ Or in the words of Arendt, one must be *judged* human in order to enjoy the benefits associated with the title.¹⁰⁶ Thus, in order to persuade the publics to turn against slavery and to pressure policy makers to abolish the slave trade, the strategy of the abolitionists was not only to show the inhumanity of the slave trade, but to demonstrate the humanity of the slaves by depicting them as belonging to the family of humans and worthy of rights.

¹⁰¹ **Hochschild, Adam:** *Bury the Chains, Prophets and rebels in the fight to free an empire's slaves.* Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 2005, 1-4

¹⁰² **Hochschild,** 2005, 5; see also **Barnett,** 2011, 57-64.

¹⁰³ **Barnett,** 2011, 57.

¹⁰⁴ **Barnett,** 2011, 57-58

¹⁰⁵ **Butler,** 2009, 2-5; **Butler** 2004,19-49.

¹⁰⁶ **Arendt, Hannah:** *Eichman in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil.* Viking Press, New York, (1963) 1994, 268.

Various strategies emphasizing the humanness of the slaves and arousing sensations of sameness with the slaves among the Western publics were used in order to include the distant people of different color and continent into the rank of humanity.¹⁰⁷

The Visual Strategy of the Abolitionist

The early antislavery movement engaged in various, often also visual, tactics to encourage the Britons to see the slaves as humans and, thus, to sympathize with their suffering. Pamphlets vividly describing the cruel practices and brutal consequences of the slave trade in detail were among them. The minds of the British publics were also tempted to turn against slavery by putting a human face on the slaves; tours of former slaves telling their stories of enslavement and emancipation were arranged. Also travelling displays showcasing the brutality of the slave trade and its practices were organized. These displays presented material objects associated with the inhuman business: weapons of discipline, whips, thumbscrews and shackles. These demonstrations aimed at arousing the imagination of the audience. The theatrical arrangements confronted the spectators with a question: what would it feel like to lose one's freedom. Showcasing the slave trade practices—presenting the freed slaves along with the equipment of discipline—was used in order to get the spectators to recognize the fact that the inhuman practices were used to sustain the lifestyle of the British public. Thus unveiling the nature of slavery was articulating to the publics: the sugar and tea you are enjoying are coming from the colonies and are produced by slave labor; you are all part of this and, thus, also guilty of these inhuman practices. Therefore, at the heart of the Abolitionists strategy was to arouse emotions of *guilt* and *shame* in the audiences.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, what is remarkable in the tactics of the abolitionists is that they often centered on visuality and explicitly focused on showing the bodily, corporal features of the suffering induced by slavery. As a vulnerable body is shared condition of all living creatures, sensations of sameness were effectively aroused in the spectators through visual encounters with suffering others, and the imagination of a shared human condition was stimulated by visually presenting bodily vulnerability. As an example of this strategy is a medallion used in a British Anti-Slavery campaign in 1787, picturing a shackled slave in a kneeling posture, with an accompanying text "Am I not a Man and a Brother?" (See illustration 2.2¹⁰⁹)

Another vivid example of this theatrical style of abolitionist publicity is demonstrated by a historic speech of an antislavery activist, member of the parliament, *William Wilberforce* delivered on April 2, 1792 at the British parliament. Wilberforce's speech centered not only on reasoned arguments

¹⁰⁷ Sliwinski, 2011, 1-5.

¹⁰⁸ Barnett, 2011, 58-59.

¹⁰⁹ Included in the illustration 2.2: "Am I not a Man and a Brother?" A medallion designed by Josiah Wedgewood for the British Anti-Slavery campaign 1787.

against slavery, as the previous appeals for the abolition of slave trade had tended to do, but focused on emotional appeal and strived to arouse benevolent sentiments in the audience. As Sliwinski argues, Wilberforce's strategy was to get the members of the parliament to *squirm in their seats* and to experience the emotions of shame and guilt over the prevalent and legal brutal treatment of slaves. For this he used narratives of extreme humane suffering. Among other vivid descriptions of the brutality of slavery, he told a story of a single slave girl, 15 years of age, being cruelly beaten on a slave ship, placed on display, hanged upside down from her leg and left dying by the captain of the ship. In his presentation Wilberforce centered on the physical suffering of the "innocent" child, on the cruelty of the captain and the slave trade system and, thus, placed the members of the parliament in a position of *baring witness* to the suffering of the girl and to the suffering induced by slave trade. Wilberforce's performance was followed by a heated debate, and the parliamentary session lasted the whole night, after which an act of "gradual abolition" of slavery was passed. After the parliamentary session Wilberforce's story of the brutally murdered slave girl spread out side of the walls of the parliament, made the news, was transformed into popular representations and caused a public uproar.¹¹⁰

After a week from the hearing, a hand colored print, illustrating the event of the beating and murder of the young girl was produced and rapidly circulated from hand to hand among Londoners. The print is captioned: "The abolition of slave trade. Or the inhumanity of Dealers of human flesh exemplified in Capt'n Kimbler's treatment of a young Negro girl of 15 for her virgin modesty." The image shows a young naked girl, hanged on a rope from her angle, held up by a sailor. The young girl is exposed to the gaze of the captain placed on the forefront of the image. Several other slaves are presented as looking at the event in the background of the image, and sailors, who are pictured as turned away from the scene of torture, are also placed in the background. The captain is pictured as smiling and looking content—or even cruel—as the sailor holding the girl by the rope is titled as saying: "Damn me if I like it. I have a good mind to let go." As the girl is pictured naked, her breasts and buttocks revealed for gazes of the spectators. She is pictured as trying to cover her face, a sign pointing to her modesty. What is emblematic and typical of the representations of this type is that the girl at the center of the image remains anonymous—as she also did in the parliamentary hearing—and thus she, in her bare corporality becomes a nameless symbol of the victims of the inhuman trade.¹¹¹ (For the image see illustration 2.2¹¹²)

The picture of the anonymous slave girl's murder, the mode in which it presents the event and its textual framing is, according to Sliwinski, descriptive of the nature of the abolitionist's rhetorical and visual strategy.

¹¹⁰ Sliwinski, 2011, 2.

¹¹¹ Sliwinski, 2011, 2-4.

¹¹² Isaak Cruikshank "The abolition of the slave trade" 1792, image is included in the Illustration 2.2

Also the rhetorical strategy of Wilberforce, added with the popular visual representations depicting slavery inspired by his speech, contains features fundamental to (visual) humanitarian communication for years to come.¹¹³ Ever since the abolition, these features—the nameless sufferer, pain-stricken and in need of saving, the curious and outraged spectators witnessing the pain of distant others, the mode of addressing the audience by representations arousing guilt and shame, and the stress on the physical suffering demonstrated by visual representations of corporal pain—have remained as central and lasting for humanitarian communication. Moreover, the theatrical mode of representation is again immanent in the visual strategy of abolitionist. As the victims are visually presented to the spectating audiences as weak, unable to help themselves and suffering, and the emotions of the spectators aroused in the face of the suffering of others is given a central role in the arrangement.¹¹⁴ Overall, the religiously driven abolition movement and its civilizing and evangelizing motives in the fight to end slavery, enlighten the nature of humanitarianism of the colonial era, but these motives also underline its central functions and modes of representation that have lasted as primary modes of representing distant suffering for future decades.

With unprecedented speed, the ideas of the abolition of slavery—an avant-garde, nearly utopian idea of the 1780s—resonated with large segments of the British public, and the abolition movement spread widely with enormous scale. Law soon incorporated an idea that had been unimaginable just a few decades earlier, as the *Slave Trade Act* (An Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade) was passed by the British parliament in 1807. The act restricted slave trade in the British Empire and encouraged pressuring other European nations to end slave trade, but it did not end slavery as such. Finally, the *Slavery Abolition Act* passed in 1833 abolished slavery in the whole of British Empire. From Britain the fight quickly spread to other colonial powers, and the spirit of anti-slavery saw no deceleration.¹¹⁵

2.3.2 PRELUDE TO PHOTOGRAPHY OF ATROCITY: GOYA AND THE SPECTATORSHIP OF WAR HORROR

As Sliwinski notes, the history of the struggle for human rights and the evolution of the protection of humanity can be perceived as a story of courageous campaigners and pioneers telling stories of atrocious events to fascinated and outraged spectators.¹¹⁶ The stories and images of the suffering of other humans, mediated by the avant-garde humanitarians of their times have been widening the scope of what can be perceived as life worth of mourning over and demanded to be protected. In the early

¹¹³ Sliwinski, 2011, 2-4.

¹¹⁴ See: Orgad, 2012, 60; Halttunen, 2015; see also Chouliaraki, 2013, 27-32, & Boltanski, 2000.

¹¹⁵ See: Hochschild, 2005.

¹¹⁶ Sliwinski, 2011, 4.

twentieth century, in addition to slaves, also the pain of soldiers and other victims of war became to be mourned over, and their pain was presented in images shown in order to arouse humanitarian sentiments in distant spectators.

Francisco Goya (1746-1828)—a well-known and an influential artist of his era and a court painter of the Spanish monarchy—stands out as a striking example of a visual avant-garde revealer of war induced suffering. After bearing witness to the war between Spain and Napoleon's France (1808 - 1814), Goya produced—whilst officially working as an artist of the crown—a series of 82 etchings illustrating cruelty and human suffering induced by the war: the *Disasters of War* (or as the artist himself entitled the collection, *Fatal consequences of Spain's bloody war with Bonaparte, and other emphatic caprices*). At the time when paintings and artistic visual representations of war tended to center on the heroic features of war, Goya extraordinarily pictured the horrific nature, suffering and universal madness of war.

Goya produced the plates between 1810 and 1820 in response to the conflict, but the critical views of the artist close to power were kept to himself at the time, and the drawings were publicized only posthumously. The style of the prints is raw and detailed; after the tour of images the spectator feels utterly dispirited in the face of such inhumanity, cruelty and pointlessness of war. The images focus, unlike most war art of the time, not on the heroic nature of fight but on the pain of individuals caught in the middle of the bloody carnage. Cruelty and physical pain in their bareness are at the forefront of the images. Goya did not explain why he made the images; but he accompanied each image with dire captions.¹¹⁷ Perhaps one of the most famous images of the series' (Plate number 39) pictures three naked, disfigured, mutilated bodies and body parts hanging on a tree; a headless torso on one branch, a head in another, one man tangled at the root, another tied to the trunk. The text blatantly says: "Heroic Feat. With dead men". Plate 12 pictures an armless vomiting man about to fall into a pile of dead bodies and is laconically titled: "This is what you were born for". Image 26 titled: "One can't look", pictures a man kneeling down to a prayer, a mother trying to shelter her children, a man covering his face and women begging for mercy, all being pointed at with rifles. Plate 33, titled "What more can be done", pictures two men holding third man by his legs, while a fourth man uses a sword on the genitalia of the man.¹¹⁸ The onslaught of barbarity, torture, rape and atrocities of *Disasters of War* is endless. (See illustration **2.2.** ¹¹⁹)

¹¹⁷ Sliwinski, 2011, 48-54.; See also Sontag, 2003, 39-42.; *Goya's Disasters of War: The truth about War laid bare*. BBC, July 17, 2014.

¹¹⁸ All of the plates can be seen online, for instance here: <http://www.richardharrisartcollection.com/portfolio-view/francisco-goya-2/>

¹¹⁹ Included in the illustration: **Goya, Francisco**, *Disasters of War*, Plate 39 "Heroic Feat. With dead men" & Plate 12 "This is what you were born for".

The way in which Goya's pictures war, accompanied by his punitive captions, leave few questions to be asked; it's hard to see them as anything other than a visual protest against violence and war. The viewpoint of the images is often arranged so that they show the events from an onlooker's perspective and thus places the spectators as the witnesses of these horrors. The focus is on the perception of the horrors, not the horrors themselves, underlining a feeling of having been there at the spot. These images do more than show, they *bear witness*; they claim, things like this happened, and thus invite the spectator to actively imagine the horrors taking place, and thus also to think of and imagine—not only inhumanity—but *humanity*. Moreover, the images do not much differentiate between the suffering and the perpetrators of the violence; it is often hard to tell who—a French or a Spaniard—is inflicting the suffering. It seems that taking sides did not matter to Goya. His images were making a global condemnation: war to him was a universal lunacy, inglorious for all partakers.¹²⁰

If Goya's images point to the perils of humanity, they also point to the universality of vulnerable humanity and the need to protect it in line with the ideas of Enlightenment thinkers. The images do not solely point out the madness of war but also stipulate empathy for its victims, soldiers and civilians alike. Again the theatrical mode of addressing is present: the emotions of the spectators are at a central position in the arrangement of images. The Disasters of War images were published decades after the artist's death in 1863, since publishing the set of prints denouncing violence and abuse of power in such a way was deemed impossible during the rule of Ferdinand VII. These images seem more like the modern, realistic photographic images poignantly criticizing and describing the madness of war, a prelude of the years to come, than the standard war art of his time. The images of the *Disasters of war* are graphic snapshots of war before the invention of photography.¹²¹

2.3.3 DUNANT GAZING AT THE DESTRUCTION OF SOLFERINO: THE STARTING SHOTS OF INSTITUTIONALIZED PROTECTION OF HUMANITY

The start of modern, organized humanitarian movement is regularly pinpointed to Henry Dunant's humanitarian reaction provoked by witnessing the suffering caused by the bloody battle of *Solferino*, June 1859. When arriving at the battlefield of Solferino at nightfall, Dunant, a young Swiss businessman, had never seen a battlefield before. In his book *Memory of*

¹²⁰ Sliwinski, 2011, 48-54; Sontag, 2003, 39-42; *Goya's Disasters of War: The truth about War laid bare.; How Disaster of War made Goya a Modern artist*, February 13, 2012- Phaidon.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* See also: Griffiths, Antohony, Wilson-Bareau, Juliet & Willet, John: *Disasters of War: Callot Goya Dix*. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1998.

Solferino Dunant writes about his impressions of the following night after the actual fighting was over:

*Bodies of men and horses covered the battlefield; corpses strewn over roads, ditches, ravines, thickets and fields... The poor wounded men were pale as ghosts and exhausted. Heart-rending voices kept calling for help. Who could describe the agonies of that fearful night.*¹²²

Dunant was deeply shocked by the aftermath of the enormous battle, which left 6000 dead and 30 000 wounded men on the battlefield.

When he returned to Geneva he wrote *Memory of Solferino*. Seeing and witnessing the destruction by his own eyes—and trying to attend to the enormous suffering of the wounded men left without medical care—led him to think about the need to alleviate the pain of soldiers on all sides of the battlefield. Dunant dedicates a larger part of his book to descriptions of the horrors he encountered at the scene of Solferino, and by poignant depictions of human suffering he invites the reader to imagine the horrors of war. After enveloping the reader in blood and carnage, only at the end of his book, he makes a plea for the international recognition of a need to universally alleviate the pain caused by war.¹²³ Although Dunant's testimony of the carnage did not include visual images, visual testimony of the suffering is at the heart of his plea for humanity and its protection. His description of the horrors has led to numerous artistic representations of the scenery he described in the book, which have helped the distant audiences to imagine not only the horrific downfall of humanity in the midst of war but also aroused the will and determination to help the victims of war in countless generations to follow. (See illustration 2.2¹²⁴)

Dunant's eye-opening and persuasive testimony of the destruction of war resonated with the philanthropists of Geneva and Europe. Soon a committee promoting humanitarian ideas of war and advocating the sending of volunteer medical personnel to battlefields—wearing a Red Cross emblem of neutrality—was formed. In August 1864 a diplomatic conference met and the first *Geneva Convention* for the “Amelioration of the Conditions of the Wounded in Armies in the Field” was formulated. As *Loius Appia*—a founding member of the committee—put it: “To make war more humane, if that is not a contradiction in terms, is our mission... once we have voiced our undistinguished rejection of war, we must take it as it is, unite our efforts to alleviate suffering”. For the first time in history nations agreed to sign a treaty that exceeded the boundaries of national governments to respect a

¹²² Dunant, Henry: *Memory of Solferino*, 1862. Cited in *Humanity in War. Frontline photography since 1860*, ICRC (Caroline Moorehead), Geneva, 2009, 8.

¹²³ *Humanity in War*. 2009, 8-9; Rosén, Gunnar: *Sata sodan ja rauhan vuotta. Suomen Punainen Risti 1877-1977*. Suomen Punainen Risti, Helsinki, 2002, 25-27.

¹²⁴ Included in the collage illustration 2.2. is a painting by Charles Édouard Armand-Dumaresq, picturing Dunant administrating aid at the Solferino Battlefield.

code of conduct in war. As a result the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Red Cross movement were born in 1864.¹²⁵ Still today the founding principles of *humanity, neutrality, impartiality, universality, independence, voluntary service* and *unity* of the Red Cross live on in the minds of the public when humanitarianism is mentioned.

Again we see here, in the history of the international Red Cross movement and in the history of the Geneva Convention aiming at creating the laws of war, how they emerged as a reaction to visually and intensively witnessing the pain of others giving rise to a demand to do something to alleviate the pain caused by war. Dunant's awakening in the face of enormous suffering again indicates the inseparable communion between seeing suffering and humanitarian reactions: on the one side of the coin there is pain, on the other relief. Humanitarianism is given birth to by bearing witness to pain.

¹²⁵ *Humanity in War*, 2009, 8-9; Rosén, 2002, 27- 38.



Chapter 2. Illustration 2.2.

2.3.4 EMERGING DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY REPRESENTING THE PAIN OF OTHERS

Artistic visual illustrations have historically had an important role in the formation of the understanding of the world beyond our gaze, as well as our perspectives on history and memory. War-art, combat art and paintings of catastrophes and war are still even today widespread modes of articulating the spirit and pain inflicted by war for distant spectators¹²⁶, but after the invention of photography in 1830's (there are numerous dates marking the invention) photographic images quickly came to occupy predominantly the visual mediation of suffering and war from crisis zones. As *Susan Sontag* remarks, since the invention of photography, photography has kept company with death.¹²⁷

Early on the novel medium of photography was perceived as the *Pencil of Nature*; as a technical and scientific apparatus, a wonder of natural sciences, offering an objective and uncompromising representation of the real. Although the camera's ability to record reality "as it is" was emphasized, photographs never were objective records of reality. Photographs have always had a point of view. Whilst they are copies of an actual moment of reality, photos have been, from the very start, framed gazes and tendentially produced points of view, interpretations of reality. The primary difference of photography, in contrast to verbal accounts and artistic manmade visual representations of wars, crises and events of suffering, is the underlying notion that the photographer, as well as the camera, had to be at the location of the dramatic event in order to produce images and record the unfolding events. The reality behind photographic images and the eye-witness quality of photography adds an aura of truth and proof value to photographs, especially when taken of dramatic events and human suffering.¹²⁸ Therefore, baring witness to horrors of war and the suffering of distant others through a photographic image—a record of the real—brings the visual encounter between the safe spectators and the distant suffering others to another level. As *Roland Barthes* acknowledges, looking at a photograph is always looking at something that no longer exists. Photographic images record stalled moments of the past, and thus they collect and replicate something already lost. As light is what makes the photographic image possible, it always also depends on dark; the shadow. The complex relationship of lived life, death and photography is inseparable, at the same time elusive and dire.¹²⁹ This feature of photography makes the spectatorship of bodily suffering (always pointing to the shared vulnerability of living creatures) even more complex and compelling.

¹²⁶ Still today war-artists record contemporary wars, although photography is today perceived as the primary route to seeing war and suffering in a global setting. *An artist in Afghanistan: 'To tell the story, you've got to take risks'*, The Guardian, 19 October, 2014.

¹²⁷ *Sontag*, 2003, 21.

¹²⁸ *Barthes, Roland: Camera Lucida*. Vintage Books, London, 2000 (1980), 76-77.

¹²⁹ *Barthes*, (1980) 2000, 96; *Sontag*, 2003, 22-23.

Developments in the technical means of photography, as well as progress in the field of mediating and reproducing visual images, have defined and altered the uses and effectiveness of visual images throughout the history. The innovation of the portable Kodak dry plate camera in the late 1880s as well as the introduction of the truly portable Leica camera using cinema film in the 1920s both revolutionized picture taking, just as digital and mobile technology has done lately. Although Kodak cameras democratized the use of the medium and made it accessible for larger publics, it was only when the camera was liberated from the constraints of the tripod it became truly movable and portable, and equipped with a range finder and lenses suitable for both close up and distant range shooting—that photographs came to lead the way of picturing and mediating horrors of wars and combat in a mass scale. Therefore, as Sontag argues, it took some time before photos were able not only just to record but to actively produce narratives.¹³⁰ Later on, with developments in photography, artistic, man-made images have lost their leading role as mediators of horror, suffering, and wars as well as of heroism. But along the way, so has deteriorated the belief in the objectiveness of photographs.

In the following chapter I shall introduce early photography depicting and communicating war and battlefield sceneries to distant Western spectators from the 1840s onwards. After this I shall present early photographic representations of distant suffering from the colonies from the late 1880s onwards and open up how these initial photographic representations of distant suffering others formed the conventions of visual humanitarian communication.

The Early War and Crisis Photography

Only about a decade after its birth, photography was for the first time used to record war. Daguerreotypes of the US-Mexican War (1846-48) have survived and give the contemporary spectator a view into a war that took place more than a century and a half ago. As photography equipment at the time was too slow to record action, war images of the time had to be taken of still moments, stationary objects; capturing battle and action scenes or the moving reality of war were made possible only decades later. These early war images predominantly focus on scenes where a war took place; landscapes and military camps and also habitually pictured soldiers and officers in portraits and depicted troops posing for the camera. But among the images there are also photographs pointing to the human peril of war: images of war graves and burial places of US soldiers and images of operations in military hospitals.¹³¹

The *Crimean War* (1853-56) has been regarded as the first war that was somewhat systematically documented by the means of photography. The war

¹³⁰ Sontag, 2003, 21.

¹³¹ See: Sandweiss, Martha: *Eyewitness to War: Prints & Daguerreotypes of the Mexican War, 1846-1848*, Smithsonian, 1989.

is known most famously through images taken by *Roger Fenton*. Fenton spent March-June 1855 in Crimea as an official photographer, employed by the British military, to record the war and the British war campaign. Just like the photos of the US-Mexican war, Fenton's camera was unable to capture the bloody reality of war in the sense we now understand war photography, due to technical restrictions of photography of the era. His images offer a view into the war through portraits of soldiers and officers, pictures of life in the military camps, as well as local workers and camp followers. His photographs were published, e.g. in *Illustrated London News*. Casualties of war, the dead and injured are not among his choice of photos, probably partly due to his position as a military photographer hired to promote the war for the spectating domestic audiences. But Fenton's most famous photograph, *The Valley of the Shadow of Death* (April 1855), picturing a dirt road in Sevastopol Crimea scattered with cannonballs, mediates a strong sense of horror. Although the image does not show any wounded or dead, as Sontag phrases it, it is a *portrait of death without the dead*. The photo is a poignant scene of war, an image which most likely would not communicate the same story if it was not a photograph. While Fenton and his work were quite quickly forgotten by his contemporaries, this image has been later identified as the first iconic image of war.¹³² (Included in the illustration **2.2**, Roger Fenton's *The valley of the shadow of death*, 1845.)

The visual coverage American Civil War (1861 to 1865) was the first attempt to document a conflict in its entirety by the means of photography. *Matthew Brady* and *Alexander Gardner*, Brady's employee, are amongst the most known photographers to chronicle the war. The most notable difference in the Civil War photos, in comparison to the photos from the Crimean War, is their relentless portrayal of death. With his employees Brady, named the father of photojournalism, took thousands of images of the war: portraits, battlefield scenes prior battle, aftermaths of battles, as well as images of the camp life and routines of war. More so than the images of the Crimean War, the Civil War photos brought the bloody and harsh reality of war before the distant spectating publics. Photographs displayed in the 1862 exhibition *the Dead of the Antietam* assembled by Brady deeply shocked the contemporary American public. Images, in the exhibition, showing the battlefield without the dead being removed from the scene, were the first brutal war photos distributed to a mass audience. Images of the bloated bodies of the fallen men, entangled corpses scattered around the battlefield and left to decay astonished the spectators. In a review of the exhibition that was published in the *New York Times* in October 1862 it was said: "Mr. Brady has done something to bring home to us the terrible reality of and earnestness of war. If he has not brought bodies and laid them in our door-yards and along the streets, he has done something very like it...". For the first time photographs of war challenged the public's long nurtured belief that death at the

¹³² Sontag, 2003, 43-46.

battlefield was glorious and heroic; these images had the capacity to shock and unravel the minds of the spectators in a visually novel way. Thus it can be said that the images of *the Dead of the Antietam* addressed their viewers not only in a revelatory manner, but they also pointed to the horrors and suffering induced by war in a corporal and emotive mode, and thus the images potentially aroused compassionate reactions and novel understandings of lives in need of protection in the viewers.¹³³ (Included in the illustration **2.2**: Gardner, Alexander: “Confederate dead on the Hagerstown Road, Antietam Battlefield, September 1862” from the series “The Dead of the Antietam”, 1862)

The photos were sold at the exhibition, published in books, made into wood engravings and published in, e.g., *Harpers Weekly*. Numerous articles on the exhibition were published in the press. The images of the horrors of war were also circulated in *stereo cards* (cardboard pictures looked at through a binocular viewer to produce stereo view from two nearly identical photographic prints that produce an illusion of a three-dimensional image), which was a popular novelty collected by the publics of the time. However, the exhibition could only reach a limited audience; newspapers were still read at low incidence among the publics and stereo cards were expensive. Therefore photographic images did not yet suffice to reach ample audiences at the time of the Civil War, and the power of photographs in shaping the public’s view of the war still remained quite limited.¹³⁴

Early war photography was inhibited by several the technical factors, means of mediation, circulation, as well as of production. Thus photography of the time was barely able to record the reality of war as eye-witnessed and experienced at the battlefield. In addition, the mediation techniques, at the time, were unsophisticated, and the means of reproducing photographic images in the press were still rather inadequate. Moreover the public’s access to the images in large scale often remained limited.¹³⁵ Nevertheless, the invention of photography and the widening use of this novel apparatus to record war and crisis gave a new and more powerful method to mediating the events of faraway places and the suffering of others to audiences too far to witness the events with their bare eyes, which also enabled the spectators to engage with the suffering of others in radically altered ways. The early photos of war paved the road for more comprehensive war and crisis photography to come.¹³⁶

¹³³ **Moeller, Susan**: *Shooting War: Photography and the American Experience of Combat*, Basic Books, New York, 1989, 23-25; *The Death of Antietam*. Jones, Terry, L. September 24th, 2012, New York Times. **Sontag**, 2013, 46-48.

¹³⁴ **Moeller**, 1989, 23-25.

¹³⁵ **Ibid.**

¹³⁶ In addition to this, the example of early war photography exposes how, on the one hand, developments in camera equipment and in the technology of visual mediation and, on the other hand, varying policies of restrictions and censorship have been the key parameters of visually mediating events of war from the very start. Even today, in the era of rapidly flowing and hard to confine social media images, attempts to circulate images revealing war inflicted suffering, efforts to restrict the circulation of visual images that might jeopardize the popularity of a war, and the production of images that promote and legitimize warfare are all still central to mediating contemporary warfare. This is one

Imagining Suffering in the Colonies

In the early years of photography, in addition to war photos, distant suffering was presented to Western viewers in photographs depicting human suffering, such as famines, in the colonies. The introduction of a portable Kodak camera in 1888 expanded the use of photography as a tool of documentation also to nonprofessional photographers. Now also missionary humanitarians and investigative journalists travelled armed with Kodak cameras and were able to mediate what they saw in the colonies into the awareness of distant spectators by the means of photography. New camera technology, along with the advances in printing techniques allowing mass production of original photographs in periodicals and newspapers in the early 1890s, enabled wider use and circulation of photographic illustrations in the media.¹³⁷

Early photos depicting human suffering, famines and epidemics in the colonies—i.e. in Africa and India—were predominantly shot and circulated by missionaries and humanitarians of the colonial era and published in Western papers from the 1880s onwards. Presenting images of atrocious events and human suffering in faraway corners of the world, along with haunting narratives of misery, the humanitarians aimed at engaging the Western spectators in empathetic action on behalf of their fellow humans around the world and to care for the faraway vulnerable lives, regardless of their different color, race, or religion.¹³⁸ Although the suffering of the indigenous people of the colonialized areas was brought before the Western spectators predominantly for humanitarian purposes—for arousing benevolent sentiments—the representations carried with them a strong colonializing—religious, evangelizing, civilizing and patronizing—emphasis. (See illustration 2.2 ¹³⁹)

The predominant mode of picturing distant suffering is in these images corporal and passive. Naked bodies of the nameless sufferers were often placed and arranged in front of the camera by the photographer, in order to show the suffering in the most vividly naked way possible. Skeleton-like, brown, weak bodies—sometimes even supported by ropes and other devices to make them stand up in the absence of any physical strength—were on display for Western eyes to indulge in. The missionary aid, alleviation of suffering and civilizing endeavors provided by Western the humanitarians was often underlined in the narratives produced by images and accompanying texts. The predominant mode of representation was as well

of the central features of this study, to which I will come back to in several occasions in the course of the study.

¹³⁷ **Curtis, Heather:** *Depicting Distant Suffering: Evangelicals and the Politics of Pictorial Humanitarianism in the Age of American Empire*, *Material Religion* 8/2, pp. 154–183, 2012, 157-159.

¹³⁸ **Curtis,** 2012, 157-159; see also **Imagining Famine Project:** <http://www.imaging-famine.org/index.htm>; **Sliwinski,** 2011, 73.

¹³⁹ Included in the Illustration 2.2, is an image showing skeleton-like victims of famine, that can be seen as a thick image picturing the suffering in the colonies, typical for the representational practice of the era. *A famine in Madras*, 1876. Sean Sexton collection. See: **Imagining Famine Project:** <http://www.imaging-famine.org/historical/o2.html>

pointing to the underdeveloped surroundings of the indigenous people; and the incapability of the locals of taking care of themselves is highlighted by style of the images. Added with the representational style of *bare life*¹⁴⁰—physical, corporal suffering, often depicted in the bodies of nameless crowds—the powerlessness and otherness of the distant colonized people is further highlighted. Therefore, the main mode of addressing the audience of these images is done through a colonial mindset, stressing Western dominance over the inferior people of the distant colonized crisis zones.¹⁴¹

Michael Barnett argues that Western colonialism and the emergence of global humanitarianism are inseparable. In the era, the European empires' colonial exploitation of Africa and India forced the powerful to contemplate their relationship with the local populations of the colonies. The emergence of the humanity discourse in the late eighteenth century and the widening scope of humanity did not stop at the early abolition movement but broadened into a discourse on the overall relationship of the powerful Westerners and the weak, subjugated and governed peoples of the colonies. The superiority of the powerful—Western, Christian, white and wealthy—was often seen within the colonial mindset as creating a duty to help and civilize the ruled, undeveloped, uncivilized, savage and weak pagans. Nineteenth century Western colonialism included an ideology of trusteeship, defined by the themes of civilization and conversion. Many missionary humanitarians of the era— just like the religiously driven abolition activists—were not against colonialism as such but against its extreme consequences, its exploitative and cruel features. Yet, the colonial powers justified their conquest of new areas and peoples in terms of civilizing mission. The French had their *La mission Civilisatrice*, the British the *white man's burden*, and the United States the *manifest destiny*. The paternalistic ideologies, accompanied by the then-contemporary racist theories based on the notion of inferiority of non-white races, formed new kinds of hierarchies of humanity and were very much part of the colonial humanitarian project. The belief in the Western cultural, racial and religious superiority convinced the imperialistically driven humanitarians to think that developing, civilizing and governing—even forcefully—the underdeveloped areas and taking care of the local people, not quite seen as full-fledged humans, was an act of doing good in the long run. The immediate consequences of the developmental and civilizing projects—the lost lives and destroyed communities—were seen as sacrifices for the bigger plan of civilizing and converting these people and developing these distant areas toward a more Western system.¹⁴²

The roots of modern global humanitarianism and humanitarian photographic imagery can thus be traced back to the civilizing religious conversion projects of the colonial era. Just like the abolition activists, who

¹⁴⁰ **Agamben, Giorgio:** *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1998 (1995); on the representational style of bare life, in humanitarian visual communication, see: **Chouliaraki**, 2013.

¹⁴¹ **Imagining Famine;** Curtis, 2012, Compare to: **Cohen**, 2001; **Chouliaraki**, 2013.

¹⁴² **Barnett**, 2011, 60-64.

often were driven by evangelist religious motives, the missionary humanitarians saw colonialism as an endeavor to civilize and develop the backward populations of the colonized areas. Imperialism and colonial submission of the distant people did not, for the religious humanitarians of the era, contradict humanitarian efforts in alleviating suffering of the colonized, but rather the other way around: humanitarianism of the era cannot be separated from the imperial economic interventionist and expansive logic of colonialism. The colonial and imperialistic efforts of the industrializing Western countries were commonly seen as endeavors of transforming the non-Western colonized societies into ‘wealthier, happier and more stable’ societies. Christianity, conversion, colonial commerce and civilizing were seen as the route to progress. At the time, humanitarians acting in the colonies were most often acting without direct economic ties to states and were usually financed by parishes at home. Although they functioned without governmental financial support, they nevertheless relied on the colonial powers for security and legal sanctuary and shared the attitudes and outlooks of the colonial powers. Missionaries aimed at introducing modern Western institutions, such as schools and health clinics in the colonies, emphasized the importance of hygiene, preached the importance of discipline, self-control, sobriety and hard work that were central to Christian protestant ideology. Thus, they also aided the colonial administrators in taming and domesticating the locals into Western customs, values and tastes, making them supposedly easier to govern and rule.¹⁴³ Thus humanitarianism of the era was very much a part of the colonial apparatus of Western power. The intersections of power, violence and humanitarianism were central to modern imperialistic world order. The history of modern humanitarianism is, thus, tightly tied not only to religious civilizing endeavors of the missionary humanitarians but also with imperialism and the belief that Western style governance and the capitalistic mode of production offer a route to modernity, development and better life for the colonized. Defenders of the empire and of humanity of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries widely believed that importing the capitalistic imperial economic system—forcefully or not—was an act of improving the lives of the “less developed” peoples; imperialism was often seen as a fundamentally humanitarian enterprise, and humanitarianism can thus be seen to stem from a colonialist foundation.¹⁴⁴

The intertwining of the colonial commercial governance and humanitarian, religiously colored ideology is prevalently present in the photographic imageries of distant suffering presented by the missionary humanitarians in the late nineteenth century. The self-assumed duty of the sovereign religious Western people to intervene in the suffering, by civilizing the distant underdeveloped peoples of the colonies, was articulated in the

¹⁴³ Barnett, 2011, 64–68.

¹⁴⁴ *Stanford historian uncovers the dark roots of humanitarianism*, Stanford Report, April 23, 2015.

images of corporal and nameless suffering and passive *bare life*¹⁴⁵. As the suffering objects of the images seem utterly unable to help themselves, the presentation of the visual corporal suffering was not only to arouse the will to help and sentiments of empathy and benevolence in the spectators but also feelings of superiority and the duty to govern and intervene. The patronizing colonial-humanitarian ideology is distinctly visible in the early humanitarian photographic representations of the colonies. (See illustration **2.2**.) From the very start of humanitarian (international/global) communication, relying on photographic representations, a hierarchical—and theatrical—practice of picturing the objects of humanitarian aid, predominantly in a corporal mode and as weak, passive, nameless, inferior others, is present. This mode of representation can be seen to reflect the dominant Western outlooks and mindsets of the era. Although the distant suffering others were presented as humans in need of help, they were not presented as being human in the same sense as the spectators of the images, the Western potential intervening, civilizing helpers. In the visual humanitarian representational practices of the colonial era the hierarchical role divisions of the Western helper and the non-Western weak helped are imminent.¹⁴⁶

The Handless Children of the Congo Free State

The story of King Leopold's rule over the Congo Free State is an extreme example of the atrocious consortium of humanitarily rationalized civilizing endeavor, forced financial progress and systematical terror, murder and slavery in the colonies. But the story as well exemplifies the then novel power embedded in the use of photographic images of suffering in unveiling distant human rights violations, and moreover the story sheds light on the early formation of visual representational practices of global humanitarianism. King Leopold II, the monarch of Belgium, seized colonial power over the area of Congo in the 1880s. Leopold's rule over the area was rhetorically framed and rationalized as a civilizing economic development project, and his interest in the area was at the time widely believed to be humanitarian in the West. In reality, Leopold's interest was financial by exploiting Congo's natural resources—namely rubber—of the area by resorting to wide spread terror, violence and forced labor.¹⁴⁷ The use of photographic images in the fight to unveil the horrific nature, the human rights violations and atrocities produced by King Leopold's cruel colonial enterprise also serve as a watershed in the humanitarian use of atrocity photographs; one that shaped visual humanitarian communication for decades to come.

¹⁴⁵ Agamben, 1998 (1995) ; Chouliaraki, 2013.

¹⁴⁶ Chouliaraki, 2013, 27-32; Boltanski, 2000; Douzinas, 2007, 68.

¹⁴⁷ Hochschild, Adam: *King Leopold's Ghost: A story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*. Mariner Book, Boston, 1999; Sliwinski, 2011, 57-81; Twomey, Christina: *Severed Hands: Authenticating Atrocity in the Congo, 1904-13*. In *Picturing Atrocity*, 2012, 39-50; Twomey, Christina: *The incorruptible Kodak. Photography, Human Rights and the Congo Campaign*. In *The Violence of the Image. Photography and international Conflict*. 2014, Kennedy, Liam& Patric, Caitlin (eds.) I.B Tauris, London, 9-33.

The story of the atrocities in Leopold's Congo Free State began to unfold for the Western audiences in the 1890s. American George Williams travelled to Congo in order to investigate what he believed to be a benevolently governed African society but found out a reality quite the opposite. After witnessing the widespread and arbitrary cruelty of the Belgian colonial rulers toward the natives, he wrote a public accusation Open letter to King Leopold II of Belgium. Condemning the atrocities and offering a detailed testimony of the atrocities, Williams claimed in the letter that Leopold was “waging unjust and cruel war against the natives.” After its publication in the *New York Herald* in 1890, the testimony aroused wide spread outrage and became vastly circulated and reprinted throughout America and Europe. Following the outrage, an investigative report of the situation in the Congo Free State, assembled by the British government, came out in 1903. The report, including several horrific photographic images, paints an appalling picture of the oppression in the Congo Free State system.¹⁴⁸ Probably for the first time in history, this report used photographs of pain as forensic evidence of atrocities and human rights violations. For instance, the report visually describes the cruel doctrines of the local police *Force Publique*, and particularly it describes the type of mutilation that became an icon of Leopold's colonial rule: the cutting off of hands. The Belgian officials of the regime demanded proof from the Force Publique of native killings, which was routinely offered in the form of delivering the cut-off right hand of the victims. Cutting off of hands became a form of terror. Among the photographs used in documenting the mutilations were images of maimed children, such as the much-circulated story and photo of a young boy by the name of *Mola Ekilite*. This images pictures the young Mola¹⁴⁹ and an even younger girl named *Yoka*, both mutilated by colonial authorities. The children are pictured staring at the camera, their mutilated, cut-off hands appearing as a stark contrast to the white clothes they are wearing, are at the center of the image, drawing the attention of the spectator to the painful bodily marks of the cruel colonial regime.¹⁵⁰ (The image of Mola Ekilite and Yoka is included in the illustration **2.2**. The image is taken about 1905)

Photography was also used in documenting other instances of such cruelty in Congo. Among these photographic representations are the images of a British missionary *Alice Harris*, who photographed the atrocities happening in Congo with her Kodak camera. In 1904 a Congolese man called *Nasala* came to Harris, telling her of an attack by the officials of the Anglo-Belgian India Rubber Company. He showed her the severed limbs of his wife and daughter that the offenders had left behind. Appalled by the story Harris made Nasala pose for her camera looking at the small limbs of his dead

¹⁴⁸ *An Open Letter to His Serene Majesty Leopold II, King of the Belgians and Sovereign of the Independent State of Congo By Colonel, The Honorable Geo. W. Williams, of the United States of America, 1890*. See full text at Black Past.org.

¹⁴⁹ Mola's hands were actually not cut off by the soldiers, but beaten off by them with rifle-butts. See *Sliwinski*, 2011, 63-64.

¹⁵⁰ *Hochschild*, 1999; *Sliwinski*, 2011, 59-64.

daughter, *Boali*. As soon as Harris's husband saw the photograph, he understood the strong power they possessed in mediating the story of the suffering of the Congolese midst the cruel colonial system to the Western publics and arousing strong moral outrage even in the most skeptical viewer. Sliwinski argues, that the strong emotional appeal of the images also shifted the focus from immediate outrage and action to the level of relationship between the photographs and the growing public spectating them; between the pictures and the safe Western spectators witnessing the visualized atrocities of unknown faraway individuals. Thus, the images were seen as an effective tool in arousing widespread public condemnation of violence and violations of human rights.¹⁵¹ (Included in the Illustration 2.2, the image of Nasala, taken by Alice Harris in 1904.)

Visual representations of the suffering of the Congolese became an important tool in the fight against the Congo Free State's cruel regime, much used by missionary organizations such as the *British Congo Reform Association* (RCA). RCA's strategy was to disseminate information of the Congo Free State through publications and public meetings—also photographs were central in this strategy. RCA collected and published evidence of the atrocities happening in the Congo and, building on the evidence, claimed that Leopold's regime was "criminal" and suppressed the Congolese people, who RCA saw possessed some inalienable rights as members of the human family. Early conceptions of "crimes against humanity" and safe guarding of human rights beyond the boundaries of nationality and citizenship surfaced in the discourse on the Congo Free State atrocious crimes. Photographs of suffering were used in multitudes of ways in the campaign to unveil the cruel nature of the regime for the Western publics. The brutal images were published in journals and books as well as presented to the publics in the form of lantern slide show lectures.¹⁵²

First, before the revelations of the atrocities committed by Leopold's regime, lantern slide shows delivered by evangelist missionaries typically presented the colonial rule and Christian conversion as civilizing acts aimed at saving the savage colonialized people. But once Leopold's crimes were unveiled, and the RCA campaigns were launched, the lantern shows featuring atrocity images came to be used as an effective and dramatic tool for awaking the "Christian consciousness" of the Western spectators. The lantern shows featured atrocious images, producing scripted horror narratives, and were presented along with melodramatic evangelical appeals. The visual shows were aimed at persuading the audiences to see the cruelty and inhumanity of the regime and to elicit a strong emotional response in the spectators guiding them to realize the humanity and the need of protection of the Congolese. The photographing missionary Alice Harris and her husband John were among the missionaries delivering these popular visual horror shows. Although the aim of the shows was to arouse benevolent emotions in

¹⁵¹ Sliwinski, 2011 65-67; Twomey, 2012, 39-50.

¹⁵² Hochschild, 1999; Sliwinski, 2011, 71-80; Twomey, 2012, 39-50

their audiences, to gain recognition for the crimes and to make a plea to stop the cruelty, the phantasmagoric shows have been criticized for misrecognition and for transforming particular cases of individual suffering into “standardized objects” and “thematic events” (as Sliwinski describes them) creating a distorting standard for picturing the distant other in need. Moreover, the shows were in a central place in the process of building the modern hierarchical relationship between the Western spectators and the colonial objects of the images, as they created a strong difference between the superior onlooker and the inferior looked-upon racially different *other*. The concept of the other—in this context referring to primitive races and exotic savages—was largely created by the use of photographic technology. Sliwinski argues that the visual language and the discursive framings of the visual shows, furthermore, transformed the moral relationship of “I and Thou” into a relationship on “I and Them,” which transforms the other into “it”.¹⁵³ Therefore, although these images and visual representations of the atrocities were predominantly used in order to arouse the benevolent emotions of the spectators (just like the missionaries’ images of famines) and to reveal information on the cruelty of the colonial rule, through their representational mode these images reproduced certain features that reveal the deep buried colonial attitudes and that, moreover, play a major role in constructing the visual imaginary of the far away (racially different) distant others.¹⁵⁴

As a conclusion it can be said that the atrocity imagery of the lantern shows, as well as the early famine photos of missionary humanitarians, unveil prevalent attitudes and mindsets of their era, but moreover these imageries set a pattern for representing distant suffering, the need to help and the need to intervene for years to follow. The iconic representations of missionary humanitarians, displaying barely living, skeleton-like, starved bare life, and the practice of presenting the objects of aid as very divergent from and as somewhat less human than the average Western spectator have significantly influenced the Western gaze on the less fortunate of this world over the centuries and are still somewhat prevalent today, as we shall see later. I claim that still today calls for human rights often (perhaps partly unconsciously) borrow form these representations dating back to the colonial, patronizing mindset. In contemporary calls for the respect of human rights and for the alleviation of distant suffering the use of atrocity photography and demands for Western intervention are still inherent, as also is the reliance on transcendental notions of dignity and the duty of Westerners to act upon the plight of the distant others. Moreover, the representational style and composition of the images point out the theatrical visual addressing, as well as the hierarchical arrangement embedded in the humanitarian imagery. The hierarchical roles of the humanitarian mediators

¹⁵³ Sliwinski, 2011, 71–80.

¹⁵⁴ Sliwinski, 2011, 73.

of the images, as compared to the amazed and dazed distant spectators and the suffering looked-upon objects of the images, are solidified.¹⁵⁵

2.3.5 IMAGINING SUFFERING AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY: FIRST WORLD WAR CENSORSHIP AND PACIFISTIC SHOCK THERAPY OF WAR IMAGES

The new century brought about a new kind of modern worldwide war—the First World War (1914-1918). Propaganda and atrocity stories, telling of the brutality of the opponent and thus motivating the fight, served a central position in the war on both sides of the front. Stories of the bloodthirsty Huns circulated in the publicity of Britain and the USA. In the propaganda campaigns of the allied the Germans were told to massacre nuns, nurses, and infants and to boil human fat and bones into lubricants and glycerin in “corpse factories.” Often these stories did not hold water and were later proved to be misleading and exaggerated. The atrocity stories thus produced an aura of fakery and skepticism midst the Western publics.¹⁵⁶ In addition to straightforward propaganda or conscious dissemination of false or misleading information, journalistic presentations during the First World War were tightly censored, especially in the case of photographs of war. *Susan Moeller* argues that due to the advances in technology, photographs at the time of the First World War already had “storytelling ability,” but because of the very ability feared by the military and warring states, the publication of war photos was suppressed by strict censorship.¹⁵⁷

During the war censorship was strictly applied to visual representations of war in Germany, as well as in Britain and United States. The main articulated objective of press censorship of all of the Western warring states was the acknowledgement of the importance of withholding critical information about military movements from enemy forces. The other objective was to keep up the will to fight and the morale of the home fronts. Especially images showing the horrors of war and the casualties among one’s own troops were seen as lowering morale by unveiling the unprecedentedly violent face of modern warfare, the hopelessness of the trench war, the use of poison gas and the massive amounts of victims.¹⁵⁸ The reportage of the war was strongly constrained by the governments and the militaries: publishers, editors, writers and photographers were placed under strict rule of not publishing “unpatriotic” stories. In the US a system of bonds was introduced. Bonds

¹⁵⁵ **Sliwinski**, 2011, 81; **Twomey**, 2012, 48-50; **Chouliaraki**, 2013, 27-32; **Boltanski**, 2000; **Douzinis**, 2007, 68.

¹⁵⁶ **Ponsonby, Arthur**: *Falsehood in Wartime*. George Allen&Unwin Ltd, London, 1928. ; **The Long shadow of “German atrocities” of 1914**. De Schaepdrijver, Sophie, British Library ; **Zelizer, Barbie**: *Remembering to Forget. Holocaust Memory through the Camera’s eye*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1998, 31.

¹⁵⁷ **Moeller**, 1989, 135-136.

¹⁵⁸ **Moeller**, 1989, 130- 152; **First World War: How state and press kept truth off the front page**. The Guardian, 2014, 27, July ; **Censorship Guidelines 1914, 1**. Documents, Germany at War 1914-1918: Mobilization of the home front.

were paid by newspapers to the military in order to get their journalist a right to work in the field. If the journalist did not obey the rules of “patriotic reporting”, the money invested was not refunded by the military. Arrangements like this held back critical reporting. In addition, restricting journalists' access to information enforced the censorship line, and the press was predominantly dependent on the official military bulletins as well as photographs produced by the military.¹⁵⁹ Journalists were encouraged to do their “patriotic war duty” by reporting on the war along the lines of military rules and viewpoints. Self-censorship also played a part in the First World War reportage, and for the most part there was no fight against the spirit of control. Thus it can be said, that war journalists at the time were successfully prevented from informing the public of the reality of war by three forces: the governments, the military as well as the proprietors of media houses themselves.¹⁶⁰

Military rules and restrictions of not giving information on the movements of the troops and events at the front, which could jeopardize the war effort by revealing information to the enemy, led to imprecise captioning of photographs. In publishing photographs of the war usually no information of the place, event, date, situation, or of the identity or the military position of the individuals in the images, or the identity of the photographer was allowed to accompany the published images. Often war images did not pass the censors hands, even if the information about the photographer was not mentioned in the caption. Therefore, the First World War photos for the most part remained plain images, with no narrative storytelling ability. Captions of released images often referenced patriotic phrasing backing the official military spirit, such as “Our Heroes at the Front.” Relatively few images of the American war dead were shown in publicity during the war, and images depicting the reality of the trench war remained predominantly unseen by the American public. However, images showing wounded and dead enemy soldiers were published along with atrocity stories demonizing and building hate toward the enemy. By visually showing the destroyed adversaries, it was believed, the enemy would appear as defeatable, and thus such images were seen to motivate fighting. Nevertheless, combat images and images of the bloody reality of the fighting were usually not released.¹⁶¹ Censorship efforts were effective in hiding the bloody reality of war from the home front public, and for instance one of the bloodiest battles in military history—like Somme 1916, where 600 000 allied soldiers died—at the time went largely unreported.¹⁶² Referring to the control of the visibility of the war and its unprecedentedly bloody and devastating nature, Susan Moeller

¹⁵⁹ Moeller, 1989, 130-132.

¹⁶⁰ *First World War: How state and press kept truth off the front page*. The Guardian, July 27, 2014.

¹⁶¹ Moeller, 1989, 130 -141.

¹⁶² *First World War: How state and press kept truth off the front page*. The Guardian, July 27, 2014.

writes:” the photographs that best represent the real conflict were denied any exposure until after the war. And it is those unpublished photographs that best recall the horrors of the first “great war”.¹⁶³ Dramatic visualizations of the war were not exposed to the gaze of the home front before its end. Predominantly the publics learned about the high casualty toll and the horrific nature the new war—the trench warfare and the agony of soldiers caused by the use of poison gas—only after the war.

This is not to say, that people at the time did not know anything about of the atrocities of the war. Soldiers returning from the war and other firsthand eyewitnesses had always challenged the governmental and military efforts to hide the bloody side of war. But during the First World War governmental efforts to keep the bloody reality out of sight were significant, and perhaps emblematic of modern day visual mediation of war. A belief in the idea that seeing the pain of others would create empathetic ties between the sufferer and the spectator—springing already from Enlightenment discourses—can be detected in the efforts to censor the bloody images of war. As seeing the pain of others has been seen to create solidary bonds between the safe spectators and the pain-stricken objects of the images, it can thus be seen to lead to disillusionment with the nature of war and to produce a drop in the morale of the home fronts. And hence, hand in hand with the evolving technology of visual mediation, militaries have gone to new lengths to govern the imagery of war. As Sontag points out, at the turn of the century many people were convinced that if the horrors war imposes on people were made visible in way vivid enough (through photographic accounts on a corporal and visual level), people would be outraged by the insanity of war and would turn against it. Therefore, as militaries have tried to control the visibility of war, actors opposing war and the military mindset have seen a potential in presenting images unveiling the brutality and insanity of war as a weapon of shock therapy, possessing the power of pushing people towards anti-war sentiments and pacifism.¹⁶⁴

An anti-war photo pamphlet *Krieg Dem Kriege!* by a German pacifist *Ernst Friedrich* (published in 1924, six years after the war), displaying horrific war images, is an example of the pacifist approach aiming at unveiling the reality of war that militaries and warring governments attempt to hide.¹⁶⁵ Friedrich’s album exhibits almost 200 hundred photographs—mostly deemed un-publishable by the government censors. The images were drawn from German military and medical archives and compiled by Friedrich in a clear attempt to force the spectators to confront the reality of war and to shock and scare the spectators into realizing the horrifying nature of war. Friedrich shows horrific images of mass graves, wrecked buildings and demolished infrastructure, forests cut down by fire fights, soldiers killed

¹⁶³ **Moeller**, 1989, 152.

¹⁶⁴ **Sontag**, 2003, 12-13.

¹⁶⁵ **Friedrich, Ernst**: *Krieg Dem Kriege!/ War Against War!/ Guerre à la Guerre!/ Oorlog aan den Oorlog!* Anti-Krieg’s Museum, Berlin, 1999, (1924).

by poison gas and grotesque images of front line prostitutes used by the military and of children starved by warfare. He juxtaposes such images of the horror of war with propagandist photos of war: an image of enthusiastic merry soldiers leaving to fight is on the next page met with an image of the entangled corpses of young men lying stiff in piles, entitled “Field of honor”. But even midst the overwhelming carnage of war, shown vividly by the images selected by Friedrich, a chapter of the book called “Face of War” stands out. Close up images of disfigured soldiers with severe facial wounds and the apparent horrifying physical agony makes the spectator gazing, from behind a gap of hundred years, sick to his/her stomach, revolted and fearful. But in addition to this, Friedrich’s visual pamphlet does more. It addresses the viewer in a forcefully political manner. (For the cover of the original 1924 edition of *Krieg Dem Kriege!*, see illustration **2.2**.)

Krieg dem Kriege! does not only rely on the narrative power of photographic images, but the messages of the images are enforced by sharp political criticism and a textual manifesto. At the very start of the book, Friedrich calls “all human beings in all lands” to learn about the causes of war, the prevention of war, and about the way to wage “a war against war”. His message is one of peace and love, of the universality of all humans, of non-violent ideology and opposition to organized military violence. He identifies role of money in society and the capital class as the cause of all wars, calls for a general strike, and begs his audience to acknowledge its position as mere pawns used in the game of the powerful and the capitalist class. He also points to the responsibility of every man and woman to oppose war, which encompasses everything from bringing up of children to the refusal to do military service and to the obligation of citizens to fight against capitalism. The pacifistic perspective is underlined throughout the book by Friedrich’s style of writing accompanying the photos. The texts point a finger at the ones responsible for the horror and pain and at “military lies”. Friedrich lashes the military ideology and makes a mockery of warmongers by his laconic and ironic phrasing. He places patriotic phrases besides images of decaying corpses, producing a collage that mocks the common myths reiterated in patriotic representations and in the rhetoric of the military. By this visual collaging he points out how the prevalent society and its settings and institutions—from children’s toys to schooling, from the church to other powerful public institutions—prepare the minds of citizens by the means of socialization to violent warring and military ideology. Along with the horrific images describing what war does to humans and individuals he points out how business is allied with the state and the military, together producing the mentality of modern warfare, which ultimately destroys everything.¹⁶⁶ Friedrich’s critique draws from socialist thinking. He identifies the victims of war as members of the proletariat, abandons the nationalistic and patriotic ethos of the military and replaces it with internationalist thinking embedded

¹⁶⁶ Friedrich, 1999, (1924).

in Marxist thought. Thus, throughout the pamphlet he speaks of the universality of humanity and points to the emancipation from war inflicted suffering by the means of not only pacifistic but socialist thinking. By visually showing the horrors that the militaristic project steered by a capitalist logic do to human beings, he indicates a way to oppose violence and to strive towards the protection of humanity through pacifistic socialist method.

Expectedly the authorities did not condone the publication of the photos and Friedrich's phrasings; bookstores were raided and military and veteran organizations denounced the publication of the images. Nevertheless, the book circulated at an unprecedented speed, 10 editions in German were published before 1930 and the book was translated from the original four languages—German, French, English and Dutch into several others.¹⁶⁷ Friedrich's declaration against war intensively circulated midst intellectuals, left-wing writers, and artists of the time. He was very influential in the pacifistic peace movement, and his ideas gave rise to numerous anti-war leagues, believing firmly that the book and its visual strategy of anti-militarism would make a difference. Friedrich's book and his manifesto had such a massive influence, partly because before the publication of the book people had—due to strict censorship—rarely seen photographs of the war.

When reading *Krieg dem Kriege!* one cannot help but think of Goya's *Disasters of War*. Both projects centering on the visual exposure of horrors of war also share a universalist ethos; they aim at revealing the agony of the people—of individuals—and point to the need to protect humans from organized violence of states and militaries. Friedrich was not alone in his time either, but critical contemporaries of Friedrich also produced paintings and drawings of the war and published critical anti-war poems describing the horrors of the war. Political artists such as *Otto Dix*, and *Georg Grosz* pictured the horrors of war through strong realism and terrific scenery and *John Heartfield's* satirical Dadaistic photomontages ridiculed the military mind-set. The influence of such artists can be detected in Friedrich's work.¹⁶⁸ But at the time, the utilization of realistic photographic war images as documentary pieces of evidence, combined with anti-war ideology in the style in which Friedrich did it in *War Against War!* was unprecedented. As Friedrich was probably influenced by the avant-garde artists of his time, the critical circles were touched by his montage of war imagery and humanistic ideas, stressing the need for collective organization against war. And his non-violent fight against militarism still lives on; among other things in the insignia he designed to represent the fight against military violence—two hands breaking a rifle—is still used by many pacifistic groups around the world.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ The release of Anti-kriegs Museum from 1999, acknowledges that approximately 400 000 copies of the book were printed by 1999.

¹⁶⁸ *Disasters of War*, 1998

¹⁶⁹ *Sontag*, 2003, 12-14; About Friedrich's works effect on the peace movement and on his Pacifistic anarchism see: **Kellner, Douglas**: *Ernst Friedrich's Pacifistic Anarchism*.

This take on the horrific images unveiling the nature of war was not, and is not, only manifested in the work of Ernst Friedrich. But the idea on the power of shocking images in arousing empathy and even anti-war sentiments seems to be at the core of the widespread use of atrocity and war imagery aimed at informing the public of the mindlessness of war. In the early twentieth century many shared Friedrich's belief in the emancipating and pacifistic manner of using atrocity images.¹⁷⁰ In this spirit, *Virginia Woolf* describes, in her 1938 essay *Three Guineas*, an encounter with images depicting the death and horror of the inhabitants of the Spanish Basque city of Guernica after it's bombing. Looking at the news photographs of mutilated bodies of what perhaps used to be a family, Woolf wonders whether the image contains bodies of human beings or slaughtered pigs. By looking at the images it was hard to tell. Shocked by the scenery of war-induced suffering she attested that one can only have one reaction to such images: to oppose the madness war.¹⁷¹ The belief in the potency of photographs of pain in evoking a disapproval and mobilizing a cry against violence moreover highlights the role of the spectator as an active (political) actor, with a possibility of acting in behalf of the suffering others, and even combatting war.

2.3.6 THE FLOWING AMBIVALENCE OF ATROCITY IMAGES

The belief and hope in the power of atrocious images in shocking the public into turning against violence and war was strong in some circles at the start of the century, and visually unveiling the horrors of modern warfare was widely believed to be effective in communicating the humanity and need of protection of the sufferers depicted. Nevertheless, one must bear in mind that the ways in which images of atrocity work and are utilized—what images tell to their spectators and how they address their viewers—is far more complex than the belief in the visual shock therapy of atrocity images gives reason to think. Photographs of pain and horror, as Sontag puts it, may give rise to opposing responses: a call for peace (as it was hoped) or a cry for revenge. Alternatively, they may just simply, as Sontag phrases, create a bemused awareness that terrible things happen.¹⁷² As an image of death may arouse a cry for peace in one and bring about sensations of desperate sadness and horror in another, the very same photograph may spell retaliation, incite more violence, or even arouse emotions of fulfillment and justice being served for the other. This phenomenon becomes lucid especially in times of war, conflict and division. In a situation of war, on the one hand, a picture of a fallen soldier may be an icon of grief and sacrifice —or an image of a destroyed enemy facing a just end. In an extreme situation images conveying

¹⁷⁰ Sontag, 2003, 12.

¹⁷¹ Woolf, Virginia: *Three Guineas*. Penguin, London, 1978 (1938); Sontag, 2013, 3-11.

¹⁷² Sontag, 2003, 11-12.

horror, moral decay, terror and disgust may, on the other hand, be objects symbolizing glory, supremacy or even enjoyment for some.

This phenomenon is vividly demonstrated by an example of the photos of racial lynchings in America and by a photo exhibition and book called *Without Sanctuary*. The *Without Sanctuary* project, displaying violent images of the racial lynching's of twentieth and twenty-first century America, came out in 2000 and provoked awareness of the recent bloody history of the United States.¹⁷³ The project graphically informed the public of the atrocities caused by racism in the not so distant past, by shedding light to nearly 5000 visually recorded lynching's from 1889 to 1968. The images collected in the exhibition and book are brutal: The bodies of the victims are mutilated, burned, shown hanging from trees, disfigured. At the time of the launching of the project, the images produced horror and shock in their spectators. The message was one of anti-racism, but, as *David Campbell* acknowledges, this had not always been the case. At the time when the photos were taken, these very same images often conveyed for their producers and circulators a completely different story. Lynchings at the time were communal events, social rituals attended by vast number of local people, creating often a festive atmosphere. The killings were often openly advertised in advance in local papers and witnessed not only by the usually white male perpetrators but spectated by local bystanders, women and children. Kodak's clicked in the crowd as the killings were taking place. More importantly, the crowds of on-lookers, as well as the perpetrators, are in plain sight in many of the images that have survived into our era, and the on-lookers in the images seem to be clearly aware of the presence of the camera. The spectating crowds, visible in the visual records of the atrocious performances, can thus be seen as participants in the violent acts. As they, for the most part, accepted the acts of violence and, thus, made them possible, by supporting and taking part in the continuation of the brutal acts.¹⁷⁴ (Included in the illustration **2.2.** is lynching image 27 from *Without Sanctuary* book. This photo picturing a lynched body hanging from a tree was taken in August 1930 in Marion Indiana.)

In addition to the visible perpetrators and crowds, these images include other significant and—to a contemporary viewer—somewhat peculiar features. Visually they share features with typical *hunting images*, as they show the killers and the bodies of their lynched human victims in the same manner as the bodies of prey animals are often shown in photographs: with the proud killers showing off their prey. As these images now send shivers down the spine of an average contemporary spectator, one must bear in mind, that these photographs were popular at the time; they were not hidden and kept in shoe boxes under beds, but they were openly presented, kept as a

¹⁷³ *Without sanctuary. Lynching Photography in America*. Allen, James, Als, Hilton, Lewis, John & Litwack, Leon, F (eds.), Twin Palms Publishers, 2000; See the photographs, and a movie narrated by James Allen, who compiled the exhibition, here: <http://withoutsanctuary.org/>

¹⁷⁴ **Campbell, David:** *Horrific Blindness. Images of Death in contemporary Media.*Journal for Cultural Research, 8/1, 2004, 55-74.

mementoes of the incident, sent as postcards and collected.¹⁷⁵ The popularity of the images was grounded in their function as “icons of white supremacy” at the time. They “dramatized the racial and gendered cleavages of a social order in which blacks were terrorized, white women were vulnerable and white men were on the top, invulnerable and free”.¹⁷⁶ These images were trophies and mementoes for the perpetrators, telling of glorious acts worth recording, showing off and remembering.

By 2000s, the time of the introduction of *Without sanctuary*, the visual icons of white supremacy were generally seen in a totally reverse way from the original meanings they conveyed to the perpetrators of the acts. If the images for most spectators signified horrendous acts and were commonly seen as appalling and outrageous in 2000s, they had signified horror to many of their contemporaries as well. For African American communities—as well as for Jews, Native Americans, Hispanics and other minorities who were among the victims of the social ritualistic killings—the photos also, at the time of their production, represented completely different things than to the perpetrators; violent racism, repressed societal position, personal grief, fear, threat intimidation, inequality. But then again, for a majority of the then contemporary people living in the areas where the lynching’s took place, the images showing bodies of the victims of violent murders were merely records of the prevalent societal system, in which killing members of some minorities was seen somewhat commonplace, perhaps not liked, perhaps felt ashamed about, but quietly approved of. And as Sontag put it, for the majority they probably just showed that things like this happen.

What the example of lynching photographs poignantly shows, is how the messages of images—the things images articulate and do to their spectators, what they are and what they tell—depends on who looks at them and in what context. The message of an image depends not only on its visual composition, or on what it pictures and how bluntly. Even an image picturing the most horrendous suffering imaginable for one may be honorable, even pleasurable when gazed by another. The messages and meanings of images cannot be stalled or frozen, but their significations fluctuate constantly as they move and circulate from one context (time, place, position, culture) to another. Thus, images *flow*; they alter according to the spectator, perspective, time and context. Moreover, images are *read* and *interpreted*. An act of interpretation in the case of photographs is much more ambivalent, contextual and tied to prevalent cultural, political and historical conventions than interpreting texts and words tends to be. ¹⁷⁷ Thus the same image may do and articulate different things, according to the context of their presentation and spectator and the individual interpretation. As was

¹⁷⁵ **Campbell, David:** *Horrific Blindness. Images of Death in contemporary Media.*Journal for Cultural Research, 8/1, 2004, 55-74.

¹⁷⁶ **Rushdy, Ashraf:** *Exquisite Corpse.* Transition. 3/9, 2000, 70-77, 70. As cited in **Campbell,** 2004, 57.

¹⁷⁷ As was discussed in the chapter 1. See for example: **Burke,** 2001, 124–128; **Barthes,** 2000, 111–121.

discussed in the chapter 1, images themselves can be seen as mute; they cannot articulate for themselves, but their meanings are added to them by framing, captioning and by the surrounding mindsets. That is, this is a matter of *framing* and *presentation*; a matter that comes lucid also when thinking about the different uses and framings of the lynching images through time.¹⁷⁸ Therefore images of horror, violence and war can address their viewers in multitudes of ways, according to context and, thus, be interpreted, utilized and understood in a variety of fluctuating manners, which cannot be confined or ultimately defined. This complex singularity of photography and photos as messages is very relevant when looking at and analyzing images of suffering and atrocity; and one that I shall come back to repeatedly in the course of this study.

2.4 IMAGES OF PAIN IN THE AGE OF NEO-HUMANITARIANISM

Michael Barnett dates the *age of Neo-humanitarianism* as starting from the end of the Second World War (1945) and spanning all the way up to the end of the Cold War (approximately 1989). From the end of the World War II onwards, decolonization and Cold War—the forces of destruction of the time period—opened up a new space for new kinds of compassions. The end of the Second World War, and particularly the pain and horrors induced by the war—namely the horrors of the Nazi Holocaust largely revealed to the Western world at the end of the war—lead to new international endeavors to protect the fragile humanity from violence and human rights violations. The founding of the new international organ, the United Nations (UN), in 1945 and the UN Declaration of Universal Human Rights (1948) marked a new era in the apprehension of universal humanity and institutionalization of human rights. In this time period the world, as Barnett phrases it, “got serious about humanitarianism”. States became more involved in the organization and delivery of aid and relief, non-governmental organizations (NGO) expanded and the architecture of aid became more global and organized around principles of humanity. In addition to benevolent and altruistic motives, this development had to do with the idea of safeguarding the political, strategic and economic interests of particularly the Western states through humanitarianism and development. As the speeding decolonization created institutional vacuums in the Third World, the superpowers, as well as non-governmental organizations and international organizations promising to bring welfare, progress and modernity to the backward populations, quickly occupied space; the humanitarian sector expanded, and state and NGO humanitarianism intertwined. In the politically and ideologically divided global settings of the Cold War, humanitarianism was often harnessed to advance superpower interests. New forms of global governance and

¹⁷⁸ Barthes, 1977, 15-31.

ideologies, proclaiming that the global rich and the powerful have obligations to teach the “global minors,” changed the colonial tones of voices of the former era into *developmentalism*. This change, however, predominantly left the patronizing structures of global humanitarianism untouched. As institutional humanitarianism remained West-centered, the discourses of humanity and impartiality were capitalized in order to claim a universal jurisdiction. According to Barnett, the era became, on the one hand, a struggle between claims of neutrality and impartiality and, on the other hand, moved towards a growing dependence of humanitarian action on states and international organizations. The era ended with deep dissatisfaction with humanitarian action that had come to be accused—from inside as well as from outside—of both of neutral cowardice as well as active, non-neutral participation in wars.¹⁷⁹

In this chapter I shall tackle the developments of the era in the discourse of humanity and its protection, map out the uses and presentational practices of the images of suffering and war in the twentieth-century milieu, and introduce some significant watersheds in the uses of images of distant suffering and war in the era. I shall start with the images of the liberated Nazi camps and take a look at the imageries by humanitarians depicting distant suffering in the non-Western world, and I shall also analyze the role of photographs of the Vietnam War in international political settings.

2.4.1 PICTURING THE NAZI DEATH CAMPS: FROM THE GROUND ZERO OF HUMANITY TO THE DECLARATION OF UNIVERSAL HUMAN RIGHTS

By the time of the Second World War (1939-1945) photography had technically evolved into a stage in which cameras were portable and fast enough to record combat situations. The means of visual transmission techniques had improved with the advancements in the Wirephoto technology by the mid-1930s. Regardless of the technical preconditions available for global mediation of photographic images, the problem with the storytelling ability of photos in news production was their then prevalently perceived inferior status as a mode of communication. Photographers were at the time still commonly perceived as “newspaper illustrators” rather than photojournalism. Images were commonly seen as an adjunct to textual journalistic reports, and ‘real’ journalist intervention was seen as necessary for them to make sense. Images were fillers and story illustrations but not a principle way of reporting on the news. Moreover, at the time images were often used in news reporting and media without proper accreditations; they were commonly published without info on the date or place of their taking, or of accurate info on the people and the situations depicted. Without detailed referential information the use of photographs in news created ambiguity,

¹⁷⁹ Barnett, 2011, 30-31; See also Duffield, 2007.

and photographs commonly remained symbolic markers rather than conveyed detailed and plausible news value.¹⁸⁰

Iconic images telling visual stories of the suffering and brutality of the Second World War are nevertheless numerous. And due to changes in the mediation techniques and press conventions the censorship conditions were not as strictly applied and the flows of images were not as easily controllable as they were in the previous worldwide war. Even though the Second World War produced many iconic images depicting human suffering—utilized and referred to also in the context of humanitarian ideas, humanity and need to protect it from violence—I shall not deal with the various visual mediation practices of the war in more depth. Rather, in the following paragraph I shall focus on the mediation of images that were produced at the very end of the war: the visual representational practices and the relevance of the Holocaust images, in the context of humanitarian ideas, to the enlargement of human rights thinking and institutionalization of universal human rights.

The very end of the Second World War produced atrocity images surely most famous in the Western cultural sphere: photos of the Nazi camps liberated by the Allied forces, later known as *Holocaust images*. At the time when the disastrous war beyond comparison was still raging, rumors and anecdotal information of the *Final solution* and the Nazi camps system was circulating in the publicity of the Western allies as well as Soviet union, but a wide spread understanding of the Nazi extermination camp system remained rather unknown until the very end of the war. The story of the perhaps most massive and visually iconic atrocity performed by humans began to be revealed to the surrounding world once the Allied troops began to conquer the central European territory earlier occupied by the Nazi Germany. Although almost all have now seen these images, perhaps the understanding of these hideous crimes still today exceeds the full scope of apprehension.

Although now the spring 1945 is most often think of when imagining the liberated Nazi camps, the Soviet troops first reached the *Majdanek* extermination camp in Poland in July 1944. During the summer prior to the end of the war Soviet forces also reached the *Belzek*, *Treblinka* and *Sobibór* camps, which had already been abandoned by the Nazis in 1943 (the efficient death apparatus of the camps made itself redundant as the majority of the Jews in the area were already killed by the time). In January 1945 the Soviets reached the Auschwitz camp in Poland. Several months later, in April the American forces reached the Buchenwald camp in Germany. More than 20 000 inmates were liberated. The liberation of several other camps followed in the spring of 1945: *Dora-Mittelbau*, *Flossenbürg*, *Dachau* by the US, *Sachsenhausen* and *Ravensbrück* by the Soviets and *Bergen-Belsen* by the British all in April, and later in may *Mauthausen* by the American and

¹⁸⁰ **Zelizer, Barbie:** *From the Image of Record to the Image of memory: Holocaust Photography Then and Now.* In: *Picturing The Past. Media, History and Photography.* Brennen, Bonnie& Hardt, Hanno (eds.) University of Illinois Press, Chicago,1999, 99- 103 ; **Zelizer, Barbie:** *Remembering to forget. Holocaust memory through the camera 's eye.* University of Chicago Press, 1998,16-30.

Stutthof by the Soviets. Although the Majdanek camp was liberated already in the summer of 1944, the enormous death toll and incomprehensible amount of suffering induced by the Nazi rule began to be revealed to the wider spectating Western world in a large scale and in an unprecedented visual manner almost a year later, when the Western troops entered the death camps in April 1945.

Early Representations of the Nazi Camps

By the time the Soviet forces first reached the Majdanek camp, it had been for the most part emptied by the Germans, and the Soviet troops were met only by about 700 survivors. The fleeing Nazis attempted to destroy the evidence of mass murder, but the gas chambers and other infrastructure of the camp were left standing. The Soviet authorities and media published stories and photographs of the firstly encountered camp, and Western journalist were also invited to tour the camp. During the summer and fall of 1944 textual accounts of the horrors of the camps were published also in the Western press. The conditions of the camp and the horrors met by the reporters—the systematic organization of destruction of human lives and the scope of the horror transcending imaginary—challenged the conventional methods of reporting. The horror met in the camp was so unbelievable, that the early eyewitnesses had to combat disbelief in order to make the world believe what the reporters witnessing the camps first hand had seen. Something more than words was needed; and thus visual representations were widely used in order to help the public believe the unbelievable. Images of the gas chambers, cans of the *Zyklon B* gas used in murdering the inmates, hanging ropes, piles of shoes and other personal belongings of the victims, photographs of the barrels filled with the ashes of the burned victims sold as fertilizers and images of the ghastly facilities of the camps were shown in Western press already in 1944. What evidence remained of the carnage was documented by photography and the story of the brutality of the German rule was told through images in the Soviet Union and in the Western media.¹⁸¹

Despite of the horror stories of the death camps breaking already in 1944, the atrocities reported from Majdanek failed to attract significant public notice in the West. During 1944 in the Western publicity, the camps were for the most part treated in the press and encountered by the readers as isolated incidents, and the exposed camps were not framed as a system representing Nazi regimes terror at large. One factor contributing to the scant attention has been seen to be the public's disbelief in the scope of the destruction and the uncertainty about the facts. Western press was somewhat skeptical of the truth-value of the Soviet presentation and reporting of the event, and thus the stories were often treated as needing additional confirmation. The stories were met with suspicion because of the general suspicion of Soviet propaganda. The horrors were referred to as “Alleged killings of 1.5 million”

¹⁸¹ Zelizer, 1998, 49-61.

and sometimes paralleled with the fabricated First World War atrocity stories of German corpse factories.¹⁸² Because of the scant attention the revelation of the Majdanek horrors received in the West, in retrospect, one cannot avoid thinking about the significance of Soviet troops as the liberators of the camps. The wartime race between the Western powers and the Soviet Union to reach Berlin became exacerbated after the *D-Day* in June 1944. Political overtones and wartime rivalry between the allied surely played a part in the weak Western reporting and response to the Holocaust story.

Moreover, one significant factor in the meager early attention on the story of the Nazi death camps may be attributed to the nature of the photographic representations used in reporting. As the camps liberated during the summer of 1944 were predominantly emptied and partly destroyed before the liberators reached them, the images of dead bodies and piles of corpses—which compose the foremost visual mode of representing the Nazi determination camps in contemporary imaginary—remained unseen.¹⁸³ The invisibility of blunt bodily suffering—visual witnessing of the suffering or dead corporal individuals and bodies, which has been seen as the predominant mode of arousing both outrage and empathy in the distant spectators—most probably played a part in the weak response to the reporting. In any case, the reporting of the death camps of 1944 did not create an influential spectacle in the West and has been said to have had little effect on public opinion. There were ones who readily believed in the Nazi atrocity, but the ones in doubt were not convinced. Perhaps the Western public was not yet willing to believe the full scale of German atrocities.

In addition, the Soviets did not for some reason issue press releases from the other camps liberated after Majdanek, i.e. from Belzec, Sobibor or Treblinka. Only after the liberation of the camps on the Western front by Western forces in April 1945, the liberation of *Auschwitz*—that took place already in January—was made public more widely also in and by the Soviet Union. Therefore, most of the images iconized in the Western publicity and imagination are from the Buchenwald, Dachau and Bergen-Belsen camps, liberated by Western troops in April.¹⁸⁴ As the Western troops reached the first death camps in April 1945, the story of the brutality of the Nazi of the camp system and the scope of the systematic carnage very quickly spread around the Western world. This time images of Nazi brutality and inhumanity of the systematic destruction of human lives surely constructed a powerful, wide-spread, influential and lasting visual spectacle.

The Visual Horror Story Breaks

The scale of the death camps began to unveil for Western publics only as journalists and photojournalists accompanying the Western forces reported

¹⁸² Zelizer, 1998, 49-53. See the previous chapter dealing with First World War and atrocity stories, and Ponsonby, 1928.

¹⁸³ Zelizer, 1998, 49-56

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

the events of the liberation and the conditions at the camps. Shock and disbelief along with the difficulties of mediating the scale of the horrors impacted on the early eyewitnesses. The eye-witnessing journalists commonly phrased their frustration in their inability to mediate what they experienced and witnessed at the camps. As reporter *Edward Murrow* stated after visiting the liberated Buchenwald camp phrased it: “ I have reported what I saw and heard. But only part of it. For the most of it, I have no words”.¹⁸⁵ Some reporters complained about the general inadequacy of the news language in mediating the atrocity story, which challenged language appropriateness claiming that printing the actual story of the camps would compose a “story of obscenity and filth that would be unprintable.” Moreover, after the long war, it was said, the public was tiered of propaganda and no longer believed the written word. Therefore the utilization of “factual photographs”—visual mediation strongly relying on atrocity images and witnessing through the eyes—became the primary mode of trying to explain the situation and making the distant spectators believe—and at least partly apprehend—what the eyewitnesses saw.¹⁸⁶ In this spirit, General *Dwight D. Eisenhower*, after witnessing a scene in the Ohrdurf camp on April 12th ordered American units in the area to visit the camps and see the destruction with their own eyes. He also issued a call to the press back home to report on the camps. Eisenhower, perhaps abreast of the lingering disbelief and inability to report the scale of horrors, has been recorded as saying: “Let them see this.”¹⁸⁷ Seeing and visually witnessing the suffering and horror became the primary modes of encountering the Holocaust.

As Western reporters rolled into the camps, countless photographers produced images of the same scenes: the scenes now widely recognized as signifying the ground zero of humanity. What the world saw was a devastating cavalcade of suffering bodies: skeletal bodies of the survivors, dirty and barely alive men, women and children stuffed into barracks and staring empty-eyed from behind barbed wire, courtyards, train cars and mass graves filled with tangled piles of dead bodies, gas chambers, cremation ovens and the infrastructure of industrial mass murder, and eyewitnesses looking at the bodies of the victims. “BELIVE IT!” cried out the headline of a photographic article by Lee Miller from the death camps of Buchenwald and Dachau.¹⁸⁸ Doubt and disbelief about the scale of the atrocity and nature of the camp system were very much what the reports tried to diffuse. As this was the case already with Majdanek, it continued to be the major concern in picturing the subsequently liberated camps. Making the spectators *bear witness* to the unimaginable scope of terror and suffering was at the forefront

¹⁸⁵ Cited in **Sliwinski**, 2011, 100.

¹⁸⁶ **Zelizer**, 1998, 83- 87.

¹⁸⁷ **Eisenhower Presidential Library**, *World War II: Holocaust, The Extermination of European Jews ; General Eisenhower to General Marshall, concerning Nazi Horrors; request visit by members of Congress and the media*, Cable, April 19, 1945.; **Ohrdurf**: The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

¹⁸⁸ **Sliwinski**, 92, 86 ; **Zelizer**, 1998.

in the practice of visual reporting. Trying to make the unimaginable *imaginable* to the distant spectators was the goal. The *act of witnessing*—the feelings and reactions of the spectator aroused by seeing the images—was the focus of these visual representations. The representational style of the images again places the spectators and their moral feelings as the main characters of the story in a theatrical way. The intention was thus to invoke certain emotions, and moreover political assessments, judgments in the audience. Moreover, the photographs were framed as *proof* of the atrocities committed by the Nazis, and thus the images acted as tools of confirmation. *Barbie Zelizer* argues that the circulation of these images played a central role in the legitimation of photography as the primary tool for bearing witness to distant horrors. In the mid-1940s, probably driven by the force of the Holocaust imagery, visual photographic evidence came to outweigh all other forms of testimony in regards to distant suffering.¹⁸⁹

The predominant use of the images depicting the scope of the killing, the systematic manner and the planned nature of the carnage and the amount of suffering were used to make it seeable and, thus, more comprehensible. But the at the time still prevalent nebulous system of photojournalism—the lack of proper credits, precise information on the time and place of the taking of the images, as well as generalized captioning—all pointed to a generic representation and understanding of the atrocity, rather than to specific acts of violence taking place in a specific time and place.¹⁹⁰ Thus most influential atrocity images known were often published without proper information on the time, place, the photographer or the individuals depicted in the images, and, thus, they were not firmly tied to textual representations. *Zelizer* claims, that often the more horrific the image, the less it was specified. Therefore, she argues that the photographs of the camps were primarily presented in a way that they often turned into *symbols* of horror and of the downfall of human rights per se, instead of being evidence of the particular events they were depicting.¹⁹¹ (For *Lee Millers* and *Margaret Bourke-White's* iconic photos of the camps, see illustration **2.3**.¹⁹²)

Visual Symbols of the Fall of Humanity

The symbolic capacity of the camp images has taken new forms and depths as the images have travelled through time; what they have come to depict is not only war, death and the suffering of humans amidst war, not only the camps or even the evils of the Nazi regime, but the modern downfall of humanity: systematic genocide, organized destruction of people driven by an ideology of hate; the *Holocaust*. *Sliwinski* argues that contemporaries looking at the images bore witness to something horrific, but did not at the time, just yet,

¹⁸⁹ *Zelizer*, 1998, 86-140.

¹⁹⁰ *Zelizer*, 1998, 53-61.

¹⁹¹ *Zelizer*, 1998.

¹⁹² Included in the illustration 2.3. are two photographs by *Lee Miller* the other from liberated Dachau camp, and the other (one with the prisoners) from Buchenwald, spring 1945. And one by *Margaret Bourke-White*, from Buchenwald, Spring 1945 (the one with a pile of corpses and Germans passing by.)

know what they had seen—not in the manner in which these images are now typically gazed upon. The perception of the revelation at the time escaped full consciousness of the spectators.¹⁹³ Susan Sontag has described her first encounter with the images as a young girl in a way that perhaps is emblematic of encountering these images. She writes: “When I looked at those photographs, something broke. Some limit had been reached, and not only that of horror; I felt irrevocably grieved, wounded, but part of my feelings started to tighten; something went dead; something is still crying.” So strong was the sensation the images created, that she describes the visual encounter as dividing her conception of time into two: a time before seeing the images and the time after the images. Nevertheless, Sontag recalls that upon encountering them, in the 1940s at the age of twelve, she did not fully understand what the images were about.¹⁹⁴ At first, the horrors of the camps were predominately treated as records of life under the Nazi rule. Jews or Jewishness—or gays, gypsies, or the handicapped—or the fact that the majority of the victims were Jews, were rarely mentioned in the original captions of the images. As a matter of fact the term *Holocaust*, as something distinct from war in general, only surfaced as a widely used phrase in public discourse only in the 1960s. In the 1940s Nurnberg trials terms such as “war crimes” and “crimes against humanity” were used. The trial of the Nazi criminal *Adolf Eichman*—the architect of the of the *Final solution*—held in Jerusalem in 1961, brought up the terms “crimes against the Jewish people”, and the term Holocaust, as something distinct from the whole of the Second World War, began to be used in the publicity of the West.¹⁹⁵

The images of the Nazi death camps, showing victims stripped of humanity—living, breathing people reduced into mere matter—, showed for Hannah Arendt how humans were “brought down to the lowest common denominator of organic life itself, plunged into the darkest and deepest abyss of primal equality” by the Holocaust.¹⁹⁶ The fact that the victims in the images are shown as bodily creatures tied together only in pain and vulnerability, represented for Arendt life stripped of dignity—bare life—that has nothing else to cling to but life at its barest, and that shows “the abstract nakedness of being nothing but human”.¹⁹⁷ For Arendt, the Holocaust represents an attempt to annihilate the very concept of human.¹⁹⁸ The picturing of Holocaust, focusing on representations of destroyed human bodies, raised awareness of the fundamental and shared feature of humanity: the vulnerable and precarious body, the very being and persistence—or annihilation—of which depends upon the surrounding social conditions and institutions.¹⁹⁹ The epiphany of becoming aware of humanity and realizing

¹⁹³ Sliwinski, 2011, 83-85, 96-97

¹⁹⁴ Sontag, 1977, 19-20

¹⁹⁵ Sliwinski, 2011, 83-85, 96-97 ; Zelizer, 1999, 105.

¹⁹⁶ Arendt, Hannah: *The Image of Hell*, in *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954*, Schocken Books, 1994, 197-198.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Arendt, 2004 (1951), 380.

¹⁹⁹ Butler, 2009, 33.

the need to protect it (from humans themselves) was, once again, located at the heart of the visually and bodily presented ruins of life. Photography provided a kind of forensic evidence—indisputable proof of the fall of humanity—that was mobilized in arousing the outrage of publics spectating at distance. In the phrase “Never again”, introduced after the Holocaust, the outrage of the spectators was cemented into the language of human rights and future protection of humanity from such a destiny.²⁰⁰ Therefore, the ground zero of humanity of Holocaust is often pinpointed as the locus where the international institutionalization of universal human rights was conceived.

In April 1945, simultaneously with the revelations of the Nazi camps, representatives of 50 nations and numerous non-governmental organizations met in San Francisco in order to form a new international body, the United Nations. World War II—leaving 60 million dead, the majority of them civilians and approximately 6 million of them Jews, killed just because they were Jews—was unprecedented in its barbarity. Already before the end of the war, the urgent need for a new international body was realized especially by the allied nations, the US, Britain and the Soviet Union. As the basic structures of the UN—the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Secretariat—were set up in the founding conference, the meeting also established the Hague International Court of Justice.⁵¹ The participating countries signed the United Nations Charter on June 16th 1945.²⁰¹ The horrific images of the liberated Nazi camps, circulating in the Western publicity at the very time of the founding conference of the UN, have often been indicated as having had an impact on the formation of the agenda of the UN.²⁰²

Yet, despite the knowledge of the atrocities of the war, including the novel revelations made by the visual record of the Nazi camps—the diplomats meeting in San Francisco had to be pushed and propped to include human rights on their agenda. Strong pressure by minority, labor, religious and human rights groups, as well as by some Asian and Latin American states, finally changed the minds of the leaders of Britain, the Soviet Union and the United States, and they agreed to put human rights in the United Nations Charter. Still the Charter of 1945 puts more stress on international security issues and devotes only few lines to the protection of humanity and human rights, stating only: “Universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion”. But the founding meeting did set up the *Human Rights Commission*, which as its first task drafted a bill of human rights that would later constitute the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.²⁰³

²⁰⁰ Sliwinski, 2011, 102.

²⁰¹ See for instance Hunt, 2007, 200-202.

²⁰² Zelizer 1998.; Sliwinski, 2011; Hunt, 2007.

²⁰³ Hunt, 2007, 201-203

In December 1948, the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights was announced, and the goal of a 150-year struggle for international institutional recognition of human rights was finally reached.²⁰⁴ The preamble of the UN Declaration of Human Rights relies strongly on the atrocities of war as its starting point, by stating:

*Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people.*²⁰⁵

The declaration went further in defining human life worthy of protection than its predecessors; a quality that can probably be attributed to the then recently set new benchmark of inhumanity. Article 1 states: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood”.²⁰⁶ Whereas the declarations of the eighteenth-century talked about individual rights, equality before law, freedom of speech and protection of private property, the 1948 declaration mentions *dignity* and *rights* inherent to all individual human beings and treats them as inalienable qualities of each person.²⁰⁷ The declaration prohibits slavery, advocates universal and equal suffrage, calls for freedom of movement, for a right to nationality, right to marry, right to social security, to work and to equal pay and life sustaining wage, for a right to rest and leisure, and for a right to education. However, the UN declaration calling for the universal rights for all humans in reality rather expressed a set of moral obligations for the world community, but it did not set up any mechanisms for enforcing them. In the system of the Cold War the set of rights often fell victim to both domestic and international politics, but nevertheless the 1948 declaration, rather than marking a culmination of the rights of the man, initiated a process of enlargement of and deepening regard for human rights in international political settings.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ One day prior (December 9th 1948) to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1948 UN *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* was also signed by the general assembly of the UN.

²⁰⁵ *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, UN, 10th December, 1948 Preamble.

²⁰⁶ *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, UN, 10th December, 1948, Article 1.

²⁰⁷ **Hunt**, 204 ; **Sliwinski**, 103. Arendt critiqued of the concept of human rights as they were declared in the 1948 UN declaration, since she believed, that what the Holocaust ultimately showed was that merely belonging to species of the human can not provide shelter from the fall of human rights, and that declaring that all humans belonging to “humanity” not a sufficient enough guarantee of protection of human dignity. See **Sliwinski**, 2011, 104-105; **Arendt, Hannah**: *The Rights of Man: What are they?*, *Modern Review*, 1949.

²⁰⁸ *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, UN, 10th December, 1948; **Hunt**, 2007, 204-207.

2.4.2 THE POLITICS OF MAKING PAIN VISIBLE— AND INVISIBLE

The Holocaust images are repeatedly marked as sites of bearing witness to something that is impossible to witness. They were, and perhaps still are, too traumatic to sink in and, thus, not fully comprehensible.²⁰⁹ Their significance has shifted in time, and they still actively flow from one context to another, continuously gathering new meanings along the way. They are referred to in new settings, juxtaposed with more contemporary images of atrocity, used in art, discussed in visual culture studies, circulated by the media, and commonly referred to in political speech in times of crises. Through their extensive circulation at the time of their revelation, as well as in the decades following the Second World War, the Holocaust has been established as the modern ground zero of humanity. The horrific images describing and unveiling the impeccable horrors under a violent totalitarian system have been solidified as the iconic visual representations of both the ultimate fall of humanity as well as of the symbolic warning signs of the human rights driven “never again” paradigm. Thus, they have also been used in legitimating military interventions. They have been framed and established as iconic images, which have been and are continuously referred to in the face of contemporary atrocities the backdrop against which we often gaze at all the subsequent atrocities.²¹⁰

Referring to the Holocaust and stating that contemporary images and sites of violence resemble these iconized atrocities has been a strong political statement used in multitudes of ways and contexts. Textual references to and visual juxtaposition of the most famous death camp images with contemporary images of violent events is prevailing. This has been the case with, for instance, the mass killings of Cambodia, Rwanda and Yugoslavia, and more recently for example with the war in Syria.²¹¹ The reiterated references to the Holocaust images does not solely function as an attempt to understand, explain and frame the contemporary events, but as Zelizer argues, the subsequent overuse of the Holocaust photos may diminish the need to see more contemporary instances of brutality. Our helplessness when confronted with the more contemporary atrocities may, thereby, be derived from our recognition that we already know what they look like; that we have already seen them. Holocaust images have become a memory bank of an iconic atrocity against which everything is weighed out. For example, images of the Bosnian War were commonly juxtaposed with Holocaust imagery, and, thus, the war was referred to as a “reoccurrence” of what happened in the 1940s. The images of camps in Bosnia were pointed to by for example saying: “surely these images belong to another time”. Zelizer argues that the

²⁰⁹ **Sliwinski**, 2011, 95-97.

²¹⁰ **Zelizer**, 1998, 202- 239.

²¹¹ This feature of the Holocaust images I will come back to later in this chapter focusing on the history of atrocity images, as well as in later more empirically orientated chapters of this work, for example in the chapter dealing with the images of the Bosnian war. References to historical atrocity images and particularly the images were continuously made in also connection to the Syrian August 2013 gas attack in Damascus. More on this in the chapter 7.

continuous reproduction and references to the Holocaust images constructs a remembrance practice that rather encourages the spectators to “forget” contemporary atrocities, as nothing can succeed the pain and horror of the Holocaust. The surrounding, spectating world often remains paralyzed in the face of the horrors taking place now. The earlier atrocities may be remembered so as to forget the contemporary ones.²¹²

What is further interesting in regard to the central standing and iconization of the Holocaust images is their contextual political appropriateness in the Western sphere and utilization both right after the World War as well as later.²¹³ The uses of Holocaust imagery thus also tell a poignant story of politics of representability of human suffering. For example the weak Western reaction to the Majdanek story breaking in 1944, tell of the position of politics in the breaking of atrocity stories, of the politics of selectiveness in publicizing, framing and signifying atrocity images—especially in times of war. As mentioned earlier, General Eisenhower, when witnessing the horrors of the extermination camps, was recorded saying that the images should be seen by the Western publics as well as by US soldiers. He also added that, if US soldiers had formerly possibly been uncertain about what they were fighting *for* in Europe, the visual testimony of the camps surely made them aware of what they were fighting *against*.²¹⁴ This phrase gives away a significant factor in the framing of atrocity images: images of suffering can and often are politically utilized in order to indicate the enemy and point to its evil nature, by showing destruction induced by the enemy in the bodies of the victims. Images of pain can thereby, in addition to functioning as representations making war waging more difficult (as was for example in the attempt of the usage of the First World War photos by Ernst Friedrich), also make waging war easier. The control over, governance and regulation of images showing the suffering induced by friendly forces is a standard procedure in warfare, as is also the framing and presentation of images of the physical pain brought about by the enemy on especially civilian populations. This feature is central to visual wartime censorship and propaganda. Regardless of the spectacularly horrific nature of the Holocaust images, traits of this thinking are also detectable in the framing and representation of the Nazi camp atrocity images.

²¹² Zelizer, 1998, 202- 239. These themes I will get back to in the following chapters of this work.

²¹³ What is also noteworthy here is that the relevant studies on the uses of the Holocaust Images predominantly center on Anglo-American settings. For instance these images were not so eagerly circulated in some other countries, such as Finland (at the time fighting along side with German troops). I made a brief inquiry to the uses and visibility of the Holocaust images in the Finnish magazine (biggest in the country) *Suomen Kuvalehti*. And I did not find any citations or mentions to the Holocaust imagery of the liberated camps from summer 1944 until summer 1945. This is to suggest that the wide circulation of these contemporarily widely known images may have not pierced the publicity of the time so widely in the non-Anglo-American settings. In the future I plan to make a more extensive inquiry into the utilization and seeability of the Holocaust imagery in the publicity of Finland in 1944-1945.

²¹⁴ Eisenhower Presidential Library, *World War II: Holocaust, The Extermination of European Jews*.

As the iconized photos of the Holocaust still contemporarily seem to determine the ways in which contemporary atrocities are seen, made sense of and understood, they can also be seen to have blocked the Western view on other atrocities taking place in conjuncture with them and made other brutalities invisible. For example, images telling of the suffering experienced by the civilian populations of the German city of Dresden—bombed by the Allied forces in February 1945, estimates of the death toll vary from 25 000 to several hundreds of thousands—have not been extensively publically circulated, seen, mourned over, or iconized as signifying unimaginable human suffering or generalized madness of war. The suffering of these people has neither been remembered as an ultimate sacrifice, nor have the perpetrators of these acts (The British and the US) been framed as the embodiments of evil. Nor have the images of the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki nuclear bombs—dropped by the US in August 1945, killing at least over 120 000 people in an instant—been circulated with an equivalent intensity as have the Holocaust images in the Western publicity. It seems that the amount of human suffering experienced by the victims has little to do with the iconization of some images as representing the ground zero of humanity. Rather, it seems that what determines the iconization, representability and the extent of circulation and processes of signification of atrocity images, besides the atrocities themselves is political context and political as well as cultural appropriateness.

The ones possessing power over representational practices have the power to determine whose suffering is visualized, made visible and significant, and thus they have power over who's suffering matters. In the context of warfare the power to govern the representational practices usually belongs to the ones who win the war. And especially in the context of war photos, the process of making the suffering of some visible, and thus significant, is also a process of making the suffering of some others invisible, and thus less significant and less reacted to.²¹⁵ Hereby, the history of visualizing the pain of others is also a history that reveals the political frames in which the pain of others becomes *representable*, and moreover a history that unveils who are recognized as humans in need and worthy of protection at different times. This comes apparent for instance in the context of the American racial lynching images dealt with earlier. As Sontag points out, it is often so—and especially after the Nazi death camp images produced a novel representational practice in the field of visual atrocity photography—that, if there is no photographic evidence of suffering, there is (in the minds of the spectators) no atrocity. If no images of an event of violence are made public, circulated, named, and framed accordingly—so as to produce a narrative of suffering, human rights violations and the carnages tend to remain unseen, and thus unreacted to. Whose suffering we see and how we see it, as well as whose suffering remains unseen to us, are subject to political governance and

²¹⁵ See **Butler, Judith:** *Frames of War*, Verso, 2009.

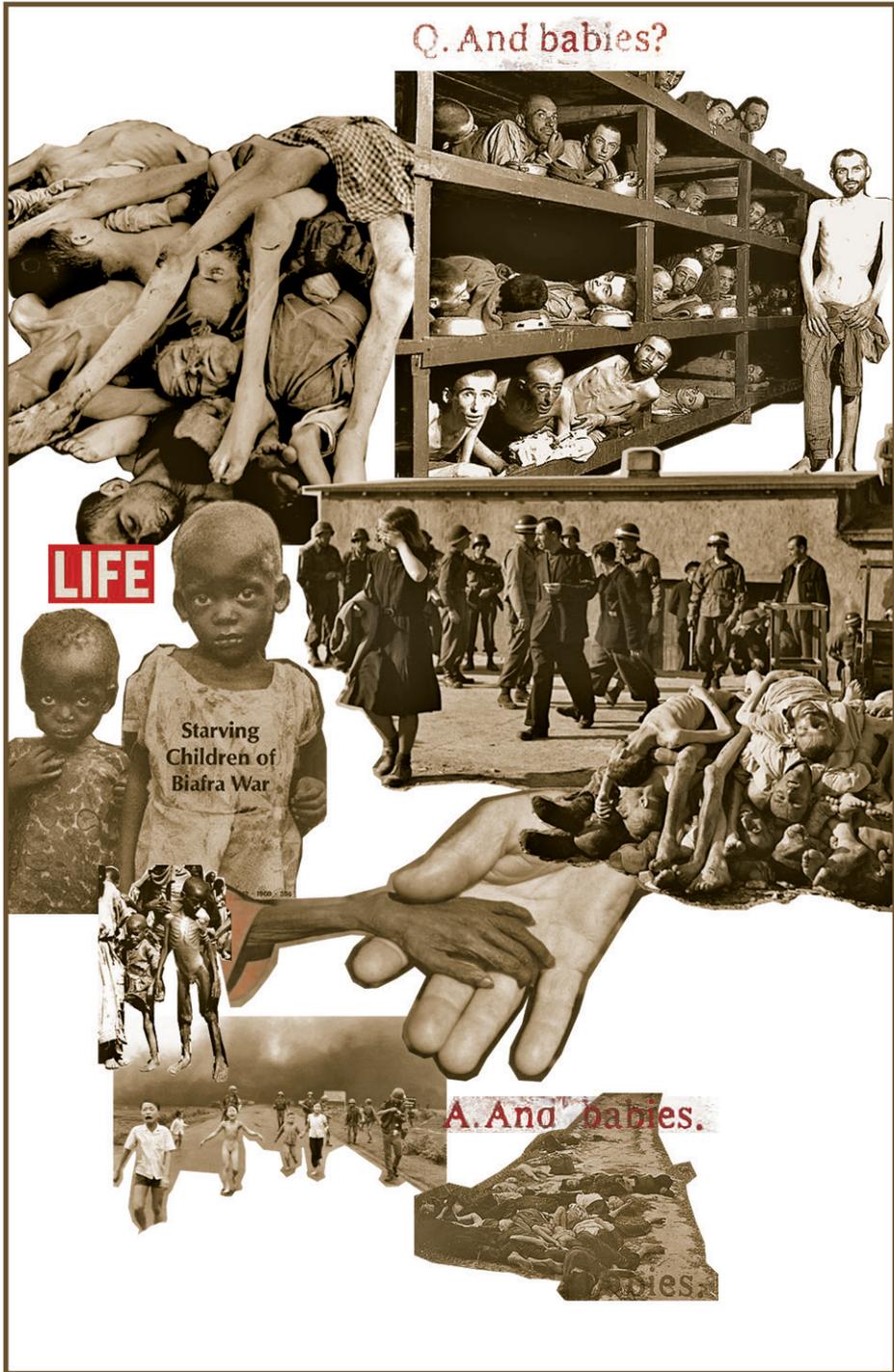
power, and also substantially a matter of politics of (the institutionalization of protection) humanity.²¹⁶ The Holocaust images and their connection to the advancement of the institutionalization of human rights and the evolvement of the humanity paradigm unveil this connection in an illuminating way. Conventions, institutions, norms and practices craft living people into recognizable subjects and, then again, leave some living creatures outside recognition and (human) status. As Hannah Arendt puts it, one must be *judged* as a human, before being able to become recognized as a human in need of protection and rights.²¹⁷ In this manner, one must also be pictured as a human, in need of protection and rights, before one can be included into the realm of humanness.

Therefore, by looking at the modes of representation and the framing practices of atrocity images mediating the pain of distant others, it also becomes apparent whose lives are perceived as worthy of being met with grief, outrage or cries for protection. Thus, the frames of what is recognized as grievable and non-grievable life become visible. Still today not all life at all times is perceived as worthy of protection, nor even always grieved when lost: Death sentence is still a common practice, killing another human in war is legal and quite generally seen as somewhat acceptable, and mass scale industrial killing of non-human animals for food is a normal everyday practice. As bodily vulnerability is a shared condition of all living creatures—not only of humans but of all animals—visual presentations of vulnerable life is in a pivotal position in the recognition process of (protectable) life itself.²¹⁸ I shall develop these themes in more length for instance in Chapter 4 of this study.

²¹⁶ Sontag, 2003,74- 79 see also Butler, 2009, 69.

²¹⁷ Butler, 2009, 5; Arendt, 1994, 268.

²¹⁸ Butler, 2009, 1-32.



Chapter 2. Illustration 2.3.

2.4.3 HUMANITARIANISM AND HUMANITARIAN ICONOGRAPHY IN THE COLD WAR ERA

What comes to your mind when you think of an iconic representation of human suffering in the Cold War era? Do you think of images of the starving crowds of naked African children, with bloated stomachs, flies in their eyes, staring into the distance in apathy and bare corporal existence? Or do you reflect on the image of a small Vietnamese girl, running naked and screaming as napalm burns her flesh? Both of these imageries arguably iconize something focal in the not so distant history, which is hard to vocalize but nevertheless painfully central for the Western understanding of the world of yesterday. These two types of images both address their viewers in somewhat different modes, but nevertheless they could be called thick imageries, iconic of the visual representation of suffering in the late twentieth century.

It is widely recognized that humanitarianism—its organizational settings, status within Western politics, and thus also the styles, uses and modes of representation of humanitarian visual representations—has gone through significant changes in late twentieth century, and especially towards the turn of the century. Humanitarian aid and development work, as well as the overall ethos governing global humanitarianism, have dramatically transformed within the later decades of the previous century. Neutral and a-political humanitarian orientation—based on the ethos of impartiality and neutrality of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) —in the later part of the twentieth century gave way to new, more selective and politically committed humanitarian objectives. This trait is represented by organizations such as the *Mèdecins Sans Frontières* (MSF) founded in 1971.²¹⁹ These developments have also left their mark on the visual representational practices of distant suffering. This chapter deals with the alterations and nature of humanitarian representations of human suffering in the Cold War era.

In the pages that follow my aim is to map out the historical changes of humanitarianism in the Cold War era; to analyze the changes in humanitarian iconography, and its modes of addressing its audience, and to combine and cross-examine these with the overall changes in Western humanitarianism and with the expansion and alterations of the humanitarian frame. I shall start with the representational practices in humanitarian images and messages in predominantly organizational settings during the latter twentieth century. I shall trace the kinds of solidary bonds different modes of visual addressing create between the spectators of humanitarian images and the objects of the humanitarian action and help, i.e. the sufferers in the images. I shall also examine the images, the ways in which the Vietnam War was presented to Western spectators, and open up the influential and much debated Vietnam War syndrome paradigm on the foreign policy influence of images of suffering. In addition, I shall also

²¹⁹ Fox, 2001 ;Chandler, 2001. Barnett, 2011, 132-158, 161-170, 196-219.

explore and consider the political power of images of suffering in the contexts of technological novelties of visual mediation, of foreign policy and war, as well as ponder on the sentimental effects of images of suffering in international political settings.

Era of Non-interference Humanitarianism and Iconography of Vulnerability as Bare Life

In her book *The Ironic Spectator*, Lillie Chouliaraki maps out the representational practices of humanitarian images and messages during the late twentieth and early twenty-first century (predominantly in the context of communication of humanitarian NGOs). She traces the kinds of solidary bonds different modes of visual addressing create between the spectators of humanitarian images and the objects of the humanitarian action and help. She tracks the diverse forms of solidarity different representational practices of distant suffering create. Chouliaraki describes the iconic twentieth-century representations of distant (non-Western) atrocities—such as the representations of the Biafra famine (and war) around the turn of 1960s and '70s and the dominant aesthetic framings of the 1980s Ethiopian famines—as belonging to the register of *vulnerability as bare life*. Perhaps the most piercing and thought-provoking, iconic humanitarian images of the later twentieth century belong to this iconographical mode. These images most typically present extreme and acute suffering, such as sickness and starvation, through visually detectably non-Western (naked) bodies, mostly through African, and often children's, bodies. In these photorealist representations, the suffering objects in need of our help are typically presented in a state of weak existence, extreme bodily suffering and nameless passivity. Often the objects of these images are represented as masses of suffering crowds and pictured in nearly voyeuristic style, often naked and reduced to mere bodily creatures. In these representations belonging to the “register of bare life”, the sufferers are typically presented as not interacting with the camera, but are pictured passively and calmly giving themselves up for observation in the barest physical condition for the spectators of the images. These weary, skeleton-like figures are typically presented without names, histories, or without political context explaining the situation causing their suffering and condition.²²⁰ (See illustration **2.3**.²²¹)

This representational mode strongly resembles the ways in which suffering in the colonies was pictured in the late nineteenth-century images of religious humanitarians, discussed earlier. In the age of imperial humanitarianism and within the Western imperialistic mindset, the ruling or saving of these ‘helpless adolescent’ non-Western subjects was seen as the imperialistic responsibility of their European/Western rulers. The ways in

²²⁰ Chouliaraki, 2013, 9-15, 46-53.

²²¹ Included in the illustration **2.3**. Mohammed Amin's photograph of the famine in Ethiopia, 1984. And image “starving boy and a missionary” by Mike Wells from Karamoja district, Uganda in April 1980, and Life Magazine Cover, “the starving children of Biafra”, July 12, 1968.

which the early colonial representations address their viewers can be seen as a preamble to the prevalent visual humanitarian communication style of the twentieth century. That is, the predominant type of representing distant suffering, lasting far into the twenty-first century, was given birth by the colonial mindset. Hence, and because of the visual and political mode of addressing the images entail, Chouliaraki calls the solidarity created by the practice of presenting distant suffering, through addressing ‘vulnerability as bare life,’ as “the solidarity of neo-colonialism”. Moreover, these images, concentrating on the passive bodies of the victims, show distant suffering—such as famine—not as politically created situations, i.e. not as situations ultimately created by a system of unequal distribution of resources or other situations produced by complex (global) political structures, but as a *medical condition* that can be remedied by relieving the symptoms, such as malnutrition. That is, the centrality of the passive, bare biological bodily suffering de-politicizes the suffering of the inhabitants of the “less-developed” non-Western world, and thus the images provoke a focus on immediate corporal relief and lead to solidarity, which aims at saving lives rather than at changing the conditions, which induced the suffering in the first place.²²² Thus, this mode of representation exemplifies the dominant ethos of humanitarianism still predominant in the post-World War era, up until the mid-1980s, which mostly centered on non-governmental, neutrally framed help, based on the principles of non-interference, and practiced by organizations such as the Red Cross.²²³

Moreover, this representational practice creates the starkest of contrasts between the spectators and the objects of the images. It maximizes the distance between the relatively happy, safe and well-fed spectator, gazing from the safety of an orderly society, and the weak, barely living (majorly) non-Western creatures, presented through their bodily feeble condition, pictured in nakedness, hunger and namelessness. *Stanley Cohen* finds that these kinds of representations produce sentiments of indignation, shame and guilt in their spectators (just as did the colonial representations of the late nineteenth century, as did the visual appeals of the abolitionists). They make the spectators feel bad, miserable and guilty; and thus Cohen claims, rather than being capable of producing compassionate reactions, they risk undermining them.²²⁴ It has been argued widely in research that this mode of addressing does not mobilize the spectator’s will to help in an effective way, but rather passivizes and even leads to a “I have seen this before”-syndrome or to *compassion fatigue*^{225,226} Cohen argues that the risk of becoming indifferent or not taking action, when continuously facing this sort of images, is not necessarily because of exhaustion but because of the physiological moral distance they create. He argues that such images might

²²² Chouliaraki, 2013,58-61; see also Cohen, 2001, 168-195.

²²³ Barnett, 2011, 95-158.; Fox, 2001.

²²⁴ Cohen, 2001,214, 194-195; Chouliaraki, 2013, 61.

²²⁵ On compassion fatigue, see: Moeller, 1991.

²²⁶ Cohen, 2001, 185-195, 214-218; Chouliaraki, 2013, 60-61; Moeller, 1991.

leave the spectator feeling utter hopelessness and shock, and thus they risk creating a specific form of denial: the inability to even think about what was encountered via the image, because of the impenetrable horror conveyed by the images remains so completely remote from the sphere of experience of the spectator that it actually leaves us passive. The repetition of the hopeless and fatalistic imagery—accompanied by exhausting facts on millions of suffering children, dying of curable conditions such as diarrhea and hunger—further removes the well-fed and secure spectators away from the depicted suffering. The iconography of bare life, thus, actually tells us that nothing really can be done about the persistent problem of global inequality and that these people and their lives are beyond the scope of our help.²²⁷ Portrayal of the sufferers through such “negative aesthetics” works to remove them from the order of “our humanity” and places the suffering objects of the images as *subhumans*, utterly different from the ‘full-fledged’ Western humans gazing at the images.²²⁸ Thus again, the fixed role division of the humanitarian story—well-off Western spectators and the weak and passive non-Western sufferers—as well as a theatrical mode of addressing centralizing on the emotions of the spectators prevails in the arrangement and addressing of the images presented within the register of *vulnerability as bare life*.

From the mid-1980s onwards this mode of visual representation has gathered vocal critique. Such mode of representation was seen not only as inefficient but also unethical, and the iconography of bare life thus started to become less frequent in humanitarian representations. Researchers of the field, as well as organizations and the Western mainstream media, started to highlight the need to represent people with dignity and respect, and the need to change the predominant representational style of distant suffering became vocalized widely. As the ethics of representation has been analyzed, organizations practicing humanitarianism, as well as media houses, have sketched various best practices on representing situations of pain and suffering increasingly since the late 1980s. Conventions on the uses of images and messages in describing the Third World have been formulated, and “codes of taste and decency” compiled.²²⁹ The critique of the inefficacy and ethical dilemmas of the iconography of bare life have changed the predominant style of humanitarian images, although this does not mean that images entailing iconographical elements belonging to the visual register of bare life, producing the solidarity of neo-colonialism, would have been swiped off the representational register. Nevertheless, more lately this style of addressing is generally applied less frequently, and used with more caution and consideration, at least in organizational settings.²³⁰

²²⁷ Cohen, 2001, 194-195.

²²⁸ Chouliaraki, 2013, 57; Douzinas, 2007, 66-75; Malkki, 1996. See also Butler, 2009, 63-100; Cohen, 2001; Moeller, 1999; Boltanski 1999. I will get back to the hierarchical positioning that the humanitarian imagery construct/reflect in more depth later on in this chapter, as well in the chapter 3.

²²⁹ *Code of Conduct: Images and messages relating to the Third World*, CONCORD, 1989. Boltanski, 1999; Moeller, 1999; Chouliaraki, 2013; Chouliaraki, 2006; Chouliaraki, 2010; Sontag, 2002 (1977); Sontag, 2003; Cohen, 2001; Campbell, 2004.

²³⁰ I will go into more depth on these issues in the following subchapter 2.6. as well as in the chapter 4.

Visual addressing of vulnerability and bare life, possessing long historical roots, was still the predominant mode of representing distant suffering by humanitarian organizations a couple of decades ago. In addition, as the iconography of bare life has also been the predominant mode of addressing used in media representations illustrating distant, namely non-Western crises, I argue that images of bare life are still most familiar to all individuals now above 30 years-of-age living in Western societies. These images can still be seen to constitute one of the most influential and iconic modes of representing distant misfortune in the imaginary of Western publics. When growing up in Finland in the 1980s, my mother used to refer to the starving children of Biafra when trying to get us children to finish our meals, by saying that “some children don’t even have anything to eat, and you dare not to clean your plate.” And she was not the only Western parent resorting to this argument. I claim, that because of the shocking nature and wide public repetition of such atrocity images, presentations of this sort have forcefully formed the imagination of Africa and other non-Western, less-developed global areas for generations of Western inhabitants, and they still influence the ways in which we tend to see not only the others but also our position in the global world.

What is noteworthy in the critique of the iconography of bare life is that it took place concurrently with a more general shift in the attitudes towards humanitarian aid and a wider self-examination within the discourse humanitarianism. The horrors of the Biafran famine and the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) can be seen as a watershed in this respect. The disappointment and frustrations experienced by a group of French doctors working for the ICRC in Biafra inflated a heated debate on the desirability and acceptability of the “silence rule”, neutrality, non-condemnation and non-comment and non-interference policy of the Red Cross, as well as the tradition of “neutral and impartial” humanitarianism in broader terms. After witnessing the Nigerian army butchering unarmed and wounded men, women and children, along with Red Cross workers, the French doctors decided not to keep their vow of silence anymore. These “Biafris”, had lost their faith in the functionality and morality of the Red Cross principles and *modus operandi*, and thus revolted against the ICRC’s neutral stance on Biafra. The Biafris publically accused the Nigerian government of genocide and pleaded for its international condemnation.²³¹

The frustration and disappointment of field workers with the non-partial humanitarian logic ultimately formed a new approach to humanitarian work and ethos. The Biafris, with other like-minded groups, started compiling a manifesto for new humanitarianism. *Mèdecins Sans Frontières* (MSF), founded by *Bernard Kouchner* and *Xavier Emmanuelli* in 1971, has been regarded as the beacon of the new humanitarian proceedings and principles. MSF combined the professional medical ethic with cosmopolitan

²³¹ **Barnett**, 2011, 142-147.

universalism and human rights. MSF can also be seen to represent a then contemporary version of a French ideology, *la mission civilatrice*, dating back to colonial times, which justified foreign intervention in order to improve human welfare. The MSF ideology resonated with many in the radical and politically turbulent years of the late 1960s and early '70s. Among the participants of the movement and defendants of its ideology were both left- and right-wing anti-colonialists and humanitarians, who imagined that the new approach would bring progress to "backward populations."²³² The changes in the organizational field and in the ethos of humanitarian work have been seen as having paved the way for the growing overall politicization of humanitarianism, in which the previous universality and neutral aspirations of humanitarianism have been seen both as naïve and dysfunctional. The critique of the representational practices of iconography of bare life and the critique of the a-political framing of the victims, therefore, merges with the concurrent overall critique of the ethos and practice of non-interventionist, "old-style" humanitarianism and with the growing perception of its inability to alleviate distant suffering. This development can be seen to have ultimately led to the birth of state *military humanitarianism* and, further, to what I call *Western humanitarian world politics*, themes that I shall open up in more detail later in this chapter.²³³

2.4.4 IMAGES OF ATROCITY IN THE TELEVISION ERA: VIETNAM WAR SYNDROME OR MANUFACTURING CONSENT?

As identified above, in the post-World War era, visual representations of organizational humanitarianism and humanitarian aid industry presented suffering individuals predominantly in a visual setting of bare life, as consequently did a multitude of media representations. The a-political ethos—based on the colonial history, global power relations as well as on the non-interference tradition of humanitarianism dominating the era—resulted in humanitarian emergencies being predominantly met with 'compassion as *neo-colonialism*.' But concurrently there also existed other remarkable and historically emblematic visual representations describing human fragility and suffering, which seemingly do not fit this depoliticizing representational frame.

The Vietnam War (1955-1975), from the 1960s onwards, was widely witnessed through televised images of atrocity, massively circulated in the Western publicity. At the turn of the 1960s and '70s stunning images of the Vietnam War, namely images depicting atrocities, war crimes, and suffering the warfare inflicted on Vietnamese civilians, gained immense visibility and attention in the Western publicity. These images stirred up heated political debate and were central in the anti-war movement. Haunting images, such as

²³² Barnett, 2011, 142-147.

²³³ Chandler, 2001, 683- 85; Fox, 2001; Barnett, 2011. In more depth about the alterations in humanitarianism at the turn of the new millennium in the next chapter 2. 4.

Eddie Adam's image "General Loan executing a Vietcong Suspect" (1968) picturing a South Vietnamese General shooting a alleged Vietcong terrorist in the head on a point-blank range and describing the events of the *Tet Offensive* in the streets of Saigon, have been iconized as one of the most powerful representations influencing the public image of the war. Also Ron Haerberle's images of the *My Lai Massacre* (1968) inflicted by American soldiers and Nick Ut's picture of napalm-burned child victims of an "Accidental Napalm Attack" (1972) perpetrated by South Vietnamese forces have been iconized as politically powerful atrocity images in the Western sphere. Still today these images are often referred to when the political power and influence of mediatized war images on public war sentiments and political decision-making are discussed. (Included in the illustration 2.3 is material from an anti-war poster "And Babies?" made of Ron Haerberle's photographs of the My Lai massacre, 1968, and the iconic Nick Ut's photo "Accidental Napalm attack" from 1972.)

The visual style of these images is photorealistic and the scenery offered by them of the war is horrific. These images concentrate on the physical (mass) destruction of the individuals caught in the midst of war and picture the devastating human toll of the war waged by a Western power. But they also often point directly to illegal use of force—even to war crimes —of American/allied soldiers. For instance, the images of the My Lai massacre (secretly) shot by an army photographer Haerberle—which also played a part in the trial in which American soldiers were accused of and sentenced for crimes of war—blatantly show stunning images of unarmed villagers about to die as well as picture Vietnamese civilians, among whom are also babies and small children, killed by American soldiers and heaped into piles of unidentifiably tangled human bodies. Moreover, in all of the three emblematic iconic images mentioned above, the perpetrators of the violence are to some extent present in the images or strongly referred to. In their common contextual uses in the media, the style of addressing of the representations is formed so that the images intend to unveil features of the war that were perhaps unknown or hidden from the eyes of the distant Western spectators before. Thus their mode of representation is revelatory, and they produce active political narratives of war as well.²³⁴

Vietnam was the first war predominantly encountered in the living rooms of Western citizens through private TV sets. Vietnam is often nominated as an "uncensored war", from which images allegedly flowed into the sight of the Western viewers without notable control from the state. The recurrently and massively circulated images, unveiling the brutal nature of American war and the atrocious price it puts on distant individuals, have frequently been hailed as having produced significant change in the public impressions of the war, causing public vigilance and outrage. Furthermore, it has become customary to claim that images of the Vietnam War not only negatively

²³⁴ See for example **Goldberg, Vicki**: *The Power of Photography: How Photographs Changed our Lives*. Abbeville Publishing Group, New York, 1991, 225- 246

influenced public perception of the war but worked to undermine the war effort, and, consequently, pressured political decision makers, ultimately leading to American withdrawal from the war, thus causing the so called *Vietnam War syndrome*.²³⁵

In his memoirs (1978) President *Richard Nixon* voiced his impression of the role of media during the Vietnam War and stated his frustration particularly with the media's use of atrocious images:

More than ever before, television showed the terrible human suffering and sacrifice of war. Whatever the intention behind such relentless and literal reporting of the war, the result was a serious demoralization of the home front, raising the question whether America would ever again be able to fight enemy abroad with unity and strength of purpose at home. ²³⁶

Arguments regarding the Vietnam War syndrome are often heard from the direction of the American state and military, and they stress how the centrality of visual war reporting and the increased power of media in the television era affect the public opinion and home front sentiments. This theory about the Vietnam War syndrome refers to media's ability to destroy public morale and support for war, and claims that the media can pressure or even *force* political decision-makers into action. Often in everyday understanding and public discussion the Vietnam War is still commonly reminisced as a war during which governmental visual censorship was weak, and the media was in opposition to the official US policy of the war. It is still often reiterated that the revelatory imagery of the atrocities of war forcefully affected the public sentiments and attitudes towards the war. The myth of the Vietnam War syndrome still lives on. In reality, the relations between the publication of the images by the media, political power and public sentiments created by the revelatory images are far more complicated and ambivalent than this theory suggests. ²³⁷

For example *Daniel Hallin* has concluded that the position of the media in opposition to the elite consensus on the war and the effect of the images mediated through a novel mediation platform have been highly exaggerated, or are even false. He has pointed out that the presentation of the crude images of war in the US media actually followed an established elite view of the war, rather than led it. Through detailed analysis of the changing historical trajectory of the war in the US, Hallin shows that, in contrast to the

²³⁵ See for example **Hallin, Daniel, C:** *The uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam*. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1989 (1986) ; **Chomsky, Noam & Herman, Edward, S:** *Manufacturing Consent. The political Economy of the Mass Media*. Pantheon Books, New York, 2002 (1988). ; **Robinson, Piers:** *Researching the US media-State relations and the twenty-first century war*, in *Reporting War: Journalism in wartime*. Allan, Stuart & Zelizer, Barbie (eds), Routledge, London, 2004 ; **Cottle, Simon:** *Global Crisis Reporting. Journalism in the Global Age*. Open University Press, Maidenhead, 2009;

²³⁶ **Richard Nixon:** *The Memoirs*, Grosset & Dunlap, New York, 1978, as cited in **Hallin**, 1989,3.

²³⁷ See: **Goldberg**, 1991, 225- 246 ; **Hallin**, 1986; **Chomsky & Herman**, 1988.

commonly reiterated belief, critical reporting of the war actually intensified only after the political elite of the US became to be—at the turn of the 1960s and '70s—divided into the *Doves* and the *Hawks*. The pro-war Hawks believed that the war had to be won at any price, whilst the Doves had become disenchanted with the war and believed that the price of victory in Vietnam was not worth paying for. The turning point in this respect has been dated more specifically back to the May Lai massacre and the Tet offensive of 1968. It has been noted that especially the unfortunate Tet offensive led into a situation in which a number of Western spectators of the war felt that the US war effort had lost its credibility. In addition, *Noam Chomsky* and *Edward Herman* argue in *Manufacturing Consent* (1988), that by 1970 US had already won the war in Vietnam in terms of its major objectives, and thus critical public opinion was not a significant threat to the aims of the political elite anymore. This is to say that the images surfaced in the media, because a sufficient number of the national elite was already war weary and disappointed with the war, or even opposed the continuation of it. In other words, the war weariness and disappointment of the elites came first, and the presentation of the images seconded this change in the political atmosphere. Thus, Hallin argues that the presentation of the images—or the novel visual mediation techniques—did not change the dominant public (or elite) sentiments towards the war, but rather trailed it.²³⁸

Likewise, Chomsky and Herman shoot down the thesis on the political power of the Vietnam War images. They see that (American mainstream) media, in the case of Vietnam reportage but also in wider terms, functions under the political and economic elite and at the discretion of the ruling classes and groups, and thus remains prominently a disseminator of the “official agenda.”²³⁹ This line of thought on the nature and functions of (Western) media has been supported by a number of critical scholars, analyzing the relations of the mass media and the state in the twenty-first century as well as in the post-Cold War milieu. It has been, quite the contrary to the thesis on the Vietnam War images, found that, especially in times of war, national media tends to support the official agenda and elite views, often even succumbing to cheerleading and displays of patriotism, rather than opposing the official line. The position of the media as a part of the ideological machinery and institutional structures of the dominant cultural and political sphere, within which it operates, has also been theorized and analyzed by many.²⁴⁰ For example, Stuart Hall writes about the tendency of mass media to align itself with the dominant consensual political culture, and about the inclination of those who disaffiliate or challenge the status quo routinely to be marginalized by the media. He argues that the

²³⁸ Hallin, 1986; Chomsky&Herman, 1988.

²³⁹ Chomsky&Herman, 1988.

²⁴⁰ See: Cottle, 2009, 111-114; Cottle, Simon: *Medialized Conflict. Developments in media and Conflict Studies*. Open University Press, Maidenhead, 2006, 75-99; Zelizer, Barbie& Allan, Stuart: *Journalism after September 11*, Routledge, London, 2002; *War and the Media*, Thussy, Daya & Freedman, Des (eds.) Sage, London, 2003.

institutionalized ethos of news media is often the source of hidden (national) consensus, rather than an institution providing revelatory anti-government information or revolutionary viewpoints challenging elite views or the political status quo. Furthermore, newsworthiness—what is seen as important and newsworthy—and, moreover, how news and news photographs are framed, presented, and signified remain highly political matters, and journalists often succumb to the ideological considerations of the elite. The selection and determination of news photographs describing war, furthermore, are a matter of political and cultural signification and framing. Generally, the mainstream media can be seen as functioning as a part of the ideological machinery of a given cultural and political sphere; and thus media representations reveal and reflect the dominant political and ideological ethos prominent in the given time, place, cultural and political surroundings.²⁴¹ These issues, i.e. the political and ideological nature of news media (and particularly mainstream media or mass media), the ways in which crises and wars are (visually) framed and presented in mass media, are issues, which I shall also develop later in more length and one that remains at the heart of this study.

In regards to the Vietnam reporting, it has been shown, by a multitude of research projects, that media previously tended to reiterate the government line but, towards the turn of the decade, swung toward the anti-war movement.²⁴² Thus, it may be said that visual media representations of the Vietnam war were more likely to appear in the mainstream media, because the critique towards the war had already become so wide-spread—and commonly accepted—in the early 1970s that critical viewpoints—also in the form of brutal imagery—had become culturally representable and politically newsworthy. Moreover, in line with what Hall argues on the biased position of news media, elite consensus, and position of critical perspectives, Chomsky and Herman argue that, in the case of visual Vietnam reportage, regardless of the massive media bombardment of brutal images, the reportage did not actually have a significant effect on the popularity of the war before the turn of the decade. At least the reportage was not leaning toward the direction it has later been claimed to have been by the Vietnam war syndrome discourse, but rather in the opposite direction: still in the late 1960s a vast number of American media spectators actually reported that they had become more supportive of the war than before due to the television coverage.²⁴³ Quite similarly Vicky Goldberg describes the response to the publication of the My Lai massacre images. Even though the images of the carnage of up to 500 civilians in the village of My Lai and the war crimes

²⁴¹ **Hall, Stuart:** *A World at One with itself*. In *Manufacture of News, Deviance, Social Problems and Mass Media*, Constable, London, 1981, pp. 147-156; **Hall, Stuart:** The Determination of News Photographs, In *Manufacture of News, Deviance, Social Problems and Mass Media*, Constable, London, 1981, pp.227-243. In *Cohen, Stanley & Young, J* (eds.): *Manufacture of News, Deviance, Social Problems and Mass Media*, Constable, London, 1981; **Hall, Stuart:** *The Determination of News Photographs*, 227-24.

²⁴² **Goldberg,** 1991, 235; **Chomsky & Herman, 1988; Hallin,** 1986.

²⁴³ **Chomsky & Herman,** 1988, 199.

committed by American soldiers appeared continuously in the media, according to a poll up to half of the of American public refused to believe that the massacre was real or inflicted by their countrymen. The New York Times at the time, possibly quite correctly, reported, that the spectator reactions to the My Lai story apparently paralleled the way people felt about the war in wider terms. If the spectator was anti-war, she probably saw the images as evidence of a massacre and of the way in which the war was ripping apart not only Vietnam but also the United States. If seen by a pro-war spectator, the images probably told about a legitimate US response to enemy atrocities.²⁴⁴

Therefore, still at the end of the 1960s, encountering brutal imagery of Vietnam War crimes and atrocities generally did not effectively change the US public opinion on the war. Consequently, although the anti-war movement forcefully utilized the graphic photos of atrocity in its campaigning, concurrently the pro-war section of the society did not see them as conveying anything out of the ordinary. Thus, the media reportage of the war actually came to represent a larger division in the US society. Therefore, following Sontag, it can be said, also in relation to the Vietnam War images, that images, as a powerful means of conveying information on human rights violations and revealing massive suffering they may be, cannot independently produce an outcome. They cannot provide a moral position, unless a political and moral atmosphere sufficiently backing their message already exists.²⁴⁵

Additionally, Chomsky and Herman claim that the soldiers returning from the war actually brought back a more disillusioning picture of the brutality of the war than the media reportage: What was shown by the pictures circulating in the media was, thus, already for a large part known by many at the home front. Moreover, they argue that regardless of the fact that brutal images were indeed shown on TV already in the 1960s from day to day and night to night, yet they still were not sufficient enough to stir up significant protests before the change of approach ensued in the highest of political domain. Thus, it appears that spectating war images was generally common in the late 1960s that seeing the brutality of war became business as usual—just like seeing images of the starving Africans.²⁴⁶ Chomsky and Herman go on arguing that, especially in the year prior to the swing in the elite attitudes, American media actually went on observing and discussing atrocities of the war quite blatantly, not considering them as raising moral issues, and thus, in fact, they did not treat them as atrocities at all but rather as *achievements* of the war effort.²⁴⁷ Moreover, the presentational practices of the Vietnam War images in the Western media actually, for the most part, concentrated on the emotions of the Western spectators, and these practices did neither present foremost the suffering of the Vietnamese civilians per se

²⁴⁴ Goldberg, 1991, 233-235.

²⁴⁵ Sontag, 1977, 17; Sontag, 2003, 80-84.

²⁴⁶ Chomsky & Herman, 198-200.

²⁴⁷ Ibid, 195.

as being problematic, nor did they present war as such as immoral, but rather they concentrated on the failed war effort of the US.²⁴⁸ Therefore, similarly as in the case of the bare life imagery, Vietnamese victims of violence, in their physical conditions, were framed as not belonging to the same register of humanity as the Western spectators. As African famine victims were presented as a-political victims of a medical condition and, thus, met as *subhumans* naturally belonging to the register of continuous suffering, the Vietnamese (civilian) victims were seen as less human and as somewhat justified victims, and sometimes—especially in the earlier representations and the media’s mode of addressing—they were framed even as the enemy, as *inhuman* characters deserving their fate and suffering²⁴⁹.

The Power of Visual Framing

As the two somewhat concurrent powerful and historically emblematic types of picturing distant suffering of the era—the bare life representations of, for instance, African famine and the images depicting the suffering of Vietnamese civilians amidst Western warfare—may firstly seem very divergent, there are, as a matter of fact, some noteworthy similarities in their representational style. They both place the victims of the suffering—in their own distinct ways—into a separate sphere of humanity from that of the spectators. They both distance the suffering and actually concentrate on the feelings of the spectator facing the images more so than they actually center on the suffering of the individuals/groups/areas presented in the images. But these two image types are also arranged and presented significantly differently. Although the images of the African famine victims almost totally a-politicize the suffering and suggest that the way to engage with the victims is to alleviate their hunger by allotting some money to an organization, they do not, on the average, point into the direction of a wider political change as a possibility by their visual and contextual arrangement. In contrast, the Vietnam images address their viewers in more outright political manners. At least in the later 1970s milieu, media framings of the images seem to suggest to their spectators—foremost to the American public—that the spectators, as citizens of a democratic state, can have an effect on the suffering, and that their impact comes not foremost through giving money to an organization but through legitimization or de-legitimization of the war effort by democratic means or by protest. The framing the atrocity images are granted in the Vietnam War syndrome discourse suggests that the public has the power to change the course of war, by either supporting it or by resisting it. Thus, the spectator is given a role of a political actor, who may alleviate or even stop the suffering of distant individuals by taking a political stand. Not claiming that this really was the case, the mode of addressing and the arrangement of the Vietnam images—probably created somewhat in

²⁴⁸ See, **Robinson**, 2004, 97.

²⁴⁹ Chapter 6 of this study deals with the contemporary inhuman figures of the visual humanitarian narrative.

retrospect—functions in a very different mode compared with the largely organizational images of suffering of African bare life. This has, as we have seen previously in the chapter when dealing with images in pacifistic arrangements and settings, been the case also earlier in history. A belief in the potency of brutal images of human suffering, affecting the public opinion on war/atrocity/human rights violation, thus seems to be historically formed and quite deeply engrained in the Western sphere.²⁵⁰

The juxtaposition of the bare life imagery and the medialized images of the Vietnam War suggest that several different modes of representing distant suffering or different modes of visual addressing—created by different contextual framings, rather than divergent iconographical styles—exist concurrently. Images presented of wars and crises in which Western the spectators—as members of Western political and cultural sphere—are participants and active agents in (on an openly political or, furthermore, military level) seem to be presented differently and address their viewers in different modes than images presented in a ‘purely humanitarian’ setting. Here, the concurrently existing, segmented and collage-like nature of humanitarian images becomes clearly visible.²⁵¹ These different co-existing modes of representation, framings, and signification, and the divergent ways in which the imagery in its contextual setting invite their spectators to see them, is what I am eager to open up more in the following pages of this study, which concentrate on the more contemporary imagery.

Albeit the myth of the political power of the Vietnam images has been effectively discredited in academic research, the Vietnam War syndrome and the idea of the potency of suffering images in affecting (foreign) political processes seems to be cemented in the public consciousness as well as in the mindset of governmental and military actors. The myth of the Vietnam War as an *uncensored war*, and the belief in the brutal war image’s negative effect on the Western countries’ ability to wage war and to “fight the enemy abroad with unity and strength,”²⁵² has affected the ways in which war reportage and, especially, visual images of war are, still today, governed and controlled both governmentally, culturally and by media.²⁵³ Further, it is also often stated that what Pentagon—and probably the Western policy-makers in larger terms—learned from Vietnam was that the ability to control (visual) media narratives of war is essential for the success of military operations. The British war in the Falkland Islands (1982) has been considered a test site of the new Western constraints on media coverage following the lessons from Vietnam. The governance and control resources—such as the pool system for war journalism—were further developed later and applied during the US operations in Grenada (1983) and Panama (1989-1990). Furthermore,

²⁵⁰ This theme I will develop in more length in the following paragraphs of this chapter, as well as in chapter 7 dealing with the contemporary claim of the political power of social media images.

²⁵¹ See: **Rancière**, 2011, 26-30.

²⁵² **Nixon**, 1978, as cited in **Hallin**, 1989,3.

²⁵³ **Cottle**, 2009, 128.

military control of Western war narratives and sceneries have been said to have been used to successfully polish to new heights during the Gulf War in 1990-1991. Western war has, ever since Vietnam, been, and continuous to be, predominantly fought in the hearts and minds of Western media spectators.²⁵⁴ This is why the Vietnam War reportage and the belief in the Vietnam War syndrome can be seen as a significant watershed in modern mediation and control of visual images of crises and wars that has had a lasting impact, particularly in crises in which the Western powers play an interventionist part. I shall explore these themes in more length in the following paragraph dealing with the uses and presentation of images of war and pain in the age of *liberal humanitarianism*.

2.5 IMAGES OF PAIN AND WAR IN THE AGE OF LIBERAL HUMANITARIANISM

The era after the end of the binary system of the Cold War has meant significant and foundational changes both in humanitarianism and the system of world order. In *Empire of Humanity* Barnett calls the era starting from the end of the Cold War (1989) up until this day as the *age of liberal humanitarianism*. After the Cold War (Western) states became increasingly committed to saving “failed states,” in order to create *liberal peace*, security, and development. Barnett argues, that towards the end of the century and increasingly after 9/11, saving and securitizing states and areas in turmoil became a human security issue, far too important for the Western powers to leave to the humanitarian NGOs to handle. During the era domestic conditions, such as poverty and despotism in fragile (non-Western) states possibly fostering future terrorism, came to define the orientation of international actions of Western states. The regime of interference led to interventionist military-humanitarian operations and Western wars legitimized by humanitarian rhetoric.²⁵⁵ This new humanitarianized Western political environment has had major consequences for organizational humanitarianism.

On the other hand, concurrent changes and alterations within the humanitarian organizational setting—namely the shift from immediate lifesaving aid to developmental emphasis—can be seen to have had an enormous effect on the recent Western take on global politics and international crisis. The interplay of changes between organizational humanitarianism and the humanitarization of Western global politics makes these two dimensions inseparable and manifoldly entangled. As a result, warring states, relying on humanitarian, security and securitizing discourse,

²⁵⁴ See For example: **Campbell, David**: *Cultural Governance and Pictorial Resistance*. Review of International Studies, 2003, 29,59, 57-73; **Butler**, 2009,64-66.; **Sontag**,2003, 58-65. . More on the later phases of Western media control, and the Gulf War and media in the next chapter 2.6.

²⁵⁵ **Barnett**, 2011; **Belloni**, 2007; **Douzinis**, 2007; **Aaltola**, 2009; **Chandler**, 2001; **Chandler**, 2002; **Duffield**, 2007.

and humanitarian organizations, banking on development ideology, have begun to co-opt and co-operate increasingly in multitude of ways in global crisis zones. Consequently, some outright political, interest-oriented governmental acts and organizational humanitarianism have merged and become ever harder to tell apart.²⁵⁶

Consequently, the neutrality of humanitarian relief organizations—and moreover also the neutral spirit of humanitarianism at large—have become increasingly questioned. As governmental actors and military personnel, acting in crisis zones under the guise of humanitarianism, have become difficult to tell apart from actors of humanitarian relief organization. Subsequently, *humanitarian space* has decreased, and humanitarian workers have been placed increasingly under suspicion by the locals, and they have even come increasingly under violent attacks.²⁵⁷ However, as a consequence of the humanitarization of Western international politics, humanitarian NGOs have not only been increasingly engaged in development efforts but, moreover, in political activities: currently humanitarians are commonly included in colloquies of high level international politics, even influencing resolutions of war. Humanitarians have also begun to be involved in post-conflict resolutions and peace building; they commonly address human rights issues, causes of poverty, gender equality and so on.²⁵⁸ As concurrently—increasingly towards the end of the century—the number of humanitarian organizations has mushroomed significantly, the visibility and economic significance of humanitarianism has increased, and the weight of the humanitarian point of view in political settings has further asserted itself.²⁵⁹

It can be argued that during the post-Cold War era humanitarianism, as we thought we knew it, has withered away and become multifariously entangled with outright political, strategic international objectives of state actors. During the era of liberal humanitarianism, the system of humanitarian Western politics began, for a significant part, to use humanitarian organizations as tools in advancing their strategic objectives in global politics. As *Colin Powell*, former US Secretary of State, has been quoted saying in 2001, humanitarianism and humanitarian organizations have become a “force multiplier” in Western warfare.²⁶⁰ Furthermore, humanitarianism and humanitarian rhetoric have expanded from its

²⁵⁶ **Barnett** 2011; **Belloni**, 2007; **Fox**, 2001; **Chandler**, 2001; **Chandler**, 2002; **Douzinis**, 2007; **Rieff**, 2003; **Cottle, Simon**: *Global Crisis Reporting, Journalism in the Global Age*. Open University Press, Berkshire, 2009, 147-150.

²⁵⁷ See for instance **Reiff**, 2003.; **Cottle**, 2009, 147-150.

²⁵⁸ **Douzinis**, 2007; **Duffield**, 2007; **Cottle**, 2009, 147-150.

²⁵⁹ **Fearon, James, D**: *The Rise of Emergency Relief Aid*. In *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics*, Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss, eds., Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2008, 49-72 ; **Chouliaraki**, 2013, 6.; **Kennedy, Denis**: *Selling the Distant Other: Humanitarianism and Imagery- ethical dilemmas of Humanitarian Action*. The journal of humanitarian assistance, 2009.

²⁶⁰ As quoted in **Barnett**, 2011, 31-32, In relation to the Afghan war in 2001 Powell stated: “Just as surely as our diplomats and military, American NGOs are out there serving and sacrificing on the front lines of freedom... NGOs are such a force multiplier for us, such an important part of our combat team”.

organizational aid setting into a prominent key term within the Western political sphere and has become a focal component in Western international political aspirations. Humanitarian reasoning and objectives, as well as the emphasis on human rights and protection of human lives, have, from the late twentieth century onwards, increasingly come to determine not only what is meant by the “international community” but also risen to a central status within Western power political reasoning, action and political branding. Military humanitarianism²⁶¹ and interventionist Western politics have increasingly been carried out under the (rhetorical) cover of humanitarianism, humanitarian action and protection of humanity since the early 1990s.²⁶² Humanitarianism has quite recently grown from activist endeavor acting in the margins of the Western societies into a significant paradigm outlining and defining Western public life at large.

As the overall settings, functions and ethos of humanitarianism have altered significantly, likewise the humanitarian iconography—i.e. the uses and styles of representation of humanitarian imagery—have in the latter part of the twentieth century been substantially revised and altered. Furthermore, the dramatic evolvement in the technical means of visual mediation—TV, real-time live reportage from crisis zones and more lately using cell phones, digital cameras, new media and social media as means of mediation—have meant continuous and considerable shifts in the mediation of distant crises. Technological change has influenced the representational styles and iconography of images of war and pain and has significantly altered the ways in which humanitarian imagery has been presented to Western spectators. What have the recent alterations of global humanitarianism meant in more detail for humanitarian communication and visual representations depicting distant suffering and war during the last decades of the twentieth century? What do the various styles of visual representations of distant suffering tell of their era and its political ethos? This is what I shall outline in the following paragraphs.

2.5.1 UPDATING HUMANITARIAN IMAGES AND MESSAGES

From the mid 1980s onwards both the neutral and a-political ethos of humanitarianism, its concentration on immediate help without changing the settings producing inequality and suffering, were increasingly placed under doubt and criticism. And, as mentioned, consequently, the iconography of bare life, creating the compassion of neocolonialism, gave way to new visual representational practice. The turn of the century meant substantial commentary on the predominant uses of visual representations in humanitarian setting. Negative appeals, resorting to photorealistic images predominantly picturing helplessness and physical suffering, were seen not

²⁶¹ I shall later come back to the term *military humanitarianism* in more length. See For Example **Fox**, 2001; **Chandler**, 2001; **Douzinis**, 2007, 58-66.

²⁶² **Aaltola**, 2009; **Chandler**, 2001; **Chandler** 2002; **Barnett**, 2011.

only as inefficient in arousing empathy—and thus in the context of NGO humanitarianism ineffective in collecting donor money—but were also increasingly seen as unethical, inappropriate and even fallacious modes of picturing Third World and its populations.²⁶³

The criticism stemmed not only from the academic tack, but also from the practitioners of the humanitarian field. At the end of the 1980s, it was stated by European humanitarians that the images and messages projected of the Third World by media and NGOs themselves were undermining the work of development organizations and endangering the solidarity and co-operation between the non-Western perceivers of help and the largely Western humanitarians.²⁶⁴ Concurrently, Western media consumers were reported stating increasingly that they want to be protected from images of horror in the media. The statement “I don’t want to see these photos while eating my breakfast,” can be seen as an emblem of indifference, but it is also often connected to the sensitivity to such images emerging at the time. This led to medias guidelines of representing images of death and suffering.²⁶⁵ As a consequence of the critique, the iconography of bare life has lately been replaced predominantly with a more positive visual representational style, one that has been designed to activate sentiments of hope, by focusing on the similarities and stressing interaction between the distant individuals in the images and their spectators.²⁶⁶

A significant shift in this respect can be traced to the 1989 *Code of conduct on images and messages relating to the Third World*, which was adopted by European NGOs functioning in relief and development fields (The General Assembly of European NGO’s, CONCORD) to guide and regulate communication narratives used in education, public relations and fundraising. The recommendation was to avoid *catastrophic images* that lead to “clear conscience rather than a consideration of root causes.” In other words, the code suggested giving up the bare life representations that create what Chouliaraki calls solidarity as neo-colonialism.²⁶⁷ Further, the code takes up the need to present distant people as human beings with dignity, and it stresses the need to provide the reader with a consideration of and information on the social, cultural and economic environment and cultural identity of Third World countries. The code asserts that the voice of the people should be heard and consulted, and their ability to take responsibility on the issues concerning development should be underlined. The recommendation goes on and states that generalizations should be avoided,

²⁶³ Boltanski, 1999; Moeller, 1991; Cohen, 2001, 185-195, 214-218; Chouliaraki, 60-61

²⁶⁴ *Code of Conduct: Images and Messages Relating to the Third World*, CONCORD, 1989. The General Assembly of European NGO’s (CONCORD) adopted a Code of Conduct on Images and Messages relating to the Third World (the Code) in April 1989. The Code was written in order to challenge and guide NGOs to be attentive to messages that over-simplify or over-concentrate on sensational aspects of life in the Third World, whether in education, public relations or fundraising activities.

²⁶⁵ Campbell, 2004.

²⁶⁶ Chouliaraki, 2013, 61-64; Cohen, 2001, 216-218

²⁶⁷ Chouliaraki, 2013.

the obstacles to development should be clearly indicated, and the interdependence and mutual responsibility of (under)development emphasized. Also causes of poverty, those natural but also those political and historical (such as colonialism or power struggles and vested interests) should be made apparent and exposed in humanitarian communication. The code further adds that the messages of the NGOs (and beyond) should avoid all forms of discrimination—racial, sexual cultural, religious as well as socio-economic—and denounce all forms of oppression and injustice. The predominant role of women as passive, voiceless victims in messages describing the global south is acknowledged and denounced, by stressing the need for a “positive change” in picturing Third World women.²⁶⁸

Such new types of visual representation and humanitarian addressing began to be utilized predominantly in the communication of humanitarian organizations from the late 1980s onwards. But the re-figurations that the code reflects also had a broader effect: they raised more wide-ranging awareness of the problems of picturing the other and, thus, also shifted the focus of other representations—such as media images—describing the Third World in the era. Consequently also media houses have drafted their own best practices, and moulded their conduct on displaying crisis imagery.²⁶⁹ As the CONCORD 1989 code is just one of the documents remodeling the mode of representation in the era, it vividly illustrates and reflects some of the central changes taking place also in the wider setting of the humanitarian field during the era of birth of the CONCORD code, and beyond.

The shift, away from the *catastrophic images* and starkly othered and passive distant sufferers toward empowered characters with a say in the way they are presented, is emblematic of the era in respect of visually depicting suffering, but also in larger terms in regards to humanitarianism. The 1989 code denounces the formerly predominant a-political nature of humanitarianism and dismisses the past tendency of de-politicizing representation. The code further pinpoints the colonial past as the one creating Third World problems and acknowledges that the interests of Western countries in the global south should be recognized. Thus, a move away from representations that picture suffering as a medical, rather than a political phenomenon is called upon in the code. Furthermore, in the reformulation of the code, immediate aid and relief as forces of remedy are dismissed, and an emphasis on *development* takes a central stage as a suitable humanitarian action and narrative. The stress on development here is interweaved with a wider topical shift in humanitarianism away from relief and towards a strong stress on changing the prevalent societal, political, and economic circumstances creating suffering, with the help of externally

²⁶⁸*Code of Conduct: Images and Messages Relating to the Third World*, 1989.

²⁶⁹ See for example: *Media ethics. Issues and Cases*. Patterson, Philip & Wilkins (eds.), Lee. McGraw-Hill, New York, 2008, 206-208. See also: *Making hard choices in journalism ethics. Cases and practise*. Boeyink, David & Borden, Sandra. Routledge, New York 2010; *Society of professional journalist: Code of Ethics*.

imported and governed developmental aid.²⁷⁰ As saving lives under immediate threat, patching up wounds and feeding the hungry was not seen as enough anymore in the age of the liberal humanitarian discourse and project, also the narratives describing the need of help needed to change. Furthermore, a strong emphasis on *human rights issues*—including gender issues and the wider posing of questions on discrimination—and human security, formerly not seen as central in the predominantly relief-oriented humanitarianism, is visible in the reconfiguration of the CONCORD code.²⁷¹ The reformulation of the governing rules of humanitarian messages and visual images, thus, tells a telling tale of the changing ethos of humanitarianism at the brink of the age of liberal humanitarianism, as it sets out new guidelines for altered visibility of humanitarianism for a new era to come.

Positive Appeals, Vulnerability as Tender-Heartedness and Target Orientated Communication

The 1989 Code of conduct on humanitarian images and messages set out to change the ways in which distant suffering and need of help were visualized, by dealing with questions on the inefficacy of distancing visual representations as well as by raising questions on the ethical problems embedded in picturing the pain-stricken others through “catastrophic images.” Historically the dissimilarity and distance produced by images of distant pain has been a dominant issue—and both an ethical as well as a practical dilemma—ever since the times of the Enlightenment. As has been discussed visual humanitarian communication has for centuries relied on displaying images of corporal suffering as a mode of producing emotions of empathy and identification, and thus aspired to awaken the sensation of belonging to the same universal community of humanity with the sufferers in the spectators. But quite paradoxically, the communication practice relying on catastrophic images has often created a sense of horror and suffering belonging to another world, afar from the everyday experiences of the safe spectators, rather than being able to connect the potential helpers with the pain of others. Therefore, the effort of bridging the moral gap, through humanitarian visual representations centered on severe bodily expressed pain, has often resulted in widening the disparity between the spectators and the pain-stricken.²⁷²

At the end of the century, at the brink of the new stage of humanitarianism, the attempt was to bridge this gap by a novel visual strategy. In consequence of the critique of the ethical issues of imagery and the changes suggested in order to measure up with the new challenges and the altered surroundings and ethos of humanitarianism, a new

²⁷⁰ Barnett, 2011, 161-170; Chouliaraki, 2013, 61-64; *Code of Conduct: Images and Messages Relating to the Third World*, CONCORD, 1989.

²⁷¹ *Code of Conduct: Images and Messages Relating to the Third World*, CONCORD, 1989

²⁷² Cohen, 2001, 194-195.

representational practice began to take more space within humanitarian communication appeals. A major change in the novel visual representational style was that it dismissed the practice of showing the sufferers as passive victims. Within the new practice of humanitarian visuality the aim was to present the objects of aid in a personalized manner, with names and stories, with agency and dignity. Within the new representational mode, the visual style of the images is like that of their predecessors, i.e. photorealistic, but the subjects in the images are not nameless, passive or on the verge of dying, and the atmosphere is not one of paralyzing hopelessness. Images used within this visual regime are rather hopeful, picturing even happy and smiling individuals in realistic surroundings. Typically such images depict, for example children attending school. The images take as their subjects the local inhabitants of crisis zones, but they picture them as attending to their daily chores, working and interacting. These representations even commonly portray people in fragile settings actively trying to better their situation and developing their societies by demanding a better quality of life, as well as their own rights. As the attempt is to display circumstances creating inequality, distress and suffering following a novel logic, the root causes of suffering are not predominantly presented via injured, suffering and battered bodies any more.²⁷³ (Pictured in the illustration **2.4.** are 2 emblematic, thick images representing the mode of addressing in positive appeals .²⁷⁴)

In comparison to the former bare life representations banking on catastrophic images and a negative style of addressing, Stanley Cohen and Lillie Chouliaraki call the novel types of appeals “positive appeals.” As important as the novel type of representing the objects of help is, also the way in which the representations of the new regime invite their spectators to see the distant individuals in need is significant. The aim of such addressing is to bring the distant people closer to the spectators and to make the spectators feel and recognize that they belong to the same register of humanity with the distant people in need of their help. As the shock-effect of corporal suffering was replaced by a call for personal identification with those in need by Westerners living in abundant welfare, skeleton-like bare life characters dying of diarrhea could not function as the objects of the images anymore. In order to create benevolence and will to help the visual addressing style of the images was switched to hopeful sceneries, centering on similarities and focusing on visualizations evoking warm-hearted sensations in the spectators. The mode of addressing in the appeals characteristic of the age of liberal humanitarianism is one that Chouliaraki terms positive appeals and iconography of *vulnerability as tender-heartedness* and *spectacles of self-determination and hope*. Such representations stress the *similarity* between us and them, the spectators

²⁷³ ***Code of Conduct: Images and Messages Relating to the Third World***, CONCORD, 1989; See for example, Chouliaraki, 2013, 61-65; Cohen, 2001, 216-218.

²⁷⁴ Included in the Illustration **2.4.**, “Positive appeals/ images”: an image from a Unicef appeal Humanitarian action for children/Chad, 2016, picturing a happy mother and a newborn child. And an appeal-image of the *Salesian Mission* from September 2015.

and the spectated, focusing on the universally shared features of all humans (beyond vulnerability and the ability to suffer). Within this representational practice the victims of pain and atrocity needed to be portrayed as familiar, *ordinary people* (from the perspective of the spectator).²⁷⁵

As the novel mode of addressing is inviting the spectators to see the distant sufferers as similar to 'us', the addressing of the appeals, furthermore, strives to make a claim that the misfortune pictured could also encounter oneself, or people like 'us'. The positive appeals ask the spectator to imagine herself as a person who may come under threat in a setting that may seem genuinely possible in the lifeworlds of the spectators; they call their audience to imagine themselves as the undeserving victims of maladies, such as sickness, rape or illegitimate prosecution, and thus invite the spectators to engage with the suffering through *identification*. Concurrently, the Western inhabitants and spectators have been invited to intimately and directly participate in the lives of personified distant people in need, through novel participatory, benevolent and development-spirited campaigns, such as adopting an African child whose schooling to sponsor or buying a goat for a Bangladeshi family in order sustainably support their well-being. Thus, the shift in focus has also been from *victim-orientated* to *target-orientated* appeals and addressing. Even more so than before, the feelings aroused by the representations are again—just like formerly, during the history of visual humanitarian communication—principally centering on the Westerners as the spectators, on the feelings of identification and sameness of the spectators at face with such images, rather than centering on the objects of help. Thus also here, the theatrical arrangement of humanitarian images is again clearly detectable.²⁷⁶

But, although the novel, more positively assembled representations aim at more complex, ethical and authentic representation of the vulnerable others, the spectacles of hope and self-determination have also attracted vocal critique, for example, for being inefficient in both arousing the will to help and in bridging the gap between the spectators in abundance of welfare and the suffering others. Firstly, presenting the suffering inhabitants of the less developed world through empowering sceneries of self-determination and sunny hopefulness may make the spectators feel similarity and identification with the distant individuals, but the hope-filled sceneries may potentially misrecognize the surrounding reality of the global misfortunate and obscure the differences in surroundings and possibilities between the spectators and the distant others. In reality, populations living in wealthy northern/Western states with developed, steady and relatively lawful institutions have a vastly different level of self-determination, possibilities and means to help themselves compared to the populations living in fragile, disorderly and less wealthy settings.²⁷⁷ Additionally, images of smiling children and empowered

²⁷⁵ Chouliaraki, 2013, 61-64. Cohen, 2001, 216-218.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁷ Chouliaraki, 2013, 62-63.

women may lead to another kind of misleading illusion, which is countering the aim of the representations. Overtly positive representations of the everyday life of distant others may give the impression that “they are just like us” up to the point in which the spectators see no reason in helping the seemingly perfectly well-off smiling children of the Third World depicted in the images. Furthermore, stressing the agency and self-determination of the distant strangers potentially produces an illusion of ‘no help needed,’ since the overtly positive and empowering picturing suggests that the objects of the images are perfectly capable of helping themselves. These representations risk arousing the question: Why should we help, if everything is already taken care of and “they” are just like “us”?²⁷⁸ Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, the stress on development and human rights, and the practice of picturing the distant needy strangers “just like us” risks assimilating the distant others under *our norm*. At the time of the liberal humanitarianism this practice exemplifies larger global structural power relations prevalent in the humanitarian practices beyond organization-based humanitarianism.²⁷⁹

2.5.2 ICONOGRAPHY OF SOLIDARITY AS DEVELOPMENT AND EMERGING STATE INTERVENTIONIST HUMANITARIANISM

The communicative practice of positive appeals and tender-hearted representations, revolving around the universal similarity of humans, the ethos of development and human rights, reflects a substantial shift in the humanitarian project and its ethos—also in larger terms than within the NGO humanitarianism. The emphasis of humanitarianism on development, and further on human rights and human security issues, reproduced in humanitarian communication and imagery—also reflects the substantial changes the (Western lead) humanitarian discourse and paradigm have gone through from the mid-1980s onwards. Starting from the disillusionment of the Biafris and the founding of MSF in the early 1970s, the disaffection within the inefficient and a-political humanitarian practice of non-intervention has been prevailing. Incrementally the frustration with neutral help, the sense of powerlessness in the face of the suffering of others, and the critique of a-political aid orientation led to a generalized practice of going beyond immediate aid. In the later 1980s this trend resulted in an expanding orientation toward progress and enhanced human security via humanitarian-development projects, and further it led to an emphasis on human rights as providing improved living conditions for the vulnerable others.²⁸⁰

Concurrently, after the shift in the global balance of power after the fall of the Soviet regime and the collapse of the Cold War binary system and at the turn of the century, Western states adopted human security, development,

²⁷⁸ Cohen, 2001, 183-184.

²⁷⁹ Chouliaraki, 2013, 62-64.

²⁸⁰ On the alteration of humanitarianism at the turn of the century, see for example: Barnett, 2011, 161- 170; Duffield, 2007; Chandler, 2002; Douzinas, 2007; Fox, 2001; Aaltola, 2009.

and the policy of securitizing crisis areas as their predominant international political interests. This has meant increasing use of humanitarian rhetoric in the international political tool box of Western countries and general framing of Western international politics as humanitarian, human rights, human security and development centered. Moreover, the rise of humanitarianism from the political margins into a focal component of Western international politics and into an expression of the shared values of the “international community” has also led to a system, in which the Western states have increasingly defined their interests in the global setting under the guise of development, human rights and humanitarianism. This trend has manifested itself in the use of humanitarianism as a source of rhetorical legitimization of foreign political actions and development projects driven by political interest but explained by universal moral imperatives. The interventionist humanitarian spirit of Western international political agenda has also led to different procedures of managing and containing threats, such as terrorism, within crisis areas by “humanitarian methods” and, furthermore, to humanitarily framed military operations, wars and occupations, such as the Kosovo campaign 1999.²⁸¹

The altered core interest and novel definitions of policy, both in organizational humanitarian settings as well as in the Western world political surroundings, are manifoldly entangled, concurrent and in many ways complementary. Thus, the late twentieth century changes in picturing the perceivers of others’ need of help through themes of universal similarity also produces other significant outcomes, which are strongly tied to the concurrent politicized human rights orientation, developmentalist ethos and the interventionist spirit of emerging state humanitarianism. Picturing and perceiving the distant, vulnerable Non-Western others as “just like us” in Western representations makes interventions into the living conditions—and societal, cultural and political structures—of the Third World inhabitants seem valid and results in seeing the assimilation of the distant people into Western world politics through “our norms” as practical and right. As humanitarian visuals circulating in the Western publicity have turned into portraying distant others as “just like us”, the Western spectating audiences have perhaps grown accustomed to feeling that molding the surroundings of the depicted non-Westerners so that they become equivalent to Western (societal, cultural, political) structures is acceptable, in extreme cases even by forced military intervention. Therefore, the visual “spectacles of hope and self-determination” exemplify the power relations of *developmentalism* and produce *solidarity as development*, as Chouliaraki terms it.²⁸² But, furthermore, these representations also epitomize and reflect the growingly aggressive interventionist humanitarian outlook adopted by Western states as a strategy of securitizing “fragile states” and governing global crisis areas.

²⁸¹Ibid.

²⁸² Chouliaraki, 2013, 62-64.

Therefore essentially, by attempting to empower the distant sufferers with positive performativity, the development-driven positive appeals, by claiming the objects of the images as the same as the majorly Western spectators, end up disempowering the sufferers by substituting their right to define their own norms etc. with the Western norms of human rights, political structures, of correct conduct and good governance and perceptions of good life and preferable society. Furthermore, the logic of universalism and empathy-induced sameness, in this mode of humanitarian communication, subjugate the distant others to a Western political project of securitization, legitimized by development-based state humanitarianism, and expose the distant others even to wars fought in the name of humanitarianism forcefully helping distant others. As the positive appeals centering on development, agency, human rights and similarity between the Western spectators/actors and majorly non-Western objects of help/actions, produce benevolent sentiments in the spectators, paradoxically, at the same time, the interventionist moral feelings operate as instruments of Western power over the rest of the world. In other words, the interventionist ethos of the emerging Western lead *humanitarian world politics* is blatantly visible in the iconography of solidarity as development, and concurrently construct the ways in which the Western spectator apprehends world politics, themselves and the “others” of the world.

In the same era, during which the governing idea of organizational NGO humanitarianism shifted from relief to development, the number of organizations in the broadening humanitarian field has grown significantly, and the economic value of humanitarian aid and the money moving in the field has substantially increased. The amount of money allocated especially to emergency relief aid, as well as to development aid, has steadily increased from the late 1970s onwards, but really skyrocketed from the early 1990s onwards. Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss show the humanitarian aid business growing from \$2 billion in 1990 to \$6 billion ten years later, followed by another tripling to \$18 billion by 2008. Especially NGO and private money flows have increased, but at the same time also government money allocated to development aid and peacekeeping has substantially grown. *James Fearon* explains the rise by the somewhat late response of major donor countries to the increased need of aid, created by the spread of civil war from the late 1970s onwards, but also by the winding down of the Cold War. As the Cold War system shifted, the attention of major Western powers, their voting publics, and the media was increasingly turned towards global high-profile civil wars, which were increasingly met with international—often Western-lead—humanitarian interventions.²⁸³

²⁸³ **Fearon, James, D:** *The Rise of Emergency Relief Aid*. In *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics*, Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss, eds. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2008, 49-72.

The growth of humanitarian organizations and industry, as well as the heightened status of humanitarianism in international relations in the late twentieth century, also reflects and corresponds to the rise of new communication technologies, visualization of Western societies and the upsurge in advertising in the humanitarian field. This has meant increasing visibility for humanitarianism and humanitarian imagery in the Western public life. Humanitarian imagery has caught the eyes of the Western public via a growing number of appeals inviting potential donors through new modes of appeals, distributed via technological applications, divergent campaigning styles and intensifying humanitarian addressing from diverse directions. Over the past decades humanitarianism has increasingly penetrated the life of Western citizens in a number of new ways, from public charity concerts, celebrity appeals, popular television programs revolving around the issues of helping the distant individuals in need to an atmosphere supporting humanitarianism, addressing Western citizens in divergent and often interventionist modes.²⁸⁴

Furthermore, the increased visibility of humanitarianism within the Western public sphere has been topped by the upsurge of humanitarian issues and reasoning within intergovernmental political settings. As the prominence of humanitarian issues in high-level politics has substantially grown, humanitarianism in Western political rhetoric and the legitimization of international issues have become more customary over the recent decades.²⁸⁵ This rhetorical turn has, furthermore, strengthened the presence of humanitarianism also at the level of everyday life and experiences of Western citizens. This broad *humanitarization* of the public and political life in the West, I argue, has led to a situation in which the humanitarian framing of international politics and approach to the surrounding world has progressively come to determinate how we, the Western citizens, see not only the humanitarian modus operandi of helping the distant others in need and despair. Moreover, I argue that, during the era, humanitarianism—broadly understood—has become an influential (unconscious) ideology, central to Western public and political life, significantly impacting our apprehension of the global world of peoples surrounding us and our own status in this world.²⁸⁶

2.5.3 VISUAL MEDIATION OF POST-COLD WAR MILITARY CONFLICTS

Spectacles banking on soft, benevolent images aiming at sensations of similarity and universality became the new endorsed mode of representing

²⁸⁴ See for example: **Kennedy, Denis**: *Selling the Distant Other: Humanitarianism and Imagery-ethical dilemmas of Humanitarian Action*. The journal of humanitarian assistance, 2009. ; **Chouliaraki**, 2013, 5-6 ; **Yrjölä**, 2014.

²⁸⁵ See for example: **Aaltola**, 2009.

²⁸⁶ I shall open this line of thought more broadly in the following chapter 3.

the distant others within organizational humanitarianism at the turn of the century, and the tendency was to avoid using catastrophic images of human suffering. But again, like earlier in history, this proves not to be the whole picture defining the representational practices or the use of iconography of distant suffering within the wider frame of humanitarianism and the apprehension of vulnerable humanity of the era. Therefore, in this section I shall engage with other influential and emblematic visual representation of distant suffering and need of help, entailing a humanitarian mode of addressing, circulating in the Western publicity during the era. By this I aim at further opening up the relations between visual images and humanitarian involvement at the turn of the century and beyond.

Despite the codes of conduct and governing rules on humanitarian imagery in organizational settings, we also encounter human suffering and need of help through visual representations presented by other than humanitarian organizations. Political turmoil, violence and war at the turn of the century have been iconized in the Western imaginary through widely circulated media images of human suffering, pictured substantially by shocking images of corporal pain. Images of Somali fighters dragging a US soldier through the streets of Mogadishu (1993) became emblematic of the US war effort in Somalia.²⁸⁷ Also images of mutilated bodies of Tutsis, who perished in the mass killings of the Rwandan civil war (1990-1994), floating in rivers, lying tangled in piles and mutilated by machete strokes, permeated the eyes of Western media spectators in the early 1990s. The pain and destruction of the Yugoslav wars (1991-2001) was mediated and cemented into our awareness via images of mass graves, cities destroyed by siege and sniper fire, as well as via images of skeleton-like concentration camp inmates.²⁸⁸ No matter how forcefully the images of violence, inequality and suffering are encouraged and recommended to be pictured in a more ethical and polished manner, emergencies, wars and immediate situations of brute violence inevitably break the code of ethics—and mediatized crisis and war brings back the haunting images of corpses. Such images picturing brutal violations of bodily human integrity and humanity became to be, in this era, more political than perhaps ever before, as the horrors pictured were frequently referred to when rationalizing and justifying the Western military interventions in the situations causing these horrors. (See Illustration **2.4**²⁸⁹)

As stated above, this significant point of ethical alteration in the ever more politicized international humanitarianism can denote the era of the

²⁸⁷ The images that became widely circulated, debated and influential— and iconized —were shot by a Canadian war journalist *Paul Watson*. He won the Pulitzer prize in 1994 with the images.

²⁸⁸ For example images of the sieged Sarajevo, people living midst the destruction of war and running to avoid sniper fire, and photos of *Ron Haviu* of the inmates of the Trnopolje camp in Bosnia (1992) and brutalities of the war became widespread in western publicity. See some of the iconic the images for example here: <http://time.com/3787440/bosnia/>

²⁸⁹ Included in the illustration **2.3** Paul Watson's image from Somalia 1992 and Ron Haviu's image from Bosnia in Bijeljina 1992, in which "Arkans's Tigers" paramilitary troop soldier have killed and kick local civilians.

new world order, emerging from the end of the Cold War. During the wars in the Former Yugoslavia the new humanitarian paradigm of the West was materialized, which can be seen in how the principles of “right to criticism” and “right of intervention” were extensively deployed. This is when attempting to help “those who are striving against oppression” in “their struggle for dignity and basic human rights” became an essential part of the Western political humanitarian discourse.²⁹⁰ Concurrently with the emerging interventionism, television and satellite technology increasingly enabled real-time mediation straight from crisis zones. The visual mediation of crises and altered foreign policy dynamics of the turn of the century have been often referred to and defined by the concept of the *CNN effect*. The CNN effect can be described as a popular thesis, which suggests that witnessing foreign conflicts by means of real-time, live reportage from crisis areas can powerfully affect public opinion, create sentimental outrage in the distant spectators and, thus, bolster public condemnation of atrocities. The often reiterated idea of the CNN effect theory has been that (global) international televised news coverage from crisis zones—and especially crude images of suffering inflicted by wars and political violence—would not only influence public opinion, but, further, pressure political leaders to react more promptly and forcefully to war crimes, atrocities and human rights violations, often by (military) interventionist means.²⁹¹ Novel visual mediation technology, changes in global power structures and alterations in humanitarian ideals combined to create the new kind of perception, and answer, to distant wars and crises.

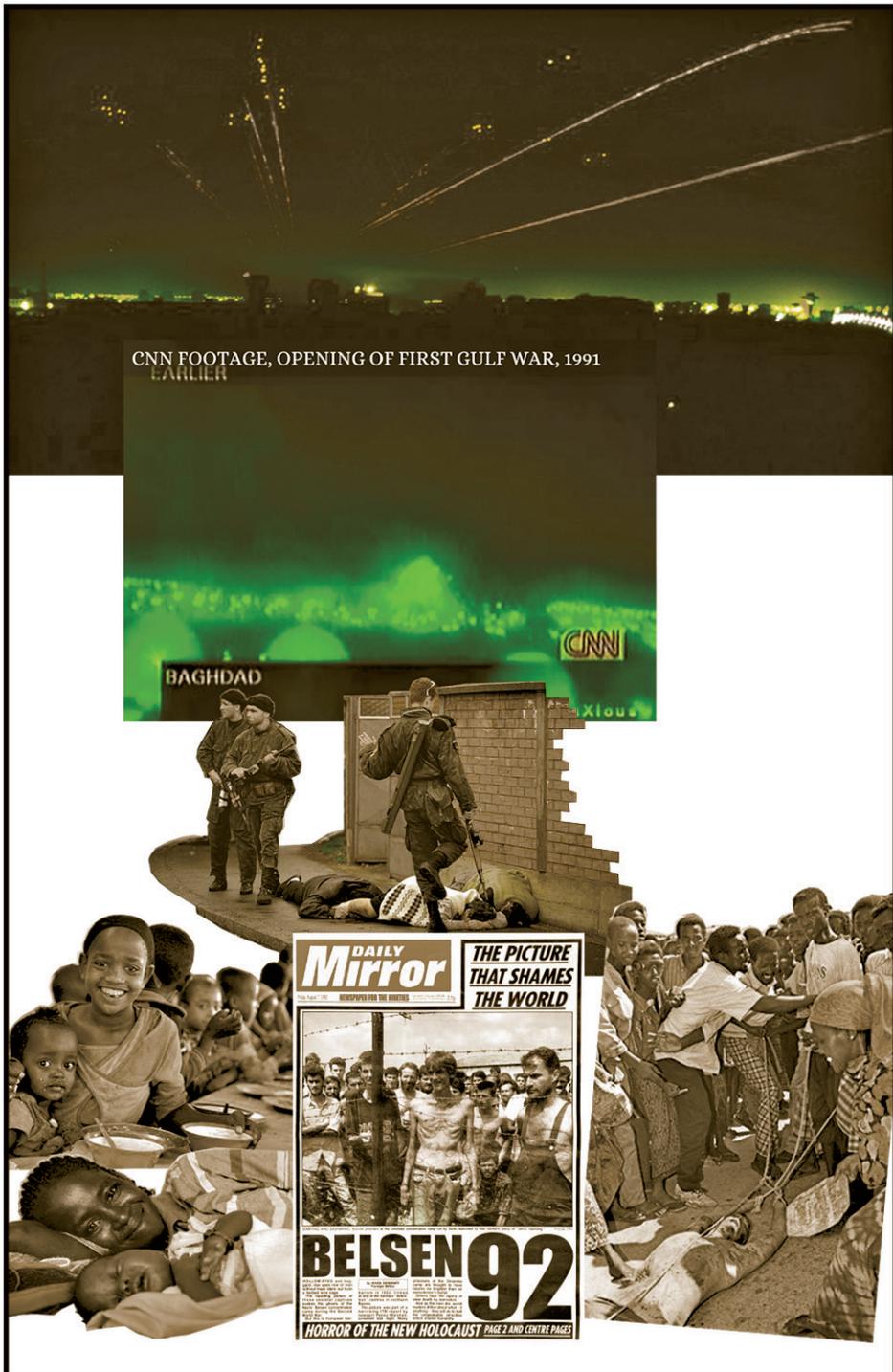
Whilst a major factor in the CNN effect was the growingly fast-paced and wide circulation of brutal and shocking images of distant wars and crises among (Western) audiences, also a very different mode of presenting military conflicts thrived concurrently. The *Gulf War* (1990-1991) has been commonly termed—referring to its visual presentation, mediation and perception—a war in which visual material reaching the eyes of Western spectators was heavily controlled by the military and the images of war were largely sanitized bloodless. The “brave new war” of Westerners, fought above Iraq was pictured unprecedentedly: shot by the nose cameras of “smart bombs” and presented through Western superior technological force, appeared like a computer game; unreal and distant from the reality on the ground. As a result of the novel representational practice and effective control and governance of war imagery, relatively few human casualties were seen, and the war was made to look like it did not yield human sacrifices or cause suffering.

There is a stark difference in the visual presentation of Gulf war, waged by the Western super power, the USA, when it is contrasted with the brutal

²⁹⁰ **Chandler**, 2001, 685. (quote from George Foulkes speech, 17.4.1998)

²⁹¹ **Robinson**, 2002; **Giboa, Eyatan**: *The CNN Effect: The search for a Communications theory of International Relations*. Political Communication, 22, 2005, 27-44

images that were circulated and presented of the wars by *others* during the same era, (in these the Western powers sometimes played an interventionist part, but one which they were not seen as starting the wars *per se*). This, again, shows how different modes of picturing war, the need of help and suffering of distant strangers thrive concurrently, and illustrates the segmented and collage-like nature of humanitarian imagery as encountered by (media) spectators. Moreover, the visual framing of the Gulf war as a bloodless, technological and relatively nonviolent, surgical operation—in terms of visible human suffering—is remarkable, and it can be seen to have significant ramifications for the future visual representation of Western wars. It is also emblematic of how the Western powers, the USA in front, came to govern and control the image flows from its war zones in a way that fit the humanitarian political atmosphere and reasoning at the brink of the new century. Thus, the First Gulf War reflects the character of Western humanitarian international politics to come. In the following paragraphs I shall explicate these themes in more detail.



Chapter 2. Illustration 2.4.

2.5.4 WITNESSING SUFFERING LIVE: THE CNN EFFECT AND THE EMERGING WESTERN INTERVENTIONIST WORLD POLITICS

Despite the predominant shift by humanitarian organizations towards benevolent images in the 1990s, when looked at through media images of wars and crises the era appears perhaps surprisingly violent. Western media audiences began to be increasingly bombarded with real-time live coverage from crisis and war zones, accompanied by striking imagery of enfolded, often violent events. The CNN effect theory that emerged in the post-Cold War era was inspired by the novel news mediation through satellite technology. Especially CNN, an independent US News Corporation founded in 1980, was the first news agency strongly relying on live reportage straight from global crisis areas and was, thus, often hailed as an emblem of change in crisis reporting and power.²⁹²

There are numerous different interpretations on how the CNN effect actually functions. Some of the readings strongly highlight the causal effect that images of suffering, mediated by the novel resources, with more speed, density and mass, have on foreign policy actions and international (humanitarian) interventions. For example *Feist* (2001) writes: "the CNN effect is a theory that compelling television images, such as images of a humanitarian crises, cause US policy makers to intervene in a situation when such an intervention might otherwise not be in the US national interest". Similar, yet more moderate conclusions were made by, among others, *Seib* (2002), who explained that CNN effect illustrates "[t]he dynamic tension that exists between real-time television news and policymaking, with the news having an upper hand in terms of influence".²⁹³ These readings suggest that mediation of crisis news and images has the power to forcefully affect foreign policy, even to *force* it by addressing the media audiences and furthermore Western policy makers in a humanitarian and interventionist mode.

Western journalistic real-time live reportage from topical global crisis zones—and especially the heightened use of mediation of graphic images of human suffering—was seen as a means of waking up the (Western) public to the atrocious events in distant areas and, thus, pressuring political decision-makers into interventionist actions in often distant corners of the world. The new kind of crisis mediation and the journalists involved in it have even been virtually accused of the emergence of Western humanitarian interventionist political approach to various foreign crises in the 1990s. The former British foreign secretary *Douglas Hurd* blamed the foreign correspondents in the Bosnian crisis for advocating military intervention, calling them the founding members of the "something must be done school", as he saw the journalists as partly constituting the system of intervention.²⁹⁴ The former UN Secretary General *Boutros Boutros-Ghali* has been quoted as saying that the CNN acts

²⁹² **Robinson**, 2002; **Giboa**, 2005, 27-44

²⁹³ Cited in **Giboa**, 2005, 29.

²⁹⁴ Cited in **Giboa, Eytan**: *Global Communication and Foreign Policy*, Journal of Communication, 52/4, 2002, pp.731-747, 734.

as the “sixteenth member of the Security Council” due to the effect its crisis reportage had on international decision-making.²⁹⁵ It seems that the concurrent novelties of the post-Cold War era—visual real-time mediation and powerful emergence of the political concept of Western humanitarian intervention—intermingled, and that the concurrent novelties produced the idea of the CNN effect. Because of the historical simultaneousness and the intermingling of the two novelties, it was commonly suggested—and perhaps hoped—that novel revelatory mediation of crude images of suffering (and their empathetic power) and the emerging Western humanitarily legitimized practices in international relations would consequently work together to make the world a better, more secure, less violent place.²⁹⁶

Other scholars have seen the CNN effect in more moderate or even critical terms and have viewed media’s role in foreign relations more as a strategic enabler of (Western) political involvement and intervention.²⁹⁷ Even as the “CNN myth” seems to still live on in public notions, the belief in the potency of mediatized images of suffering to form or direct—even to force—foreign policy has also been widely questioned and criticized, and the causal logic at the core of the claim has been effectively disputed by research. *Pierce Robinson*, in his influential 2002 book *The CNN Effect: The Myth of News, Foreign Policy and Intervention*, studies the role of media reportage in the “humanitarian” interventions of Iraq, Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo and Rwanda. He differentiates between strong and weak effects of the media reportage on political actions and makes the claim that, if the policy of the political actor (most often the US) is certain, reportage does not make much difference. However, he asserts that media reportage showing humanitarian distress may have an effect in cases in which the policy (geopolitical interests and will to act) is uncertain.²⁹⁸ For example, in relation to the US intervention in Somalia, in the early 1990s called operation *Restore Hope*, he concluded that:

If, however, the media played any significant role at all vis-à-vis the policy process it was an enabler and then a builder of support. Policy makers, aware of the prior sympathy toward the suffering in

²⁹⁵ **Television’s impact on UN Resembles ‘sixteenth’ Security Council member, says Secretary-General, in address opening world television Forum**, UN, Press Release, November 12, 1996.

²⁹⁶ **Robinson, Piers**: *The CNN effect. The Myth of News, foreign policy and intervention*. Routledge, New York, 2002; **Perlmutter, David D**: *Photojournalism and Foreign Policy. Icons of Outrage in International Crisis*. Praeger, London, 1998.

²⁹⁷ See for example: **Robinson**, 2002; **Livingston, Steven**: *Beyond the “CNN effect”: the media-foreign policy dynamic*. In *Politics and the Press: the news media and their influences*, ed. Norris, Pippa, Lynne Rienner, Boulder, 1997, 291-318; **Belknap, Margaret**: *The CNN effect: Strategic enabler or operational risk?* *Parameters*, 32/2002, 100-114; **Strobel, Warren, P**: *Late Breaking foreign policy: the news media’s influence on peace operations*, United states institute for peace, Washington, 1997; **Neuman, Johanna**: *Lights, Camera, war: is media technology Driving International Politics?* St Martin’s Press, New York, 1996.

²⁹⁸ **Robinson**, 2002.

*Somalia among journalist and the public, could act confidently in the knowledge that an intervention could easily be sold to the public.*²⁹⁹

Therefore, in this view, media reportage of humanitarian suffering can be rather seen as an enabler of interventionist policy, or even a strategic political tool; a powerful source of legitimation, rather than a force pressuring and forcing policy makers to act against their will or interests. Many other researchers on the issue more or less agree with this view.³⁰⁰

Therefore it could be said, in contradiction to the CNN effect thesis, that political interests and strategic evaluations have been far more likely driving forces behind international military interventions in atrocious crisis situations than the amount of horrific images, or the new technological means of mediation. In line with what Sontag has argued on the power of images, it seems that images may give a push to action and strengthen political reactions only, if there is enough cultural, ideological and political resonance to prop their messages, and, above all, if there is enough political power, and geopolitical and economic interests to reinforce their account.³⁰¹

Picturing Suffering in the Yugoslav Wars

Images of the Yugoslav Wars serve as examples of the political utilization of suffering images in the age of the CNN effect and within the emerging Western political interventionist humanitarian spirit and future military operations. British *Independent Television News* (ITN) published images of the Serb *Trnopolje camp* on the 6th of August 1992. The television report identified the camps as Bosnian Serb authorities' tools of ethnic cleansing, and showed images revealing the suffering of Bosnian Muslims at the camps. Widespread public outrage followed. Images of weary, starving men pictured behind barbed wire made the front pages of Western papers. Especially an extremely thin man, with his ribs sticking out—a Bosnian prisoner named *Fickret Alic*—was featured at the fore in many of the widely circulated images. For the Western spectators Alic came to symbolize the atrocities inflicted by the Serbs and horrors of the Yugoslav Wars.³⁰² A day from the publication of the ITN report images of the camps filled the front covers. The headlines cried out: “Belsen -92’: Horror of the new Holocaust”³⁰³, “Must it go on? The Balkans: Muslim prisoners at a Serbian detention camp.”³⁰⁴ and “The proof: Behind Barbed Wire, the brutal truth about suffering in Bosnia.”³⁰⁵ All of these papers displayed the same image of the inmates, with

²⁹⁹ Ibid. 62-63

³⁰⁰ See for example: **Livingston**, 1997; **Belknap**, 2002; **Strobel**, 1997; **Neuman**, 1996.

³⁰¹ **Sontag**, 1977, 17; **Sontag**, 2003, 80-84.

³⁰³ The cover of *The Daily Mirror*, August 7th 1992. Included in the Illustration 2.4.

³⁰⁴ The cover of *The Time*, August 7th, 1992.

³⁰⁵ The Cover of *The Daily Mail*, August 7th, 1992

Alic on the front. (Included in the illustration **2.4**, the cover of the Daily Mirror, August 7th 1992 picturing the inmates at the Trnopolje camp.)

These images were, in their media use and their political contexts, framed to resemble the horrors of the Nazi-style concentration camps and the Holocaust. In the imagination of the Western spectators, the images of skeleton-like inmates of a concentration camp, presented as suffering behind barbed wire fences, effectively recalled the memory of the Holocaust—the ground zero point of modern humanity. The “never again” argument, referring to the Holocaust, was central in the framing of the images and pointed to the need of intervention for the sake of saving humanity.³⁰⁶ The images did not just spark public outrage among the media spectators, but came to be commonly referred to in political surroundings. The Former British Prime Minister *Margaret Thatcher* criticized his successor *John Major* of not taking action by saying “I thought I would never see another Holocaust in my life.” It has also been reported that the American public approval of the intervention in the Yugoslav War sparked up from 35% to over 50% after the publication of the images. Furthermore the images gained a lot of attention in policy circles and were, for example, later used as evidence of Serbian war crimes at the War Crimes Tribunal in Hague. Therefore, some have seen these images as significant for the 1996 US troop deployment in Bosnia and as an emblem of the force of the CNN effect.³⁰⁷ But what did the images actually do at the international political level?

There has been a lot of public controversy over the images of Trnopolje and Omarska camps. Most famously a magazine *Living Marxism* (LM) claimed that the images were, if not fabricated, at least framed in their presentation in a way that they pointed to the monstrosity of Serbs—and consequently in the Western media they pointed to the necessity of intervention. The LM article argued that in the media and politics the framing of the images of ITN led to the conclusion that the depicted camp was a Serb concentration camp for destruction of the prisoners. However, the article asserted that, in reality, this was not the case. LM claimed that the facility was rather more like a refugee camp, from which the people were free to leave at will, and suggested that the pictures were shot from behind the barber wire in order to create a false impression of forced detainment. *Thomas Deichmann*, in his LM article, made the claim that the images and their use in the Western media produced a CNN effect, paving the road for the later deployment of Western troops on the ground in Bosnia in 1996.³⁰⁸ Despite the commonly acknowledged data of Serbian war crimes, this quarrel

³⁰⁶ **Campbell, David:** *Atrocity, Memory, Photography: imaging the concentration camps of Bosnia – the case of ITN versus Living Marxism*, Journal of Human Rights Vol. 1/ nr 1, 2002(A.),1-33;
Campbell, David: *Atrocity, Memory, Photography: imaging the concentration camps of Bosnia – the case of ITN versus Living Marxism*, part 2. Journal of Human Rights, Vol 1, nr. 2, 2002 (B.), 143-172.

³⁰⁷ **Campbell,** 2002(B), 157-158.

³⁰⁸ **Deichmann, Thomas:** *The Picture that Fooled the World*. In *Living Marxism*, February 1997.

over the intention and framing of the images has been going on until recent years.³⁰⁹

Thus, the ITN images have been nominated as an occasion of the CNN effect really taking place.³¹⁰ But *David Campbell* argues that what the televised images of atrocity actually lead to was more political pressure, which was more of a challenge for the US (and Western) officials to withstand. The West went, on this occasion, to lengths in the effort of not naming the events as genocide. Campbell claims that, at the time of the ITN images were aired, the political will to intervene was not there, and thus the intervention did not initially take place, in spite of the images and the heated debate. He goes on and argues that the Western policy with regard to the situation in Bosnia was not changed by the images, but he sees that rather the story the images told was effectively hushed down by Western leaders. Campbell sees the Trnopolje images, following the argument made by *David Perlmutter* (1998) on the effect of crisis images in foreign politics, more as “icons of outrage”, stirring controversy, accolades and emotion, but achieving absolutely nothing in regards to change in policy.³¹¹

Nevertheless, the case of the Trnopolje camp images and their framings in media and in Western politics seems to strengthen the claim that images of suffering and crisis were, at the time of the heated CNN effect discussion and emerging Western humanitarian international orientation, utilized and presented in the Western publicity in line with the predominant political orientation and ethos of the time. But, the CNN effect, in regards to the role of suffering images in *forcing* or changing the politics of international crises or, especially, military intervention is very contingent and complex. Although the position of global interests and cold strategic political calculations as the number one driving force of intervention, military involvement and foreign policy decisions may not have been challenged or transformed by crisis reporting, nevertheless the legitimation of Western international actions altered in the era—and so did the images picturing Western warfare.

Belief in Technologically Driven Causality

Nevertheless, despite the fact that the CNN effect theses—as well as the Vietnam War syndrome argument discussed earlier—have been effectively rebutted in research, a belief on the political potency of mediatised atrocity images at the core of these arguments is noteworthy and remarkable, and the thesis still seems today very vital to the discourse on the effects of atrocity images. In wider terms this belief, resting on the history of humanitarian communication relying on a major part on the mediation of visual images of pain, seems not to have been born in the television era or the era of satellite technology, but it can be traced back in history, all the way back at least to

³⁰⁹ See for example: **Campbell, David**: *Atrocity and Memory; Poison in the Well of History*. The Guardian, March 15th, 2000.

³¹⁰ For instance : **Goving, N**: *Real-time TV coverage from war: does it make or break government policy?* In *Bosnia by Television*, ed. Gow. J, British Film Institute, London, 1996.

³¹¹ **Campbell**, 2002 (2.), 157-158; **Perlmutter**, 1998, 28.

the times of the Enlightenment, and thus it has been influencing the discourse on images of suffering and politics of empathy during the past centuries.

Technological innovations in the field of (visual) communication are commonly seen to have strengthened the impact of humanitarian images. *Johanna Neuman* argues that this hope of being able to influence humanitarian politics has been renewed time and time again in the course of history, every time a technological innovation has taken place. May it be the Guttenberg revolution, invention of photography, familiarization of pictorial magazines, or the use of real-time news coverage from crisis zones, it has commonly been hoped that images mediated through novel means could make a difference in the reactions to crises and the suffering of others.³¹² This line of thinking can also be found in the discourse on the power of revelatory images of war to generate anti-war sentiments at the turn of the century, as well as in the established discourse on the effect of the Holocaust images on the evolvment and institutionalization of human rights dealt with earlier. This hopeful belief has been again renewed in the TV-era, more lately by the live reportage from crisis zones in the form of the CNN effect, and even more lately by the use of Internet and social media in mediating distant distress. Therefore I argue that the historically formed, optimistic belief in the causal “the more we see, the more we do” phenomena is detectable throughout the course of the history of humanitarian communication, although shaped by the surrounding historical and ideological settings.

Still today we seem to keenly believe in the centuries old idea that technology of (visual) mediation may alter the ways in which we (the spectating world) react to the suffering of others, and that mediated images of suffering may function as building blogs of a better, more secure and just world. Therefore, it could even be said that this idea banking on the potency of images in producing political outcomes lies at the core of the prevalent humanitarian discourse and is central in the overall use and position of visual images in humanitarian communication. The persistent (mythical) belief in the political potency of atrocity images in awaking empathetic reactions—or even in gradually bettering the status of humanity, in enabling a strengthened global moral ties between the sufferers and the spectators—seems to suggest that almost a straight correlation between seeing more, caring more and doing more on the suffering of others (and even perhaps more forcefully preventing suffering) exists. This line of thought produces what I call a *causality effect*; a positive, technology-driven belief of the humanitarian political power of atrocity images in the context of international politics and their potency in furthering the humanitarian project, i.e. making the world a better, less violent, more humane place.³¹³

This causality belief not only exists as a generally reiterated popular discourse but it also is foundational in the utilization of crisis images in

³¹² *Neuman*, 1996.

³¹³ *Cottle*, 2009, 131.

humanitarian settings, from organizational humanitarian communication to media's crisis reporting. Moreover, the causality belief, in its diverse historical manifestations, seems to be quite often reiterated also in relevant research. Humanitarian organizations as well as news media constantly develop new and, wishfully, more effective ways of visually communicating the agony of others, attempting to raise the awareness of the spectators awareness. The hope of a more direct, and thus more forceful, effect seems to always be restored when new ways of mediating news and images from crisis zones is invented. This hopeful belief in the power of images exists and continuously hovers behind the discourse on crisis and suffering imagery. As in the TV-era, the belief was founded on the reliance in the mass media's power of shaping public opinion, and the line of argument stresses that there is a causal logic embedded in the way that images of atrocity work on political levels. Furthermore, this common take on the power of mediated images of suffering on the humanitarian responses suggests that within contemporary Western democratic settings, public outrage created by "independent media" would then pressure the political decision-makers to increasingly take into account humanitarian issues in their actions and to reinforce humanitarian (military) interventions. I shall elaborate and develop this thought of the causality effect in more detail later and critically assess it in contemporary surroundings in chapter 7, when the uses of social media images in the international political settings are dealt with in the context of the Syrian war.

2.5.5 VISUAL PRESENTATION OF THE WARS FOUGHT BY THE WEST: BLOODLESS LIVE TELEVISION WAR AT THE PERSIAN GULF

Characteristically the foreign crises of the end of the twentieth century were efficiently mediated by new technological means, circulated unprecedentedly swiftly and predominantly pictured through images focusing on spectacular suffering. But this is not the whole truth on the representational practices of war in the post-Cold War era. Quite the opposite to the horrific images from Somalia, Rwanda and Yugoslavia, the Gulf War (1990-1991) has been termed by *Jean Baudrillard* as the war that *did not take place*. He argued this, despite the fact that the war—especially the combat phase "The Operation Desert Storm"—was made public by vastly circulated imagery, presented in a strikingly visual manner by novel means of visual mediation. What Baudrillard said in his essays was not that there was no violence going on at the Persian Gulf, but he claimed that what happened was, in terms of its (visual) representation, more like a simulation of war than a war in the conventional sense; an atrocity masqueraded as a war. Baudrillard argued

that the operation spelled a significant change in Western politics, warfare, and in the (Western) visual perception of war.³¹⁴

Western media audiences witnessed the Gulf War through live TV-shows from the comfort of their distant homes. The war was a media hit, a strange live show in which missiles shot from far away at a city of millions were openly seen in real time, but the destruction the ‘smart bombs’ induced was never visualized in the Western perception. It was a technological 24-hour show war, resembling a *computer game*. What we saw of the war was sanitized, technologized imagery of “surgical attacks” on buildings, structures or the enemy state, rather than attacks on human bodies, living creatures, distant habitats and cultures, conventionally associated with war imagery. The Western warfare at the Gulf appeared through media as an efficient, clean technowar, with no corpses and no suffering. Although we were bombarded with massive amounts of imagery, the restrictions on the mediation of information from the Gulf war theater were unparalleled in their strictness. Knowledge of the events of the war and the images presented of it, to the spectating Western audiences, were predominantly government controlled and military produced, in other words manufactured by the military and the Pentagon. This is why Baudrillard, among others, was amazed by the presentation of the war and what the intended perception the visual presentation of it implied. He saw the presentation of the Gulf war as an emblem of the global (Western lead) international politics to come. In his view, the presentations of the war obscured the reality of the conflict in a peculiar, unprecedented way, and by the stylized and selective performance led to misrepresentation, rather than to a realistic account of the situation.³¹⁵

At the time of the Gulf War I was about ten years old; it was the first war I followed or witnessed somewhat consciously. I remember sitting in the dark living room (it was night time) of our safe and cozy house in central Finland with my sister and father, looking at the beams and flashes of greenish light lighting up the night sky of Baghdad as the US missiles apparently hit their designated targets. I remember thinking that this is what war looks like; the way the events in TV looked like did not strike me as odd or altered, it was the way war was *presented to me* when I first encountered it through contemporary mediated imagery. The historical wars, which I of course already knew about and had seen photos of (the Finnish Civil War of 1918, the Second World War, the Finnish Winter War and Continuation War of the 1930s and 1940s), were for me past wars, something that happened then, decades ago, a time unimaginable for me at the time. I cannot recall whether the flaring rockets lighting the night sky seemed false, true, novel, peculiar or horrific to me, or whether I associated them with suffering or human casualties. I probably already understood that it was a presentation of something happening, but it was a presentation of something that I did not

³¹⁴ Baudrillard, Jean: *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1995 (1991).

³¹⁵ Ibid.

have any understanding of; like many things on TV are for a girl of ten years. In light of my own experiences, Baudrillard's claim that war is, to us distant safe spectators, about presentations—about framing and stylizing, about perception and its management—seems poignantly valid. Regarding perception management and control over the visual presentations of war, the Gulf War clearly made history. (Included in the Illustration 2.4. is a still image from CNN reportage of the start of the war, and an image of the US missiles and Iraq air defense fire over Baghdad.)

Governing and Framing the Presentation of War

The Gulf War is often termed a war in which the US propaganda machinery—taking its lessons from the Vietnam War and the reputed disaster the brutal images created for the US war effort—efficiently succeeded in hiding the bloody scenery of war from the sight of Western spectators. The Pentagon took visual mediation of war seriously, knowing that control over media—especially television—was essential to controlling the military's message in public. The way in which the Gulf war was *seen* marks a remarkable shift in how war (fought by Westerners) began to be presented to Western audiences. The procedures of controlling media and managing public perception used at the Gulf were already developed and tested in the Grenada, Panama and Falkland operations, but the procedures of control reached their high point in the Gulf War. A *pool system* was introduced in the 1983 Grenada operation, which efficiently controlled media reporting and remained relatively well hidden from the public gaze. The system, which was created in order to control media's access to the war theater, to limit the number of reporters in the operation area and to govern the flow of information from the war zone, was effectively utilized at the Gulf.³¹⁶ Of the roughly 1400 journalist sent to the Gulf area to cover the war, the majority had to settle for the limited daily military briefings as their source of information. Only 200 reporters were selected as pool members. The pool members were taken to chosen sites, told selected stories and were accompanied, at all times, by military personnel; "minders" who restricted the actions and controlled the movements of journalists and photographers. In addition to this, all the reports and images produced by the journalist were sent to the *Joint Information Bureau*, which censored them, before allowing them to be published by the media outlets that had joined the pool. Knowledge about the location of the allied forces was not to be revealed, and unpatriotic or critical angles and information that could jeopardize the public support of the war were generally frowned upon. For instance, no images of casualties or of the suffering inflicted by the Western coalition were allowed to be published. The

³¹⁶ Sontag, 2003, 65; Butler, 2009, 65-66; Baudrillard, 1991; Macarthur, John, R: *The second Front. Censorship and Propaganda in the 1991 Gulf War*. University of California Press, Berkeley, 2004; Campbell, David: *Cultural governance and pictorial resistance: Reflections on the imaging of war*. Review of international studies, 2003, (29), 57-73, 59-60; Kellner, Douglas: *The Persian Gulf War revisited*. In *Reporting War. Journalism in Wartime*. Zelizer, Barbie & Allan, Stuart (eds), Routledge, 2004.

control machinery imposed over media in the Gulf War was the tightest in history, and it ensured that critical reporting of the war was minimized. The quickly resolved, novel and tidy looking technological media war was a publicity success, especially in the US.³¹⁷

In addition the polished and carefully selected bloodless techno war reports from the Gulf—disseminated predominantly by the military itself—and the tight censorship control over the media, also disinformation operations and straight forward propaganda were used in shaping the public opinion on the war. Unscrupulous disinformation strategies were used in making the enemy look bad and inhumane in the public eye and, thus, to legitimate the war against Iraq and its evil leader Saddam Hussein. *Macarthur* has demonstrated how public relations companies, such as *Hill and Knowlton*, disseminated atrocity stories of the monstrosity of the enemy and outright lies were deployed in framing the operation as necessary and humane. Predominantly, in the Western publicity the war was presented as a justified war against an enemy, embodied by the evil leader Saddam Hussein. Hussein was regularly referred to as the “new Hitler”, and presented as a ruthless and nearly crazy enemy threatening peace, security, the Western way of life and humanity itself. Often the Iraqi leader assumed a figure of a demonic eternal enemy, immoral adversary of the good West, who needed to be stopped from “raping” his neighboring countries. Whilst political leaders are often eager to mount biased enemy images, especially in the wartime, media is often compliant in disseminating and circulating them, and the public willing to follow.³¹⁸ As the West was presented as a moral, humanitarian force, the enemy took the figure of the inhuman evil other.³¹⁹ By the joint effect of disseminating favorable information and effectively controlling the methods of mediation, and with the help of propaganda and misinformation, as well as of the careful political framing of actual events, the war against Iraq was predominantly framed, in Western publicity, as a necessary, just, clean, efficient, precise and humane war, inflicting no pain. Later on, the Gulf War has become infamous for uncritical reporting, strong censorship and disinformation campaigns.

Governing the images showing corporal pain, suffering and death inflicted by the war was central to the restrictions of reporting and framing the war as humane. Images containing visual aspects associated with arousing empathy and creating solidary bonds between the distant spectators and the populations of the war area—such as detectable suffering, especially corporal suffering of civilian populations—were generally not seen in the Western publicity during the war. Seeing the suffering of the locals living midst the

³¹⁷ **Kellner**, 2004; **Sullivan, George**: *Journalists at Risk. Reporting America's Wars*. Twenty-first Century Books, 2006, 72-77.

³¹⁸ See: **Macarthur**, 2004, 37- 77; **Kellner**, 2004.; **Harle, Vilho**: *Hyvä, Paha, Ystävä, Vihollinen. Rauhan kirjallisuuden edistämisseura ry, Rauhan- ja Konfliktin tutkimuslaitos, tutkimuksia*, 44, 1991. 130-137.

³¹⁹ I will get back to enemy images in the time of the “war on terror” in the chapter 6, which deals with contemporary enemy images and Western identity formation at times of crisis and confrontation.

raging war—especially when inflicted by the Western war effort—is commonly seen as potentially undermining the popularity of war midst the domestic media audiences. Likewise, the suffering or casualties of the Western troops were generally not mediated in an effort to secure the popularity of war. An emblem of the effort to hide the domestic human cost of war is the ban on picturing the coffins of deceased US soldiers returning home, implemented by President Bush (senior) at the time of the Gulf War. Journalists were denied access to the Dover Air Force Base, where the remains of the war deceased are flown back onto the US soil and the flag-draped coffins are given their ceremony. Banning the broadcasting of the ceremony can be seen as dodging the “Dover test”, which has been used to describe the US public’s tolerance for troop casualties.³²⁰

Rationalizing the need for the war and keeping up the popularity of the war at the domestic front are not the only detectable reasons for tidying up the presentations and hiding the atrocious aspects of the war from the perception of the public. The timing of the ban over showing the remains of the returning soldiers and the numerous other efforts in hiding the suffering induced by the Gulf War are also emblematic of a larger shift in picturing war waged by Western powers. As the discourse of humanitarianism and human rights forcefully entered the Western international politics from the 1990s onwards, the perception of Western war (in the West) has been forcefully *humanized*. Following the emerging humanitarianly framed spirit of Western international politics, the war was impelled—in order to fit the frame the West imposed on itself—to look humane, clear-cut and as if causing no suffering. This humanizing tendency in the iconography of Western war, forcefully emerging from the presentation of the Gulf War, has been an ongoing trend in picturing Western warfare ever since. Often the reason for the change in the presentation of the Gulf War has been, in a quite simplifying way, pinpointed to the bitter media lessons of the Vietnam War. Even though, clearly, the concurrent timing of the Western states adopting a humanitarian role in global conflicts, branding of the Western operations as humanitarian endeavors, and the emergence of the sanitized media presentations of Western war is noteworthy, and epic. The humanizing iconography describing Western war was given birth to by the age of emerging humanitarian foreign politics, and the Gulf war only spelled the start of this phenomenon.³²¹

Governing the presentation and framing of war—predominantly by means of controlling the imagery of suffering—does not only affect the ways in which the Western spectators understand the war their governments, and culturally and politically likeminded governments, are waging, but it creates also larger global structural biases and distortions. This phenomenon is

³²⁰ **Butler**, 2009, 65; *Pentagon Ban on Pictures of Dead Troops Is Broken*. March 23, 2004, New York Times; *Pentagon Rethinks Photo Ban on Coffins Bearing War Dead*. February 17, 2009, Washington Times.

³²¹ See: **Hammond, Philip**: *Humanizing War. The Balkans and beyond*. In *Reporting War*, 2004, 174-205; **Butler**, 2009, 63-66.

illustrated by juxtaposing the modes of visually representing the violence of the 1990s wars in Yugoslavia, Rwanda or Somalia with the picturing of the Gulf War. As Western warfare and aggression was reduced to flaring lights in the night sky, technological “smart bombs” pictured as destroying precisely designated infrastructural targets and showing off of the hi-tech equipment, in contrast other crises of the era were shown through images of bloody carnage and suffering bodies. The visual juxtaposition of the concurrent global crises highlights the special character of the visualization of the Gulf War. The turn in the visual representation of Western-waged war at the Gulf marks a turn in how “our wars” have been presented as relatively non-violent, and how the wars of “the others” continue to be pictured through images of brutality, corporal suffering and bloodshed.³²² Visually picturing the wars of the others (wars in which the Western powers have not had a downright military involvement in) as bloody and violent and presenting Western warfare as virtually non-violent also lowers the threshold for Western militaries foreign interventions. The images of the violence and carnage in Yugoslavia, for example, were used in order to promote a Western-coalitions/NATO military solution to the situation. Whereas the Western answer to the situation was framed as a surgical operation, relatively bloodless compared to the heavily visualized massacre taking place on the ground. The tendency to picture the wars of others as bloody and effectively visually framing Western war as humane emerged in the 1990s and has been prevalent ever since. Consequently Western induced suffering and suffering of Western individuals remains relatively unseen in the West as Western bodies shown in their vulnerability are hidden from Western gazes. Whereas the brutality and pain caused by non-Western individuals and regimes and corporal suffering of non-Western individuals is, at the same time, brought forth by visual representations widely circulating in the Western publicity. This distinction in picturing Western suffering and Western inflicted suffering vis-à-vis non-Western bodily vulnerability and brutality creates significant political outcomes. Representational practices emerging at the time of the Gulf War are telling of the global politics of Western interventionism. They spell a change in the mode of picturing “Western wars” and the “war of the others” for years to come—and paradoxically reveal the conditionality of Western take on humanity in the age of *humanitarian world politics*. I shall develop these themes further especially in chapters 4 and 5.

³²² **Petley, Julian:** *War Without Death: Responses to Distant Suffering*. *Journal for Crime, Conflict and Media* 1/1, 2003, 72-85.

2.5.6 IMAGES OF CONFLICT IN THE AGE OF HUMANITARIAN WORLD POLITICS

The humanitarily framed interventionist spirit of Western powers became fortified after the early 1990s. A watershed in this regard is the Kosovo military campaign and the NATO bombing of Serbian forces in 1999. The Kosovo campaign spelled the start of an era of Western interventionist wars legitimated by humanitarian rationale and rhetoric. As David Chandler writes in his book *From Kosovo to Kabul and Beyond*, from the Kosovo operation onwards international interventions in the name of human rights and humanitarianism came to define Western international politics for years to follow.³²³ The development stemming from the end of the Cold War led to military-humanitarianism and it has become customary for Western governments to use humanitarian and human rights rhetoric as their moral and ethical shields and justifications for foreign interventions. (Western) *humanitarian world politics* started to emerge. This stipulated also a wider change in the ethos and spirit within the international sphere. *Mika Aaltola* argues that in this era humanitarianism became a key frame through which multifarious actors in the international field assess each other's legitimacy and determine their power positions. Moreover, the "humanitarian paradigm" has become an expression of the "international community" and contemporary Western hegemonic power.³²⁴

From Kosovo onwards, Western humanitarian military interventions were normalized as a possible and seemingly effective way of securitizing crisis areas in turmoil, of governing the "disobedient" non-Western minded leaders, and of alleviating the suffering of the populations of crisis areas. But furthermore a system was born, in which intervention legitimized by humanitarian reasoning came to be widely seen as a *right* and a *moral* way of acting in the international political sphere. Consequently, criticizing humanitarily framed interventionist actions was not only seen as outdated and old fashioned, but it was often blamed for being tantamount to approving human rights violations and terror.³²⁵ The shaping of the UN paradigm of the *Responsibility to Protect* (R2P) can be seen as an emblem of the spirit and orientation of foreign intervention, which was placed above the Westphalian sovereignty norms. As the horrors of Holocaust gave birth to the 1948 UN convention on the *Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* ³²⁶, the crises of the 1990s—namely the Rwandan atrocity—marked a modern turning point for the notion of the necessity to protect humanity, placed over the sovereignty principles of Westphalian non-interference. Combined with a discussion on the *right to intervene* rising from the Western intervention in the Yugoslav Wars at the turn of the millennium—especially from the 1999 NATO campaign in Kosovo—this new international

³²³ Chandler, 2002.

³²⁴ Aaltola, 2009, 1.

³²⁵ Campbell, 2006, 13-16; Aaltola, 2009.

³²⁶ *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, UN, 1948.

interventionist paradigm, the Responsibility to Protect, started to form. The outline and formation of R2P can be seen as a continuation of the historical evolution of the protection of humanity. Whilst states were formerly placed in the position of securing their people from mass atrocity and genocide, in the formulation of the R2P the *international community* was given the right—and a moral obligation—to intervene in the sphere of sovereign states in order to stop crude violations of human rights and to protect civilians.³²⁷ The emphasis on the status of international community as the actors answering to human distress by interventionist means is emblematic of the ethos of the era.

The September 11th 2001 terror attacks on the USA swiftly changed the climate of global politics. The “global war on terror” started with the US and allied forces operation *Enduring Freedom*’s air strikes on Taliban and Al-Qaeda targets in Afghanistan on October 7th. The War on Terror marked a significant strengthening of the humanitarianization of Western war. As the Afghan operation was legitimized by its targeting of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda—seen to be responsible for the 9/11 attacks—it was also forcefully framed, rationalized and legitimized by humanitarian rhetoric. The operation was framed as an endeavor to secure the lives of the locals and to protect human rights and gender equality against the suppressing forces of radical Islamism.³²⁸ The operation soon became a multinational operation, as numerous countries around the world deployed troops to fight terrorism and inhumanity in Afghanistan. In 2003 a NATO-led *International Security Assistance Force* (ISAF) took the lead in the war. The multinational Afghan-ISAF operation was mandated by the UN, led by a US General and had participants from nearly fifty countries from 2003 onwards, and it can thus be seen as an embodiment of a new kind of war waged by the international community in the name of saving and protecting humanity.

In the era defined by “global war on terror” politicized humanitarianism has arguable become a powerful tool of Western global control and governance; a tool used to stabilize and control crisis areas according to Western standards of good governance and civilized, humane way of life. Critics of the political and militarized humanitarianism even state that a point has been reached when humanitarianism has evolved into a moral cover under which a powerful minority of the world’s countries—namely the United States—globally oversees its own interests. As *Roberto Belloni* states: “Humanitarianism has become a part of the control strategy designed to prevent the transmission of disorder and chaos from the global war zones,

³²⁷ On Responsibility to Protect see: **The UN 2005 World Summit outcome document:** (In particular paragraph 4, 138 – 140, 30: **Responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.** Briefly on the History and present of the R2P, see: **Background Information on the Responsibility to Protect**, United Nations.

³²⁸ **Address to the Joint session of Congress and the America People.** September 20, 2001. Office of the Press Secretary, The White House ; **Presidential Address to the Nation.** October 7, 2001. Office of the Press Secretary, The White House.

and poor peripheral countries to the Western world.”³²⁹ This development has also spelled significant changes for picturing wars and crises, and it has, I argue, changed the ways in which Western spectators apprehend, value, imagine and feel about the suffering of distant others, and how the pain of others is encountered through visual representations. In the empirically orientated chapters (4-7) that follow I shall analyze further the multifarious contemporary modes of representing wars and crises, suffering and non-suffering, and I shall investigate the changes brought about by the era of Western humanitarian world politics on visual representations of suffering and non-suffering, as well as examine the different political framing and utilizations of war and suffering imagery in the contemporary era (roughly from about 2001 to 2015) in Western publicity, politics and media.

2.6 CONCLUSIONS

By following the varying representational and mediation practices of visual images depicting the pain of others, the history and evolution of humanitarian ideas and the practices of the protection of humanity can be traced. Visual images of crisis, pain and of the need of help illustrate the history of humanitarianism, and the changes in humanitarian ideology and organizational/state settings slant the ways in which distant suffering and the need of help have been visually portrayed. The overview of the past nearly 300 years from the point of view of ideas on humanity and visual humanitarian communication sketched above reveals some persistent patterns and themes reoccurring in the course of history. These main claims, underlying beliefs and mind-sets built into the framework of humanitarian communication and the different formulations and functions of the images within the discourse are at the core of this study in multitudes of ways. The historical overview and the detected patterns of display function as a backdrop against which I shall analyze the representational practices and uses of images telling of the distress of others in the more contemporary settings in the following chapters. The main findings drawn from the history of humanitarian visual communication, central to the following, more empirically orientated chapters are:

- 1.) Visual representations displaying the pain of others are central to the humanity discourse and its evolvement. The pain of others encountered through visual images has been central in building solidary bonds between humans. Humanitarianism and apprehension of vulnerable life and thus life worthy of protection stems from encountering (visualized) the pain of others. The ways in which the pain of others have been presented to the spectating distant (Western) audiences have played a central position in the widening apprehension of humanity, and have been in an important position in

³²⁹ **Belloni, Roberto:** *The Trouble with Humanitarianism*. Review of international Studies. 2007. vol.33, 451-474.

expanding the scope of what has been at different times comprehended as human lives worthy of protection, saving and rights. As the presentation practices change according to their presentational context and the wider surrounding mind-sets, ideas and paradigms of their era, the images of the distress of others unveil the evolvement and stages relevant for the development of humanity and humanitarian discourse. Moreover, throughout history the processes of visually representing and thus defining the humanity of others can be observed as a project promoted by pioneering individuals and groups, striving to broaden the scope of what can be more widely understood as belonging to the realm of humanity/protectable life. As the amazed and often outraged spectators have been encountered by emotion awaking images of the pain of others the conceptions of humanity and of lives worthy of protection have expanded, and the ways in which the pain of others has been encountered and reacted to have altered. However, images of the pain and distress of others are also inclined to be framed and governed politically and purposefully. Thus, tracing the utilization, framings, significations and contextual intentions of images of suffering and crisis in the contemporary settings reveal information critical for understanding the stage of humanitarianism, also in the contemporary milieu.

2.) Observing the history of visually mediated suffering of others reveal persistent problems and dilemmas of ethical presentation. Objectifying, othering, distancing and inauthentic, even misleading presentations of the suffering of others are thriving within humanitarian communication throughout history. As presenting the vulnerability of others—especially in visual images—is tricky in moral and ethical terms, the history of visual humanitarian communication poignantly reveals the hierarchical, power-bound and political nature of humanitarianism. The humanitizing hierarchical power of the West over the rest of the world and the political nature of humanitarianism is vividly illustrated through the representational practices of mediating distant suffering over the years. Thus, visual representations of suffering and of the need of help offer a revealing insight into the historical evolution of humanitarianism and, moreover, a route through which the more contemporary stage of humanitarianism can be critically observed.

3.) Throughout the history of visual humanitarian communication a *theatrical mode* of visual presentation and mediation can be detected. Humanitarian communication can be perceived as a theatrical arrangement through which the (Western) spectators are *visually addressed*, i.e. invited to see the pain of distant others, to respond and relate to it in a multitude of fluctuating ways. The theatricality of humanitarian mediation can already be vividly seen in the visual representations at the time of the Lisbon earthquake, that is, in the starting point of the politics of pity or (modern) humanitarian communication. In the visual humanitarian theater the pictured suffering individuals are placed at the center of the stage in order to arouse the empathy of the distant and safe spectators. Thus, often the

spectating audience and the emotions they go through (most commonly within the humanitarian frame, emotions of guilt, shame, indignation, outrage, the will to help, empathy) due to witnessing the pain of others are at the core of the arrangement, just like in an arrangement of a play in a theater. The spectating audiences are thus placed as the subjects of the arrangement, as the sufferers often remain as the objects of their gaze—and action. The humanitarian play of the images of suffering is arranged, governed, framed and directed by the mediating quarters; the avant-garde activists, organizations, the media and political actors and militaries acting within the wide humanitarian frame. The visual arrangements on the humanitarian stage—the casting of the story and the mode of addressing designed to invite the audience to relate to the suffering of others—change according to the historical evolution of humanitarian ideas and practices.

The theatrical arrangements of mediating distant suffering formulate role differentiations clearly visible throughout the history humanitarian visual mediation. As the safe spectating audience (as well as often the mediating quarters) are presented as strong, able, resourceful, willing and able to help the weaker suffering others, they are composed to carry the role of “full-fledged *Humans*”, representing the height of humanity. In contrast the suffering victims in the images—and the objects of aid and humanitarian acts—often appear as weak, passive, nameless, dehistoricized, and somewhat incapable characters or even bare life creatures, lesser human figures; the “*Subhumans*”. Also a third figure is relevant—although often implicitly present—to the humanitarian theater, namely the evil figure, causing suffering and threatening humanity and human integrity, the “*Inhuman*” character, often embodied as a foreign, bad and corrupted leader.

The theatrical nature and the historically fluctuating modes of addressing the spectators embedded in humanitarian communication are at the core of my theoretical take, and are central to understanding the contemporary humanitarian visual communication. In the pages that follow I shall analyze the ways in which images presented within the contemporary humanitarian frame invite their spectators to see and perceive the unequal global world, and respond to the suffering and hardships of distant others. I shall develop these ideas further in the next chapter 3, in which I shall present my theoretical and methodical position in more length. The metaphor of visual theater will play a more central role in the following to the empirically orientated chapters drilling into the more contemporary uses and presentational practices of images of violence that follow.

4.) The history of the visual mediation of images of suffering reveals a history of efforts of constraining and governing the presentations of suffering by regimes, states and militaries. There has been a constant attempt to govern and control especially images revealing the bloody nature and bodily suffering inflicted by wars by warring states by a multitude of methods. The history of control and governance over images cannot be grasped only by analyzing censorship attempts but by analyzing the predominant modes of

presentation. As we have seen while going through the history of visual humanitarian mediation, by making some things visible, others are often made invisible. Analyzing the contemporary methods of control and dominant structures of presentation is at the core of this study, particularly in chapter 6. dealing with the Western visual strategic communication on the Afghan war.

5.) References to historical atrocity images are commonplace when discussing contemporary events of human distress. Moreover, modes of presenting distant suffering drawing from history are central to understanding, framing and judging the relevance of the suffering of others. Images of suffering often refer to iconized past atrocities, and topical atrocities are often politically framed and signified by historical references to the past. The visual memory of the Holocaust seems to be one of the pivotal reference points in the Western sphere. For understanding the contemporary humanitarian images, their uses and significations, historical references are central. I shall repeatedly return to the history of atrocity images in the chapters that follow.

6.) Different modes of representing the pain of others –and thus also different modes of addressing and inviting the audience to perceive and identify with the suffering– exist and appear simultaneously, in different uses and contexts. These modes often contradict each other, but they also interact, affect and shape each other in a multitude of ways. The several concurrent modes of representation form segmented, collage-like images, through which the spectators encounter the suffering of others. Prevalent styles of presentation used in organizational humanitarian settings shape media representations, which then again affect the ways in which the suffering of others is referred to in political speech and presentations by state actors. In turn, presentations in organizational settings are influenced by the large-scale political framings guided by the way in which the pain of others is presented to us, and so on and so forth. Identifying the many faces of humanitarianism, the different modes of representation and their interrelationships is pivotal to understanding and analyzing visual humanitarian communication and the ways in which it works in contemporary settings.

7.) Although at each time in history different parallel modes of representation—also with different intentions—exist, there seems to be a tendency of some modes of representation becoming established as the emblematic representations depicting distant suffering in their era. Therefore, some types of images and imageries are cemented as iconic, or *thick images*; emblematic and characteristically describing their epoch and its posture towards distant suffering. As these thick imageries describe the current ethos of their time, identifying and analyzing them reveals significant information on the status of humanitarian ideas that have produced and moulded them. The overall historical shifts and changes within humanitarian presentational practices and their ethos, thus, tell a vivid story of the

predominant preconditions a particular era places on humanity and on the understanding of human worth, but these shifts also illuminate and expose the dominant, global hierarchical power structures and attitudes of the presenting (Western) quarters towards the rest of the world. Locating the relevant thick images, describing the ethos of their era in multitude is at the core of the methodological take of this study, which I shall cover in the following chapter 3.

8.) When following the visual trail of images of suffering it becomes clear that visual images of atrocity are at the same time ambivalent, and the messages they entail are tied to the context of their presentation. Reading images of atrocity in the context of their presentation, and revealing the contextual mode of addressing they entail is in a focal position throughout this study. But furthermore, the representational practices of mediating the pain and need of help of distant individuals are not confined to specific contexts, but images—especially iconic thick images—*flow* from one context into another, gathering different uses, framings, meanings and significations along the way. This phenomena can be seen for instance with the Holocaust imagery as well as images of the Yugoslavian wars. As Sontag has pointed out, images of atrocity presented in different contexts may give rise to opposing responses: they may construct a cry for peace, or a cry for revenge or war. Alternatively, they may just produce awareness that terrible things happen.³³⁰ Following and taking into account these *image flows*—different contextual uses and meanings the images gather in their different settings and framings—is crucial in understanding the arrangement of humanitarianism and the ethos it takes in different time periods. The flows of images are, I claim, further strengthened in the contemporary era, which is marked by intensified communication practices and technologies. Thus, following the contemporary flows of humanitarian images is at the core of my research interests. I shall further develop my ideas on image flows in the following chapter 3.

9.) Technological development in the field of visual communication has remodelled and changed the ways in which distant suffering has been presented to the spectating audiences. Technology also plays a focal role in how distant suffering is perceived and understood by the spectating audiences. Technology and the changes in technological mediation techniques in the field of visual mediation and media are, thus, at the core of the analysis also in the subsequent chapters of this study.

10.) Looking at the historical uses and evolvment of humanitarian images it becomes evident that there is a thriving positive belief in the ability of images to bridge the gap between the sufferers and the spectators. This historically formed claim produces a causal way of thinking about the power of images, following the logic “the more we see, the more we care/do”, i.e. that by seeing more, the humanity would unify and wake up to comprehend

³³⁰ Sontag, 2003, 11-12.

the suffering of others. This *causality effect* is tied to the technological evolvment in the field of visual mediation and has been revived time and time again in the course of history. The causal power of suffering images and their mediation was debated at the time of the Guttenberg revolution and later it was revived due to the invention of photography. In the television era the causality effect was called the “Vietnam war syndrome”, and at the time of satellite technology it took the form of “the CNN effect.” Although the thesis about the power of images to create more empathetic global relations and to direct foreign policy has been effectively challenged, it has nevertheless been revived again during the Internet and social media era. In the following empirically orientated chapters of this work, I shall locate and critically assess the historically prevalent causality belief in the contemporary settings, especially in chapter 7, which deals with the images of the Syrian war mediated via social media.

11.) Within the recent decades and years humanitarianism has risen to a central position in the public life of the Western societies, and moreover it has begun to serve a focal role also in Western international politics. I call the era from the turn of the late 1990s onwards as the age of Western humanitarian world politics. The increased significance and visibility of humanitarianism, within the Western understanding of the world, as well as the heightened status of humanitarianism and human rights discourse in Western politics has hoisted humanitarianism into an influential (unconscious) ideology, which for a large part determines how people within the Western sphere see and apprehend the global world and their own position in it. The recent changes have meant significant changes also for the visual representations of distant suffering and war. The emerging humanitarization of Western politics has led to sanitized and humanized presentations of Western wars and suffering caused by the West and Western warfare has become less visible. In the post 9/11 world and in the age of the “global war on terror” this visual tendency has been further fortified. The visual humanitarization of the recent Western wars, revealed when juxtaposed with the picturing of other, non-Western conflicts/catastrophes, is central to all of the following empirical chapters of this study. The differences in visualizing the suffering and conflicts of the distant others, when compared with the suffering inflicted or experienced by Westerners, are a major starting point for this study. The recent overall changes within the representational practices and modes of addressing in the images of suffering and crisis is what I aim at tackling from a multitude of perspectives in the chapters that follow.

In the subsequent chapter, after the tour of history of visual images of pain and humanitarian communication, I shall open up in more detail my theoretical and methodological take on analyzing and reading the images of pain and distress within the era of liberal humanitarianism and Western humanitarian world politics.

3 THE SPECTATORSHIP, ANALYZE AND ARRANGEMENT OF THE HUMANITARIAN TRAGEDY THEATER

3.1. INTRODUCTION: RESEARCHING THE ACTS AT THE HUMANITARIAN THEATER

As the history of visual humanitarian communication indicates, visual images of suffering have served a focal role in the formation of the ideas of a shared human community, development of international human rights and humanitarian paradigms. The mediation and representational practices of the images of pain closely follow the phases of the evolution of (Western) humanitarian ideas, and visual arrangements vividly reflect and communicate the dominant ethos of the humanitarian thinking of their era.

Today the everyday life of Western publics is unparalleledly abundant with visual records telling of dramatic destinies and violent experiences of distant strangers. It is suggested that this is due to several parallel singularities. First of all, novelties in the media sphere—such as the ever more frantic tempo of mediation and global flows of images, induced by, for instance, the growing use of internet based communication and social media—bring the tragedies of others increasingly forcefully under the sight of distant onlookers. Additionally, the recent strengthening of the status of humanitarian organizations within the international sphere has increased the visibility of manifold campaigns and appeals in the public sphere and everyday lifeworlds of Western citizens. The intensified visibility of foreign suffering and the need of help of distant others is moreover increasingly infiltrating the Western sphere due to the heightened status of human rights and humanitarian issues within the contemporary Western international political agenda.

Today visual representations of the pain, precarity and despair of distant others are perhaps most renownedly used in campaigning and fundraising of humanitarian organizations. But powerful and emotion evoking images are also topically and commonly utilized in and by the (mainstream news) media. Images of crisis and suffering are mediated for spectating audiences in order to convey information, facilitate our understanding of distant crisis and to inform us of their human toll. Academic research has been mostly interested in the use images of crisis and suffering in and by the media and by humanitarian organizations.³³¹ But moreover representations of human suffering and precarity are today—at the age of Western humanitarian world

³³¹ See for example: **Chouliaraki**, 2013; **Chouliaraki** 2008; **Moeller**, 1999; **Boltanski** 1999; **Kennedy& Käpylä**, 2014.

politics—increasingly discussed in actual political connections, particularly in the Western sphere. Images of pain and distress from mostly non-Western crisis areas are habitually referred to by high-level politicians at times of crisis and sometimes even produced, presented and circulated by (Western) governmental actors or actors close to them. Presentation and circulation of visual images of wars, crisis and suffering are moreover often controlled and governed by political, governmental and military actors. The centrality of humanitarian and human rights orientation within Western international politics has not solely increased the visibility and utilization of crisis and suffering images in political connections, it has also expanded the contexts in which such images are referred to and impacted on the ways in which these images are arranged, presented and intended to (ideologically) address their viewers. Thus images of suffering and crisis today address their spectators in a multitude of highly political ways also at the level of international relations and politics. Therefore I argue that humanitarian communication—and especially visual images of suffering presented within the wide humanitarian frame—is today a powerful resource of mediating the violent and dramatic events of distant places for Western spectators, but, moreover, a resource of communicating the *world order* and thus also a central arena constituting the ways in which Western spectators perceive the surrounding world.

In order to read the intended, contextual messages and meanings of the more contemporary imagery, within the ample setting of Western humanitarian world politics, and to unveil the ways in which images of war, crisis and suffering invite their spectators to see and signify them, a theoretical framework is needed. The theoretical approach introduced in this chapter—and applied to the subsequent chapters dealing with the contemporary status of images of pain and crisis—draws from the theoretical body of work underlying the previously sketched history of visual humanitarian communication, and from the existing analysis of the arrangements and dominant representational modes. In this chapter I shall introduce my theoretical framework through which I analyze the images and their status within the Western humanitarian world political frame: I shall introduce how I see humanitarianism today as functioning as an (*unconscious*) *ideology* which *interpellates*³³² (or hails) its subjects through the spectatorship of emotive visual representations of crisis and suffering, and explicate how I see humanitarian visual communication taking a *theatrical mode of addressing* which resembles the casting, arrangement and narration of a *tragedy* play. Furthermore, I shall explicate the method and the circumstances that guided the way I have selected the contemporary cases/imageries dealt with in the following chapters 4-7.

³³² **Althusser, Louis:** *Ideology and ideological state apparatuses*. In: *Lenin and philosophy and other essays*. Monthly Review Press, New York, 1971, 85-127.

3.2 HUMANITARIANISM AS AN (UNCONSCIOUS) IDEOLOGY

As previously denoted, humanitarianism, broadly understood, has risen from the margins into a prominent status within the international politics during the last decades. Humanitarianism is in the early 2000s world political context an influential discursive paradigm, but it is also a world outlook, an all-encompassing mindset within the Western public sphere that is hard to elude contemporarily. Also in this respect, humanitarianism is not only a powerful standard by which the Western powers estimate the legitimacy of others' political operations and advocate their own political actions in the global world, but it also is a mindset which strongly determines how people living within the Western cultural and political sphere perceive the world around them, as well as their own status and the status of others in it.³³³ Therefore, humanitarianism may also very well be understood as an *ideology*. An ideology can be described as “a fairly coherent and comprehensive set of ideas that explains and evaluates social conditions, helps people understand their place in society, and provides a program for social and political action.”³³⁴ Humanitarianism, within contemporary Western societies, in many ways fulfills this criterion, as we shall see later.

As we have seen, going through the visual history and evolution of the ideas of a shared human kind in the previous chapter 2, humanity, human rights, protection of humanity and the development of humanitarianism and the evolution of the conceptions of humanity are historical in nature, politically constructed and ever changing. These ideas or cultural, discursive constructions have been versatile in their demarcation, content and political agenda. Nevertheless, contemporarily the belief in the universal advancement of human rights, humanitarianism and humanitarian world politics are commonly understood and presented as natural world outlooks revolving around fairly neutral actions of bettering the status of humanity, doing good and acting morally. In spite of their historically, culturally and politically constructed nature and background, the contemporary global political structures and actions which claim to aim at the progression of human rights and the alleviation of the suffering of others are often referred to and comprehended as somewhat eternal and neutral. Thus, in the contemporary Western discourse and in the prevalent understanding, the advancement of human rights and the acts of bettering the status of humanity by humanitarian means are commonly proclaimed as natural, “self-evident”, universal and ahistorical.³³⁵ Moreover, questioning the humanitarian act of “doing good” or criticizing the attempts to globally advance conceptions of human rights established by the West—even by

³³³ Aaltola, 2009; Chandler, 2002; Douzinas, 2007; Belloni, 2007.

³³⁴ Weber, Cynthia: *International relations theory. A critical Introduction*. Routledge, New York, 2010, 4.

³³⁵ On the changing nature of human rights and their often assumed “self evident” nature see, for example Hunt, 2007.

military means—are today commonly found to be inappropriate, or even seen as tantamount to approving human rights violations or being indifferent to the suffering of others.³³⁶ Thus, the contemporary politicized Western humanitarian outlook on the world works on two levels: on a rather conscious level, as an ideology proclaimed in declarations and used as a powerful legitimating tool, and on a more subliminal level as a powerful *unconscious ideology*, which nevertheless forcefully influences dominant Western conception and judgments on the world.³³⁷

Unconscious ideologies are world outlooks or conventional ‘truths’, which are understood as foundational to our understanding of the world, as commonsensical and natural. They often remain beyond conscious recognition as a coherent ideology and, thus, linger outside of critical evaluation and political debate.³³⁸ *Louis Althusser* suggests that ideologies never actually proclaim out in the open their ideological nature, but present themselves as the “right way to think”.³³⁹ This applies to the contemporary humanitarian paradigm poignantly. Just like the in-groups of (unconscious) ideologies in general, Western international political humanitarian efforts are often in the Western sphere believed to be essentially *good* and our humanitarian mindset on the world is habitually perceived as *true* and *right*. However, the influential political system of humanitarianism does not much welcome the label of a political ideology, but denies such accusations forcefully by claiming universality and neutrality and by referring to the virtue of morality and ethics. Contemporary global humanitarianism habitually portrays itself as “anti-politics”—this is central to its inner cohesion, functionality and legitimacy.³⁴⁰

However, paradigms that, within a culture, “go without saying” are at the very core of the political. Roland Barthes describes such social constructions as *de-politized speech* or *Myths*. Barthes claims that power functions through such depoliticized myths. Myth makes the historical and contingent seem eternal; it offers natural justification to political constructions and abolishes the complexity of human acts by referring to their natural essence. A myth is something that makes a fact and a natural truth out of an interpretation. Yet, messages that seem to contain *apparent truths*—*naturalized* self-evident contents and slogan-like messages—are nevertheless always historical, cultural and, thus, constructed, artificial, mythical and intrinsically political and ideological. Myths are manifestations of unconscious ideologies that influence our thinking in powerful, though often latent, ways. Unconscious ideologies and myths are often taken for granted and culturally naturalized, de-politicized paradigms that powerfully determine the ways in which the world is perceived.³⁴¹ Humanitarianism, within the Western sphere today,

³³⁶ As articulated by **Chandler**, 2006, 13-16.

³³⁷ **Barthes, Roland**: *Mythologies*. Vintage Classics, London, 2000 (1957), 109-159.

³³⁸ **Weber**, 2010, 5.

³³⁹ **Althusser**, 1971, 175-177.

³⁴⁰ See for example: **Douzinis**, 2007, 78-79.

³⁴¹ **Barthes**, 1972 (1957), 109-111, 128-131, 142-145; **Weber**, 2005, 6-7.

indeed full-fills the criterion of a mythicized truth, and thus performs as an unconscious ideology, strongly—but often subconsciously—determining prevailing perceptions on the world.

In his seminal text *Ideology and ideological State Apparatuses* (1971) Althusser explains how ideologies “recruit” their subjects by hailing, summoning or *interpellating*. He uses an everyday example of a police officer in the street shouting “hey, you there!” to explain the act of becoming a subject of an ideology. In the instant the hailed individual recognizes that (s)he has been addressed and acts, i.e. turns around to face the police officer, (s)he already has become *interpellated* into the subjectivity of an ideology and becomes a subject of the ideological apparatus represented by the police officer.³⁴² Althusser perceives ideology as a construction—or an apparatus—that has its own rules and practices to which its subjects are at the moment of the interpellation subjugated. Hence, a subject of an ideology sees the world according to the discursive principles of the ideology: (s)he adheres to the behavior, social practices and attitudes of the discourse.³⁴³ The act of interpellation, hailing or addressing is how an ideology creates its subjects and subsumes people under its ideological discourses.

3.2.1 IDEOLOGICAL ADDRESSING OF THE HUMANITARIAN IMAGES

When observing the history of humanitarian visual communication, it becomes clear that humanitarian images are often presented to their audiences with deliberate *intentions*: targeted to tell particular stories, with the intention of producing certain meanings and affecting their (intended) spectators in intentional, and often politically formulated, ideologically ways. In their contextual uses and surroundings within the humanitarian frame, these representations offer their audiences topically fitting suggestions of reading and provide different routes to react and to take action in order to alleviate the suffering of the individuals/populations at issue. Images presented in such connections have, for instance, pointed to different ways of helping, getting involved and changing the conditions that inflict inequality, suffering and atrocities. The contextual arrangements of humanitarian images have offered their spectators topical, intended and more or less ready-made suggestions to react and act in the face of the images. For instance, in the early nineteenth century within the frame of the abolition fight the suggested or intended messages and meanings of images depicting the suffering of slaves was to suggest and communicate the humanity of the slaves and to provide routes to oppose and abolish the system of slave trading. The Holocaust images, when presented to Western audiences in the post Second World War setting suggested a reading that not only presented the Nazis as inhuman inflictors of immense human suffering and the

³⁴² Althusser, 1971, 175- 177.

³⁴³ *Ibid.* 173- 175.

Holocaust as the ultimate downfall of humanity, but also communicated the need for institutional and universal safeguarding of the human family. Then again, in the 1990s, the sanitized techno-images of the Persian Gulf War (produced primarily by governmental actors) presented to Western audiences were aimed at legitimizing the US Iraq intervention, as also the presentational practices and framings of the crude images of the Yugoslavian wars suggested a need of international humanitarian military intervention in the war.³⁴⁴ The history of visual humanitarian communication and contextual reading of the intended or preferred (Western) significations of different imageries in their contexts indicates how images of suffering trail and reflect the dominant humanitarian ethos and the dominant ideological settings of their time, and thus also show how they constitute Western spectatorship of such imagery.

Because of the central standing of humanitarianism within the contemporary Western international politics, humanitarian political speech and rhetoric describing and legitimizing Western international political actions and aspirations has, over the recent years, particularly in the years of the “war on terror,” been permeating.³⁴⁵ In addition to textual proclamations, political rhetoric and speech acts³⁴⁶ centralizing on politicized humanitarianism, also visual representations depicting crisis situations and the suffering of others has served as a focal arena within the Western political humanitarian ideological theatrical addressing during the past years.³⁴⁷ I claim, that through multitudes of arrangements of visual representations of crisis and suffering, the topical politicized humanitarian apparatus interpellates the spectators of these images into a subjectivity of the humanitarian ideology, and, thus, the imageries invite particular, contextual readings formed according to the preconditions of the era. I see that the practice of visual interpellation through the presentation of mythicized images of pain and crisis is pivotal for the humanitarian ideology and functionality of Western humanitarian world order.

In the contemporary situation in which humanitarianism has forcefully infiltrated Western international politics, I—on the grounds of history—claim that the representational arrangements of such images also trail the predominant preconditions of their representational surroundings and contextual (ideological) setting. Moreover, I thus hypothesize that such representations and their presentation also unveil interesting and significant traits of the recent Western worldviews and political constellations. Therefore, for instance, an image of a starving child in a foreign land, presented within the topical Western political ambiance and international

³⁴⁴ This function of humanitarian images is exemplified in variety of cases in the chapter 2 of this work.

³⁴⁵ **Douzin**, 2007; **Aaltola**, 2009; **Barnett**, 2011; **Barnett & Weiss**, 2008; **Chandler**, 2006.

³⁴⁶ **Austin, J. L.** *How to do Things with Words. The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955.* Oxford at the Clarendon Press, London, 1962.

³⁴⁷ **Douzin** (2007, 76) makes a claim that “contemporary humanitarianism repeats and exaggerates many aspects of the humanitarian campaigns and reforms of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.”

political setting, perhaps does not suggest to the viewers that they should imagine 'neutral' humanitarian assistance aimed at helping the ones in need with traditional humanitarian aid functions or that they should engage in such endeavors. But an image of distant suffering presented in the wider, politicized and militarized Western humanitarian frame might point to and advocate a militarily fortified and humanitarily justified operation, aimed at intervening in the political and societal structures of distant (particularly non-Western) areas and the lives of their populations.

Perceiving the contemporary and growingly influential humanitarian paradigm as an ideology that theatrically addresses its subjects through visual representations of human suffering and crisis is pivotal to understanding and reading the messages of the images presented within the humanitarian frame. It enables analyzing the contemporary utilization and presentation practices of images of crisis and distress. Perceiving humanitarianism as an ideology that hails its subjects through visual representations of pain and distress, moreover, enables one to perceive these representations as intentionally inviting certain readings and ways of seeing, and thus I see that they constitute a particular Western way of perceiving such images; the Western spectator of suffering. On the grounds of this, I shall, in the following chapters 4 to 7 focusing on the more topical humanitarian imageries of the post 9/11 era, analyze the contemporary ideological and politically formed modes of addressing and the contextual and intended significations and meanings of the imagery. Thus asking questions, such as how images of suffering are contemporarily presented to Western audiences, who presents them and with what intentional messages and through what kinds of contextual modes of addressing, is at the core of the following chapters of this study.

3.3 THE HUMANITARIAN STORY AND VISUAL HUMANITARIAN COMMUNICATION AS A TRAGEDY THEATER

As outlined in the previous chapter 2., humanitarian/crisis images within the humanitarian frame during the past nearly 300 years, is based on a sentimental narration —a *humanitarian story*—, in which the roles of the arrangement are habitually fixed according to a global hierarchy and conventions embedded in the workings of the global humanitarian apparatus. Particularly in the contemporary era the global roles of the full-fledged Western “*humans*”, the helpers and the helped “*subhumans*” have become permeating also in downright international political settings. As *Costas Douzinas* phrases it: “The global humanitarian sees victims of misfortune everywhere. Undifferentiated pain and suffering has become the universal currency of the South and pity the global response of the North.” He adds: “Pity is misanthropic. It is the closest we get today to the Hegelian

master and slave dialectic; the slave's recognition of the master in his position of mastery is not reciprocated, the relationship remains one directional."³⁴⁸ Due to the hierarchical power relations of the humanitarian machinery and communication the spectators of the suffering others are most commonly the "full-fledged humans" of the Western sphere who look (down) at the less fortunate, the most often non-Western, helpless, and pain-stricken inhabitants of crisis areas, who are often pictured as somewhat adolescent vis-à-vis the, on the average, safe and comfortable Westerners. In addition to these characters, yet another figure is indispensable for the humanitarian story: the evil "*inhuman*". This third character—often foreign and intensively othered, even demonized—is the reverse side of the good self and the deranged version of the victim other. The inhuman is habitually pictured within the humanitarian story as the evil force, which inflicts suffering on the (innocent) victims, the heroes (the "humans" of the story) then again are attempting to remedy. Although this evil character is quite rarely visibly detectable in humanitarian imagery, and even if it often lurks in the fringe area of the stage, it nevertheless is essential for the functionality of the humanitarian story. Habitually the contemporary inhuman character within the Western story is embodied by violent, undemocratic and corrupt, bad leaders of non-Western areas or pictured in the body of a terrorist leader, unshackled by and threatening the humane norms of the international community.³⁴⁹

Conventional representational practices of bodily vulnerability poignantly visualize and epitomize the humanitarian story, its fixed role divisions and differentiations, central for the functionality of global humanitarianism and Western humanitarian world politics.³⁵⁰ Although this narrative arrangement is perhaps effective and sufficient in capturing the structural and narrative construction of the global humanitarian arrangements, I see that it alone is not entirely sufficient in helping us to understand how visual humanitarian communication works and how the images of suffering are contemporarily framed to address their viewers in political ways, creating their assumed viewer-subjects and the intended messages and meanings of humanitarian imagery. Lillie Chouliaraki in her book *The Ironic Spectator* aptly opens up the arrangement of humanitarianism (and humanitarian communication) as a drama action. She sees that the staging of suffering, its spectatorship and the moral education embedded in these arrangements, dates all the way back to the Antique and being already present in the theatrical arrangement of a

³⁴⁸ Douzinas, 2007, 68. See also Chouliaraki, 2013, 26-36.

³⁴⁹ Ibid. Douzinas, 2007, 66-78; see also Malkki, 1996; Butler, 2009, 63-100. I use the highly laden terms "Human", "Sunhuman" and "Inhuman" from time to time in the course of the study when referring to the role division of the humanitarian story. I am aware of the load such expressions carry, and I must underline that by using the terms I do not aim to make claims on the character of the groups/individuals as such, but to refer to the role given to them in the context at hand.

³⁵⁰ Douzinas, 2007, 66-75; Malkki, 1996. See also Butler, 2009, 63-100; Cohen, 2001; Chouliaraki, 2013; Moeller, 1999; Boltanski 1999

Greek tragedy.³⁵¹ This theatrical arrangement becomes lucid when reading and analyzing the historical representational practices of humanitarian imagery presented already in the times of the Enlightenment.³⁵²

Perceiving visual humanitarian communication as a theatrical arrangement, which resembles the setting and arrangement of a classical tragedy play, helps to conceive visual humanitarian addressing in a more comprehensive and multimodal way. I wish to develop this idea and to open up the tragedy form of humanitarian visual communication in more length, since I see that this helps to unwrap the way the visual images of suffering present their objects (most often the sufferers) and how the spectacles of suffering and vulnerability are intended to address their subjects (the assumed Western spectators) in contemporary humanitarian settings. But moreover the metaphor of tragedy theater helps to unveil how the images are arranged and governed, and how the organizing actors direct and arrange the emotive visual scenes at the humanitarian theater. The theatrical setting enables us to take into closer consideration the arrangers, the screenwriters, organizers and assemblers of the spectacles—organizations, media as well as political actors—who are often left out of the equation when scrutinizing humanitarian visual communication. In the following subchapters I approach the humanitarian tragedy theater drawing from the definitions of a tragedy that *Aristotle* introduced in *Poetics*.³⁵³ The idea of humanitarian visual communication as a theatrical tragedy theater is one that will permeate through the following chapters of this work.

3.3.1 THE HUMANITARIAN TRAGEDY THEATER

In *Poetics* Aristotle defines a *tragedy* as a theatrical arrangement, which describes individuals suffering a tragic fate. In addition to the suffering main character(s) on stage, a focal component in a tragedy is the audience—the empathetic spectators following the act. Following Aristotle, the main objective of a tragedy’s storyline is to create and arouse emotions in the spectators, who are expected to empathize, be moved and touched when attending to the tragic fate of the main figure, sentimentally portrayed to them.³⁵⁴ Thus, although the starting point of a tragedy is communicating the tragic fate of the lead player(s) on stage, the emotions brought on by the sentimental story in the audience is the deeper purpose of the arrangement. Similarly the humanitarian (visual) communication has, at least ever since the times of the Enlightenment, highlighted and focused primarily on the

³⁵¹ **Chouliaraki**, 2013, 4, 23, 27-36, Chouliaraki points to Boltanski as introducing the theater frame into the analyze of humanitarian communication: **Boltanski, Luc**: *The Legitimacy of Humanitarian Action and Their Media Representation: The Case of France*. Ethical Perspectives, 7/1, 2000, 3-16 The metaphor of theater in relation to picturing suffering was already used by Boltanski in his book “Distant suffering”, but in a somewhat different way in which I use it. See **Boltanski**: 1999, 24-27.

³⁵² See Chapter 2.1.

³⁵³ **Aristotle**: *Poetics*. The Internet Classics Archive. Translated by S. H. Bucher.

³⁵⁴ **Aristotle**: *Poetics*.

spectator's feelings and reaction in the face of the suffering of others. And thus the distant spectator has predominantly been placed as the (moral) subject of the humanitarian visual arrangement. Just like in a tragedy theater the feelings of awe, horror, fear, pity and compassion, and the will to help—as well as guilt—aroused in the spectators by vivid, often visual records of suffering are the driving forces of humanitarian communication³⁵⁵ Therefore, humanitarian communication often takes a form that considerably resembles the arrangement of a theatrical tragedy play, in which the suffering *objects* in their vulnerability are displayed at center of the stage, and the (distant/distanced) spectators constitute the audience. Thus, the audience actually functions as the decisive subjects of the play, who are invited to feel, to be moved and to react when faced with the pain of others presented to them in a form of a visual performance.³⁵⁶

According to Aristotle, a tragedy play is an *imitation* (or a representation) of events that arouse the feelings of *fear* and *pity* in the audience. Thus, creating a tragic ambience and sentimental appeal are central to a properly functioning tragedy storyline. Moreover the (moral) character of the suffering main figures—appropriate casting and role differentiation—are also central to the functionality—the emotional force—of a tragedy. Aristotle describes that—in order for the sentiments of pity and fear of the audience to be mobilized—the main character of a tragedy needs to be a somewhat 'normal' individual, in the sense that (s)he should not be too different from the average spectator in moral constitution. The main character should neither be bad nor evil, somebody who might be seen as deserving the tragic fate, since this kind of a storyline cannot mobilize the emotions of the audience in a sufficient way. Nor should the main figure be outstandingly virtuous, since, on the average, spectators cannot be expected to be especially righteous either.

Moreover, in an Aristotelian tragedy *hamartia* is a central feature. By *hamartia* Aristotle means a bad choice made by the main character—a mistake guided by inner compulsions, ignorance or unawareness—which results in his/her misfortune. The spectators of the act detect and can identify the mistake—the *hamartia*—because of their remoteness and their more informed perspective as spectators. As the central aim of the tragedy play is to produce strong feelings of pity and fear in the audience, another focal point is *catharsis*. The storyline of a tragedy—after giving the audience a taste of misfortune happening to another human not completely alike nor unlike the audience—should, according to Aristotle, provide the spectators a release from or an absolution for these disturbing feelings—a *catharsis*. Thus, a tragedy should result in a discharge of the feelings of pity and fear,

³⁵⁵ Sliwinski 2011, 20-21; Orgad, 2012, 60; Halttunen, 1995; Chouliaraki, 2013, 26-36. See also chapter 2.1.

³⁵⁶ Chouliaraki, 2013, 4, 23, 27-36.

and thus, quite paradoxically, it is often described as leading to feelings of relief, purification, even satisfaction.³⁵⁷

Just as a theatrical tragedy play is an imitation of events that arouse pity and fear in the spectators, visual humanitarian communication telling of the tragedies of others is also always a *representation* of pain and catastrophe (framed, mediated and assembled) taking place in another place, another time. A tragedy play is written and engineered by an *arranging* agent—by a scriptwriter, the assembler of the scene. In the light of the previously overviewed history, I argue that so is the case with humanitarian spectacles also. Visual spectacles presented within the humanitarian frame are almost invariably assembled, arranged and conveyed for the audience by a mediating quarter (with certain intentions), and thus the storyline included in the representations always molds the ‘real’ events in certain ways and provides preferred and suggested ways of seeing and reacting. Prevalently visual humanitarian communication, through which the Western spectators bear witness to mediated and framed miseries of distant others and are invited to experience strong emotions, and are, in the end, offered a route to a cathartic release from uncomfortable emotions, in many ways resembles the assemblage of a classical tragedy theater.³⁵⁸ Then, how are hamartia and catharsis manifested in the arrangements of the contemporary humanitarian visual communication? And how is the storyline of contemporary humanitarian tragedy theater composed and who arranges the acts in the theater?

3.3.2 HAMARTIA IN THE CONTEMPORARY HUMANITARIAN TRAGEDY ARRANGEMENT

Within visual humanitarian representations the sufferers are commonly presented in rather conventional ways. As we have seen, it is essential for tragedy theater to contain hamartia, i.e. the downfall of the protagonist, and that the main character not be seen as deserving his/her fate. For the play to achieve its designed impact, the representation of (ideal) victimhood is central. The humanitarian suffering *ideal victims* are most often presented in the bodies of weak and innocent children, as well as of women, or they are habitually presented as crowds of civilian population, depicted as somewhat passive and *innocent*. Nevertheless the suffering victims usually are not presented as singularly virtuous, but in most cases they appear as coincidental victims, who happened to be in harm’s way. Usually the victims

³⁵⁷ **Aristotle:** *Poetics*.

³⁵⁸ I must underline that this is not to say that the tragedies mediated for the awareness of the spectators would not be ‘real’ or would be thoroughly planned by the mediating quarters. The tragedy theater here functions as a metaphor, which reveals the assemblage and arrangement of visual humanitarian communications. The tragedy form perhaps quite simply is a form that the human mind reacts to strongly; or then perhaps we (Westerners) are so accustomed to this form of presentation that (visual) arrangements that resemble the form of a tragedy play affect us forcefully, and thus this form is much used also in humanitarian contexts.

are not pictured as gravitating towards harm's way intentionally, nor are they usually presented as active subjects in the circumstances inflicting suffering on them (such as soldiers actively taking part in conflicts or even able bodied young men, stereotypically seen as active subjects, capable of molding their own destinies). Furthermore, the visualized sufferers are not habitually presented as evil or corrupt characters deserving their fate.³⁵⁹ Thus, although there are strongly stereotypical features in the ideal victims and how they are presented, the habitual sufferers of the humanitarian story are generally not too distant from the spectators in their moral composition, not evil, not particularly virtuous, but rather in this sense quite identifiable and mediocre. Thus, the role division of humanitarian communication is routinely formed according to the (casting) outline of Aristotle's tragedy description on roles and moral positioning of the main characters on stage and the spectators in the crowd.

Therefore, seemingly it might appear, that hamartia—the tragic mistake made by the central suffering character leading to his misfortune, which is central for the tragedy play—would not at all fit the (contemporary) humanitarian theatrical arrangement, which in everyday thinking most commonly stems from the idea of an innocent (passive) victim coincidentally at the mercy of violent events. But observing more closely, and taking into consideration the prevailing globally hierarchical nature of humanitarianism and humanitarian visual arrangements, in fact hamartia can be seen to be a central feature in the conventional visual humanitarian storyline. As was seen in the previous chapter 2, mediated records of suffering others have been commonly seen to produce sensations of horror, pity and amazement, and thus they have been seen to enable a compassionate encounter with the sufferers, leading to will to help, and further arousing imagination of a shared humanity and understanding of the fragility of all life. But at the same time, already in the representations of the Lisbon 1755 tragedy, the *otherness* of the victims has indeed played a focal position in the (visual) arrangement and spectatorship of distant suffering.³⁶⁰ The distance created by mediation places the spectators and the suffering objects in an unequal relationship, and thus alienates the viewers from the viewed, and consequently others the sufferers, making them appear somewhat different from the spectators. In this sense both in the setting of a classical tragedy play as well as in the arrangements humanitarian communication, hamartia separates the spectators from the characters presented on stage. Moreover, due to the (spatial and often also temporal) remoteness of the spectators, the spectators often possess additional information that the suffering characters midst the

³⁵⁹ See for instance: **Boltanski**: 1999; **Moeller**: 1999; **Chouliaraki**, 2006. ; **Malkki**, 1996. ; **Cohen**, 2001; *The visual dehumanization of refugees*. Bleiker, Ronald, Campbell David, Hutchinson Emma& Nicholson, Xzarina. Australian Journal of Political science, 2013, 48/4, 398-416. See also chapter 4 of this study.

³⁶⁰ **Orgad**, 2012, 60; **Sliwinski**, 2011, 43-45. See also chapter 2.1.

Sometimes the victims of violence and pain, also in humanitarian contemporary contexts, are presented as deserving their fate. More on this in the chapter 6.

enfolding tragic events lack—just as in an Aristotelian tragedy. Because of the distance and the additional knowledge granted by remoteness, the spectators often cannot imagine themselves making the same mistake.

Furthermore within contemporary humanitarian communication, the spectators—the Westerners gazing from the safety of their homes and relatively orderly societies—most commonly hear and see stories of the misfortune of individuals living in the non-Western, distant areas in turmoil, usually located in non-Western setting, in societies seen as less developed, less wealthy and less secure than our own. Thus, the global hierarchy of the privileged West and the less fortunate “rest” is typically inherently present in the visual representations of bodily suffering aimed at arousing humanitarian emotions. The othering, distancing and objectifying dimension of humanitarian visual communication is an ever-present dilemma and a continuous tack in humanitarian communication, especially central to visual mediation of suffering.³⁶¹

Therefore, when seeing the suffering of the inhabitants of less developed and less secure non-Western areas, what is ultimately seen—in addition to the smallest common denominator, the precarious human body—are the different hierarchical and globally fractioned segments of the humanity. Through visual humanitarian communication, the ‘the Third World’, ‘the developing world’ of the non-Western world is articulated to the ‘first world’-on-lookers. Thus, while spectating mediated images of suffering through humanitarian visual arrangements, the Western spectators often tend to gaze at the unfortunates of this world, pictured in their immaturity and insufficiency. Thus the Western spectator often tends to see others—subhumans—people not quite like themselves, individuals (and areas) failing to live up to ‘their standards’, and thus interpret their *hamartia*—tragic mistake—ultimately as the simple coincidence that these people happened to be born into a wrong area and regime: a wrong place, at a wrong time. Therefore the tragic mistake of the objects of the image presented at the humanitarian theater is the fact that they were not born to be a part of the Western global nobility, not included in the rank of the spectators gazing from the Western safety. Thus, humanitarian imagery presenting graphic images describing the downfall of human rights and human worth, Western based ideals of a shared humanity, quite often seems to suggest that not being a Westerner today is the most terrible mistake you can make. Thus, I argue that *Hamartia*, stemming from the global political distinctions and hierarchies, is in fact at the center stage in humanitarian communication.

Therefore *hamartia* can be seen as a persistent feature, included in the logic of global humanitarian communication, strongly determining the ways in which the Western spectators see the suffering individuals and areas presented to them in humanitarian images. I will develop these themes further and analyze the contemporary humanitarian *hamartia* in the

³⁶¹ See for instance: **Boltanski**, 24-26; **Chouliaraki**, 27-29; **Dauphinee**, 2007; **Malkki**, 1996; **Käpylä&Kennedy**, 2014; **Cohen**, 2001, 206- 218.

subsequent chapters of this study, particularly in the next chapter 4, in which I contrast and compare the display of Western suffering with the suffering of the less-developed world and introduce a *theater of proof* created by the presentational practices of suffering images.

3.3.3 CATHARSIS AT THE HUMANITARIAN TRAGEDY THEATER

In addition to hamartia, catharsis—an emotional cleansing or a healing sensation experienced by the spectator after going through emotions of fear and pity—is a focal component in an Aristotelian tragedy play. The central significance of a tragedy play is to produce sentiments of *fear* and *pity* and, then, to give the spectator a release from them, resulting—quite paradoxically—in feelings of emotional healing, even satisfaction. This characteristic mode of feeling, linked to the appeal and strength of a tragedy play, is also detectable as central function in the spectatorship of the visual humanitarian visual arrangements. I see that, correspondingly to classic tragedy arrangement, also in the (visual) humanitarian setting, the dramatic spectacles of suffering and despair offer their spectators ways to overcome fear and pity and, thus, create multiple routes to reach a humanitarian catharsis.

Without the possibility of reaching a catharsis the spectators would only feel miserable in the face of troubling images of pain and distress. Thus such representations would perhaps be avoided, perceived as ‘numbing’ and turned a blind eye to.³⁶² But once a route to a cathartic state is offered (by the sentimental education embedded in humanitarian communication), the spectators may reach a level of feeling at ease with themselves and even experience sensations of being ‘good’, acting morally, ‘doing something’ and even feeling good about themselves. As discussed earlier, the catharsis today within the global humanitarian theatrical setting can be achieved in numerous ways: by making a phone call or clicking a mouse and donating a preferred amount of money to a cause, which is designed to alleviate the suffering of the objects depicted. Numerous methods of donation and participation are made as easy and as appealing as possible. Today we may ease the pain of others—and reach an individual humanitarian catharsis—by attending a beneficiary concert, watching a charity TV program and simultaneously sending money to a cause, paying a monthly endowment by becoming a sponsoring ‘godparent’ of an African child, or by just clicking the mouse and ‘liking’ humanitarian actions on social media. By ‘helping’, acting morally and responding to the addressing of the humanitarian appeal, a state of catharsis is attained.³⁶³

But in addition to these softer routes—and more relevantly to my interest in the following chapters of this study—it may be argued that the

³⁶² See for instance **Cohen**, 2001, 168-195

³⁶³ About the self-centeredness and entertainment dimension of contemporary humanitarianism see, **Chouliaraki**, 2013.

humanitarian catharsis has also been made attainable—especially towards the end of the twentieth century and beyond—by much harder, even militarized means. The spectator, facing an image of calamity might, for instance, reach an instantaneous humanitarian catharsis by becoming convinced that a suggested political solution or action aimed at the alleviation of this distant suffering—such as a military intervention aimed at securitizing a distant area in turmoil and rationalized and legitimized as a humanitarian solution—is an apt one and then giving political consent to such actions. Therefore, I argue, that a humanitarian catharsis may, in international political settings and, particularly, in the contemporary age of the humanitarian world politics, be achieved by supporting military-political solutions designed, framed, presented and marketed as alleviating the suffering of others. Thus, the cathartic release from fear and pity can be reached by giving governmental actors/mediating quarters the legitimation they need within Western democratic political systems to intervene in foreign crisis situations even by military means. Moreover, the humanitarian catharsis today may then be even attained by participating in militarized humanitarian efforts first-hand; by working as a crisis management official, or even by enrolling to become a (humanitarian) soldier fighting in the name of a more just and humane world (order).³⁶⁴ Therefore, I claim that multifarious ways—from donation to voting, from dancing at a charity concert to consenting to political decision-making, and all the way up to carrying a gun—are contemporarily offered to Western spectators within humanitarian communication as routes of getting rid of the sensations of fear and pity aroused by seeing the plight and tragic fates of others, and reaching a catharsis. In the subsequent chapters of this study I shall pay attention to the routes suggested and provided to achieve a humanitarian catharsis by the contemporary visual humanitarian arrangements, and I shall analyze the visual contemporary humanitarian tragedy arrangements from this viewpoint.

Because of the very cathartic function of (visual) humanitarian communication the arrangements of the humanitarian tragedy enable the spectators also to become active *subjects* of the theatrical arrangement. This seems to have been the case in many occasions throughout the course of modern history of humanitarian visual communication, during which the audience, its feelings as well as reactions when facing the suffering of others has been at the core of these arrangements. Accordingly, Aristotle notes that the character or the personality of the sufferers encountered through the tragedy are not the central theme. The spectators do not need to know too much about the personality of the main characters, since what is essentially interesting and important for the storyline and functionality of a tragedy is

³⁶⁴ Such humanitarian addressing can be seen in the recruitment images of Western nations. See: **Jantunen, Saara & Kotilainen, Noora:** *Drones, Missiles and Teddy bears: The crisis of the 21st century soldieryship*. In *Binaries in Battle. Representations of division and conflict*. Vuorinen, Marja, Huhtinen, Aki-Mauri & Kotilainen, Noora. Cambridge Scholars Publications, 2014, 94-98

not *what happens to* the suffering characters on stage, but how the audience relates to it.³⁶⁵ Just as theatrical tragedy play centers on the emotions of the audience, also humanitarian visual arrangements actually often leave the main characters displayed in their corporal substance speechless, casting them as *objects*. This dividing feature is persistently present in humanitarian communication, as we have seen while discussing the earlier history up until the turn of the century. Although from the 1980s onwards the discussions on making the voice of the victims and their personal stories heard has been central, when thinking about the ethics of representing the misfortune of others³⁶⁶, most commonly the spectators of the visualized tragedies still do not hear the personal histories behind the corporally presented destinies mediated for them and designed to evoke their imagination and emotions towards the suffering of this world.

But, in addition to the central role of the spectators in the humanitarian tragedy arrangements, also the mediating quarters—the orchestrators of the play—, the diverse humanitarian actors and the media, which arranges the setting for displaying, presenting, circulating and selecting the acts of suffering that shall be referenced and thus frames them for the spectating audiences, play a central role in determining the mode of addressing, as well as the functionality of the humanitarian theatrical arrangements. Yet it seems that the role of these agents is, still today, rather under acknowledged in relevant research.³⁶⁷

3.3.4 THE SCRIPTWRITERS AND ASSEMBLERS OF THE HUMANITARIAN TRAGEDY SPECTACLES

According to Aristotle, in order for the tragedy play to be satisfactory, for the hamartia to be credible and effective, and for the catharsis to be attained, the story as well as the visual display needs to be carefully curated, planned and written. Aristotle defined the story—the manuscript of the play and the art of storytelling—as the most important feature of a spectacle that needed to comply with the rules of tragedy. The story needs to be effective in arousing strong sentiments of fear and pity, but its constitution also needs to accomplish a satisfactory outcome, catharsis. Aristotle continues describing the material staging as well as the orchestration of the tragedy in many words, but he places the script, the work of the author in creating a sufficient and functioning story, as a priority.³⁶⁸ As the skill of the author and a good story are central to the effectiveness of a tragedy play, likewise in the setting

³⁶⁵ Aristotle: *Poetics*.

³⁶⁶ Chouliaraki, 2013, 61-64; Cohen, 2001, 216-218; *Code of Conduct: Images and Messages Relating to the Third World*, CONCORD, 1989.

³⁶⁷ The role of the humanitarian NGO's as well as the media has been taken up in relevant research, but mostly the role of the governmental actors, politicians as well as the military as assemblers of the arrangements has been quite unacknowledged. See for example Chouliaraki, 2013; Chouliaraki 2008; Moeller, 1999; Boltanski 1999; Kennedy & Käpylä, 2014.

³⁶⁸ Aristotle, *Poetics*.

of humanitarian visual mediation an efficient storyline and arrangement—and thus the role of the mediators and assemblers of the suffering imageries—is pivotal.

One might think that by the writes of the theatrical arrangements I would point to the photographers and other initial producers of the visual material, but rather I see the (institutional) mediators of the arrangements of the visual material as more interesting and noteworthy.³⁶⁹ As presenters, assemblers and the actors framing the contemporary visual humanitarian tragedy play are perhaps most commonly perceived the humanitarian organizations and their visual appeals. But as we have seen and discussed in chapter 2, also the mainstream media and political and governmental actors dealing with humanitarian, international issues, crisis and war clearly belong to this group.³⁷⁰ I argue that contemporarily—in the era of Western humanitarian international politics—what we see, how we see it, as well as what we do not see of the suffering of others is determined not only by the prominent humanitarian organizations, international institutions or by the (Western) mainstream media, but increasingly also by governmental, political and even military actors. Especially in the contemporary situation, these actors have the power to elevate some tragedies and some imageries into the public consciousness and societal/political discussion by referring to them, by using them in their proclamations and descriptions on foreign crisis situations or even by disseminating imagery, by governing and controlling the image flows and, moreover, sometimes by producing such imageries themselves.³⁷¹

I see that these manifold actors present, mediate, arrange and frame the suffering of others, and, thus, actively create spectacles of suffering and theatrical arrangements presenting the pain of others for wide, spectating audiences.³⁷² Thus they are the scriptwriters and directors of the humanitarian tragedy theater, whom predominantly answer of the visual assemblages of suffering permeating the sight of the spectators.

The power structures embedded in the global humanitarian machinery, its procedures, discursive, ideological and historical constructions, determine

³⁶⁹ I must underline, my interest in this study is not in scrutinizing the rationale or motives of individual producers of the visual material—be they professional photographers taking the images for international news corporations or ordinary citizens capturing dramatic event on the spot and uploading them to the social media.

On the criticism towards photojournalist in this setting see for example **Linfield**, 2010.

³⁷⁰ This has probably has somewhat been the case throughout the modern history, but in the more contemporary setting I see that this function has become even more determining. As an example of this is the growing Western governance of war imagery from the Vietnam War Syndrome -discussion onwards, and particularly for example the governance, control, dissemination and design of the Gulf War imagery. See chapter 2.

³⁷¹ Judith Butler discusses this "staging apparatus" and refers to these state functions in controlling and regulating the image flows and "representability/unrepresentability" of suffering in *Frames of War*. See: **Butler** 2009, 72-74.

³⁷² I am not here claiming that the media, humanitarian organizations or even the Western political actors have directly and explicitly created the circumstances that cause suffering in the first place. But what I claim is that they nevertheless perform as the mediators and scriptwriters of the performance that are aimed to reach and effect the spectating crowds.

the ways in which the suffering of others is presented to the spectating audiences, and the multifarious mediating agents furnished with diverse intentions determine through which arrangements the spectating audiences encounter the less fortunate fellow humans. Furthermore, the overall political, ideological, cultural and historically formed ways of seeing and perceiving the world—the unconscious ideology of humanitarianism—shape the ways in which the suffering of others are presented to the surrounding world. Additionally, Western spectators have grown accustomed to seeing the suffering of others in distinct ways, and through representational conventions that are culturally and historically familiar. The historically formed, conventional ways of presenting, as well as perceiving, affect the ways in which the theatrical arrangement of suffering is organized, and, moreover, how suffering is framed and intended to be seen, perceived and signified. The hierarchical power-settings embedded in the global humanitarian machinery, and its functions and practitioners, as well as the politically selective features determine whose suffering we see—and whose suffering remains unseen. Moreover, the representational practices of humanitarian imagery and images of suffering are governed by culturally and politically constructed norms and conventions of “taste and decency.” In addition to this, the material seen suitable for distribution from global war zones is also governed by political constraints and sometimes even regulated by influential high-level political actors of international politics.³⁷³

The intention of a theatrical tragedy play is to give the spectators, through the force of storytelling, visual assemblage, and framing, a tour of horror, arousing fear in order to arouse pity, and then to provide a route to catharsis, a release from these emotions. Alike, I argue, images of suffering and despair within the humanitarian communication are set out for display with the *intention* of emotionally influencing their audiences. The contemporary assemblers and presenters of tragic images, operating within the wide Western public sphere, assemble and arrange the spectacles of suffering guided by their often purpose-oriented intentions of addressing the intended audiences in certain ideologically formed ways. Thus, I shall in the following chapters (4-7) analyze the uses and arrangement of the images on the level of socially circulating discourses, by considering them on the levels of cultural norms and political utilization. By taking into account the status and position of the scriptwriters—the orchestrators of the theatrical setting of humanitarian visual communication—and analyzing the intentions of the actors answering for the assemblage of the arrangements and their suggested cultural/political readings within the contemporary humanitarian frame. I shall analyze and seek to unveil the contemporary theatrical arrangements of visually mediated distant suffering and crisis imagery.

³⁷³ See chapter 2.4.5. **Campbell**, 2004; **Butler**, 2009, 69-83; **Sontag**, 2003, 59-65. For more see Chapter 4 and 7.

But before proceeding to untangling and analyzing the arrangements, messages and meanings of the contemporary humanitarian images, I shall in the following paragraphs, elaborate on how I have selected and sorted out the particular imageries—or acts or stagings in the contemporary humanitarian theater—to be scrutinized.

3.4 THICK IMAGES

As said, the selection of the visual images discussed in the history chapter 2 was largely guided by previous research, and because these instances have been established as important watersheds and referential nodal points in the history of visual humanitarian communication. Thus, the formerly discussed images and episodes represent a somewhat conventional and established (perhaps canonized) ways of seeing the history of picturing atrocity and the Western history of evolution of humanitarian ideas. Many of the images discussed in chapter 2 may thus be referred to as *iconic*. The well-known and much referred to iconic nature of these images, thus, moreover, proves the significance of these imageries for the public imagination on the topic.

The material of the subsequent chapters (4-7) of this study consists of various diverse types of images and imageries, presented by manifold quarters and circulated in multitude of different channels. The material includes images originally produced by local inhabitants of crisis areas and initially circulated through social media channels,³⁷⁴ The material also consists of images perhaps less familiar to the wider public, such as ‘war branding imagery’ of international military organizations discussed in chapter 5. Some of the images analyzed are produced and presented by governmental actors of Western countries, mostly of the United States,³⁷⁵ as well as by influential international actors such as the NATO.³⁷⁶ But in addition to the images presented in such directly political contexts and sites of utilization, my interest predominantly lies in the representational practices, uses, framings and significations of these images within the so called Western mainstream media. Majority of the images analyzed in this study have been presented in and circulated in and through the Western mainstream media. ³⁷⁷ Such images can be seen as representations, which have, up to a certain extent, reached a major share of Western audiences.

³⁷⁵ For instance some of the material in chapters 5 and 6.

³⁷⁶ Chapter 5.

³⁷⁷ On ‘mainstream media’ and its functions (in remediating images of suffering): *The manufacture of news*, Cohen, S & Young, J, Constable, London, 1972; **Cottle, 2008**, 111-113; **Robinson, Pierce: Researching US Media-State Relations and Twenty-first century Wars**. In **Allan, Stuart & Zelizer, Barbie** (ed.) *Reporting War. Journalism in Wartime*. Routledge, London, 2004. **Hallin, D: The Uncensored War. The Media and Vietnam**. Oxford University Press, New York, 1986; **Barthes, Roland: Image, Music, Text**, Fontana Press, 1977, 15-32; **Hall, Stuart: The determination of News Photographs**. In *The manufacture of news*, Cohen, S & Young, J, Constable, London, 1972; **Chomsky & Herman**, 2002 (1988).

As images of crisis and pain have a central role in international politics, as well as in Western contemporary public life, because of their strong emotive force and haunting character, and some images of pain have formed into well-known, much used and influential, *iconic* images. Calling an image of pain or war iconic is commonplace. By iconic it is often meant that such images are much used and circulated, familiar to many and well-known, even famous. These sorts of images are often displayed in cover illustrations and news contexts. They circulate fast in different mediums and gather multitudes of different utilizations in various contexts. They are reproduced across a wide range of media, in relation to different genres and topics. Such images are thus widely known, as well as remembered and frequently referred to. They commonly are in their composition and arrangement culturally conventional and fulfill a certain criterion, when it comes to visual appearance, and are, thus, comprehended as pictorial. These kinds of images have cultural resonance; they are easily recognizable within a culture, easily read and familiar. Such images often point to well-known, familiar, historical images in their visual quality. Furthermore, iconic images are typically seen as extraordinarily metonymical and as encapsulating in regards to what they depict.³⁷⁸ Such images are often widely discussed, and also taken up and analyzed in scholarly research.

Many of the images discussed in the history chapter 2 may be characterized as iconic—but perhaps not all. The same might prove to be true of the images discussed and analyzed in the following chapters 4-7. All of the images discussed in this work are in some ways very emblematic, but perhaps not iconic, in their nature and status in the manner defined above. They all are not perhaps that well-known, circulated year after year in the media, scrutinized in research, or taken by famous photographers of famous people, winning photography contest or even much featured in the front covers of magazines, nor recirculated widely in different representations in a wide range of public culture. But what binds all of the images I have selected to be addressed together in this study is that they all may be described as *thick*. As has been explained in the introductory chapter, by a *thick images* (or imagery) I mean images that perhaps do not quite come up to the level of iconic, but which are, nevertheless, significant and worth of closer examination. Images that I call thick are often widely circulated at the particular point of time when they surface. Alternatively, the type of imagery they represent may be much used by the media/publicity to describe phenomena at a certain point in time. But thick images nevertheless multimodally and thickly (as an antonym to thinly, superficially) describe their objects (and events), as well as reveal significant traits of the political ethos descriptive of their presentational time and context. Thick images entail

³⁷⁸ This is how *David Perlmutter* describes iconic (foreign political) images. **Perlmutter, David, D:** *Photojournalism and foreign policy. Icons of outrage in international crisis.* Praeger, Westport, 1998, 11-20; See also: **Hariman, Robert & Lucaites, John, Louis:** *No Caption Needed. Iconic Photographs, Public Culture and Liberal Democracy.* University of Chicago Press, 2007, 27.

features, which, when analyzed in their cultural and temporal context of utilization, crystallize something very emblematic of the political ethos of their time and place.

The term ‘thick’ I have adopted, with modifications, from *Clifford Greetz’s* concept of *thick description*. Greetz, an anthropologist, explained that, in trying to understand cultures of people, what he was interested in were the “webs of significance.” That is, he intended to take into account the social meanings and collective representations constituting significations. Following Greetz, a thick description—instead of a *thin* description, or superficial reporting—intends to interpret and take into account the social meaning behind collective representations, by analyzing and interpreting the contextual connections between people, the beliefs and manners and the characteristics of and temporal context of the event.³⁷⁹ Thus, when analyzing thick images, a thick description and interpretation of their social and contextual meanings may be achieved.

On the one hand, I have chosen the particular images/imageries for this research, because they clearly have relevance in light of their recurrent usage in the media and political context. But, on the other hand, I chose not to study some extremely thick, even iconic imagery, which distinctly describe their time and its ethos in a thick and an emblematic ways, which have been much discussed already in contemporary research literature, such as the *Abu Ghraib* torture images.³⁸⁰ One reason for this is that I strongly suspect I would not have many original new ideas to put forth on these much researched imageries, dwelled on by many brilliant minds before me. But beyond this, I also want to make a point that there is a corpus of not so well-known and less researched imagery, which, nevertheless, tells descriptive stories of the politics of their time. These less well-known images are also hugely influential, because they constitute the bread and butter of visual humanitarian communication, and it is important to take them into consideration when aiming to uncover how images work in political humanitarian connections and contexts. I believe that by analyzing such more quotidian imageries also new directions for the study of such imagery in contemporary humanitarian settings may be opened up.

3.4.1 IDENTIFYING AND FINDING THICK IMAGERY

Then, how have I chosen to study and analyze the particular images discussed in this study? The imageries selected for analysis arise naturally from the Western media stream of the past 15 years. The ways these images

³⁷⁹ **Greetz, Clifford:** *Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture*. In *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. Basic Books, New York, 1973, 3–30.

³⁸⁰ See for instance: **Sontag, Susan:** *Regarding the Torture of Others*. *New York Times*, 23, 5 2004.; **Butler**, 2009; **Hansen, Lene:** *How Images make World Politics: International icons and the case of Abu Ghraib*. *Review of International Studies*. 41/2, 2015, 263-288; **Dauphinée, Elisabeth:** *The Politics of the Body in Pain: Reading the Ethics of Imagery*. *Security Dialogue*, 38/2, 2007, 139-155; **Linfield**, 2010.

were utilized, contextually and politically framed and signified stood out for me as striking, troubling, noteworthy, metonymic and *thick* at first glance.

During the years of writing this study many instances and serendipitous juxtapositions of mediated thick imagery of suffering presented themselves to me in the Western media stream. In September 2009, a blurred image of a mortally wounded 21-year-old US Marine *Joshua Bernard* (taken by an Associated Press photographer *Julie Jacobson*) stirred up a heated political and moral debate in the US, on whether the images should have been published or not. The debate told me about the political and global boundaries of *representability* (and unrepresentability)³⁸¹ of human suffering. At about the same time with the debate on Jacobson's images the *Haiti earthquake* (January 2010) took place. Blunt images of immense human suffering—images of identifiable and recognizable individuals, exposed, bloody, in pain or already lifeless—were scattered everywhere in the Western publicity. They were seen in appeals, in the news, and in the photographs of the US Army. The realization that pushed me into writing this study arose from the contrast of these imageries. Whilst this difference between portraying casualties and death of Western and non-Western peoples in itself is not a new observation, I deemed it important to analyze this dynamic also from the more contemporary viewpoint. Thus writing, what now constitutes **chapter 4** of this study, started from the observation that today the suffering of Western citizens—civilians and soldiers alike—is relatively nonexistent and invisible in popular and wide-spread visual representations, whereas concurrently the suffering of non-Westerners is abundant almost everywhere you lay your eyes on. This speaks of the visual performativity of humanness. The difference in the visual staging of suffering seemed to me to suggest different hierarchical strata of humanity and the Western humanitarian world political ideological thinking behind such a hierarchy.

Success in contemporary warfare is essentially about winning the fight over the perceptions—the hearts and minds—of the surrounding world and justifying the desirability of the costly military operations to the home fronts. Visual imagery provides a central arena through which the distant spectators of war form their assessments on contemporary 'overseas insurgency operations' and the War on Terror. The communications team of the NATO-led Afghanistan-ISAF operation (2003-2014) presented the events and the ISAF's actions in Afghanistan through a massive amount of visual images uploaded onto their *ISAF-Media on the flickr* ³⁸² image sharing site on the internet. This imagery created and circulated by the ISAF offers a revealing insight into the intentions and role division embedded in the visual narratives used to win over the hearts and minds of coalition audiences. As I discovered these perhaps quite extraordinary war images, instantly they struck me as significant and striking; they invited me to think what their

³⁸¹ Butler, 2009, 72-76.

³⁸² <https://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/>

intended messages were as well as led me to think what kind of, perhaps non-deliberate narratives of the “humanitarian war” did they create. The visual material of **chapter 5** is an interesting example of the visual branding—or *visual strategic communication* efforts—of the contemporary Western wars constructed and circulated by Western military officials and governmental actors. And hence this imagery speaks about how governmental actors are changing the way humanitarian imagery is utilized in the contemporary era.

Chapter 6 deals not only with the contemporary foreign political opponents of the West but also with the Western identity as a global humanitarian power. Osama bin Laden was captured and killed in the Operation *Neptune Spear* in May 2011. Shortly after the operation I was talking with my colleague *Saara Jantunen*. While discussing the operation, the capturing of bin Laden and the Western discourse of humanitarian war, we spotted a spectacular visual pattern that seemed to connect the capturing spectacles of bin Laden in 2011 and Saddam Hussein in 2003. We saw that these visual spectacles narrated something significant about the contemporary visual presentation of Western enemies. The theatrical form of the humiliation and annihilation of these enemies, to us told a story of the humanitarian ethos of the Western world politics. Then, after the Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi was captured and killed in October 2011 the pattern of representation that followed was very much similar to those picturing his precedent antagonist fellows making the (visual) narrative pattern even clearer, which cemented our earlier observations and compelled us to write about these spectacles in our separate research projects.³⁸³ These events visualize the central plots of the humanitarian story, as picturing the punishment of evil and the victory of the strong, moral Western humanitarian actors is essential for the functioning of the Western humanitarian world order.

The reason for choosing the material of **chapter 7** is somewhat similar and also highly personal. In the late summer 2013, I had just slowly started returning to work after my maternity leave, as the *Ghouta Chemical attack* of August 21st took place. Soon after the images surfaced in the media, it became evident that the utilizations of these images crystallized significant features of the visual staging of Western political theater of suffering. In addition to the novel mediation technique of social media, the images were also extensively referred to in the rhetoric of Western leaders in rationalizing a humanitarian military operation into Syria. I encountered the horrific social media images of the attack through Western mainstream media and could not escape them. Maybe because of being a fresh mother of a one and half year old baby boy, the images of suffocated small dead bodies lined up on a concrete floor, wearing nothing but diapers, moved and shocked me in a

³⁸³ Saara and I both wrote separate and very different articles on the punishment narratives of the “bad boys” of Western world politics for Finnish Journal *Kosmopolis*, 4/2012. A modified version of Saara’s article can also be found in her Doctoral dissertation: **Jantunen, Saara: Strategic Communication: Practise, Ideology and Dissonance**. National Defence University, department of leadership and military pedagogy. Publication series:11, doctoral dissertation, Juvenes print, Tampere, 2013, 145-166.

profound way. I felt overwhelming grief and fear in the face of these images—and I cried a lot while looking at them. But I also felt the need to understand how these images operated and how they were used in Western publicity and politics. Even though I did not want to look at the disturbing images that made me feel very anxious, I was compelled to write about their role in Western politics in relation to the Syrian War and about their significance in depicting how images flow in the global context and how they are contextually signified within these flows. These images certainly are thick; they entail something that deeply describes their time and the contemporary manners of mediating crisis imagery, and they, in a thick way, unveil how images of immense human suffering are utilized in contemporary international political settings. I felt that I had to include these images in this study.

Besides identifying each of the cases as relevant for the study, coincidentally they all happened to intertwine with a story in my life and with my personal history. We are all, after all, products of our life time and the way that the representational practices embedded in humanitarian communication interact with our lives are part and parcel of the effect and power these pictures have on our modes of thinking and acting. Consequently, in a study like this one, the choice of the research material is partly influenced by emerging events, by humanitarian and political actions and the modes of their representation as well as by the effect that the images of suffering have on the wider public, me myself included. The next chapter—*Emotional Theaters of Proof: Humanity's Conditionality in Humanitarian Images*—analyzes the first contemporary staging of images in the visual humanitarian theater selected to be scrutinized in this study.

4 VISUAL THEATERS OF PROOF: HUMANITY'S CONDITIONALITY THROUGH IMAGES OF SUFFERING

4.1 INTRODUCTION: THE THEATERS OF PROOF OF VISUALIZED SUFFERING

Visual representations of vulnerable bodies have during the history of modern humanitarian communication served a focal position in shaping the apprehension of the shared vulnerable nature of all human kind.³⁸⁴ Images of suffering others have determined comprehensions of life worthy of protection, fostered demands in widening the boundaries of humanity, and activated benevolent sentiments and humanitarian actions. Also, today the ways of visually representing (bodily) vulnerability—the visual humanitarian tragedy theatre—occupies a central arena in which belonging to humanity becomes determined, and through the spectating of which, the value of lives of others are considered.

When browsing through contemporary mediatized images of human suffering midst crisis, war and catastrophes presented within western publicity, a strictly hierarchical practice of representation becomes lucid. Representations depicting violated, suffering and dead bodies of non-Western humans are presented to Western spectators on daily basis. As on the other hand, vulnerable bodies and corporal suffering of Western individuals are relatively scarcely represented in the Western publicity and mainstream media. This is a well-acknowledged fact, simply because the humanitarian machinery tends to gravitate from the western sphere towards the non-Western world, and thus also the flow of images is predominantly orientated from the non-Western towards the western sphere. This visual tendency could perhaps also be explained by simply stating that lives of Westerners are more secure within relatively safe western societies and thus less liable to face violence. But these explanations are not alone sufficient in explaining the prevailing disparity in the see-ability of non-Western bodies vis-à-vis their Western counterparts.

I claim, that the highly hierarchical system which manifests itself in the contemporary see-ability/representability of some vulnerable bodies, and on the other hand the exclusion of representation/invisibility of some others in Western publicity, is a hierarchical system, historically formed, culturally, politically and discursively governed through varied representational norms and practices. I see this tendency reflecting the hierarchical humanitarian

³⁸⁴ This topic has been discussed in more length in the former chapters of this work. See for example: **Halttunen**, 1995; **Butler**, 2004 ; **Sliwinski**, 2011.

system, the Western take on globally divergent value of life, as well as the ethos Western humanitarian international politics. Furthermore I argue, that the norms of upholding as well as the practices governing and constituting the representational arrangements of images of suffering are at a central position in demonstrating the apprehension of the value of life³⁸⁵, conditional nature of belonging to the realm of full-fledged humanity, and on the other hand, of not-belonging. This chapter deals with the hierarchical and conditional nature of belonging/not belonging, inclusions/exclusions of humanity which become demonstrated and visible through scrutinizing contemporary representational arrangements of images of suffering. This chapter thus analyses the visual norms and practices that govern the representation of images of crisis and pain, and therefore sheds light on how the contemporary Western spectator/spectatorship of images of suffering is constituted through representational patterns of humanitarian images.

I argue, that the exposure to visual bombardment of vulnerable, weak and suffering non-Western bodies, and on the other hand strict (cultural and political) governance over the representation of visualized Western bodily vulnerability creates a *visual theatre of proof* (following *Bruno Latour's* concept of theatre of proof) in which the conditionality of membership of humanity and different statuses of global lives become visually articulated and proofed.³⁸⁶ Thus, the objective of this chapter is analyzing the representational practices and visual features and substance defining the “*human*” and “*subhuman*” characters, which are central for the functionality of *the humanitarian story* and which are at the heart of the contemporary arrangements of the humanitarian tragedy theater.³⁸⁷

The contemporary visual theaters of proof of (belonging to) humanity are in this chapter approached through a multitude of divergent contemporarily much circulated visual material: images of war and terrorism, images of natural catastrophe and epidemics as well as visual representations of refugees/refugeeness. Firstly, I will indicate through divergent contemporary cases, how the representation of non-Western suffering and Western suffering are rather rigidly and hierarchically arranged in the Western popular publicity. The divergent visual representations of non-Western suffering circulating in the Western publicity are juxtaposed with the presentation/ governance patterns of Western suffering, and Western inflicted suffering. The ramifications of such representational practices in the context of human dignity and Western humanitarian international politics are pondered upon. The latter part of this chapter investigates the customary boundaries of visual performativity of humanness through images of refugees and refugeeness. Through examining the disproportional and rigid representational practices of human suffering I shall shed light on the political governance of images of suffering and analyze the contemporary

³⁸⁵ Or following Judith Butler, grievable/ungrievable life. **Butler**, 2004.

³⁸⁶ **Latour, Bruno**: *The Pasteurization of France*, Harvard University Press, 1988, 85–86

³⁸⁷ See chapter **3.3**.

representational patterns and arrangements of such images. But furthermore I shall take into consideration how the ethos of conventional Western global humanitarianism and Western apprehension of life worthy of protection and rights, and the conditional nature of belonging to the (full-fledged) humanity are constituted through the arrangements and spectatorship of such imagery.

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4.2 THE HIERARCHICALLY STANDARDIZED VISUAL PERFORMATIVITY OF (BELONGING TO) HUMANITY

When a natural catastrophe, terror attack or war hits non-Western crisis areas, pictures of vulnerable and wounded non-Western bodies commonly widely appear in the Western publicity. Contemporary examples of this are vast: The horrors of the Syrian war have been repeatedly brought home to the western spectators through graphic images of bodily suffering. Bodies destroyed in the bombings, as well as rows of dead bodies of Syrians killed by the use of chemical weapons have over the recent years become painfully familiar to Western spectators.³⁸⁹ Likewise, images of bloody corpses of university students were widely used in the Western media to depict the horror caused by a terror attack in the Kenyan University of Garissa, April 2015. Likewise, images of non-Western weak and vulnerable victims of natural catastrophes and sickness are commonly presented in rather blunt imagery. In 2015 heart-breaking images of the drowned refugee children acted as the ultimate wake up call for the Western spectators on the severity of the plight of the Syrian people and the refugees attempting to approach Europe.³⁹⁰ Westerners are spectating images of disfigured, suffering and pain stricken foreign bodies on a daily basis. This is despite of the lively academic, professional as well as public discussion of the last nearly 30 years on the ethics and effects of graphic images of suffering produced from the non-Western global crisis areas, and displayed in Western publicity. The crux of this debate relies on the global hierarchy of suffering bodies³⁹¹.

³⁸⁸ Images dealt with in this chapter are compiled into collage illustrations (4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5), which can be viewed by the reader. These illustrations are compiled in an effort to firstly to provide the visual material discussed visible for the reader, but these illustrations moreover visually narrate the theaters of proof of humanity and act as sites of contemplation for the reader. More relevant imagery discussed can be found by following the links provided in the sources.

³⁸⁹ The Syrian war has been reiteratedly referred to as a war mediated – also visually – via the social media in a revolutionary way. Images of the Syrian war - and particularly imagery of the August 2013 Ghouta chemical weapon attack - are discussed in more length in the chapter 7.

³⁹⁰ I here refer to predominantly to the widely circulated images of the drowned Syrian refugee child *Aylan Kurdi*, which caused an influential media spectacle in August 2015.

³⁹¹ The global hierarchy of picturing suffering was also discussed in the chapters 2&3.

4.2.1 THE GLOBAL HIERARCHY OF SUFFERING BODIES

Generally the critique of the imagery bluntly mediating the suffering of non-Western individuals for the sight of Western spectating audiences has stemmed from the problematic arrangements of humanitarian images, which have, particularly historically shown the pain stricken objects of the images in stereotypical and simplifying ways. The ethical as well as practical problems of representing the pain of others in (catastrophic bare life) imagery of bodily suffering have been extensively dealt with in academic discussion. Chiefly this critique has targeted the imagery of suffering used by humanitarian organizations, which is generally aimed at arousing benevolent emotion and a will to help (donate) in their spectators.³⁹² But the critique also hits home in the representational practices of the mainstream media, and media's practices of depicting the suffering of others has also been widely academically discussed.³⁹³

The exhausting bombardment of crude "shock effect" pictures and the numbing amount of suffering presented to the Western spectating audiences has been claimed to diminish the moral and ethical responsiveness to the suffering of others, and rather than generating empathetic emotions, need and will to help, the endless visual flood of images of suffering crowds have been seen to produce "compassion fatigue" or "boomerang effect".³⁹⁴ Guided by this critique as well as practical hands-on observations, humanitarian organizations have from late 1980s onwards been drafting and outlining "codes of conducts on the images and messages" to govern the tone and contents of the messages sent from global crisis areas to the largely Western audiences. These guidelines have been compiled so that the inhabitants of the non-Western world would not be presented to the potential helpers—the Western financially capable populations—in stereotypical, subjecting and simplifying ways; giving falsely a passive and helpless account on the subjects of help. Moreover, what has been central to this critique and representational turn of the recent decades is that crude representations have been seen to compromise benevolent emotional ties between the sufferers and the spectators, and thus seen as inadequate in generating sufficient will to help, and producing necessary financial flows.³⁹⁵

As was discussed in the chapter 2.4.1. after the 1980s, codes of conduct of images and messages regarding the representation of the "Third World", compiled by humanitarian organizations (as well as the overall discussion

³⁹² Boltanski, 1999; Moeller, 1999; Chouliaraki, 2013; Chouliaraki, 2006; Chouliaraki, Lillie: *Post-Humanitarianism: Humanitarian communication beyond a politics of pity*. International Journal of Cultural Studies, 2010, 13/2, pp. 107-126; Sontag, 1977; Sontag, 2003; Cohen, 2001. For more on this discussion see chapter 2. 4.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*; *Media ethics. Issues and Cases*. Patterson, Philip & Wilkins (eds.), Lee. McGraw-Hill, New York, 2008, pp. 206-208. see also: *Making hard choices in journalism ethics. Cases and practise*. Boeyink, David & Borden, Sandra. Routledge, New York 2010; *Society of professional journalist: Code of Ethics*.

³⁹⁴ Boltanski, 1999; Moeller, 1999; Chouliaraki, 2013; Chouliaraki, 2006; Chouliaraki, 2010; Sontag, 2002 (1977); Sontag, 2003; Cohen, 2001.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*; *CONCORD: Code of Conduct on images and Messages* 2006.

and development of organizational humanitarianism discussed in the chapter 2.4.1.) have led to a situation in which visual representations used by humanitarian organizations in their fund raising and appeals have significantly altered. Typically humanitarian appeals more and more tend to engage their audiences through *positive appeals*, which attempt to show the objects of help as more active subjects and appeal to their spectators through concentrating on the similarity between the spectated and the (Western) spectators. Within recent years, humanitarian appeals have even oriented towards using visual representations that move away from the customary photorealistic accounts, and leaned towards often non-photorealistic *post-humanitarian appeals* which attempt to engage their spectators with the suffering and need of help of others—their petitions revolving around the agency and emotions of the spectators.³⁹⁶

In addition to the organizational sphere, the discussion over ethical issues regarding the uses of graphic and objectifying images of human suffering in and by the mainstream media has also been lively during the last decades. Hence, guidelines for making ethical choices directed and tailored for journalists and media houses have also been assembled. Associations of journalists have drafted codifications of ethical representations, which also deal with considerations of publishing tragic visual images. For instance, as a basic rule, photojournalists are encouraged to contemplate the privacy, intimacy and dignity of the photographed subject when pictured at times of dramatic events. The necessity to intrude into the “personal space” of the victim is instructed to be bared in mind and carefully contemplated while considering the nature of images published. Questions such as “should this moment be made public”, “will being photographed cause further trauma”, and “am I acting with compassion and sensitivity”, are urged to be asked by the ones producing as well as publishing such images. Issue such as “drawing the line” and “good taste” are discussed and ethical observation is encouraged.³⁹⁷ Generally there is no mention of different standards when producing or publishing photos of more distant foreign victims and (socially, culturally, spatially or emotionally) ‘closer’, Western or domestic victims.

On the other hand, the concept of journalistic “globally comparative value of death” in publishing violent events is often referred to when discussing reportage of crisis and dramatic, violent events. By “comparative value of death” it is pointed to a tendency of (globally, culturally and politically) biased reportage, drawn on the principle of “nearest is dearest”: for instance in America “one dead fireman in Brooklyn is worth five English bobbies, who are worth 50 Arabs, who are worth 500 Africans”. This tendency reflects a logic embedded deep in the human mind on caring most of the people whom are closest to us, and whom we identify with in cultural, geographical and

³⁹⁶ Chouliaraki, 2013; Chouliaraki, 2010; Cohen, 2011. See also chapter 2.4.1.

³⁹⁷ *Media ethics. Issues and Cases*. Patterson, Philip & Wilkins (eds.), Lee. McGraw-Hill, New York, 2008, pp. 206-208. see also: *Making hard choices in journalism ethics. Cases and practise*. Boeyink, David & Borden, Sandra. Routledge, New York 2010; *Society of professional journalist: Code of Ethics*.

political terms.³⁹⁸ However, as the standard of publishing crude images of pain remains divided along cultural lines, the logic of “nearest is the dearest” in the case of visual images of pain functions in a somewhat reverse manner. As Susan Sontag has noted, the further the victim of violence is culturally (politically and geographically and in regards to identity), the more eagerly gruesome images and detailed accounts of the violence encountered by her are featured in the Western publicity. And in turn, the closer the victim is to the intended spectating audiences, less visual representations of her physical suffering is usually shown.³⁹⁹ And thus, despite the altered conventions of visual representation in the organizational appeal field, and ethical codes of (visual) journalism by Western media, I can be argued, the visual representational style of Western mainstream media has not followed the softer current contemporarily commonplace in the appeals of humanitarian organizations.

So, despite of the ethical considerations regarding presentation and publication of images of pain, codifications revolving around the concepts of dignity and honour of victims and culturally formed “codes of taste and decency”, the visualized non-Western pain in Western media remains the norm. The persistent use of images of suffering can be seen as quite understandable, regarding the long history and central standing of images of pain and crisis in humanitarian communication and in informing the surrounding world of distant catastrophes. Furthermore, it is quite expectable that up to certain extent the news media outlets cannot restrain from using photographic and photorealist representations in describing and mediating information on urgent foreign events. At least not in a way that might perhaps be possible for premeditated and carefully considered appeals of humanitarian organizations. But what is truly remarkable in the context of visual performativity of humanness is that while images of battered bodies flood in to the sight of Western spectators, these bodies almost as a norm not “our bodies”, but bodies of global others—“foreign bodies” of non-Western individuals. Thus it seems that the sketched ethical considerations seem not to be, in their full scope, applied when publishing representation of the inhabitants of the non-Western world. These considerations predominantly only govern the presentation of Western bodies.⁴⁰⁰

This disproportion has essential consequences for apprehending and assessing the value of life and determining the humanity of “us” and “them” in global political context. As has been discussed, *Judith Butler* bases the body as the base of being, knowing, as well as feeling for the other. And furthermore, she sees the apprehension of shared vulnerable condition of all bodies (all humans) as the foundation of apprehending a shared humanity,

³⁹⁸ **Moeller**, 1999, 22; See also, **Ginzburg, Carlo**: *Killing a Chinese Mandarin: The Moral Implications of Distance*. *Critical Inquiry*, 1994, vol. 21, 46-60

³⁹⁹ **Sontag**, 2003. ; **Campbell**, 2004; **Hanusch, Folker**: *Publishing the Perished: The visibility of Foreign death in Australian quality newspapers*. *Media international Australia, Incorporating Culture and Policy*, 125, 29-40, 2007.

⁴⁰⁰ **Campbell**, 2004; **Butler**, 2009, 63-100.

or human community. But she acknowledges that some (human) lives (and bodies) are apprehended as more valuable than others; some lives are highly protected and grieved over, as some others are not so keenly supported, nor mourned over.⁴⁰¹ This tendency is poignantly made clear by the globally differentiated representational practices of images of bodily human vulnerability. Furthermore, as *Monica Casper* and *Lisa Jean Moore* have observed, visibility of some bodies and on the other hand the invisibility of some other (vulnerable) bodies is due to complex and intermingling conditions, such as race, gender, age, geography, status, class and citizenship—and power.⁴⁰² Further, *Allen Feldman* has remarked, that often the pictures of dead foreign others act as messages of the Western mastery or superiority, and further of Western “cultural anaesthesia”: by presenting the non-Western “others” as the weak and vulnerable to violence, the Western “us” in comparison becomes presented as powerful, strong, even inviolable.

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As the standard is that violent and crude pictures of human suffering in the midst of wars, crises and catastrophes are pictured through non-Western suffering bodies, and as, on the other hand the bodily suffering of Western citizens is rarely seen, visualizations of crisis create strong globally, culturally and politically divided conditional hierarchical arrangements and juxtapositions. Thus, looking through the representational practices of vulnerable bodies it seem, that while the inhabitants of the Western world seem to be safe from harm—living safely, protected by their orderly societies, political systems and the western human rights and humanity notions—the non-Western individuals appear comparatively looking as precarious, unprotected, even uncivilized—and are (re)presented in as weak corporal *subhumanity*.⁴⁰⁴ Therefore this predominant visual representational style also suggests, that the *hamartia*—the tragic mistake of the lead player of the humanitarian tragedy leading to his/her misfortune, as was discussed in chapter 3—is actually attributed by the coincidence of the sufferer being a non-Westerner.⁴⁰⁵ Thus, the representational arrangements of bodily vulnerability can be seen to exemplify and reflect, and moreover to construct and constitute the global rigidly hierarchical Western apprehension on the human kind and valuable life, by providing visual proof of the conditionality of humanity. In the following paragraphs I will open up the concept of “theatre of proof”, and its usefulness in the context of reading and apprehending the (hidden) messages embedded in the globally hierarchically unevenly divided presentation practices of images of bodily vulnerability.

⁴⁰¹ **Butler**, 2004, 26-32.

⁴⁰² **Caspers, Monica, J & Moore, Lisa, Jean**: *Missing Bodies. The Politics of Visibility*. New York University Press, New York, 2009

⁴⁰³ **Feldman, Allen**: *On Cultural Anesthesia: from Desert Storm to Rodney King*. *American Ethnologist*, 2/21, 1994, 404-418.

⁴⁰⁴ I here refer to the hierarchical “humanitarian story” and the non-Western “subhuman character” as discussed in chapters 2&3.

⁴⁰⁵ See Chapter 3.2.1.

4.2.2 THE THEATRE OF PROOF OF VULNERABLE/INVIOLEABLE BODIES

In the 1880s French chemist *Louis Pasteur* aimed to prove germ theory and the functionality of vaccinations with the help of public, visual and corporeal illustrative shows. The 1880s public was skeptical of the effectiveness of vaccinations and germs as the cause of illnesses. This was mainly because they had no knowledge or understandable proof on the workings of epidemics or germ theory, and were thus reluctant to share the abstract and to the human eye *invisible* ideas of scientist. By publically staging live animals, vaccinating some of them and leaving some without a vaccination—and tagging the vaccinated and non-vaccinated animals by different visual markings—Pasteur set up a dramatized visual “theater of proof” on the functionality of vaccinations. As *Bruno Latour* describes it:

Pasteur’s genius was in what might be called the theater of the proof ...Pasteur invented such dramatized experiments that the spectators could see the phenomena he was describing in black and white. Nobody really knew what an epidemic was; to acquire such knowledge required a difficult statistical knowledge and long experience. But the differential death that struck a crowd of chickens in the laboratory was something that could be seen ‘as in broad daylight.’... To ‘force’ someone to ‘share’ one’s point of view, one must indeed invent a new theater of truth. ⁴⁰⁶

Thus Pasteur proved the effectiveness of vaccinations and the protection against illnesses they offered by conducting dramatic visual shows and proofing the effect of vaccinations by *showing the corporeal proof* to the spectators: dead carcasses of the non-vaccinated animals, and on the other hand, the alive bodies of the vaccinated animals belonging to the control reference group. Bruno Latour sees Pasteur’s genius in addressing the crowds by the usage of the spectacular visual proof; by visually and corporeally showing and thus making the crowd to visually bear witness to the phenomena, he persuaded, or even forced them to share his authoritarian point of view. ⁴⁰⁷ The idea and power of the theater of proof is in the use of a visual, spectacular representation as an expedient to show and prove an otherwise *invisible phenomenon*. By making the spectators visually bear witness to the spectacle, the audience is persuaded to share the point of view of the authority, an authoritarian social discourse or an ideology. Thus the arrangement of the theater of proof also functions as a particular method of producing *certainty* on an otherwise abstract and intangible phenomenon.

In order to understand the use of the term and concept of “theater of proof” in the context of humanitarian pictures, let’s think of the suffering bodies of the humanitarian pictures as actors on the stage of a theatrical

⁴⁰⁶ **Latour, Bruno:** *The Pasteurization of France*, Harvard University Press, 1988, 85–86.

⁴⁰⁷ **Ibid.**

(tragedy) play. As has been discussed in the previous chapters of this work, visual images of suffering and bodily precarity have served a great role in the apprehension of a shared human condition, formation and evolution of humanity discourse, the institutionalization of human rights and within the development of humanitarian world politics. Pictures of suffering are inevitable for the humanitarian discourse for it to convey its message.⁴⁰⁸ Thus, pictures of pain and corporeal suffering in the context of the widening apprehension of protectable life, political and institutional formation and evolution of human rights, humanity discourse and humanitarian world politics can be seen to produce a type of “theater of proof”. In humanitarian context the suffering corporeal body has been used to illustrate the otherwise invisible: the pain felt by others, the need for help, distress of faraway bodies and the madness of war, as well as making the abstract ideas of humanity and human worth see-able—as something concrete and tangible. Just like Pasteur’s test animals, the suffering bodies in the pictures are set on the stage to make the invisible ‘truth’ and function of the paradigm ‘black and white’.

By viewing the arrangements of images of suffering as a visual humanitarian theatre of proof which produces certainty and visually illustrates the value and need of protection of human lives, and by placing such representations under examination in their contextual, ideological and visual surroundings, the meanings, messages and effects of this type of picturing may be scrutinized. And moreover, by scrutinizing such visual arrangements also underlying Western conceptions on the world and on humanity may be retrieved. This, abstract and often unconsciously affecting notions of human rights, the humanity discourse and politics of humanitarian ideology become “black and white” in the theatre of proof of visualized bodily human vulnerability. The distinctions and global/cultural differences and divergent norms in visual presentation of bodily vulnerability underline the ideological power and function of Western humanity politics, human rights and humanitarianism discourse. I argue that, authoritarian arrangements of images of suffering presented in public force the spectators to see and witness corporeal pain and the fragility of human life in certain rigid arrangements and settings, and thus they forcefully affect political emotions, humanitarian responses and apprehensions of valuable life. Thus they also aim to demonstrate the power, effectiveness of and need for humanitarian world politics.⁴⁰⁹ In the subsequent pages of this chapter I shall illustrate by contemporary examples, how the theatre of proof of images of suffering works to demonstrate the power and dominance of the (Western way of life exemplified by) humanitarian ideology, as well as the (globally stratified conditionality of humanity).

⁴⁰⁸ See chapter 2. **Sontag**, 1977; **Moeller**, 1999; **Zelizer**, 1998; **Sliwinski**, 2011.

⁴⁰⁹ **Butler**, 2009, 67-670, **Sontag** 2003, 85.

4.3 CONTEMPORARY HUMANITARIAN THEATRES OF PROOF OF PICTURING TERROR, PAIN AND SICKNESS

Marred bodies of the victims of a terror attack from Africa and images of hundreds of civilian casualties of the Syrian War, lying in long rows on a cold concrete floor—normal mediation of daily news, and visually mediated business as usual from the topical chaotic crisis zones. A blurred image of a wounded Western soldier in Afghanistan, American citizens leaping to their death from a collapsing building in the aftermath of a terror attack—widespread public outrage centring on the disrespectfulness and tastelessness of picturing individuals in their critical moments of vulnerability. Weak and vulnerable bodies of non-western victims of catastrophes aided and saved by strong, militarized western helper figures: an arrangement never averted, which thus produces stories of global hierarchies and power structures.

In the following paragraphs I will investigate the differences of (corporally) picturing the suffering of Western individuals and non-Western individuals in contemporary widely circulated media images. I examine the forms of governance of such images; norms and restrictions placed on visual representation of Western pain, and on the other hand the public presentation patterns of non-Western pain. I shall as well contemplate on what the public arrangements of images of suffering communicate to Western spectators when apprehended as a humanitarian theatre of proof on human worth. Through the themes of personhood, honour and dignity I shall analyze how the distinctions in visual presentation of human suffering articulate and configure the Western conceptions of a singular human kind and (un)conditional human worth. Moreover, I shall pay attention to the ways of picturing of not only pain, but also its alleviation. Thus I also take a look at images produced and circulated of the ones helping and governing the lives of the weak—and analyze what these arrangements tell of Western comprehensions of the global division of capabilities and (human) character, and of the ethos of the humanitarian world politics of the early 2000s.

4.3.1 BLUNTLY EXHIBITING THE SUFFERING AND BRUTALITY OF THE NON-WESTERN SPHERE

It is commonplace for a Western media spectator to find herself facing a mutilated or a dead body of unnamed distant stranger. This has happened to me hundreds, if not thousands of times. One such occasion was late August 2010. I was at home browsing through daily news late at night on my laptop, as I encountered a piece of news from Somalia: A terror attack carried out by a terrorist group *Al- Shabaab* in Mogadishu hotel killed 31, among them 6

members of the Somali Parliament.⁴¹⁰ What stalled me at face of this news was perhaps not amazement due to the bloody terror attack, taking place in unruly Somalia, but rather the way the news on the attack was illustrated. As I clicked the *Reuters* story open, what I encountered was a bloody body of a *member of the Somali parliament* who was killed in the attack. Another image accompanying the news bluntly and recognizably showed another dead Somalian MP being moved by soldiers and locals, covered in blood, his head hanging lifelessly as he was lifted.⁴¹¹ Also an image of Somalian (Western backed provisional government's) soldiers dragging the dead body of a member of the Al-Shabaab killed during the fight behind a military vehicle was included in the slideshow of images illustrating the events. ⁴¹² To say the least these images and the scenery they paint are brutal, but in fact what these images communicate in a global political context and how, is not uncommon. (For these images see illustration 4.1.⁴¹³)

When looking at the images I was astonished, firstly because the imagery pictured members of the Somali government in such a blunt and brutal way. Furthermore, what caught my eye was that as the bodies pictured were nominated as members of the parliament, the names of the victims nevertheless were not mentioned. This simply would not be the case in picturing members of the parliament or other high-level politicians of the Western sphere, nor even usually Western 'ordinary civilian' victims of terror attacks.⁴¹⁴ Neither would an image of an act in which a body of a killed terrorist is being degraded behind a vehicle be generally seen as normal mediation of information in the Western context. What evoke me was this norm of bloody representation from the non-Western crisis zones seems to prevail despite of the fact that the Western media's ethical norms generally recommend that images published of dramatic events which include human suffering should be carefully pondered upon and avoided. In choosing images to illustrate dramatic events involving human suffering, journalistic codifications recommend avoiding violating the "sense of self" and the privacy of the victim, as well as place importance on the use of "good taste". As media norms stress ethical approaches such as treating "every subject (of a photograph) as an end, not as an means to an end", this sort of a visual arrangement clearly points otherwise. ⁴¹⁵ Thus I started asking questions: why were these images selected to publish, and what do they communicate in their contextual surroundings?

⁴¹⁰ ***Somali militants storm hotel, 31 dead includes MPs.*** August 24.2010, Reuters. Also other Western news outlets ran the story with same or similar images: ***At Least 30 killed in Somali Hotel Attack,*** New York Times, August 24, 2010.

⁴¹¹ See illustration 4.1.

⁴¹² See illustration 4.1

⁴¹³ Included in the illustration 4.1 are the three mentioned images included in the Reuters story ***Somali militants storm hotel, 31 dead includes MPs.*** August 24.2010, Reuters.

⁴¹⁴ Susan Sontag writes that "the powerless are not named in the captions". Does this then mean that in comparison to Westerners not even the Somalian MP's have power? **Sontag,** 2003, 70. , see also **Butler,** 2009, 94

⁴¹⁵ ***Media Ethics, issues and cases,*** 2011, 208.

It may be argued that the images showing the human toll and brutality of the acts—both from the side of the al-Shabaab terror and also in relation to the violent retaliation of the Somalian (Western back) government forces—describe and vividly illustrate the events and make them extremely tangible for a Western spectators. They without a doubt throw the brutality of terrorism in a ‘failed state’ straight at the face of the spectator in an extremely blunt way. The images, especially when accompanying the text of the Reuters news, give a painfully clear picture of the violence, havoc and uncontrolled circumstances in conflict-ridden Mogadishu at the moment of the events. The news text highlights how the event shows that the government forces well as African Union peacekeepers have failed to bring order to Somalia tormented by violent anarchy for already two decades. The uncontrolled situation of Somalia, atmosphere of violence and fear, sense of panic and impending threat, brutality and bloody nature of the conflict (from both sides) are made very evident and highlighted by the intermingle of the images and the text. As the images concentrate on showing the human toll and brutality in corporal arrangements, the text goes on to describe “how the blood of the dead is leaking out of the hotel”, and how workers cleaned the floor by pushing the bloody water out of the hotel with their brushes, and how men, decapitated and armless, riddled with bullets were lying outside the site of the attack.⁴¹⁶ Thus the arrangement can be seen to amplify the sense of threat and fear, and build up an image of a totally failed state in a state of uncivilized brutality.

Thus I argue, that rather than arousing empathetic sentiments in the spectator/reader, or strengthening emotional ties and bridging the moral gap between the sufferers and the spectators, the arrangement of the images and the text produce sentiments of fear and resentment, which stem from highlighting the brutality, extreme bloodshed and chaos. As the extreme and chaotic brutality of the event is underlined, the distance between the safe Western spectators and the victims depicted in the images grows. Added with the violent retaliation of the government forces emphasized by the arrangement of the news story and the images, the sensation of distance and belonging to another world are perhaps even more amplified for the Western spectator.⁴¹⁷ The cooperative effect created by the images of the dead MP’s and the degraded body of the Al- Shabaab fighter underline the cruelty and spirit of inhumanness and uncivilizedness of both sides of the conflict. Thus empathetic sentiments of the spectator are even less probable to be aroused, since neither the mutilated Al-Shabaab fighter nor the dead politicians are presented as innocent or impartial “ideal victims” who’s suffering should be particularly mourned over. Rather, it could be said, that the images are used in a way, which presents the political situation in the area as potentially threatening (also to the wider surrounding world) and in a total quagmire. Thus the exhibition of the bodies seems rather to be “a means to an end”,

⁴¹⁶ ***Somali militants storm hotel, 31 dead includes MPs.*** Reuters August 24,2010

⁴¹⁷ **Cohen**, 2001, 193-195.

than an end in itself. Moreover, as the news concentrates on the threat of Islamist terrorism, it also highlights that even though the Western powers are not tempted to send forces to Somalia to fight the threat (as was pointed out in the text), they are keen to support the legal government forces (and “transitional federal institutions”)⁴¹⁸. Thus, the West (United States and well as the EU) are presented as forces providing help, standing on the side of security, tranquillity, civilization and a more prosperous future of Africa.⁴¹⁹

What makes the visual arrangement of this news story so noteworthy is its relative prevalence in the mediation of information of the contemporary Western mainstream media. The arrangement of the photos depicting the situation in Somalia are not unique, but rather follow a visual norm of picturing violent events of the non-Western world, which would not be applied in presenting similar Western events. Equivalent was for example the case with the terrible news of a terror attack killing almost 150 people in the Kenyan university of Garissa April 2015. The news of the terrorist attack was commonly run in the Western media illustrated by brutal images depicting horror at the scene. The images habitually depicted dead bodies of the victims in lecture rooms: knocked over chairs, tens of often recognizable and tangled up corpses of university student lying in pools of blood. The news of the terror attack was often also accompanied with images of student at the spot in panic and crying, as well as images of the bloody and injured victims at a hospital. The images of horror, again caused by an Al-Shabaab were openly circulated in the Western media, despite of their bloody and graphic nature.⁴²⁰ Images of dead or even wounded students after Western school shootings (which can sometimes be seen as a type of terrorism⁴²¹) would not, as a rule be published in Western mainstream media. Nor are were images of recognizable victims of the 2105 January or November Paris terror attack, or mutilated victims of the April 2016 Brussels attack shown in Western mainstream media representations. (An image, which was widely circulated in the Western media picturing the Garissa attack, is included in the illustration 4.1)

Again, it could be said, that the use of such imagery was presented in an attempt to illustrate the nature of the situation at the campus and “the extent

⁴¹⁸ Quotations from the news text:

“Analysts agree that, despite their worries about Somalia serving as a base for international Islamist militancy, there is no appetite among Western powers to send forces to Somalia.”

“In Massachusetts, John Brennan, assistant to U.S. President Barack Obama for counterterrorism and homeland security, said Washington would “continue to work very closely with those in Africa, particularly in the Horn of Africa and Somalia, who are interested in ensuring that Africa can build and realize its full potential and prosperity for all Africans.”

“EU foreign affairs chief Catherine Ashton said the EU remained fully committed to providing long-term support to the transitional federal institutions of Somalia.” **Ibid.**

⁴¹⁹ **Ibid.**

⁴²⁰ See for example: **147 Dead, Islamist gunmen killed after attack at Kenya collage.** April 3, 2015, The CNN; **Paraded in front of a primary School: Gruesome pictures emerge of the terrorist's bodies being put on display as survivors of the Kenya massacre is found alive after hiding in a wardrobe for two days.** April 4, 2015, The Daily Mail:

⁴²¹ See for example: **Aaltola, Mika: Koulusurmaaja rinnastuu itsemurhapommittajaan.** September, 25, 2008, Vieraskynä, Helsingin Sanomat.

of al Shabaabs crimes”⁴²². The images of dead bodies in a classroom were seen by Western media outlets to “reveal the true horror of the massacre “. ⁴²³ But clearly the choice of the visual footage again communicated much more than just neutral dissemination of information. Rather, the arrangement of images in mediating the news by the use of violent imagery, paints a picture of threat of islamist terrorism (towards Christian people) and in doing so, quite ruthlessly intrudes the “personal space” of the victims and exploit the victims at extremely fragile moments. It could be asked, does the publication of such images actually somehow enhance the understanding or perception of the Western spectators of the events, or were the images published only to produce gruesome sensations of astonishment in a rather pornographic or at least sensationalist (meaning aiming to arouse quick and intense emotional reaction by exploding graphic, and rather personal visual material)⁴²⁴ manner.

There are many differences in these two cases, but what binds them together is the arrangement of showing brutal violence taking place in a non-Western setting by utilizing graphic and blunt picturing of non-Western bodies. Although the publication of such brutal images is seemingly justified by mediating information on foreign crisis situations for Western media spectators, the contextual arrangement seem to be quite stereotypically centered on the violent brutality of the non-Western crisis zones. Moreover the publication of these images clearly compromises the ethical practices drawn by Western media houses themselves. The reportage of these cases and especially their visual assemblage and the way they were chosen to be presented in Western media cannot be termed as misrepresentations per se. But they nevertheless by the use of graphic images, clearly present the events in somewhat stereotypical and ethically dubious, even pornographic ways. Thus the arrangement of the images create a theatre of proof, which visualizes and provides proof of the uncivilizedness of the pictured areas, create impressions on their innate tendency for violence and the precarity of the lives of the people inhabiting them.⁴²⁵

Then, what can be learned from the examples of the visual arrangements in braking the stories of the 2010 terror attack in Somalia and the Garissa University attack of 2015, and their visual arrangement by juxtaposing these imageries with the representational practices of images depicting the suffering of Western individuals midst terror attacks and war?

⁴²² As Journalist for New Yorker explained his decision of sharing brutal images of the victims on Twitter. See: *Garissa massacre and the dissemination of Graphic photos*. Latif Dahir, Abdi, April 10, 2015, Sahar Journal.

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ See for instance: *Halttunen*, 1994, 312- 325.

⁴²⁵ What is further interesting here is that the picturing Somalia and Kenya here is rather generic, despite of the fact that the two African countries are very different in their economic and societal build. The two countries thus just seem to represent "Africa" as a one big crisis area, without making distinctions between the conflict-ridden Somalia and rather stable Kenya.



Chapter 4. Illustration 4.1.



Chapter 4. Illustration 4.2.

4.3.2 THE GLOBAL CONDITIONALITY OF PERSONHOOD, HONOUR AND DIGNITY

Ethical codes of Western media habitually encourage fair and considerate approach on publishing images, and especially when picturing persons at times of distress and pain respect and compassion are recommended to be bared in mind. The Code of Ethics the *Society of professional journalist* urge journalist to “minimize harm” and to treat all “sources” as “human beings deserving of respect”.⁴²⁶ But the conventions of media representations and the choices made with regards to which images to show and which not, are not solely in the hands of journalists, or not even solely governed by influential media houses. Culturally driven codes of taste and decency, as well as straightforward political restrictions govern the conventions of how pain is presented and encountered in visual images.

Publishing images of war casualties and suffering inflicted by war has throughout history been objected to strict governmental control. This is also an issue in which—in especially times of conflict and war—self-censorship of (national) media(s), “rallying around the flag” -effect and “manufacturing consent” has played a part in.⁴²⁷ These predispositions are still today in place. As an example of the regulation of the presentation of images of war casualties in the Western media, a rather resent case of US (Governmental) visual censorship is enlightening. Until a few years ago it was forbidden to take and circulate photos of the coffins of US soldiers deceased in wars waged overseas. The ban on photographing the returning caskets of soldiers was implemented at the time of the Gulf War (1991) by President Bush.⁴²⁸ Attempts to politically control and ban publication of images of war is quite comprehensible from the point of view of Western strategic political and military aspirations, as images pointing to the bodily precarity and suffering of soldiers has been seen to damage war efforts and to diminish the public support of military operations. Thus Western high-level politicians have controlled the visibility of such aggravating imagery.⁴²⁹ But restrictions on publishing images of dead or wounded Western soldiers (or other individuals) are not only placed because of political efforts of governmental actors to ban the circulation and visibility of images of Western bodily precarity. The presentation and circulation of such images is habitually in the West frowned upon and widely perceived as offending the rights, dignity and

⁴²⁶*SPJ Code of Ethics*. Society of professional journalist, September 6.,2014: <http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>

⁴²⁷ This was dealt with in the chapter 2. For more, see for instance: *Reporting war, Journalism in war time*, 2004; Cottle, 2009; Chomsky & Edwards, 2002.

⁴²⁸ On the ban on the photography of the coffins, see: Butler, 2009, 65; *Pentagon Ban on Pictures of Dead Troops Is Broken*. Carter, Bill, New York Times, April, 23,2004; *Pentagon Rethinks Photo Ban on Coffins Bearing War Dead*. Scott Tyson, Ann and Berman, Mark, Washington Times 17. 2.2009. See also Caspers, & Moore. 2009. For more on this subject, see also Chapter 2.4.5

⁴²⁹ See Butler, 2009, 65. These themes are also dealt with in the chapter 5, when the images of the Afghan war are discussed.

honour of the depicted victims.⁴³⁰ (Included in the illustration 4.2 is an image of flag draped coffins returning to US soil from war.)

A case of such intermingle of political control and cultural governance restricting our view on suffering of Western individual midst war, is the story of an image of a mortally wounded US soldier *Joshua Bernard* at his last painful moments in Afghanistan, taken by an Associated Press (AP) photojournalist *Julie Jacobson* in 2009. Jacobson worked in Afghanistan for AP as an embedded journalist⁴³¹ moving along with the troops. She had signed the embed rules in order to be able to do her job as a photojournalist mediating the situation in Afghanistan, and to be able to move around in the area.⁴³² One day her embed-unit was ambushed. Jacobson followed the embedding rules and took photos of the situation from afar, without meddling in the occurring events. As a result, grainy pictures taken from distance, barely recognizably showing Bernard mortally wounded by grenade came into existence. Jacobson and AP contemplated publishing the pictures for a few weeks, after which they came to the conclusion, that the images should be published, in order to show the bloody and unfortunate reality of war.⁴³³ (Included in the illustration 4.2 is the Photo of Bernard, taken by Julie Jacobson in 2009.)

Visually showing an image of the dying US soldier in the Western media evoked public discussion and comments from the highest political circles. Defense Secretary *Robert M. Gates* intervened personally in the discussion, stating that AP should not have published the picture. Gates resented the publication of the photos on the grounds of “respect of the soldier”. He stressed that the media company should have had a sense of honor and sensitivity towards Bernard’s family by not publishing such photos of their loved one. Gates accused AP of “lack of compassion and common sense”. He called the presentation of such footage as “appalling” and saw it as representing bad judgment and lack of decency.⁴³⁴ The Western media’s “codes of taste and decency”⁴³⁵ and the Western cultural norms of decency forcefully come into play in the case of the picture of Bernard, as Defense secretary Gates namely called the publication of the picture as offending the

⁴³⁰ This discussion is exemplified by for example by the high level political and moral discussion stirred up by a picture taken by Associated Press photographer Julie Jacobson in the autumn 2009 of a mortally wounded soldier Joshua Bernard in Afghanistan. For this discussion see: **Behind the scenes: to Publish or Not**. New York Times, the Lens Blog. September 4, 2009; Joshus Bernard Photo: Marine Dies in Afghanistan. Huffington Post, October 20, 2009.

⁴³¹ More on the embedded journalism and its effects on the media practices and messages see: **Thumber Howard**, *Prisoner of news values: Journalism, professionalism and identification in times of war*. In **Reporting War. Journalism in wartime**. 2004, 190-205; **Robinson, Piers**: *Researching US media – state relations in twenty-first century wars*. In **Reporting War**. 2004, 96-112.

⁴³² Public affairs guidance (PAG) on embedding media during possible future operations/Deployments in the U.S. central command (CENTCOM) area of responsibility (AOR).

⁴³³ *AP and the Death of a Marine*, September, 3, 2009, The Associated Press; **Dunlap, David, V** : *Behind the scenes: rewriting new rules*. October, 15, 2009, The New York Times LensBlog.

⁴³⁴ **Dunlap, David**: *Behind the Scenes: To Publish or Not?* New York Times, Lens Blog September 4, 2009.

⁴³⁵ **Campbell, David**: *Horroric Blindness. Images of Death in contemporary Media*. Journal for Cultural Research, Vol. 8/1, 2004.

common sense of *taste and decency*. Correspondingly media recommendations in regards to publishing imagery of suffering often also point to the abstract notion of “good taste”.⁴³⁶ As Susan Sontag writes in her book *Regarding the Pain of Others*: “Good taste is always a repressive standard when invoked by institutions and acting as obscuring a host of concern about public order and public morale that cannot be named”.⁴³⁷ In the case of the public presentation of pictures of suffering, the question of what is of good taste or what is decent, make visible the boundaries of culturally defined decency as well as human dignity as cultural, political, globally and contextually conditional constructions. When juxtaposed for instance with the cases of Somalia and Kenya discussed earlier, it becomes clear that same rules and definitions of (in)decent and (dis)tasteful do not apply to all humans in the same extent. What is revealing here is that publications of the picture of a dying US marine is seen as indecent and appalling, violating the *honor* of the Western *person* and sufferer of political violence. But on the other hand, displaying the marred body of a Somali legislator is seen as normal news, mediation of information, and business as usual.

The tendency to attempt to hide precarious Western bodies, can also be seen to tell a story of Western de-realization of the nature and bodily effects of war; the humanitarization of the concept of the new war, and of the reluctance to face fragile human corporeality and mortality attached to the concept.⁴³⁸ But it is not just that Western military related deaths and suffering—potentially jeopardizing the popularity, support for, and humanitarian image of Western waged war—that are habitually cleansed from the Western media representations. David Campbell has observed that codes of “taste and decency” also more generally govern the presentation practices of visual images of suffering and violence in the Western media, causing particularly Western bodily suffering to disappear from the media scene. Placing harsh pictures of suffering Westerners on display and visualizing deceased Western bodies is widely resented by audiences and thus avoided by media houses. This is often also done on the grounds that showing this type of suffering is immoral, tasteless and indecent.⁴³⁹

A well-known and much discussed case of public outrage at in the face of contemporary images depicting Western suffering is the image of the *falling man*. The collapsing Twin Towers hit by aeroplanes became the iconic visual representations of the events of the 9/11: pictures of towers coming down and the destruction of the metaphorical structures—representing the symbolic stately body under attack—were repeated over and over again in the media, and have been iconized as the leading way to illustrate the events. But early on after the catastrophe other ways to visually represent the event —

⁴³⁶ *Media ethics. Issues and Cases*. 2008, 206-208.

⁴³⁷ Sontag, 2003, 61-62; Jantunen & Kotilainen, 2014.

⁴³⁸ See for instance, Butler, 2009, 64-66.

⁴³⁹ Campbell, 2004.

also images showing suffering bodies and corporeal humans heading for their destruction—were also circulating in the Western media. The pictures of the “falling man” taken by photographer *Richard Drew*—images of individuals jumping or falling from the burning towers—were early on commonly used to picture the chaos and suffering caused by the terror attack. The picture of the “Falling man” was displayed in front pages of numerous newspapers the morning after the attack—but soon after the pictures referring to bodily human suffering were cleaned away from the imagery of the event. Images of the “falling men” were seen unfitting and indecent for picturing the tragedy—again namely on grounds of personal integrity and decency, respect for the honour of the suffering individuals and their close ones.⁴⁴⁰ (Included into illustration 4.2. is a frame showing a man falling from the World Trade Centre 11th of September 2001.)

Bodily suffering or even images pointing to the impending bodily destruction of Western persons as a means of representing the disasters were widely repudiated and resented by the Western viewers.⁴⁴¹ The newspapers that ran the picture of the falling man were soon charged of exploiting the death of the pictured man, stripping him of his *dignity*, invading his *privacy* and turning his personal tragedy into *pornography*. The bottom-line in the critique was that the man falling from the tower had an *identity* (although his identity was not verified and remained a mystery), he was a *person*; someone had to know him and care of him—and the picture was thus offending.⁴⁴² This, when juxtaposed with the non-Western cases dealt with earlier, exemplifies how cultural and global conditionality on questions of personhood, identity, personal integrity, honour and dignity of the victim pictured at fragile moments are at the core of the discussion on “taste and decency”.

Correspondingly, for example Western school shootings are strictly not pictured through imagery showing the corporal plight of the victims.⁴⁴³ Discussion on recirculating the brutal images of beheadings of Westerners conducted by ISIS (*The Islamic State*, a brutal terrorist organization famous for its distribution of brutal imagery) has been recently heated in the West. Redistributing the images of ISIL has not only been seen to advance the bloody terror strategy banking on circulating terrifying and brutal imagery (as this has been the primary reason), but also violating the personal integrity of the (Western) victims pictured in the images. Similarly, when the

⁴⁴⁰ **Barbie Zelizer**: *Photography, Journalism and Trauma*, 2002; in *Journalism after September 11*; **Zelizer, Barbie**: *About to Die*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2010, 41-52. see also **Caspers&Moore**, 2009.

⁴⁴¹ Embedded in the Western media practices on picturing western suffering also a great danger of derealisation stalks: the prevalent tendency of avoiding to show the bodies of westerners is also assuming that the western persons are safe from corporeal suffering, pain and mortality: the essential conditions and elements of being a living, corporeal human-animal.

⁴⁴² **Junod, Tom**: *The Falling Man*. September.9.2009, The Esquire. This thinking also suggest that the non-Western subjects of the images would not have anyone; no-one would care of them, and they would not have a family... Surely they do. But this is rarely discussed. See **Sontag**, 2003, 65.

⁴⁴³ As an example of this the media treatment of the Finnish School shootings of Jokela (2007) and Kauhajoki (2008).

office of the French satire magazine *Charlie Hebdo* was attacked by Islamic terrorist in January 2015, circulating and distributing images of the victims was habitually frowned upon in the West. Circulating the imagery was warned about in the media, as it was seen as advancing the goals of the terrorists and moreover commonly perceived as distasteful and violating the honour of the victims.⁴⁴⁴

What is noteworthy here is that Bernard as well as “the falling man” and for example the Western victims of the Paris attacks—were seen as persons; individuals with a names, life stories, history, friends, family, as humans *deserving dignity*. The personhood, dignity and rights of Western individuals are seen to be at stake in the visualization of bodily Western precariousness, suffering and death. But concurrently the problematic of personhood rarely stands out when picturing suffering midst wars and catastrophes of the non-Western world.⁴⁴⁵ As it is habitual to display imagery of non-Western victims in the Western media in their bodily vulnerability, as well as in namelessness and through de-personifying picturing, it therefore, in the light of the representational practices, seems, that non-Western humans are regarded as less human than their Western counterparts.⁴⁴⁶ What is furthermore noteworthy here is that the Somali MP’s pictured in the Reuters story on the terror attack were not even named, regardless of their high societal standing as high level politicians and legislators. What this points out is that not even high societal standing of the victims in the non-Western world changes the tendency of picturing the suffering of the non-Western world in the form of nameless masses and crowds.⁴⁴⁷ Thus it seems, that in the light of contemporary norms of visual representation, individuals seen to belong to the realm of non-Western life may be portrayed in their bodily vulnerability in “undignified” manners, while correspondingly the dignity of Western individuals constantly needs to be safeguarded. Then, what is meant by dignity, constantly referred to when arguing against publication of images showing Western pain?

The phrase “human dignity” is commonly referred to when discussing human rights, yet there is no universal definition of the term. Thus it is used rather inconsistently.⁴⁴⁸ The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares: “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and

⁴⁴⁴As examples of banking the brutal ISIS imagery for example Hashtag campaigns [#DontShare](#) and [#ISISmediaBlackout](#) which surfaced after the killing of the American photojournalist James Foley. ISIS Images depicting local, non-western victims have not generally hoisted such campaigns. See for example: [#ISISmediablackout goes viral following the purported execution of James Foley](#), Washington Post, August 19.2014.; [Mieti, ennen kuin jaat kuvan terroristihökkäyksestä](#). Pullinen, Jussi, Helsingin Sanomat, January 7, 2015.

⁴⁴⁵ It must be added that this double standard is from time to time taken up in critical discussion on publishing crude images of non-western individuals. But what is remarkable is that this discussion generally does not change the reality in which the majority of the media spectators encounter these spectacles through mediatized images.

⁴⁴⁶ **Butler**, 2009, 76- 77. See also **Sontag**, 2003, 65, 70.

⁴⁴⁷ **Malkki**, 1996, 11/3 , 377-404.

⁴⁴⁸ **Helis, John**: *Hannah Arendt and Human Dignity: Theoretical Foundations and Constitutional Protection of Human Rights*. Journal of politics and Law, 1/3, 2008, 73-78, 73.

rights".⁴⁴⁹ This emphasizes the natural, inherent and unconditional nature of human dignity as the starting point of human rights and their up holding. But in the light of the representational practices and debate revolving around the publication and representability of visual images of pain, "human dignity" seems not to be unconditional, but rather globally very unequally divided. Also *Hannah Arendt* saw *human dignity* as an essential quality of man, and the starting point of universal human rights. But Arendt also saw the safeguarding of human dignity stemming from a membership of political community—not from inalienable natural laws or just the coincidence of being born human. For Arendt human rights are debated in particular political communities, and the safeguarding of human dignity requires humankind's right to belong to a genuine (universal) political community. Thus for Arendt loss of dignity is "not the loss of specific rights, then, but the loss of a community willing and able to guarantee any rights whatsoever". For Arendt "only the loss of a polity itself expels him (a man/or a human) from humanity".⁴⁵⁰ Then, what does this mean in the context of the globally and hierarchically divergent representational practices of contemporary images of pain, and references to human dignity?

In regards to presentation of images of suffering most often only the loss/violation of dignity of Westerners is taken up, worried about and mourned over, whereas the dignity of non-Western objects of such images is scarcely even mentioned. Thus, it seems, that this arrangement places Western individuals as members of a political community in which human dignity is safeguarded, but locates the non-Westerner humans outside of this human polity. In turn, Arendt envisioned the human community as a universal and cosmopolitan community that should include all humans alive, not as a matter of belonging to a nation or a political regime. But the (Western) representational practices of images of pain, the differentiated norms of representation and the divergent discussion on rights and dignity suggests, that it is (in the predominant Western perspective) actually the membership of the Western political and cultural regime, which is seen to guarantee and determine the dignity—the intrinsic value—of human beings. Thus the prevalent representational practice actually articulates an underlying (Western) assumption that if one does not belong to the in-group—the political community of the West—one's dignity is not as forcefully safeguarded and cared over, or it even stays unmentioned. The representational practices show, how the ones outside of the Western political regime remain at the state of "abstract nakedness of being nothing but human", outside of the human polity, which is able to safeguard humanity and dignity.⁴⁵¹ Thus, the ones outside of the Western political

⁴⁴⁹ *UN Declaration of Human Rights*, 1948, article 1. ("All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.")

⁴⁵⁰ *Arendt, Hannah: The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Harvest, Harcourt, Brace & company, San Diego, 1971 (1951), 297-298.

⁴⁵¹ *Arendt*, 1971 (1951), 297.

community remain to be pictured as humans in a reduced manner—as *subhumans* of the humanitarian story⁴⁵².

As we have seen in the previous chapter 2, during the history of visual humanitarian communication it has been habitual to portray vulnerable individuals and groups in their bodily precarity. It has been commonplace to use a visual strategy of suffering bodies to claim (human) rights of repressed groups and articulate their status as fellow humans worthy of protection.⁴⁵³ It has furthermore been common to point out, that if atrocities experienced by groups or individuals are not visually depicted in images, and information on their plight has not been thus mediated and verified by visual proof, the suffering is at risk of being left without notice and recognition by the surrounding world. As Susan Sontag has phrased it “if there is no image of the suffering, there is no atrocity”.⁴⁵⁴ Thus the regime of protectable and valuable life has been historically seen to be broadened by presenting and circulating visual records of the suffering bodies.

Nevertheless, it seems that over the last decades this logic has been compromised and turned upside down. Almost as a rule, the ‘full humans’ of the Western sphere may not be presented in images of bodily vulnerability, since it is seen as compromising the honor, dignity and their uncompromisable value as human beings. But on the other hand, the non-Western humans are on regular bases shown in visual images centering on bodily vulnerability in order to tell stories of not just their plight and vulnerability (and need of protection), but also to mediate the overall turmoil of the non-Western sphere they inhabit. In the West, publication of such images is seen as acceptable because of the norms of dignified representations are not fully applied to the non-Western individuals, seen as somewhat reduced in their humanness. Therefore it seems, that the restrictions and cultural conventions and norms of publishing and circulating violent imagery are increasingly forcefully politically governed, in patterns that are tightly tied to global hierarchical power structures. As the vulnerability and weakness of non-Westerners is communicated, the vulnerability of Westerners is being concealed through visual representational practises of images of suffering. Thus the arrangements of images of suffering, violence and pain have become an arena through which the underlying notions of conditional value and globally differentiated regard of life is contemporarily articulated.⁴⁵⁵

At the base of Western political self-apprehension, world politics and international human rights institutions the universally unconditional value of all human lives is overtly reiterated. Yet, it seems that the realization of this concept is nowhere to be found when approached from the perspective of visual images of pain and global differences in their

⁴⁵² Douzinas, 2007. See also chapters 2 and 3.2.

⁴⁵³ More on this see chapter 2. See also Sliwinski 2011; Chouliaraki, 2013.

⁴⁵⁴ Sontag, 2003, 85; see also: Butler 2009, 69-70

⁴⁵⁵ See: Butler, 2004, 19-50.

distribution/presentation. Rather, the predominant visual representational practices show the human kind as divided into different, very differently comprehended and valued strata, based on rigid global, regime resultant conditionality. The representational practices and conventions of images of pain thus suggest, visualize and provide certainty on the divided apprehension on the value of Western vis-à-vis non-Western lives. Thus, at the theatre of proof of images of suffering the otherwise 'invisible' background notions of Western based universal human rights, unalienable human worth and the politics of belonging to the regime of protectable life/unprotected life become visualized. But moreover Western representational practices and arrangements of images of vulnerability and suffering can be seen to articulate Western humanitarian world order and dominance over the rest of the world. In the following paragraphs, I will go on to explain how I see them doing that.

4.3.3 THE STRONG, INVOLABLE HUMANITARIAN WEST TAKING CARE OF THE PRECARIOUS AND SICK REST

The tendency of judging Western suffering and non-Western suffering on a different scale and thus representing them differently (in Western publicity) can be seen to draw from a wider frame than merely the codes and conventions of the media, or even political governance of such issues. Picturing far away events in bodies of humans whom are located in geographically, culturally and politically divergent settings through different norms may be, up to a certain extent, seen as somewhat understandable in the light of how the human mind tends to work. The sensitivity and reluctance for seeing death and suffering of those who are closest to us, may be seen to be inherent in human thinking. According to Western moral philosophy we tend to feel emotionally closer with the suffering of individuals resembling ourselves culturally, politically, societally, age and appearance wise, as well as geographically and historically. The closer the one suffering is to us is in all these loci; more empathetic we tend to feel towards her. Thus we also tend to grieve the suffering and death of our like; we are more touched by it, more sensitive to it, for it also reminds us of our own vulnerability and mortality. And vice versa: suffering distanced from us, taking place far away settings and pain experienced by a person not so similar with us is met with reduced amount of empathy—and thus also felt easier to encounter and see.⁴⁵⁶

From this 'nearest is the dearest' tendency it is also drawn, that we often turn our eyes away from the suffering of our like. This tendency expands from the personal level to cultural as well as political: we would like to see

⁴⁵⁶ **Ginzburg**, 1994, 46-60; **Butler**, 2004, 37-38. This tendency has furthermore been acute for humanitarians through the decades, since bridging this moral gap (partly by the usage of visual material) has been as one of their central objectives.

ourselves, the likes of us, our political and societal system and world views as being secure, inviolable and safe from harm. This streak is furthermore easily utilizable for political actors and especially warring states: covering up of the brutal sides of war and political violence inflicted on the others, as well as hiding the bloody effects of war on “our bodies”, is often in the interests of Western warmongers fighting contemporary “surgical wars” in the name of protection of humanity. The reluctance of seeing the suffering of our like is in contemporary political connections sometimes thus stretched even to the point in which the visual arrangement of war wound up denying our own vulnerability.⁴⁵⁷ Challenging the comforting anesthesia of humanitarian war and seeing the brutal side of the recent warfare in Western bodies may cause too much pain and distress.

It has become a visual norm to globally differently represent political suffering and human vulnerability. Yet, this representational practice does not solely reflect the “nearest is dearest” –tendency. This prevalent representational norm works to construct and amplify the apprehensions of the spectators on the globally hierarchically distributed value of life, and articulates Western dominance over the weak rest of the world. As Feldman remarks, the tormented bodies of distant and foreign individuals may, for the Western spectator, thus act as messages of Western superiority and amplify Western “cultural anaesthesia”. While the contemporary representational practices habitually present the distant, non-Western people as weak and vulnerable, they concurrently wound up picturing them as subordinate to us and reduced in their humanness, compared to the inviolable “us”.⁴⁵⁸

Therefore, it might be argued that representations of suffering non-Western individuals are presented to the Western audiences in an attempt to articulate their rights and lives as entitled to protection, as an effort to ‘lift’ and include them to the regime of protectable life. And admittedly, a humanitarian driven developmental—or even colonial—streak is also perceivable in this arrangement. But moreover, the representational practices and their global and regime driven differentiations—in addition to being a site where the conditionality of belonging to full-pledged humanity is articulated—serve a central function in communicating the western *world order* and *dominance* over the rest of the world. This tendency is poignantly visualized in contemporary imagery of foreign (natural) disasters and epidemics, and the militarized humanitarian help provided by Westerners in global crisis zones.

⁴⁵⁷ See: **Butler**, 2004; **Butler**, 2009.

⁴⁵⁸ **Feldman**, 1994.



Chapter 4. Illustration 4.3.

The Visual Politics of Humanitarianly Taking Care of Haiti and Ebola

A massive earthquake hit Haiti in January 2010, claiming lives in numbers hard to imagine—on this poor island between 230 000 to 300 000 human beings lost their lives. Instantly disturbing imagery from the scene of destruction flooded the Western media. Habitually these images presented the victims of the devastation in ways rather customary for depicting non-Western natural disasters: in victimhood, passivity, corporality—and reliant on outside help. Illustrations used in the Western media showed bloody bodies of Haitians in the ruins, hysterical people at the site of the destruction, destroyed material surroundings, people being pulled from the debris of the collapsed buildings, as well as aid given to the victims of the catastrophe.⁴⁵⁹ (Included in the illustration 4.3. is one of the first photographs of the Haiti earthquake that went viral: an image of a victim of the Earthquake taken by Haitian photographer *Daniel Morel* showing a woman amidst rubble.)

The immense scale of the destruction and an earthquake⁴⁶⁰ as its cause forcefully aroused the benevolent sentiments and actions of the surrounding world. The Haiti earthquake accumulated enormous media attention, and an unprecedented amount of donations from private people around the world. But it also enticed a massive amount of governmental crisis relief and military humanitarian attention. After the catastrophe, a state of humanitarian emergency was declared in Haiti. Although at first, the majority of help was given by locals, the most notable and recognized aid operations came from abroad, particularly from the US. In the course of the US Operation *Unified Response* to Haiti, United States took control of the international relief efforts. United States sent about 20 000 troops into Haiti, took control of the entry and exit point to the city of Port-au-Prince, sent military vessels to the coast of Haiti, took control of the Airport and responsibility for security. Thus, although the territorial integrity of Haiti remained, it may be argued, “the sovereignty of life at Haiti became depoliticized, internationalized and negotiable”. The Haiti emergency provided the US a momentum to act as a global Good Samaritan, but the forceful response of the US can be seen as an international political act of militarized and containing *disaster interventionism*.⁴⁶¹

In addition to the typical catastrophe imagery, the Haiti disaster was visualized in remarkable ways. Due to the Western “compassionate

⁴⁵⁹ *In pictures: Haitian Earthquake*, January 13, 2010, BBC News ; *Haiti's Earthquake: A photo gallery*, January 22, 2010, New York Times.

⁴⁶⁰ Earthquakes can be seen as iconic events of natural disasters: suddenly and unexpectedly striking whoever on their way. They are non-political catastrophes, which may be imagined to encounter any of us. Because of their nature earthquakes have a power to touch universally, and thus are often reacted to emotionally and empathetically, often more so than wars and political upheavals, since they require no political side-taking. As was pointed out in the chapter 2, earthquakes may also be seen as one of the initial sites of catastrophe visually mediated for the sight of far-away spectators.

⁴⁶¹ **Moore, Annica:** *Catastrophe and containment: A critical Analysis of the US response to the 2010 Earthquake in Haiti*. In: *The Politics and Policies of Relief, Aid and Reconstruction*. Attina, Fulvio (ed.), Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 113-132, 113-114.

intervention”⁴⁶² and the strong presence of militarized Western disaster interventionism, imagery that strongly juxtaposes weak and suffering Haitians and strong Western helpers emerged in the Western publicity. Images of helpful (US) soldier figures, armed and dressed in military uniforms, yet compassionately aiding the ones in need and moreover keeping up the control in a precarious and chaotic situation often visualized Western presence in Haiti in the Western media. Well-equipped Western soldiers were pictured delivering aid, handing out food packages, taking care of the victims and carrying the wounded to safety. Also images of armed US soldiers patrolling the streets of Port-au-Prince while maintaining overall security were run in Western publicity. Thus, due to the forceful militarized disaster interventionism of the US, an interesting visual feature in the pictures presented from Haiti emerged: the figure of a Western *humanitarian soldier*⁴⁶³ pictured gently taking care of the local victims but concurrently visualizing the strong Western military presence and dominance.⁴⁶⁴ (Included in the illustration 4.3. is an image of the US Defense department showing US soldiers carrying a victim of the catastrophe on a stretcher.)

The visual contradiction of the strong Western militarized helpers and on the other hand the weak, powerless, physically wounded Haitians visualize and offer proof of the distinction of the strong and humane West, and the weak, corporeally bleeding, in-need-of-help global south. In these pictures the Western humanitarian power and strong military dominance over the poor and peripheral global south becomes visually tangible.⁴⁶⁵ (Governmental) Help and relief in (natural) disasters is more than a matter of altruism; intervention into fragile situations such as the Haiti earthquake is an act of political power, global governance and a form of communicating the world order. In the context of Western humanitarian international politics, the visual arrangement of a strong West and helpless Haitians can be seen also as a means of gaining political power and prestige, by presenting the Western power as helper of humanity and guardian of the helpless majority of the world's fragile populations. Showing the victims as helpless, bloody, naked and desperately in need of help and protection can lead to pleas and consent of dominance over the suffering crowds, the people, areas and cultures seen and presented infantilized: as helpless, weak and unable to take care of themselves.

⁴⁶² *The US Military In Haiti, a compassionate Invasion*, January 16, 2010, The Time.

⁴⁶³ In the next **chapter 5**, which deals with the Afghan war, I will go into more depth to describe the figure of humanitarian soldier and its relevance for contemporary visual images of war.

⁴⁶⁴ Such images were presented by the US government, but also featured in the western media in describing the situation at Haiti. *Defence.Gov. Photo essay 100124-D-0000G-002.JPG*. Department of Defense. January 24, 2010: *Haiti: US troops start to leave earthquake-ravaged island*. February 15, 2010. The Telegraph ; *Haiti earthquake: Sovereignty takes back seat as US takes command*. January 29, 2010, The Guardian.

⁴⁶⁵ The history of Haiti and the United States moreover amplify and build up the significations of the arrangement of the images.

The distinction of the less developed and suffering south and competent and militarized humanitarian West, visible in the picturing of the Haiti earthquake is also manifested in the pictures presented in the Western media of the 2014- 2015 Ebola outbreak in West Africa. In 2014, hemorrhage fever caused by the Ebola virus reached epidemic proportions, causing more than 11 000 deaths namely in West African nations of Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone. Summer 2014, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak a “public health emergency of international concern”. Sensationalist and frightening images of the Ebola victims hoisted fear and pity in the surrounding spectating world.⁴⁶⁶ Soon after the WHO announcement, also US president Obama announced the Ebola outbreak in West Africa being “the top national security priority for the United States”. President Obama furthermore added that “When a disease of disaster strikes, Americans help”. The United States decided on the measures to take in order to “contain and combat” the disease at “the source”. The measures included sending American about 3000 US military troops to build medical facilities and training local medical workers in Ebola containment in West Africa.⁴⁶⁷ Thus, in addition to the frightening images of weary individuals sickened by the disease, images of the isolated victims at hospitals and makeshift detention centers and medical staff dressed in insulated suits, also imagery presenting American soldiers fighting the dreaded disease in West Africa was circulated in the Western publicity.⁴⁶⁸ (Included in the Illustration 4.3. are media images of the Ebola victims, as well as US government images of the aid endeavor.)

Correspondingly to the Haiti earthquake images, also these images present the Western helpers as advanced, strong, humanitarian, able bodied and militarized. The strength of the Western helpers was again further fortified in comparison to the helpless and disease stricken locals. Westerners were presented acting as tutors, providing their technical and material aid and superior professional skills. A strong developmental streak is embedded in these representations: they point to the less-developed nature of the non-Western world and concurrently visually underline the insuperability of the West. The militarized Western helpers are pictured as taking care of the situation that the “global minors” cannot handle. As the images picture the Western intervention into the emergency situations, they also differentiate the global roles: aid is been provided by the full-fledged

⁴⁶⁶ *Times Coverage of Ebola: Pulitzer-Winning Articles and More*, April 20, 2015, The New York Times ; *Ebola Outbreak: Telegraph photojournalist Will Wintercross reports from Liberia* 2014, The Telegraph ; *Ebola Outbreak: Liberia Hospitals and Treatment Centres Struggle to Cope [PHOTOS]*, October 6, 2014, International Business Times.

⁴⁶⁷ *President Obama on America’s response to Ebola: “When a disease of Disaster Strikes, Americans Help*. October 28, 2014, The White House; *Fact sheet: U.S Response to the Ebola Epidemic in West Africa*. September 16, 2014, The White House.

It is relevant to remark here, that many other, also non-Western nations contributed to the fight against Ebola, such as China and India.

⁴⁶⁸Such Images: *10 things to Know about Ebola*, October 14, 2014, US News; *The US Military’s War on Ebola*, October, 7, The Atlantic; *US Troops head to Africa for Ebola mission*: October, 1, 2014, USA Today.

Western humans to the populations of non-Western crisis areas “still struggling to gain access to full humanness”⁴⁶⁹. Thus, through the predominant the visual representation practices of Haiti and Ebola, the strength of the West is emphasized, as concurrently the weakness and impotence of the non-West is being articulated for the Western spectator.

The militarized conduct of humanitarianism is at the foreground in both of the imageries depicting Western militarized aid in non-Western emergency situations. The aid operations thus appear as a militarized and effective tour de force of the Western powers. These images poignantly epitomize the contemporary military-humanitarian ethos and force of the West over the rest of the world. As these ways of visually representing foreign crisis show the Westerners as militarized, strong and potent, they show the rest of the world as impotent victims, and objects of the Western militarily fortified compassion and control.⁴⁷⁰ The visual juxtaposition of suffering non-Western bodies and the strong bodily inviolable humanitarian Western helpers illustrate the triumphant story of Western practices, humanitarian paradigm and world order—and on the other hand to show the precariousness and vulnerability of the bodies not protected by the membership of the Western polity. Moreover, what binds these images of the Haiti earthquake 2010 and the Ebola outbreak 2014-2015 together is that both of the military humanitarian interventions into foreign emergency situations, in addition to being compassionate operations aimed delivering “more aid more quickly to more people”⁴⁷¹, can be seen to communicate *securitization* and *containment* of these areas and the threats they breed—disorder, sickness and capricious surplus people—by military-humanitarian means.

Among the objectives of both of the humanitarily legitimized and rationalized operations was the securitization of the areas, as well as containment of risks within the areas of their emergence. Development is always tied with security. By aiding areas of emergency, the harms therein are attempted to be contained and prevented from spreading.⁴⁷² Thus in addition to altruism, compassion and morality, also very evident strategic self-interest beyond international recognition of the West (the US) as a humanitarian super power played a central part in both of the operations discussed. In the case of the Ebola outbreak it is obvious that preventing the disease from spreading was in the interest of all. The American operation was not even rationalized and legitimized in the official statements solely by altruistically helping the populations of the West African nations, but by securitization of the situation and containing the virus from spreading.⁴⁷³ In

⁴⁶⁹ **Butler**, 2009, 76.

⁴⁷⁰ On military humanitarianism, see chapter 2 and for instance: **Chandler**, 2005 ; **Chandler**, 2001, **Douzinis**, 2007; **Belloni**, 2007.

⁴⁷¹ As described by *Hillary Clinton*. Cited in **Moore**, 2012, 121.

⁴⁷² **Duffield**, 2007.

⁴⁷³ **Fact sheet: U.S Response to the Ebola Epidemic in West Africa**. September 16, 2014, The White House.

the case of Haiti, as *Annica Moore* points out, one of the aims of the massive military-humanitarian operation was to prevent the Haitians from leaving the Island and seeking refuge in the West, namely in US. As the disaster left one million people homeless and caused significant trouble for the rest of the community the threat of massive migration flows was acute. One of the major functions of the US aircraft carrier quickly moved to the coast of port au Prince was surveillance of the population; as well a disseminating messages demotivating and deterring potential refugees from leaving the area. The forceful military deployment was to also give a signal that aid was given to the population at the spot; there was no reason to leave. It was in the interest of US also to attempt to securitize the area and quickly try to rebuild the poor country as a sufficient place to live in order to hinder the flow of unwanted people to West.⁴⁷⁴ Thus the orientation of developmental-military-humanitarian projects is rather to contain the problems and disorder, prevent them from spreading and actually in both of these cases, to manage and prevent the unwanted or threatening populations from moving.⁴⁷⁵

Thus the people governed by these operations are—in addition to being visually presented majorly through weakness, helplessness and lessened humanity—seen as “unwanted” surplus life which must be controlled, contained and prevented from moving geographically. As *Mark Duffield* argues, the inhabitants of the Western cultural and political realm appear as “insured life” protected by the sustaining institutions of their national states, as the inhabitants of the rest of the world are “uninsured” life, which is presumed to be self-reliant. This uninsured “waste life”⁴⁷⁶ thus remains as the global precarity at mercy of poverty, violence and vulnerability. This “uninsured life” is therefore also often governed by the global powerful, by means of development and humanitarian interventions. The surplus life is moreover seen as potentially dangerous life, in need of constant governance, rescue, reintegration and containment, as a necessary part of constituting liberal political order itself.⁴⁷⁷ The visual representations of the Haiti earthquake and the Ebola outbreak and their Western governance and control produce arrangements which produce narratives on the Western actors and providers of help, Western dominance, as well as the (non-Western) suffering or helpless objects of help, and thus of the global humanitarian order.

The visual theater of proof constituted by the images of Haiti Earthquake and West African Ebola outbreak thus exemplifies how the strong West is governing the weak rest. This act at the visual theater of proof offers the spectators of these images proof of the Western supremacy and dominance. But also concurrently provides evidence of the non-Western weakness, fragility and inability to help itself, lives which are at the mercy of Western

⁴⁷⁴ **Moore**, 2012, 129-130.

⁴⁷⁵ **Duffield**, 2007.

⁴⁷⁶ Zygmund Baumann refers to non-western surplus life, or “uninsured life”, as “waste life”. **Baumann, Zygmund**: *Wasted lives. Modernity and its outcasts*. polity, Cambridge, 2004.

⁴⁷⁷ **Duffield**, 2007, 216- 218.

help and benevolence. The arrangements of these images visually illustrates how the Western human rights paradigms and Western “civilized lifestyle” grants the Westerners a “vaccination” against the weakness caused by unordered society and chaotic non-Western lifestyle—and how the non-Western bodies left without a “vaccination” remain precarious and weak: they must be aided, secured, contained and their movement must be restricted by the ‘global adults’. Therefore these visual arrangements moreover produce narratives of the non-Western lives as unfit surplus human material that must be not only helped but controlled and contained in order to secure the safety of the West. Therefore the visual theater of proof produced by these images in turn suggests that gaining access to full-blown humanity, human worth and alleviation from suffering is achievable only by the membership of the Western political realm⁴⁷⁸.

Therefore such imageries, which present the strong humanitarian West as helpers of the suffering rest of the world, exemplify the non-Western *hamartia* of the humanitarian theater poignantly: The “tragic mistake”—the *Hamartia*—of the sufferers presented at the contemporary humanitarian theater most often is the fact that they were not born into the protected global nobility, as Westerners. As the global nobility, the rich and the powerful appear bodily inviolable and may move freely and cross any global borders they wish, the poor and the miserable are pictured in their bodily suffering, controlled and governed by developmental and humanitarian means—contained, and not allowed to move freely. ⁴⁷⁹ The frames, boundaries and different segments of humanity are marked by different visual performativity. This leads us to the theme of the next paragraph, which is visual performativity of humanness in the context of refugeeness and the “European refugee crisis”

4.4 THE MISERABLE “SEA OF HUMANITY “– THE CORPOREAL POLITICS OF PICTURING THE REFUGEE CRISIS

Media framings and political discussion over the images of the 2010s ‘European refugee crisis’ ⁴⁸⁰ poignantly brings forth the questions of visual performativity of human fragility, need of help —and humanness—in a contemporary setting.⁴⁸¹ The number of people fleeing to Europe and taking

⁴⁷⁸ As was also argued in the chapter 3.2.

⁴⁷⁹ **Baumann, Zygmund:** *Globalization. The Human consequences*. Columbia University Press, New York, 1998, 77.

⁴⁸⁰ I here refer to the ‘refugee/migration crisis’ of the 2010s, especially the inflated situation starting from 2015.

⁴⁸¹ This subchapter dealing with the refugee imagery was written during the late summer/autumn 2015, motivated by the acute crisis and the need to understand the heated societal discussion revolving refugeeness and refugee imagery.

the Mediterranean route⁴⁸² has dramatically increased after the Arab Spring uprisings (2011), and for example after the fall of the Libyan ex-leader Muammar Gaddafi, who had been influential in banking migration flows from Africa to Europe. Further the chaotic political situation and turmoil in the Middle East and North Africa, growing influence of ISIS, and acutely the gory Syrian war has driven unprecedented amounts of people to leave their countries of origin and seek refuge in the West during 2015.⁴⁸³ In this situation, images of the ‘sea of refugees’; rickety boats loaded full of people seeking refuge, crowds of asylum seekers at European reception centers as well as images of refugees drowned en route searching a better life, have become familiar to all media spectators in the Western sphere.

Ways of picturing refugees and refugeeness are particularly interesting in the context of visual performativity of need of help, fragility and humanness in a global perspective, since refugees (especially in the case of the ‘European refugee crisis’) attempt to cross (national) borders and move spatially from one place to another in a geographical sense. Furthermore, by moving from one area to another, the refugees also contest the boundaries of political and cultural regimes. Moving and refugeeness is thus also an attempt to stretch the global, hierarchically divided boundaries of humanity. Seeking asylum is in essence arguing for the protection of one’s right to live and demanding human rights—an attempt to make claims based on the idea of unconditional universal humanity entitled and worthy of protection. Refugeeness thus exemplifies (a sudden and acute) attempt to move away from one sphere of humanity into another.

Looking at the visual representations of refugeeness—and especially scrutinizing how refugeeness is performed in visual images, and how such images are discussed in the Western politics and publicity—is highly revealing when analyzing how (the presentation practices of) visual images articulate humanness and the conditionality of belonging to the human family. These images, when approached as a visual theater of proof on the conditionality of humanness, bring forth the Western take on the value of (non-Western) human lives. Discussion on and picturing of the refugee crisis, refugees and refugeeness in the Western publicity can thus also be seen as an arena, in and through which the Western spectatorship of suffering is constructed, and Western conceptions of the hierarchies of humanity are reiterated and produced. The images of refugees offer revealing scenery into the ways in which humanitarian images are often intentionally arranged and signified in order to produce certain political emotions.

⁴⁸²Although the Mediterranean route(s) has been under most discussion and are typically most significant, refugees today take many routes to enter Europe. See for instance: *Migratory Routes*, Frontex (accessed November 25, 2015); **6 charts and a map that show where Europe’s refugees are coming from – and the perilous journeys they are taking**, September 16, 2015. The Independent.

⁴⁸³ ***Mediterranean Crisis 2015 at six months: Refugee and migrant numbers highest on record***. UNHCR, Press Release, July 1, 2015 ;Refugees/migrants Emergency Response – Mediterranean, UNHCR (retrieved November 20, 2015).

During the summer 2015 the refugee crisis expanded: more people reached Europe, and more people died on the way trying. European train stations, border crossings and reception centers all the way up north filled up, and the societal and political discussion on migration policies and refugee issues were at center of the European mainstream media's attention. Concurrently attitudes and postures on refugees strongly divided the continent: some expressed their sympathy and solidarity to the refugees vocally, and pleaded to international conventions on human rights, the shared nature of humanity and the obligation to help one another. At the same time others boisterously attempted to repudiate the need and entitlement of help of these people, demanded stricter border control and more effective measures to stop the flood of unwanted human material into the West. As the situation of refugees was in the limelight of Western publicity and societal discussion, the refugees and their plight also became poignantly visible in the everyday lives of Europeans and imagery describing the people striving to move towards Europe/West infiltrated the Western consciousness.

Ronald Bleiker et al. argue that media images of asylum seekers are a central arena in and through which political debate on refugees has been framed.⁴⁸⁴ But as always, messages of visual images are ambivalent and multifarious. Thus the stories told by the topical refugee imagery in the case of the 2015 'European refugee crisis' was miscellaneous, even contradictory, and typically formed according to their divergent uses, framings and contextual intended messages. I shall analyze the different visual arrangements through which the refugees and the refugee crisis have been in the recent years (around 2010s and especially year 2015) represented in the Western (European) publicity. Bleiker et al. have found that the refugees are often (in the 2000s Australia) depicted in images of anonymous crowds, as well as pictured through images of refugee boats filled with people. They found that refugees were significantly more rarely portrayed as *individuals*, in close up images with recognizable facial expressions of other features exemplifying their individuality, than in imagery of crowds and masses.⁴⁸⁵ In relation to the picturing of the 2015 European refugee crisis a similar visual representational pattern may be detected. Images of the refugee boats approaching Europe⁴⁸⁶, masses and crowds of refugees making their way

⁴⁸⁴ *The visual dehumanization of refugees.* Bleiker, Ronald, Campbell David, Hutchinson Emma & Nicholson, Xzarina. Australian Journal of Political science, 2013, 48/4, 398-416.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.* ; see also Malkki, 1996.

⁴⁸⁶ Such images widely used in the contemporary western media reporting: *Deaths in Austria, Mediterranean raise migration's grim toll in Europe*, August 27, 2015, CNN; *Europe's boat people. The EU's policy on maritime refugees has gone disastrously wrong*, April 25, 2015, The Economist ; *Masked 'Commandos' Are Attacking Refugee Boats Off This Idyllic Greek Island*, August, 13, 2015 The Huffington Post; *Pääministeri Sipilä: Schengenin tulevaisuus on kriittisellä polulla, jos järjestelykeskuksia ei saada pystyyn.* November 11, 2015, Helsingin Sanomat ; *The Guardian view on the refugee crisis. Much more must be done and not just by the UK.* September, 3, 2015, The Guardian. As an example of this sort of picturing is for example an image of a refugee boat taken by Massimo Sestini of a refugee boat

across Europe⁴⁸⁷, groups of people at the reception centres and at border crossings⁴⁸⁸ have served as a predominant visual arrangement through which the crisis has been presented in Western publicity. (Included in the Illustration 4.4, are some much used media images that picture the refugees as large crowds and masses.)

It is notable that such visual representational styles—centring on boats, and large groups of unnamed crowds and masses of people—most commonly used in depicting refugees, has been found to more often lead to politics of *fear* and *threat*, rather than succeed in arousing humanitarian sentiments such as compassion and will to help.⁴⁸⁹ Correspondingly, also in the contemporary European situation this sort of imagining has been commonly framed to picture malevolent and hurtful invasion of culturally different crowds of people attempting to sink the ‘European way of life’ and societal order under their tide. Interestingly such imagery of the refugees and refugee crisis—and such visual performativity of refugeeness—has served as a major arena of argument for political actors opposing “multiculturalism”, holding anti-immigration attitudes, or even openly xenophobic stances. Furthermore, such images have been seen to show and visually verify the bogus nature of the asylum seekers. In these framings and readings, the entitlements of the need of help of the pictured fellow humans, as well as their motives for the exodus, has been questioned and strongly criticized, and moreover the value of these individuals as *human beings* (worthy of our help and protection) has commonly been placed under doubt.⁴⁹⁰

However, in addition to the representations concentrating on large masses of humans, there is also an alternative tendency in picturing the situation and visualizing the need of help, plight and the dangers the asylum seekers face, as well as the human toll of the crisis. The situation of the refugees has also been depicted through highly emotive imagery, which has primarily focused on individuals and their (bodily) anguish in harsh

approaching Europe in 2014. The photo won the World Press Photo contest in 2015, and circulated widely in the Western media. This image is included in the illustration 4.4.

⁴⁸⁷ Such images by the media, see for example: *Drone footage of Migrants and Refugees travelling across Europe, In pictures*, The Telegraph.; *Hungary Closes main border crossing with Serbia*, September, 3 2015, The Guardian ; *En Tiedä kaunanko jaksan yrittää*. September 4, 2015, Helsingin Sanomat; *The Police escorts Migrants through Slovenia, in Pictures*: October 26, 2015, The Guardian; *Why Migrant don't want to stay in Hungary*. September 5, 2015: New York Times.

⁴⁸⁸ Such picturing see for instance: *Poliisi päästää pakolaiset Tanskan läpi Ruotsiin*, October, 10, 2015, Helsingin Sanomat; *Suomi ehkä mukaan estämään ihmissalakuljetuksia Välimerellä*, May 15, 2015, Helsingin Sanomat; *President Obama directs administration to accept at least 10000 Syrian refugees in the next fiscal year*. September, 10, 2015 Washington Post ; *US will accept more refugees as crisis grows*, September 20, 2015, New York Times; *Vastaanottokeskus hämmentää kirkkonummelaisessa kylässä. Osa vanhemmista ei enää anna tyttöjensä kulkea yksin*. August, 25, 2015, Helsingin Sanomat ; *Finland Lowers Asylum seekers forecast to 30 00- 35 00*. October 14, 2015: Business Insider.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.; Bleiker et al, 2013; Slovic, Paul: “If I look at the mass I will never act”: *Psychic numbing and Genocide*. Judgment and Decision making 2/2, 2007, pp.79-95.

⁴⁹⁰ Such political argumentation, for example: *Hungarian PM: “we don’t want more Muslims”*. Al Jazeera, September 4, 2015; *Sink immigrant’s boats –Griffin*. BBC, July 8th, 2009; *Slunga-poutsalo: Elintasosurffarit käännytettävä pikaisesti – eriarvoistavat tuet poistettava*. Suomen Uutiset, August 21, 2015 .

conditions. Images of individualized human distress, single victims pictured in close up images, presented with knowledge of personality, personal history, names and identity have been seen to arouse benevolent sentiments in their spectators. Furthermore, such images have frequently taken children—often perceived as innocent *ideal victims*—as their primary objects.⁴⁹¹ Thus the individualizing mode of picturing entails addressing, that can be seen to point to shared humanity in need of help. In such representations the objects of the images have been presented as human subjects worthy of amnesty and refugee status (in accordance with the Geneva conventions) —and thus entitled to our help. (Such personified imagery is included in the illustration 4.5.)

Thus, images of the plight of certain others have been framed in a way that has worked to arouse compassionated feelings and sentiments of belonging to a same register of humanity as people in Western spectating audiences. Such imagery of the refugees have also been often framed as offering proof of the suffering of these people, by showing the suffering and distress of the refugees in a visual, and sometimes even in crudely corporeal manners. Such imagery has been utilized in illustrating the humanitarianly unsustainable conditions at the borders of Europe, and to point out the necessity to answer to the crisis in more efficient and more humane manners. This sort imagery has also frequently illustrated media stories in which political critique towards the European immigration policies have been taken up. In such contexts, the visualized suffering of these people has served as a political tool of persuasion targeted to address European politicians, and Western citizens who have the democratic right to influence the decision making in regards to immigration and border practices of their countries.⁴⁹²

Therefore it may be said, that the picturing of the refugee crisis, as well as the attitudes and reactions on the visual representations of refugees approaching/seeking refuge in Europe have been ambivalent, and rather rigidly fixed according to the political stances towards immigration of their presenters/commenters/contexts of presentation. The assemblage of refugee imagery can therefore also be seen to reflect the apprehension of humanity and human worth of their commentators also in larger terms. Therefore the visualizations of the refugee crisis unveils the contextual ambivalence of suffering/crisis imagery in an extremely politicized contemporary setting, and shows how visualized (bodily) performativity of refugeeness is a matter of political assemblage and contextual signification.

⁴⁹¹ Such images are for example the spectacular and iconic image of the drowned Syrian boy *Aylan Kurdi* which surfaced early September 2015: ***Shocking images of drowned Syrian boy show tragic plight of refugees*** The Guardian, September 2, 2015. As well as images of other drowned refugee children such as: ***Pictures that need to be seen***, August 29, 2015, Migrant Report. As well as for instance images of the plight of refugee children in Europe, see for instance: ***Where the Children Sleep***. Photos by Wennman, Magnus, (text by Bergfeldt, Carina, Wiman, Erik& Weigl, Kerstin) Aftonbladet, 2015. Such framings can be seen also in for instance: ***Migrants find a unbridled route to Greece***. (Photo by Daniel Etter) August 17, 2015, New York Times.

⁴⁹² ***Ibid.***

In the following subchapters I shall discuss and analyze the imagery used to describe the refugee crisis and the political signification of such imagery in the Western publicity over recent years and especially in the contested situation of the 2015. I shall scrutinize the images as acts at the humanitarian visual theater of proof of the (visually demonstrated) hierarchical conditionality of belonging to the realm of (protectable/valuable) humanity. First I shall analyze the political significations of images of refugee boats and crowds, flows of migrants and masses of asylum seekers at border crossings and reception centers, and the political debate surrounding these sorts of visual representations. Secondly, I shall pay attention to the other principle type of picturing refugees and refugeeness in the Western contemporary media publicity: images of individual refugees and primarily emotion evoking representations of sorrow and suffering of namely child refugees and dead refugee children. I analyze the significations of these images in the context of visual performativity of humanness and universal human worth.



Chapter 4. Illustration 4.4.

4.4.1 HUMANITARIAN CRISIS OR BOATS FULL OF BOGUS SUBJECTS? VISUALLY (DIS)PROVING THE HUMANITY OF REFUGEES

Primarily the Western media arrangements of the refugee imagery can be seen to have been targeted to rather dispassionately inform the public of the topical situation. But informing of political issues—especially visually—and newsworthiness (of an image) is never neutral. In relation to the refugee crisis, sometimes even the very same imagery that has been generally utilized and framed to rather dispassionately to tell of the situation at the borders of Europe, has been in other connections quite contradictory framed to illustrate the threat posed by the asylum seekers to the European nations under the ‘uncontrolled avalanche’⁴⁹³ of the migrants and thus arranged and targeted to induce fear rather than solidarity in the Western spectators. Recurrently in the statements of (European) anti-immigration actors, images of the refugee boats and crowds of asylum seekers have been framed to epitomize the threat these people fleeing war and seeking a better life in the “West” pose to the “European way of life”, and the societal, cultural (religious) as well as economic resilience of the recipient countries.⁴⁹⁴ In this line of arrangement and argumentation, the differences and differentiations between “us” and “them”—the Western full-fledged humans worthy of good and secure lives and, the surplus humans of the non-Western sphere seen as unentitled to protection or good life—as well as aggressively combating life not seen as belonging to the same register as “us”, are essential. In this view the refugees are presented as unwanted, foreign surplus (Muslim) life, that should be halted and contained, denied the right to move and seek protection, and to articulate their plea of humanness.⁴⁹⁵

This thinking at its extreme is exemplified for example by the aggressive argumentation of British Member of the European Parliament (MEP) *Nick Griffin*, who already in 2009 told the BBC how he thinks that the refugee boats should be sank at the sea, before arriving to Europe, in order to “combat the flow” of people seen as “illegal”. In this line of argument the floods of people seen as unwanted have been recurrently rhetorically presented as “drowning” Europe or “swamping of the EU by the Third World”.⁴⁹⁶ Within these discourses, the threat to the Western well fare, “our way of life”, Western/European cultural and even societal and economic sustainability has been presented as threatened by the invasion of the

⁴⁹³ Images that represent the refugees in such manners, see for instance: *Europe’s boat people. The EU’s policy on maritime refugees has gone disastrously wrong*, April 25, 2015, The Economist ; *Drone footage of Migrants and Refugees travelling across Europe, In pictures*. (accessed November 25, 2015) The Telegraph; *Poliisi päästää pakolaiset Tanskan läpi Ruotsiin*, October, 10, 2015, Helsingin Sanomat.

⁴⁹⁴ Examples of this sort of (populist anti-migration) rhetoric and visual positioning for example here: *A Nightmare reborn*, September 17, 2015. Gates of Vienna: <http://gatesofvienna.net/2015/09/a-nightmare-reborn/>

⁴⁹⁵ *Migration crisis: Hungary PM says Europe in grip of madness*, September, 3 2015, The Guardian.; *Hungarian PM: “we don’t want more Muslims”*. Al Jazeera, September 4, 2015.

⁴⁹⁶ *Sink immigrant’s boats –Griffin*. BBC, July 8th, 2009.

invasive migrant crowds. Moreover, the *humanness* of the refugees has within this discussion been widely placed under doubt, as the subjects of the images have not even been seen as humans worthy of protection and rights which are commonly perceived in international humanitarian/human rights conventions to follow the status of human.

Such visual arrangements and mode of addressing, topically much used in the context of refugee imagery, is in many ways typical and characteristic of the (historically formed) ways of picturing the others in need of our help, and objects of humanitarian assistance. *Liisa Malkki* writes about how visually depicting refugees as large masses, presented in their namelessness and voicelessness, and through their physical vulnerable, bare condition and mere existence has historically been emblematic in picturing refugees and refugee crises. The imagery of refugeeness predominantly pictures the recipients—or in this case applicants—of help, primarily in a visual form of weakness, (bodily) suffering, and as dehistoricized, nameless crowds and masses⁴⁹⁷. Malkki analyses the ramifications visual arrangements that have represented refugees as “the miserable sea of humanity” have had on Western understanding, stances, attitudes and reactions towards refugees and refugeeness. The ways of visually representing refugees is often standardized according to authoritative narratives—familiar from representations of humanitarian actors and organizations as well as media images—much used and circulated in the (Western) publicity. Such representations have thus served as the primary form of receiving information and knowledge on “them”. Although images of refugees have often been used in rather philanthropic affiliations and in humanitarian contexts, they nevertheless have largely determined the ways in which Western on-lookers have become to rather rigidly understand and perceive refugeeness. These dominating visual representational practices have influenced the ways in which refugeeness is visually performed, which has had its effect on apprehending what refugees look like, or how they ought to look like and how they should (visually/bodily) perform themselves.⁴⁹⁸ These historically and authoritatively formed ways of visually presenting refugees and refugeeness can be seen to be at the heart of the Western discussions with regard to the topical visual representation of refugees in the 2010s.

The historically formed, standardized and rigid arrangements of visualizing and conceptualizing and spectating refugees/refugeeness, can be seen as the bases of the heated discussions that have flared for instance in relation to the refugee crisis discussion in Finland in 2015. As Finland is among the Eastern European EU member states, in which mass scale asylum seeking and refugee issues have a rather short history on the global scale, the Finnish discussion on the performativity of refugeeness in the context of visual images of refugees is eye opening, and thus I shall concentrate on this Finnish (2015) discussion for a while. The Finnish discussion, which can be

⁴⁹⁷ This was also discussed in the chapter 2.

⁴⁹⁸ **Malkki**, 1996, 385- 390.

seen to largely draw from the performativity of refugeeness, has for a large part concentrated on the definition of a *genuine*, ‘real refugee’. The search for exemplary victims worthy of help, and on the other hand locating “bogus subjects” perceived as not worthy of help and protection have occupied a central arena in this discussion. Especially young men crossing the Mediterranean and reaching their destinations in the EU (most commonly pictured in the imagery of crowds and masses) have been in this discussion not seen as ‘real refugees’, and thus have often been framed as ‘bogus subjects’ motivated by economic reasons, rather than “real distress”. The suffering of such subjects does not appear as severe enough. The false nature of these asylum seekers has often been signified by references and descriptions pointing to the visually detectable well-being and well-offness of the subjects in the images presented by the media.⁴⁹⁹

This line of thinking is exemplified by A Finnish populist right-wing politician and Member of the EU parliament *Jussi Halla-aho’s* (from the populist and anti-immigration oriented *Finns Party*) statements in which he called the refugees taking the Mediterranean route “iPhone men” (In Finnish: “iPhone-miehet”). The accusation of the use of modern technological devices (seen as unsuitable for refugees—but quite suitable for Europeans) was at least partly motivated by the images of the refugees given to the Western spectators in which many of the refugees are shown as possessing and using smartphones. By calling the refugees as “iPhone men” Halla-aho strived to indicate and frame the refugees as subjects not really entitled to help, but rather as subjects too well off to be seen as suffering victims and rather seeking to come to the Western countries on bogus excuses.⁵⁰⁰ In the same spirit Halla-aho’s party member, member of the Finnish parliament, *Riikka Slunga-Poutsalo* referred to the refugees by calling them “living-standard-suffers” (“Elintasosuffarit”). She claimed that four out of five asylum seekers seemed to be able-bodies and healthy men of 18 to 50 years of age, whom should be “defending their fatherlands, instead of coming to Finland to live on the social well-fare”.⁵⁰¹ The (assumed)

⁴⁹⁹ In 2015 Finland, terms such as “asylum-tourists”, “Fake-refugees”, “iPhone men” and “living-standard-suffers” have been introduced in the debate on refugeeness and the suspected inauthenticity of the refugees.

⁵⁰⁰ Halla-aho used the term “iPhone men” in his Facebook status in August 2015. And has repeatedly used the phrase ever since. The usage of this term by a visible and active anti-immigration politician, and a Member of the European Parliament caused a media sensation in Finland. <https://www.facebook.com/jussi.hallaaho/posts/828897627230433> (The whole post in Finnish here: “Suomeen odotetaan tänä vuonna 15 000 iphone-miestä. Hallituksen linja näyttää olevan se, että tärkeimpiin lähtömaihin, Somaliaan ja Irakiin, ei palauteta ketään. Seuraavaksi alkaa sitten perheenyhdistämismatka, joten odotamme mielenkiinnolla alkaako hallitus ohjelmansa ja perussuomalaiset vaalilupaustensa mukaisesti ajaa perheenyhdistämissääntöjen järjehtämistä. Suuri osa turvapaikanhakijoista tulee Suomeen Ruotsin kautta, epäilemättä Ruotsin viranomaisten kehottamana ja ehkä jopa kustannuksella. Dublin-sääntöjen perusteella Suomen ei pitäisi edes käsitellä näiden ihmisten hakemuksia, mutta hallitus näyttää olevan eri mieltä. Se, että Ruotsi on - ministeri Orpon sanoin - kyllästetty, johtuu ruotsalaisten pitkään jatkuneesta hölmöistä politiikasta. Meillä ei ole mitään solidaarisuusvelvoitetta Ruotsia kohtaan. Sen sijaan meillä on solidaarisuusvelvoite omia kansalaisiamme ja tämän maan tulevaisuutta kohtaan.”)

⁵⁰¹ *Slunga-poutsalo: Elintasosuffarit käännytettävä pikaisesti – eriarvoistavat tuet poistettava*. Suomen Uutiset, August 21, 2015.

material well-offness, physical condition, age, gender and the economic motivations (all reportedly visually observable in media images) of the asylum seekers fleeing the horrors of war, was again utilized in order to frame them as bogus subjects, not deserving help. The openly xenophobic anti-immigration populist actors have in their rhetoric reclined strongly to the (right) visual performativity of refugeeness.⁵⁰²

Halla-aho's phrase "iphone men" as well as Slunga-Poutsalo's arguments metonymizes two distinct and much used arguments often arising from the visual features and performativity of refugeeness, which have been central in questioning and disputing the real need of help and sincerity of the refugees—male gender, young age and (relative) economic and material well-offness. Along with the pejorative references to the use of modern mobile technology, not seen as suitable or appropriate for the status, behavior and performativity refugees, also references to expensive brand clothing worn by the mostly male asylum seekers have been taken up by political 'immigration critique' actors.⁵⁰³ Thus, visually depictable character, modern and decent (similar to 'our standards') clothing, along with the use of novel media technologies, added with male gender associated with strength and active able-to-help-them-selves qualities, have been used to undermine the need of asylum and help from these people.⁵⁰⁴ Such characters and features are seen to collide with the visual signs of the "exemplary victim". In relation to refugee discourse, Malkki (already in 1996) has noted that once the visual signs traditionally associated with refugeeness and victimness decrease, the level of refugeeness decreases. This happens in the eyes of not only the public, but also the perception of authorities of refugee issues. Visual traits and signs of "real" and "pure" refugeeness are often physical wounds, marks of "real violence", dirtiness, physical raggedness and torn clothes and "having nothing". Typically the plight and need of help has been also materialized in the bodies of female and child victims, associated with helplessness and victimness.⁵⁰⁵ Visual traits of economic and material well-being—or even suspected wealth—and (suspected) strength of the people approaching Europe has thus been conceptualized and signified as diminishing their need of help, and seen as emblems of their bogus refugeeness and status as illegal subjects. Therefore, the exemplary refugee victim, according to the

⁵⁰² On the racism embedded in the Finnish immigration policy, see : **Rajas, Jarmila**: *State Racist Governmentality: A Foucaultian Discourse Theoretical analysis of Finnish Immigration Policy*. Doctoral Thesis, Loughborough University, 2014.

⁵⁰³ Examples of such rhetoric: **5 Major Myths of Europe's refugee and migrant crisis debunked**. September, 16, 2015, The Huffington Post ; **Perussuomalainen kansanedustaja kaivoi maahanmuuttoväitteillensä pohjan netistä ja myöntää, faktatietoa ei ole olemassa**. July, 21, 2015. Etelä-Suomen Sanomat.

⁵⁰⁴ Habitually fake (or deliberately biasedly framed) imagery centring on the well-being, physical performativity seen as unsuitable for refugees (muscular habitus, clothing) as well as accusations of islamist extremism have been used in order to turn the attitudes of westerners against refugees. See for instance: **The fake refugee images that are being used to distort public opinion on asylum seekers**. September, 16, 2015, The Independent.

⁵⁰⁵ **Malkki**, 1996, 384- 385; See also **Chouliarakis**, 2013. This theme was also dealt with shortly in the chapter 2.3.3.

standardized and historically formed way of picturing (and visually perceiving) refugees—and to which the populist anti-immigration parties can be seen to point to in their critical pleas—should be presented in visible bodily vulnerability and weakness, detectable in body of the refugee subject.

The picturing of refugees has customarily (photographs taken as well as circulated by professionals and authorities) centered on imagery that both emphasize their existence as a nameless and dehistoricized masses and crowds, but also highlights their physical, corporeal wounds, pain, vulnerability and helplessness. This, according to Malkki, is because the corporeal wounds of the silent masses tend to speak to the on-lookers and spectators of the plight of the refugees in a manner perceived as more believable and accurate than the personal accounts of the refugees, or “refugee stories”. Verbal accounts of refugees are often considered not as reliable as visually depictable bodily proof: marks of violence, bodily suffering and having nothing, bare existence. Refugee’s stories are often seen as overtly dramatic, hysterical or even tendentiously false. As *Franz Fanon* observes, for the “native” the “objectivity is always against him”. Following this, Malkki claims, much the same can be said in the case of the refugees, as wounds and corporality also in their case also speak louder than their words.⁵⁰⁶ Thus it seems, that the spectators tend to need visual verification of the pain and plight of distant others— “bare facts” given by bloody and tragic images are insisted—the narration of the subjects in not enough. Similarly, *Elaine Scarry* writes in her book *The Body in Pain* that while the pain to the sufferer herself is often unquestionable, real and tangible, the most reliable and true account there is, yet the pain of others always remains under suspicion and questioning, as something that needs to be proofed.⁵⁰⁷

Photographs and visual images of the pain of others are thus often needed and utilized to overcome this void of experiencing pain first hand, and believing and observing the pain of others. Images presenting the pain of the refugees in vulnerable bodily settings strive to show to the suspicious remote potential helpers the situation of the other under pain and in need of help in the most reliable way possible. This customary bare life imagery—presenting the plight of the refugees in corporeal, dramatic and bloody ways—is the kind of imagery that seems to be missed and called for in the populist anti-immigration rhetoric. Smartphone using, able-bodied youngish men dressed in rather decent, Western-style clothing for the European anti-immigration or openly xenophobic voices gaining much influence in the European discussion, do not seem to describe and perform the plight of the refugee subjects in a “right” way.

Moreover, the tendency and tradition of picturing the genuine need of help and “real refugeeness” principally through the bodily suffering works to silence the refugees (just as the objects of humanitarian actions and interventions in many other cases as well) and places them into a status of

⁵⁰⁶ Malkki, 1996, 384-385.

⁵⁰⁷ Scarry, 1985.

voiceless objects, who's stories are heard through dramatic images arranged by specialists and the media, rather than by their own narration.⁵⁰⁸ However, picturing the objects of humanitarian action and populations in need of help in bare life imagery of corporeal pain, as well as in the form of helpless masses tormented by illness and weakness, works to distance the objects of help from the potential helpers; the spectators of the images. This kind of imagery—as we have seen previously in this study—is in the forefront in creating global humanitarian hierarchies, dividing the world into (mostly Western) strong able to help 'human-subjects' and the helpless and corporally suffering 'subhumans', plunging differentiated groups of people into segmented categories of humanness, and thus works to maximize the distance between the helpers (spectators) and (spectated) the objects of help.⁵⁰⁹

Also, as has been reiterated in a multitude of research, this tendency in humanitarian visual communication moreover serves to paralyze the spectators of the images; such images are often even seen as producing phenomena sometimes called "compassion fatigue", "I've seen this before syndrome" or "boomerang effect", which have all been seen to actually work to diminish the ability of the spectators to connect with the objects of the images and thus seen to decrease their will to help.⁵¹⁰ Therefore, when picturing refugees as suffering masses, having nothing and through physical bare existence, the very same political actors now claiming that the refugees appear to be "too well off", might very well, when facing bare life imagery, argue that these people have nothing in common with us, as they seem to occupy a different stratum of humanity, and therefore cannot be welcomed into our societies. As visual signs of sameness (strength, well-offness, active status and able bodiedness) function as ground for denial of the status of genuine a refugee, then the bare-life representations work to widen the void between the refugees and the one's spectating at their images as humans, and moreover often point to cultural difference, and may be argued to showcase the uncivilized, unfitting nature of the applicants, too diverse with us to be "integrated" into our western societies.⁵¹¹

Furthermore, what is remarkable here is that usually (visual) features and attributes pointing to similarity between the objects of help and the helpers (the spectators of the images) are seen to fortify the solidary bonds between the sufferers and the observers of the suffering, and thus to strengthen the sentiments of compassion and will to help. Visually detectable, shared features such as similarity—regarding age, physical appearance, cultural similarity, race, gender, as well as parallel physical performativity at large—

⁵⁰⁸ Malkki, 1996.

⁵⁰⁹ Douzinas, 2007, See chapter 2.4.1& 3.2.

⁵¹⁰ This phenomena and effects of negative appeals and bare life imagery were dealt with in the chapter 2. See also Chouliaraki, 2013, 55-61; Cohen, 2001, 185-195, 214-218.

⁵¹¹ This sort of arguments are often used within the anti-immigration rhetoric, especially when decribing refugees (immigrants) coming from islamic states and areas. See for example: *Migration crisis: Hungary PM says Europe in grip of madness*, September, 3 2015, The Guardian.

have been seen to increase the compassionate and solidary reactions of the observers/spectators.⁵¹² But, in the case of the refugees, visual performativity and visual traits of sameness seem to actually work aberrantly. This might be, because of picturing and debating refugeeness is, from a humanitarian point of view, rather different from many other forms of picturing global humanitarian crisis and need of help. As the humanitarian catharsis may be today attained by a Western spectator rather easily—by participating in a campaign or a charity concert, allotting some money with a click of a mouse to an organization working at the crisis zone, or even by supporting a militarized humanitarian intervention into the crisis area by democratically legitimizing such action, as was discussed in chapter 3.—dealing with the refugees demands more from the spectating audiences and potential helpers. It is far more demanding to welcome refugees into ‘our societies’, as potential neighbors, co-workers, and countrymen entitled to the same social benefits as the spectators, than just (mostly financially) outsourcing the responsibility to care of and help the distant strangers to organizations, professionals and state actors. Therefore, I argue that the imagery of refugees and refugeeness works at somewhat different density than many other types of humanitarian imagery. Thus, picturing refugees, from the politicized, anti-cosmopolitan, even xenophobic anti-immigration point of view, in which the subjects seeking asylum and our help are in the first place perceived as somewhat *dubiously human* compared to one’s self, creates a dilemma. In this hostile context, the refugees have no way to win: it is impossible for them to be pictured in a way that would make them seem as fully-human, suitable and legitimate subjects worthy of help, welcomed to our societies—and ultimately, to be perceived as humans on the same scale with the Western spectators.⁵¹³

The refugees, within the xenophobic, anti-immigration and “anti-multiculturalism” discourse have a rather limited prospects of being treated as humans on the same scale as the Western spectators and ‘full-fledged humans’ are: they are always framed and perceived as being of a wrong quality or wrong moral essence because of the way they are presented or due to the way they perform their role as objects claiming the benevolent reactions/actions of the surrounding (Western) world. Therefore rhetorical references to the visual performativity of refugeeness made by the political actors holding an anti-immigration stand unveil the ever more ground winning, influential and loud voiced attitudes and stances on the conditional nature of humanity within the Western/European migration/refugee discussion. As Judith Butler puts it: “It is not just that some humans are treated as humans, and others are dehumanized; it is rather that dehumanization becomes the condition for the production of the human to

⁵¹² Ginsburg, 1994.

⁵¹³An internet meme I stumbled upon “If she floats she is an economic migrant, if she drowns she is a refugee” pinpoints this dilemma rather poignantly. See: <http://lawprofessors.typepad.com/immigration/2015/09/if-she-drowns-shes-a-refugee-if-she-floats-shes-an-economic-migrant.html>

the extent that a “western” civilization defines itself over and against a population understood as definitionally illegitimate, if not dubiously human.”⁵¹⁴ This mode of thinking can be seen to be at the heart of the xenophobic stances and anti-immigration politics, growingly influential and loud voiced in European societies in mid 2010s.

4.4.2 HUMANITY WASHED ASHORE—VISUALLY CLAIMING THE HUMANITY OF REFUGEES

Along with images of refugee boats and crowds of asylum seekers at the European border crossings and reception centers, blunt images of migrants and refugees struggling for their lives in the Mediterranean Sea, as well as pictures of the drowned bodies washed ashore on the coasts of Europe have been quite commonly used to visualize the refugee situation over the recent years. Such dramatic images have been widely circulated and frequently featured in the wide Western publicity and mainstream media already from early 2000s onwards. Illustrative examples of such imagery are the award winning images of migrants taken by a Spanish photographer *Juan Medina* near the Canary Islands in early 2000s.⁵¹⁵ Images of horrified and nearly drowning men in the sea, clinging to life buoys, as well as images of bodies of the individuals who did not make the journey alive, washed ashore on European beaches have been used to tell of the flows of migrants, their despair and the horrors they face trying to reach Europe. Perhaps most effective this imagery is when it strongly juxtaposes the relaxed and worry-free leisure and well-being of Westerners sunbathing on the very same beaches where the asylum seekers are struggling for their lives or washed ashore already dead.⁵¹⁶ (Juan Medina’s award winning photographs of migrants from 2004-2006 are included in the illustration 4.5.)

Such images have been often utilized in pointing out the unsustainability and problems of European immigration policies. For example *Juan Medina*’s images are clearly targeted to arouse benevolent sentiments in their spectators by reporting the horrors of the journey, as well as to point to the European (unbearable) outlooks towards people seeking a better life in the West. But their visual posture and contextual textual framings in the Western publicity have nevertheless often strongly pointed to difference, and can thus also be seen again to articulate sentiments of fear, threat and invasion of life somewhat seen as unwanted into the Western sphere. Firstly because most

⁵¹⁴ **Butler, Judith:** *Precarious Life, Powers of mourning and violence*, London, Verso, 2006, 278.

⁵¹⁵ A well-known example of such imagery of “would be immigrants” in the water, is a photo taken in 2004 near the Canary Islands by photographer *Juan Medina*, which won the World Press Photography award in 2005. This image is included in the illustration 4.5. More of Medina’s images of Asylum seekers at the borders of Europe see for example: *The Horrors of the Sea*. April 27, 2015, BBC.

⁵¹⁶ A poignant example of such images is Juan Medina’s photo from May 2006, of a man who made his way to Europe, crawling on a beach in the Spanish Canary Island, while tourists are sunbathing on the background. see: *In search for a better life*, July, 2010, Reuters.

(Caption: 'A would-be immigrant crawls after his arrival on a makeshift boat on the Gran Tarajal beach in Spain's Canary Island, May 5, 2006) This image is included in the illustration 4.5.

often the distressed individuals pictured are youngish adult, black/dark skinned men; features that are often seen to point to cultural difference, otherness and at the same time ability—and responsibility—to take care of themselves. Moreover, habitually the names of the objects of the images have not been provided, as also other information shedding light on their personal histories, life stories is usually not included. Additionally the people in the images are recurrently textually framed and referred to as “would be immigrants” and even “illegal immigrants”.⁵¹⁷ Thus, besides benevolent significations and messages, also these images—regardless of their blunt and dramatic visual features—have been from time to time framed and conceptualized as depicting the expansive threat of the foreign and culturally different crowds trying to flood the “old continent” and its moral and cultural order. Thus the threat that these “uncontrolled” flows of people and unwanted masses pose to the European or Western way of life has yet again been widely associated with the suffering objects of the images in their multiple contextual significations. Nevertheless, this style of visually representing the migrants/asylum seekers somewhat differs from the habitual images of nameless crowds, as this picturing points out the individuals in the crowds and the humans behind the statistics. Moreover, by also pointing to the striking dissimilarity of Westerners sunbathing on the sunny beaches where the globally less fortunate wound up dead, they also work to exemplify the unsustainability of the global arrangement and the morally questionable European reactions to people attempting at crossing the political borders of Europe.

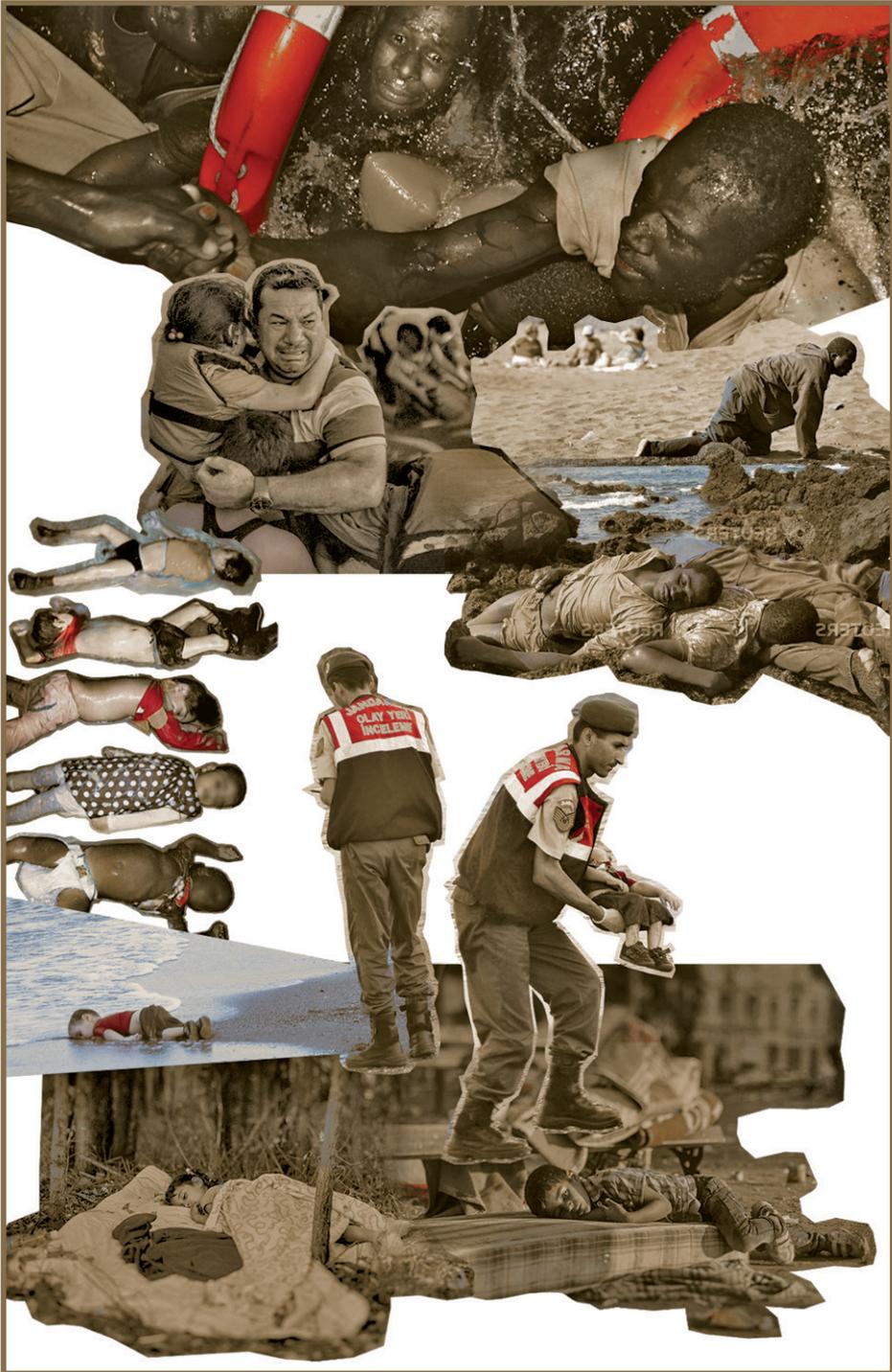
In larger terms, a more personal visual strategy in depicting the humans in need of help—close up imagery of individual human beings, identifiable facial expressions and even naming and personalized story telling included in the imagery—is generally seen to more effectively arouse benevolent reactions and humanitarian emotions in the spectating audiences. As with other humanitarian imagery, arrangements which personalize and center on the individuality of the sufferer and sameness between the sufferer and the spectator is seen to create stronger solidary bonds between the spectators and the depicted than images of depersonalized crowds and masses. Such personifying—and thus humanitarily more effective—style of representation has also been seen to be less frequent in case of picturing refugees.⁵¹⁸ But in the highly the contested situation of the intensified the refugee crisis (namely in 2015 as the crisis expanded) a visual strategy of

⁵¹⁷ The presentation of Medina’s award winning image for the **World Press Photo** site also points out, that majority of the immigrants who made it to Europe “were deported almost immediately”. This can be seen to point to the “bogus nature” of the comers in the eyes of the European legislation. World press photo caption of the image:

Would-be immigrants from Africa are rescued from the sea, after their makeshift boat had capsized. The boat, carrying 36 people, overturned during an operation by Spanish civil guards in November. Seven of the immigrants were lost, but the remainder were saved. Authorities in the Canary Islands had already detained over 5,500 illegal immigrants that year. The majority were deported almost immediately.

⁵¹⁸ **Bleiker et al**, 2013; **Malkki**, 1996; **Chouliaraki**, 2013; **Cohen** , 2001.

emotive close up images, personified stories and hauntingly disturbing imagery of human suffering, highlighting the need of help of the refugees can be detected strengthened in the Western (European) publicity.



Chapter 4. Illustration 4.5.

Personifying the Refugees

It seems the intensified stage in the refugee crisis produced—maybe even demanded—a different mode of picturing, one of visually stressing and underlining the individuality and personhood of the comers. Such images can be seen as a counter reaction to the traditional de-personifying style of picturing refugees, as well as to the anti-immigration debate which has taken as its strategy to dehumanize the asylum seekers by presenting them as bogus (humanitarian) subjects, or even claiming their reduced humanness. Personified picturing and visual storytelling, which can be both seen as striving to mitigate the difference between the people in need of help and the potential helpers by visual means (along with providing information on the individuality and including personal stories, names and even refugee voices) flooded the Western publicity particularly in 2015. An example of such picturing is *Daniel Etter's* image of Iraqi refugee, *Laith Majid*. In this emotive image, which went viral late summer 2015, Majid, dressed in a life vest is pictured crying and holding his children, after their dangerous boat journey safely reaching the Greek island of Kos.⁵¹⁹ The representational style of this image clearly stresses the individuality of the asylum seekers, by close up images of recognizable faces and emotional postures. The story accompanying the images provides names and stories, and attempts to bring home the sincerity of the need of help and humanness of the refugees. The visual images and the text aim to bring the story of Laith's family for the spectating audience through themes to which most people can relate to—parenthood, fear, anxiety, parental worry, love. This image can be seen emotively centering on the similarity of the spectators with the ones in despair. (Included in the Illustration 4.5. Daniel Etter's photo of Laith Majid, which was published August 2015 in the New York Times.)

Similarly touching are images of refugee children shot by photographer *Magnus Wennman* during 2015. In his project *Where the Children Sleep* Wennman pictures refugee children sleeping—in the streets, market places, border crossing, hospitals, reception centers, parks and forests—while making their way across Europe. Wennman's reportage includes detailed personal information on the children pictured: their names and ages, their whereabouts, where they left and why, what they had to leave behind (toys, homes, friends, family, schools, health). The reportage includes descriptions on the journey of the children and their families, as well as on the political situation hindering their seek for a refuge and journey in Europe (Hungary closing its borders etc.) and the trouble they face along the way.⁵²⁰ The

⁵¹⁹ *Migrants find an unbridled route to Greece*. (Photo by Daniel Etter) August 17, 2015, New York Times.

⁵²⁰ *Where the Children Sleep*. Photos by Wennman, Magnus, (text by Bergfeldt, Carina, Wiman, Erik & Weigl, Kerstin) Aftonbladet, 2015. One can also detect an intertextual reference to the photographs of **James Mollison's** *Where Children Sleep – Project* and a book. In Mollison's work the bed rooms of children around the world are presented, and the significance of the place of rest for children in different settings is exemplified. <http://jamesmollison.com/books/where-children-sleep/>

images and the reportage is heart breaking, as it for a Western spectator juxtaposes the material wealth and well-being, secure everyday life and an accessible cozy bed at reach of an average European, with the unbearable conditions the often traumatized small asylums seekers have faced in their counties of origin and continue to face in the ‘civilized’ wealthy Europe. As the edge of the images are children as ideal victims—often apprehended as innocent, pure and in need and entitled to protection—deprived of a own bed and secure place to rest, the tormenting message for a (Western) spectator is the intolerable conditions in which the asylum seekers live in Europe. The appeal of the reportage is built around the theme of common human fragility, and a plea for humane treatment for humans suffering amongst us. The visual arrangement of presenting the refugee situation through children deprived of safety and acceptable living conditions speaks the language of sameness, which is in many ways the starting point of humanitarian emotions and will to help. The children depicted in the images ‘could be our own’, they often look familiar, they are dressed in colorful clothes we see on the child next door, they long after lost toys we see at the shops we go to, but the objects of the images are placed in totally wrong, heart wrenching settings. They miss security, ease and happiness—the kind of life ‘our children’ are allowed to live. (Included in the illustration 4.5. are images of the Magnus Wennman’s series *Where the Children Sleep* published in Aftonbladet, 2015.)

This change in the mode of picturing the refugees may be seen to stem not only as a counter reaction to the anti-immigration speech and dehumanization of the refugees gathering a louder voice in Europe, but also from the altered situation in Europe at a time when the number of asylum seekers radically increased. The need to see and present the newcomers as individuals and human beings “just like us” is at the heart of this more benevolent and personal style of picturing, centering on similarity and aiming to arouse understanding of the plight of others, and thus the will to help of the spectators. Therefore these acts of picturing the ones in need as individuals sincerely in need of asylum and entitled to it (in accordance to international conventions), can also be seen as political appeals for a more humane politics and as pleas for more effective means to help the people who are entitled to help. However, visually showing other humans in fragile bodily settings and laid bare in their vulnerability also always conveys other significations—they are acts of claiming and articulating the *humanness* of the subjects depicted.

The Miscellaneous Politics of the Images of Drowned Refugee Children

Although images of lifeless bodies of refugees trying to enter Europe have not been unseen in the Western publicity over the years, the visual representation of the refugee crisis in the Western publicity took a strong

turn in the intensified situation of late summer 2015.⁵²¹ The questions of claiming the humanness of the asylum seekers by publishing strong emotive, visual representations, presented with a deliberate motivation to influence the political discussion and decision-making on the issue reached its peak in the form of a visual spectacle of drowned refugee children. In the extremely heated political situation dreadful images of dead refugee children were forcefully hammered into the retinas and consciousness of Western spectators, as they flooded the mainstream as well as social media.

Late August 2015 *Migrant Report*, a Malta based NGO specializing in migration issues, decided to publish images of the child victims perished as a refugee boat capsized near the coast of Libya. These images taken by Libyan relief workers bluntly show the bodies of drowned refugee children on the shores of a Libyan coast town *Zuwara*. Images of small bodies lying face down in the sandy beach some wearing diapers, some dressed in their pretty dresses, all dead and washed on the shore all alone after their unsuccessful attempt to seek protection are heartbreaking and hard to look at. These small children in their contextual setting signify not only the victims of war, but also of human trafficking, and European migration policies. The images poignantly and heart wrenchingly epitomize the human toll behind the statistics constantly reiterated in cold numbers. Still, the victims depicted remained unidentified and unnamed for the media consumers.⁵²² (Included in the illustration 4.5. are some of the Migrant report's images of drowned refugee children published August 2015.)

Even if the problematic ethical considerations of publishing photographs of dead children are evident, the circulation of these images at that very moment was commonly justified by their urgently political nature. These images were presented as “pictures that need to be seen”, as the Migrant Report titled their story on the disaster. The images were framed as unveiling the unbearable conditions of the refugees approaching Europe by showing tangible bodily proof of the victims, and emotionally putting faces on the refugees and the crisis taking place right at the moment. As the newsletter editor *Mark Micallef* of the Migrant Report stated: ... “we respect the dignity of those children more by publishing the photos of their bodies than by not publishing them. If the pictures move a single politician holding an unhelpful position, their death would not have been completely in vain.”⁵²³

A few days after the publication of the haunting images by the Migrant Report, images of a dead refugee child found on the beach of a Turkish town

⁵²¹ Now, in retrospect in early 2016, one might say that this style of picturing was rather short lived—a momentary surge—and after the spectacle of fall 2015, the predominant picturing went back to the images of crowds and masses. Maybe the power of the emotive, persofying, haunting images was exhausted.

⁵²² ***Pictures that need to be seen***, Migrant Report: August 29, 2015; ***You might as well ignore photos of dead refugee babies on Africans shores***. August 31, 2015, The Dailybeast.

From August 2014 to August 2015 the reported number of individuals drowned at the Mediterranean was more than 3500. see: ***Mediterranean Sea, Data of Missing Migrants, Deaths in the Mediterranean by month, 2014 and 2015***

Missing Migrant Project, International Organization for Migration, IOM.

⁵²³ ***Ibid.***

Bodrum, formed into an enormously visible media spectacle in the whole of the (Western) world. A Turkish photojournalist *Nilüfer Demir* was documenting the aftermath of yet another capsized refugee boat on the coast of Turkey, and took photos of a victim: a three year old Kurdish Syrian boy named *Aylan Kurdi*, laying face on the sandy beach. In another frame shot by Demir the dead little body of Aylan is pictured in the arms of a Turkish gendarme, while he is carrying the little boy's remains away from the beach. These images shocked and outraged the surrounding world: they flowed across the mainstream and social media like wildfire; no one could escape the heart wrenching scenery.⁵²⁴ (Included in the Illustration 4.5. are the images of Aylan Kurdi shot by Nilüfer Demir, September 2015.)

The images picture a small child—a child who could live next door to us (dressed in clothing familiar to the spectating western audience)—in a dreadful yet calm and strangely beautiful posture, speaks the language of sameness and familiarity. There is no blood, no torn clothes, just a small body of a perfect human creature, lifeless on the shore. Yet, it is extremely hard to repudiate the plight and suffering so evidently present in the image. Again the publication and circulation of the heartbreaking images was rationalized by the political force and potential of the revealing scene the images offered. Nilüfer Demir, the photographer who took the images, stated that she wanted to make the tragedy heard, hoping that the image would be a call for action and have an improving impact on the situation at the borders of Europe. She stated that she hoped the images would serve as a call to action: "I have photographed and witnessed many migrant incidents since 2003 in this region", she said in the interview. "Their deaths, their drama. I hope from today this will change".⁵²⁵ Thus, in both of these cases the *hamartia*, the tragic mistake leading to the peril of the refugees was seen necessary to be visually show to the surrounding world.

The potential of these images in raising awareness and 'doing good'—serving the rights of the victims and even perhaps saving others like them to come—was thus seen as more urgent and valuable than the questions of dignity of the objects of the images, and other ethically problematic aspects in representation. Showing, publishing and circulating images of dead refugee children was thus seen as a humanitarian practice, used in arguing for the humanity of the victims, their entitlement for asylum and moreover as a plea for a more benevolent, humane politics. This logic actually largely complies with the standardized and historically formed ways of picturing repressed groups as (bodily) vulnerable victims and thus aiming at awaking benevolent and solidary emotions in the spectators, and further claiming the

⁵²⁴ *Shocking images of drowned Syrian boy show tragic plight of refugees*. September 2, 2015, The Guardian; *Family of children found on Turkish beach were trying to come to Canada*. September 3, 2015, The Ottawa citizen; *Brutal Images of Syrian Boy Drowned Off Turkey Must Be Seen, Activists Say*. September, 2,2015, New York Times; *Aylan Kurdi: Syrian boy's family took deadly voyage after Canada refused refugee application*, September 16, 2015, The Independent.

⁵²⁵ *Photographer who found Syrian toddler dead on Turkish beach was petrified*. September, 3 2015, The Washington Post.

victims (or the groups she/he represents) right for protection. The images of dead refugee children were primarily stated as been published and circulated because of their messages as news worthy representations “showing the reality of these people”. It was reiterated that it was necessary for the Western audiences to confront the human toll of the Syrian war, the topical situation of the refugees and the humane cost of European migration policies by looking at the images. Thus the humanitarian potential of graphic images of suffering—claiming the authenticity of suffering and thus verifying the need of help of these people (and the groups they represent) by presenting visual, corporeal proof—was the leading rationale behind publishing and circulating these images. Accordingly, the images were quite bluntly used as political weapons in pressuring western decision makers into facing the consequences of European migration policies. For instance the British Prime Minister *David Cameron* was criticized for his strict stances by reclining to the image of Aylan Kurdi, and was demanded to change his “heartless”, “cruel” and “out of touch” attitudes and political alignments towards the refugee crisis.⁵²⁶

What is remarkable in the case of Aylan’s image is that the victim was given a name, an identity, a story and a history. The heartbreaking and emblematic story of little Aylan’s family was soon after the publication of the images echoed throughout the Western media. Everyone learnt the name of the small victim, and of his brother, 5-year-old *Galip*, and their mother *Rehan*. Both of who also perished as their boat capsized. Even the only survivor of the family, father *Abdullah*, was given an active voice in the media. The Kurdis were identified as a Kurdish family fleeing from the Syrian town of *Kobane*, massively destroyed in the war. The family fled the war to Turkey, and was trying to emigrate from there to Canada, but their application was refused. Thus, the family decided to take the dangerous route from Turkey to the Greek Island of Kos, on which they perished as their boat capsized. Abdullah Kurdi’s statement that he had now lost everything, and wants nothing more than to sit on the graves of his family was echoed in the worldwide media. Moreover, what can be seen as rather unusual in such cases, he actually indirectly consented with the presentation and circulation of the images of his child by stating that he “wants the world to remember his son”. The spectacle created by the images of Aylan Kurdi and the story of the family point a finger not only towards the governments and political groups causing wars and terror, creating suffering and refugeeness in the first place, but in a clear, blunt and emotive way show to the Western spectators the ramifications of the dysfunctional and unsustainable migration policies of the EU and the bland negligence of surrounding world. Thus, the image and the story together aim at arousing emotions of shame and guilt, waking up the consciousness of Western spectators, and to force the Western on-lookers

⁵²⁶ ***Brutal Images of Syrian Boy Drowned off Turkey Must Be Seen, Activists Say.*** September, 2, 2015, New York Times.

to face the harsh reality of the people fleeing war and chaos. As *Nadim Houry*, *Human Rights Watch* deputy director for the Middle East and North Africa described the images; the images are the “Biggest indictment of collective failure”.⁵²⁷

Publicizing the images with the personal history of the family can be seen to fortify the argument of trying to give a face to the tragedy and thus affecting the politics and attitudes towards migration and asylum seekers. Enclosing the personal story of the family with the tragic image at least partially breaks the code of representing refugees as de-historized and nameless crowds. But, although this time the “subaltern” (the father of Aylan Kurdi, a victim himself, as also other members of his extended family) was given a chance to speak⁵²⁸, again in the case of refugees, the story alone was not enough, not without photographic evidence of the “real” bodily suffering in the body of an exemplary victim (an innocent child). The body of a child was needed in order for the voice of the refugees themselves to be credible. Solely a verbal story of the horrors of war, the voyage and its dangers and tragedy so many before and after the Kurdis have gone through would have not been sufficient in validating the horror experienced by “the others”, nor to show the essence and worth of refugees as humans “just like us”.⁵²⁹ In this way, it may be said, that physical vulnerability—in the case of refugees—still today speaks louder than words. The words—or “refugee stories”—are not considered as believable as visual accounts of “real” bodily suffering. Moreover, the picture of Aylan can be seen to have been so efficient not only because of the topicality of its timing, but because of its visual composition, its visually iconic nature in many senses. Therefore, visually endorsing and proofing the extent and nature of the plight of refugees to the somewhat suspiciously postured audience is at the core of publishing the images. Again—just like so many times in the bloody course of history—a tangibly bleeding corporeal icon, photographic evidence, was needed to validate the doubtful words of the incredible non-Western sufferers.

Thus furthermore, the spectacle of Aylan Kurdi shows, how Western spectators need visual corporal proof of the humanity of “the others”, before being able to apprehend them as belonging to the regime of humanity and the regime of life entitled to protection, asylum or a decent life. The visual arrangements of picturing refugees in relation to the heated crisis of 2015 lays bare the constant need of corporal and tangible—horribly emotive—

⁵²⁷*Senior British Politicians tell David Cameron: When dead children are being washed on beaches-it's time to act*. September 3, 2015, The Independent; *Syrian Toddler's Dad: "Everything I was Dreaming of is Gone"*, September 4, 2015, CNN; *Shocking images of drowned Syrian boy show tragic plight of refugees*. September 2, 2015, The Guardian; *Family of children found on Turkish beach were trying to come to Canada*. September 3, 2015. The Ottawa citizen; *Aylan Kurdi: Syrian boy's family took deadly voyage after Canada refused refugee application*, September 16, 2015, The Independent.

⁵²⁸ I here refer to the idea of *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* in her Essay (1983/ 1988) "Can the Subaltern Speak?".

⁵²⁹ *Parashar, Swati: On Images, Stories and the Need to Hear More*. E-International Relations, October 8, 2015.

proof of the humanity of the others in order to be compassionate. But concurrently the very same function actually unveils some underlying negative assumptions on the (needy) others as “subhumans”—reduced in humanness in comparison to the “inviolable Western us”. The visual spectacle of the dead little Aylan—as also the other benevolent imageries stressing and calling for the humanity and entitlement of asylum and rights—thus actually articulate how extremely hard it is for the well-off distant spectators to apprehend the value of the lives of the others and to see their essence as humans on the same level, on the same scale as their own.

The movement of people crossing the political boundaries of different regimes of humanness (the West and the rest) poignantly reveals the global conditionality of human worth. The arrangements of visual performativity of refugeeness in Western publicity, impressiveness and repeated force of such visuals, reiterated again and again, unveil how the lives of the non-Western “subalterns” are generally assumed to be less human than their Western counterparts”. Yet, all of us humans (should) know—or at least that is what is declared in ceremonious declarations—that we all are human animals—very similar in our genetic, bodily as well as, psychological, psychosocial and emotional build, needs and aspirations—it seem that this is not tended to be recognized, but constant reproof of the fact is needed in the form of tragic visual images. It seems, that it is only in visual images of extreme pain and vulnerability—sublime loss—where the essential sameness of the suffering others and “us” seem to be recognized. And then again, the waves of compassion die out as suddenly as they are born. Another heartbreaking image of an exemplary victim elsewhere is always around the corner.

4.5 CONCLUSIONS: THE VISUAL CONDITIONALITY OF BELONGING TO FULL-FLEDGED HUMANITY

The apprehension of valuable life, and the claims made for protection of such lives can be seen (historically) stemming from the apprehension of all human lives sharing a precarious and bodily vulnerable essence. As visual records of pain have been seen as a more forceful arena in mediating the pain of others to remote on-lookers than mere worlds, mass scale mediation of visual images of bodily pain have been seen as a major arena for articulating the pain and need of protection of (distant) lives to (remote) spectators. The representational practices of images of pain and vulnerability have thus been seen to comprise a visual theater, through which claims for protection of the lives of the others has been made. Thus images of pain have functioned as an arena through which tangible and emotively forceful proof on valuable life has become articulated, and which has provided certainty on the otherwise abstract notions of belonging to the regime of protectable and valuable life.

The unconditional and universal nature of human rights and human worth can be seen as corner stones of the societal order of Western societies

and public life, international politics and Western self-apprehension. But when the notions of the unconditional value of all human lives and dignity of all humans is approached through visual images of suffering and their (global) representational practices, a radically different scenery into the notions of global human worth are revealed. Sieving through contemporary images of human vulnerability, war and crisis presented in the Western publicity, a strictly hierarchical, globally and politically segmented practice of presentation is clearly detectable: publication and circulation of visual representations bluntly showing non-Western suffering bodies are a norm in contemporary global mediation of information, while concurrently Western vulnerable bodies are scarcely visible. Therefore, the contemporary practices governing the picturing of vulnerable humanity in its bodily precariousness can be seen as a strictly hierarchical and authoritative arrangement, which provides certainty and tangible proof of the globally, geographically, culturally and politically conditional nature of human worth and value. The representational arrangements of images of pain and vulnerability thus comprise a visual theater of proof on the conditionality of belonging to the regime of protectable humanity.

This globally and politically segmented normative representational tendency in the seeability of vulnerable and suffering bodies places chaotic and brutal events and bodily suffering into the non-Western global and political sphere and claims the inviolability of Western bodies. Moreover as media's codes of taste and decency aimed at the protection of the dignity, honor and humanity of the individuals depicted in times of trauma and pain, mainly only govern and restrict the visual representability of Western vulnerability, the dignity and humanness of non-Western individuals becomes contested. Western lives are understood as belonging to the regime of protectable lives, seen as grievable and valuable, but the personal dignity of non-Westerners in the context of visual arrangements of pain and suffering is rarely mentioned. Therefore, today predominantly only bodily suffering of bodies not quite rated (in the Western point of view) as full-fledged members of humanity is seen in Western publicity.

Moreover, the visual representational practices of human vulnerability serve a central function in communicating the Western world order and dominance over the rest of the world. This tendency is poignantly visualized in contemporary imagery of foreign disasters and the Western militarized humanitarian interventions into such situations. Picturing the strong humanitarian yet militarized West vis-à-vis the sick, helpless and the weary rest produces revealing scenery into the global developmental dominance of the West over the non-Western lives seen as lives in a lessened manner. Thus the function of the humanitarian theater of proof of images of suffering is at least twofold: it articulates globally (culturally and politically) conditional understanding of belonging to humanity, as it visualizes and provides certainty on the power of the Western way of life and Western political ideology marked by humanitarianism and human rights. And at the same

time it makes visible the humanitarian Western dominance over the rest of the world. Therefore these visual arrangements produce narratives of the non-Western lives as unfit surplus human material that must be not only helped, developed and civilized, but also controlled and contained in order to secure the safety of the West. The visual theater of proof produced by these images suggest, that gaining access to full-blown humanity, human worth and protection from suffering (insurance/vaccination towards vulnerability) is achievable only by the membership of/belonging to the Western political realm.

By observing the representational practices of Western /non-Western bodies at large it becomes lucid that plight and suffering may generally be show visually and corporally only when the object of the image is perceived somewhat inferior to the global Western elite. Thus, showing the suffering of the non-Western others in a visual manner, is not anymore so much about making us aware of the distant atrocities (as it still is also this) but has also become a means of indicating the status of the sufferers in the global hierarchy. The visual representational practices of the refugee crisis and political references made adverting to the images of refugees, in many ways exemplify the miscellaneous visual politics of belonging to humanity. The (full-fledged) humanity of the refugees is on the one hand contested by references to the (unfit) visual performativity of need of help and protection. And on the other hand, by making claims on the humanity of the refugees resting on dramatic visual representations of their suffering, the underlying negative assumptions on their reduced humanness are revealed. At the theater of proof of the contemporary images of suffering, the otherwise 'invisible' background notions of universal human rights, unalienable human worth and the politics of belonging to the regime of protectable life/unprotected life become visualized. In addition, the various normative presumptions concerning the picturing of the world, its hierarchies, the inhabitants contained therein, and the conditionalities of (non)belonging become visually articulated.

5 HUMANITARIAN SOLDIERS, COLONIALIZED OTHERS AND INVISIBLE ENEMIES: VISUAL STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION NARRATIVES OF THE AFGHAN WAR

5.1 INTRODUCTION: A MILITARY VIEW INTO CONTEMPORARY WAR

“You may not be interested in war – but the war is interested in you”
Leon Trotsky⁵³⁰

Recent military operations have had more to do with information and cognition of people than ever before. In the post 9/11 era wars are waged not only on the ground, in the air, in maritime surroundings, but also in the evermore complex and frantic information environment. The role of information today is not only pivotal in mediating the events of war, but also in shaping how war is now conceptualized, perceived, comprehended and felt by large populations.⁵³¹ In post 9/11 wars fought by the West and the international community⁵³², rigorous imago formation has been central. Carefully created, novel and widely approved, easily adoptable “warbrands”, which can be fitted to the expectations, mindsets, values, attitudes and visions of the audiences, are vital in topical wars. The age of post-modern war can be seen as an epoch of intensifying strategic communication, marketing or branding of military operations, public diplomacy policies and public opinion control.⁵³³ The emphasis on communication strategies, strategic communication and winning the battle for the hearts and minds of the people

⁵³⁰ This quotation is often attributed to *Leon Trotsky*, although there is no concrete evidence that Trotsky really said this. However, the aphorism describes the logic of military-strategic communication very well.

⁵³¹ **Huhtinen, Aki -Mauri:** *Sanasota. Johdatus Sodan ja Sodanjohtamisen Filosofiaan.* Maanpuolustuskorkeakoulu, Helsinki, 2005, 57, 72–73, 76–77; **Huhtinen, Aki-Mauri:** *Keinosota.Taistelu vastaanottajista.* Elan Vital, Lahti 2003, 33–34; **Virilio, Paul:** *Ground Zero*, Verso, New York, 2002, 24–27, 33–34, 35–36. ; **Zizek, Slavoj:** *Welcome to the Desert of Real.* Verso, London, 2003; **Baudrillard, Jean:** *The Spirit of Terrorism*, Verso, New York 2003 28–34; **Virilio, Paul:** *The Information Bomb.* Verso, London, 2000.; **Understanding Information Age Warfare.** Alberts, David, S et al., CCRP Publications, August 2001, 9–34, 43–52.

⁵³² As also stated before (Chapter 1.), by international community I refer to the term as it is often used in international relations and in the realm of human rights and moral value systems. International community often refers to all of the peoples, cultures and governments of the world, and their common moral duties and obligations. However, the use of the term can be seen as problematic, since it can be used in political, economic and military contexts to gain authority and legitimization. See, for example: **Fehrer,** 2001; **What is the International Community,** 1 September 2002, Foreign Policy.

⁵³³ **Huhtinen,** 2005; 57, 72–73, 76–77; **Huhtinen,** 2003, 33–34; **Virilio,** 2002, 24–27, 33–34, 35–36; **Zizek,** 2003; **Baudrillard,** 2003, 28–34. *Understanding Information Age Warfare,* 2001, 9–34, 43–52.

has, in recent years, significantly ascended up the Western war agenda and become more important in war strategies.⁵³⁴ In this competition the best stories win; the narratives that show and present war according to the expectations, sentiments, mindsets and value systems of the target audience are most likely to be successful. Thus the followers and media spectators are the consumers of war, and the war is interested in us.⁵³⁵

The war over public perceptions is fought on many fronts and with a variety of weapons. Powerful visual representations are pivotal when it comes to persuading people to see war in certain ways. The Western alliance's communications strategy with regards to the war in Afghanistan (2001-2014) elevated the importance of new media, social media and interactive, realtime communication. As discussed above, the power and status of visual images in shaping perceptions of wars has been long recognized. However, visual representations have recently roused more concern and received strengthened attention in Western military strategies. Over the past few years, more emphasis has been attributed to the use of visual materials when building up the image of Western military operations. Nowadays, instead of just talking about "combat-cam", the US and NATO manuals for strategic communications talk about effective usage of "visual messages and narratives" and strategic usage of visual representations.⁵³⁶

This chapter examines the visual strategic communication endeavor of the multinational NATO-led Afghanistan International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) operation. The study chiefly deals with the situation of the Afghan operation in 2011, when the transitional stage of handing out the responsibility from the ISAF to the Afghan National Forces (ANA) and other local security institutions gradually started. At the time societal discussion on the nature of the operation and the desirability of carrying on the long dragged operation was heated, namely in the north-European publicity.⁵³⁷

⁵³⁴ One of the key aspects of the Counter Insurgency Theory (COIN) is to win over the support of the populations via communication, and thus to win the war. For more about COIN, see: **Nagel, John, A:** *Learning to eat soup with a knife. Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2002; **The US Army Counterinsurgency Field Manual**, Marine corps Warfighting Publication No. 3-33.5, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2007. For further information on the topical military strategic communication and its challenges concerning Afghanistan, see: **Commander's Handbook for Strategic communication and Communications Strategy**. Version 2.0 US Joint Forces Command, Joint war fighting Center, October 27, 2009; **Allied Command Operations (ACO) Strategic Communications directive**, September 15, 2008; **Allied Command Operations and allied command transformation Public Affairs Handbook**. July, 2010; **Principles of Strategic communication**, US Department of Defence, August 2008; **Payne, Kenneth:** *Waging Communications War*. Parameters, Summer 2008, 37-51. On the western fight to win the counter-propaganda of the Taliban, see: Taliban **Propaganda: Winning the war of Words?** The International Crisis Group, Asia Report N°158 – 24 July 2008; **Taliban winning the war of Words. Taliban slick Propaganda confronts US**. *BBC News. U.S struggles to counter Taliban propaganda*, October 1, 2010, *Washington Post*.

⁵³⁵ **Huhtinen**, 2003, 33-35, 28-29; **Zizek**, 2003.

⁵³⁶ See: **Commander's Handbook for Strategic communication and Communications Strategy**, 2009; **Allied Command Operations (ACO) Strategic Communications directive**, 2008; **Principles of Strategic communication**, 2008.

⁵³⁷ This chapter is mostly based on a working paper that was published by the Finnish Institute of international affairs in August 2011. See: **Kotilainen, Noora:** *Humanitarian soldiers, Colonialized*

The new kind of post 9/11 era war fought by the international community (almost 50 nations participated in the ISAF⁵³⁸) the long, dragged out and complex Afghan operation at the start of the transition period, the war wary populations of the coalition participant nations and resilient critique combined with the evermore frantic and demanding information environment, together with the acute need to convince the broad international community of the desirability of the expensive and burdensome operation and its successfulness—create an intriguing starting point for study of the strategic communication endeavor of the Afghan war. The multinational Afghan ISAF operation was mandated by the UN, and can be seen to represent a new kind of embodiment of the international community—the values, aspirations, practices and aims of the multinational community within world politics.⁵³⁹ Therefore, analyzing and reading the ISAF imagery offers an insight into recent military strategic communication messages, uses of imagery within contemporary Western warfare, as well as to the spirit bestowed on the humanitarily legitimized military operations of 2000s conducted by the international community.

In this chapter I shall track down what kind of means, messages and narratives the Western strategic communications machinery used—namely during towards the end of the operation in the contested situation of 2008-2011—in order to more effectively convince and address the publics of the coalition nations on the desirability of the operation. The aim is to analyze and interpret what kind of visual messages and narratives the strategic communication images entail. When interpreted with Panofsky's iconographical - iconological frame⁵⁴⁰ and analyzed in the context of

Others and Invisible enemies. Visual Strategic Communication Narratives of the Afghan War. The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Working Paper 72, August 2011.

Most of the ISAF images referred to and analyzed in this chapter are from years 2008-2011. After the transition period the Nato-led ISAF operation (2003-2014) was terminated at the end of the 2014. As it is stated by Nato: *From 2011, responsibility for security was gradually transitioned to Afghan forces, which took the lead for security operations across the country by summer 2013. The transition process was completed and Afghan forces assumed full security responsibility at the end of 2014, when the ISAF mission was completed. A new, smaller non-combat mission ("Resolute Support") was launched on 1 January 2015 to provide further training, advice and assistance to the Afghan security forces and institutions.* **ISAF's Mission in Afghanistan** (2001-2014), Nato: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_69366.htm

⁵³⁸ In 2011 there were 43 Troop-contributing nations in ISAF and the total strength is approximately (March 2011) 132 203 (about 90 000 of which belong to the US). US General (from the summer of 2010) *David Petraeus* commanded the NATO operation. Since 2006, the US army operation "enduring Freedom" (Started in 2001) has been part of the NATO-led multinational International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), which has been active since 2002. ISAF is mandated by the UN. For more information on the operation in 2011, and about the formation of ISAF and the historical evolution (involvement or evolution) of the operation, see: **International Security Assistance Force (ISAF): Key Facts and Figures.**

⁵³⁹ As ISAF announced its mission in 2011: *In support of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, ISAF conducts operations in Afghanistan to reduce the capability and will of the insurgency, support the growth in capacity and capability of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), and facilitate improvements in governance and socio-economic development in order to provide a secure environment for sustainable stability that is observable to the population.* See about ISAF mission and official texts concerning the operation: **Archive: official texts. NATO:** <http://www.rs.nato.int/archives.html>

⁵⁴⁰ **Panofsky**, 1955, 26-54.

predominant world politics, the images tell stories of their presenter as well as their audience, but also of the values, mindsets and attitudes of their time and of the topical world order they are presented in. Thus, when reading the visual narratives utilized by the strategic communication effort, aspects of the Afghan operation often left unaddressed in political speech, can be indicated, revealed and set out in the open.

Under scrutiny in this chapter are the visual strategic communications images produced and presented by ISAF in an Internet social media surrounding majorly during the contested years of 2008-2011. The material of the study consists of a set of visual images, numbering in the thousands, produced and presented online by the public affairs unit of the ISAF operation on the site *ISAF media photostream on Flickr*⁵⁴¹. I see that these representations are mainly designed to influence and address the populations of the coalition countries; that is, the 'home front' or the domestic, mostly Western audience of the ISAF operation.

In the following subchapter 5.2 I shall open up the recent evolution and concepts of information warfare and strategic communication, as well as elaborate on the environment in which the strategic communication of the Afghan war operated at the time. I shall touch upon the different aspects, challenges, sides and novelties of the recent communication war endeavor—keeping focus on the communication aimed at influencing the mostly Western audiences. I will also briefly explicate how the material of the study is handled and divided into different narratives that are descriptive of Western information warfare and strategic communication, and of the current discourses and paradigms contemporarily governing our thinking. In chapter 5.3. "The Humane War", I shall analyze the different kinds of visual narratives that can be found in the material that describes the operation. I analyze and mirror the emblematic pictures and their messages alongside topical Western discourses, worldviews, attitudes, political paradigms and structural changes within international politics of recent years. While going through the large amount (over 15 000 pictures) of visual material, it became evident that some narratives were 'made visible by invisibility'; that some themes and sides of the operation do not visibly stand out in the ISAF imagery. Thus, chapter 5.4 "The War Unseen", focuses on the 'aspects missing' from the narratives used to legitimize, justify and market the war effort to the audiences. Things left unaddressed, unmentioned or scantily addressed tell the story of the politically ticklish sides of war, and of aspects that do not fit the overall justifications and rational of the operation. But things left unmentioned also tell us about the frames in which the Western

⁵⁴¹ The visual study material is retrieved and can be found at: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/>
By Early April 2011, there were 15 044 images picturing the operation downloaded on the Flickr service. The images are usually produced (photographed, selected etc.) by ISAF personnel (soldiers, communications officers, and sometimes by the US army or relevant Aid agencies) and presented and published by ISAF. I, therefore, see that the images represent the narratives, perspectives and standpoints of the ISAF operation.

audience of these visual narratives—are willing to encounter this war, and of frames in which Western spectators are perhaps willing to see themselves and others in this global world. In chapter 5.5, I shall draw conclusions from the findings and observations made from the different metanarratives found in the ISAF pictures.

5.2 VISUAL NARRATIVES OF WAR AND STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

“We need to understand the people and see things through their eyes. It is their fears, frustrations, and expectations we must address”⁵⁴²

Today’s frantically updated news, fast paced media representations, plenteous and striking visual images and strong narratives of war forcefully affect what we see of the world and how we see parts the world not directly in our natural sight. We also reflect our comprehension of our own statuses and roles in today’s world, as well as our feelings and political emotions towards the distant others of the global community, according to the representations presented and mediated to us with regards to war.⁵⁴³ But, media, expert assessments, scientific analyses and representations of popular culture are not the only soldiers in this vital battle space of today’s war. Different sides taking part in today’s military conflicts seek ferociously to disseminate information and to influence the perceptions people have of their struggle, actions and aspirations, as well as the justifications of their fight.⁵⁴⁴ In this global information struggle over the perceptions of large populations, all possible weapons are used: narratives addressing our fears, beliefs and worldviews. Within this frame also visual images that affect our emotions and work on our cultural values, therefore showing us “proof” of how things are and acting as sites of witnessing, are utilized by military actors.

As was pointed out in the chapter 2, publication of crude images of human suffering inflicted by Western militaries have been especially from the 1980s and 1990’s onwards ever more forcefully governed and restricted. Nevertheless harsh photographs of suffering inflicted by Western warfare, and even images of violent war crimes committed by Western forces, have occasionally surfaced from the recent wars. In the age of swift real-time communication, mobile phone cameras and social media, the unexpected revelatory information outbursts are ever more difficult—or next to

⁵⁴² A quotation from *Stanley McChrystal* in *ISAF Commander’s counter insurgency Guidance*, August 2009. http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/official_texts/counterinsurgency_guidance.pdf United States Army General McChrystal was the commander of the ISAF and commander of the U.S Forces Forces in Afghanistan, until 2010.

⁵⁴³ **Weber, Cynthia**: *Imagining America at war. Morality, Politics and Film*. Routledge, NewYork, 2006, 10–13; **Baudrillard**, 2003, 27–31; **Sontag**, 1977; **Sontag** , 2003; **Sontag**, 2004; **Butler**, 2009, 63–100; **Moeller**, 1999, 33–53.

⁵⁴⁴ **Huhtinen** 2003, 28, 33–35; **Glover**, 2008, 221–227.

impossible—to control by militaries.⁵⁴⁵ These visual revelations and ‘runaway images’ have often damaged the reputation and public imago of recent military operations and increased disillusionment and brought about opposition towards the wars. The 2003 Abu Ghraib torture pictures stirred up a vivid discussion on the procedures of the US forces and strongly damaged the reputation of the Iraq operation.⁵⁴⁶ Revelatory image outbursts into the hidden scenery of the Afghan war are numerous. For instance a Danish documentary *Armadillo* (2010) showed revealing images of barbaric violence perpetrated by Danish ISAF soldiers in Afghanistan, and stirred up a lot of discussion in the Nordic countries concerning the conduct and attitudes of the soldiers, as well as the desirability of Danish participation in the operation.⁵⁴⁷ Likewise, violent runaway photos of war brutality damaged the reputation of the Afghan operation, when *Der Spiegel* (20 March 2011) published a set of photographs exposing the conduct of the so-called US “Kill Team”. The images portray ISAF soldiers posing with the bloody corpses of dead civilians that the soldiers allegedly killed for “fun”. The coalition feared a major public backlash, and expected an Afghan retaliation due to the pictorial eye-opener.⁵⁴⁸ Similar was the case with a sensation brought about by the revealing scenery of a video picturing US soldiers urinating on the dead bodies of Taliban fighters summer 2011.⁵⁴⁹ These revelatory instances powerfully illustrate the power of images of suffering and violence in today’s warfare, as well as the position of visual images in formation of public imagination regarding war, the power and difficulties of images in forming attitudes towards war, and on the other hand the challenges and difficulties faced by visual military strategic communication.

However, visual images of war and military operations can also be used and understood in just the opposite way. Pictures of war do not solely tell emotive stories of suffering or the madness of war, but they also offer a powerful and persuasive arena for mediating positive stories of military operations—heroic tales of honor and victory. Pictures of war heroes, heroic soldiers, leaders and winners have been elevated to iconic positions, acting as agents of identity formation, comprehension and strong emotions—and thus political action. They can also be used to market wars in effective and influential ways.⁵⁵⁰ Although the power of visual images as mediators of information and as power players in wars and crises has long been recognized, only recently has the Western military communication strategy

⁵⁴⁵ **Sontag**, 2003 & 2004; **Butler**, 2009, 78–83.

⁵⁴⁶ See for example: **Sontag**, 2004; **Hansen**, 2015.

⁵⁴⁷ Homepage of the documentary: www.armadillothemovie.com/armadillo/TRAILER.html; see also: *Armadillo: the Afghanistan war documentary that shocked Denmark*, *The Guardian*, June 3, 2010. ; **Kotilainen, Noora**: *Afganistanin Sodan Pojankasvot*. *Ulkopolitiikka*, 3/2010.

⁵⁴⁸ See: On “The “Kill team” Images: *US Army Apologies for Horrific Photos from Afghanistan*. March 21, 2011, *Der Spiegel*.

⁵⁴⁹ *US marines charged over urinating on bodies of dead Taliban in Afghanistan*. September 24, 2012, *The Guardian*.

⁵⁵⁰ **Sontag** 1977 & 2003; **Butler**, 2009, 95–100, **Weber**, 2006, 10–13; **Baudrillard**, 2003, 27–31.; **Moeller**, 1999, 33–53. **Burke**, 2001; **Goldberg**, 1991.

elevated the role and status of visual images and narratives in the use of military strategic communication. Images of war, utilized by military actors in strategic communication endeavors, act as one of the major tools shaping our perceptions of war today. So, how has the Western military strategic communication deploy visual images in recent years? And how have images been utilized in the current Western fight to influence public opinion? In the following, I shall first briefly open up the concept and recent evolution strategic communication as a segment of military information warfare. Secondly, I shall open up the usage and workings of visual images in the recent ISAF strategic communication effort in Afghanistan.

5.2.1 VISUALLY WINNING OVER PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS

Psychological operations, propaganda and communications have long served an important role when waging wars. Even in the writings of ancient war strategists, influencing the perceptions of one's adversary, as well as misleading the opponent with information and using it as a weapon, is granted a central role in winning battles and wars. The basic ideas of using intensive psychological manipulation disseminated via mass media in order to alter and construct the opinions, assessments and thinking of large populations, stem from the times of the Second World War. Still, the information operations of today have their roots in the teachings of the past, as today's information operations namely build on thoughts and methods developed during the propaganda warfare of the Second World War.⁵⁵¹

Even though modern propaganda is the precursor to the current information warfare, over the years the meaning and means of utilizing information in warfare have expanded and the field has significantly changed. The environment where the military strategic communication operations currently work is miscellaneous, very crowded and complex. Furthermore, despite the long roots of information at the service of the militaries and its use as a tool of warfare—information warfare as it is today understood—it is a rather newly acknowledged sphere in this field. The first courses of information warfare were taught in the central US army academies in the early 1990s, at the dawn of this new post-modern warfare. Simultaneously, novel descriptions of information warfare sprung up in Western military strategy. In 1993, the Pentagon brought up information as a “strategic asset” and “information/knowledge warfare” in its memorandums, with more emphasis on psychological operations influencing “emotions, motives, objective reasoning and ultimately behavior” becoming more common in US Army briefings at the time of the first Gulf War.⁵⁵²

After this, the weight of information has continuously grown heavier and the shift in highlighting the status of information in warfare has been vibrant.

⁵⁵¹ **Huhtinen**, 2005, 58–60.

⁵⁵² **Toffler, Alvin & Toffler, Heidi**: *War and Anti-War. Survival at the dawn of the 21st Century* Little Brown & Company, New York, 1993, 139–141.

The extremely rapid changes in the information environment in recent decades—facilitated by modern technologies and new real time media distribution methods, such as the Internet, digital cameras, cell phones and Internet-based social media like Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Instagram, YouTube, as well as the internet information exposure sites such as the WikiLeaks—have drastically changed the settings in which strategic communication typically works. Militaries—as well as insurgent groups and other parties involved in topical conflicts—are now forced to promptly react and respond to the challenges of the drastically expanded information environment and new type of irregular, hybrid warfare.⁵⁵³

The quite novel term *information warfare* refers to (military) information operations that are carried out during a crisis or a conflict in order to accomplish certain objectives, or to advance certain goals. Information operations include the efforts to influence military and political decision-making, operative capabilities and public opinion by using information as a target or a weapon. Like other military operations, information operations have both defensive and offensive sides, and can be conducted in political, psychological, social, economic and military methods, and at any level (tactical, operational and strategic) of warfare. The range of information warfare spans from tactically “hard” offensive cyber-attacks on an enemy’s information systems to “soft” defensive surveillance of the information environment.⁵⁵⁴

Strategic communication can be seen as a sub-category of the ample domain of information warfare, and the term is mainly used by military actors and governments. Strategic communication refers to psychological operations and processes that seek to preserve, influence and enhance the credibility and favorable conditions of the operation, and to advance the interest, policies and objectives of the party concerned. The US strategic communications and communication strategy handbook from 2009 defines the capabilities of US strategic communications as follows: to inform and educate, to persuade and coerce. Four specific strategic communications goals are to: 1) Improve credibility and legitimacy 2) Weaken an adversary’s credibility and legitimacy 3) Convince selected audiences to take specific actions that support US and International objectives, and 4) Cause a competitor or adversary to take (or refrain from taking) specific actions.⁵⁵⁵ Thus, the main functions of psychological information operations—or strategic communications—are to work to sustain the morale of the troops

⁵⁵³Virilio, 2000; *Commander’s Handbook for Strategic communication and Communications Strategy*. Version 2.0 US Joint Forces Command, Joint war fighting Center, October 27, 2009; *Allied Command Operations (ACO) Strategic Communications directive*, September 15, 2008; *Allied Command Operations and allied command transformation Public Affairs Handbook*: July, 2010; *Principles of Strategic communication, US Department of Defence*, August 2008; Payne, Kenneth: *Waging Communications War*. Parameters, Summer 2008, 37–51; *Taliban Propaganda: Winning the war of Words?*, 2008.

⁵⁵⁴Huhtinen, 2005, 60–61; Toffler & Toffler, 1993, 139–141.

⁵⁵⁵*Commander’s Handbook for Strategic communication and Communications Strategy*. 2009, Chapter 3, pp. 18–19.

and to influence the perception of civil populations (directed at different target audiences, such as domestic populations, decision makers of coalition countries, local populations, neighboring populations, etc.), as well as to protect populations and troops from the offensive information operations of the enemy and counteract enemy propaganda efforts.⁵⁵⁶

During the later years of the Afghan operation—namely after 2008—a significant shift and an intensifying trend in Western Afghanistan public diplomacy and communications strategy took place. As the war proved burdensome, hard to win and is diminishing in popularity, the coalition players in Afghanistan paid more attention to the development of the communications strategy and strategic communication. After 2008 US Strategy for Afghanistan-Pakistan and NATO's directives for strategic communication clearly state that a more effective and better-resourced strategic communications plan was to be created for the Afghanistan operation. The long, drawn-out war has seriously damaged the reputation and imago of both the war and the warmongers. These papers stipulate that the imago and reputation of the operation—and of NATO and its allies—have to be improved and communication backing its popularity and image must be intensified in order to win the war.⁵⁵⁷ Concurrently, more vigorous communication schemes were made and the status of communications was emphasized in the strategies; NATO's strategic communication was strengthened in order to win over the support of local populations. The other aim was to achieve one of the main goals mentioned in the NATO strategy: to involve the ever more skeptical international community more closely and actively in the war effort.⁵⁵⁸ This meant addressing and persuading the domestic front more effectively, in order to improve the reputation and imago, as well as to secure the success and future of the operation.

This chapter concentrates on this turning point of the communication strategies, and focuses on the 'soft', or 'humanistic', and defensive sides of the information warfare carried out by ISAF towards the end of the Afghan operation. The interest is focused on psychological warfare and operations targeted to influence values, attitudes, perceptions, emotions, opinions, motives and decision-making processes. My focus is on how the perceptions of civil populations and decision-makers at the *domestic front* of the Afghan war—namely the populations of the coalition countries, i.e. mainly Western people—were targeted by coalition information warfare/strategic

⁵⁵⁶ *ibid*; Huhtinen, 2005, 60; *Understanding Information Age Warfare*, Alberts, David, S et al., CCRP Publications, August 2001.

⁵⁵⁷ *Principles of Strategic communication*, 2008; *NATO allied Command Operations directive for strategic communications*, 2008; *Allied Command Operations and allied command transformation Public Affairs Handbook*, 2010; *Allied Command Operations (ACO) Strategic Communications directive*, September 15, 2008; *White Paper of the Interagency Policy Group's Report on U.S. Policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan*; ; *Obama's Afghanistan strategy*, March 29, 2009, The Washington Post.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid*.

communication operations in new media surroundings, by the use of visual materials.

Skepticism, criticism and opposition towards the operation and its objectives, and doubt as to the prospects of winning the war, rose towards the end of the operation among the participant nations, and some of the coalition members—for instance Canada and the Netherlands—decided to withdraw their troops from the area.⁵⁵⁹ The ever more war-critical audiences and policy-makers of the NATO ally and partner nations participating in the operation were to be assured of the functionality, desirability and accomplishments of the coalition action as well as the necessity of the war. The conceptions and blessings of the populations of more than 40 nations involved in the coalition were central to the successful continuation of the operation. Despite of—or perhaps namely because of—the growing Western skepticism, the 2009 US strategy for Afghanistan stresses that the international community must, in coming years, assume more responsibility for the operation and counterterrorism action in the area. By using enhanced and strengthened strategic communication, NATO and the US were calling on the coalition countries to better understand what is at stake for the whole international community.⁵⁶⁰ The challenges of the new information environment and the unease over the operation placed demands on NATO the strategic communication, particularly on the messages aimed at encouraging the populations of NATO ally and partner states to support the operation. What was then done in this contested situation in order to visually win over the hearts and minds of the domestic fronts?

More fierce communications plans of the NATO-led and US-commanded forces were developed and put into action. The aim was also to develop targeted and effective messages and narratives suitable for different audiences. Timelier, faster, more reactive, frequently updated and more precisely targeted, agile information and communication was stressed. Namely within the communications strategies formulated after 2007, ISAF stressed the importance of increased efforts towards more accountability, transparency and accessibility. More weight was put on strategic communications via public announcements, press releases and the enhanced use of new media communication tools such as Facebook, Twitter as well as the photo-sharing community *Flickr*, and the utilization of strategic visual messages was highlighted.⁵⁶¹ In these strategies, it is highlighted that the information and messages disseminated to the audiences have to be easily

⁵⁵⁹ The Netherlands withdrew its troops in 2010, and Canada 2011.

⁵⁶⁰ *White Paper of the Interagency Policy Group's Report on U.S. Policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan.*

⁵⁶¹ See for instance: *Allied Command Operations Strategic communications Directive*, September 15, 2008; *Implementation of the Department of Defense Strategic Communication Plan for Afghanistan*. September 12, 2007.

accessible, understandable and have to appeal to the audience and influence it.⁵⁶²

An active and imaginative implementation of *strategic themes* and *messages* designed to resonate, appeal and influence target audiences, which include explanations for and justifications of the actions, were highlighted in the NATO strategic communication directives of the time. It is stated, that the themes and messages used in the strategic communication have to constitute a logical, instinctive and consistent narrative on the organization and its actions and objectives. These narratives have to resonate with the target audiences, thus these messages are on the one hand fitted to the mindsets of the locals, and on the other to the worldviews of the coalition nations' populations.⁵⁶³ The use of unconventional communication arenas, more extensive use of the Internet and the 24/7 information environment, as well as tailored messages aimed at addressing the previously unaffected or unreached strata of Western populations, have become more prominent in the recent US and NATO strategic communication plans and strategies. It was stated that the communication has to reach out to different segmented audiences in order to make them understand "what the US and NATO are all about". Thus strategic communication fights to counter the opponent's use of information, but it is particularly aimed at enhancing alliance success. It is stated that in order to assist the operations and manage public perceptions, gaining and sustaining the support of the public and opinion leaders of the coalition countries (NATO nations and partners) is vital.⁵⁶⁴ As NATO's Senior Civilian Representative in Afghanistan, ambassador *Mark Sedwill* stated in early 2011, the most important thing in communicating the importance of war to domestic populations is to: "make people realize that NATO is making progress; as people will tolerate deaths if they perceive that the sacrifice was not in vain".⁵⁶⁵ Therefore, the NATO strategic communication was pointed towards making people see the operation as fruitful and worth taking part in, regardless of the heavy human cost.

5.2.2 ISAF ON FLICKR

Pertaining to the new strategic communications plans, ISAF launched a new type of website in late 2008 (<http://www.isaf.nato.int/>). This website integrates ISAF's Facebook and Twitter pages, and links to content sharing

⁵⁶²*ACO Strategic Communications*, Aco Directive nr. 95-2, *New Allied Command Operations Directive*. Supreme headquarters Allied powers Europe September 15, 2008, chapter 2; *Principles of Strategic communication*, 2008; *Commander's Handbook for Strategic Communication and Communication Strategy; Field manual 3.0 Operations*, Washington, Department of the Army, February 2008, (see Chapter 7); *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, Field Manual no.3-24, Headquarters, Department of the Army, 15 December 2006, <http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/army/fm3-24.pdf>.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁵ *Sedwill* was responsible for communication with non-military directions. *Naton siviiliedustaja: Afganistanin vastuunsiirto alkaa monella alueella*. January 26, 2011, Helsingin Sanomat.

site YouTube and photo sharing community Flickr. Also, blogs and other frequently updated content appear on the site. As a press release on this site states, it is launched “in an effort to more quickly deliver current relevant and accurate news and information about military operations in Afghanistan directly to the public”.⁵⁶⁶ The regularly updated “ISAF medias photostream” on Flickr⁵⁶⁷ consists of thousands of pictures telling stories of the operation. ISAF’s Flickr site consists of images of the soldiers serving in Afghanistan, as well as ISAF operations and of local people and everyday situations on the ground. The communications press release states that the pictures give a tour of “life on the ground in Afghanistan” and offer a “real insight into the mission and life on the frontline of NATO operations”. According to the press release, posting pictures on Flickr is part of the effort that ISAF has recently made in “striving to make our mission in Afghanistan as accessible to our audience as possible”.⁵⁶⁸

The ISAF Flickr photographs are mostly shot by military ISAF personnel⁵⁶⁹ and can be freely used by members of the media as well as a wider audience. It is stated that these pictures are meant to convey and mediate information from the Afghanistan operation, and to influence the public imagination and perceptions, or the coalition home front of the ISAF operation. The images are intended to be used and distributed, in order to make the ISAF operation visible, imaginable and available to the intended audiences from the viewpoint of the military and ISAF actors. The presented pictures are also said to illustrate the positive sides and progress—that, according to the press release, are often left unreported—seen by NATO forces on the ground, as well as to show some of the “challenges that we still face”. As the briefing states, the photos are, most importantly, meant to “give you a little flavor of the daily life of our colleagues and friends who are serving there”.⁵⁷⁰ The images are thus designed to give spectators a ground level account, to show a “real” and “true” account of the operation and to allow an understanding of the actors and the operation conducted by the ISAF. The statement describes the audience as “us” and the “ones on our side”; the ones interested in the operation. The shape of the text and type of addressing suggests to the reader that the effort in Afghanistan is a shared, collective endeavor. The text suggests that this is something ISAF wants to share with the audiences, which they, due to distance, cannot see without the help of the ISAF communication effort.⁵⁷¹ Due to the communication

⁵⁶⁶ **International Security Assistance Force launches a new website. News Release. ISAF Joint Command – Afghanistan.** November, 30, 2008. ; the website: <http://www.isaf.nato.int/>

⁵⁶⁷ See: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/>

⁵⁶⁸ **International Security Assistance Force launches a new website**

⁵⁶⁹ The photographer is often appointed in the information attached to the image. Usually, they are ISAF troops, but can often be US army soldiers, and sometimes an aid organization is mentioned. As the images are presented on the ISAF Flickr site, I handle them as representations of the ISAF public diplomacy /strategic communications policy lines.

⁵⁷⁰ **International Security Assistance Force launches a new website ; Flickr Community Guidelines:** <http://www.flickr.com/guidelines.gne>

⁵⁷¹ **International Security Assistance Force launches a new website.**

channel, the content of the Flickr images and the mode and tone of the addressing, I recognize that the target audiences of these representations are mostly the populations and decision makers of the participant countries interested in the situation in the Afghanistan-Pakistan area, as well as also members of the media.

Due to the Internet environment, social media/interactive multimedia arena, and specified and selected target audience, the Flickr site may be argued to clearly represent the new public diplomacy and strategic communications agenda of the Western coalition. Also, because of the novel use of visual material, Flickr pictures can be seen as an example of the new approach and as an expression of the new kind of strategic communication recently drafted and aimed at influencing the Western coalition audiences. Placing photos on Flickr can be perceived as an attempt of striving to mediate prompt information and influence the audiences to encounter the operation in positive ways. Thus the photos and their contents are here perceived as a part of the NATO strategic communication endeavor and analyze and interpreted in this context. What is significant and interesting when it comes to the narratives meant to brand the operation is, that such representations always reveal more than the carefully constructed strategic story. Narratives and stories of the war and its justifications and objectives, which are designed to influence public opinion, do not work in a vacuum. They can be seen as expressions of wider Western ways of thinking and thus they form a part of a larger discourse. This is what makes reading into them so remarkable and interesting.

The narratives found in the Flickr images are perceived to conform to the deliberately formulated messages of the strategic communication effort of the Afghan war. Thus, they figure some of the topical currents of today's world politics, as well as the central paradigms, justifications and objects of today's military operations (waged by the international community). In addition to this, the stories told by the images need to resonate with the target audiences; they have to appear supportable within the discourses framing today's ideas of the functions of 'international community', humanity and acceptable, just war. But the narratives comprised by the images do not solely tell of the spirit and conduct of the present wars; they also make visible the terms and frames in which war waged by the West/international community can be shown, presented and justified to the intended audience of today in persuasive and widely acceptable ways. Thus, these narratives reveal significant information on the worldviews and stances of their presenter, but also about the audience and about "the Western us", the citizens and policy-makers of the countries participating in the war. Thus I see that the images presented by ISAF constitute an interesting and a revealing scene at the contemporary visual theater of humanity constituting the Western spectators.

The ISAF media's photostream on Flickr is an extensive source material; by early April 2011⁵⁷² there were over 15 000 single pictures telling of the Afghan operation on the site. The pictures presented on Flickr can be seen as one wide and multilayered visual narrative of recent Western war. The analysis of ISAF's images was conducted by going through the mass of visual material (and the related captions). The starting point is that recurring appearance of some visual and narrative features throughout the material proves the significance and standing of the stories told by the images. Subsequently, I divided the concurring thick imagery, which I saw of telling descriptive stories of the recent warfare (and contemporary humanitarian world politics), into thematically differing groups and into different categories in order to analyze the stories these different types of images tell. Some emblematic pictures—examples of such thick images—of each category are presented in a form of collage illustrations (5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5), which enable the reader to see descriptive examples of the Western war branding imagery while reading. In the course of the analyses I also refer to other similar pictures found in the material.

5.3 THE IMAGES OF WAR TODAY: HUMANE WAR

A picture of war: blue skies and sunny weather over an Afghanistan roadside landscape; an ISAF soldier is leaning towards to a local child, calmly and gently taking care of him, as a heavily armed fellow soldier keeps watch in the background. Image 1 of Illustration 5.1⁵⁷³ is in many ways emblematic and representative in visualizing and describing the Afghan mission. (See image 1. in the illustration 5.1) The visual composition, arrangement, juxtapositions, language and messages of this image are typical and recurring in the ISAF visual material depicting the war. By visual appearance the soldier—positioned as the central figure of the image—is strong. He is heavily armed, wearing an ISAF uniform as well as a helmet and other modern military accessories, he seems ready for combat, physically strong and well built, well protected and equipped. But the soldier pictured is not behaving in what is perhaps traditionally seen as characteristically 'soldier-like'. Instead of entering into combat with the enemy or acting in other action traditionally

⁵⁷² When the collection of the study material was finalized.

⁵⁷³ Picture 1 can be seen in the collage **illustration 5.1**, and can be found here: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/3137404397/in/set-72157611673009576>

The caption of the Image: *MAYWAND, Afghanistan--A medical technician for 2nd Platoon Alpha Company for the U.S. Army's 2nd Brigade 2nd Infantry (2-2 INF) performs a medical check-up for a child at a local village near Combat Outpost (COP) Terminator in the Maywand District of Kandahar Province on Dec. 23, 2008. Construction began on COP Terminator earlier this month by the 62nd Engineers that work out of International Security Assistance Force Regional Command East and will be used to house members of the 2-2 INF while they conduct security operations in Maywand. ISAF Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Aramis X. Ramirez.*

associated with military tasks, the soldier is pictured in an overtly humanitarian position. In the picture, the strong, militaristic soldier is bent over an Afghan child and holding a stethoscope; he is gently taking care, nurturing and providing medical assistance to a local child. The image places the child as the subject of the care and object of the operation; as the child and the local veiled woman holding the child are pictured calmly, contently and passively receiving help from the coalition soldier.

Such visual arrangement between the ISAF soldiers and the local inhabitants is one of the most common and emblematic ways of presenting the operation via images. Furthermore the landscape in the background is typical for the ISAF imagery: rural, empty, dry, wasteland-like surroundings are most common in pictures describing the landscape of Afghanistan. The commonly recurring juxtaposition of the Afghan wilderness, its emptiness and rural, un-modern, un-built surroundings, combined with the local Afghans as receivers of help, alongside the modern, strong and helpful soldier figure—when read in an iconological frame—constitute a multitude of visual messages. What is also noteworthy in the pictorial disposition of image 1. of the illustration 5.1 is the figure of the armed soldier patrolling in the background; the figure gives a sense of safeness and security, but also an impression of the need for armed protection which points at the local insecurity. The main figures of the images—the soldiers, the child and the local inhabitant receiving help—act as symbols of the Afghan war, and epitomize the objectives of the ISAF operation in Afghanistan when described in visual images.

5.3.1 THE HUMANITARIAN SOLDIER

The most visible key figure in ISAF imagery is arguably the above-sketched figure of the gentle and humanitarian ISAF soldier.⁵⁷⁴ Images of soldiers engaging in functions that can be broadly termed as humanitarian, are strikingly common in the imagery. These images constitute the visual narrative of the humanitarian soldier. Visual descriptions of the ISAF soldiers as humanitarians entail numerous recurring features. The figure of the humanitarian soldier is most commonly pictured with local people—especially children. ISAF soldiers are often pictured carrying out healthcare and health education tasks. The soldiers are pictured educating and civilizing the locals: advising, teaching skills and customs and furthering human rights/women's rights in the area. Pictures of soldiers handing out food packages and relief help, playing with children, handing out toys and sweets, mending locals' minor wounds, teaching hygienic customs and building roads and school house. Images picturing ISAF soldiers taking part in humanitarian action or behaving in a friendly and helpful manner towards

⁵⁷⁴ For representations of the humanitarian soldiers see also chapter 4.3.3, where the Haiti 2010 earthquake and Ebola epidemics are discussed.

the local people constitute a notable part of ISAF's strategic communication images.⁵⁷⁵

All in all, the soldiers of the images are acting in a humanitarian spirit. Image **2** of illustration 5.1 ⁵⁷⁶ illustrates this humanitarian spirit in an emblematic way: here the ISAF soldiers are presented as friendly helpers, smiling and handing out water bottles to the orphaned children surrounding them. What is noteworthy in the images presenting the Afghan operation is the visual juxtaposition of the strong, helpful, armed coalition soldier and the orphaned children avidly accepting and welcoming the help and care given to them by the soldiers. Image **3** of the illustration 5.1 ⁵⁷⁷ also illustrates some of the important features of this modern soldier figure. In this image, the uniformed and armed British ISAF soldiers are pictured patrolling a field in Afghanistan, but in midst of this military function they find the time to make a local girl (on the right, dressed in a traditional gown) happy. The soldiers are pictured bettering relations with the local inhabitants by giving the little girl a teddy bear. Smiling and nurturing yet strong; kind and friendly but armed; as well as secure and trustworthy yet militaristic, are the visual features recurring in the images and determining this figure. The figure of the ISAF soldier appears so humane and sensitive, that while looking at these pictures it is often hard to remember that this figure ultimately represents military power in a war-stricken area where people (civilian and military) are being killed every day. The visual features and actions in which this figure is presented are multiple: the humanitarian soldier has many forms, shapes and roles.

Image **4** of the illustration 5.1 ⁵⁷⁸ presents the ISAF soldiers as lifesavers, as the image offers an insight to a coalition medical care facility where a

⁵⁷⁵ For such emblematic images of the humanitarian soldiers, see for example pictures: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/3040863306/>; <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/3040862800/>; <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4631919068/>; <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4343101024/>; <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/3311572558/>; <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5080386066/>; <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5571032342/>; <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4116275981/in/photostream/>; <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4748021811/in/photostream/>

⁵⁷⁶ Illustration 5.1, Image 2. Caption: *U.S. Army 1st Lt. Joshua Edgington, Texas Agribusiness Development Team-04, hands out bottled water to kids from an orphanage near the construction site for the Arbaba Environmental Park in Ghazni, Afghanistan, Oct. 12, 2010. 1st Lt. Edgington and other members of the ADT were checking on the progress of the park, which will provide a central location for conservation and agriculture training in Ghazni. ISAF photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Joseph Swafford.* <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5096674476/in/photostream/>

⁵⁷⁷ Illustration 5.1, Image 3. Caption: *KAJAKI, Afghanistan – British Maj. Grant Haywood, Commander of Company X, 2nd Battalion, Parachute Regiment, watches Cpt. Doug Beattie, Operational Mentoring Liaison Team, here June 15, 2008 give a stuffed bear to a local resident during a patrol south of Kajaki Dam. The ISAF soldiers are responsible for the security of the dam as well as working with the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police to assist in security for local villages.* (ISAF photo by Staff Sgt. Jeffrey Duran, U.S. Army) <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/2755581527/>

⁵⁷⁸ Illustration 5.1, Image 4. caption: *A coalition medical team treats children after an insurgent attack in Muqer district, Ghazni province. A joint coalition and Afghan National Security Force patrol was attacked by insurgents with mortar rounds and rocket propelled grenades. The insurgent*

coalition medical team is treating an Afghan child injured in an insurgent attack. In addition to the coalition facility mentioned in the text, the male figures in the foreground of the image are recognizable as military personnel by their clothing and weapons they carry. The chief object of the action in the image remains the small body of the weak, injured child and the narrative that directly presents the coalition forces as the saviors of civilian lives in the area. Images **5**⁵⁷⁹, **6**⁵⁸⁰, **7**⁵⁸¹ and **8**⁵⁸² of the illustration 5.1 present the ISAF soldiers communicating with the locals, giving aid and building good relations. Pictures of this type are common in ISAF imagery. What is interesting is that the dominant arrangement of the ISAF soldiers in the imagery is picturing the soldiers in poses and activities usually not affiliated with the traditional soldier. The main attributes visually represent these brave new warriors of today's global battlefield as humane, care-giving, helpful, and deeply intimate and compassionate spirits, who are securitizing and rebuilding Afghan society, bettering the lives of the locals and, in some cases, saving them. On the whole, the humanitarian warrior figure is performing more like a peacekeeper—a friendly companion of the people or a humanitarian worker—than a traditional soldier.

The humanitarian soldier figure prominent in ISAF pictures has perhaps started to look familiar to many Western spectators in recent years; but in historical terms it is rather a new acquaintance. What does the emergence of the figure of the humanitarian soldier stand for? Why is this figure so prominent in recent strategic communication images and why are the contemporary Western soldiers pictured in this way? What are the messages and narratives embedded in this figure in the context of the Afghan war?

fire hit Afghan civilians in the nearby Yarbi Kala village.

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5378001350/>

Other such images from hospitals etc. see: For such images from

hospitals etc, see, for example: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/3040905874/>;

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/3040076233/>;

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4092331226/>;

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/sets/72157626809060641/>

⁵⁷⁹ Illustration 5.1, **Image 5:** *Kabul, Afghanistan (Feb. 17, 2011) - An Air Force member speaks to a village elder and offers him a blanket with the help of an interpreter during Operation Outreach's humanitarian mission in Kabul City today. Operation Outreach is a team of American military volunteers at Camp Pheonix in Kabul and they have donated blankets, fuel doughnuts, school supplies, clothing and food to several refugee villages near Kabul:*

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5455801790/>

⁵⁸⁰ Illustration 5.1, **Image 6:** *Afghan children receive humanitarian aid from Polish soldiers in Dehe Khoda Ydad, Afghanistan, Feb. 28, 2011. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. David Zlotin)*

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5490856231/>

⁵⁸¹ Illustration 5.1, **Image 7:** *Caption: Staff Sgt. Cary Anderson, a team leader with Lima Company, 3rd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, greets an Afghan child in Habibabad during a joint patrol, Dec. 13. Marines and Danish soldiers, alongside their Afghan National Army counterparts met with locals during a joint patrol to establish relationships in the area.*

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5265297822/>

⁵⁸² Illustration 5.1, **Image 8:** *Caption: Sgt. Cody T. Romriell, a combat engineer with 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines, helps local farmers dig out a clogged canal during the construction of Typhoon 3 in Marja, Afghanistan, Sep. 9. Marine engineers with 2/9 have been constructing new patrol bases in their area of operation in order to increase force protection. Typhoon 3 is one of the many being built.* <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5043262267/in/photostream/>

What does this figure say about the politics of our time, and of the contemporary war waged by the West and the international community?

The humanitarian peacekeeper-like spirit and the humanitarian actions of the ISAF warriors visible in the images could both be seen as reminders of the historical peacekeeping mission roots of the ISAF, and as markers of the initial functions and objectives of the ISAF operation. Initially the ISAF operation was created in accordance with the 2001 *Bonn Conference* as an UN-mandated multinational crisis management and reconstruction endeavor, which NATO took leadership of in 2003. The initial political decisions to take part in the mission were, in many participant nations, made in a situation far different from reality in Afghanistan in later years of the operation. The operation and its objectives have, since the initial times, strongly expanded and evolved, as the operation has also involved US troops since 2006.⁵⁸³ Because of this history, the operation was many countries originally discussed and promoted mainly as a peacekeeping, reconstruction and assistance operation, which was to primarily focus on societal reconstruction and security, human rights and humanitarian questions, as well as more specific issues such as anti-drug work, gender equality and education. At the beginning of the operation, taking part in a war or a 'war-like situation'—as the operation has always been seen in the United States—almost never surfaced in the political discourse of some of the participating countries. This was especially true in the participating states that are not plenipotentiary members of NATO, such as Finland and Sweden.⁵⁸⁴ In many of the European coalition countries, societal discussion on the changed and recently more war-like nature of the operation was towards the end of the operation and in namely the transitional phase (particularly during 2008-2010) heated; and the debate about whether the mission should be termed a war or something else was, from time to time, a hot topic in the media and politics.⁵⁸⁵

Since the justifications, objectives and reasons given for the ISAF operation were for a long time in many of the participant countries almost entirely peacekeeping oriented, the use of the humanitarian soldier figure utilized in strategic communication can be seen as congruent with these initial justifications and conditions. Thus, the figure of the humanitarian soldier can be seen to ascend from the past, as well as partly outdated justifications and the realities of the operation, and seems to stem from the initial words used in many of the participant countries to justify and describe the objectives of the operation. But this does not solely suffice to explain the

⁵⁸³ For the history and evolution of ISAF, see: ISAF's mission in Afghanistan (2001-2014).

⁵⁸⁴ **Salonius-Pasternak, Charly & Jarno Linnéll:** *Miksi Afganistan on Tärkeä Suomelle?* National Defence University, Department of Strategy, Julkaisusarja 4: Työpapereita No. 30. 2009, 3–4.

⁵⁸⁵ For Finnish discussion on the matter, see **Salonius-Pasternak, Charly:** *Suomi on paraikaa sotaa käyvä maa*, 24 July 2009, Helsingin Sanomat; **Paavo Arhinmäki:** *Suomi on ollut sodassa jo pitkään*, 28 July 2009, Helsingin Sanomat.; **Stubb ja Häkämies:** *Suomi ei ole sodassa*, 25 July 2009 Helsingin Sanomat; **Lindholm, Jari:** *Afganistan on Suomen sota*, 25 July 2009 Suomen Kuvalehti.

visual emergence of the figure—indeed there is more embedded in the figure of the humanitarian soldier.

The International Humanitarian Order and the Figure of Humanitarian Soldier

The figure of the humanitarian soldier, so visible and central in the ISAF images, can be seen as emblematic of something far more extensive of contemporary world politics than just the justifications and political rhetoric that is used to explain the Afghan operation (for populations of the coalition member states). The figure of the humanitarian ISAF soldier can be perceived as an embodiment of the international coalition's presence in Afghanistan, but also in broader terms an embodiment of the topical *humanitarian international order*, and the spirit of (Western lead) human rights-driven world politics of recent years.

Humanitarian and human rights rhetoric and the imperative of helping distant people and individuals in need—saving people from evil states and regimes unbinding to universal humane values and human rights norms—has become one of the central political idioms of Western international politics of the recent years and decades.⁵⁸⁶ This strengthened humanitarian paradigm of particularly the post 9/11 world politics is visible in ISAF photo material. Human rights and humanitarian arguments—the moral imperative and the action of helping the distant other in need and despair—acted as the major initial justifications and reasoning behind the Afghan war. The moral tone of obligation, and the imperative to help the suffering and oppressed Afghan nation, surfaced in political speech soon after the demand to demolish and destroy the terrorist cells that were behind the 9/11 atrocities. These humane and peacekeeping operation-like justifications have been central, particularly when justifying the operation to the European participant states of the ISAF operation.⁵⁸⁷ The figure of the humanitarian soldier also acts as a reflection that represents the justifications given to the operation, and served as a guarantee of the legitimacy of the military endeavor in the country. The visual figure of the humanitarian soldier in the use of the strategic communication machinery gives the Western audience a visual passage to the ground level of the operation, and visually proves that the soldiers are helping and acting humanely. The visual figure provides proof of the operation as a just and desirable one; an endeavor drawn according to the moral-political spirit of the time. The soldier figure extensively pictured in a humanitarian light—conducting humanitarian efforts and working for the betterment of humanity—addresses Western audiences in powerful ways according to the moral and ethical paradigms (or

⁵⁸⁶ See for example: **Chandler**, (2002) 2006; **Douzinis, Costas**: *The Many Faces of Humanitarianism*. Parrhesia 2007/2, 1–28, 6–8.

⁵⁸⁷ See for example: **President Bush declares “war on terror”**. Speech to a Joint Session of Congress, September 20, 2001.; **ISAF Mission**; **Chandler**, 2006; **Weber**, 2006.

the unconscious ideology of humanitarianism) widely embraced in the Western sphere.

On the top of this, the Afghan war and the figure of the humanitarian soldier as an embodiment of it act as illustrating examples of how humanitarianism and human rights driven international politics have, in recent decades, risen as a political alternative to the *Westphalian system*. This system, which has allowed sovereign states to dominate international relations for more than three hundred years, has clearly eroded in the past few years. In the Westphalian system—determined by an international community, constituted of sovereign states with elusive authority and control over their territory as well as jurisdiction, and with force the chief source of legitimacy—international law has constituted the set of norms aimed to guarantee the peaceful coexistence of sovereign states. In turn, contemporary politicized humanitarianism allows—in addition to non-governmental actors such as humanitarian NGO'S—the international community and also political state actors, to play an important role at an international level and within the boundaries of sovereign states. This has previously, according to Westphalian norms, been practically the domain and responsibility of sovereign states.⁵⁸⁸ The breakdown of the Westphalian system has given room to use of humanitarian justifications and human rights as power political tools in international politics. And thus humanitarian and human rights concerns have started to surface as the central justifications for international operations, and even military endeavors.

This brave new soldier figure, used in military strategic communication, acts as corporeal manifestation and a symbol of the international humanitarian order and community at work on a practical level. The strong, heavily armed and muscular but righteous global player is taking care of and educating the 'weak and inept Afghan people', and tending to the wounds of the civilians. The nurturing and assisting humanitarian soldier, who is helping the locals to build solid, Western-like governance, is corporally and visually underlining the spirit of the Western-led humanitarian world order. But moreover, the figure also illustrates some of the topical problems and challenges neutral humanitarian organizational work is facing today, as it shows some of the moral, ethical and practical problems that lie within the intermingle of human rights and humanitarianism with powers politics and military conducts. The figure visually illustrates the changed role and identity of today's soldiers, and defines the blurred line between neutral humanitarian work and military humanitarianism. Thus, the humanitarian in military uniform also makes visible the current difficulties faced by neutral humanitarian work in crisis areas and displays the diminishing of humanitarian space in today's global war zones, by showing that the

⁵⁸⁸ Belloni 2007, 451–452; Douzinas, 2007, 6–11.

distinctions between the humanitarians and soldiers are only to be uniform-deep.⁵⁸⁹

All in all, what needs to be kept in mind when critically assessing today's international order and military interventions is that today's military humanitarianism—protection of “universal humane values” and human rights by arms—is currently widely used in international politics by Western states (or the international community) as de-politicized standards, excuses, justifications and as a legitimatizing paradigm enabling them to play an active role within the boundaries of sovereign states.⁵⁹⁰ This order is specifically present and visible in the Afghan operation and its strategic branding. The ethos of this order is descriptively expressed in the ISAF imagery through the figure of the humane and humanitarian soldier, and used in the military strategic communication effort aimed at gaining support for the Afghan operation.

Non-Political Humanitarianism Beyond Criticism?

The central role of human rights and humanitarian conduct in current Western-led world politics is often celebrated by Western political leaders as a triumph of the universally shared sacred values of all humanity. It is seen as evidence of the significant progress of humanity and an outstanding collective achievement for all humankind.⁵⁹¹ Although politics is often regarded as an expression of self-interest, human rights-based politics is commonly perceived to be an expression of altruism, the sacred collective values of a moral community and acts of moral consensus. Thus Western-based humanitarianism and human rights-justified politics—even military interventions—are often rationalized, argued and perceived (in the West) to originate from altruistic motives of helping the ones in need—disregarding politics or self-interest.⁵⁹² Questioning the principles of human rights/humanitarian-based military maneuvers—even in extreme cases such as removing governments of sovereign states from power, air strikes, bombardment of civilians and the establishment of long-time protectorates in ‘failed states’—advocated by human rights and ethical principles has recently often been seen as “heresy”. *David Chandler* argues that the (Western) consensus of recent world politics dictates that almost anything done in the name of human rights is right; and in addition to this, it is often understood that criticism is not just wrong but tantamount to supporting human rights violations. This has led to a situation where questioning the motives and justification of humanitarily legitimized and branded wars are very easily interpreted as supporting brutality and inhumanity, or having a

⁵⁸⁹ For more on the problems and challenges the neutral humanitarian NGOs are facing topically, partly due to “military-humanitarian interventions” as well as the moral and ethical problems faced today due to “humanitarian power politics”, see, for example: **Fox**, 2001; **Rieff**, 2002; **Chandler**, 2006; **Barnett**, 2010; **Chandler**, 2001; **Belloni**, , 2007, 451–474.

⁵⁹⁰ **Douzinis**, 2007, 1–28.

⁵⁹¹ **Chandler**, 2006, 12–15, 19.

⁵⁹² **Ibid.** 14–19.

hostile attitude towards human rights, promotion of gender equality, democracy and freedom of speech.⁵⁹³ And in the context of the Afghan war, approving of, or even supporting the extreme Islamism and the terror of the Taliban-regime and their inhuman politics.

The language and rhetoric of the protection of these sacred rights in states seen as undemocratic or in areas seen as weak in human rights terms—such as Afghanistan—have been utilized as powerful legitimizing tools. These paradigms are hard to argue against within the Western contemporary widely shared discourse of universal human rights and insuperability of protection of the individual, or what I call the unconscious ideology of humanitarianism. And thus, as mentioned earlier in chapter 2, some critics of the recent years militarized humanitarianism even say that point has been reached where humanitarianism has evolved into a moral cover under which powerful countries—namely the United States—oversee their own interests around the world.⁵⁹⁴ The much used visual figure of the humanitarian soldier in the use of military strategic communication can also be seen to draw its suggestive power, as well as its function and figure, from this humanity discourse, which appears to be beyond criticism. Human rights-based politics and humanitarian principles are currently widely talked about and expressed as undeniable, natural and universal values; as something that the whole of humankind consensually supports.⁵⁹⁵ This is why international political acts, and even military interventions justified by humanitarian goals or by the protection of human rights, can be seen as serving as a powerful and outstanding means of persuading people to see even violent and sometimes morally dubious political acts as legitimate and worth supporting.

Thus, the power, applicability and usefulness of humanitarian features—and the visual figure of humanitarian soldier as an embodiment of Western humanitarian goodwill—in the use of the strategic communication machinery is effective. The visual features of the soldier figure (kind, helpful, humane, nurturing, tutoring, supporting, smiling, playful, strong, protecting, etc.) and the actions presented (education, help, humanitarian aid, reconstruction aid, playing with children, humanely communicating with locals, securing the area, mending wounds, giving gifts, saving lives, etc.) thus appear to be beyond criticism. The reason for this is that they point to, and seem to represent, the sincere and high-minded aspirations of the strong and humane Western/international community's influence on the ground at foreign crisis zones. Within this dominant discourse, criticizing the humanitarian soldier within the ISAF imagery thus also becomes questionable. Questioning the goodwill or altruistic actions of the humanitarian soldiers—visually proven in the reoccurring images to be unquestionably conducting good work and advancing human rights issues

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.* 5, 13–16.

⁵⁹⁴ **Belloni**, 2005, 1, 8.

⁵⁹⁵ **Chandler**, 2006; **Barnett**, 2010; For more on the evolution, historical readings and evolution of human rights, see: **Hunt**, 2007.

among the Afghan population—could easily be interpreted within humanitarian discourse as the questioning of universal humane values. Criticism could also be seen to undermine the self-evident good human rights aspirations of the international community and of the ISAF operation on the whole.

The figure of the humanitarian ISAF soldier pictured as a nonpolitical global humanitarian, and the embodiment of the healing hand of the international community's presence on the ground in Afghanistan, acts as perfect justification, as well as a marketing image for the operation. In addition to this, the figure of the humanitarian soldier works as an effective 'guise' for involvement in military action within current world politics and prevailing humanitarian discourse. For the contemporary Western viewer, interpellated by the unconscious ideology of humanitarian politics, it is all too easy to agree with the underlying principles and universal values that the figure represents, and perceive the figure through the unconscious, totalizing ideology of Western humanitarianism.⁵⁹⁶ The humanitarian soldier figure can thus be seen as the embodiment and expression of the unconscious ideology of humanitarianism: a construction which claims to be self-evident, universal, a-political and a natural expression of Western altruistic, humanitarian aspirations in the area—but which therefore is at the very heart of political. The ideas and paradigms justifying and explaining the recent (the Western/international community waged) wars and attempts at gathering support for them are emblematically present in the figure of the humanitarian soldier. This figure is a perfect example of how, in the context of humanitarian world politics, power works through myths by taking the politics out of the ideological, and thus presenting culturally constructed paradigms and stories as natural and undeniable universal truths.⁵⁹⁷ Humanitarianizing the operation with the help of the figure of the humanitarian soldier makes the Afghan operation seem a-political, and thus morally beyond criticism.

In addition to this, the new form in which the soldier is visually presented can also be seen as confusing. Images that present the soldiers primarily as humanitarians and helpers—as friendly, unthreatening and non-violent figures—lead the audience to think and feel that the reality of the war is non-violent. The figure of the humanitarian soldier is targeted to address the spectators to see the war as practically nonviolent, just and supportable, and the war effort as unambiguously enduring and "good". Using the language, messages and narratives of the "protection of humanity carried out by military means", and by presenting soldiers as helpers and guardians of human rights and value, in many ways fits the mindsets of the Western 'civilized global citizens' of the recent years— and thus the imagery effectively addresses and powerfully persuades the Western target audiences.

⁵⁹⁶ **Belloni**, 2007, 463–471. See chapter 3 on humanitarianism as an unconscious ideology.

⁵⁹⁷ **Barthes**, 2000, 142–145.

Presenting war and soldiers in military strategic communication narratives according to the values and dominant, widely shared paradigms of their time is good marketing: it sells and can be expected to contextually gain the support of the coalition spectators



Illustration 5.1. Image 1.



Illustration 5.1. Image 5.



Illustration 5.1. Image 2.



Illustration 5.1. Image 6.



Illustration 5.1. Image 3.



Illustration 5.1. Image 7.



Illustration 5.1. Image 4.



Illustration 5.1. Image 8.

5.3.2 THE PROTECTED OTHER

The ISAF Flickr site contains a vast amount of photographs, that on the one hand paint a picture of the operation and the international coalition's action in the area, but on the other visually represent the local populations in multitude of signifying ways. In this subchapter I shall analyze the ways of picturing the local Afghans in the ISAF Flickr images. When looking at the images that picture the Afghans, I examine how the actions, position, status and appearance are visually presented vis-à-vis the presentation of the ISAF troops, as well as the coalition objectives in the area. I will start by presenting an image type of the ISAF soldiers, which is slightly different in its appearance and action from that of the humanitarian soldier: the strong and more militaristic ISAF warriors. After this, I shall move on to analyze pictures that represent the ISAF-Afghan military and civil co-operation in the area, from which I shall analyze the visual messages embedded in the images that present the local Afghans vis-à-vis the ISAF soldiers and personnel.

These images, besides working as intentional strategic messages revealing the principal conscious intentions of the strategic communication effort, also portray the local inhabitants and actors in culturally signifying ways, and can thus be seen as representations of a faraway area and a foreign culture. Therefore, the images provide a window also to subliminal (Western) attitudes and worldviews of the presenter. The ways in which locals are pictured—in addition to purposefully describing the operation and the situation on the ground—also unintentionally illuminate and unveil some of the conventional ways and frames in which Western communication and the coalition's domestic target audiences are used to seeing and picturing Afghans and, more broadly, 'the others' of this world. Other here signifies the targets of humanitarian and development aid, the populations of the areas seen as "less developed" and different from the Western viewpoint; such as for example Islamic cultures.

Clean Hi-tech Warfare and Trouble-Free Co-operation

The figure of the humanitarian soldier discussed above is not the only visual figure in which the ISAF warriors are pictured. Among the imagery there are also a lot of images picturing ISAF soldiers in day-to-day tasks, carrying out training and patrolling activities; in actions more customarily associated to military functions. There are also a vast number of images describing military meetings and high level visits from generals and politicians.⁵⁹⁸ As the humanitarian soldier is commonly pictured with local civilians, the modern cosmopolitan brothers in arms are usually pictured with other soldiers and local security personnel. In these images the ISAF soldiers are typically posing with weaponry, modern arms and equipment, thereby

⁵⁹⁸ Such images for example, see: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5433717504/>;
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5433717504/>;
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4641642143/>;
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4903766137/>

corporally presenting the coalition power, the muscular force and capacity of the coalition arms and personnel. In these pictures, heavily armed soldiers are often testing and presenting their weaponry and training by patrolling or taking part in everyday military activity. The images of the soldiers, as well as the arms and other hi-tech equipment, paint a picture of a strong and effective, modern, powerful and ready to act military. These images allow the viewers to see the operation and the coalition presence in Afghanistan as efficient and strong. They visually and corporally present the coalition's power and the strong presence on the ground, and work to sustain belief in the operation's success. (See image 9 in Illustration 5.2)⁵⁹⁹

As these modern warriors are usually pictured other coalition soldiers or Afghan security personnel, and not with civilians as the humanitarian soldiers, these figures do not act in such humanitarian manner as their softer counterpart, but instead appear more military-like. The image of the modern brothers in arms, training and simulating war seems to work as a more masculine, strong and more traditional soldier like correction figure when compared to the image of the civilian-orientated humanitarian soldier. These soldiers seem strong and trustworthy, thanks to their powerful and modern weapons. But what is noteworthy is, that despite carrying heavy weapons and possessing the firepower, equipment and training to shoot, fight and "neutralize" the opponent, the modern soldiers in these images never fully exercise or release their capacity: they do not use their firepower in the images. Pictures present training, patrolling, and normal "peaceful" everyday military routines, as well as visits from the operational commanders and other military events (Images 9&10, in the illustration 5.2),⁶⁰⁰ but no pictures of combat, downright military operations or casualties are presented.⁶⁰¹

A large number of images presenting the hi-tech ISAF soldier include scenes where the soldiers are participating in joint action, co-operation and interaction with the local soldiers of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the local police forces.⁶⁰² These images depict shared security tasks, the

⁵⁹⁹ Such images see illustration 5.2: Image 9. [ISAF does not provide a caption for this photo.] <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5381004854/>; and Image 10, Caption: *Benjamin K., a German military service member, scans the horizon while securing a 4th Combat Aviation Brigade, 4th Infantry Division CH-47 Chinook supporting an unmanned aerial vehicle recovery mission in northern Afghanistan, Dec. 20. The capable 4th CAB Chinook supported the German troops in sling loading the UAV. (Photograph by U.S. Army Sgt. Sean Harriman, 4th CAB Public Affairs Office):* <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5302229644/>; and other similar images: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5470184241/>; <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4080166554/>

⁶⁰⁰ See for example the images 9&10 in the illustration 5.2. and : <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/2957212147/>; <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5096242657/>; <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5096211471/in/photostream/>; <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5856321722/in/photostream/>; <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5847990304/in/photostream/>; <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5197720504/in/photostream/>; <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4649277399/>

⁶⁰¹ The invisibility of combat imagery is further discussed in the chapter 5.4.

⁶⁰² See, for instance, pictures 11–15 in this paper.

education of the national army troops and tasks such as delivering relief help or conducting construction work in the area. The co-operation of the ISAF troops and the local security officials seems to be carried out in total harmony, consensus and even close friendship among the ISAF soldiers and their Afghan counterparts. No disagreement, misunderstandings or difficulties are present in the images. Just like the civilian Afghans and the international troops are pictured in an ambiance of seamless co-operation, the coalition soldiers by looking at the Flickr images seem to be brothers in arms with the local security officials.

What is interesting and remarkable in the visual language of these images is the visual arrangement and positioning of the local actors and the ISAF soldiers. In most of the images describing the joint efforts of the ISAF troops and the local military and security partners, the ISAF soldiers are presented as trainers, tutors and leaders vis-à-vis their local counterparts. The visual language of the images underlines the dominant position of ISAF/West/international coalition. Thus, the locals are usually seen in supporting roles or tasks, or as straightforward subjects of help and targets of tutoring and education. The images present the coalition soldiers teaching the local security personnel how to handle and fire weapons, while they guide and closely monitor them. This arrangement of action/statuses is rarely inverted, meaning the locals are not pictured tutoring the international troops, nor would the ISAF troops take part in Afghan-organized work in the area. The positioning seems relevant and understandable, as one of the main objectives of the ISAF troops was to train and educate the local security authorities in order to be able to handle the task of securitizing the area without the help and supervision of the coalition forces after the transition period. By such dominant visual arrangement the leadership of ISAF is being strongly manifested. But in addition, the imagery can be seen to exhibit the capabilities of the Afghan National Army and police—trained by the international troops—in maintaining security in the area.⁶⁰³

Different estimates concerning the date of the coalition departure or the transition of responsibility were in the 2011 still not concretely decided. The year 2014 (which later then actualized) was at the time frequently mentioned as the point of ISAF withdraws. In 2011 General *David Petraeus* described the transition as a process of “thinning out” Western responsibility when the situation allows it, and not “handing off” responsibility when the coalition feels like it.⁶⁰⁴ Thus, these pictures can be seen to underline the planned NATO strategies of handing over security tasks to the local authorities as soon as they are capable of handling the job. By showing the seamless

⁶⁰³ The ISAF Mission as stated on the website: *In accordance with all the relevant Security Council Resolutions, the main role of ISAF is to assist the Afghan government in the establishment of a secure and stable environment. To this end, ISAF forces conduct security and stability operations throughout the country together with the Afghan National Security Forces and are directly involved in the development of the Afghan National Security Forces through mentoring, training and equipping.* see: <http://www.isaf.nato.int/mission.html>

⁶⁰⁴ *An interview with General Petraeus*, February 9, 2011.

cooperation and trouble-free, friendly co-existence of the locals and the coalition troops, belief and trust was therefore cast on the designed finalization and success of the operation. Thus presenting such imagery underlined the capabilities needed to fulfill the objectives of the power transition according to the planned schedule. Visual representations of seamless co-operation, friendly co-habitation and happy and grateful recipients of coalition advice, help and Western tutelage can also be seen to work to build the support and trust of the operation in the eyes of the target audiences addressed. Therefore, imagery such as this is aimed at producing the motivation needed to carry on the mission by showing that progress is being made in securitizing the area and visually demonstrating that the locals are happy with the operation, co-operation and the overall process. Positive pictures of co-operation in security and reconstruction work, as well as images of friendly co-habitation and co-operation with the locals, underline that the Afghan state and the state of Afghanistan are evolving in the direction desired by the international coalition and ISAF. These pictures motivate the viewers of the pictures, and they see the operation as worth taking part in; things are evolving as planned, co-operation is trouble-free and the local populations are willing to and capable of taking responsibility for security and carrying on the work and legacy of ISAF in the area. Visually showing to the intended audience that the coalition help and presence is needed is persuading the viewer to see the war as necessary and as an efficient project.

The ISAF Flickr imagery moreover vividly demonstrates the patronizing position of the international troops over their Afghan counterparts. In the images the ISAF soldiers are in the lead: they teach, give advice, tutor and educate. Therefore, the visual language of the pictures creates positioning whereby the local actors assume a strongly subsidiary status. This juxtaposition is evident for example in the in image **11** of the illustration 5.2⁶⁰⁵, in which an ISAF soldier is physically supporting an ANA soldier during shooting practice: the former is pictured behind the practicing young ANA soldier and holding him by the shoulders in a little brother-big brother-like visual position. Similarly, in image **12** included in the illustration 5.2⁶⁰⁶ coalition soldiers are pictured overseeing an ANA shooting practice. The visual language of the image is meaningful in its symbolic positioning: the practicing apprentices—the ANA soldiers—are lying on the ground as the coalition soldiers oversee the action standing up, therefore underlying the difference in status between the experts and their pupils. Even when

⁶⁰⁵ See illustration **5.2**, Image **11**: Caption: *During the whole course ANP members learn how to take maximum benefit of their official weapon, AK 47 7.62mm rifle. At the shooting range they perform shooting tactical exercises. On the picture a member of the Spanish POMLT show how to aim their rifle.* <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5253341411/>

⁶⁰⁶ See illustration **5.2**, Image **12**. Caption: *U.S. Army military Police Soldiers from 401st Military Police Company, 720th MP Battalion based at Fort Hood, Texas serve as range safeties for Afghan National Police personnel at a weapons range during a month long train-the-trainer course on Forward Operating Base Airborne in Wardak Province, Afghanistan, Jan. 23.* Image 12: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5391048059/>

describing the close relationship between the locals and the ISAF soldiers, this juxtaposition of statuses prevails. In image 13⁶⁰⁷, a local policeman and an ISAF marine are presented in an overtly friendly and close interaction.⁶⁰⁸ The Marine hugs the local policeman while smiling and posing for the camera. The related caption describes the local police and ISAF representatives as often being close—perhaps even friends. But concurrently the language of the picture visually underlines the subordinate position of the local police in relation to the international coalition troops. The by appearance young, almost child-like local police officer smiles timidly, adopts a stiff stance and leans ahead, while the heavily armed and far sturdier, smiling Westerner holds him by the shoulder. The strong, big brother-like ISAF soldier is portrayed as protective and friendly, as well as mindful towards the local officer. Such imagery, by underlining the friendly, efficient and seamless co-operation, however, simultaneously produces a visual presentation of the locals as somewhat child-like and weak, and creates a clear leader-subordinate juxtaposition. (See illustration 5.2)

In the ISAF Flickr images the subordinate position, the status of secondary actor and the arrangement of the locals as the subsidiary objects of action are recurring, and thus noteworthy. By the representational arrangement the ISAF personnel is thus presented as the more developed, strong, adult actor—the *human figure* of the humanitarian story—whom is pictured giving advice to the adolescent Afghans. Thus, the ways in which the locals are pictured in the images, in relation to the ISAF personnel, also enclose content other than that perhaps deliberately intended by the presenter. Representations of culturally different areas and people often mirror subliminal paradigms, attitudes and impressions the presenter has on the other. In the following subchapter I shall move on to further analyze what kind of meanings and signifying ways of expression the images of the locals enclose.

⁶⁰⁷ See illustration 5.2, Image 13. Caption: *FORWARD OPERATING BASE JACKSON, Sangin, Helmand province, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan – Corporal Michael Creighton, a team leader with the Police Mentoring Team, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, smiles and hugs an Afghan Uniformed Policeman during a stop at a local AUP station, Nov. 21. Creighton, a 25-yearold native of Los Banos, Calif., and his fellow Marines teach the AUP weapons handling, discipline, and patrolling, but they also live with and are good friends with the Afghan policemen. (Official U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Ned Johnson)*

⁶⁰⁸ For similar images, see: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5197459832/in/photostream/>;
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4649278101/>



Illustration 5.2. Image 9.



Illustration 5.2. Image 11.



Illustration 5.2. Image 10.



Illustration 5.2. Image 12.



Illustration 5.2. Image 13.

The Colonialized Other

A prominent number of the ISAF pictures present the operation in Afghanistan through pictures of reconstruction and development that has been enabled by the international troops. Images describing the ISAF actions in order to securitize the area are frequent among the type of images. These pictures habitually present happy Afghans part taking in co-coordinated work, which is led by the international actors. Here again, the helpful, humane, protective and patronizing humanitarian soldier is the most prominent figure describing the ISAF, Western or international community's role in the country. But the figure of the humanitarian soldier that represents the tutoring, healing and securing hand of the international community also creates a flip side. The other side of the coin is contracted of the ways in which the local populations—the receivers of outside help, aid, as well as the objects of the teachings and cultivation—are pictured in the imagery. When reading the messages of the images, a duality of responsibility and leadership between the locals and the international troops becomes lucid.⁶⁰⁹ The helper and the helped, the tutor and the pupil, the providers of the help and the subordinate receivers of help exemplify of the two different sides of the same coin.

The visual juxtaposition of the West/international community (the humanitarian, strong and modern soldier figure) and the local Afghans is visually apparent in the majority of the ISAF images. One major visual theme that is vividly detectable and noticeable from the visual representation of locals is the representation of a different culture and of a less developed area, a foreign land and the foreign customs of Islam, Muslim people and of Islamic culture and its society through Western eyes. Afghanistan is an Islamic state, and this shows in the pictures, even if it is not always referred to or mentioned verbally. Here, also, the landscape and material culture visible in the images becomes noteworthy. When reading into pictures of other cultures, the external appearance of the persons pictured is crucial. What people look like, how they are clothed and how they appear physically is of significance when reading the messages of images. As *Franz Fanon* writes in his book, *Studies in a Dying Colonialism*: “The way people clothe themselves, together with the traditions of dress and finery that custom implies, constitutes the most distinctive form of a society's uniqueness, that is to say the one that is the most immediately perceptible.”⁶¹⁰ These differences in visible culture become even more significant and culturally noteworthy when Islamic culture and its people are visibly presented for the mostly Western viewers in the environment of military communication. And in reference to the war in Afghanistan—that was initially started as a

⁶⁰⁹ For such images for example: images **11**, **12**, **15**, **16**, **17** (Illustrations 5.2 & 5.3) and, for example: [http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4748021811/in/photostream/;](http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4748021811/in/photostream/)
[http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4668355797/;](http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4668355797/)
[http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4668978796/in/photostream/;](http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4668978796/in/photostream/)
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/3311582148/>

⁶¹⁰ **Fanon, Franz:** *Studies in a Dying Colonialism*. Earthscan Publications, London, 1989 (1959), 35.

response to “Islamic terrorism”. Ways of clothing, dressing customs and the appearance of people become more visible when locals are presented away from security tasks and other similar activities; i.e. when the locals are out of uniform. In the following pages I will mostly analyze images that depict the locals in their cultural surroundings, while taking into consideration their action, positioning, roles and status vis-à-vis the ISAF troops.

As said, many of the ISAF images provide a glance into the material culture, scenery and landscape of Afghanistan. The poverty of the area and the insuperability of Western help, modernity and development are time and again juxtaposed in the images through the physical appearance of the locals, landscape, material culture and background of the images. Images **14–19** included in the Illustration 5.3⁶¹¹ all serve as examples of this. The uniformed, modern ISAF soldiers are presented as clean, official, technical, disciplined, modern and advanced. They are portrayed as tutors, leaders, experts and enablers of development. The locals pictured beside the ISAF personnel thus seem not to be in charge but under the tutelage of Western influence, but moreover they are often traditionally dressed, and their appearance habitually also makes them seem dirty and poor vis-à-vis the Western military appearance. The Afghan landscape by Western standards, in addition to being empty and often without infrastructure, seems rural, poor and underdeveloped. The fact that the most common landscape seen in the images is rural and images of cities or towns are rare merely serves to underline the impression of rural underdevelopment and poverty. As developing the area served as one of the major objectives of the operation, the pictures surely show that there is still lot to accomplish. The poorness of Afghanistan is a fact: the country in 2011 was one of the poorest countries in

⁶¹¹ see Illustration **5.3**, Image **15**: *U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Iascc Baca, a builder and Khost Provincial Reconstruction Team engineer, teaches proper mortar mixing techniques to local engineers, construction contractors and foremen during a monthly contractor training session held at the Civil Military Operations Center, Khost, Afghanistan, Nov. 14. Engineers from the Khost PRT provided construction quality assurance training to locals in order to facilitate high quality construction practices in the region. (Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Stephen J. Otero, Khost Provincial Reconstruction Team Public Affairs)* <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4132144703/> Image **17**, Caption: *CAMP BASTION, Afghanistan – A British Royal Irish soldier gives school supplies to local children outside Camp Bastion June 6, 2008. The ISAF soldiers provide the Force Protection to Camp Bastion and will often visit local villages to give out donated supplies. (ISAF photo by Staff Sgt. Jeffrey Duran, U.S. Army)* <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/2756487952/in/photostream/> Image **19**, Caption: *Gen. David H. Petraeus, commander of NATO and International Security Assistance Force troops in Afghanistan, visits a successful road construction project in the Badakshan province, Regional Command North, Sept. 30. Petraeus also attended a shura with Afghan President Hamid Karzai and U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry. (Photo by U.S. Navy Chief Petty Officer Joshua Treadwell)* Image **19**: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5038984037/in/photostream/> Image **20**, Caption: *GURESHK, Afghanistan—Royal Army Sergeant Adam Kennedy of the Royal Engineers Explosive Ordinance Disposal (EOD) regiment conducts mine awareness training with local Afghan residents outside of the Host Nation Clinic at Forward Operating Base Price on Jan. 27, 2009. Military leaders at Task Force Helmand are beginning a rigorous mine awareness campaign with local residents, Afghan National Police and Afghan National Army to teach proper identification and marking of unexploded ordinance with the goal of reducing civilian casualties from accidental handling of explosive devices. ISAF photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Aramis X. Ramirez.* Image 20: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/3238372698/#/>

the world, with a life expectancy of 44 years; 42% of the population live under the UN poverty line.⁶¹² The landscape, infrastructure and material culture visible in the images all work to paint a picture of extreme poverty, and of a weak country that has been reduced time and again to rubble in the past 40 years of conflict.

Image 14 included in the illustration 5.3 sums up some of the common compositions used when picturing the locals vis-à-vis the way in which the coalition actors are presented. In the image, a soldier (in uniform, named) and local (unnamed, dressed in a traditional gown) “high-five” after undertaking a joint task of unclogging a canal at the construction site of a new patrol base. What jumps out of the composition and the story of the image is the visible difference in appearance. The composition presents a bigger and stronger Western soldier who is named and the smaller helped local who remains nameless—and can thus be seen to represent a part of the mass of “Afghans”. Also, the extremely Western habit of greeting (high five) imposed on the Afghan man sticks out.⁶¹³ The picture does not just talk about the soldier helping the traditional Afghan man with work-related issues, the good co-operation evident and the grateful receivers of help, it also accounts the West and the international community and its patronizing influence, imposing Western cultural practices on the locals and picturing the locals as the instructed and the cultivated crowd; and thus, from the Western point of view, as the underdeveloped, culturally different others. (See Illustration 5.3)

Similar positioning is apparent in image 16⁶¹⁴ which pictures a traditionally clothed Afghan man is sitting down at a coalition medical center as a uniformed ISAF actor apparently measures his blood pressure. Also, image 18⁶¹⁵, picturing an Afghan girl’s worn sandals on her dirty feet, accompanied with a text explaining that she is waiting for a new pair of shoes from the US soldiers, repeats the same arrangement and narrative. Development, know-how and help are pictured to emanate from the ISAF figure, which represents outside help, Western style modernization and

⁶¹² *Afghanistan. World Bank fact sheet*: <http://data.worldbank.org/country/afghanistan> (2011)

⁶¹³ Illustration, 5.3, Image 14. Caption: *Sgt. Cody T. Romriell, a combat engineer with 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines, high-fives a local after helping him unclog a backed-up canal during the construction of Typhoon 3 in Marja, Afghanistan, Sep. 9. Marine engineers with 2/9 have been constructing new patrol bases in their area of operation in order to increase force protection. Typhoon 3 is one of the many being built.*

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5043265509/in/photostream/>.

For other images whit similar arrangement, see:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/3745894616/>;

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4084691875/>;

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4084925343/>

⁶¹⁴ Illustration 5.3, Image 16: Caption: *HERAT, Afghanistan--An Afghan local receives medical treatment at the International Security Assistance Force Role 2 Medical Center on Camp Arena, Sept. 23, 2008. The center provides medical treatment to military personnel assigned to the camp and local residents. (ISAF photo by U.S. Air Force TSgt Laura K. Smith)*

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/2887435270>

⁶¹⁵ Illustration 5.3, Image 18. Caption: *091204-F-9171L-311 An Afghan girl wearing worn sandals waits for a pair of shoes being distributed by U.S. Soldiers , Boragay Village, Zabul Province, Afghanistan, Dec. 4, 2009. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Efren Lopez)*

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4165467527/>

development; while on the other hand, the local Afghan receiving the medical care and the girl in the broken sandals are representative of the local Afghans: the passive, non-Western helped. Both of the locals depicted are passively resorting to the outside help and thus, in the composition of the images, become the weaker, less developed party. Both of these images represent the way in which the Afghans and the ISAF action are depicted in the strategic communication imagery, but symbolically such images and the juxtaposition of the figures also tell another story. This division and duality in the representation offers a window into the Western ideas about the operation and the Western presence in the area. These photographs illuminate the ways in which ISAF is picturing the West, the Westerners, “our” operation action, the international community, Western values and aims, as visually presented and intended to address mainly Western audiences. On the other hand, these images represent the ways of depicting different, foreign cultures, areas and people. Thus, they open up a route to the representation of the others used in contemporary strategic military communication, designed to motivate and legitimate the war.⁶¹⁶

As cultural bias and attitudes can be relatively easily hidden and left untouched in written texts, visual material is often bound to reveal stereotypical positioning of “us” and “them”. When encounters between cultures are visualized, images are likely to be more or less stereotyped; they lack nuances and tend to place one culture (way of life, style, type, etc.) above the other.⁶¹⁷ The traditional mode of life and traditional appearance (visible in clothing, landscape, material culture and appearance) that become evident in the imagery are often, in Western perception, seen as equal to underdevelopment.⁶¹⁸ It seems that in the ISAF images, the Afghans and Afghanistan, the traditional Afghan way of living, physical appearance (the veil, the Burka, the beards, the traditional gowns of the men, the worn shoes of a child, etc.) become associated with underdevelopment, helplessness and weakness; the objects ISAF was set to remedy. And then, on the other hand, the Western style modern military appearance, behavior, features and functions become associated with power, capability and development. In the eyes of the Western viewer, the imagery thus underlines the weakness and subordination of the Afghans and emphasizes overwhelming dominance of the West. Therefore it seems that the ISAF images repeat some of the age-old Western cultural inversions of “us” and the Orientalized “them”.

This kind of dominant arrangement thus also tells a broader story of Western thinking: the story of Western insuperability, the need to cultivate and impose one’s own customs, conventions and ways of thinking upon the less developed Other. The positioning of the helped and the helpers—the composition of masters and subordinates familiar from the visual

⁶¹⁶ See also chapter 4, and the representations of “disaster humanitarianism” in the case of Haiti and Ebola epidemics.

⁶¹⁷ **Burke**, 2001, 123–126.

⁶¹⁸ **Said, Edward**: *Covering Islam. How The Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*. Vintage, London, 1997 (1981), 29–30.

representations of the colonial era discussed above—is so repetitive and strikingly visible in the ISAF pictures that it cannot escape the eye. It can even be said that the historical conventional Western way of presenting different cultures and peoples—especially the Islamic world—in *Orientalizing* and *colonializing* ways is at its most visible in the images of the ISAF. By Orientalism, *Edward Said* meant that the Western practices of circulating stereotypical representations of the *Orient* (the East, Asia, the Arabs, the “non-Western world” and “other” cultures in general) often present the cultural other as a subordinate to the Westerners. Orientalizing representations habitually presents the non-Western cultural others as barbaric and brutal, or as childlike and underdeveloped—as well as primitive and immature.⁶¹⁹

Historically familiar orientalist ways of representation are detectable in much of the ISAF imagery that pictures the locals. The local populations are generally not pictured in the ISAF images as brutal or barbaric (which has been customary for orientalist representations), but the Afghans in the ISAF images are mostly pictured as child-like, immature, in need of help and guidance, and subordinate in character and position vis-à-vis the Westerners and their practices. According to Said, the Europeans constructed their own identity by researching, observing and building representations of the “Orient”. Just as the Orient is often described as irrational, primitive and underdeveloped, Western identity is conversely built as rational, civilized and developed.⁶²⁰ A similar type of projection becomes evident when observing and reading the ISAF representations of the Afghans. The others—representatives of different cultures, mindsets, areas, etc.—are often seen as an antonym of the self. Features and attributes opposite to ours are often associated and inserted into the others. The helpless and weak Afghans become the antithesis of the strong, modern West, the international community and the ISAF. The others are seen as different from “us” and thus often “less or worse”: less developed, less advanced and weaker; lessened in their humanity—and thus the Afghans in ISAF images become presented as the *subhumans* of the humanitarian story. This juxtaposition—characteristic for the logic and the plot of the theatrical humanitarian tragedy form—is strikingly evident in visual representations of the ISAF.

Critics of topical military humanitarianism have observed a similarity of statuses and roles between colonial times and the present era. As discussed in the chapter 2., in the colonial era, Westerners used to carry the “the white man’s burden” – the obligation to spread civilization, reason, religion and law to the “barbaric” parts of the world. The main characters of this colonial story were the colonial administrator, the master, the missionary and the barbaric, uncivilized savages, that needed help, saving, tutelage and guidance. Nowadays, it may be argued, the colonial buzzword and concept of civilizing the cultural others has been replaced with humanity,

⁶¹⁹ **Said, Edward:** *Orientalism*. Penguin classics, London, (1978) 2003.

⁶²⁰ **Ibid.**

humanitarianism and development, and the topical main characters are now, in addition to the humanitarian workers, also the humanitarian soldiers, the (Western) militaries and the international community, who all act as state builders around the global crisis zones. On the other side of this picture are the weak sufferers and suppressed locals of the failed states and the helped people of the crisis areas. The humanitarian soldiers and the helped locals of failed states are the faces that have replaced the old colonial figures of the past.⁶²¹ In addition to this, the representation and juxtaposition of the ISAF actors and the locals works wonderfully in the use of military strategic communication: the images and positioning also reinforce and construct the Western identity as superior and the image of the West/coalition as strong, efficient, needed and able to win the fight in Afghanistan.

⁶²¹ See for instance: **Douzinis**, 2007, 21.; **Ignatieff, Michael**: *Empire Lite*, Vintage, London, 2003, 17. For the colonial history of humanitarianism See chapter 2.



Illustration 5.3. Image 14.



Illustration 5.3. Image 17.



Illustration 5.3. Image 18.



Illustration 5.3. Image 15.



Illustration 5.3. Image 19.



Illustration 5.3. Image 16.



Illustration 5.3. Image 20.

The Grateful Locals and the Emancipated Others

One of the major narratives constructed by the ISAF images is constituted of the following elements: crowds of Afghans enthusiastically shaking hands with General Petraeus—the commander of the ISAF operation—while smiling and welcoming the military leader⁶²²; images of happy smiling children receiving gifts from the ISAF soldiers⁶²³; orderly and friendly fellow soldiers avid to learn from their big brothers⁶²⁴; and grateful, humble and calm women and men receiving development aid, health care and advice from the ISAF officers⁶²⁵. (See Illustrations 5.1, 5.2, 5.3& 5.4) A narrative of civilizing the Afghans is very clearly visible in the images. As said, Muslims and Islamic culture have habitually been presented, in Western representations (both historically as well as in recent decades), as aggressive or even violent, barbaric—and often cut as a terrorist figure.⁶²⁶ But what is different in the ISAF images when compared to the customary old colonial prototypes and nowadays frequent media representations of aggressive Islamic terrorists, is that the locals in the ISAF images are not at all pictured as barbaric, violent or brutal, but rather as docile, happy, very friendly, although habitually child-like and weak, but nevertheless accepting of the coalition presence and action in the area. This kind of representation of local populations can be seen as effective from the viewpoint of the strategic communication endeavor backing the operation. Picturing the locals as barbarians or as violent, mistrustful and discontent would not only be detrimental to the strategic communication aim, but additionally it would not fit the current humanitarian story.

Pictures of happy, cooperative and content locals (civilians as well as the local security force personnel) market the operation in an up-to-date humanitarian style and thus aim to help to win over the hearts and minds of the coalition home fronts. These images encourage the spectators to think and feel that the operation is a just and an efficient one, also wanted and unanimously supported by the local populations. The happy and grateful receivers of aid and Western teachings are intended to motivate the audiences of the pictures to see the endeavor in a positive light. The images seek to provide proof of the operations as what the weaker Afghans unanimously want. The grateful figures of the Afghans also communicate to the (Western) viewers of the images that the locals pose no danger or threat to the soldiers or the coalition effort, as they are calm, content and tamed. All in all the images convey a message of a legitimate operation steadily progressing and worth taking part in. The same mechanism, and mode of representation has been detected and utilized in the imagery of humanitarian

⁶²² Image 19, illustration 5.3.

⁶²³ Images 17, 6, 5, 3, for example.

⁶²⁴ Images 11, 12, 13.

⁶²⁵ Images 16, 15, 14, 2, 5.

⁶²⁶ For more on the figure of the Islamist Terrorist, see, for example: **Said**, 1997. and chapter 6 of this book.

organizations and development NGO's: Pictures of happy, appreciative, orderly and accepting crowds of aid receivers more effectively encourages humanitarian action and money flows; much more so than images of suffering or angry, frustrated masses or ambivalent reactions towards outside help.⁶²⁷

Aside from the "docile locals" narrative, what can be seen in the images is what is often done by giving help, as well as civilizing and developing less fortunate people and areas: imposing what are seen as civilized or Western ways and customs on the less developed world and the culturally different others. The practices of imposing one's own culture on the other is extremely present in the ISAF images depicting the helped and "civilized" locals. This is visible, for example, in image 14 discussed above, in which an ISAF soldier is "high-fiving" the bearded, local Afghan man dressed in a traditional white costume. The cultural practice of the high five is hardly very Afghan; and neither are the figures of *Mickey Mouse*, *Donald Duck* and *Minnie Mouse*, which are all used in a ISAF mine awareness campaign.⁶²⁸ (Illustration 5.4, Image 20) Such traces of cultural predominance are occasionally made visible by the imagery. They can be seen as accidental slips, but also as indicators of indifference towards cultural differences and nuances. Also, on a much deeper level than just imposing straightforward cultural practices and markers on the other, this practice of not taking cultural differences into account or pushing one's own ideas of good, tolerable life and value systems on others is in many ways visible in the ISAF imagery. This projection becomes visible in many of the images depicting development and emancipation.

The narrative and ethos of the development furthered by ISAF troops in Afghanistan is extremely present in the ISAF images. This is understandable given the development of the area is one of the major objectives of the ISAF mission.⁶²⁹ ISAF troops building schools and infrastructure, handing out aid,

⁶²⁷ See for example chapters 2&4 and **Chouliaraki**, 2013; **Cohen** 2001.

But despite of this style of presentation, according to interviews of Afghans, the ISAF presence in the area does not seem to be so

unanimously supported, but many Afghans feel resentment and distrust towards the troops. See, for instance: **The Trust Deficit: The Impact of Local Perceptions on Policy in Afghanistan**. Erica Gaston and Jonathan Horowitz, October 2010, Open Society Foundations.

⁶²⁸ Illustration 5.4. Image 20, Caption:

GURESHK, Afghanistan--Royal Army Sergeant Adam Kennedy of the Royal Engineers Explosive Ordinance Disposal (EOD) regiment conducts mine awareness training with local Afghan residents outside of the Host Nation Clinic at Forward Operating Base Price on Jan. 27, 2009. Military leaders at Task Force Helmand are beginning a rigorous mine awareness campaign with local residents, Afghan National Police and Afghan National Army to teach proper identification and marking of exploded ordnance with the goal of reducing civilian casualties from accidental handling of explosive devices. ISAF photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Aramis X. Ramirez (RELEASED)
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/3238372698>

⁶²⁹ The ISAF mission is depicted as such: to "facilitate improvements in governance and socio-economic development in order to provide a secure environment for sustainable stability that is observable to the population."; "ISAF supports reconstruction and development (R&D) in Afghanistan, securing areas in which reconstruction work is conducted by other national and international actors. Where appropriate, and in close cooperation and coordination with GIROA and UNAMA representatives on the ground, ISAF also provides practical support for R&D efforts, as well as support

teaching government officials, educating populations, encouraging modern practices, developing healthcare etc., constitute a majority of the ISAF Flickr images. But development, just like humanitarianism, is not innocent, altruistic and simply non-political as it often is presented to be, and as it may seem at first glance. The images narrating ISAF-enabled development in the area embed themselves in many messages that only open up when scrutinized in the context of contemporary world politics, and when analyzed in more depth. Development can be seen as a political keyword, as well as a political global governance and securitization practice, that is topically widely used not only by aid agencies but utilized by states in international politics.⁶³⁰ Development or emancipation as terms can be used, for example, in counterinsurgency war rhetoric, and thus they offer powerful justification for military engagement and war. The description of ISAF's mission is to: "facilitate improvements in governance and socio-economic development in order to provide a secure environment for sustainable stability that is observable to the population". War and military acts are nowadays widely seen by the international community as preconditions of developing failed states and the underdeveloped corners of the world. As Mark Duffield states in his book *Development, Security and Unending War*, we have, in regards to recent wars been often been told—and especially in the case of the Afghan war—that more fierce and more war-like posture, even more so that was at first planned, is required to solve the conflicts of today. It is often said that war and military suppression are necessary for development to follow and take root in "failed states" and global crisis zones occupied by international troops. This has led to a situation in which development (just like humanitarianism) becomes mingled with war. In this situation, development can also be used as a tool to further political goals in so called failed states. Development carried out by military tools can be seen as a practice of governing and contain risks and threats, seen to potentially stem from these areas, such as terrorism, political extremisms, disorder and migration.⁶³¹

On the bases of human rights violations, terrorism, humanitarian emergency, epidemic sickness and developing of failed states, Western influence in global crisis areas has, in recent decades and years, increased. Usually, the relationship between the helper-developer and the helped-under-developed—the West and "the rest"—is presented as a relationship of mutual self-interest. However, both increased penetration and interventionist politics could also be seen as essential for the West's own security. Although development is often presented in the ISAF images in a way that makes it seem non-political, it can also be interpreted as a depoliticized practice, a guise and a Western interstate technology of security to

for humanitarian assistance efforts conducted by Afghan government organizations, international organizations, and NGOs." <http://www.isaf.nato.int/mission.html>

⁶³⁰ Duffield, 2007. On development as a liberal practice of governance see also chapter 4 of this work.

⁶³¹ Duffield, 2007, 215–222. See also chapter 4.3.3.

govern the worlds of people.⁶³² Political, as well as military involvement in faraway, less developed areas and in societies inhabited by culturally different others under the guise of modernization and development, is not exactly a new phenomenon.

As discussed in chapter 2., the concepts of civilizing, cultivating and helping the culturally others have also been used to govern the less developed corners of the world after the colonial era; often in the form of modernization. As *Said* states, the modernization of Muslim countries can be seen as a child of Orientalism. In the times of the Cold War, the modernization theory was often seen by the West as an ideological answer to the increase of revolutionary upheaval in Asia, Africa and the Muslim/Arab countries. Modernization was then used by the US for example, to block the spread of communism. By planting modernization, 'good leadership' and a political system resembling the Western style of governance, countries and areas seen as backward were molded in to a shape unthreatening to the West. The local Muslims were then often presented as child-like victims of their own nature and barbaric political leaders, while the West was presented as the bearer of progress, civilization and development. The discourses, practices and representations of modernization, humanitarianism, civilizing and colonializing the others constitute the figures and roles of the helped, the evil and the helpers; the weak uncivilized, the brutal; and the strong civilized.

⁶³³

When looking at the ISAF images and reading their narratives, this story and its arrangement of different characters does not seem to be far from visual representations of the Afghan operation. The official developmental ISAF objectives and the imagery of the helped weaker locals, when read in the context of the historical colonial and developmental projects and their ethos, constitutes an interesting narrative on the operation, and the contemporary Western gaze on the global world. It moreover highlights the hierarchical divisions of different levels and characters of humanity.⁶³⁴ The imagery seem to communicate an updated orientalist story of development and modernization planted by international (Western) armed troops, into a backward failed state tyrannized by its political system and underdevelopment—and populated by non-Western child-like locals.

Because of the strong political power positioning, post-development research has questioned the whole concept of development: developing the global others has been construed as Western violence and forcefully pushing Western ideas, practices and ideals towards non-Western areas and people. As such, development has been seen as a political practice parallel to colonialism and imperialism.⁶³⁵ Consequently—and in addition to justifying

⁶³² *Ibid*, 219–220.

⁶³³ *Said*, 1997, 28–31; see also *Douzinis*, 2007

⁶³⁴ *Said*, 1997, 28–31; see also *Douzinis*, 2007.

⁶³⁵ See for example: *Mattila, Päivi & Vuola, Elina: Kehitys*. In *Toinen Maailmanpolitiikka. Kymmenen käsitettä feministiseen kansainvälisten suhteiden tutkimukseen*. Eds. Kantola, Johanna & Valenius, Johanna. Vastapaino, Tampere, 2007, 216.

military interventions, securing one's own interest and containing threats—what is often achieved by helping, civilizing and developing less fortunate people and areas is the forcing “the Western ways”, customs and ideals on the less developed world—or the culturally different others. An interesting and revealing passage into the development-driven colonialist visual representations of the local Afghans, and of the external modernization and ‘Western ways’ imposed on the less developed other, are the images of Afghan women within the ISAF imagery.

One of the most important narratives legitimizing the war and intervention and the ISAF operation in Afghanistan was the development-driven idea of the betterment of the Afghan woman's position. Women's rights and liberating women from under barbaric and intolerant political regimes, unwilling to protect and respect women's rights and the ideals of gender equality, have become the moral justifications of Western war efforts in the age of “war on terror” and humanitarian war. Human rights violations in general and women's rights violations in particular have in recent years become powerful justifications for the international community to intervene and play an active (and military) role within the boundaries of another state. Feminist scholars have also acknowledged this harnessing of gender rights in to a legitimizing discourse of war, often skeptically.⁶³⁶

The schooling of girls and education of women were among the most used justifications for the Afghan operation. Freeing, emancipating and bettering the societal standing of women who had been left without social, economic and educational rights under the Islamist era has been one of the central aims proclaimed by the international coalition and the ISAF operation. Furthermore, the rights of women have been sedulously repeated in the political speech that has legitimized and backed the operation.⁶³⁷ Against this background, the vast amount of pictures of emancipated women within the ISAF imagery is not surprising. Showing images of happy, active, content, emancipated and freed women is a powerful tool in the toolbox of the current information warfare and strategic communication which backs the operation in Afghanistan. But what else do the images of emancipated women articulate to the Western viewer of the ISAF images? What kind of meanings do these pictures entail, and how do the images present the ISAF operation and the women of Afghanistan? What kind of signifying messages of the operation, as well as ISAF activity and the outside emancipation endeavor of the Afghan women, Afghanistan and Islam, do the pictures enclose?

A Woman Unveiled is a Woman Saved?

⁶³⁶ **Wylie, Gillian:** *Women's rights and righteous war.* *Feminist Theory*, 2003, 2/4, 217; **Kouvo, Sari:** *Ihmisoikeudet*, In: *Toinen Maaailmanpolitiikka. 10 käsitettä feministiseen kansainvälisten suhteiden tutkimukseen.* 2007, 266–267.

⁶³⁷ **Wylie,** 2003: *George W Bush Warns Against withdrawal from Afghanistan: 'Women would suffer'*, April 1, 2011 The Huffington Post.

Encouraging images of local women are well represented in ISAF imagery. The Western home front viewer of the ISAF images who most likely, in some extent believes in gender equality and gender rights, probably feels relief when looking at some of the imagery depicting the activities of the Afghan women, liberated from under the strict rules governing their lives and oppressing their rights under the Taliban era. Images of Afghan women/girls sitting in classrooms being educated by the coalition soldiers visually represent development and the emancipation of women. The photographs of ISAF also tell us that the women of Afghanistan are due to the multinational operation able to play soccer and compete in sports, a matter that was facilitated by the ISAF effort in order to better the status of women in the country. When compared to the treatment and juridical rights of women under the Taliban era, Afghan women proudly showing their inked fingertips as a markers of them casting their vote, as well as images of smiling little girls in a classroom while waiting the coalition soldier to better their schooling facilities, most probably satisfies the viewer bound to Western humanitarian mentality.⁶³⁸ (See images **21 -25** in illustration 5.4)

Such images depicting the emancipated women of Afghanistan habitually show the ISAF troops as enablers of development, emancipation and as facilitators of women's liberation. (See the images **23** & **23** in the illustration 5.4) An average Western liberal viewer—touched by the humanitarian ideology and believing in human and gender rights and the humane justifications of the operation—when looking at image of an unveiled woman in many cases, feels happiness, satisfaction and relief. The contextual intent and the iconological message of such visual representations for the Western spectator is that the Afghan women are emancipated and liberated, freed from the shackles of an oppressive, traditional Islamic order, by the help of

⁶³⁸ See Illustration 5.4. Image **21**, Caption: *U.S. linguist Shafiqha Ansary of Union City, Calif. (right), and U.S. Army Master Sgt. Darla Sheasley of Everly, Iowa, veterinary technician for the Iowa National Guard's 734th Agribusiness Development Team, answer questions while providing basic animal care training to 22 women from the Chowkay District Jan. 31. (U.S. Army photo/ Sgt. Tessa Poppe)* <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5426991970/>

Image **22**: Caption: *Afghan women show off her inkstained fingers in Kabul after taking part in their country's parliamentary elections Sept. 18. Photo courtesy USAID.* <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5000541503/in/photostream/>

Image **23**: *Along with heating and electricity needs, the Farah Provincial Reconstruction Team assessed that the Farah City Fourth District Girls School they visited, Dec. 9, needs more space for its over 1,700 students as evident by a first grade classroom filled to its capacity with 50 young girls, Farah, Afghanistan. (Photo by Master Sgt. Tracy DeMarco, Farah Provincial Reconstruction Team)* <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4194180173/>

Image **24**, Caption: *The Afghan Women's International Team (in red) played a friendly, yet competitive, game of soccer against a team of International Security Assistance Force women (in gold) on April 1. The game ended with neither team scoring a goal, but the real goal of the game was met. The Afghan women had an opportunity to play their sport against another women's team. The team does not get the opportunity to play against other teams in Afghanistan, so the game was chance for them to play a new opponent and build a relationship with women from several NATO countries, said Khalida, the coach, and a player of the Afghan Women's International Team.*

Image **25**, caption: *(KABUL, Afghanistan, Oct. 29, 2010) Players from Afghanistan's national women's soccer team posed for pictures after a friendly match against an international pickup team of women assigned to the International Security Assistance Force Headquarters in Kabul. The Afghan women controlled much of the game, but scored just once. That goal, which came in the first half, was enough for the win.* <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5125728807/in/photostream/>

the military operation. Thus, the images in their contextual position intend to show that the ISAF operation has made a positive difference and advanced the gender equality of the Afghan women. The visual narrative of modernization and development, as well as the imagery of the women emancipated by the help of ISAF, create a narrative that suggests that the war has been inevitable for development and emancipation; they imply that the war and coalition military presence on the ground was inevitable before the Afghan woman could be freed.

But images of Afghan women attending schools, graduating from the police academy, voting, playing soccer or undressing her veil, may give the spectator premature satisfaction. Such images may be casting false belief on the achievements of the ISAF operation and the immediate effect of the external help on the status of Afghan women. The attitudes towards women are deeply rooted in culture and society (as also in Western societies) and the oppression of women is most apparent in domestic and private, everyday lives of women, and in the attitudes and value systems of the people. Often the local communities also support these structures. There is only so much that a state-system or outside (military) influence can do to the grass root level practices which prevent women freely and plenipotentiary participating in the functions of education, society, politics and private life.⁶³⁹ These systems and attitudes do not change in an instant; they cannot be brought into a society overnight and be expected to flourish soon after seeding. It takes years to break societal gender systems; this can be vividly seen in many Western societies. Furthermore, inequality between the genders is often more easily identified and seen in other cultures—in faraway places and especially in “less-developed” areas of the world⁶⁴⁰ than in cultures closer to one’s own. It is easier to detect and try to mend the gender equality questions and shortages in the other, than to notice structures producing inequality in one’s own, familiar surroundings. That is not to say women’s rights would not be insufficient in Afghanistan or in some other parts of the Islamic world. However, what is typical of the predominant Western political discourse, as well as feminist discourse, is that Islam is often presented as a religion naturally and by definition repressive to women and disregarding of women’s rights, as opposed to other religions—namely Christianity.⁶⁴¹

In post-development and post-colonial feminist research, Western-based feminism and women’s liberation are often perceived (especially by non-Western scholars) as a part of Western cultural hegemony and colonialism. West as a norm also means the Western woman as a norm. In Western feminist discourse, “Third World women” are often seen as a homogeneous group labelled by oppression and powerlessness. *Chandra Mohanty* talks about discursive colonialization, whereby the Third World woman is often

⁶³⁹ **Kouvo, Sari:** *Ihmisoikeudet*, 266. In: *Toinen Maailmanpolitiikka*, 2007.

⁶⁴⁰ **Sontag** 2003, 85.

⁶⁴¹ **Toinen Maailmanpolitiikka. 10** käsitettä feministiseen kansainvälisten suhteiden tutkimukseen.

constructed as traditional, backward and weak vis-à-vis the Western norm of the modern, advanced and emancipated woman.⁶⁴² It seems through looking at the ISAF images that the women of Afghanistan are most often emancipated according to Western principles. It is assumed that the societal standing of women and the condition of gender rights are mended when the Afghan women are acting, in predominant Western view, in an emancipated manner—as a liberated Western-style woman.

Westerners are usually quite feeble in detecting the structures and conventions that inhibit the freedom of women (and sexual minorities), as well as norms that repress genders in their own surroundings and societies, but agile in detecting imperfections in the cultural others. This could also be said about the discussion concerning the use of the Burka in Western European countries⁶⁴³, as well as the strong condemnation of the practice of female circumcisions as opposed to Western women's appearance and beatification norms, such as plastic surgery, or the gendered violence towards women still persistent in many Western countries.⁶⁴⁴ All in all, the whole universality of the Western ideas of feminism and women's liberation has been strongly criticized by the non-Western (as well as many Western) feminists. Critics of Western-based ethnocentric feminism have also brought to the fore the idea that above "universal sisterhood", "universal feminist claims" and the oppressive patriarchal system there are a vast number of power structures that differentiate women globally, such as colonialism, racism, imperialism and globally and culturally unequally divided wealth. In post-colonial feminist studies, Western feminism is often regarded as one of the West's import products. Western feminist ideas are placed upon non-Western women, and emancipatory language is used as a means of forcefully thrusting something foreign on what is seen as underdeveloped and backward women of the orient.⁶⁴⁵

Clothing and apparel are important markers of identity and culture, which are visible and prescriptive especially in visual representations. Clothing and external appearance are even more significant in visual representations of the Muslim women. As clothing traditions reveal belonging to a certain type of society and culture, the veil (or burka)—which carries many culturally signifying implications—worn by Muslim women is often at once noticed and essentialised by spectators. The veil, so apparent in Afghan society, as Fanon describes it, presents a disturbing mystery and miscellaneous trouble for the Western viewer. The veil, a headscarf or a

⁶⁴² **Mohanty, Chandra Talpade:** *Under Western Eyes. Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse.* In: *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, ed. Mohanty, Chandra

Talpade, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres. Indiana University Press, Indianapolis 1991, 51–52;

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade: *Cartographies of Struggle: Third world women and the Politics of Feminism*, in *Third World women and the Politics of Feminism*, 1991, 51–52.

⁶⁴³ For example, the law prohibiting the public use of the burka and the nigba in France came in to effect in early April 2011, as well as the French 'Burkini-ban' that stirred vast discussion on 2016.

⁶⁴⁴ See for example: **Kennedy, Aileen:** *Mutilation and Beautification.* Australian Feminist studies, vol 24, 2009, 211–231.

⁶⁴⁵ **Mattila & Vuola**, 2007, 211; **Mohanty**, 1991 a&b.

burka, also presents a puzzle for development projects and feminist emancipation efforts.⁶⁴⁶ Just as traditional modes of life, customs, apparel and appearance often equate to underdevelopment and “uncivilized” culture, so the veil is often seen in the West to point to the oppression of women and to a disregard of woman’s rights.⁶⁴⁷ Fanon explains how the Algerian women of the colonial era were subordinate to their colonial masters: they were the subjects of seduction and were forcefully tired to made to convert to their masters’ culture and be “unveiled”, in order to better fit the Western cultural description of a modern woman.⁶⁴⁸ Emancipating women and placing them in, according to Western perception, progressive and liberating positions can also be seen as a process of unveiling the women.

Picture 26 of illustration 5.4⁶⁴⁹ in which the Afghan women are portrayed practicing shooting dressed in trousers, could be seen to portray ISAF’s visual practice of undressing or stripping the veil that belongs to Islamic culture. Thus, this image concurrently represents modernization and the emancipation of women, as it also represents the culture and modernization of the master, which are imposed upon the Afghan woman. When seeing the veil removed, many Western viewers may sigh and be relieved—another woman is liberated from Taliban terror or Islamic oppression. But as these women can be seen as liberated, they may also be seen as stripped and civilized according to the worldviews of the master and the Western perception of women’s liberation and gender equality. The practice of unveiling the Afghan women, seen in the images, and thus presenting them as saved from oppression, can also be viewed as a manifestation of the totalizing Western humanitarian ideology placed on the culturally other. Women’s rights, gender equality and the schooling of girls are such strong and powerful, naturalized subjects in many Western societies that they are often seen as indisputably noble aims; and questioning the aims and practices used to further these goals that are seen to be universal may be regarded as supporting the oppression of women. The intent of such images, within the Western military strategic communication can be seen as attempting to show how a woman unveiled by the ISAF is a woman saved.

The strategic communication imagery of ISAF paints a multilayered picture of the operation, the war and the situation in Afghanistan. The images allow us an insight to the ground level of the operation and show the operation in an appealing light in order to sustain its support. However, the ISAF imagery also communicates some of the structures of today’s world

⁶⁴⁶ Fanon, 1989 (1959), 34–35.

⁶⁴⁷ Said, 2007(1978), 27–31.

⁶⁴⁸ Fanon, 1989, 35–44.

⁶⁴⁹ Illustration 5.4, Image 26, Caption: *Kabul –Afghan National Police women qualify on the AK-47 rifle during the tactical training program portion of the police basic training course at Kabul Military Training Center, April 13, 2010. During the eight week course, trainees learn police-specifics such as penal and traffic codes, use of force and improvised explosive device detection. The course also covers the Afghan constitution, human rights and two weeks on weapons and tactical training.* (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Sarah Brown)
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4522480681/in/photostream/>

politics, as well as global power structures—and moreover essential features of the humanitarian political zeitgeist of our time. All in all, addressing of the ISAF strategic communication images—pictures of the humanitarian soldiers, trouble free co-existence of the ISAF troops and the images of the grateful locals, as well as the images of emancipated women—all suggest to the Western spectator that the humanitarian catharsis, in this act at the humanitarian theater, may be attained by supporting the ISAF operation and consenting to the continuation of it. The ISAF images aim to address the target audiences in strategic manners, and thus work to construct the conceptions concerning topical world politics, war and the surrounding world of the Western spectators. But concurrently the images also, perhaps partly unintentionally, reveal some paradigms that are left unsaid about the operation in written accounts and the spoken word, for visual representations habitually reveal stereotypical picturing formed according to cultural attitudes and political objectives. But what aspects of the operation and the coalition action in Afghanistan are not made visible, hidden or scantily addressed within the recent Western visual military strategic communication, this is what I shall look into in the following subchapter.



Illustration 5.4. Image 21.



Illustration 5.4. Image 24.



Illustration 5.4. Image 22.



Illustration 5.4. Image 25.



Illustration 5.4. Image 23.



Illustration 5.4. Image 26.

5.4 THE WAR UNSEEN

“If there is no picture, no photographic evidence of the suffering; there is no atrocity.” Susan Sontag ⁶⁵⁰

As visual images are pivotal in mediating information from global crisis zones, and utilized in multitudes of ways in visual military strategic communication, however, some things that are usually seen as belonging to military conflicts, operations and war-like situations are left out—or are indirectly addressed in such imagery. These themes, left unseen, are also relevant when reading and analyzing the strategic communication imagery and the messages they entail. The unseen war creates narratives, just as the pictured operation does. What is framed out of the images makes the viewers focus and imagine, and to ignore and confine. Thus, the unmentioned construct the frames in which the war, the situation in Afghanistan, and the ISAF operation, are understood. In this chapter I will concentrate on some of the visual “blind spots” of the ISAF imagery and address the missing aspects left out of the narrative: the features that are framed out of the narrative of the contemporary war and western lead military action.

5.4.1 THE INVISIBLE ENEMY AND THE PROTECTED COALITION SOLDIERS

What sticks clearly out in the ISAF imagery is the invisibility of the enemy figure. The Afghan operation was throughout violent; the number of casualties was on the rise at the start of the transitional phase; and the fighting and insurgent attacks were frequently reported in the media. However, the ISAF images do not visibly present the “enemy”, the figures of the “insurgents” and “terrorists”, nor do they visually show the antagonist.⁶⁵¹ Given that representations of the “Islamite terrorist” are frequent and much used in popular culture and media imagery circulating in the West, it is noteworthy that such figures are absent from the ISAF imagery.⁶⁵² Why is this, and what does this tell us in the context of strategic communication? What does this say about the war and the operation in broader terms; and what does the “invisibility of the enemy” communicate about the principles and the narrative of the contemporary war waged by the “international community”?

The invisibility of the enemy in the ISAF imagery seems to indicate that the enemy really is, in today’s counter insurgency operations, quite rarely

⁶⁵⁰ Sontag 2003, 85.

⁶⁵¹ For more regarding civilian deaths in Afghanistan at the time when the images discussed here were produced, see: *Afghanistan Annual Report 2010*: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflicts. ; On the Coalition casualties year by year see: *ICasualties. Coalition military Fatalities by Year*.

⁶⁵² For more on the figure of the Islamist terrorist, see: Said, 1997; Burke, 2001, 128. And the following chapter 6.

encountered face to face. On the other hand, the tendency to avoid showing the corporal opponent may well be because the adversary in today's war is not dressed in uniform, meaning that the enemy could be practically anyone. Not picturing the enemy in a human figure therefore descriptively illustrates the paranoid reality of the war on terror on the ground.⁶⁵³ This paranoid spirit of today's war is well visualized, for example, in the Academy Award-winning movie *The Hurt Locker* (2008, Kathryn Bigelow), which tells the story of a US army bomb squad unit working in Iraq.⁶⁵⁴ In recent wars opposition and the enemy have been very hard to visually spot, especially in warzones defined by insurgency and terrorism, such as Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria. The enemy fighters in Afghanistan were not an army in a traditional sense; the insurgents do not carry identification badges or uniforms, and thus in a visual sense they might resemble local "civilians". A "Taliban fighter" could look like an Afghan civilian, as this is the logic of an insurgency war. Visually personifying the enemy in the strategic communication images could thus lead to a mixed situation, whereby the ISAF images picturing the cooperative Afghans receiving help, protection and developmental aid from the coalition forces would be hard to visually distinguish from the figure of the enemy. This visual absence of the aggressive opponent also relates to the presentation type that we have already discussed—the figure of the tame and grateful local help receiver. Leaving the enemy visually unaddressed thus suits the strategic communication endeavor, as the tame and grateful locals are a much more desirable object of help and motivators of the operation. Two quite opposite characters illustrated in a fairly similar visual figure, could and would be perplexing, and personifying the civilian-like enemy in a visual human form could thus be seen to visually tarnish most of the local peace-loving civilians as potential terrorists.

Although the figure of the enemy, the opponent or the "terrorist" is not personified in the form of a human figure, the weapons the opposition use, as well as the mark that the insurgent attacks leave and the damage they cause, are from time to time visualized in the ISAF images. The most common way to depict the opposition of the enemy in the ISAF imagery is by picturing the weapons the coalition troops have confiscated or found on the enemy fighters.⁶⁵⁵ (See Illustration 5.5, images **27** & **28**) The confiscated arms often presented in the images as pillage. When reading the images in an iconology frame, images presenting the arms can be seen to point to the potential danger and threat that the otherwise invisible enemy poses to civilian lives,

⁶⁵³ See, for example, **Zizek**, 2002, 37.

⁶⁵⁴ See: *The Hurt Locker*, 2008, IMDb: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0887912/>

⁶⁵⁵ Illustration 5.5. Image **27**, Caption: *Afghan and coalition forces discovered home-made explosives during a search for a Taliban improvised explosive device facilitator in Zabul province, Dec. 12. Additionally, they found a weapons cache including chest racks, assault rifles, fragmentary grenades and rocket-propelled-grenade casings. The facilitator was detained along with two of his associates. (DoD photo)* <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5253831322/>

Illustration 5.5. Image **28**, Caption: *Insurgent weapons, munitions and Improvised Explosive Device components recovered during the joint Special Operations Task Group/Afghan National Security Force operation against the insurgent stronghold in southern Afghanistan. Photo courtesy Australian Government Department of defence.* <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4077005599/>

as well as the coalition soldiers. Presenting the arms as pillage taken from their users also indicates that the arms and the potential threat they pose have been neutralized, taken care of and made harmless. The images depicting the confiscated armory of the enemy often portray “improvised explosive devices”, homemade bombs and weaponry that could be described as quite weary and shabby by appearance. The appearance of the arms and the technical capacity of the insurgent weapons, when compared to coalition arms, seem outdated, obsolete and weak, yet at the same time vicious. As the coalition arms pictured in the images underline capacity, modernity, cleanliness and preciseness, the arms of the enemy, judging by their visual appearance, do quite the opposite. The outdated arms visually point to the traditional and even backward ways of the opponent: his weak economical, structural and technical condition and skills, as well as the disorder and imprecise nature of insurgent warfare. Yet, concurrently these weapons also point to the disruptive force, vicious power and violent operating method of the adversary. The dirty-looking and improvised weapons are the ones used in the persistent and relentless opposition. They also point to the challenging task of rooting out insurgent activity in the area.

Insurgents and enemy violence are sometimes, although quite rarely, also manifested in the images in bloodier, more concrete ways. Image 29⁶⁵⁶ shows a shoe in a puddle of blood after a suicide bomb attack. The caption explains that the attack claimed lives of “multinational personnel” and damaged nearby infrastructure. Occasionally, the suffering or even death of a member of the coalition personnel is also addressed in the images. However, the injured or dead bodies of coalition members/ISAF soldiers are never visible in the images. On the other hand, as discussed above, the imagery contains some graphic images that show corporal suffering in the bodies of the local people, although these too are relatively rare.

When the power and deviation of the enemy is shown through pictures of corporal suffering, it is most often presented in images of hospitalized locals and namely injured children. In many of such images, the coalition personnel is portrayed in the figure of the humanitarian soldier.⁶⁵⁷ The soldiers are pictured as attending to or enabling the medical care of the wounded. And habitually the ISAF soldiers are depicted playing with the injured children,

⁶⁵⁶ Illustration 5.5., Image 29, Caption: *KABUL, Afghanistan: A shoe stands alone in a puddle of blood after a suicide bomb attack went off on Jan 17. A vehicle born improvised explosive device (VBIED) exploded near the German Embassy and a US base. The VBIED killed and wounded multinational personnel and damaged vehicles and nearby buildings. ISAF Photo by US Air Force Tech Sergeant Brenda Nipper. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/3203442818/>*

⁶⁵⁷ Illustration 5.5., Image 31, Caption: *KAPISA PROVINCE, Afghanistan: Service members from Task Force La Fayette provide medical attention to a local Afghan who was injured during a rocket attack that killed and wounded Afghan civilians, in the Tag Ab market in Kapisa province, Afghanistan, yesterday. The victims were medically evacuated to several military hospitals. (Photo by French Army ADC Jean-Charles Thorel, Task Force La Fayette) Image 31: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4114227024/>*

cheering them up and “trying to make their pain a little more bearable”.⁶⁵⁸ (See Illustration 5.5 Image **30** & **31**) The images of wounded locals suffering from insurgent-inflicted violence show the brutality of the enemy in the most powerful way: through visual records of bloody bodily pain. An image of a local male victim lying on the ground immediately after an insurgent rocket attack (Image **31**) also names the coalition and Afghan service members as the helpers. Thus, this image also points to the help and relief offered by the coalition and its allies as a counterforce of insurgent violence. Picturing the victims of the destruction through images of bodily suffering within strategic communication effort, aim to point the severity of the situation for the spectators. But as the ISAF images only depicts the suffering the Afghan civilians, when the pain has been inflicted by the insurgents, and as the imagery concurrently presents the coalition and ally forces as the helpers, the imagery can thus be seen to address the viewers in a way that encourages continued participation in the operation.

What is remarkable in the ISAF’s visual manner of describing the enemy is that, as the opponent is presented only through arms, firepower, violent deeds and the destruction he causes, the enemy becomes de-personalized, thus almost mythical and hard to grasp; invisible. The enemy is “the Taliban” or “the insurgents”, but the corporal human behind the monolithic enemy hides from the gaze of the spectators. Thus, the enemy is not shown in the figure of human, but the ISAF soldiers are. Remembering that terrorism and the 9/11 attacks conducted by extreme Islamists were the underlying reason for the war (as well as freeing the country from under the Taliban order and scattering the international terrorist groups and terrorist safe heavens in the area) it seems strange that there are no images of the terrorists in imagery targeted to assure the spectators and motivate the war. It is hard to say whether the invisibility of the enemy can be solely explained by the fact that the enemy in Afghanistan really was so invisible. The invisibility of the enemy might also be seen to point to the fact that opposing, destroying, “neutralizing”, killing and fighting something that is not visually shown in a human figure has often been seen as easier than seeing the opponent eye to eye. But not picturing the enemy in a human form may also be seen to point to the discourse of the protected coalition/Western soldier.

⁶⁵⁸ Illustration 5.5., Image **31**, Caption: *KAPISA PROVINCE, Afghanistan: Service members from Task Force La Fayette provide medical attention to a local Afghan who was injured during a rocket attack that killed and wounded Afghan civilians, in the Tag Ab market in Kapisa province, Afghanistan, yesterday. The victims were medically evacuated to several military hospitals. (Photo by French Army ADC Jean-Charles Thorel, Task Force La Fayette)* Image 31: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4114227024/>



Illustration 5.5. Image 27.



Illustration 5.5. Image 28.



Illustration 5.5. Image 29.



Illustration 5.5. Image 30.



Illustration 5.5. Image 31.



Illustration 5.5. Image 32.

5.4.2 THE INDIVIDUALS AND THE CROWDS

The discourse of the protected coalition soldier is visually manifested in another blind spot of the imagery. Another, visually almost unaddressed topic within the ISAF images are the wounded or fallen coalition soldiers. Clear, visual corporal suffering of coalition personnel is totally absent from the images. There are, however, a few images in the material that picture the coffins of fallen coalition soldiers.⁶⁵⁹ (See Illustration 5.5, image 32) The ban of publishing images of US soldiers coffins (which was lifted in 2009) was discussed in the former chapter 4. Images picturing war casualties and returning caskets containing the dead bodies of fallen soldiers have been known to damage the war efforts and diminish public support for recent wars. Therefore, showing the coffins of fallen soldiers in the ISAF strategic communication images is certainly quite daring. Visually encountering the coffin, known to contain bodies of those who deceased in the war, points towards war inflicted pain and loss. Nonetheless, the casket is as close as the ISAF images get to addressing physical vulnerability and suffering on the part of coalition personnel. There are no images showing the bodies of wounded or deceased coalition soldiers in the imagery. This is not surprising since, as was also discussed in the chapter 4., presenting and publishing photographs of the wounded bodies of Western soldiers is widely seen in the West as banal, tasteless and brutal, as well as offensive to the rights and honor of the victims and as a violation of the personal integrity of the person in question.⁶⁶⁰

This phenomenon is distinct in the ISAF strategic communication images. It is expectable, that audience does not want to see harsh images of Western bodily suffering; and for military strategic communication, surely dead bodies of their own boys/girls do not encourage support for the war. It is evident that death and the human cost of war seen in bloody images would reduce support for the operation. In addition to this, the bodies of dead soldiers do not fit the justification given to the Afghan operation, nor the rhetoric of the war, and its public image.⁶⁶¹ The suffering and potential death of coalition soldiers is clearly a troublesome issue, which the coalition does not want to address in the images. But by not showing pain (or showing it very rarely and indirectly), danger and the potential for death, the images also come to imply, or perhaps even aim to indicate that the coalition soldiers are protected, safe from harm, inviolable and strong. However, what is

⁶⁵⁹ Illustration 5.5 Image 32, Caption: *HERAT, Afghanistan—Spanish Army soldiers load the remains of a soldier killed onto an aircraft headed for Spain, Nov. 10, 2008. The soldier died during a vehicle borne improvised explosive device attack near Shindand in western Afghanistan. The soldiers were performing an International Security Assistance Force mission at the time of their death. (ISAF Photo by U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Laura K. Smith)*

Image 32: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/3026818205/>

Other images of the coalition coffins: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/3181644214/>;

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/3180806353/in/photostream/>

⁶⁶⁰ See Chapter 4.3.2.

⁶⁶¹ See for example: **Petley**, 2003, 72; **Zizek**, 2003, 38–39.

interesting—as was also discussed in the chapter 4—is that the rule of non visualized pain does not seem to apply to the bodies of the locals. Although the picturing of wounded locals is quite rare in the imagery, Afghans are occasionally presented in imagery of suffering and corporal pain. As ISAF images show local Afghans in the midst of the war and crisis and in corporal pain, the images can be seen to point to the potential threat and danger in the area. Thus, they offer justification for the operation. But on the contrary, showing coalition damage would point to the weakness and violability of the operation. This feature can be seen to point to the phenomena more broadly discussed in the former chapter 4: The implications of distance on our sense of solidarity and empathy, as well as the global, cultural and political differentiations of the honor and dignity of humans, and eventually the Western conditional stance on the universal human value, unveiled by representational practices of images of suffering.⁶⁶² The fact that this very same visual positioning, which tends to hide the suffering of westerners and quite freely exhibit the suffering of the “global others” that was detected in the former chapter, can also be found in these military strategic communication images, further proves the significance of the phenomena and visualizes and reveals the Western stance and attitude towards globally and culturally divided humanity, human worth and the integrity of the human body.

5.4.3 THE NARRATIVES OF UNSEEN AGGRESSION AND THE IDENTITY CRISIS OF TODAY’S SOLDIER

As discussed, another blind spot in the images is the absence of coalition soldiers in combat situations. As described above, the ISAF soldiers are habitually pictured as carrying heavy weapons and they practice and handle arms. But what is remarkable is that the ISAF images never picture soldiers in “real combat” or in other potentially violent action. And there is no single image within the ISAF Flickr material analyzed in this study, that would point to a situation in which an ISAF soldier has caused human suffering. Violence and suffering caused by the coalition and its allies is painted by the pictures as non-existent, and the violence is solely devoted to the enemy forces. Thus the imagery gives a nonviolent, peaceful and humanitarian, yet strong (bodily inviolable), image of coalition action and presence, and locates violence solely into the enemy. This is, of course, understandable from the point of view of the strategic communication effort: there is no point in showing the brutality of war while simultaneously building support for the operation by promoting its humane spirit and noble aims. Showing aggression and violence among the images would be conflicting, contradictory and even damaging to the humane grand narrative created for the operation.

⁶⁶² See chapter 4.

It is easy to understand while looking at the ISAF imagery—the messages it contains and the narratives it creates—that aggression or violence of coalition soldiers does not fit into the strategic communication narrative of ISAF. Nevertheless, Western audiences surely did hear and see the news in which the situation in Afghanistan was portrayed as relatively violent: people were killed, people got killed and firefights and insurgent attacks were a reality there for all the duration of the operation. Everybody surely also knew that in reality the ISAF troops were armed with real bullets, they took part in military missions, used fire power, and the operation caused human suffering and also civilian deaths.⁶⁶³ Absence of such imagery can be seen to hide a very evident side of the military operation, and thus to create a narrative gap between what is commonly know by the public and what is shown by the ISAF. In addition to this, the absence of such images also creates interesting arrangements, and reveals notable aspects of today’s war waged by the West and the international community. What kind of narratives does this visual denial of violence and aggression create? And where does the non-violent presentation of the Western war effort and action stem from, and what does it tell us?

The unseen violence of the ISAF imagery can be seen to stem from larger discourses, political change and the cultural currents of recent years. Despite the overall media surroundings (fiction, movies, videogames, news, documentaries, etc.) being flooded with atrocious images, media images of wounded or dead Western soldiers and Western-afflicted pain in political conflict have become few in recent decades. The disappearance (or thinning out) of the suffering of Westerners and Western-afflicted violence in wars and conflicts is an evolution that has to do with the new type of warfare.⁶⁶⁴ It can also be attributed to the tightening of media control by the Western militaries and the Western media inlet’s invocation of the criteria of “taste and decency”. There has also been talk of embellishing the images of war in recent times due to Western military restrictions on war photography—for example regarding the policy of embedding war journalists. This development was more broadly discussed in the chapters 2 and 4. The relative absence of such imagery, added with the amplified visual military strategic communication, has arguably lead many Western spectators to feel, think or at least hope that the Western military presence, soldiers, war efforts and practices do not cause suffering or are in essence non-violent. When the brutality and violence of the coalition soldiers are very seldom seen, and as the political speech and justifications of war are humane and highlight the

⁶⁶³ According to the UNAMA Afghanistan Annual Report on Protection of the Civilians in Armed Conflict (2010), the coalition and pro-government forces were responsible for 440 of the civilian deaths (16% of the total) recorded in Afghanistan in 2010. Anti-Government elements were responsible for 75% of civilian deaths, and 9% were unaccounted for. See UNAMA: Afghanistan. Annual Report on Protection of the Civilians in Armed Conflict (2010).

⁶⁶⁴ By this I mean the humanitarianization of war, the concepts such as the “war on terror”, war fought by the international community and in the name of human rights, the intermingling of humanitarian aid and war, the concepts of precise, “surgical war” and “war without casualties”.

protection of civilians and human rights, thus it has been tempting and easy to think and hope that Western violence does not exist.

Paradoxically, this phenomenon can be perceived through recent sightings of atrocious war images: “escaped” pictures of extreme violence revealing the brutality of Western/international coalition military personnel. Although the military governance over images of war and imago/image control is tight and the cultural conventions and media practices shun violent images, images revealing and exposing brutality, inhumane practices and human suffering inflicted by the coalition soldiers have from time to time surfaced in the media and gathered significant notice in the West. Such examples from recent wars include the Abu Ghraib torture pictures (2003), the documentary *Armadillo* showing Danish soldiers killing unarmed men (2010), the “Kill Team” images published by *Der Spiegel* (2011), and the instance of American Marines urinating on the dead Taliban fighters (2011) mentioned above.⁶⁶⁵ These instances are examples of “escaped” visual information conflicting with the official story of today’s war waged by the West and the international coalition. These kinds of sightings of images have, in the age of “war on terror”, caused several media spectacles, vivid societal discussion—and a lot of anger and disillusionment. The revelatory sensations of atrocious images that have leaked from the theaters of recent wars have all caused the Western world to ask “is this really what we are doing”, “how can this still happen” and “are we involved in something like this”? These sensations tell of the politically constructed ideas and beliefs of the Western spectators, as they enlighten what Western spectators have been told about the wars, by the politicians and the military. The sensations caused by revelatory violent imagery reveal what the public is made to believe by contemporary war rhetoric. But the sensations also enlighten how the Western spectators want to believe that the contemporary wars waged by the West do not cause suffering and their practices do not include cruelty, killing, torture or pain.⁶⁶⁶ Even when we constantly hear in the news that people (civilians, soldiers and insurgents) are been killed and wounded in the course of war, the dominant discourse of the Western war on terror and the war fought by the international community is painted to be painless, somewhat humane, precise and clean. This makes the spectatorship of war easier to bare for the Western spectator.

This is precisely what the strategic communication imagery of the coalition war effort— and the ISAF Flickr images—are built to do. The images are meant to give—from the military operation’s point of view—a desirable image of the operation. They are designed to influence the audiences of the coalition countries, so that they see the operation in a desirable light. The spectators are reassured that pain and brutality are not a part of the topical war. In addition, the official imagery is designed to fight the conflicting revelatory visual information and to make it look exceptional. Thus, it seems

⁶⁶⁵ Mentioned earlier in this chapter.

⁶⁶⁶ **Sontag**, 2004; **Butler** 2009, 62–100. see also **Dauphinee**, 2007, 139–155.

that often the exposures of brutal images of war, with regards to Western military conduct, are thought and framed as abnormalities and as exceptions from the norm of humane war. The brutality of war expressed by these revelatory images is thought of as deviations from the normal humane conduct and guidelines of war waged in the name of humanity. Thus, the atrocities are blamed on the brutal individuals and are regarded as acts of disturbed persons, as acts not belonging to the logic and nature of the topical Western wars.⁶⁶⁷ Killing, brutality and the violent madness of war have become something that does not fit in to the frames of today's war fought by the international community.

When decoding the non-violent nature of the ISAF operation painted by the visual representations, we have to go back to the figure of the humanitarian soldier. When compared with historical photographs that have been used to visualize and report war⁶⁶⁸, the humanitarian soldier-figure circulating in ISAF pictures clearly breaks the accustomed visual norm of a traditional soldier. Unlike the ISAF soldier, traditionally soldiers pictured in war imagery have habitually been pictured not only wounded, shocked, devastated, disfigured but also as fighting. Traditionally soldiers have been expected to fight, to participate in downright military action, and use the weapons they carry. Furthermore, soldiers have been commonly expected to encounter opposition and, to put it bluntly, act like warriors.⁶⁶⁹ But as we have seen looking at the ISAF Flickr imagery, ISAF soldiers are not foremost presented as fighters; although they have the firepower, they do not exercise or release their capacity. The role of the humanitarian soldier seems to be preventing the soldier figures of the ISAF strategic communication images from acting like traditional warriors. Thus ISAF soldiers are muscular and armed figures that look like soldiers but unlike their historical counterparts they are expected to patch things up, be nurturing and humane, rather than to fight, destroy or kill.

When the traditional role of soldiers as active and often violent fighters are compared to the humane depiction of the ISAF operation and the violence painted invisible by the ISAF images, highly contradictory roles for the soldier of today are constructed. *Cynthia Weber* writes about this “identity crisis of the soldier” in her book *Imagining America at war*. She describes how American soldiers, taking part in the Bosnia operation (in the early stage of the humanitarian war) in the 1990s, felt frustrated and even ashamed due to their new role. The soldiers felt that the mission in Bosnia was not a “real mission” and the war was not a “real war”. There was not enough action, too much waiting around and, furthermore, the enemy was not usually visible or even precisely defined.⁶⁷⁰

⁶⁶⁷ See, **Sontag**, 2004.

⁶⁶⁸ See for instance chapter 2.

⁶⁶⁹ **Weber**, 2006, 57–61; See also **Jantunen & Kotilainen**, 2014.

⁶⁷⁰ **Weber**, 2006, 57–61.

This crisis of the contemporary soldiership is likewise visible in the ISAF imagery. The same phenomena is also articulated, for example, in the 2010 Danish documentary *Armadillo*, which illuminates the Afghan war from the point of view of western ISAF soldiers. This documentary follows the life of Danish ISAF soldiers serving in Afghanistan. The soldiers serving in Helmand province are craving participation in the “real action”, instead of just patrolling, talking to the locals and waiting around at the base camp. The soldiers clearly state that they want action – firefights and *real war*, as well as extreme experiences that one cannot have in a normal life living in a secure Nordic state.⁶⁷¹ Handing out stuffed animals or sweets to children, chatting with the locals, drinking tea, securing, patrolling and acting as armed humanitarians does not seem to be what Western soldiers expect from their war experience. Warfare has changed, and the everyday tasks and status of the soldier has altered. Along with this transformation, the identity of the soldier seems to have been somewhat lost. The humanitarian soldier figure seems to point to the identity crisis being endured by Western soldiers. This crisis has originated due to the topical frames and justifications of war, as well as the changed spirit and new conduct of today’s warfare. On one hand, soldiers are expected to be strong and tough, do their job and overcome their enemy, but on the other, they have to be presented (from the point of view of military strategic communication and the justifications of the operation) as humane and in a strictly non-violent visual form.⁶⁷²

In addition, the transformation of the soldier figure also tells a powerful story to the audiences of the pictures and domestic followers of the war effort. The portrayal of the soldiers as humanitarian helpers, as friendly, unthreatening and non-violent figures, leads the audience to think and feel that the reality of the war is non-violent, and thus palatable, and morally unquestionable. Therefore, the reception of the *Armadillo* documentary in Denmark—as well as in Finland⁶⁷³—tells a revealing story of the clash of the traditional soldier and the (at least to some extent strategic communication-built) new expectations that the larger populations have, especially in European countries, about humane spirit and the conduct of war. The North European audiences of *Armadillo* were shocked, disturbed and surprised about the violent nature and rough operational mode of the Danish soldiers revealed by the film. Pictures of Danes shooting people to death (and laughing while doing it), participating in firefights and getting hit by real bullets firmly opened the eyes of the audience in the Nordic countries. The European audience had not, it seems, pictured the Afghan war looking like this. Lively discussions on the desirability of participation in such an

⁶⁷¹ *Armadillo*, 2010: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1640680/> ;

⁶⁷² For more on the crisis of the 21st century soldiership, see: **Jantunen&Kotilainen**, 2014.

⁶⁷³ For more on the Finnish reception of the film *Armadillo*, see: **Kotilainen, Noora**: *Tyttökoulumiina, erillissotateesi ja vientidemokratian rajat*. The blog of The Finnish Institute of International Affairs.; **Kotilainen, Noora**: *Afganistanin sodan Pojan kasvot*, Ulkopoliitiikka, 4/2010.

operation surged in Denmark after the launch of the film.⁶⁷⁴ As soldiers are trained to fight, use their arms and take part in military action; however it seems that the frames of justifications and the presentation of today's war have created a situation in which the ISAF soldiers were not expected—namely by the domestic audiences—to release their violent potential.

The invisibility of battle and aggression, and the tendency of leaving physical military activity, violence and fighting visually unaddressed throughout the ISAF imagery, seems to point to the coalition 'brute force impotence'. The inhibition of releasing the ultimate physical military power, visualized by the unseen aspects war of the ISAF imagery, can be seen as troublesome also for the carrying out of the ISAF operation itself. The ability and power to use force is there but the humane spirit, the justifications of the operation and expectations bestowed on the ISAF operation prevent and inhibit the use of power. By not showing the ISAF personnel fighting or actively 'releasing his/her fire power', and thanks to the vast number of images picturing the soldiers in humanitarian action and spirit, the ISAF images create a narrative whereby the coalition soldier is not first and foremost seen as a fighter, and the operation not as a violent war. But as the imagery concurrently associates violence and pain solely with the enemy, the imagery of the ISAF revealingly visualizes the Western frames of representing and apprehending contemporary wars and military engagements.

5.5 CONCLUSIONS: THE MILITARY FRAMES OF REPRESENTING CONTEMPORARY WESTERN WAR

The ISAF strategic communication imagery on Flickr, addressed in this chapter visually sketches a manifold depiction of the operation in Afghanistan at a critical time (namely during 2008-2011) of the operation. The images produced and presented by the ISAF describe the operation according to its official objectives and present the coalition presence and work in the area in a positive, humane light. Thus, the ISAF Flickr images can be viewed as the official imagery of the operation and the Western/international coalition waged war. The images work in order to win over the hearts and minds of the intended audiences according to the paradigms and spirit of the time. War is a serious business: it takes lives and it takes morals, will and money. In order to persuade the then-contemporary Western publics to see the operation as meaningful and to persuade the audience to be willing to take part in the long-dragged out, costly and morally heavy military operation, serious justifications were needed. To address the audience in adequate ways, the strategic stories needed to be drawn

⁶⁷⁴ On the societal discussion the documentary aroused in Denmark; see: *Armaddillo: The Afghanistan war documentary that shocked Denmark*, The Guardian, June 3, 2010; *Tappakaa ne kaikki*, Voima, 8/2010.

according to the predominant acceptable frames, mindsets, values predominant in Western international politics, as well as the aspirations of the perceivers—and therefore they tell about the audience—and moreover they unveil how the audience wants to perceive itself. The visual stories and narratives of the strategic communication had to be drawn according to the to the essence, roles, features and character in which the intended audiences want to see and perceive themselves as participants in a war, as members of the international community and as inhabitants of this global world. And, on the other hand, by not addressing some things, the imagery also tell a story of what the target audience does not want to identify itself with.

Narratives of the justifications and objectives of the war, designed to influence public opinion are not constructed out of thin air. They are expressions of widely shared thinking which is constructed and molded by the predominant world order, global power politics and the dominant military machine. Thus, the images reveal the aspirations, worldviews, values and identity of the audience, but moreover unveil aspects of the humanitarian political identity of the West. Thus the imagery of ISAF reveals and visualizes some of the central paradigms of the world politics of recent years; they tell about the structures, trends and currents of topical global politics, international relations paradigms and the evolution of war and military concepts. Novelties such as “War on Terror”, “Pre-emptive warfare” and “Humanitarian war”, as well as concepts prominent in today’s world politics such as military-humanitarian interventions, have also left their mark on these visual representations of war of the 2010s. Concurrently the addressing of the images also reveals the topical route to catharsis offered by the images. At this staging at the humanitarian tragedy theater the suffering and distress of the Afghan people is suggested to be relived, the security of the surrounding world ensured and the humane order to be maintained by the multinational military operation; thus the route to catharsis offered to the (Western) spectator is supporting the operation, and (democratic) consenting to the continuation of it.

The figure of the humanitarian ISAF soldier most prominent and apparent in the imagery illustrates the current warfare, its justifications, the topical world order and the humanitarian paradigm widely used in the recent global governance efforts of the Western powers and the international coalition. The gentle figure of the humanitarian soldier can be seen as a corporal manifestation and a symbol of the healing hand of the international community at work on a practical level in today’s global crisis zones, failed states and the developing world. The figure describes and makes visible the international humanitarian order prominent in the contemporary (Western lead) world politics and global order. The humane and helpful, non-violent humanitarian soldier figures seem a-political and veils the operation in an altruistic and non-violent guise. With the help of the visual humanitarian soldier figure, the operation appears to be a humanitarian aid, development and reconstruction project conducted by the strong and responsible

international community, in order to benefit the local people of the war-stricken area. The narrative of the strong but humanitarian and helpful, a-political international community helping the weak Afghans is aimed at addressing the intended audiences to see the operation in a positive light. The figure helps to present the international coalitions attendance in the area, drawn according to the contemporary humane and human rights-driven zeitgeist pivotal in Western international politics and the public life of the Western sphere.

However, the images also bring into sight narratives beyond the official justifications and intended strategic narratives. When looked at more closely, the imagery also contains unintended content that gives away subliminal ways of apprehending and perceiving the world, and therefore sheds light on the Western ways of seeing ourselves and the Others of this global world. Thus, the ISAF imagery also produces a flip side to the image of the strong, humanitarian and civilized ISAF soldier figure. The visual presentation of the operation—handled by the strong, modern, humane and mostly Western coalition troops juxtaposed with picturing the local actors and populations—illustrates many meaningful narratives. The visual disposition and the messages embedded in the images present the ISAF troops, almost without exception, in a dominating and stronger status compared with the local actors. Showing the locals as weaker and less developed, and in a subordinate position, but as the happy, cooperating and content subjects of the international coalition's help, coerces the audience into supporting what seems to be an eminently needed mission. This works to justify the ISAF operation as a development and modernization project aimed at helping the unanimously willing, welcoming and grateful Afghan people. The representational mode of the ISAF Flickr images also present the operation as a precondition to development, and thus presents the war as a necessary requirement for bettering the lives of the local people in distress. Picturing the operation as a development and modernization project can also be seen to de-politicize the military operation, and to guise the power political aims of the operation in an easily supportable and humane costume.

Such picturing also creates other meaningful juxtapositions between the coalition actors, representing the international coalition, and the local Afghans in the images. The Afghans represent the populations of the developing world, the failed states, Islamic societies and the weakened others of the global world governed by the West and the international community. When picturing the Western actors as the strong, civilizing, dominating and humane builders of Afghan society, the images place the local Afghans as the "others"—the weak, underdeveloped and child-like. Thus the images create the two main characters of the humanitarian story: the humanitarian helper and the weak helped, the full-fledged humans and the weakened subhumans reduced in their humanity. Recurrently placing the coalition troops and the Western way of life above the locals creates a strong position of Western coalition predominance over the traditional way of life, and constitutes

narratives of the underdeveloped and weak others. In these narratives, constructed by the images, the differences in visual appearance, clothing and material culture are noteworthy.

What comes out of this arrangement of visual representation is a strong tendency of imposing Western or modern ideals, value systems and cultural practices on the Afghans as the others. This kind of visual picturing resembles the age-old Orientalizing and colonial picturing of the culturally different other; and thus modernization, development and civilizing the others reflected in the images can be seen to be violent, compelling and colonializing practices. This is very visible, for instance, in the visual descriptions of emancipated Afghan women. The images of emancipated Afghan women place the modern, Western-style freed woman as the norm of gender equality and shows Afghan women, unveiled by the coalition modernization effort, as a justifying and legitimizing instrument for the military operation.

Moreover, as some topics and matters are extensively and in signifying ways addressed in the imagery, concurrently other issues are left unaddressed, covered indirectly or not noted/visualized at all. The topics and sides of the operation left unaddressed also constitute signifying narratives, as they communicate and draw visible the representational frames of today's war being waged by the international community. Matters framed out of the imagery guide the viewers to focus, imagine and to ignore, and thus they construct the frames of representability through which the war and the ISAF operation is understood. The figure of the enemy explicitly pictured is non-existent in the imagery. But the depersonalized opponent and the viciousness of the enemy are presented through images of his brutal arms, violated local bodies and the destroyed material culture left in his wake. At the same time, the conduct and actions of the ISAF soldiers are pictured in a completely nonviolent way; and ISAF soldiers are never seen participating in combat, causing destruction or suffering, nor are the soldiers themselves ever pictured in pain. The division of picturing pain and vulnerability in images of corporal pain also separates the Western individuals and the bodies of the locals into differing stratum of humanity: as the suffering of ISAF bodies is non-representable due to the honor of the full-pledged individual, as on the other hand the suffering body of an Afghan can be visually shown in order to illustrate the war and the violence of the insurgent adversary.

As coalition aggression is never visually shown, the spirit, identity and status of the soldiers also begin to resemble that of the non-violent humanitarian. When juxtaposed with the images of the destruction and the pain that the enemy causes, the whole ISAF operation is subsequently painted as a non-violent and humane action. The physical pain, customary violent conduct war and aggression are removed from ISAF's conduct, and placed solely on the enemy other. The ISAF images also illustrate how the wars waged by the West and the international community can be shown, articulated and justified in today's political surroundings. The images quite

firmly reflect the official justifications and the political marketing speech of the operation, and are very much drawn according to the lines of the prevailing Western common sense of good and bad, decent and indecent, honorable and dishonorable within the Western international politics. By not addressing some points of war, the images also paint a picture of what the brave new war does not include; just as the images are used to humanitize war, they are also used to demonize it. Thus, the images also produce two conflicting sides: the civilized non-violent international community and the brutal and violent, local insurgent, which approaches the figure of the evil, inhuman. As the inhuman is taken out of the self by not addressing some themes, it is subsumed into the other—the insurgent.

When looking at the extensive ISAF imagery and the narratives it produces, one cannot help but wonder if the eventually quite black and white, emotionally, culturally and politically- driven juxtaposition of good and evil suffices to convince the intended audiences of the humanitarian, non-violent, kind and clean coalition war? Does the humanitarization narrative of contemporary war have the power to persuade the audience? Is it believable enough? Does the absolute invisibility of coalition-caused pain and aggression, and the presentation of the coalition soldiers as next to inviolable, cause a narrative gap when compared with the concurrent everyday news of fallen ISAF soldiers and civilian casualties? Can the ISAF visual narrative of humane, clean, hi-tech war without mistakes, pain and suffering, be producing disillusionment when reflected against the reality on the ground and the news mediated from the war theater?

Undeniably, war has always been—and is still today—a grievous business that takes lives, destroys, and causes pain and terror. Softening it up with up-to-date explanations and humane images does not abolish the deviance embedded in the phenomena. Thus, what is to be borne in mind when looking at the images of today's war is that there has never been a war that was not reasoned as a just and a necessary war; it is only the justifying narratives and the legitimizing components that vary according to time. What is remarkable in these images that tell the story of the Western waged war of the recent years is that they draw the topical narratives used in current military strategic communication out into open, and visibly shed light on the frames of seeing and presenting war in today's public eye. By looking at and analyzing the images, it is possible to learn what kind of authorization and legitimization has been recently needed and used for war in order to win over the hearts and minds of mostly Western audiences. By iconologically and contextually reading the images—their addressing, framings, themes, stories—the narratives recently used to politically mobilize, calm down and convince the Western spectators can be detected and learned about.

The images also communicate some of the common Western ways of perceiving ourselves and the others of this global world. In other words, the images of war that are designed to address the Western spectators, speak more about the evolution of Western values, mindsets and the current

political paradigms essential within the topical world order, than they talk about the situation in Afghanistan or the changes in wars waged by the West. By looking at the images depicting the Afghan operation mandated by the UN—and fought by the international coalition and led by NATO—we can potentially learn about the predominant Western ways of perceiving the world, we might learn about the ideologies and political constructions that shape Western views and influence thinking on deep and sometimes unconscious levels. However, I am afraid that we do not learn much about the reality of the operation, the situation on the ground at the time, the war experiences of the local people, or the still ongoing humanitarian distress in Afghanistan.

The ISAF operation was completed in the end of 2014, and the responsibility of the security of the area was handed out to the local forces. A new NATO-led mission *Resolute Support mission* (RSM) was launched from the start of the 2015. In 2015 still some 12 000 personnel members of the NATO and partnering nations remain in the area. Their tasks are to provide further training, advice and assistance to the local Afghan security institutions. Despite of 13 years of Western led war on terror in Afghanistan, the Taliban still rules some areas, and the situation remains highly contested after nearly 40 years of conflict in the country. After the thinning out and especially after the end of the ISAF mission, the eyes of the surrounding world have turned away from Afghanistan, and concentrated into hotter topical war zones and crisis areas of Ukraine and namely Syria, and the cruel terror of ISIS. The question what will happen in Afghanistan when the remaining troops are withdrawn and the attention of the world is concentrated on more topical (and for the West strategically at the time more important) crisis, remains unanswered.

The ISAF strategic communication imagery forms a distinctive act at the visual theater of humanity. ISAF images contain visual themes that perhaps are quite uncustomary for war imageries, especially when reflected against historically prevalent modes of representing war. Nevertheless, the ISAF imagery illustrates how contemporary war is topically presented in humanitarian light in order to effect the public perceptions of war, and by doing so these images illustratively point out the narrative frames and visual arrangements seen appropriate by authorities to describe contemporary Western war. They show what is framed in, as well as out of the humanitarian war practices and the concept of the Western waged war, when presented for Western spectators. The ISAF images mostly concentrate on depicting the human and the subhuman figures of the humanitarian story on many levels and contexts. But leaves the *evil* others visually undetermined, not pictured and unseen. In turn, in the following chapter 6 *Picturing the inhuman evil enemies—the dark side of the humanitarian narrative*, this

third antagonist figure elemental for the humanitarian (visual) story then becomes to play the lead role at the stage of the visual humanitarian theater.

6 PICTURING THE INHUMAN EVIL ENEMIES – THE DARK SIDE OF THE WESTERN HUMANITARIAN NARRATIVE

6.1 INTRODUCTION: PICTURING THE EVIL— PICTURING THE VIRTUOUS

Humanitarian imagery—also in the context of the contemporary humanitarian world politics—typically portrays helpless, innocent and feeble victims of atrocity, war and catastrophe. And, on the other hand, the brave, powerful and humane (usually Western) characters set to protect and save the sufferers. These two central characters of *the humanitarian story*—the weak and infant like *subhumans*, objects of humanitarian help and interventions, and the most often Western, full fledged heroic *humans*—are familiar from the visual representations of humanitarian organizations, the (news)media, as well as more directly political representations depicting wars and upheavals. These figures have also been essentially in view in the previous chapters of this work.

But, in addition to these two main characters, also a third figure is essential for the humanitarian story: the evil *inhuman*, afflicting suffering and causing chaos.⁶⁷⁵ The evil has been implicitly present in humanitarian visual representations throughout history, but as we have seen in the previous chapters of this work, the third evil character in humanitarian contexts is typically portrayed through distress and bodily suffering of its victims. Yet sometimes also the evil takes a corporal human form. Visual representations of the antagonist other have been central in political contexts, especially in times of conflict, throughout history. In modern Western history (visual) orientalist representations of foreign Eastern barbarians, propagandist representations of immoral and racially inferior Jews, as well as greedy and bloodthirsty capitalists, and on the other hand ungodly and violent Bolsheviks, not to mention iconized demonic leader figures such as Hitler or Stalin, serve as examples of enemy images known by all in the Western sphere. Distinctive visual features, underlining the difference between us (the good) and the evil others are salient in building up of the enemy figures. The enemy other—essentially different from us—is constituent for identity formation, a sense of cohesion of the self. In extreme situations the enemy takes a form of the *evil enemy*, whom is ultimately different from us. The binary division of the enemy other and the in-group us, divides the world into starkly contradictory poles, and forms politics into a morality play of the virtuous good forces against the ultimate evil. In the

⁶⁷⁵ As was discussed in chapters 2 and 3. Douzinas, 2007, 66-78; see also Malkki, 1996 ; Butler, 2009, 63-100.

extreme case the evil represents everything we are not—something we must fight and destroy for the good to prevail. Thus, in times of conflict the figure of the enemy is substantial in rationalizing and legitimating confrontations, violent politics and wars.⁶⁷⁶

The third evil character is also essential for the functionality of the humanitarian narrative: in order there to be (political) humanitarianism, there must also be crisis, suffering—and the guilty inhuman party inflicting the calamities. Opposing the evil is a central rationalization of humanitarily rationalized (military) operations and interventions. As representations of the enemy are essential for humanitarian visual communication—yet rarely addressed in the context of humanitarian imagery—I shall in this chapter analyze how have the recent *evil others* opposed to *our good* have been presented, pictured, described and manifested within contemporary Western politics/political speech and media publicity. And, thus I shall also furthermore open up how the evil has been dealt with within the Western international politics during the recent years.

Within the recent Western international politics the role of the enemy has been typically granted to non-Western authoritarian leaders of foreign, conflict prone and chaotic crisis areas, as well as to modern global terrorist figures. The topical Western enemy has most commonly been presented in the figure of a corrupt foreign leader unbinding to the international (human rights) norms, causing human suffering and distress by oppressing local citizens and threatening the international order. In the West such enemy figures have been typically presented as posing a threat to the Western humane political aspirations, ‘Western values’, Western way of life, as well as global security, stability and humane norms held sacred of the ‘international community’. In the recent decades and years—within the frame of Western world politics and political imagery—the leading most-wanted anti-hero evil advisories have been among others the Iraqi leader *Saddam Hussein*, head of the international terrorist organization Al Qaeda *Osama bin-Laden* and colonel *Muammar Gaddafi* of Libya. Much circulated and popular visual spectacles of the contemporary enemies of the West—and of humanity at large—imposingly bring the third key figure—the evil—at the stage of the humanitarian theater.

In this chapter I shall trace the popular visual as well as textual representations presenting and describing the contemporary Western enemies—Saddam Hussein, Muammar Gaddafi and Osama bin Laden—within Western publicity. Furthermore, I shall take into account the Western international political rhetoric and statements concerning these evil

⁶⁷⁶ On binary representations of us and them, enemy images, as well as of (political) evil, see: **Harle, Vilho**: *An Enemy with Thousand Faces. The Tradition of the Other in Western Political Thought and History*, Praeger, Westport, 2000; **Harle, Vilho**: *Hyvä, Paha, Ystävä, Vihollinen*. Rauhan- ja konfliktin tutkimuslaitos, tutkimuksia 44, Rauhankirjallisuuden edistämisseura, Helsinki, 1991; **Hall, Stuart**: *The Spectacle of The ‘Other’*. In *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practises*. Hall, Stuart (Ed.), Sage, London, 1997. Bernstein, Richard: *Radical Evil. A philosophical interrogation*. Polity, 2002. Burke, 2001; **Said, Edward**: *Orientalism*. Penguin classics, London, 2003 (1978); **Vuorinen, Marja&Kotilainen, Noora**: *Introduction*, in *Binaries in Battle*, 2014.

characters during the recent decades and years. My interest here is not on commenting on the evil and inhuman deeds of these infamous political leaders, nor do I aim at taking a moral stand in regards to their actions, let alone wish to act as the “devil’s advocate”. What I shall do is to map out and analyze contextually and with the iconology frame the visual (as well as rhetoric) construction, substance and presentation practices of these evil figureheads: and to thus to draw out into open the contemporary Western visual enemy narratives. Therefore, I shall firstly sketch out into open how the enemy narratives of Osama bin-Laden, Muammar Gaddafi and Saddam Hussein have been constructed within the Western politics and media over the years. By mapping out the historical construction of the enemy figures the nature of these representations as narratives tied to prevalent political fluctuations and the political appropriateness and functionality of the enemy figures become visible. Moreover, similar patterns by which the enemies of the West have been constructed can be detected, and shared (visual) features and characteristics of all of the three antagonists narratives emerge. After mapping out each of the visual enemy narratives and their historical formation, I shall briefly introduce what is meant by evil in modern Western political thought and reflect the character of contemporary evil enemies against this backdrop. After this, the punishment and degradation narratives of Saddam Hussein, Osama bin-Laden and Muammar Gaddafi are analyzed in the context of the (visual) politics of the contemporary Western humanitarian politics. By analyzing and unveiling the visual features and patterns of assembly of these spectacles a more profound comprehension of the ethos of Western humanitarily framed politics during recent decades and years shall be traced.

Therefore, consequently, as this chapter deals with the third key figure acting on the stage of the contemporary humanitarian theater—the inhuman evil—it also concurrently deals with the opposite of the inhuman evil; the humane good Western self. Thus, in addition to mapping out the features of representing the contemporary evil in Western political imagination, I seek to drill into the core of the topical ethos of Western humanitarian world politics, and the contemporary Western political identity, which are built upon the notion of the Western self as essentially good, moral, global humanitarian savior. Thus, I claim that—despite of their exceptionally grim and bloody nature—the spectacular visual enemy and punishment narratives of the infamous foreign leaders address their viewers according to the ideological Western humanitarian frame, and therefore revealingly visualize the ethos and moral character of contemporary Western international politics infused by humanitarian ethos. Thus, in addition to unveiling the features and qualities in which the evil is contemporarily pictured within the Western frame, these representations tell a profound story of the presenters and spectators of the representations, as well as of the political environment that has shaped them.

6.2 THE POLITICAL VISUAL SPECTACLES OF THE CONTEMPORARY WESTERN ENEMIES

History is abundant with well-known (visual) representations of political enemies. Historical enemy images are often easily detected as simplifying caricatures, political and cultural in their nature. Enemy images often draw from visually distinctive stereotypes, and every so often also contain propagandist contents or are at least forcefully biased.⁶⁷⁷ We can quite easily distinguish black-and-white historical enemy images as purpose-oriented representations, built on political premises in order to further political goals. Such examples are familiar especially from times of conflict and war: The Third Reich offensive images of dirty, greedy and immoral Jews from the 1930s and 40s or the belligerent representations of Eastern barbarians from colonial times. Moreover, political leaders of rivalry regimes—most famously figures such as Adolf Hitler or Josif Stalin—have served as key characters that embody and methonymize the absolutely evil nature of their political project. As we often comprehend, historical representations of the evil advisories typically tell more about their disseminators and the political systems and the zeitgeist that have given birth to them, than of the objects pictured and described. But, stereotypical enemy images are not a phenomenon of the past, but surround us on daily bases.⁶⁷⁸ However, topical political enemy imageries often are not so easily detected, analyzed and critically examined. Although contemporary spectators habitually encounter manifold descriptions of the contemporary antagonist of Western politics—forcefully othered from ‘us’ often by measures quite familiar from the past—yet such contemporary representations are relatively rarely reflected against their historical predecessors. The political and cultural messages embedded in them are not often keenly critically assessed, their totalizing nature nor their political foundations and present day political utilization is not normally deconstructed or their totalizing nature clearly pointed out.

Like earlier in history, also today’s (international) politics often revolve around conflicts, divisions, exclusions and inclusions that are commonly manifested by binary representations. As human rights and an overall humane ethos have during the recent decades become to forcefully determine Western politics and way of life, visually striking imagery describing evil enemies of the contemporary humane international order have extensively circulated in the Western political publicity and featured in media presentations. And just like in the past, also today the threat to security, civilization and humanity—*our way of life—has* often taken a visual human form. During the past decades the well-known and influential visual figures of Muammar Gaddafi, Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein have all in

⁶⁷⁷ Hall, Stuart: *The Spectacle of The ‘Other’*. In *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, 1997; Burke, 2001 123-135.

⁶⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

their own turns served as the contemporary embodiments of the external *evil* opposed to the Western *good*.

Since the creation, circulation and construction of the figures of Saddam Hussein, Muammar Gaddafi and Osama bin-Laden have been at least twofold—downright political as well as widely popularized and circulated by the mainstream media—also my analytical take on the contemporary enemy narratives is twofold. I shall firstly trace both the Western political rhetoric describing these antagonists, and secondly track the influential; much circulated and reiterated visual media representations presenting the infamous enemies of the West and humanity. In outlining the rhetorical and visual historical formation of the enemies I shall pay attention to stages of heightened conflict between the Western powers and the antagonists (states) of the West. The visual form of the enemies is traced through front-page illustrations and other much used and circulated visual material describing the political opponents. I see that, by frequent media use, circulation, as well as high standing and political references popular visual descriptions of the Western enemies have formed into *thick images* that are not only iconic, but serve as representations that multimodally describe their objects, as well as encapsulate and reveal ideological positioning, political perceptions and objectives of their era and presenter, as well as spectators.

Key thick images that have been widely used in picturing the enemy figures are compiled into collage illustrations. These illustrations (Gaddafi 6.1, 6.2&6.3, Hussein 6.4, 6.5&6.6 and bin Laden 6.7 ⁶⁷⁹) describe the different phases of the visual enmity construction, and also aim at giving an outline of the visual features in which the enemies have been presented, and treated in the Western media. These illustrations consist of the key images by which the 1.) threat and the power, 2.) the hunt and incarceration, 3.) punishment and alleviation (killing) of the enemies have been described and represented in the popular Western media representations. Firstly the illustrations display images of these Western enemies when they were firstly introduced to the Western audiences, as well as include images of the antagonist leaders at the height of their power. Secondly the illustrations show the enemies at times in which they were, in the West considered as acute threats to the Western regime, global security and humanity more broadly. And finally, the illustrations show images picturing the humiliation, degradation and finally annihilation and death of these enemies. These collages visually exhibit the key images constructing the visual arrangement of Western enemies as presented in the Western publicity, as well as indicate the shared features of all of the three recent visual narratives of Western enemies.

⁶⁷⁹ Bin Laden's visual construction in the Western publicity was somewhat different from the abundantly visualized Hussein and Gaddafi. Therefore there is only one illustration picturing all the stages of his visual enemy formation. Nevertheless, all of the stages of the enemy narrative may be detected in this illustration 6.7.

6.2.1 THE POLITICAL MIGRATION OF THE FIGURE OF MUAMMAR GADDAFI: FROM THE “MAD DOG OF MIDDLE-EAST” INTO A POPULAR SIGHT ON THE FLOOR OF AN INDUSTRIAL FREEZER

Muammar Gaddafi (1942 -2011) ruled Libya from the late 1960s almost all the way to his violent death in August 2011. Gaddafi can be seen as an archetype of a modern Arab terrorist figure, an eccentric foreign enemy of Western values and politics. The political visual figure of Gaddafi was extensively and for a long time built up in the Western political imagination. Vast amounts of images familiarized Western audiences with the visual figure of colonel Gaddafi for over more than forty past years. Therefore the figure of Muammar Gaddafi—the historical migration of the figure and the representational style of it swiftly changing according to political preconditions—reveals some of the central features, themes and methods recently utilized in the construction of the enemy in Western publicity.

When Gaddafi was Cute

Gaddafi pierced the Western publicity and political speech already in the late 1960s as a young and rebellious Arab military leader. Images of young Gaddafi appeared frequently in Western media in the 1960s and 70s. But interestingly, regardless of his stubborn and fierce reputation as an Arab-nationalist and an anti-colonial leader, popular Western media representations of the time, seem to picture him in rather compliant terms and in somewhat positive light. Young colonel Gaddafi was frequently pictured smiling, communicating with other politicians and members of the local high society. Gaddafi was mostly photographed wearing Western style suits, or standing vigorously and nobly in his flashy military uniform. In the early Western media representations he was frequently referred to as a “freedom fighter” and visually framed as a somewhat charismatic, even handsome—yet often quite militaristic—figure representing the new political whiffs of his era. A Life photo gallery (August 2011) entitled “When Gaddafi was cute” presents early images of Gaddafi presented in Western media. The text accompanying the collection of famous photos from the early Gaddafi era marks: “Muammar Abu Minyar al-Gaddafi wasn’t always the lopsided, loopy, lunatic leader that he is today. In fact, in 1969, when he led a bloodless coup and overthrew King Idris, the 27-year-old Gaddafi was downright handsome.”⁶⁸⁰ What is noteworthy is that early on in Western representations, Gaddafi’s peculiar conceptions of democracy, his ties with terrorist organizations and socialistic political ideas were generally overlooked. At the time—in the 1960s and 70s—the Libyan leader did not

⁶⁸⁰ Visual Western media representations of young Gaddafi, see illustration 6.1 and *Muammar Gaddafi: a life in pictures*, Guardian, February, 2.2011.; *Colonel Gaddafi: Rise and fall*, BBC, October, 20.2011 ; *When Gaddafi was cute*, Life Magazine.; *Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, 1942-2011, An Erratic Leader, Brutal and Defiant to the End*, The New York Times, October, 20.2011.

pose an acute threat to the Western international political ends, and his public image in the West followed the political streak of the time. (See illustration **6.1**)



Chapter 6. Illustration 6.1.

The Mad Dog of Middle East: The Most Dangerous Man in the World

A vivid transition in the (visual) character of Gaddafi took place in the Ronald Reagan era, in the early 1980s. The rise of US right wing politics and the simultaneous political turmoil in the Arab countries heaved the figure of ‘Arab terrorist’ into the Western public consciousness. Political Islam and the Arab states became acutely threatening and politically significant for the United States and the Western bloc after the Iranian revolution in 1979.⁶⁸¹ This wider turn in the international political climate also transformed Gaddafi’s character in the Western political publicity: the freedom fighter figure of Gaddafi was swiftly turned into an Islamic fundamentalist, vigorously hating the West and the humane and democratic Western values.⁶⁸² As the rhetorical and textual accounts of Gaddafi transformed, so did visual images of him. This turn is vividly visualized by Newsweek cover from July 1981, in which the Libyan leader was nominated as “the most dangerous man in the world”. The front cover pictures Gaddafi as a threatening militaristic specter hovering over a desert landscape, illustrated along with oil drilling rigs and men wearing shemagh scarfs fiercely firing Kalashnikovs towards the spectator.⁶⁸³ In the 1980s the altered visual representations picturing Gaddafi can be seen to have gathered strong culturally othering and orientalizing features: the landscapes, visual references to militarism and violence, and stereotypical representations picturing for example style of dress associated with foreign culture and (violent) Arab-nationalism, such as the ferocious gunmen in their shemaghs pictured with camels on the background.⁶⁸⁴ (See Illustration 6.2)

Gaddafi’s anti-Israelism, support to Palestine and terrorist organizations such as the *Irish Republican Army* (IRA), Libya’s alignment with the Soviet Union and his plan to set up a federation of Arab and Muslim states of North Africa were seen as hostile to Western and particularly US international interests. This further escalated the relations of Libya and the Western powers. Particularly after the April 1986 disco bombing in West Berlin killing 3 and injuring 230, among which several US soldiers—which was linked to Gaddafi’s regime—the relationship of the Western nations, namely US and Britain, and Libya further escalated. Later the same month the German bomb assault resulted in US bombing Libya. At the time of the heated conflict Gaddafi was in the West presented as an erratic enemy of the free world, nominated the “public enemy number one” and named by president

⁶⁸¹ **Said, Edward:** *Covering Islam. How the Media and the Experts determine how we see the rest of the world.* Vintage, London, 1997 (1981), 1-35.

⁶⁸² **The President’s News Conference, April 9, 1986,** The American Presidency Project: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=37105>

⁶⁸³ See illustration 6.2. Other magazine covers of Gaddafi from the earlier and latter times, see: *Check Out 3 Decades Of Muammar Qaddafi Magazine Covers*, Business Insider, March 21, 2011.

⁶⁸⁴ **Said,** 2003 (1978).

Reagan in his famous speech in early 1986 as “the Mad Dog of Middle-east”.⁶⁸⁵

At the time of a heightened conflict between the West (namely United States and later Britain) and Libya, Gaddafi was comprised as the archetype of an orientalist terrorist not only by rhetorical but also visual means. As the conflict intensified, the somewhat noble, even handsomely smiling Gaddafi was replaced with a grim looking military man, glaring viciously from the front pages of Western papers. Cover of the *Time Magazine* from April 21st 1986 displays a drawing of an angry and defiant looking Gaddafi, and the headline proclaims: “Target Gaddafi” (see illustration 6.2).⁶⁸⁶ Gaddafi was first and foremost visually depicted as threatening, angry, defiant and strong. Furthermore, in visual terms he was depicted as divergent from the Western standards, as his violent and despotic character was emphasized. Vocally terming Gaddafi as “mad”, also influenced the way in which he was visually pictured in rather insane postures.⁶⁸⁷ After the Berlin Disco-bombing also UN placed economic sanctions over Libya, and Gaddafi’s regime became the leading international pariah-state of its time. At the latest after the Lockerbie bombing—downing of a Pan Am flight 103 over the Scottish town of Lockerbie in 1988 killing nearly 300 hundred people— Gaddafi became to represent the ultimate enemy, the embodiment of inhuman in Western public imaginary. Gaddafi’s mental stability was often questioned, and he was hereafter mainly presented as an Eastern irrational despot, exploding passenger airplanes, collaborating with other terrorists, threatening global security and aiming at compromising the humane Western values.

⁶⁸⁵ See: **Harle**, 1991, 130; Listen to the Reagan’s “Mad dog speech”:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5dq9Hwf-Ho>

⁶⁸⁶ <http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19860421,00.html>

⁶⁸⁷ See the illustration 6.2.



Chapter 6. Illustration 6.2.

The Politically Volatile Image of Gaddafi: Transformation from the “Mad Dog” into Co-operating Oriental Weirdo—and Again into Re-elected Western Enemy Number One

The isolated and trade embargo ridden Gaddafi was from the 1980s onwards predominantly pictured in the West in an irrational, dangerous and West hating antagonist figure all the way up until the 1990s. As the West then differently prioritized its global threats, gradually the relations of Libya and the Western bloc eased up, and Gaddafi was after the Cold War replaced by more topical political enemy figures. In the “the War on Terror”-era Gaddafi started to co-operate with Western powers. Political relations with Britain and the United States were revitalized and trade embargoes lifted. Gaddafi and his regime accepted responsibility for some of its past crimes, such as the Lockerbie bombing. Libya also worked together with the Western states in antiterrorism, and was for example helpful in banking flows of asylum seekers from North Africa to (Southern) Europe.⁶⁸⁸ And concurrently, from the early 2000s onwards, changed also the visual appearance of Gaddafi in Western representations.

As Gaddafi was now politically appropriate and even useful for the Western powers—someone who the West could work with to further common strategic goals—Western leaders were at the time frequently pictured in publicity along with the Libyan leader, formerly deemed as the number one enemy of the West. Western media displayed images of Gaddafi shaking hands and hugging with British Prime Minister *Tony Blair*, Italian president *Silvio Berlusconi* and US president *Barak Obama*. He was also regularly pictured taking part in international summits along with other world leaders.⁶⁸⁹ Nevertheless, Gaddafi remained somewhat distinctly presented: he was in Western media openly ridiculed because of his physical appearance, often pictured in ways that may be seen as orientalizing and presented even as a laughable, peculiar Bedouin figure. He was called “last of the Buffoon dictators”, his bizarre clothing and eccentric habits—like the Bedouin tent he stayed while travelling abroad—were regularly ridiculed.⁶⁹⁰ Although Gaddafi was after the pariah phase included in the international co-operation, the visual figure of Gaddafi in the Western publicity can be termed

⁶⁸⁸ Martinez, 2007, 43-60; *EU keen to strike deal with Muammar Gaddafi on immigration*. **The Guardian**, September 1, 2010. ; Seeberg, Peter: *The Arab Uprisings and the EU's Migration Policies—The Cases of Egypt, Libya, and Syria*, Democracy and Security, Vol.9/ 1-2, 2013, pp. 157-176.; *Italy's Bad Romance: How Berlusconi Went Gaga for Gaddafi*. The Time:

⁶⁸⁹ See Illustration 6.2 . *Tony Blair's six secret visits to Col Gaddafi*. The Telegraph, September 24, 2011.; Britain's alliance with Libya turns sour as Gaddafi cracks Down, The Guardian, February 19, 2011. ; *Obama: Gaddafi Must Leave Now*. The Time, February 27. 2011.; **G8 Summit in L'Aguila, Family Photo**, Wikimedia Commons:

⁶⁹⁰ *Gaddafi Fashion, the emperor had some crazy clothes*. The Time. ; *Colonel Gaddafi: The last of the Buffoon dictators*, The BBC news magazine, 28. October, 2011; *Muammar Gaddafi and his Travelling Tent*. The Guardian, 23 September, 2009.

as the freak of the 2000s high-level international politics rather an equal partner.⁶⁹¹ (See Illustration 6.2)

The unrest of the *Arab Spring* uprisings spread to Libya in early 2011. The new sudden political turn erased the figure of the peculiar but co-operating fool from the Western publicity, and heaved the figure of eccentric and nearly insane “Mad Dog of Middle East” again into limelight. As local Libyans began to openly protest against their undemocratic leader, concurrently Western countries suddenly turned their stance on him and vocally demanded that Gaddafi—they just had had close strategic co-operation with—must “leave now”.⁶⁹² At this time, Western media was abundant with representations picturing the Libyan leader desperately clinging to power and presenting the weakening leader in a nearly mad light. One of the visual peculiarities of the time was a video aired on the Libyan national TV February 22th, showing Gaddafi sitting in a car in Tripoli posing with an umbrella, giving a short but very strange speech, while the anti-regime demonstrations speeded up around the country. The video clip was much re-circulated and debated in the Western media, and the visual appearance of Gaddafi was widely ridiculed.⁶⁹³ (See illustration 6.2)

Eventually, the turmoil in Libya lead to a point in which an international NATO-led military intervention to Libya was realized. March 17th a United Nations Security Council resolution 1973 was adopted, authorizing a no-fly zone over Libya, resting on the principle of *Responsibility to Protect* (used for the first time in history).⁶⁹⁴ Soon after the resolution, United States, Britain and France, along with their European and Arab allies, began a bombing campaign legitimized by the protection of the civilian population of Libya, and aimed at forcing Muammar Gaddafi out of power. Finally, in late August 2011 the defiant man, who had ruled Libya for more than 40 years, was forced out of power and the capital city Tripoli, and into hiding. When the conflict between Libyan regime and the West again intensified, Gaddafi was now again pictured as a defiant evil leader unlawfully clinging to power and suppressing his people. Additionally, picturing Gaddafi as mentally unstable, weird and laughable served a central position in the way the re-elected enemy of the West was presented in the new political situation.⁶⁹⁵ (See illustration 6.2)

⁶⁹¹ On the politics of ridiculing and making foreign leaders of adversary regimes as laughable see: **Särmä, Saara: *Junk Feminism and Nuclear Wannabes - Collaging Parodies of Iran and North Korea***. University of Tampere, Academic dissertation, 2014.

⁶⁹² **Obama says Muammar Gaddafi must “leave now”**. The Huffington Post, 1st March 2011; **Libyan Rebels Win backing of US, EU as Qaddafi says “my people love me”**. Bloomberg, February 27, 2011.

⁶⁹³ **Video deconstructed: Gaddafi loses control of his umbrella and his country**. The Times, February 22 2011: See the “Umbrella video”: **Muammar Gaddafi appears on Libyan television**. The Telegraph, 22. February, 2011.

⁶⁹⁴ **Un Security Council Resolution 1973/2011** ; About responsibility to protect: **UN World Summit Outcome 2005 document**: (138-140: Responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity)

⁶⁹⁵ **Obama says Muammar Gaddafi must “leave now”**. The Huffington Post, March 1, 2011. ; **Libyan Rebels Win backing of US. ,EU as Qaddafi says “my people love me”**. Bloomberg, 27.Feb. 2011.

Presenting the enemy as irrational, strange and mentally unstable are central visual measures, commonly used in order to fortify the difference between us and them, and to present the opponent in an irrational light and to show political adversaries as the evil opposed to the virtuosity of the self. Furthermore, ridiculing the opponent is a method regularly used in diminishing the power and credibility of political opponents.⁶⁹⁶ The sudden change in the public image of Gaddafi in the West can also be seen to prepare ground for a more open confrontation. The picturing of Gaddafi after the breaking of the Arab Spring unrest shows how the public image of Gaddafi in the Western publicity closely follows the political posture between the West and the Libyan regime.

The Bloody Spectacle of the Defeated Leader: Gaddafi Captured, Mugged, Shot to Death and Placed on Display on a Freezer Floor

Another massive turn in the visual presentation of Gaddafi took place October 20th 2011, when Libyan rebel fighters found the overridden leader hiding in a culvert in the Libyan town of Sirte. After he was found, the wounded ex-leader was battered by angry rebel-minded crowd, and soon after killed by a shot in the head. Local people on the spot, watching the events as they unfolded, recorded the bloody and ultra-violent, chaotic last minutes of the ex-leader with cellphone cameras. These brutal images, which swiftly circulated in social media present Gaddafi humiliated, physically punished, mutilated and almost joyfully killed by an angry mob. All of the sudden, the strong man of Libya was seen as a weak old man, stripped of power and put on his knees by the people he formerly oppressed. Images presenting rebel fighters and locals celebrating the death of the ex-leader were, along with the mutilation and death images, a leading way to illustrate the capture and fall of the dictator in the Western media.⁶⁹⁷ (See illustration 6.3)

The bloody visual spectacle of Gaddafi didn't end in his violent death. After his death, his corpse was first moved to city of *Mistrata* for medical examination. After this, the Libyan authorities decided to keep the body for a few days and place it on public display, in order to "make sure that everybody knows he is dead", as the Libyan Oil Minister *Ali Tarhouni* told the Reuters.⁶⁹⁸ The body of the ex-leader was thus moved into an industrial freezer, where locals could come and see the body. Gaddafi's body, lying in a cooled meat storage room, became a popular attraction; people rowed to get in to see and photograph the body of their ex-oppressor. Along with the mutilation and kill images of Gaddafi, these chillingly peculiar trophy images were also extensively circulated in Western publicity. The violent act of killing and the marred body of Gaddafi became global spectacles mainly

⁶⁹⁶ Särnä, 2014.

⁶⁹⁷ *Violent End to an Era as Qaddafi Dies in Libya*, New York Times, October 20.2011. ; *Muammar Gaddafi is Dead, says Libyan PM*. The Guardian, October 20, 2011; *Gaddafi's death- who pulled the trigger*. The Reuters, October 20.2011.

⁶⁹⁸ *Row over Muammar Gaddafi's body delays burial plans*. BBC, 21.10.2011.

photographed by the locals, widely circulated in social media and extensively displayed also by the Western mainstream media.⁶⁹⁹ (See illustration 6.3)

Gaddafi's death and the brutal images presenting the events linked to the final fall of the feared ex-leader were extensively in view in Western media. Extremely graphic and brutal images of the battered and dead Gaddafi were seen throughout mainstream media the days following the event (predominantly on 20/21st of October 2011). Norms of ethical representation or regard for the dignity of the object (individual) of the images (discussed in more length in the earlier chapters 2 and 4 of this study) were not much contemplated when publicizing and circulating of the bloody images of Gaddafi. This was perhaps partly due to the local and social media origin of majority of the images (more on this theme, see chapter 7). On the contrary to considerations of "taste and decency" in running the imagery, Western news outlets eagerly transformed the predominantly local (and social media) originating and exceptionally brutal images presenting Gaddafi's violent death into news stories and flashy headlines with culturally domesticated, (Western) twists. These brutal images also made their way into arresting front cover illustrations. Routinely images of Libyan crowds battering the ex-leader⁷⁰⁰ and close ups of the already dead Gaddafi lying on the floor of the industrial freezer⁷⁰¹ as well as images of the sewage pipe he was found in, along images of the cheering local crowds surrounding the site⁷⁰² illustrated the event in the Western media. Habitually the images were presented along with bloodthirsty captions, such as: "No Mercy for a merciless tyrant" (*The Daily Telegraph*), "For Gaddafi, a bloody end in Libya" (*The Washington Post*) "Gaddafi gunned down in a sewer. A murdering Rat gets his just deserts" (*Daily Express*), "A mad dog in life, but a cowering rat in his last, brutal moments" (*Metro*), "Khadafy killed by a Yankee fan" (*New York Post*) and "Gaddafi killed by bullet in the head. That's for Lockerbie. And for Yvonne Fletcher. And IRA Semtex victims" (*The Sun*) circulated widely in the Western publicity a day after his death.⁷⁰³ (See Illustration 6.3)

Correspondingly to the ethos of the media representations high-level Western leaders widely addressed the final defeat of Gaddafi positively in their proclamations and framed it as representing the ethos of democracy and freedom, and moreover presented the death of the ex-leader in a rather jubilant ethos. President Obama phrased Gaddafi's death as marking "... a momentous day in the dark history of Libya. The Dark shadow of tyranny has

⁶⁹⁹ **Row over Muammar Gaddafi's body delays burial plans.** BBC, 21.10.2011. ; **Muammar Gadhafi's "Trophy" Body on show in Mistrata meat store.** The Guardian, October 22.2011.

⁷⁰⁰ The covers of the 21st October of the **Metro**, **The Independent**, the Finnish tabloid **Iltasanomat**, **The Washington Post**, **Daily news**, **Daily Mail**, **The Guardian** and **New York Times** among many others pictured Gaddafi mishandled by Libyan Crowds. See Illustration 6.3.

⁷⁰¹ The Covers of The 21st October by **Daily Telegraph**, **The Sun**, **The New York Post**, **The International Herald Tribune**, **The Irish Independent**, **The Daily Mirror** among others published the event by showing the bloody body of dead Gaddafi. See Illustration 6.3

⁷⁰² 21st October **Metro**, **The New York Times**, **The Sidney Morning Herald** and **The Washington Post** among others displayed images of the jubilant crowds and the final hiding place of Gaddafi. See Illustration 6.3

⁷⁰³ See Illustration 6.3.

been lifted”.⁷⁰⁴ Accordingly, the British Prime minister *David Cameron* commented the killing of Gaddafi as a day to reminisce all Gaddafi’s victims, Libyans as well as British: “those who died in connection with the Pan Am flight over Lockerbie, to Yvonne Fletcher in a London street, and obviously all the victims of IRA terrorism who died through their use of Libyan Semtex”. He also stated that the death of Gaddafi enables Libya to build a stronger and more democratic future, and announced his pride on the role Britain played in the process of ousting Gaddafi.⁷⁰⁵ In these Western proclamations the crowds that killed Gaddafi were presented and presumed—and perhaps hoped—to represent the whiffs of Western-style democracy or at least a somewhat Western-minded orientation, regardless of the fact that the brutal act of killing was clearly unlawful, conducted by the rationale of revengeful violent mob justice, rather than following principles of rule of law, fair trial, democracy or humane values.

Thus ended the long journey of the strong man of Libya and the enemy of the West, in a highly brutal visual spectacle; a killing joyfully welcomed by the Western political leaders, media and public. The bloody spectacle of violent images—revolving around bodily weakness, corporal dimension of the suffering and defeat of the ex-leader—was a central way of marking the end of his era and power also in Western publicity. Gaddafi in his last moments was presented as a weak and cowardly, dirty and disgraceful, and his final smallness was exemplified by exceptionally bloody visual means. The revengeful, joyous qualities and ridiculing features in narratives describing the defeat of the political enemy in Western publicity are apparent. What is interesting in the context of prevalent Western humanitarian world political ethos is that the Western leaders as well as the Western mainstream media framed the bloody and brutal death of Gaddafi—conducted unlawfully by a mob of locals—as a momentous day for democracy, freedom and humanity. The violent death of the ex-leader was first and foremost presented as a positive, joyful occasion marking a triumph of a more humane order. The way in which the death of Gaddafi was presented in Western publicity composes a violent and openly revengeful *punishment narrative*, which in many ways contradict the overall humanitarian ethos habitually (publically) associated with Western international politics.

⁷⁰⁴ **Remarks by the President on the death of Muammar Qaddafi.** The White House, office of the press secretary, October 20, 2011; **Obama hails the death of Muammar Gaddafi as a foreign policy success.** The Guardian, 20 October, 2011.

⁷⁰⁵ **Gaddafi Death hailed by David Cameron.** The Independent, 20th October, 2011.

6.2.2 WESTERN REPRESENTATIONS OF SADDAM HUSSEIN: FROM THE REINCARNATION OF HITLER TO AN OLD WEAK MAN PUBLICALLY HANGED

The history of Saddam Hussein (1937-2006) as the number one enemy of the of the United States and the ‘free world’ goes back to the times of the end of the Cold War and the Persian Gulf War (1990–1991). Just a few years before the Gulf War Saddam Hussein, the leader of Iraq, was generally considered as an ally of the US. Since Iraq was at the time fighting a war against Ayatollah Khomeini’s Iran (1980-1988), the timely archenemy of the US. The end of the Cold War marked a change in the world order; and as new threats arose, rose also the need for novel enemy figures. At the turn of the decade the conflict between the US and Iraq intensified, and likewise ascended the dark image of Saddam Hussein as a brutal and evil Eastern undemocratic leader, threatening both local security and global stability, as well as the ‘Western way of life’.⁷⁰⁶ The political migration of Saddam Hussein’s figure pinpoints many central features in the Western construction of political enemy images and poignantly indicates the visual styles in which enmity and inhumanity has recently been illustrated in Western publicity.

The Cruel Inhuman Oppressor vs. the Moral Guardians of the Humane World Order

In the 1990’s political rhetoric of the US, Saddam Hussein was presented as the “new Hitler”, who needed to be stopped by the civilized world, in order to prevent horrible historical catastrophes (The Second World War/Holocaust) from recurring. Saddam Hussein was repeatedly referred to as an embodiment of evil, breaking all civilized principles and norms set by the international community. Especially at the time of the Gulf War (1990-1991) Western political rhetoric describing Hussein gathered strongly moralistic tone and biblical binary spirit: Hussein was presented as an epitome of the eternal evil, as Kuwait was granted the role of the innocent victim tormented by the dark forces. Moreover, United States was portrayed as the moral actor, savior, who had to intervene in the situation in order for the “right order” to be restored. In the rhetoric of the US the Persian Gulf War was framed as a war against Saddam Hussein, not the Iraqi people. It was destined to be a “war without casualties”, surgical war, that was targeted only at removing “the sick tissue” of the Iraqi society –meaning Saddam and his regime.⁷⁰⁷

At the time images of the “the Most Dangerous Man in the World” (this time Hussein, not Gaddafi) extensively circulated in Western publicity. Hussein was visually most often pictured as militaristic, defiant, threatening and as a strong leader, usually wearing a military uniform. Visual representations circulating in the Western publicity presented Hussein in a

⁷⁰⁶ Harle, 2000, 98-102, Harle, 1991, 133-137

⁷⁰⁷ Harle, 2000, 98-102, Harle, 1991, 133-137; Macarthur 1992, 37-77; Baudrillard, 1995. See also chapter 2.4, which discusses the Gulf War.

somewhat deranged visual figure.⁷⁰⁸ At the time of the Gulf War the visual figure of Saddam Hussein followed the textual and rhetorical narrative of the US. Hussein was constructed exclusively as the evil, and the Western war against him as humanitarian, morally justified and bloodless. But as soon as the conflict between US and Saddam Hussein's Iraq dissipated from the highest political agenda of United States, so did trail away the enormously visible enemy figure of Saddam Hussein from the Western publicity, only to be resurrected again years later. (See illustration 6.4)

The image of Saddam as a mad, dangerous and evil man initially built in the 1990s, was again seen politically relevant and heaved back into the limelight before the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Before the invasion, president George W. Bush actively prepared atmosphere suitable for an open conflict by rhetorical means. In his State of the Union address January 29th 2002, Bush included Iraq in his list of the states constituting "the Axis of Evil". Bush referred to the Iraqi regime as "hiding something from the civilized world", and accused the Saddam regime of possessing biological, chemical and nuclear weapons.⁷⁰⁹ Later, spring 2003, allegations of stockpiled weapons of mass destruction (which later turned out implausible), as well as alleged ties to terrorist networks and claims of human rights violations were central in justifying and legitimizing the escalation of the conflict.⁷¹⁰ Just before the March invasion president Bush referred to Saddam Hussein as being a threat to "the security of free nations", "danger to his neighbors", "a sponsor of terrorism", "a cruel, cruel oppressor of the Iraqi people", "being capable of any crime and without mercy and without shame". Bush called Hussein "a mass murderer", and referred to him as "possessing weapons of mass murder" and stated that "we must not permit his crimes to reach across the world".⁷¹¹ Upon announcing the invasion to Iraq March 19th, President Bush referred to Saddam Hussein as "an enemy who has no regard for conventions of war or rules of morality". He announced the operation as an effort to protect civilians from harm, and to defend "our freedom" and to "bring freedom to others". The 2003 war was framed as an operation to disarm Iraq, to free its people (from under Saddam Hussein and his regime) and to defend the world from grave danger posed by Saddam Hussein.⁷¹² News of the invasion was in the West most often accompanied by an image of Saddam Hussein talking to media, as he rejected the March 17th US ultimatum to give up power. In this image Hussein appears defiant, determinant and strong, and unlike usually after the 1990's Gulf War, he was

⁷⁰⁸ Western media images of Saddam Hussein from the times of the 1990's Gulf War are included in the Illustration 6.4. See for example: **US News**, Cover "The Most Dangerous Man in the World", June 4, 1990. ; **The Time** cover September, 10, 1990 "Playing Cat and Mouse".

⁷⁰⁹ **The President's state of the Union Address**, White House, office of the press secretary, January 29, 2002.

⁷¹⁰ **President Bush Addresses the Nation**, The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, March 19th 2003.

⁷¹¹ **President Bush: Monday "Moment of Truth" for World on Iraq**. The White House, Office of Press Secretary, March 16, 2003.

⁷¹² **President Bush Addresses the Nation**, The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, March 19th 2003.

again seen wearing a military uniform.⁷¹³ Strength, militaristic and thus violent nature of the advisory were emphasized in the pre-invasion Western public visual image of Hussein. (Illustration 6.4.)

In the rhetoric of President Bush also the new Iraq war became to be framed as an operation of the good against the evil; as a humanitarian endeavor to protect human lives and freedom from the evil tyranny of Saddam. As the opponent (Hussein) was recurrently at the time of the conflict presented in the form of a strong and evil biblical enemy, and juxtaposed with its binary opponent—good, virtuous Western self, guardian of sacred humane values—the American rhetoric describing the motivations of the war and Hussein contains strong moralistic as well as religious features.

⁷¹³ *Bush Orders start of war on Iraq; Missiles apparently miss Hussein. The New York Times, March 20. From the archive, 19 March 2003: Suddenly, the Iraq war is very real.* The Guardian, March 19, 2003. This image of Saddam Hussein giving his speech is included in the illustration 6.5.



Chapter 6. Illustration 6.4.

The Toppling of Saddam: Capture and Degradation of the Ex-leader

The US led invasion of Iraq started March 20th 2003. After about three weeks the allied coalition forces reached the capital city Baghdad and the Iraqi government collapsed. Saddam Hussein was ousted of Baghdad, and he disappeared. In the absence of the head of the regime—forced out of the capital and into hiding—the fall of the Saddam Regime was marked by a flashy and strongly symbolic, metaphoric visual spectacle, orchestrated by the Americans. At the Firdos Square in central Baghdad—right outside of a hotel where international journalist covering the war conveniently dwelled—local Iraqis with the help of American soldiers knocked down a massive statue of Saddam Hussein. Before the statue was toppled, an American soldier climbed up the statue to place an American flag over its face (later it was replaced with a pre-Gulf War Iraqi flag). Debris was thrown at the statue, and finally, after about two hours of trying, the statue was finally pulled to the ground by an American military vehicle. After the fall of the statue local Iraqis celebrated the symbolic fall of the ex-leader by hitting the statue with their shoes, and later dragging the decapitated head of the monument through the streets of the Baghdad.

The metaphoric event mimicking the defeat of Saddam's tyranny was widely broadcasted in worldwide media in iconic visual images. (See illustration 6.5) By vastly circulating the images of the act, the symbolic fall of Saddam Hussein was produced into a prominent media spectacle. In Western and especially in the American media the event was often framed as a crucial moment in the history of Iraq. Toppling of the statue of Saddam was manifested as showing the Iraqi people taking the power on to their own hands after the long oppression of the corrupt leader, and the act was paralleled with victorious and epoch-making moments such as the fall of Berlin Wall or toppling of the Lenin statues in Eastern Europe after the Cold War. Furthermore the event was commonly presented as marking the victory of coalition forces in Iraq, as well as publicized as an emblem of the Iraqi people welcoming the Western invasion as a liberation.⁷¹⁴ In the context of the construction of the Western enemy image of Saddam Hussein, the toppling and desecrating of the statue of the ex-leader can also be seen as marking a symbolical destruction and stripping of power and neutralization of authority of Saddam Hussein and his regime.

After the fall of Baghdad, the disappeared Saddam Hussein was placed highest on the US list of most wanted Iraqis. For months he was nowhere to be found and did not make media appearances, other than publicizing a few audiotapes in which he vowed that his people supported him and opposed his

⁷¹⁴ About the toppling of the statue and its media representations see: **Famy, Shahira**: "They took it down". *Exploring the determinants of Visual reporting in the Toppling of Saddam Hussein's statue in National and International Newspapers*. *Mass Communication and Society*, 10/2, 2007, 143-170. ; **Aday, Sean, Cluverius, John & Livingston, Steven**: *As Goes the Statue, So Goes the War: The Emergence of the Victory Frame in Television Coverage of the Iraq War*. *Journal of Broadcasting & electronic Media*, 49/3, 2005, 314- 331.

exile from power.⁷¹⁵ Finally, December 13th 2003 in the course of an American operation *Red Dawn* Hussein was found, hiding in a hole in the ground at a farm house near Iraqi town of *Tikrit*. Next day President Bush announced the capture of Saddam Hussein in a televised speech. Bush described the operation leading to his arrest “a hunt”. He declared the capture of the ex-dictator to mark the “end of a dark and painful era”, and “the end of the road for him, and all who bullied and killed in his name”.⁷¹⁶ Upon the capture also the leaders of France and Germany cheered the event as great moment, as British Prime Minister Tony Blair announced the capture to “remove the shadow” over Iraq.⁷¹⁷

Also the visual representations of Saddam Hussein in the Western publicity took a strong visual turn after his capture. 14th of December 2003 a press conference was held in Baghdad, in which *Paul Bremer*, the top US Administrator in Iraq, officially announced the capture of Hussein. A multitude of US Army images and videos of Hussein’s capture were presented at the conference. An image of the capture became widely spread in Western media. The composition of this US military image shows the act of arresting Saddam Hussein and states the dictator’s fall from power in an emblematic way: a dirty, bearded, old and feeble looking fugitive ex-dictator, with his eyes closed is pushed against the ground by a strong, armed and able bodied US soldier. In this illustrative image, Hussein is surrounded by at least four other US soldiers, pointing their guns at the captive. Along with this viral capturing image, also other US army images were eagerly circulated in the Western publicity. These images for example exhibit the dirty and modest surroundings of the site of the capture as well as showcase the untidy, squat-like hiding place of Saddam. Another image type going viral in the media after the capture of Saddam, were close-up images depicting the bearded captive and vividly exhibiting him in his vulnerable and threadbare physical condition. The freshly captured ex-dictator going through a medical examination, conducted by a Western military doctor, as well as images of Hussein’s long hair and ears been inspected, along with an image with the ex-dictator with his mouth open for examination, were countless reiterated across Western media. These images released by the US officials strongly visually signify the degeneration of Hussein from a ruler to a fugitive, and poignantly mark his road from power to defeat.⁷¹⁸ (See Illustrations 6.5 & 6.6)

Along with the degrading and highly metaphorical images describing the fall of the tyrant, also textual remarks of the event clearly aimed at the same punishing and degrading effect. Commander of US forces, Lieutenant

⁷¹⁵ Listen to the “Saddam Tapes” as Guardian podcasts. *Iraq: The Saddam Tapes*. The Guardian.

⁷¹⁶ *President Bush Address the Nation on the Capture of Saddam Hussein*, the White House, Office of the Press secretary, December 14, 2003.

⁷¹⁷ *Saddam Hussein Captured*, The Guardian, December 14, 2003; *The Capture of Hussein: Ex-dictator Hussein caught in a makeshift hide-out, Bush says “dark era” for Iraqis is over*. The New York Times, December 15, 2003.

⁷¹⁸ See the images for example here: *Saddam’s capture*. CBS news.

General *Ricardo Sanchez* announced that Hussein offered no resistance upon the capture, and phrased that he was “caught like a rat”. Consequently, the Western media echoed the epic choice of worlds of Lieutenant Sanchez broadly.⁷¹⁹ Along with the “like a rat” phrase going viral in Western media, images of the captured and bearded, weary looking ex-leader the next day entered the front cover news often with refrains such as “We got him”⁷²⁰, “We bag the bum”⁷²¹, “Saddam the Prisoner”⁷²² and “the Tyrant is now a prisoner”⁷²³. (See Illustration 6.5)

Therefore it maybe said, that Hussein’s fall from power was visually underlined with exhibiting his “rat like” detention moment, highlighting his cowardly character and showing him in a feeble and defeated physical figure. The moment of the Western victory was as well marked by widely circulating images showing Hussein been subjugated to what can be seen as a humiliating and degrading public health inspection. Along with images emphasizing the weakness, high age, cowardly nature and perhaps (at least supposed) sickness of Hussein, also visual references to dirtiness and anti-hygienic nature of the captive ex-leader were extenuated by the capture as well as the medical examination images. All of these qualities underlined by the visual representations of Hussein are much used, typical and traditional characteristics of picturing the enemy as dirty, deranged and evil—and thus divergent from the good, strong and healthy us.⁷²⁴ Hussein’s public treatment in images as well as in the worlds of authorities can fairly be argued to comprise a humiliating, propagandist punishment narrative, by which the defeat of the enemy and the victory of the Western ethos are amplified and signified.

⁷¹⁹ *Saddam Hussein “Caught Like a Rat”, U.S Commander says.* U.S Department of Defense, December, 14, 2003; *Saddam “Caught like a Rat” in a hole:* CNN, December 15, 2003. ; *Saddam Captured “like a rat” in raid,* Foxnews, December 14, 2003.

⁷²⁰ National Post, The Denver Post, December 14 2003.

⁷²¹ Daily News, 14 December, 2003. (See illustration)

⁷²² The Guardian, 14 December, 2003.

⁷²³ The Independent, 15 December, 2003.

⁷²⁴ (Visual) features of the enemy are often associated with dirtiness, sickness and weakness. See **Hall**, *The Spectacle of The ‘Other’*, 1997.



Chapter 6. Illustration 6.5.

The Tyrant in His Pants

The degrading public visual exhibition of the detainee Hussein in Western publicity did not end in the moments instantly following his capture. In May 2005, two newspapers The Sun and New York Post—both owned by the infamous British newspaper mogul Rupert Murdoch—ran an image of detained Saddam Hussein wearing nothing but his underpants on their front covers. The cover stories presenting the images were titled “The Tyrant in his Pants” (the Sun) and “The Butcher of Sagdad. Inside Saddam’s Prison Cell” (The New York Post). These news stories exhibit an image of Hussein in his prison cell, wearing only white briefs. Other photos included in the story of The Sun show Hussein carrying out other private chores in his prison cell: sleeping and washing his clothes. (See illustration 6.5) The Sun announced that the images were handed to the media house by anonymous US military sources. The paper(s) stated, that the images were released by the officials in order to show Hussein as an “ageing and humble old man”, and wishing that presenting the ex-leader in his fragile, bare condition would burst the leader-myth of Saddam. Presenting the feared ex-despot in such images was thus hoped to give a blow to the Iraqi resistance. In other words, according to the media house, the images were published in a pursuit to positively influence the Western war effort in Iraq. The United States government vocally repudiated the claims, and denied the handing out of the images. US officials condemned the publication of the images by stating that the release of the images was a “Clear violation of Department of Defense directives and possibly Geneva Convention guidelines for the humane treatment of detained individuals”.⁷²⁵

It is interesting and noteworthy how Pentagon explicated the difference between the images released in 2003 by the US officials upon the capture of Saddam—the “spider hole” and medical examination images—in comparison to the 2005 underwear images by The Sun. US officials explained that releasing the capture images in 2003 was not a violation of the Geneva Conventions, because the images were important in demonstrating to the (Iraqi) people that Saddam really was in custody. Then again, the release of the 2005 incarceration underpants-images was seen as offending, against laws of war and humane treatment of prisoners of war.⁷²⁶ But, visually judging and thinking of the content, as well as the contextual representation, signification and (Western) media uses of the images of detained Hussein in 2003 and the 2005 prison images, no clear difference can be detected. Moreover, in both cases releasing the images was stated as advocating a positive strategic influence on the Western war effort in Iraq. Thus, no explicit distinction between the motives of publishing the images of 2003 and 2005, difference in what the images actually present, how they present it

⁷²⁵ *Military Officials in Iraq Condemn Release of Saddam Photos*. U.S Department of Defense, 20 May, 2005; *Pentagon Vows to probe Saddam photos*. CNN.com, 21May, 2005. ; *Saddam Underwear photos anger US*. BBCnews,20 May, 2005.

⁷²⁶ *Pentagon Vows to probe Saddam photos*. CNN.com, 21May, 2005.

and what they state in their uses is clear. Both of the visual spectacles show the detainee in a similar light, the message and use of the images is somewhat convergent and the narrative they create of Hussein as a dirty, weak and mundane figure, stripped of power and showing him visually humiliated seem consistent. Both the 2003 and 2005 images create a comparable narrative of a weakened ex-despot, a humiliated, defeated man, brought to his knees by strong (humanitarizing) Western (minded) forces. Thus, the difference in the reaction of US officials to the images seems actually to be more about the illegal obtainment of the images, rather than on the narrative they convey.⁷²⁷

The Trial, the Sentence and the Spectacle of the Public Hanging

After 3 years in custody, November 6th 2006 Saddam Hussein was sentenced to death by hanging for crimes against humanity by an Iraqi special tribunal. At the trial Hussein spoke fiercely, refused to stand up when the verdict was read and after hearing the sentence, was told to have shouted in protest: “God Is great!”, “Long live Iraq” and “Down with the traitors”.⁷²⁸ Right after the verdict had been read, US President Bush welcomed the death sentence as a milestone in the democratization and freeing of Iraq, “replacing the rule of a tyrant, with rule of law”. He called the verdict “a major achievement for Iraq’s young democracy”.⁷²⁹ Conversely to the political leader of the US, the European Union, among many other (Western) international actors dissented with the capital punishment as a method of justice, and urged Iraq not to carry out the death sentence.⁷³⁰

Images of Saddam Hussein at the trial were widely circulated in the mainstream publicity of the Western sphere. At the time of the trial Western media recurrently indicated Hussein as acting aggressively, “shouting” and resisting. The trial images show Hussein wearing a dark suit and a white shirt, talking intensely and judging by his bodily gestures, acting in a defiant way. It is noteworthy when thinking of the fluctuating visual representations of Hussein, that at the time of his trial, he was pictured very differently compared to the representations from the times of his capture and imprisonment, in which he was chiefly pictured as compliant and weak, almost willingly subjugated to the Western rule. The visual character of a strong and defiant leader figure of Saddam Hussein, familiar from the years prior to his arrest, was brought back in defining the nature of the accused, at the time when he was sentenced for his crimes in the starkest of ways. It seems that the defiant, strong and responsible figure of the evil Saddam

⁷²⁷ *Pictures of Saddam Hussein in his underpants could spell trouble for News Corporation*, The Telegraph, November, 19 2012; *Laptop 'destroyed to hide story' behind Saddam Hussein underpants picture*, The Guardian, 3 December 2012.

⁷²⁸ *Saddam Hussein is sentenced to Death*. New York Times, November 5, 2006.

⁷²⁹ *President's statement on the Saddam Hussein Verdict*. The White House, Office of the Press secretary, November 5, 2006.

⁷³⁰ *Mixed world reaction to death penalty for Hussein*. CNN, November 5, 2006. ; *In quotes: Reaction to Saddam's Sentence*. BBC News, December, 27.200. ; *Hussein sentenced to Hang*, November 5, 2006, The Guardian.

Hussein was politically useful and suitable again at the time of his trial. ⁷³¹ (See illustration 6.6)

December 30th 2006, at Camp Justice in Iraq, Saddam Hussein was executed by hanging. As most of the Western leaders were still in adverse on the death penalty, US president George W. Bush declared the execution as “an important milestone on Iraq’s course to becoming a democracy that can govern, sustain and defend itself, and be an ally in the war on terror”. ⁷³² An official about one minute long non-audio film of the execution and of the about-to-die- Saddam was openly distributed among Iraqi officials and Iraqi news outlets. The video shows Hussein on the gallows with his executioners and with the noose around his neck. These images do not show the actual hanging or the dead body of the executed, but the situation is stopped before the actual climax of the act, Hussein’s death. Notwithstanding the Western disagreement on the desirability on the death penalty of the ex-leader, these images of Hussein’s final defeat—showing the ex-leader with a noose around his neck—were commonly featured on front pages of Western media.⁷³³ The Western mainstream news media also from time to time distributed the dramatic pre-hanging images with bloodthirsty accompanying captions such as “Saddam Hanged. Iraq Butcher sent to hell” and “Death on Camera. Dawn in Baghdad. A tyrant meets his richly derived end. A billion people see his last moments. Was this a good day for civilization”. (See illustration 6.6) ⁷³⁴

In addition to the official footage of Saddam Hussein at the gallows, a person present at the execution—supposedly an Iraqi official—filmed the entire event with a cell phone camera without authorization. This film (with audio) was shot from below the gallows. This footage shows Hussein plunging into his death as the trapdoors opened, and crowds present at the event can be heard shouting abusive remarks. Again the actual hanging was not shown, but on this video the lifeless corpse of Hussein was displayed in close up images. The video soon went viral on the Internet. Later the day of the execution, the video was shown by *al-Jazeera* and *al-Arabiya* —and soon after also featured by many Western media outlets.⁷³⁵ Human rights activists and many others condemned showing the last moments of the defeated ex-leader and the circulation of the video was widely criticized as violating

⁷³¹**Saddam Hussein is sentenced to Death.** New York Times, November 5, 2006. **Opinion split over Saddam Decision,** the Telegraph, November 5, 2006. Trial image of the defiant Hussein is included in the illustration 6.6.

⁷³² **Bush: Execution is a milestone.** The Guardian, December 30, 2006. **Dictator Who Ruled Iraq With Violence Is Hanged for Crimes Against Humanity,** New York Times, December, 30,2006.

⁷³³ **Saddam Executed,** The Guardian, December 30, 2006. ; **Saddam Hussein Executed in Iraq,** BBC, December 30, 2006. ; **Saddam Hussein executed with “fear in his face”.** CNN, December, 29, 2006: **Dictator Who Ruled Iraq With Violence Is Hanged for Crimes Against Humanity,** New York Times, December, 30,2006. ; See also, **Zelizer,** 2010, 293-303.

⁷³⁴ The covers of the Sun, December 30, 2006 and The Mail on Sunday, December 31, 2006. See illustration 6.6

⁷³⁵ The full video of the execution can still be found in the Internet: Youtube, Liveleak and several other sources.

human dignity.⁷³⁶ Consequently, many news corporations decided not to run the unauthorized video showing the actual hanging. However, regardless of the criticism the unauthorized images gathered, some Western news agencies also displayed brutal images of the corpse of Saddam. For example an image showing the ex-leader in a body bag after the execution was widely circulated the Western media.⁷³⁷ Moreover, as the unauthorized video, its moral dilemmas—and the abusive remarks of the executioners heard on the unauthorized video—were widely discussed in the Western publicity, consequently the visibility of the video was actually amplified.

In her book *About to Die*, Barbie Zelizer has done through research on the uses of the Saddam's execution images by the Western media. She indicates that although the images of the execution were much used in the Western media, showing the images of last moments and the dead body Hussein was widely criticized from many quarters, including media consumers. The display of the brutal images was commonly seen as appalling, distasteful and even propagandist.⁷³⁸ In comparison to the capturing images of Saddam and for example the mishandling and death images of Muammar Gaddafi, it thus seems that the images of Saddam Hussein were treated differently both in Western politics as well as in Western media. His death was not as openly cheered by the international community, as was his capture three years earlier, and the hanging did not ultimately comprise such a bloodstained and revengeful spectacle as for example the sudden and violent death of Gaddafi did a few years later. Zelizer explains the criticism that media presentation Saddam's last moments gathered by the war weary Western atmosphere at the particular moment in time. In addition to the serious doubts on the Western war effort in Iraq at the moment, also the trial of Saddam and his death sentence were vastly criticized. Moreover she sees that also the previously expectable moment of the hanging influenced the more cautious, and perhaps less aggressive reaction to the handling of the hanging news: the media had time to contemplate on how to run the execution in a more "dignified" manner.⁷³⁹

As the hanging as well as the trial of Hussein gathered wide criticism, also President Bush appraised the hanging in retrospect. A year later the enthusiasm of President Bush's views on the killing had changed into pessimism, as he said the execution should have been carried out in a more dignified manner and referred to it as resembling a "revenge killing".⁷⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the execution of Saddam Hussein entered the consciousness of the Western public as a highly visual spectacle, in which the evil ex-leader was, for the last time, punished for his sins in flashy and iconic ways, which

⁷³⁶ See: Cottle, 2009, 5; Zelizer, 2010, 293-303. *Iraq to investigate the filming of Saddam's execution*. The Guardian, January 2, 2007.

⁷³⁷ See for example: *Life and death of the dictator*. Photo gallery. The Washington Post.

⁷³⁸ Zelizer, Barbie: *About to Die. How News images move the public*. Oxford University Press, 2010, 293-300.

⁷³⁹ Zelizer, 2010, 293- 295.

⁷⁴⁰ *Bush says death of Saddam like revenge killing*. The Telegraph, January 17, 2007.

can be seen as marking an exception of the overall humanitarian norms relating to images of death in contemporary Western media and publicity.



Chapter 6. Illustration 6.6.

6.2.3 OSAMA BIN LADEN: THE (IN)VISIBLE FACES OF THE WEST HATING TERRORIST LEADER

The visual figure of Osama bin Laden (1957-2011) was hoisted into the awareness of the wide surrounding world at latest after the 2001 9/11 terror attacks. Osama bin Laden, a Saudi Arabian born son of a billionaire *Mohammad bin Awad bin Laden*, joined the Mujahedeen's in the late 1970s to fight the Soviet occupiers in Afghanistan. At the time, as he was fighting the Soviet occupiers, he was on the same side of the front with the Western block. After the Afghan war, in 1988 bin Laden founded *Al-Qaeda*. In the 1990's Al Qaeda evolved into a global loosely tied terrorist network, which provided bin Laden a route to globally agitate his West-hating ideology. Bin Laden's organization supported like-minded groups, moved money and weapons, trained soldiers and spread his word effectively and globally. One of Al-Qaeda's major alliances was the Taliban in Afghanistan. Bin Laden helped the Taliban's rise to power in Afghanistan, and the Taliban provided bin Laden a refuge and a base to wage his global "holy war". In 1996 US officials nominated bin Laden as "one of the most significant financial supporter of Islamic extremism in the world". Following the 1998 US embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania he was placed on the FBI's list of most wanted terrorists. Nevertheless bin Laden still at this point remained quite unknown to the wider Western public—until the Twin Towers came down in New York 11th of September 2001. Thereafter the iconic figure of a bearded bin Laden—wearing a white turban and a white gown or a camouflage combat jacket, often posing with a Kalashnikov—became cemented as the archetype of modern, agile global terrorist figure, the perpetrator of the 9/11 attacks and the number one Western enemy of the age of the "war on terror".⁷⁴¹

The Most Wanted Face of the War on Terror

Soon after the devastation of the September 11th terror attacks, the terrorist network al-Qaeda—taking asylum in Afghanistan—and primarily its leader figure Osama bin Laden were identified as the prime suspects guilty of the attacks. President George W. Bush officially named bin Laden as the primary suspect only a few days after the attacks. Osama bin Laden was overnight elevated into the gallery of extreme evil in the American and Western imagination. The news of the suspected perpetrator was habitually accompanied with images of bearded, calm and confident looking bin Laden dressed in his characteristic white turban. The mysterious man previously scarcely known by larger publics made his way into the company of iconized past dictators. (See illustration 6.7) President Bush added that it was not solely the main man who was responsible for the attacks, but phrased: "we are talking about those who fed them, those who housed them, those who harbor terrorists". Bush further proclaimed "We find those who did it (the

⁷⁴¹ *The Most Wanted Face of Terrorism*. The New York Times, May 2, 2011.

attack) we will smoke them out of their holes, we will get them running and bring them to justice”. When asked “do you want bin Laden dead?”, Bush paraphrased “I want him—I want justice. ... there’s an old poster out West, as I recall, that said: Wanted: Dead or alive.”⁷⁴² The President’s reference to the old frontier posters of most wanted criminals was soon followed by a flood of visual memes picturing bin Laden in the Wild West poster style and consequently also illustrations in newspaper and magazine covers pictured him alike with the common criminals of past times. (See illustration 6.7)

After the 9/11, Osama bin Laden was—much like Saddam Hussein and to some extent also Muammar Gaddafi—likened with historical evil men such as Hitler and Stalin. The figure of bin Laden acted as a concrete icon that made it easier to comprehensively pin point the agony caused by the brutal acts of novel, agile global terrorism on one man: A corporal figure of the enemy. The threatening and scary, hard to catch and comprehend agile terrorism needed a human face, and the orientalized face of Osama bin Laden served the purpose perfectly. The face of Osama bin Laden offered the shocked Western world something concrete—a corporal enemy, an embodiment of evil—whom seemed possible to fight and conquer. The rhetoric as well as visual descriptions painted Osama bin Laden as the ultimate evil, inhuman character causing suffering and threatening the “Western way of life”. In the rhetoric of President Bush the evil opponent prepared fertile ground for an armed conflict and the figure of the evil Osama bin Laden was essential in preparing the minds of the public and legitimizing the Afghan war. Soon after the terror attacks President Bush was authorized to use “all necessary and appropriate force” in retaliation.⁷⁴³ Consequently war in Afghanistan started less than a month after the terror attacks. October 7th 2001 the United States and Britain launched powerful air strikes on Afghanistan in order to destroy the suspected terrorist training camps of al Qaeda and bin Laden, and to target the Taliban government.

As was pointed out in chapter 5, when looked through Western strategic communication images of the Afghan War, the enemy often remained invisible and without a human figure. In these images the enemy was visually referred to only by the devastation caused (wounded bodies, weapons, wreaked buildings and infrastructure).⁷⁴⁴ But the overall fight to conquer Islamist terrorism after the 9/11, on the contrary, can be seen as very visual in its nature. And namely concentrated on the visual figure of Osama bin Laden as the leader of the terrorist organization al Qaeda. Osama bin Laden was visually persistently present to the Western public all the way from the 9/11 until his capture in 2011, and beyond. His face became familiar to all

⁷⁴² ***The Most Wanted Face of Terrorism.*** The New York Times, May 2, 2011: ***Bush confirms Bin Laden is Prime suspect.*** The Guardian, September, 15, 2001. ; ***THE PRESIDENT; Bin Laden Is Wanted in Attacks, 'Dead or Alive,' President Says,*** September 18, 2001, the New York Times. See the video of president Bush’s speech: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFgn4EaCGQA>

⁷⁴³ ***Ibid.***

⁷⁴⁴ See previous chapter 5.

media followers throughout the world, as references to him in political connections, were transformed into visual representations by the mainstream media.

Although after the Afghan War broke, bin Laden was nowhere to be found, and was suspected hiding somewhere in the Afghani or Pakistani mountains, he nevertheless made several public video appearances and delivered audio speeches that were aired globally, primarily by the Qatar based media company *Al Jazeera*. As *Al Jazeera* aired the manifestos of bin Laden, sent to them as audio-and videotapes by al Qaeda—the fierce speeches of bin Laden made it to the headlines of the worldwide media. *Al Jazeera* was forcefully criticized particularly in the United States for allowing bin Laden to voice his arguments and air his manifestos worldwide.⁷⁴⁵ Regardless of the fact that many Western news outlets choose not to run the tapes because of political reasons, these outings nevertheless gathered international recognition and hoisted heated discussion, and made the news and headlines also in the Western sphere. And consequently the words—and the intimidating face of the fugitive terrorist leader—spread around the world. In relation to the video talks of Bin Laden, the Western media customarily pictured Osama bin Laden posing with his famous Kalashnikov, against mountain-like background or in self-made like studio surroundings. In these visual representations the terrorist leader was pictured strong and defiant, often looking straight at the camera, while delivering his fierce messages, criticizing the United States and encouraging jihad. All in all, there was not much variation in the way Osama bin Laden was pictured during the time he was denounced as the number one enemy of the West and hunted by the Western forces: the calm bearded face was established as the figurehead of modern terrorism and the number one target of the “war on terror”. (See illustration 6.7)

⁷⁴⁵ **El-Nawawy, Mohammed & Iskandar, Adel:** *Al-Jazeera: The Story Of The Network That Is Rattling Governments And Redefining Modern Journalism*. Westview Press, Cambridge, 2003, 175-184.; **Cottle**, 2008.



Chapter 6. Illustration 6.7.

Serving Justice by Killing

A turn in the public visual figure and the chase after the most wanted man took place almost 10 years after the 9/11 disasters. On May 2nd 2011, approximately an hour after midnight local Pakistani time, a small team of US Navy Seals raided a compound in a Pakistani town of Abbottabad. During the course of the CIA led operation “Neptune Spear”, Osama bin Laden was reported captured and killed. The Western world cheerfully welcomed the news of the death of the evil opponent.

Late in the evening of May 2nd President Obama announced that the United States had killed Osama Bin Laden. Obama started his speech by emotional narration of the lost American lives in the 9/11 attacks. He referred to bin Laden as a mass murderer of thousands of innocent men, women and children. He phrased that as bin Laden was “committed to killing innocents in our country and around the globe”, and that the United States was impelled to go to war against bin Laden, his organization and ideology he represented in order “to protect our citizens, our friends and our allies”. In his speech Obama told that shortly after taking office, he had told Leon Panetta—the head of CIA—to make the killing or capture of bin Laden the top priority in the war against al Qaeda. Thus, Obama praised the death of bin Laden marking “the most significant achievement to date” in the American war on terrorism. The story of the killing of bin Laden was paraphrased by president Obama as a story of the American people’s “pursuit of prosperity”, commitment “to stand up for their values abroad”, and “sacrifices to make the world a better place”. Obama nominated the act of killing bin Laden first and foremost as serving *justice*: “his demise should be welcomed by all who believed in peace and human dignity”. When describing the effect of the violent death of the opponent, The president paraphrased “justice has been done”. President named the operation as an endeavor of a small group of skillful elite men, and underlined the spirit of the operation as heroic. He stressed that the operation was intended to be limited and targeted in its scope, and further added that the extraordinarily courageous team of American soldiers took special care to avoid civilian casualties.⁷⁴⁶

In describing the effect and ethos of the killing of bin Laden, other Western leaders widely followed the rhetoric of president Obama. *John Kerry*, chairman of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, voiced the death to mark a watershed in the “war on terror”, yet added that that the 10 year “manhunt was in search of justice not revenge”. The British Prime Minister *David Cameron* marked the death as a “massive step forward” in the fight against terrorism, and added that the death of bin Laden will bring “great relief to people across the world”. Also the Israeli Prime Minister *Benjamin Netanyahu* stated, that the killing is a “resounding triumph for justice, freedom and the values shared by all democratic nations fighting shoulder to shoulder in determination against terrorism”. Likewise, the Finnish Prime

⁷⁴⁶ *Remarks by the President on Osama Bin Laden*: Osama Bin Laden Dead, The White House, May 2, 2011.

Minister *Alexander Stubb* stated that after the killing of bin Laden the world became a safer place.⁷⁴⁷ Thus, the death of the terrorist leader was all around the Western sphere signified as a triumph of justice, victory of freedom, democracy and security.

In the official US story bin Laden was told to have died after a brief firefight, and his body was told to have been taken into the custody of Americans, and buried at sea within hours of the death, according to Muslim tradition.⁷⁴⁸ Images of the captured bin Laden or his dead body were never released. The operation Neptune Spear meant a significant shift also in the visual descriptions of bin Laden. Although no images of the actual death of bin Laden were released, his death and capture in the Western publicity can nevertheless be termed very visual. Western papers habitually marked the end of the terrorist leader with showy cover illustrations and flashy headlines. And although the iconic image of bin Laden in his white turban was again at the center of these representations, the meanings and significations associated and linked with the familiar facial image significantly altered. The familiar image of bin Laden was accompanied with tabloid headlines such as: “Rot in Hell!” (The Daily News, May 2nd), Got Him! Vengeance at last! US nails the Bastard.” (New York Post, May 2nd), “He died covering behind his wife” (The Daily Telegraph) and “Bin Bagged” (The Sun), “A Coward to the End. The mastermind of 9/11 used his wife as a human shield.” (The Daily express). Revengeful and jubilant welcoming of the death news was not only fostered by the yellow press, but was common also among the more seriously orientated news outlets. *The New York Times* front page of May 2nd declared: “Bin Laden killed by US forces in Pakistan, Obama says, declaring justice has been done.” Correspondingly announced *The Washington Post* (“Justice has been Done. US forces kill Osama bin Laden”) as well as *The Times* (“Justice has been done”). *The Guardian* ran the news by printing: “US gets its man—but how could he hide so long?” A way of picturing the demise of the enemy was also pictured with a classic visual symbol marking death in photography: placing a red cross over the image of bin Laden (The Time⁷⁴⁹.) (See illustration 6.7)

These representations widely circulating in the Western media added a strong scent of revengefulness and gratifying feel to the act of killing the enemy. As justice been served by killing was throughout Western media and political contexts strongly emphasized, also the cowardly nature of bin Laden was reiterated in the media representations. His last moments were presented as disgraceful, and revealing of his true nature. The victory of the West—and the US—was the central message of these representations. Killing the enemy was openly celebrated and joyfulness of the act was expressed,

⁷⁴⁷ **Osma bin Laden death welcomed by David Cameron**, The Guardian, May 2. 2011. ; **Stubb: Maaailma on astetta turvallisempi paikka**. Yle News, May 2. 2011.

⁷⁴⁸ **Remarks by the President on Osama Bin Laden**: Osama Bin Laden Dead, The White House, May 2. 2011.

⁷⁴⁹ The cover of the Time special issue, May 2011. The Time has used the same symbolic red cross crossing over diseased dictators for decades, including Adolf Hitler in the issue of May 7th 1945.

both in the yellow press as well as in the political proclamations, as well the more serious media. The story of the killing of bin Laden took a form of a traditional morality story, rich in religious features (just as was the case with Hussein and Gaddafi). The act of killing was presented as a victorious act of (Western) heroes defeating an (non-Western) evil villain. The act as marking the fulfillment of justice was crucial for the story: restoring the right order of things was seen to be attained by killing the evil.

The (In)visible Death of Osama Bin Laden

Although—unlike in the cases of Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi—no images of the actual capture, killing, or the (dead) body of bin Laden were released, the killing of Osama bin Laden can be said to have created a widespread and influential visual spectacle. The events on the night when Osama bin Laden met his destiny have been predominantly told from the viewpoint of the US and drawing from the information told by the US officials. The visual material presented of the event in public, has been solidly controlled by the US intelligence. When looking at how the capture and the news of Osama bin Laden killing were visualized in the Western media it becomes very lucid is that these visual arrangements were largely about making *visible* and *invisible*.⁷⁵⁰

The absence of the ‘kill image’ was a subject of heated discussion in the West. President Obama told that he did not want to release the post-mortem images (indicating that such images existed, and that he, among others had seen them). Obama said to CBS: “It is important to make sure that very graphic photos of someone who was shot in the head are not floating around as an incitement to additional violence or as a propaganda tool”, and added, “We don’t trot out this stuff as trophies.” The president added that the graphic nature of the images could have also created national security risks.⁷⁵¹ Heated talk about the absence of the post-mortem photograph followed. Some felt an urgent need to see the images or even demanded the presentation of pictorial evidence of the events and of the defeated body of the evildoer. The age-old idea of the evidence function of grim post-mortem photographs was at the heart of this discussion. The fact that the pictures were not seen for some meant that something was hidden, and the absence of visual proof raised suspicion of the act really taking place. The absence of the images was thus also fertile ground for conspiracy theories. Moreover, what was discussed in relation to the missing images was (government) censorship.⁷⁵²

⁷⁵⁰ Priya Dixit writes much about this in her article: **Dixit, Priya:** *Decolonizing visibility in security studies: Reflections on the death of Osama bin Laden*. *Critical Studies on Security*, 2:3, 2014, 337-351, 341.

⁷⁵¹ **Obama: I won’t release bin Laden death photos.** CBS News, May 5, 2011; **Members of the Congress see bin Laden Photos:** CNN, May 12, 2011.

⁷⁵² for topical discussion on the subject see:

Campbell, David: *Thinking images v. 16: Osama bin Laden and the Pictorial Staging of Politics*. May 6, 2001:

Furthermore, to add the mysteriousness revolving around the death of bin Laden, US troops were told to have buried the body of bin Laden at sea later the same day, after the body had been inspected and identified by officials in Afghanistan. Thus there was no tangible—corporal or visual—proof of the events really taking place as they were told by the authorities. President Obama told that the officials decided to keep the whereabouts of the last resting place of bin Laden unidentifiable, because they wanted to prevent it from becoming a site of pilgrimage.⁷⁵³ The whole event—due to what was seen as missing visual evidence of the actual killing (an image of the body of the enemy)—remained somewhat mysterious and filled with unanswered questions. As *The BagNews*—a news outlet specializing in visual politics and analysis of news photographs—put it, the message seemed to be: “We can’t show you what ultimately happens, but we’ll tell you what we think you should know”.⁷⁵⁴ Thus, the representations of the event was forcefully controlled and governed by US officials, who up to a large extent, had the power to determine what was seen of the event, what was not see, and how we saw it.

In absence of (official) images⁷⁵⁵ of the actual killing or the dead body of Osama bin Laden, several other ways of visualizing the defeat of the enemy followed in the Western media publicity. The story of bin Laden’s demise was habitually illustrated by images of the “compound”, or the house, where the terrorist leader had supposedly spent his last years—and where he was finally captured and killed.⁷⁵⁶ Images of the house were displayed in many news outlets. Among these images also extremely graphic images of the bloody corpses of “unidentified” men killed in the operation were seen. Although the operation was termed by the US as “surgical raid by a small team designed to minimize collateral damage”, four civilians present in the compound (in addition to bin Laden), were killed in the operation. Images of the bystander victims lying in puddles of their own blood were openly exhibited and circulated. These victims were sparsely mentioned in the official narrative of the events. But the images of the aftermath of the raid in the compound show in a crude and a corporal way the human toll of the brave and heroic “surgical operation”.⁷⁵⁷ According to *Reuters*, a Pakistani official sent these graphic images to them, and the images have been generally regarded as authentic.⁷⁵⁸

Brook, Pete: *Bin Laden, Bin dying.* Prison Phtography, May 4, 2011 ; **The deeper Price of censorship: White house nixes phot of bin Laden’s body.** *The Bagnews*, May 4, 2011 ; **Why death photos matter.** Colberg, Jörg, *The Wall Street Journal*, May 4, 2011.

⁷⁵³ **Obama: I won’t release bin Laden death photos**

⁷⁵⁴ **The deeper Price of censorship: White house nixes phot of bin Laden’s body.**

⁷⁵⁵ By official I mean that there were instantly massive amounts of fake images and images claiming to present the dead body of OBL circulating in the internet, but no images released by officials, or images confirmed genuine.

⁷⁵⁶ See the photos : **Exclusive: Inside the Compound Where Osama bin Laden was killed.** ABC News.

⁷⁵⁷ See for instance: **Dixit**, 2014, 341.

⁷⁵⁸ See for example: **Osama bin Laden compound in Abbottabad –in pictures.** *The Guardian*, May 4, 2011 ; **Inside bin Laden’s compound.** *Reuters*, May 4, 2011.

The core story told by the compound images in their use by the Western media was, on one hand, the reality-effect given by the images describing and showing the actual place of the events. These images were presented so that they seemed to give some concreteness to the otherwise feebly visually documented event of the killing. Thus they functioned as enhancing the believability to the act of killing really taking place as it was told by the US officials. This seemed to be important especially in absence of the proof effect endowed by post-mortem images. But, on the other hand, they also offered the Western spectating world a scenery into the previously unseen, secret life of Osama bin Laden: A voyeuristic view to the everyday life of the mythical fugitive terrorist leader. Images of the medicine and foodstuff kept in the house, as well as of the wardrobes of the inhabitants were exhibited and explained in detail in Western media. Furthermore, the bedroom of Osama bin Laden was exhibited in images for the Western viewers. The message these images seem to be the everydayness and banality (of the house/lifestyle) of the number one terrorist: his unmade messy bed, the trash left behind by the feared ex-leader and the overall intimate everyday surroundings where bin Laden and his family dwelled. (see illustration 6.7)

A taste of ridicule and revengefulness, as well as an aspect of stripping the power of the defeated leader can be detected in the way the images of the intimate everyday scenes were presented. Showing “how they lived” —the everydayness, dirtiness and the messiness of the house (gone through a violent raid by a special force operation) —were then, in the news language and the visual arrangements, associated with the moral character of the enemy (and his close ones). A story of bin Laden’s porn collection found from the compound was ran by many Western media outlets, and tabloids ran images of the terrorist leader watching porn in his hideaway, in attempts to underline his corrupt moral character.⁷⁵⁹ Underlining of the mundane everydayness strips the power as well as tames the formerly feared leader — makes him at last just a person, someone who can be killed and defeated, someone needs not to be feared anymore. In this respect these images resemble the way in which Saddam Hussein’s hiding place was presented in the Western media after his capture: The visual representation of the “spiderhole” he was found hiding in, as well as the small dirty house he dwelled and its interior. Traits of this same function can be also detected in the culvert and freezer images of Gaddafi. Thus, it seems that publically and visually showing the intimate details of the opponents personal life is a form of punishment; it diminishes, contains a sense of ridicule, and functions as a form of making the enemy less threatening. Showing the everyday banality, smallness and corporal humanness of the (formerly feared) enemy is a visual practice of taking the leadership away and neutralizing the iconic enemy—making the enemy obsolete in a highly visual and metaphorical manner.

⁷⁵⁹ *Osama bin Laden’s pornography stash to remain under wraps*, US decides. Guardian, May 20, 2015. ; Cover of New York Post, May 14, 2011. See illustration 6.7.

In addition to the compound images the event of the killing of bin Laden, was furthermore marked by another interesting visual spectacle. When the news of the killing of bin Laden broke, openly cheerful public demonstrations were seen in the streets of many Western countries. Namely in US crowds gathered in the streets to celebrate the death of bin Laden. Images of these events were habitually used to illustrate the news of the death of bin Laden in the Western media, and such images were collected into photo-galleries in prominent Western news outlets. These images presented boisterous Westerners carrying US flags, as well as posters mocking and ridiculing Osama—and sometimes cheering Obama. The celebrations following the kill resembled the hubris of jubilant parties after victorious sport events, added with political revengeful, bloodthirsty tones. (see illustration 6.7) These openly bloodthirsty demonstrations were in the Western mainstream media quite seldom met with critical tones of voices, but rather presented as normal and understandable behavior in such an occasion.⁷⁶⁰ Even though the jubilant crowds celebrating the death of the (national) enemy are hard to apprehend as something else than macabre shows of people taking joy out of a bloody revenge. And thus, despite the fact the death of the enemy was in official statements and political rhetoric aspired to be framed as not being a revenge of the 9/11 bloodshed, the public outburst of joy revealed the vengeful and violent ethos bubbling under. For a brief moment the death of a single man (being an influential terrorist leader and an iconic evil “mastermind”) became to symbolize victory of the West—US in front—over modern Islamist terrorism and the evil which was seen as threatening the “Western way of life”. The celebrations on the streets can be seen as simulation of winning a postmodern war—one that does not end in a truce or an official peace treaty. But, at the same time these macabre public outbursts, relishing on death and violence, collide and contradict the humanitarian and humane ethos much reiterated in the Western political speech and public proclamations.

Yet another widely used way of visualizing the event is noteworthy: the photographs of the ‘Situation Room’ of the White House. These images, taken and released by the US government, picture the highest US military and foreign policy leaders watching what was told to be visual material of operation Neptune Spear.⁷⁶¹ Publishing the images can be seen as one way of attempting to verify the events really taking place as described by the officials, and pursuit in giving an impression of openness and transparency. Or then, they can be seen as telling of tendentious political framing: an attempt of molding of the public understanding of the events and skillfully governing the view of the spectators into the event of the killing. The most used, circulated and discussed of these images picture the Situation Room

⁷⁶⁰ ***Celebrating the death of Osama bin Laden:*** Reactions and celebrations across the globe in pictures., The Telegraph, 2011.; ***Celebrating bin Laden’s death: Ugly perhaps but only human.*** Carey, Benedict, The New York Times, May 5, 2011.

⁷⁶¹ ***President Obama monitors the bin Laden mission.*** The Times (Images by Pete Souza/ The White House), 2011.

filled with people, intensively looking at something on a screen in front of them. The photo has been taken from in front, from the right side of the room, showing several serious men - among them President Obama, Head of CIA Leon Panetta, Vice President Joe Biden and National Security Adviser Tom Donilon - and two women; an unidentified/unnamed (at least in the caption of the image) woman standing on the background, away from the table, surrounded by men taller to her, struggling to see the screen, and on the foreground the Secretary of State *Hillary Rodham Clinton*. As being told, at the moment of taking of the image, the members of the national security team were “receiving an update on the mission”. (See illustration 6.7)

The intent of releasing the image series can be seen to be giving an impression of the leaders of the US firmly following and being in control of the crucial events taking place on the other side of the globe. But what also draws attention to the series of images, as used in the media, was that the spectators of these images actually have no way of knowing what the people in the images were looking at. To quote *Pete Brook*, what the security officials in the images were actually looking at might be “murders in progress... or waiting nervously for the screen to boot up”⁷⁶². The spectators of these images have no way of knowing.⁷⁶³ (see illustration 6.7)

Another aspect that hoisted discussion over the Situation Room images in the West was a detail in one of the images: Hillary Clinton, looking firmly and seriously at the screen, and covering her mouth with her hand. Her bodily gesture—a classic, feminine shocked pose—separates her from the other (male) spectators, whom are pictured as serious and calmly concentrating on what they see. This photo raised a lot of public discussion, namely because of Clinton’s bodily gesture, supposedly brought on by seeing the killing of bin Laden or some other violent events live from the compound. Clinton herself has told, that she can’t recall what she saw or was thinking at the moment the picture was taken, and that she was probably sneezing due to her allergies. But what is noteworthy is the selection of this particular frame as one of the images released on global display. Why was this particular photograph presenting the female leader in an emotional character and a vulnerable light in front of violent event, —as compared to her male colleagues pictured as cool and in control—released (undoubtedly premeditatedly) by the US government to narrate the event? One cannot help acknowledging Clinton’s gesture, and thinking of it as postulating that she is (because of her gender) shocked and amazed when seeing and visually witnessing the (corporal, perhaps, violent) consequences of her own orders.⁷⁶⁴ This preference seems to speak about the gendered norms of visually depicting female (leaders).⁷⁶⁵

⁷⁶² Brook, 2011.

⁷⁶³ Later it was actually learned that at the time of the actual raid into the compound, at a critical moment there was a break in the transmission, and thus the actual killing in real time was told not be available for distant spectators. See: Dixit, 2014

⁷⁶⁴ *Hillary Clinton reaction in Osama bin Laden situation Room photo finally explained!* May 5, 2001, Forbes. ; *What "Situation Room Photo reveals about us.* CNN, May

Moreover, in addition to the clearly gendered picturing of even the highest female leaders, what is perhaps more noteworthy in the Situation Room images in the context of the enemy narratives is that the high ranking officials and political leaders of US—making decisions on the operation and ultimately on the destiny of bin Laden—are pictured as spectators, sitting comfortably in a room, thousands of kilometers away from the site of the actual operation. The remoteness from the actual dirty killing, distances the actual primus motors of the act from the violence, and places them in the audience, as spectators of “the awe and horror” they ultimately ordered and orchestrated themselves. The picture suggests and highlights that the killing and the bloodshed is happening somewhere else, outside the power and influence of the individuals pictured in the images. The (gendered) bodily gesture of Hillary Clinton works to further fortify the impressions of distance and irresponsibility of the leaders given by the picturing.⁷⁶⁶

6.3 THE SHARED FEATURES OF THE ENEMY NARRATIVES

All three recent spectacular cases of Western enemies, their construction and visual presentation in the Western publicity entail distinct and unique characters that are interesting in themselves and in their particular contexts, time and place. They all, in their singular and individual features tell interesting stories also in the context of Western humanitarian world politics. But, what makes them further intriguing and even more worth of critical inspection are their shared features. First of all, presentations of the Western enemies in Western publicity share a functional and practical foundation, which is based on the political situation at hand. Secondly, the presentations of the three central enemies seem to entail coordinated stages and features of representation, which comprise a rather coherent narrative. The common structural political basis, as well as shared narrative and visual features of the three visual enemy narratives, is the subject of the following subchapters.

6.3.1 POLITICALLY APPROPRIATE ENEMY SPECTACLES: THE INTERPLAY OF POLITICS AND MEDIA IN CONSTRUCTING THE ENEMIES

Following the historical formation of the three central recent contemporary enemy narratives it is clear, that each of the enemy spectacles have in their time been politically appropriate, convenient and useful from the Western

5, 2011. ; **Campbell, David:** *Thinking images v. 16: Osama bin Laden and the Pictorial Staging of Politics.* May 6, 2001:

⁷⁶⁵ **Dixit,** 2014, 342-343.

⁷⁶⁶ See: **Jantunen,** 2013, 145-166.

perspective. The spectacles of Osama bin Laden, Muammar Gaddafi and Saddam Hussein in Western publicity have been built on political premises of their time, according to prevalent needs, in order to serve political ends. The recent Western representations of political opponents have fluxed, changed and gathered stronger tones and the frequency of their presentation has accelerated according to political needs and circumstances; just like enemy imageries have always done all through the course of history.⁷⁶⁷ In other words, the evil figures of foreign leaders have emerged and strengthened accordingly to political fluctuations and their emergence, development and construction has in each case been politically appropriate and functional from the point of view of Western (namely US) international political aspirations and strategic positions. Thus the representations can be also termed as *propagandist* in their features as well as uses.

The threat of the contemporary enemies and the regimes they represent has firstly been vigorously build up in Western political speech—official political statements and proclamations of high-level Western leaders. After their initial outlining in downright political contexts, the enemy figures have been consequently solidified within the mainstream media through their repeated circulation. They have *flown* from the upper level political rhetoric and use into popular much circulated representations within the mainstream media, and by their frequent representation and repetition formed into thick images well-known and influential in the Western sphere. The markedly convergent ethos and features of the enemy imageries in political contexts, as well as in the representations of the media, reveal the close ties between political power, predominant cultural and political elite mindset, and the predominant popular media representations.⁷⁶⁸

The connections between politics and media have been extensively discussed and documented in social sciences, communications and war and media studies (and also touched upon in the previous chapters of this work). Generally, the mainstream media can be seen as functioning as a part of the ideological machinery of a given cultural and political sphere; and thus media representations often reveal and reflect the dominant political and ideological ethos prominent in the given time, place, cultural and political surroundings. Without taking into account the direct propaganda efforts or government restrictions imposed on media in times of conflicts and war, it has been found recurrently in research that, clearly the predominant governmental politics also indirectly influence (national) media in its mediation of information. In liberal democracies the connections between media and political elite consensus have been reported to fortify namely in times of conflict and war. In times of crisis and (military) conflicts the media

⁷⁶⁷ See for example: **Harle**, 2000, 86-90.

⁷⁶⁸ See for example: **Cottle**, 2009, 111-113; **Robinson, Pierce**: *Researching US Media-State Relations and Twenty-first century Wars*. In **Allan, Stuart&Zelizer, Barbie** (ed.) *Reporting War. Journalism in Wartime*. Routledge, London, 2004. **Hallin**, 1986. ; **Barthes**, 1977, 15-32; **Hall, Stuart**: *The determination of News Photographs*. In *The manufacture of news*, Cohen, S & Young, J, Constable, London, 1972; **Chomsky & Herman**, 2002 (1988).

seems to direct by its representations of political issues into the direction of elite consensus, and the mainstream media's outings and general line have even been often seen even as succumbing to military cheerleading and overtly patriotic representations.⁷⁶⁹ When scrutinizing the representations of the recent Western political opponents and leaders of rivalry regimes it becomes clear that the Western media has acted as a force multiplier for the politically constructed and convenient enemy images, initially created in high-level political contexts and speech. The circulation of the enemy representations within the mainstream media has amplified the predominant ideological paradigms and dominant politically appropriate interpretations of the Western enemies—as well as notions of the virtuous nature of Western politics—that have been first and foremost built on the then prevailing (foreign) political premises.

Furthermore, contemporarily news media occupies a key terrain in which—particularly in times of war and conflict—the battle for hearts and minds of domestic populations is fought. Therefore, news media does not only communicate or mediate events of war, but also work to shape the conceptions of large public on war/politics, and thus also influence the course and conduct of crisis/war. Nowadays war, as well as sentiments about war and enmity, are communicated through media spectacles, which are entered into the course and conduct of war via media (as well as political rhetoric, which also habitually becomes mediated and circulated through news media) and thus, war is not only communicated by news media, but also becomes conducted in and through it.⁷⁷⁰ Therefore, I see that the representations of the Western enemies within the Western mainstream media are not only a part of the constructions of today's Western political identity and ethos, but also furthermore, they are powerful political weapons, used to legitimate, rationalize and justify political acts; even wars and military operations.

The treatment Colonel Gaddafi got in the British media at the time of his defeat is emblematic of this phenomenon—the close relations between media, culture, history political power and elite opinion—sketched above. Although the bloody, revengeful and brutal, yet jubilant presentations informing the public of the fall of Gaddafi were widespread throughout Western publicity, it seems that British media, in comparison to other Western media outlets, was perhaps blood thirstiest in its representation. The cover of *The Sun* (21st of October, 2011, See Illustration 6.3), metonymizes the British media's treatment of the bloodstained death of the dictator in an emblematical way. The Sun features two brutal images of mugged and bloody Gaddafi at his last moments alive and accompanies them with a text “Gaddafi killed by bullet in the head. That's for Lockerbie. And for Yvonne Fletcher. And IRA Semtex victims”. For the British audience the text ties the image into British history of the past decades in an easily

⁷⁶⁹ **Ibid.** See also chapter 2.

⁷⁷⁰ See for example: **Cottle**, 2009, 109- 111.

understandable and digestible, familiar form. The text justifies and glorifies the brutal act of killing by referring to historical, nationally important and traumatic crimes of Gaddafi, well-known and remembered in Britain. The justification of killing Gaddafi is associated to the Lockerbie bombing, British victims of Irish National Army terror attacks where explosive substance Semtex provided by Libyan regime was used, and killing of a British police officer *Yvonne Fletcher* in 1984 by Libyan nationalists.⁷⁷¹ The ferocious presentations of the British media can be seen as a result of political and historical reasons, and the traumatic relations of Britain and the Gaddafi regime. But the media's presentation of the event, and its justifications, actually closely follow the worlds of the highest political elite—Prime Minister Cameron. Since the themes—Lockerbie, IRA Semtex and Yvonne Fletcher—were also precisely the refrains that Cameron took up in his comments concerning the killing of Gaddafi.⁷⁷²

The cover of *The Sun* vividly illustrates how media representations load historical, cultural and political content into images.⁷⁷³ A picture taken by amateur (mobile phone) photographer—most likely a Libyan civilian or a rebellion fighter—in 2011, is swiftly connected into a traumatic historical event, which are easily understandable for the British audience: the pain and suffering caused by the terror attack in Lockerbie in the 1980s. For the Brits (and for Western spectators) the Lockerbie reference politicizes the image in a familiar way, and the text also points to the feeling of violent retaliation and justice served by killing Gaddafi. The killing of Gaddafi thus appears as a revenge for his past bad deeds, and appears as a deserved destiny for the brutal leader. There is a bloodthirsty, revengeful tinge in the representations, which justifies the brutal handling of Gaddafi through the familiar, (nationalistic) political references to the traumatic history. The message of *The Sun* cover moreover ties the revenge and payback theme neatly and topically to the British involvement in the Libyan humanitarily justified operation *Unified Protector*. The representation can also be read in the context of the politics of the actual moment, as Britain took part in the humanitarily justified bombing campaigns, which forced Gaddafi out of Tripoli, and which eventually led to his death. The choice of the image and text are those of the paper, but the influence of (national) politics on the

⁷⁷¹ Lockerbie bombing, explosive substance Semtex was provided by Gaddafi to Irish National Army (IRA) and the death of Yvonne Fletcher can be seen as the three major and traumatic incidents of 1980's, by which the British public remember the Gaddafi regime, and its brutality. IRA used Semtex provided by Gaddafi in several disastrous terror attacks. Gaddafi regime admitted its guilt of providing Semtex in 2010. The Lockerbie event – a passenger aircraft -Pan Am flight 103 - exploded in air over the town of Lockerbie in Scotland. The aircraft was exploded by Libyan nationalists (terrorists) in 1988. All passengers on the flight were killed, plus 11 local residents by the debris of the plane hitting ground. Gaddafi regime accepted responsibility of the event in 2003. Yvonne Fletcher was a British police officer, who was killed in line of duty in a demonstration outside of the Libyan embassy in 1984. His death was central in Margaret Thatcher's decision allowing Ronald Reagan to launch a bombing campaign against Gaddafi's Libya in 1986. The Libyan government took responsibility of her death in 1999.

⁷⁷² **Gaddafi Death hailed by David Cameron**, *The Independent*, 20 October .

⁷⁷³ **Barthes**, 1977, 25-27, 39; **Butler**, 2009, 63-65.

representation is obvious. Especially so, as the cover illustration follows the public political proclamation made by the Prime Minister, and thus closely follows political elite interpretation of the events.

Regardless of the fact that the text and the image were selected by the newspaper, the influence of high level governmental politics, ideological and political stand point for the formation of the message are clear. Additionally, the influence of the message of this politically produced narrative on public opinion, national and cultural attitudes, and finally for the topical British national politics in relation to Libya cannot be separated from each other. Furthermore, besides implicitly cheerleading the topical military campaign, the representation of *The Sun* participates in governmental politics and takes part in the propagandist ‘information struggle’ per se, as it explains and works to justify the interventionist actions of Brits in the crisis, along with presenting the killing of Gaddafi by forces ally to the Brits as not only victorious, but as heroic, virtuous and serving justice. Furthermore, the influence of the constellation of image and text in the cover illustration—and the ethos they together create—draws from public sentiments and cultural positioning, at the same time constructing them. What this example of the representation of Gaddafi vividly tells is, how (national) politics and media representations cannot be separated from each other, but intertwines, interconnect and interact in multitude of ways.

6.3.2 THE NARRATIVE STAGES OF PICTURING THE ENEMY: THE THREAT, THE HUNT, THE CATCH AND THE PUNISHMENT

By following the visual presentations of the recent enemy figures in Western publicity it becomes evident that the ways in which the enemies of the West are framed, described and visually treated contains shared content and features. The treatment and stories of the enemies form patterns, which create a somewhat consistent narrative of the contemporary evil in the context of Western international politics. In the following I shall summarize how the recent enemy narratives have been constructed and assembled, and what kind of narrative and visual features they entail, as well as contemplate on what the shared narrative features tell of the contemporary spectacle of the Western enemy, as well as of the ethos of Western international politics of our time.

The Strong Orientalist, Evil Enemies of the Virtuous Humanitarian West

Binary juxtaposition—and representations—of us and the other are at the root of all human thinking. The other is needed to construct self-identity. Realizing and understanding us, and in defining ourselves—as individuals and as groups and regimes—a sense of who and what we are, and on the

other hand what we are not, is vital.⁷⁷⁴ Representations of enemies can be seen as such representations, necessary for identity formation, political coherence and unity. Thus, just like the in-group 'us', also the ultimate other needs to be constructed, again and again. Especially in times of conflict, the enemy—the opponent of us—is needed for inner cohesion and a sense of a mission.

All three iconic enemy figureheads of our time have been at first—in the early stages of building the enemy images, when they punctured the Western publicity in times of acute crisis—without exception presented as to be strong, threatening and vigorous. They have been framed as being able to harm not only their own people, neighboring states or the West, but the humankind and humanity in its entirety.⁷⁷⁵ The early images of Hussein, Gaddafi and bin Laden all build on sentiments of threat and visual traits of strength. The destructive force of Hussein, Gaddafi and bin Laden was emphasized both in rhetoric and visual means by highlighting masculinity, aggressiveness, and militaristic features. Often the enemy characters of the West opposing leaders were built up by using strong othering visual means, such as orientalizing elements. This can be seen in the textual framings of the enemies, as well as in the images of all of the tyrants, in the form of physical appearance, clothing as well as physical cultural surroundings in which they are pictured. The topical enemy figures—Arab leaders and Muslim terrorists—can be seen to for a significant degree to build on the age-old stereotypical orientalist caricatures of the backward, anti-modern, barbaric, aggressive and expansive, cruel and threatening Eastern others familiar from historical Western representations.⁷⁷⁶

Moreover, concurrently with presenting the opponents of the Western order, way of life and values in features underlining their strength, the enemies have also been presented as immoral, somewhat pervert, irrational, insane, and sometimes animal-like. Visual features pointing to the derangement of the leaders have fortified rhetorical framings pointing to the insanity of the enemies (such as the mad dog of Middle-East). Nominating the opponent as insane and mad are age-old methods of picturing the opponent as the absolute enemy. The strong juxtaposition of the non-Western irrational evil and rational and virtuous Western good is elementary for these representations. In an ultimate form, the thus other becomes established in a figure of *evil enemy*; as something totally divergent from us, as an eternal ultimate enemy, which needs to be destroyed for the good to prevail. Suggesting that the opponents are mad and irrational, is also suggesting that have no rational reasons, root causes nor motives for their bloody actions; it is stating that they are just pure deranged evil.

⁷⁷⁴ Harle, 2010. 10-12; Kotilainen & Vuorinen, 2014.

⁷⁷⁵ See for example: *Remarks by the President upon Arrival*. Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, September 16, 2001. ; *Remarks by the President on Osama Bin Laden: Osama Bin Laden Dead*, The White House, May 2, 2011. ; *President Bush Addresses the Nation*, The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, March 19th 2003.

⁷⁷⁶ Said, 2003 (1978).

Furthermore, framing the actions of the opponents as purely evil and insane exposes how the purposes and causes behind terrorism or violent politics are not understood, or at least not wanted to be addressed. This tells of a tendency in the Western political rhetoric, where the actions of political opponents are not presented as stemming from neither ideology nor societal or global political root causes, but proposed as actions of the *evil*.⁷⁷⁷

Emblematic of this is how President Bush referred to the 9/11 attacks as actions of the *evil*. He framed the contemporary evil as a new form, a contemporary incarnation of the eternal evil, a mutation, which has to be fought with novel methods.⁷⁷⁸ President Bush went as far as calling the fight to conquer the evil “a crusade”.⁷⁷⁹ The characterization of Bush is emblematic for (traditional) Western framings of the evil. The enemy figures have thus, in addition to orientalizing elements, gathered devilish qualities and the narratives have entailed strong religious (Christian) streaks. The religious traits in the representation of the enemies have presented the contemporary opponents as embodiments of the biblical *eternal evil*, which the Western powers (and the political and cultural sphere) must oppose, and finally to destroy, in order for the right order to be restored and the good to prevail. Thus the fight to overcome the opponent has in each case become framed as a classic Christian fight of the “sons of light” over the “forces of darkness”, in blatantly biblical terms.⁷⁸⁰ It seems, that at times of heightened conflict it politically functional to present the opponent in totalizing or outright biased and propagandist manners; not only as strong and threatening characters restoring to evil political maxims, but in the form of the eternal, ultimate evil enemy of the essentially virtuous West. A war rationalized as fight to conquer the archfiend is strong argument in preparing fertile ground for escalation of conflict, gathering public support for counter actions, as well as legitimizing full-blown war. All means possible need to be harnessed to defeat the ultimate evil enemies.

Historically, black-and-white representations of evil enemies have been useful in legitimating aggressive behavior, and in justifying the necessity of escalation of a conflict and war, as well as to explain the sacrifices and suffering produced by the fight.⁷⁸¹ When looking at the construction and uses of the enemy representations during our era, it becomes evident this still is their function. The recent enemy imageries and their construction can be

⁷⁷⁷ **Wolfe, Alan:** *Political Evil. What is it and how to combat it.* Vintage Books, New York, 2011.; **Ignatieff, Michael:** *How To Learn the Language of Evil*, the Slate, 26. September, 2011.

⁷⁷⁸ “This is a new kind of — a new kind of evil. ... we've never seen this kind of evil before. But the evil-doers have never seen the American people in action before, either—and they're about to find out.”

Remarks by the President upon Arrival. Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, September 16, 2001.

⁷⁷⁹ Bush phrased: “This crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take a while.”: **Remarks by the President Upon Arrival.** The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, September 16, 2001.

⁷⁸⁰ See for example: **Harle, Vilho:** *European Roots of Dualism and its alternatives in International Relations.* In *European Values in International Relations.* Harle, Vilho (ed.), Pinter, London, 1990, 1-14; **Said,** 2003(1978) 3-35.; **Harle,** 1991, 25-32.

⁷⁸¹ **Ibid.**

seen as topical versions of an age-old Western tradition of binary thinking, central for Western tradition of political thought and identity formation. In this way, the figures of Osama bin Laden, Muammar Gaddafi and Saddam Hussein can be seen as contemporary reincarnations of the eternal evil enemy (of the West).

The Hunt to Capture the Evil and to Restore the Western Order

After the first representational stage, during which the political opponents of the Western politics were presented as threatening, strong, and in mad and in demonic features, a second phase—the *manhunt*—has in each case followed. Manhunts, military operations and wars—the war on terror and namely the Afghan war (2001-2014), as well as the Iraq war (2003-2010) and the operation Unified Protector in Libya (2011)—have all been framed and legitimized as humanitarian in their motives and nature. But moreover these operations have been rationalized by the necessity of ousting demonic leaders out of power—and existence. Ousting the bad leaders of the conflict areas and capturing them have been in each case been high among the many ambitious objectives of the operations. Annihilating the evil figureheads has been asserted to restore a more humane order, to solve the problems of these conflict prone areas, to end the enmity between the West and the target areas of military operations. The operations targeted to oust most wanted figures out of power have also been rhetorically framed as *hunts*. The objective has been in each of the cases to “smoke them out of their holes”, into the daylight, “bring to justice” or to force them “out of power”—and finally to destroy them. ⁷⁸²

At the time of launching of the operations the visual representational style as well as the political rhetoric describing the enemies has presented the leaders on the other hand as deranged, but still capable of apocalyptic deeds; as strong, threatening and capricious. Catching these evil and strong figureheads has been among the most imposing, visible, spectacular and popularly appealing features of the military operations. Framing these operations as fights against devilish enemies has in each case been essential—and effectively used in motivating and legitimating usage of extreme counter actions. Presenting the military operations as endeavors to capture and destroy the evil is appealing to the public, as it has simplified the often complicated, messy operations and long dragged wars. Framing these operations as fights of the sons of light chasing the devil off of this world not only simplifies, but also promotes and sells the operations for home fronts and large masses in an easily digestible, culturally resonating and familiar ways. Demonizing the opponent (and particularly the leader figure) and framing the fight as an inevitable sacred battle in order to conquer the eternal enemy gives not only certainty, but a sense of these operations as

⁷⁸² **President Urges Readiness and Patience.** The White House. Office of the Press Secretary. September 15, 2001; **President Bush Addresses the Nation,** The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, March 19 2003; **Obama: Gaddafi Must Leave Now.** The Time, February 27. 2011.

missions that cannot be avoided nor disentangled without extreme actions and sacrifices. The strong evil figureheads have been essential for the recent Western military operations, their rationalization, legitimization and public support.

In the representations of the *hunt-stage* an interesting shared feature is prevalent: restoring by historical analogies. In demonizing the recent foreign political opponents—in addition to referring to the Satan—historical references pointing to infamous past dictators have been commonplace. Framing the topical corrupt and violent foreign leaders as reincarnations *Hitler* or likening them with some other historical leader figure whom have caused substantial terror and suffering beyond comprehension, has been a recurring method.⁷⁸³ Even if historical analogies may sometimes be eye-opening and even instructive, they usually are on the contrary misleading. Historical analogies are more often used as simplifying caricatures rather than instructive insights into solving the problems of the present situation. As *Alan Wolfe* states in his book *Political Evil*: “Everything is what it is, not another thing. Unfitting historical analogies are more hurtful than fruitful. They steer attention away from the present situation and the politics behind it, by referring to historical horrors. This directs the attention away from a possibility of understanding the situation at hand.”⁷⁸⁴ Moreover, reciting past atrocities, as *Barbie Zelizer* reminds us, works to forget the contemporary ones. The injustices and horrors of today are bad enough as they are, and contrasting them with historical predecessors also works to undermine the possibilities of taking into account—or even trying to solve—the political preconditions that have created the violent political actions, phenomena and ideologies at hand.⁷⁸⁵

But, first and foremost, likening the contemporary rivalry leaders with their demonized and iconized historical predecessors’ works emphasizes their strong and threatening nature, and suggests that they need to be stopped at any price before the history repeats itself. Likening Saddam Hussein with Hitler says: if we don’t stop him now with relentless force, we will shortly have a new Holocaust in our hands. This, if anything, is a powerful rhetorical plea, an unjust and a dishonest one perhaps, but powerful and well fitted for intensifying the conflict, as well as preparing for conflict and motivating military action. Furthermore, it places the Western forces in the position of the heroic past defenders of good moral order and humanity. The strong evil must be destroyed, and the right moral order has to be restored by ‘us’: this is the idea reiterated all over again at the phase when the evil enemies have been hunted. The idea in each case of the enemy hunts has been, that conquering the evil leader leads to restoring the *right order*. President Bush announced the operation to catch Saddam Hussein as an effort to protect civilians from harm, and to defend “our freedom” and to

⁷⁸³ **Harle**, 1991, 132-133.

⁷⁸⁴ **Wolfe**, 2011, 15.

⁷⁸⁵ **Zelizer**, 1998, 202- 239

“bring freedom to others”.⁷⁸⁶ As he also framed the hunt to catch bin Laden saying: “I want him—I want justice”.⁷⁸⁷ A conception that a state of a right, somewhat natural moral order —justice and freedom, guarded by the West—exists, infiltrates the Western political rhetoric describing the endeavors to capture the opponents. This mythical status of the right (Western) order is not explicitly explained, but recurrently implicitly surfaces between the lines. But what comes apparent is that the Western forces are the ones guarding the light, justice and humane moral order.⁷⁸⁸

Furthermore, framing the manhunts as the key to the right order and for a better future reveals a simplistic and a naïve way of thinking—but one, which is easily sellable and publically appealing in its simplicity. In this thinking destroying the symbol, will destroy what made it in the first place. As all the bad deeds of a regime or a terrorist networks are personified in the iconized corporal figureheads, restoring the right order seems to follow when the enemy figures are eliminated. This style of presenting the hottest topical global crisis situations simplifies the political and societal root causes and historical circumstances that have created political extremism (such as Islamic terrorism) and violent regimes (such as Gaddafi’s Libya and Hussein’s Iraq) and does not even strive to understand the politics behind ruthless regimes and political violence. Nevertheless, the most extreme representations from the times of the manhunts suggest, that chaos will end and all problems of the most severe global conflict areas would be solved when a person is captured—or even better yet, decapitated.

The Evil Gets His Punishment—And the Western Good Prevails

Following the first two phases, a final third stage in each of the cases followed: the capture, (physical) punishment, public ridicule and eventually physical annihilation of the evil enemies. The bearded and weary looking Saddam Hussein was found in his messy hiding place. He was captured by strong American soldiers and was at the time of his capture referred to as a “rat”. He was publically placed under medical examinations, and incarcerated. Later he was sentenced to death. His hanging was visualized in worldwide publicity and his death was celebrated as a triumph of humanity and global security. The overridden Muammar Gaddafi was found hiding in a culvert, and violently mishandled by an angry mob, then shot to death. His last moments as a feeble old man stripped of power and dignity were exhibited in detailed imagery, and later images of his battered bloody corpse were circulated widely in the Western media. His extermination was openly celebrated in the West as marking a brighter future. Osama bin Laden was found hiding in a compound, he was shot to death by heroic Western soldiers, and he was told to have acted in a cowardly manner at the time of

⁷⁸⁶ **President Bush Addresses the Nation**, The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, March 19 2003.

⁷⁸⁷ **The Most Wanted Face of Terrorism**. The New York Times, May 2, 2011.

⁷⁸⁸ **Harle**, 1991, 123-136.

his death. The media circulated images of his messy hiding place, and his death was openly celebrated in the West as a victory of justice, security and as a triumph of (humane) Western politics.

As the evil enemies of the West were in the representations of the first two stages presented as threatening and strong, the representational style of the third and final stage underline the weakness, cowardly and mundane character of the captured enemies. At the time of their capture visual features pointing to oldness, weakness, dirtiness and impotence, even perverted nature of the ex-leaders were strongly and visually emphasized. The characteristics the evil enemies were pictured in signify their ultimate loss of power. Hussein was described “hiding like a rat”, pictured as pushed literally and symbolically down to the ground by his strong capturers. His weak and dirty physical appearance was showcased in a flood of images. (See Illustration 6.6) Gaddafi’s fall from power was illustrated by picturing his disgraceful hiding place (the sewage pipe), visually showcasing his bloody and anguished face and later his lifeless battered corpse, as well as pointing to his cowardly nature (he was told to have behaved fearfully and yelled “don’t shoot”) in the hands of his killers. (See illustration 6.3) The old, outdated terrorist leader bin Laden was told to have hide behind his wife and acting like a craven in his last moments at his untidy and mundane hiding place. (See illustration 6.7) In each of the cases a shared sense of diminishing, shaming and ridicule produced by visual representations is strongly apparent.

Presenting these ex-leaders as cowardly weakened rats works to show them as outdated characters of yesterday, who need not to be feared anymore. Showing them as corporally weak, morally dubious and fearful marks the stripping off of their power. Their fall from power and smallness (as such, as well as in relation to the strength and able (-bodiedness) of the capturers) was underlined by their physical weakness and by ridiculing them of their fearful behavior and inglorious actions at the time of their capture/killing. One aspect of the ridicule dimension of the narratives is showing the ex-leaders in their mundane corporality, as “normal” vulnerable, corporal human beings stripped of power and dreaded (evil) strength. Showing the ex-dictators as weak, feeble and corporally vulnerable makes them seem defeatable, and removes their mythical diabolic evil potency. Ridiculing and shaming can be seen as a strategy of neutralizing the strength of the enemies that was built in the representations of the earlier narrative stages, but also as a method of presenting and highlighting one’s own strength and power.

Thus, the tendency of picturing the defeated enemies as weak and impotent is used to emphasize the strength and virtuosity of the self. The (American) capturers of Saddam Hussein were presented as strong, able-bodied and well-equipped modern operators—and juxtaposed with the old feeble captive their strength was even more highlighted. After his capture Hussein was subjected to medical examinations. The widely circulated

images of the medical procedures can be seen as a metaphoric hygienizing act, in which the defeated dirty leader is placed under modern norms of cleansing medicalization, and fair yet forceful Western discipline. The submissive corporality of the weakened Hussein, shown in a multitude of US Army images, also marked his subordination before the overwhelming Western practices he had formerly fulminated. (See illustrations **6.5**) Likewise, the US elite soldiers storming the compound of bin Laden were pictured as modern and effective, and compared with the mundane and modest dwelling place of the defeated terrorist leader they seemed even more technically advanced and strong. The courageous and heroic nature of the Navy Seals was further highlighted by the reported cowardly behavior of bin Laden. The modern hi-tech strength of the Americans was further fortified by visually showcasing his relatively low-profile last hiding place and its everydayness. (See illustration **6.7**) Gaddafi's fall from power was epitomized by showing him at the mercy of the anger of the violent mob of citizens he formerly ruthlessly ruled. The brave new order of Libya was represented by the (at least at the moment seemingly Western-minded) crowds, which violently killed their former leader. Strength of the self (and in the case of Gaddafi, relevant supposedly likeminded groups) builds confidence in the victory of the Western 'us' and like-minded forces over the evil.⁷⁸⁹ (See illustration **6.3**)

Bringing the evildoers into justice by capturing, physically violating and finally killing them was in each case presented as a legitimate and morally right *punishment* for their evil deeds. Thus the violent behavior of the Western (and like-minded, ally) actors and the violent physical annihilation of the evil were of the—paradoxically—in each case presented as humanitarian acts. All around the Western world, the deaths of the Western enemies were hailed as triumphs of humanity and the Western humanitarian political order. The visual juxtaposition of the orientalist, visually apparent non-Western evil leaders in their weakness and their good and strong Western captures also create strong global political and cultural hierarchies. Metaphorically the punishment narratives of the three evil enemies can be seen to point to and signify the victory of the Western (political) sphere over its non-Western evil (but ultimately weak) adversaries.

In each case the capturing and seizing operations of the enemies have been questionable in their lawfulness and equitableness, or at least in their morality. The treatment of Saddam Hussein while incarceration was questionable. Presenting images of the convict in his underpants raised questions of violations of the rights of prisoners of war. As well as did the lawfulness of his trial. Furthermore, presenting the footage of his hanging was widely seen as inappropriate, if not wrongful. Later on, even the US President himself detected traits of a “revenge killing” in the annihilation of

⁷⁸⁹ See the images of the capture, mishandling and the dead body of Gaddafi in the illustration **6.3**.

Hussein.⁷⁹⁰ The fate of Muammar Gaddafi in the hands of the angry mob hardly reflects the highest standards of (Western style) legal praxis. Mugging an old man to death and publically exhibiting his earthy remains would under normal preconditions be undoubtedly reacted to as somewhat disgraceful. Similarly the operation *Neptune Spear* to capture bin Laden has been subsequently criticized of its unlawful, questionable traits. Critics have even called it an operation in which US Special Forces stormed a residential building in the middle of the night in a foreign country, and courageously killed an old feeble unarmed man in his bedroom and along with some civilian bystanders. ⁷⁹¹ But, nevertheless, in the cases of the evil enemies, these acts, at the brink of lawfulness and moral, were widely and predominantly presented in the Western publicity as heroic, serving justice and as humanitarian achievements representing the victory of the Western values.

What is perhaps the most striking shared feature in the punishment narratives of the enemies is the strong sensation of bloody retaliation and open joyfulness of a kill. In each case the reception of the capture or kill news was cheerful in the Western publicity. The reactions of Western leaders as well as the media, and in some extent also the reactions of large publics, to the death news were openly cheerful and celebrational. High-level Western leaders nominated the bloody ends of the defeated enemies as marking a better tomorrow and a more humane world, framing the physical annihilation of humans as triumphs of the Western values.⁷⁹² Mainstream media presented the killings openly as retaliations, marking them sometimes even in extremely brutal revengeful ways.⁷⁹³ In some cases Western citizens even joined to express their joy of the brutal acts in public celebrations.⁷⁹⁴ It may be argued that Westerners commonly frown upon revengeful and brutal actions of non-Westerners. Vigilantism, brutal violence, justice delivered by mobs, disregard for the rights of prisoners of war, half-baked and dubious legal proceedings, openly revengeful political acts and joyfulness at the

⁷⁹⁰ See: *Military Officials in Iraq Condemn Release of Saddam Photos*. U.S Department of Defense, 20 May, 2005; *Pentagon Vows to probe Saddam photos*. CNN.com, 21May, 2005. ; *Saddam Underwear photos anger US*. BBCnews, 20 May, 2005. ; *Mixed world reaction to death penalty for Hussein*. CNN, November 5, 2006; *Opinion split over Saddam Decision*, the Telegraph, November 5, 2006.; *Bush says death of Saddam like revenge killing*. The Telegraph, January 17, 2007.

⁷⁹¹ *Osama bin Laden was an unarmed elderly 'invalid' when Navy Seals killed him and Barack Obama lied about the mission, report claims*. The Telegraph, May 11, 2015.: *The Detail in Seymour Hersh's Bin Laden Story that rings True*. The New York Times, May 12, 2015 ; *Seymour Hersh's OBL Fantasy*. May 19, 2015, Al- Jazeera.

⁷⁹² *Bush: Execution is a milestone*. The Guardian, December 30, 2006.: *Dictator Who Ruled Iraq With Violence Is Hanged for Crimes Against Humanity*, New York Times, December, 30, 2006. ; *Remarks by the President on Osama Bin Laden*: Osama Bin Laden Dead, The White House, May 2. 2011. ; *Osma bin Laden death welcomed by David Cameron*, The Guardian, May 2. 2011. ; *Stubb: Maailma on astetta turvallisempi paikka*. Yle News, May 2. 2011 ; *Remarks by the President on the death of Muammar Qaddafi*. The White House, office of the press secretary, October 20, 2011; *Obama hails the death of Muammar Gaddafi as a foreign policy success*. The Guardian, 20 October, 2011; *Gaddafi Death hailed by David Cameron*. The Independent, 20th October, 2011.

⁷⁹³ See illustrations 6.3, 6.6 & 6.7.

⁷⁹⁴ See illustrations 6.3& 6.7.

expense of the misfortune and death of others are frequently criticized within the Western politics and publicity, when perpetrated by others. But in the case of the evil enemies, the majority of Western politicians and mainstream media welcomed all this without much critical voices. The reactions the punishment narratives generated were in the Western publicity sometimes explained as inherent to human nature, and reasoned as natural and quite understandable in situations such as these.⁷⁹⁵ Admittedly, such reactions are common, at least in the context of conflict, war and intense enmity. But the openly joyful and even bloodthirsty ethos of the punishment narratives, when contrasted with the predominant ethos of Western international political legitimation and 'brand' vowing in the name of universal human rights and undeniable human worth and dignity, and regard for the rule of law, are remarkable—and starkly contradictory.

As pointed out recurrently throughout this study, images of violence and atrocity swiftly flow from one context into another; they are ambivalent in their messages, and gather their meanings only in their contextual uses. As images presenting the pain of others are in the context of humanitarianism most typically met with solidary emotions and seen as arousing the will to help and to alleviate the visually encountered distress, on the other hand images presenting the pain and violent treatment of the enemy may sometimes function in quite the opposite way. An image presenting the peril of the enemy— for example in the context of war or a violence ideology such as racism—are sometimes met in revengeful and joyful manners. As discussed in the chapter 2, sometimes images of defeated enemies can be comprehended and considered as *trophy images*. Trophy images metaphorically present the victorious hunter and the defeated prey. Such images in the human context can be seen to be the images of racial lynchings, a couple of decades ago in the US, or the torture images from the Abu Ghraib prison, which have in their initial locus and uses have been considered as mementos—regardless of all their bloodiness and brutality—seen as picturing heroic moments that should be memorized and openly promoted.⁷⁹⁶ The images of Osama bin Laden, and especially Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi, resemble and may be regarded as such trophy imageries: brutal images of the fall of the enemy, proudly shown, eagerly circulated and revengefully celebrated.

Moreover the bloody punishment spectacles visually exhibit and reveal the violence intrinsic to the Western humanitarian world politics, as they show the dark side of our virtuously branded political actions. Celebrating and taking joy out of the brutal deaths of ones adversaries hardly reflects the common humane principles held sacred within the international community and commonly associated with the Western international politics. Thus the

⁷⁹⁵ *Celebrating bin Laden's death: Ugly perhaps but only human*. Carey, Benedict, The New York Times, May 5, 2011.

⁷⁹⁶ This was the case with the racial lynching images in their original context, as well as often images of fallen defeated opponent soldiers in war situations. See chapter 2. And **Sontag**, 2003.

reactions and practices associated with the annihilation of the contemporary enemies seem to discredit the humane conventions often stated as undeniable and universal, and to break the humanitarian norm of the Western international politics. The exceptions of the norms were made possible by framing the figureheads of the adversary regimes and opposing political forces as inhuman *evil*.

6.4 THE INHUMAN EVIL IN THE CONTEXT OF HUMANITARIAN WORLD POLITICS

Outlining the nature of the opponents as evil has been essential for the construction and functionality of the Western political enemy narratives. The character of the contemporary enemies as evil has enabled the brutal treatment of the enemies and legitimized the norm bending brutal punishment practices, which can be seen as exceptional in the context of the generally humanitarily-framed Western politics. But what is evil, how does one become evil, and how may evil be dealt with? And what is the status and position of inhuman evil within the contemporary Western humanitarian world politics?

6.4.1 WHAT IS EVIL?

Hannah Arendt declared the “problem of evil” as the fundamental question of postwar intellectual life in Europe.⁷⁹⁷ The problem of evil in Western modern thinking has been scrutinized quite a lot, yet it is clear that no definite answers can ever be drawn of this fundamental theme. As evil is perennial, it also constantly takes new forms and gathers new manifestations. Framing the contemporary enemies as reincarnations of the ultimate evil, that need to be destroyed, even though it means resorting to brutal or even clearly illegal acts and requires bending the humane rules that the international community and the Western powers themselves have deemed universal and undeniable, imposingly brings the problem of evil in at the center of the stage of contemporary humanitarian theater.

Alan Wolfe differentiates between evil in general and political evil. Anyone can resort to evil maxims, and do evil deeds. Common criminals and insane people habitually commit murders and other immoral evil crimes. These are not usually political acts, they are done out of greed, jealousy, anger, for profit, co-incidence, or because of mental disorders and insanity. Political evil is different. Usually the politically motivated evil acts are done for a somewhat understandable, somehow rational yet amoral reasons, such as lust for power or determination to terminate ones enemy. Destroying ones enemy, someone who is seen as rivalry, dangerous for ones goals or

⁷⁹⁷ Cited in **Bernstein**, 2002, 11. (**Arendt, Hannah**: *Nightmare and Flight*, in **Arendt, Hannah**: *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1945*. Ed. Kohn, Jerome, Harcourt, Brace & Co., New York, 1994, 134)

threatening—as immoral as it may be—can be seen as humanely understandable. This is political evil.⁷⁹⁸

The Nazi extermination camps meant a change in the thinking on evil. Arendt, shocked and awed by the Holocaust, wrote about *absolute* or *radical evil*. She claims (as many of her contemporaries including *Emmanuel Levinas* and *Hans Jonas* for example) that after Auschwitz evil needed to be thought and approached in a new manner.⁷⁹⁹ Arendt describes the new form of evil the Nazi concentration camp system unveiled (or introduced) as absolute, because it cannot anymore be deducted from *humanely comprehensible motives*. This radical evil has, according to Arendt, nothing to do with human vices, such as selfishness, lust for power or other humanely understandable “sinful” motives. Rather it aims at destroying the very concept of human. This is absolute or radical evil for Arendt.⁸⁰⁰

Following these formulations, the crimes of Osama bin Laden, Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi, as heinous and terrible they were, cannot be labeled or understood as radical evil. The actions of these men were horrific, many innocent people died, and countless lives were destroyed, but these deeds were, at least to large extent done for *political reasons*. Al Qaeda and bin Laden saw the attack on the Twin Towers as political (religious) acts and as means in promoting their Islamist political cause. Hussein killed Kurds because he saw them as threatening for his political projects and invaded Kuwait for political strategic ends. Gaddafi was involved in the terrorist activities because of his cause to what he saw as anticolonial action, and he ruthlessly ruled his people as a side project of building and upholding what he saw as a desirable political regime. These reasons can be seen (and should be seen) as condemnable, intolerable and horrific, but they are not the works of radical, absolute evil as described by Arendt. Rather the evil deeds of the contemporary Western enemies seem to belong to the register of political evil.

Thus, even though bin Laden, Gaddafi and Hussein have been often in the Western political representations framed as the ultimate evil enemies and described as “new Hitlers” threatening the very concept of humanity, the motives behind their actions can be seen as political, and in this sense (in their undeniable horrific nature) at some level understandable in the context of the (violent) political goals these regimes/leaders/organizations have strived towards. The horrible actions of these evil men *make sense* in their contexts, even though they are evil, immoral and intolerable. Framing them as irrational, insane or motivated purely by radical evil (aiming to destroy humanity as such) is failing to see the (purpose of) politics of others. If we do not tolerate acts of political violence, it does not mean that they are senseless and insane; they nevertheless usually still are political. Genocide, terrorism and ethnic cleansing are most often politically motivated, and thus political

⁷⁹⁸ Wolfe, 2011. See also Bernstein, 2002.

⁷⁹⁹ Bernstein, 2002, 163-165.

⁸⁰⁰ Bernstein, 2002, 205-207.

evils. But so is restoring to immoral means—such as torturing of prisoners of war—in the fight against the evil.

All in all, evil, by definition is often understood as the opposite of good. This binary division is essential for our understanding of the world. The enemy narratives binarily contrast the evil of political adversaries with goodness and virtue of the Western self. The juxtaposition of good (humane, humanitarian) and the evil (inhuman, immoral) is essential for the sensibleness and functionality humanitarian narrative. As discussed earlier in this study, suffering caused by something evil (or ‘sublime’ natural disasters, beyond comprehension and control) is an essential precondition for the appearance of humanitarianism (emotions such as compassion and acts targeted to alleviate the pain and distress). Thus both sides of the coin—evil and virtuous, bad and good—are essential for the humanitarian discourse— and for humanitarian politics.

In addition to the humanitarian frame, traditionally this binary division is apparent in Western religious (Christian) thinking, in which the evil takes the form of a supernatural foe—the devil—that needs to be destroyed for the good to prevail.⁸⁰¹ This religiously colored dimension is saliently apparent in the recent punishment narratives. Religious framings transforming contemporary politics into fight between “the sons of light and the sons of darkness” are apparent in the Western representations of its opponents and the acts to counter them. Features of classical religiously motivated fight of good and evil are clearly evident especially in American political rhetoric, in which references to for example *crusade* surface from time to time.⁸⁰² As global (state) humanitarianism is historically in many ways intermingled with (Christian) religion, the topical humanitarian political system of the international community claims neutrality, partiality and secular ethos, and tends to fade out any religiously driven motives. Similarly—regardless of the evident religious traits—Western international politics is generally is framed as leaning mostly not to religious but rather secular values of humanity; protection of humanity and human right as secular values, guarded by humans themselves.⁸⁰³ If the thought of Westerners as the sacred bearers of the godly light is dismissed (as it is in the official discourse), and the political acts of the Westerners are measured on purely mundane and secular scale, then, how can bad and good, virtuous and evil be told apart from another, in the context of the (humanitarian) world politics?

Immanuel Kant approached the question of evil from the point of view of volition, or will (*willkür*). Willkür can be determined as the capability to choose between alternatives; free choice. And thus, for Kant our capability to be good or evil is a matter volition, choice. He defines religion and the God out of morality, and places human beings as fully accountable and

⁸⁰¹ Harle, 1991, 19, 25-32; See also Wolfe, 2011.

⁸⁰² See for instance: *Remarks by the President Upon Arrival*. The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, September 16, 2001.

⁸⁰³ See chapter 2.2.

responsible for actions they do as free moral agents. Thus, resorting to evil stems from a free choice, and human beings are accountable for the good or evil maxims they choose to adopt. Therefore, according to Kant, there are no original sins, nor moral goodness, not dark forces or the works of the devil, but all bad and virtuous deeds originate from free will. There are just humans, making moral, or amoral choices.⁸⁰⁴ Therefore, also how the evil is dealt with—what is done to it in the context of politics—is also a matter of free choice, not guarding the divine virtue by inevitable means.

When looking at the recent Western political narratives of its enemies, and the ways to deal with political evil, consideration of these Kantian aspects—fundamental for Western secular philosophical considerations of morality, evil and virtue—are nowhere to be found. On the contrary, the Western counter actions—ridiculing, physically punishing, killing (sometimes under foggy circumstance), and taking joy and celebrating the death of the enemy—are presented as virtuous not because of their standing as actions normatively seen as virtuous, but because of who has carried them out. In Western political speech and representations concerning the treatment of the contemporary enemies it is implicitly stated over and over again, in a multitude of rhetorical ways, that the Western actions and the West are good and moral regardless of what course of action is chosen. As then, the actions of the opponent—the evil—tend to appear as immoral as such. In other words, the West or the self, in this thinking, is seen as being moral and virtuous in essence, no matter how it chooses to act. As the enemy other, on the other hand, is judged by the essence of its actions and its assumed essential evil nature.

6.4.2 THE FUNCTIONALITY OF (RELIGIOUS) INHUMAN EVIL FOR THE WESTERN HUMANITARIAN NARRATIVE/POLITICS

If we follow Kant, what makes evil is restoring to amoral resources: choosing to act in an immoral—evil—way. Although the punishment and annihilation of the recent enemies have been in the West presented as virtuous acts restoring the right moral order, it can be fairly said that in normal circumstances acts such as these would not be perceived as legitimate or lawful, or morally desirable. These acts and their appropriation are made possible by systematic construction of fierce imageries of the enemies, and legitimized by the recurrent usage of humanitarianly as well as religiously colored references, language and metaphors of the opposing inhuman evil, and the divine role of the West in upholding the “right moral order”. By framing the opponent as diabolic, inhuman, absolute evil, the Western counteractions are made to seem as adequate, even virtuous. In this thinking all means necessary are allowed in the fight against the “forces of the dark side”, and even the bloodiest of actions by the sons of light in this fight are

⁸⁰⁴ **Bernstein**, 2002, 11-16.

not seen as immoral. The secular humane norms of the international community may be bent in the case of the foreign opponents framed as absolute evil. By presenting the opposing political regimes and forces as inhumanely evil, places them outside of the normal humanitarian political domain, into the domain of religiously colored morality play.

Thus—paradoxically—it seems that the religiously colored discourse is essential for the functionality of the Western humanitarian international political narrative. The basic humanitarian story in the context of Western politics entails the good moral (Westerners) ‘*human figure*’, which sets to alleviate the suffering of others. Another central character of the story then is the victim, often presented as innocent and helpless sufferer of tragic fortune and inhuman crimes—the ‘*subhuman*’. These characters are familiar from the previous chapters of this study. The enemy narratives poignantly bring the third character of the humanitarian story on the stage: the ‘*inhuman*’, evil, which causes the suffering of the ‘*subhumans*’ and motivates the ‘*humans*’ to act for the betterment of humanity.⁸⁰⁵ As was discussed earlier in chapters 3&4, the suffering subhumans are often regarded as humans somewhat reduced in their humanity (in relation to the Western full-fledged humans). The enemy narratives then show how the evil inhuman enemies are regarded as *non-human*.

Framing the third antagonist character as radically evil—and thus in/nonhuman—actually places the enemy outside of the realm of humanity, and thus enables its inhumane treatment. The inhuman—although it is central for the functionality of the humanitarian narrative and politics—is something that does not belong to the realm of (protectable) humanity. Because of its absolute religious evil nature, the evil enemy is not entitled to the privileges of being human: rights and dignity entitled with the status of human, and neither humane juridical treatment, nor pity or compassion. The absolute evil may be treated as a non-human (in some regards in very similar way as non-human animals, whom are not seen as having juridical rights nor the right to live associated with humanness). The inhumanity (stemming from the absolute evil nature of the enemies) enables and legitimizes the bloody and revengeful exceptions to the humanitarian norm, and allows the bending of the rules of humanitarian politics. The punishment narratives of Gaddafi, Hussein and bin Laden unveil a story that breaks the coherence of the typical humane narrative in a revealing way, and thus shows how the totalizing religious dimension evident in the enemy narratives is actually essential for the functionality of the humanitarian story in the context of the contemporary Western international politics.

Framing the political opponents as religious evil—rather than as opponents that resort to immoral resources by free choice, guided by some sort of evil rationality—enables the violent counteractions and the brutal treatment of the enemies, which would otherwise seem immoral or at least

⁸⁰⁵ See chapter 3.2; Douzinas, 2007, 66-78.

ethically dubious. Additionally, the inhumanity of the opponent makes the counteractions seem as virtuous acts targeted to protect the greater divine good. Thus, the punishment narratives effectively unveil the deep-rooted religious base essential for the topical Western humanitarian world politics. Even though contemporary Western international politics are most often understood (and publically framed) as non-religious and rather based on secular values of undeniable universal humanity, the connections of religion and traits of Christianity in association to humanitarianism are not all that far-fetched. Western humanitarian paradigm undeniably has religious, as well as imperialistic and colonial roots—as was discussed in chapter 2.—although they often nowadays effectively repudiated and hidden in Western political humanitarian rhetoric. Particularly there is no denying the close historical links between Western global humanitarianism and (missionary) Christian religion. The punishment narratives reveal this deep, religious level of the humanitarian logic and theatrical arrangement, as they are so strongly founded on the binary juxtaposition of ‘our’ essential goodness and the eternal evil the advisories. As humanitarianism has contemporarily become to locate a more central position in Western political and public life, humanitarianism may be seen to appear as a contemporary Western *civil religion*. In this sense, humanitarianism acts as a *myth* (in Barthean sense),⁸⁰⁶ which serves to legitimate and naturalize political actions and foster a sense of cohesion; it functions as social glue that helps to bind “the West” together under a common denominator.⁸⁰⁷ The Western sense of ourselves in the field of international politics stems from the (civil) religion driven *belief* that the political West is an essentially good, humanitarian actor representing the God on earth, no matter what maxims it may adopt.

As visualized suffering of others is commonly seen (and targeted) in humanitarian contexts to arouse the empathy and will to help of the spectating audience, the recent enemy narratives show how visualized despair and suffering of the evil enemies is targeted and intended rather to arouse the will of the spectating audience to punish, ridicule and destroy. And despite of the controversy, this binary division and contradiction can be seen to be evident and essential in the functionality of the Western humanitarian world politics of today. The style of appealing of these visual spectacles is not to plea for humanitarian intervention, protection of life or salvation of the weakened sufferers. Rather the representations urge and legitimize the destruction of the lives, which were framed as not only evil, but as inhuman (non-human), non-respectable lives that need not to be protected. The narratives and the treatment of the evil inhuman is not one that is based on empathy or pity, but on retaliation and legitimation of use of power and violence. Thus, in this staging at the humanitarian theater, the

⁸⁰⁶ Barthes, 2000 (1957), 109-159.

⁸⁰⁷ Bellah, Robert: *Civil Religion in America*. Daedalus, 1/96, 1967, pp.1-21. ; See also: *Civil Religion, Human Rights and international politics*. Ed. Porsdam, Helle, Edward Elgar Publishing limited, Cheltenham, 2012.

catharsis of the spectating audience is not achieved by alleviating the pain of others, but by killing and destroying the enemy, presented as in/nonhuman. The spectators of these tragedy plays are prepared for revengeful spectacles, and the cathartic state is achieved not by solidary emotions and humanitarian actions, but by revengeful ethos and violent destruction of the devilish inhuman. Therefore the enemy narratives unveil the concealed violence of the Western humanitarian narrative. Furthermore, these episodes of evil not only legitimate the Western use of power against inhuman figureheads and political adversaries, but they are utilized to lower the threshold for open armed conflict, they are intended to rationalize the high cost of Western militarized strategic political ends, and furthermore also excuse the ‘West’ of actually acting—choosing to act—in an evil way. The strategic capability of the inhuman evil advisories within humanitarily-framed international politics is great.

Thus, in addition to being politically and strategically functional, as well as publically appealing and culturally familiar, the recent enemy narratives reveal the dark side of the contemporary Western humanitarian narrative: Framing the Western self and Western actions as absolutely and essentially good, and on the other hand picturing the opponents as the ultimate inhuman evil leads us to—and allows us to—act in an evil way. Fighting evil with evil (amoral) tools inevitably leads to committing “lesser evils”⁸⁰⁸ — resorting to (even if in lesser measures) the same evil maxims as the opponent. The problem of dealing with the opponents (evil) within the humanitarily-framed Western politics is an acute one. This dilemma was also present in the previous **chapter 5**, when the visual strategic branding efforts of the Afghan war were dealt with. As Western democracies fight terrorism and other viscous political forces globally, they are restrained by their own (and international community’s) definitions of (relatively) violence free, humanitarian politics. The proposition that political life of Western democracies should be free from violence, secrecy, borderline practices and violations of (human) rights, posits restrictions on the measurements that the Western democracies may use in the fight to counter the ‘evil’, without compromising the values that the West itself pronounces to protecting. As international human rights conventions state, even the enemies have rights, but as the enemy narratives clearly show, in the case of the absolute evil, these ideals tend to be systematically compromised.⁸⁰⁹

Within the contemporary international politics Western enemies become enemies of the Western humane order because of their inhuman acts—violence, threat to (human) security, terrorism, unlawful acts that oppose international humanitarian conventions—acts that in the context of the humanitarian politics are seen as threatening the universal values of humanity. But as fighting terrorism and global political evils often requires

⁸⁰⁸See: **Ignatieff, Michael**: *The lesser Evil. Political ethics in the age of terror*. Penguin, Ontario, 2004.

⁸⁰⁹ **Ignatieff**, 2004, 7.

use of force and habitually leads to resorting to somewhat morally questionable measures, then the Western counteractions cannot be judged on the scale of indivisible absolutes. This thinking—leaning to exception of the indispensable humane norms in the face of radical evil—can be detected also in acts of torturing the prisoners of war in the Western prisons during the “War on Terror”. Exceptions of the (secular) humane norms compromise the universal and indispensable status of humanity and human rights, on which the Western values and politics for a large part are build upon.⁸¹⁰ In legitimizing these exceptions is where the religious dimension of evil becomes convenient, if not necessary. The religious dimension—blatantly in view in the enemy and punishment narratives—gives an absolution for resorting to morally dubious maxims, renounced by the Western powers themselves. The religious dimension of the enemy narratives may seem politically functional in times of conflict and restoring to the religious maxims might well serve its purpose in addressing the Western publics (because of its historical and cultural resonance), but it nevertheless breaks the coherence of the secular humanitarian politics of Western democracies and exposes that the system of rights, foundational for Western (world) politics, is not a system of indivisible absolutes.

As the idea of absolute evil enemies replaces the principles of humanitarian politics with totalizing morality arrangements, it also fades out the politics from politics. Framing the political enemies as insanely evil and seeing the Western self as essentially virtuous, may seem to justify the borderline actions. But it concurrently it leads to failure of seeing the politics of the others—and of the self. This is not only biased and dishonest, but it moreover does not help to resolve political problems that usually give birth to political evils in the first place. Fighting evil with (lesser) evil leaves untouched the underlying political structures and root causes that cause violence and terror to begin with.⁸¹¹ Furthermore, the religious evil transforms politics into a morality play of good vs. the evil, but in secular world of people also “the good self” as it takes up the tools of the evil, is contaminated.

Then, how should evil be dealt with? As Wolfe points out, fighting evil with evil contaminates, but fighting politics with politics does not.⁸¹² There is no coercion to restore to evil maxims in fighting for a more just world. Following Kant, adopting evil maxims is a matter of free choice. Moreover, in the context of the politics of Western democracies—wowing in the name of universal humanity and human worth—adopting violent and inhumane maxims is furthermore is a choice that compromises these self proclaimed ideas. Politics, even the violent acts of opposing political regimes, would be better off seen as politics, and reacted to in political ways, rather than revengefully twisting politics into black and white apocalyptic morality

⁸¹⁰ See: **Butler**, 2009, 63-100; **Ignatieff** 2004, 8-12 ; **Wolfe** 2011, 246-281.

⁸¹¹ **Wolfe**, 2011, 5-18 ; **Ignatieff**, 2004, 12- 19.

⁸¹² **Wolfe**, 2011, 7.

arrangements, in which all means imaginable are seen as legitimate and adequate. As *Theodor Adorno* phrases: “Violence in the name of civilization reveals its own barbarism, even as it justifies its own violence by presuming the barbaric subhumanity of the other against whom that violence is waged”.⁸¹³ Thus, furthermore, the ways in which the opponents of the West are treated, show in a pungent and paradoxical manner what succumbing to evil maxims leads to, and what abandoning the ideals of absolute human right looks like. Thus, paradoxically the religiously colored, revengeful, violent and totalizing Western enemy narratives ultimately highlight the importance and necessity of upholding the universal principles of human worth, protection of life and unalienable rights of all living creatures.

6.5 CONCLUSION: THE DARK SIDE OF THE HUMANITARIAN NARRATIVE

The recent popular political narratives of Western enemies—Muammar Gaddafi, Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden—are revealing representations that offer interestingly divergent viewpoints into the visuality of contemporary Western international politics. These enemy narratives bring the third central character of the humanitarian story—the inhuman evil—into the center of the stage of the visual humanitarian theater. Biased, even propagandist representations of enemies, rivalry powers and political opponents have been central at times of conflict and confrontation throughout history. Such representations are often simplistic, stereotypical and propagandist in their nature, they are built on political premises in order to further political goals. The enemy figures of Gaddafi, Hussein and bin Laden are the contemporary manifestations of such age-old (political) enemy imageries. The contemporary visual narratives of these enemies illustrate what the contemporary political evil from the Western point of view looks like. The enemy figures explain the actions of the self (the West); they are building blocks of the Western political identity, they bring a sense of coherence into the minds of Western citizens midst political upheaval, threatening terrorism and conflict. Furthermore, they function as social glue, giving a face to the political forces opposing the political and cultural in-group ‘us’.

Mapping out of the representations of the recent enemies in Western politics and media publicity, unveils how their visual and rhetoric assemblage share notable common features. The (visual) narrative construction and the (visual) narrative phases in the representation of the recent Western enemies have been strikingly similar. Initially the enemy figures have been introduced to the Western audiences concurrently with the

⁸¹³ **Theodor Adorno**: *Minima Moralia: Reflection from Damaged Life* (1944-1947), London Verso, 2005. Cited in **Butler**, 2009, 93.

escalation of the conflict between the Western powers and their rivalries represented by Hussein, Gaddafi and bin Laden. Construction of the enemy figures has intensified in accord with the international conflicts: representations of these men have had their highest public standing in times of heightened conflict and preparation of military solutions between the Western powers and these rivalry regimes/actors. From downright political contexts the representations of the enemy figures have flown into much used and circulated mainstream media representations. The (visual) enmity representations of the dangerous West-hating evil enemies have forcefully pierced the Western publicity, and formed into thick images known by all media consumers and followers of politics in the Western sphere.

In the first narrative phase each the enemies were presented as the number one enemy of the Western powers; as strong, capable of threatening security and “the Western values” and framed an intrinsically evil and demonic in their nature. The visual features constructing the West hating enemies and “most dangerous men in the world” have been stereotypical and often starkly culturally othering, Orientalizing and demonizing. The binary, black-and-white morality positioning of the West and its enemies has in each case been strict. These three men have all in their time served as the reincarnations of the eternal evil on earth, which the humanitarian Western forces must fight in order for the good to prevail. The second narrative stage—the manhunt—in each case followed. During this stage the madness, irrationality and evil nature of the enemies has been highlighted; their bad deeds have been widely publicized and condemned. The importance of their annihilation for upholding global security and Western moral order—and the humanitarian international order in wider terms—has been emphasized in public statements as well as in media representations. In the third and last narrative stage, the enemies have all been caught, punished and destroyed by Western or Western-minded forces. The forces conquering these evil figureheads have been presented as strong, potent and virtuous, as the defeated men have been portrayed as weak, morally dubious and weary. Their (physical) punishment, ridicule and annihilation have been presented as marking the triumph of civilization and of the right Western moral order within the international system. The downfalls and violent destinies of the ex-leaders permeated the Western front-page media. Their death was openly celebrated in the media, among high-level Western political decision makers, as also the Western citizens openly revengefully indulged in these violent punishment narratives.

Furthermore, in addition to the shared visual and narrative content, what is relevant and revealing is the political appropriateness and timeliness of these narratives. The narratives of the enemies were reiterated both in the proclamations of Western political decision makers as well as the Western mainstream media in accord. Their public appeal and visibility in popular mainstream media has been wide and infiltrating. These politically constructed narratives have functioned as much circulated and influential

spectacles, which have influenced and constructed the imagination and perception of Western publics on world politics and the global world. They have been functional in propping up the humanitarian Western political identity. Additionally they have had a direct effect on decision making on heavy weight political acts. These spectacular enemy images have had their position in rationalizing for use of force and legitimizing recent interventionist military operations and wars. The building up of enemy images and the political uses of enemy narratives has in each case been strategically functional, and it is clear how they have been built upon political premises, and are compiled and circulated in order to serve political ends. The political enemy images have by their frequent uses been formed into widely spread and influential common truths that have been rarely publically questioned or criticized. The essentially evil nature of the Western antagonist—constructed in the frequent public circulation—has thus absolved the morally questionable and brutal acts of the Western (minded) forces used in the course of fighting the evil adversaries. Enemy narratives showing the political opponent as inhumanely evil have been useful, functional and strategically practical in the context of the contemporary Western international politics.

But dealing with the inhuman evil also reveals some central and intrinsic features of the Western humanitarily-framed political thinking out into the open and visible. As Western political representations have typically striven to present Western political actions and their ethos as non-violent and humane as possible (as seen in the previous chapters 5 of this work), the enemy narratives make a pungent exception. In dealing with the evil enemies even morally dubious, openly violent, brutal and revengeful acts and ethos are seen as appropriate and legitimate. What has allowed the blatant and public braking of the humanitarian norms is framing the enemies as reincarnations of the ultimate, biblical, inhuman evil enemy. The evil enemy is seen to represent everything that the West is not; the evil enemy is the flip side of the good self. Moreover, as the enemy is *inhuman*—placed outside of the realm of humanity, and thus conceived as the non-human—it may be addressed and treated as a non-human object that is not entitled with the rights and privileges associated with humanness. The inhuman may thus be dealt with by inhuman means. In addition to this, the religiousness and the juxtaposition of the essentially good self and the essentially evil opponents allows and works to legitimize the fierce and revengeful Western counteractions and overall violent ethos revolving around the enemies, which brakes the secular humanitarian norms the West itself proclaims to stand to defend.

Consequently, the enemy and punishment narratives interestingly reveal the often renounced religious root of the Western humanitarized political narrative, and bring out into the open the Christian ethos embedded deep in Western foreign political thinking. The enemy narratives give away how the humanitarian narrative, contemporarily central in Western

international political thinking, actually for a large part relies and builds upon these religion driven black-and-white binary arrangements of good and bad, virtuous and evil. Additionally, dealing with the enemy reveals, how Western privilege, revengefulness and binary understanding of the world are actually intrinsic for the Western political humanitarian narrative, and its functionality in times of conflict. Thus, the enemy spectacles reveal the rigid Western perspective on the global hierarchy in the context of ethics and morality. The enemy spectacles give away how the actions of the West are (in Western representations and imagination) considered as essentially good, no matter of the acts, while the morality of the actions of its opponents are scaled on much more sensitive scale. The narratives show how the presupposed Western privilege is to be able to break the humanitarian and human rights norms it stands to defend, when fighting the political forces that threaten its interests and security.

The framing of the opponents as incarnations of the ultimate evil leads to apprehending politics in a form of a morality play, in which the good are against the evil, and in which all tools may be used in the fight to conquer the evil. This arrangement does not solely break the secular ethos and the legal norms guiding of the contemporary international relations set by the international community, but moreover fighting the evil opponents exposes how the West tends to resort to evil tools and maxims: fighting evil with evil contaminates, and more over compromises the humane principles the West has set out to protect. Therefore, the Western narratives of its enemies and enemy imageries tells not only of the identity politics of the West, the nor the intrinsic violence of the political humanitarian narrative, but they moreover show what happens when we put aside the universal principles of humanity and human rights. In their own exceptionally brute visual way, these spectacles tell of the necessity of safeguarding the principles of universality of human rights and human worth, as they show the downfall of the universal humanitarian ethics.

7 A SOCIAL MEDIA EFFECT? SYRIAN CHEMICAL ATTACK IMAGES IN MAINSTREAM MEDIA AND INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

7.1 INTRODUCTION: THE POWER OF SUFFERING IMAGES IN THE ERA OF SOCIAL MEDIA MEDIATION

The use of social media—namely amateur video and photograph—has been saluted as revolutionizing (visual) mediation of crisis and the image on contemporary war. The Arab uprisings of 2011—or “the Arab Spring”—were commonly entitled social media or *Twitter-revolutions*, in which user-generated and relatively institution free flow of (visual) material mediating unfolding events was seen distinctive. Likewise the importance of social media has been highlighted in regards to the Syrian war (2012-), which has been referred to as the most social media mediated conflict in history. A large part of what the surrounding world knows (and feels) about the Syrian conflict is through locally produced visual content mediated via/ originating in social media. Social media enabled swift, affordable for all, hard to control, mediation of namely amateur images have been widely seen as changing or even revolutionizing the documentation and mediation of violent events, crisis and wars. And thus social media has been hailed as an emblem of emancipation and democratization of global crisis communication.⁸¹⁴

The use of social media-technology has enabled populations of repressive regimes and crisis areas to voice first hand testimonials on evolving events. The novelty has provided a forum to rapidly and comprehensively mediate eyewitness accounts into the awareness of the wider spectating world. Thus it has been commonly hoped, that the relatively free information flows enabled by social media mediation could and would alter the view of the surrounding spectating world into the suffering of distant crisis areas. Social media based

814 **Joseph, Sarah:** *Social Media, Political Change, and Human Rights*. Boston College International and Comparative Law Review, 35 /1, 2012, 145-188; **Liberation Technology:** *Social Media and the struggle for Democracy*. Eds: Diamond, Larry & Plattner, Marc F, ed. John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2012; **Rane, Halim & Salem, Sumra:** *Social Media, Social Movements and the Diffusion of ideas in the Arab Uprisings*. Journal of International Communication, 18:1, 2012, 97-111; **Axford, Barrie:** *Talk About a Revolution: Social Media and the MENA Uprisings*. Globalizations, 8:5, 2011, 681-686; **Lynch, Marc, Freelon, Deen & Aday, Sean:** *Syria's Socially Mediated Civil War*. United States Institute of Peace, 2014; **Watching Syria's War. Images and Videos on the continuing conflict in Syria**. New York Times Project; **Shirky, Clay:** *The Political power of Social Media. Technology, Public sphere and Political change*. Foreign Affairs, Jan/Feb 2011, 28-29; **Khatib, Lina:** *Image Politics in Middle East: The role of Visual in Political Struggle*. I.B. Tauris, London, 2013; **Pantti, Mervi & Anden-Papadopoulos, Kari:** *Amateur Images and Global news*. Intellect, Bristol, 2011. **Harb, Zahera:** *Arab Revolutions and the Social Media Effect*. M/C Journal, vol. 14. 2/2011. **Pantti, Mervi.** *Seeing and Not Seeing the Syrian Crisis: New Visibility and the Visual Framing of the Syrian Conflict in Seven Newspapers and their Online Editions*. JOMEC Journal 4, 2013, 1-22.

(visual) meditation has thus been celebrated as an emblem of democratization of information, and hailed as a *liberation technology*.⁸¹⁵ But also the potential of social media technology's utilization for "evil" has been acknowledged. The infamous visual strategy of the *Islamic State* (ISIS)—worldwide circulation of ultra-violent imagery of beheadings and cruel mutilations, causing fear and terror as well as functioning as unusual recruitment material for the organization—significantly relies on social media. Visual mediation strategy of ISIS has significantly altered how visual political utilization graphic imagery at the age of social media is perceived.⁸¹⁶ Despite of the 'evil potential' of social media image flows and the efficient utilization of the novel medium also by terrorists groups, until recent years a widely addressed expectation (or perhaps hope) has been, that the use of social media would act as a positive dynamic force in the mediation of topical crisis, and act as a method of "breaking down the walls that close us of from one another "⁸¹⁷. A common idea of social media images as somewhat "authentic", produced by locals and amateurs, has been seen to eradicate the barriers of distance between the distant sufferers and the surrounding spectators, and to allow a more direct and compassionated relation between the distant spectators and the suffering, also on the level of international community. Also in international political settings the expectation has been that, because of the more direct method of crisis image mediation, the surrounding world as a whole would take action at face of grievances of others in more powerful manners.⁸¹⁸ I see the contemporarily articulated belief in the potency of social media as contemporary articulation of the age old, technology driven belief on the compassionate and revelatory political power of images of suffering. This "causality optimism" was also discussed in chapter 2.

Because of extensive use of amateur images disseminated via social media the Syrian war has been recurrently referred to as a *war documented like no other*. An equivalent number of digital, user-generated images has hardly been mediated from any previous war. As the amount of atrocious images of the Syrian war was already immense, in the wee hours of the 21st of August 2013 the war took an even more dramatic turn. In a matter of hours a massive amount of graphic eyewitness images from the *Ghouta* suburb of Damascus, describing what appeared to be a chemical weapons attack, flooded the digital sphere. The information of the alleged gas strikes—killing hundreds of civilians—first surfaced via local social media accounts, and

815 **Liberation Technology**, 2012; **Joseph**, 2012; **Rane&Sumra**, 2012.

816 **Hassan, Hassan& Weiss, Michael**: *ISIS. Inside the army of Terror*. Regan Arts, New York, 2015.

817 French foreign Minister *Bernard Kouchner* in his speech May 2010, as cited in **Calingaert, Daniel** : *Challenges for international Policy*, in **Liberation Technology**, 2012, (157- 171), 157.

818 **Joseph**, 2012; **Liberation Technology**, 2012; **Syria's Socially Mediated Civil War**, 2014.; **Watching Syria's War. Images and Videos on the continuing conflict in Syria**. New York Times Project, **Pantti & Anden-Papadopoulos**: 2011, 13; **Watching Syria's War. Images and Videos on the continuing conflict in Syria**. New York Times Project.

namely through visual accounts of the events. In just a few hours, over a thousand visual accounts describing the event were found online.⁸¹⁹ The horrific images of dead and suffering Syrians were swiftly seen and acknowledged throughout the spectating world. The atrocious images were highly visible in the Western mainstream media, and extensively influenced the construction of the Western perception of the situation and the events of the night in Syria.⁸²⁰ These images also forcefully entered the Western political debate, in which they were habitually seen and framed as proof of the guilt of the al-Assad regime for the chemical assault and furthermore deployed as legitimation for the planned Western military operation against the Assad regime.

The social media images of the Ghouta chemical attack and its heartwrenching human toll, the framings and significations of the images in mainstream media and their uses in international politics comprise a distinct and a revelatory act at the visual humanitarian tragedy theater. This act sheds light on the status, utilization, functions and political framings of images of suffering in a contemporary setting. The storyline involves all of the main characters of the humanitarian theatrical setting: the humane, good and moral force (the West), the Evil inhuman (Syrian regime) and the sufferers, the objects of the humanitarian/evil actions, mostly pictured as corporal and pictured as passive “subhumans”.

This chapter takes up the case of the images of Syrian chemical attack, in order to examine the contemporarily articulated *social media effect*. First I shall shed light on the historical formation of the notions on the revelatory images of suffering and international political reactions into the suffering of crisis areas, and then place the recently articulated social media effect into a historical context. In the contemporary digitalized world, images swiftly flow from one context to another, gathering new uses, meanings and significations along the way. Thus, I will also pay attention to *image flows* at the era of social media: the meanings the images gathered while flowing from the local social media level into the global level. I analyze the signification processes of the social media originating images within (international level) mainstream media’s journalistic remediation. I investigate how the images were presented within the (Western) mainstream media and analyze how they were named and framed in their new contexts. I shall also trace how some images and stories became to signify and define the situation in Syria for the Western spectators. In addition—due to the distinctive difference on the Russian and Western attitudes and foreign political standing on the Syrian

819 **Syria Conflict: Chemical Weapons Blamed as Hundreds Reported Killed.** The Guardian, 22.8.2013; **Government Assessment of the Syrian Government’s Use of Chemical Weapons on August 21, 2013.** The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 30.08.2013.

820 In this chapter I mostly concentrate on the Western mainstream media: news outlets of well-known news corporations, much read and referred to in the Western cultural and political sphere. But in addition to these, and for the sake of comparison in the contested regard towards the Syrian war between the west and Russia, I will also make a brief inquiry to the use of the social media images produced of the gas strike in the predominant Russian media channels; *Ria Novosti*, *Itar-Tass* and *Interfax*.

situation—I have also made a comparative inquiry to the Russian mainstream media, and the utilization and framing of the Ghouta attack images gathered in the Russian mainstream media. Secondly, I observe how the images telling of the suffering of the Syrian people devolved into the international political debate on Syria. I examine how the images were referred to and used in political argumentation and rhetoric rationalizing and legitimating the Western response to the situation—namely the planned targeted military operation against the Syrian leader al-Assad. In the light of the Syrian case, I shall pay attention to the novelties that the use of amateur images and visual social media mediation potentially have on the conventional practices of representing distant suffering and investigate the contemporary *causality claim*. At the end of the chapter I shall draw conclusions on whether the use of social media and amateur images contemporarily possess an amplified power in transforming the ways in which the spectating world sees and reacts to the suffering of distant others.

7.2 THE SOCIAL MEDIA EFFECT AND FLOWING IMAGES

As was argued in the chapter 2, a notion that seeing more crisis imagery, or encountering the pain of others more directly via visual images, would allow us to care more, and thus lead to amplified reactions towards the suffering of others, has long roots in history. At least since the Enlightenment era onwards, it has been commonly argued that once the distant spectators have an ability to see what catastrophes and distant wars do to human beings, and to witness the horrors and human right violations in a visual form, the surrounding world—or humanity itself—would unite, realize its shared fate and precariousness, and moreover work to put an end to the atrocities. There is a steep belief that the negative epiphany of apprehension of a common humanity is for a large part based on encountering visual images showing the pain of another human.⁸²¹ Historically it seems that the mediation of visual images of pain has undeniably been central in the formation and development of the human rights and humanitarianism discourse. Probably most often in this context the example constituted by the uses and effects of the Holocaust images is referred to. The sentiments that these influential images aroused, as well as implications they have had for the institutionalization of human rights paradigms, vividly demonstrate the central standing of atrocity images in the formation of our understanding of humanity and the need to protect it.⁸²² Thus, perhaps quite paradoxically, horrific images revealing the suffering of others have been widely seen as

⁸²¹ See Chapter 2, and for example **Sliwinski**, 2011, 81.

⁸²² See chapter 2; **Sliwinski**, 2011; **Zelizer**, 1998; **Linfield**, 2012; **Boltanski**, 1999; *Picturing atrocity*, 2012.; **Halttunen**, 1995; **Burke**, 1757; **Smith**, 1759.

building blocks of (global) compassion, institutionalization of the concepts of protection of humanity and perhaps even a better world.⁸²³

This notion has been again brought to the contemporary setting due to the novel means of image mediation enabled by use of swift social media technology. I argue that the historically formed causal idea on the relations of seeing more, caring more and reacting more forcefully, is also at the core of the contemporary hope invested on the social media in altering our view—and perhaps even also our response—towards the suffering of others.

7.2.1 THE SOCIAL MEDIA EFFECT OF SUFFERING IMAGES

As was discussed in the chapter 2., the close ties between visually mediated pain, humanitarian collective responses to distant suffering and novelties of mediation resources come very clear in the 1900th century milieu. Up-to-date mediation means were effectively utilized in order to pass the horror story of the Nazi extermination camps to the contemporary spectating audiences. The sweeping display of Holocaust images through renewed photojournalism, newspapers, picture magazines, books and film had an immense effect on the view of the spectating Western audiences on the Nazi regime, but moreover on the apprehension of the fragility of life and the need for its protection. The images of the unimaginable destruction of the Holocaust functioned as proof of the downfall of humanity, and thus had an immense effect on construction of the human rights discourse of the 20th century.⁸²⁴

Later on, in the 1970s the *Vietnam War syndrome*—the televised Vietnam War images revealing the suffering of Vietnamese people and the brutal conduct of Western warfare—has been claimed to have a massive influence on the Western anti-war sentiments in the 1970s. The commonly reiterated notion has been that the visual evidence of human suffering midst the war, mediated through television, not only mobilized disapproving public sentiments towards the war, but also influenced the political process of US, and ultimately lead to the US withdrawal from the war.⁸²⁵ This belief of the efficiency and influence of televised war images on foreign policy has been widely debated both in research and in public discourse. Nevertheless, for example *Daniel Hallin* as well as *Chomsky* and *Hermann* have concluded, that the effect of the images mediated through a novel mediation platform has been highly exaggerated, or even false. Researchers have pointed out, that the presentation of the images of war in US media actually followed an established elite view of the war, rather than led it. This is to say, that the images surfaced in the media because the national elite was already war weary and disappointed of the war, or even opposed to the continuation of it.

⁸²³ See Chapters 2.2.5 & 2.4.4; **Sliwinski**, 2011, 4-5.; and for example, **Hallin**, 1989 (1986); **Picturing atrocity**, 2012, 12-13 ; **Cottle**, 2009, 128-131.

⁸²⁴ **Zelizer**: 1998; **Sliwinski**: 2011, 83-110; **Arendt**, 1949; **Arendt** 2004 (1951); **Arendt, Hannah**: *An image of Hell*. In *Essays of Understanding 1939-1954*, 1994. See also Chapter 2.3.1.

⁸²⁵ See chapter, 2. 3.4. and for example: **Hallin**, 1989 (1986); **Griffiths, Philip, J**: *Vietnam Inc*. Phaidon Press, New York. 2005, (1971).

Thus, Hallin argues that the presentation of the images and visual mediation techniques did not change the prevalent public (or elite) sentiments towards the war, but actually trailed them.⁸²⁶ Nevertheless, the Vietnam War syndrome and the idea of the potency of suffering images in effecting political processes seems to be cemented in the public consciousness as well as the mindset of governmental and military actors. And thus the ‘Vietnam lessons’ have been noted to create a persistent influence on how the presentation images of Western war and Western war inflicted suffering in the media are nowadays even more tightly controlled.⁸²⁷

Later, from the early 1990’s onwards, the *CNN effect* has been extensively discussed, both in public as well as academic discourse. The CNN effect paradigm that emerged in the post-Cold War era was inspired by the novel news mediation by resources of satellite technology and got fueled by the news reporting of the Persian Gulf War. The CNN, a 1980 founded independent US news corporation, was the first news agency that strongly relied on live reportage straight from global crisis areas. CNN was thus often hailed as an emblem of change in the relations of crisis reporting and international politics. The CNN effect thesis suggests that witnessing foreign conflicts by means of real time, live reportage from the crisis areas would powerfully affect public opinion, create sentimental outrage in the distant spectators and bolster public condemnation of atrocities. The often reiterated idea of the CNN effect theory is that (global) international televised news coverage from crisis zones—and especially crude images of war inflicted suffering—would not only influence public opinion, but pressure political leaders to react more promptly and forcefully to war crimes, atrocities and human rights violations, often by (military) interventionist means.⁸²⁸ Nevertheless, many scholars have seen the CNN effect in more moderate or even critical terms, and viewed media’s role in foreign relations more as a strategic enabler of political involvement and intervention. For example *Pierce Robinson* argues, that media reportage of humanitarian suffering can be rather seen as an enabler of interventionist policy—or even a political tool, a powerful source of legitimation—rather than a force pressuring and forcing policy makers to act against their will or interests. Many other researchers on the issue more or less agree with this view.⁸²⁹ Despite of this, the “CNN myth” still habitually surfaces in public notions, and the causal claim on the power of images at its core seems to live on, although it has been rather effectively burst in research.⁸³⁰

826 **Hallin**, 1986; **Chomsky & Herman** 2002 (1988).

827 **Cottle**, 2009, 128. See also for example chapters 4 & 5 of this work.

828 **Robinson**, 2002; **Giboa**, 2005, 27-44.

829 **Robinson**, 2002; **Livingston, Steven**: *Beyond the “CNN effect”: the media-foreign policy dynamic*. In *Politics and the Press: the news media and their influences*, ed. Norris, Pippa , Lynne Rienner, Boulder, 1997,291-318; **Belknap, Margaret**: The CNN effect: Strategic enabler or operational risk? *Parameters*, 32/2002, 100-114; **Strobel, Warren, P**: *Late Breaking foreign policy: the news media’s influence on peace operations*, United states institute for peace, Washington, 1997 ; **Neuman**, 1996.

830 See chapter 2.4.4 for more on the CNN effect.

More lately, new media's and social media's effect on the way in which information is mediated in and from conflict zones has been widely discussed. *Philip Seib* describes the contemporary effect of new media and social media on the transformation of mediation of information (of international conflicts) as the *Al Jazeera effect*. He claims that the traditional ways of shaping global politics have been superseded by the influence of new media: satellite technology, Internet, the blogosphere and "other high-tech tools". Despite of the phrase *Al-Jazeera effect*, the claim is not just about *Al-Jazeera*—the Qatar based broadcasting company—per se, but *Seib* rather describes how new media and social media have the power to create new relationships and structures both in local level politics and identity formation, as well as to influence international politics. *Al-Jazeera* here, functions as a metaphor for a wider paradigm of new media's influence on global affairs. The claim is that the multifarious novelties within the communications systems and media would forcefully challenge the hegemony of the prominent Western media houses in global communication, and bring out not only a more multivoiced global media but have an effect on global politics, create challenges for those who govern and opportunities for those who want to voice their concerns (especially populations of non-democratic, repressive regimes). As *Seib* phrases it, the media is no longer just the media, but has larger popular base than ever before, and as a result, has unprecedented impact on international politics. He moreover adds that these potentialities may be used both as tools for conflict as well as instruments for peace.⁸³¹

Even more enthusiastically and optimistically the revolutionizing political force of new media and social media has been labelled as a technology that has a vast potency of not only mobilizing the citizens of authoritarian regimes but also as liberating them from under the yoke of ruling undemocratic regimes. For example in the book *Liberation Technology* the efficiency of social media in the struggle for democracy and freedom of expression is exposed from a multitude of perspectives. And the potency of social media (Flickr, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter etc.) particularly for the inhabitants of politically "repressive regimes" and crisis zones of the (non-Western world) is in the book presented as a positive passage to political mobilization, a revolutionary route of mediating grievances world wide out of the reach of authoritarian control—and ultimately a medium of "liberation".⁸³² The logic of (political) communication especially in authoritarian states has undeniably

831 **Seib, Philip:** *The Al Jazeera Effect: How the New Global Media Are Reshaping World Politics*, Potomac Books, Washington DC, 2008. The discussion (in the West) on the *Al Jazeera effect* has arguably been also due to the geographical, cultural and political standing of the now leading global news corporation, than solely conditional of a novel technical application in mediating news. *Al Jazeera* as a broadcaster located in the global south, and mediating news from a global south/Muslim perspective. Already this can be seen as a significant change in the mediation of information previously dominated by Western based media companies. See also: **Seib, Philip:** *Real-time diplomacy: Politics and power in the Social media era*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2012 (also includes a More cynical note on how policy makers (of repressive regimes) might make use of social media to advance their political interests).

832 *Liberation Technology*, 2012.

been challenged by the new mediation means offered by the new media and social media techniques. The restricted and state owned news agencies of authoritarian states do not anymore hold the local monopoly of information mediation. The revolutionizing force of social media most often refers to information mediation as a means of political mobilization on the local level. The local effect of social media accounts surfaced into an intensified discussion especially at the time of the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings. Today citizens of crisis zones are not only perceived as receivers of filtered information, but are seen to act as active producers and mediators of even critical anti-regime information, in a relatively institution free mediation environment.⁸³³

This line of optimistic thinking is quite often detectable in Western public discussion on the potency of the new media in revolutionizing the mediation of information, and the paradigm of social media revolution is also from time to time heaved up in Western political discussion on the upheavals of global crisis zones. Habitually (Western) policy makers have been saluting the novel ways of mediation (from crisis zones) as emblems of democracy, also effecting foreign policy and enforcing more humanitarian world politics. In her speech 2010 the US Secretary of State *Hillary Clinton* hailed the spread of “information networks” (meaning the use of Internet and social media) as the “new nervous system for our planet”. In her speech she more over took up the foreign political potency of the new mediation technologies—feature familiar from the Vietnam War syndrome and the CNN effect discussions—as she highlighted the importance of social media in “making the governments more accountable”. Similarly, the same year French foreign Minister *Bernard Kouchner* hailed the promise of new communications technology as “the most fantastic means of breaking down the walls that close us of from one another”. Kouchner’s (a well-known humanitarian and a founding member of the Doctors Without Borders organization⁸³⁴) reference to breaking down of the barriers dividing humans globally, can be read as a strong appeal, pointing to bridging the global empathy gap between the sufferers of this world, and the ones spectating the suffering of the global less fortunate. The relations of the populations of the non-Western repressive regimes and their undemocratic leaders is sometimes, for example in the book *Liberation Technology*, in a quite simplifying way presented in a form, in which the repressive and undemocratic regimes strive to control the free mediation of information, as the activist using social media are presented as fighting for democracy, freedom of expression and the freedom of the internet. Concurrently, *Liberation Technology* tends to celebrate the role of the Western democratic states in this process quite unambiguously as the global guardians of Internet freedom and as political enablers liberating

⁸³³ See for instance: **Joseph**, 2012; **Harb**, 2011.

⁸³⁴ See Chapter 2.

technological novelties within these “repressive regimes”, the political opponents of the Western regimes, such as China, Iran—and Syria.⁸³⁵

This optimistic postulation of the revolutionizing ability of social media (crisis) mediation is not only fostered within (Western) academic, public or political discussions highlighting the positive Western influence on global freedom of expression. It is also detectable at the local, grass roots level at the crisis zones, among the net activists and opposing actors of topical conflicts. The use of social media in mediating war imagery is a strategic asset for the local populations/rebel groups in the course of contemporary warfare, utilized not only locally, but employed in multifarious ways in the fight over the hearts and minds of the surrounding world. The effective dissemination and strategic use of terrifying images by the ISIS serves as a poignant example of this phenomenon.⁸³⁶ The motive of local actors of crisis zones to upload crude images of war on social media, has been to rapidly mediate information, to inform the wider surrounding world of the immediate events in conflict areas, and thus also to influence public notions, political conceptions, and perhaps even foreign political decision making regarding these areas. This has also been the case with disseminating crude social media imagery of human suffering from the topical war wrenched areas, such as Syria where external journalists are scarce. International media houses have become to more and more rely on local social media sources as providers of (visual) material and mediators of information. Consequently the social media information mediation of topical crisis areas has become more and more organized and systematic, and external players have also often funded dissemination of information.⁸³⁷

Local producers of social media content rely on the messages they generate to have influence the battle they fight—and moreover effect the overall notions the wider spectating world have of their fight. In line with this notion, *Jamal Flitani*—Syrian social media rebel activist who posted Ghouta gas attack images into the social media—told an Associated Press (AP) journalist that he became aware of the power of his posts, when he saw his images used by international news corporations, and moreover cited by the intelligence service of the United States as a proof of the tragic events of 21st of August taking place. Later Flitani has been running an opposition media center in Douma, Syria.⁸³⁸ This further implies that there exists, also among the information producers of the local level, an expectation that revelatory war images not only mediate information from crisis zones, but have power

835 See for instance: **Liberation Technology**, 2012, 157-171.

836 *On social media, ISIS uses modern cultural images to spread anti-modern values*. September 24, 2015, Brookings.

837 *Syria's Civil War plays out on Social Media*. The Huffington Post ,19.10.2013; **Syria's Socially Mediated Civil War**. Lynch, Marc, Freelon, Deen& Aday, Sean. Peaceworks, United States Institute for Peace, 2014; *Syria Activists record all they can for history's sake*. October, 24.2012, Los Angeles Times.

838 *Syria's Civil War plays out on Social Media*. 19. October, 2013, The Huffington Post.

to influence external action and foreign political decisions in reference to topical crisis.

All in all, the recent discussion on the dynamic power and effects of the social media enabled mediation clearly is a topical manifestation of a historically thriving way of thinking on the novel mediation technologies and the emotional power of images in international political settings; a successor of the former discussions of the Vietnam War Syndrome and the CNN effect.

7.2.2 THE MORE WE SEE THE MORE WE CARE? TECHNOLOGY DRIVEN CAUSALITY OPTIMISM

An overview of the recent discussions dealing with the novel fortified effectiveness of crisis imagery on public sentiments and (Western) foreign policy, shows that there are two interrelated grounding presumptions embedded in the discourses. First of all, profound technology optimism seems to be grounded in the (Western) thinking on the power of new technology and namely the (foreign political) power of the novel ways of visual mediation. Mediation of distant crisis (visually) and reacting to them has historically evolved hand in hand not only with the predominant mindset, political preconditions, but particularly with technological development. *Johanna Neuman* argues that this optimism seems to be reasserted time and time again in the course of technical evolvement in (visual) mediation. In her book *Lights, Camera, War: Is Media Technology Driving International Politics?* she places the CNN-effect into a broad historical context of technical communication innovations, which have altered the way in which knowledge of the distant suffering has been mediated from crisis zones for the awareness of wider audiences. She states that each technological innovation has in its time raised hopes that it could strip power from the elites, bestow it to the public, expand democracy and eventually make the world a more just place. May it be the “Gutenberg revolution”, the invention of photography and its effect on emotions towards distant others, invention of film creating a global village or the more recent inventions of TV and satellite technology, contemporaries seem to have recurrently firmly believed that technological novelties in the field of visual mediation would have the power to change the relations between the ruled and the rulers, as well as the safe spectators and the distant sufferers.⁸³⁹ This thinking is clearly detectable also in contemporary discourses on the Al-Jazeera effect, social media “Liberation technologies” and the overall optimism on the effect of social media images on bridging the empathy gap between the sufferers and the spectators.

In addition to the technology-optimism, there are certain additional significant similarities in the Vietnam War Syndrome, the CNN-Effect, as well as the overall topical reformatory optimism of visual social media

839 *Neuman*, 1996.

mediation in restoring compassionate relations and political change. In the discussions on the power of mediated visual images on policy, especially in the more recent 20th and 21st century settings, a highly causal way of thinking thrives. Following this causal logic, it has been repeatedly argued that revelatory media representations of human suffering—and especially crisis images—would lead to heightened sense of (global) obligation towards the suffering of others. This has been, especially in the more contemporary settings, seen to lead to the political process of foreign (humanitarian) intervention. The effect has been usually understood to manifest itself in a three-stage process. Roughly, in the first stage, encountering images of distant suffering via a novel mediation technique, has been seen to efficiently, promptly and directly hoist the suffering of others into the attention of wide spectating (Western) audiences. Secondly, new mediation techniques are habitually thought of as enabling a more empathetic relation and thus public reaction to the suffering of others, and thus seen as creating an emotional public spectacle, and ultimately a cry for action. In the third stage, the emotional public outcry (of the citizens of Western democratic regimes) is then seen to influence, press, or even force the (Western) policy makers to more forcefully react to the situations causing human suffering. In the recent decades—in the post-Cold War era, dominated by Western humanitarian world politics—most often the instances referred to as “forceful reactions”, have been (Western) humanitarian military interventions into mostly non-Western conflict areas.⁸⁴⁰

Thus there is a widely reiterated notion on the relation between the nature and amount of images and reactions, added with the belief that a novel medium creates a different relationship between the sufferers and the spectators, which then furthermore produces political action. This produces a technology driven causal claim. The technology optimism on visual crisis mediation ties up with the age-old idea ‘If only people would know, they would act’.⁸⁴¹ I argue that this decades old belief is topically renewed in the discussion on effect of social media: today an effect, much parallel to the Vietnam War syndrome and the CNN-effect, is widely articulated. This debate can be located to exist in academic discussion and among media practitioners, as well as among local populations of crisis areas and parties of current military conflicts utilizing social media. Moreover it is detectable among (Western) foreign policy makers. I call this recent discourse the *social media effect*, and place it in the continuum of a historically formed way of thinking and perceiving the altering (and liberating) effect of crisis and war images on global imagination, empathy and international politics. The social media effect is an up-to-date variation of a historically prevalent optimistic and causal discourse accounting the influence of technology in mediating image of suffering and global imagination.

⁸⁴⁰ Gilboa, 2005.

⁸⁴¹ Cohen, 2001, 185.

7.2.3 IMAGE FLOWS IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA ERA

The Syrian war has been titled history's most socially mediated war, especially in terms of (graphic) imagery. But as said, August 21st 2013, the visual mediation of the Syrian war took a dramatic turn. At about 2.30 in the morning, images depicting what seemed to be a chemical weapons attack—killing hundreds, mostly civilians—in the Ghouta area, suburbs of Damascus started to flow into social media. Chaotic videos and images of people convulsing, gasping for breath and foaming from the mouth, as well as images of rows of dead civilians—among which a lot of small children—first surfaced via social media accounts of local civilians, medical and humanitarian workers and opposition sources. In just a few hours there were thousands of graphic and horrific visual accounts of the event to be found online.⁸⁴² (See illustration 7.1)

The social media originating images and videos were habitually shaky, hasty and shot in the middle of the disarray of the evolving events. The images were usually added meaning with information on the place, time, and account of the events. As the attack took place in a mostly rebel held territory⁸⁴³, every so often the texts accompanying the images also pointed to the responsibility of the President *al-Assad's* regime for the attacks. In their primary use the intent of the local social media accounts was most commonly to document the unfolding events. They were targeted to inform the local sphere of the events. But the intent of their mediation also expands from this local affect. The intent was also to inform the wider surrounding world of the atrocity. The opposition activists posting the videos and images online, most certainly hoped—in line with the predominant thinking of the effects of images of suffering—that the crude images would rouse international outrage, work to delegitimize the Syrian regime in the eyes of the surrounding world, as well as to make the surrounding world bear witness to the horrific events.⁸⁴⁴

And, as the Western spectators woke up to the morning of 21st of August 2013 and opened their web browsers or newspapers, they encountered a horrific view from Syria. But what is remarkable and important to bear in mind here is that although the attack was at first reported, documented and mediated through the social media accounts and reports of the locals, the majority of the more distant spectating world—in this study namely the Western as well as the Russian public—first encountered the news of the attack and the images of the horrific events through more conventional news media, e.g. mainstream media; as news items produced and reframed by the

842 *Syria Conflict: Chemical Weapons Blamed, as Hundreds Reported Killed*. The Guardian, 22.08.2013; *Syria crisis: Rebels claim hundreds killed in government chemical weapons attack - Wednesday 21 August*. The Guardian, 21.08.2013; *Government Assessment of the Syrian Government's use of Chemical Weapons August 21, 2013*. The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 30.08.2013.

843 At the time Ghouta was predominantly in the control of anti-regime rebels, namely groups that identified themselves as belonging to the *Free Syrian Army*.

844 *Syria's socially mediated civil war*, 2014, 8-10

prominent (local) news corporations. Thus, the faces and bodies of the victims were often encountered through images shot by locals, but nevertheless predominantly remediated for the view of the more distant spectators by habitual (local/global) news agencies, and mainstream medias broadcasting. And thus, the social media originating imagery became an important source of visual raw material for the more conventional mainstream media in reporting the events worldwide.⁸⁴⁵

Thus, while social media mediation is today often labeled as a powerful means of (globally) distributing images and messages of war, when assessing the force and the namely the messages of social media images, it must be regarded, that sporadic local accounts still nevertheless do not have the power to mediate consistent crisis information on a wider—let alone global—scale. Today the utilization of social media images of crisis situations is an increasingly important news production tool for the more conventional mainstream media—and likewise the mainstream media is an important force multiplier and circulation enhancer for the local producers of crisis social media content. As majority of the wider, international audience do not actively follow Syrian civilian or rebel social media sources, but rather lean to geographically, culturally and also politically positioned mainstream news producers. Thus, permeating the mainstream media's news agenda and inclusion into their broadcasting is an important support factor for locally produced (visual) social media content, which allows social media activist's messages to spread.⁸⁴⁶ And circulate these images did. They were widely and extensively used by the prominent Western news outlets (along with content produced by big and influential media houses and news corporations them selves), gathered into vast image galleries, accompanied by cautions of graphic, potentially disturbing images.⁸⁴⁷

Thus, as social media techniques enable information mediation by amateurs on a local level, it moreover enables the utilization of the locally produced (visual) material on a more global level. The heightened use of locally produced, social media originating material by the more conventional mainstream news producers is the reality of crisis news production today.

845 The shares, re-shares and circulation of the images in the wider social media milieu also have an impact on how the conceptions and framings of the images are constructed. But I here discount from my analysis the circulation of the images by individual (Western) social media users and concentrate on the use of the images in more conventional mass media channels.

846 See for instance: *Syria's Socially Mediated Civil War*, 2014, 7-12.

847 See collections of images (social media originating as well as images of the events produced by prominent news corporations them selves) used in the Western media: ***Syria: Slaughter of the innocents as children among over 1,000 civilians gassed to death***. The Mirror, 22.08.2013; ***Syria's Darkest Day? Opposition Blames Assad as up to 1300 killed in "poison gas attacks"***, The Independent, 22.8.2013; ***Syrian Rebels report Chemical attack***, The New York Times, 21.08.2013; ***Video Shows Victims of Suspected Syrian Chemical Attack***, The Lede Blog, New York Times, 21.08.2013; ***Syria: Footage shows horrific aftermath of alleged gas attacks- video***. The Guardian, 21.08.2013; ***First on CNN: Videos show glimpse into evidence for Syria intervention***, CNN, 08.09.2013; ***In Shock, Survivor of Attack Says, 'I'm Alive'***, New York Times Project, Watching Syria's War; ***Syrian Punaiset Viivat***. Helsingin Sanomat, 22.08.2013; ***Syria's darkest hour: Hundreds of children's bodies piled high after nerve gas attack near Damascus leaves up to 1,300 dead***, The Daily Mail, 22.08.2013.

The more conventional media frequently relies on locally produced footage of immediate events, especially in reporting and picturing events rapidly evolving in turmoil crisis areas, where international journalists are often scarce. This has been the case namely in the war wrenched Syria, a country that was ranked “the most dangerous place in the world for journalist” by the *Committee to protect Journalists* in 2013.⁸⁴⁸ The relationship of local social media content producers (hoping for their messages to spread widely) and mainstream media news content producers is a symbiotic one: For the messages of social media to spread expansively and gain global attention they need to be taken up and harnessed by the more conventional, influential (global and local) news outlets, and for the mainstream news production of foreign event to be efficient, cutting edge and up-to-date, the media houses need to keep up with the local social media sources of crisis areas and war zones.

As (global) mainstream media has become to more heavily rely on locally produced (visual) material, it has been commonly stated among (Western) journalists and media researchers, that the use of amateur images and local material provide a novel and more intimate reporting of crisis, producing amplified feelings and reactions towards distant suffering. Likewise, in popular conceptions, amateur images are often understood as somewhat objective accounts and entitled as “authentic”, and even perceived as conveying the events “as they really were” at the spot of events. Whereas, on the other hand, it has been warned, that the reliance on locally produced material may produce a risk of recirculating potentially partial, misleading and perhaps politically motivated narratives originating from local accounts. Thus, researchers have cautioned, that use of social media material might create “a dangerous illusion of unmediated information flows”.⁸⁴⁹ To prevent biased or even false locally produced material to flow worldwide, journalists and news corporations have resorted to sophisticated protocols to verify particular videos and images. Mass media agencies use verification services such as the *Storyful*⁸⁵⁰ to check the authenticity of the content. But deeper structural bias perhaps embedded in the messages and images may nevertheless be hard to identify by such measures. But consequently, quite paradoxically, in part the use of verification services has also led to a situation in which some content producers familiar to journalists have been established as trustworthy, and thus the number of material producers has narrowed down. It is warned that a selective reliance on these particular producers is likely to grow in the future.⁸⁵¹ Moreover, as *Mervi Pantti* has

848 *Syria's Civil War Plays out on Social Media*. October 19, 2013, The Huffington Post; *For News From Syrian Battleground, a Reliance on Social Media*. 30, August, 2013, the New York Times; *Pantti & Anden-Papadopoulos*, 2011, 10-15; *Committee to Protect Journalists: Syria, The most Dangerous Place for Journalist*.

849 *Syria's Socially Mediated Civil War*, 2014, 7-12. *Pantti & Anden-Papadopoulos*: 2011, 13; *Cottle*, 2009.

850 see: *Storyful- The world's first Social News Agency*: <http://storyful.com/>

851 *Syria's Socially Mediated Civil War*, 2014; *David Campbell: Thinking Images: Syria, social media and photojournalism*. 26.4.2011.

shown in relation to the Western media's (visual) mediation of the Syrian war (2012/early 2013 before the chemical attack) majority of the images (more than 80% of the imagery with source provided) used to picture the Syrian crisis was actually produced by the big Western news agencies (AP, AFP and Reuters).⁸⁵²

Nevertheless, the utilization of visual social media footage is contemporarily prevalent in mass media broadcasting of topical crisis. Mainstream media recirculates the social media content—especially war images—in their own broadcasting, and sometimes even present the locally produced images as their own material.⁸⁵³ This reliance of mass media on local sources most certainly has an effect on how, and through what kind of footage, the global crisis of today are mediated for the sight of the wider spectating world. But in practice, I argue, the power of culturally, geographically and politically segmented mainstream news media as the primary new producer (for large masses) still for a large part remains. Moreover, the more conventional mainstream media still functions as a *gatekeeper* for the social media information to spread. For local events and crisis to register as newsworthy and to gain global importance and concern, the amateur accounts need to be transformed into global media events, in the remediation processes of the more conventional mainstream media. Furthermore, the mass media filters and selects certain “newsworthy” events and suitable images to be used in its own journalistic remediation, out of the massive body of socially mediated raw material. The deployment of the selected messages by mainstream media enables the flow of sporadic social media content worldwide, and renders the social media images the attention of the wider audiences. However, the preconditions of remediation also narrow and constrict as well as culturally and politically contextualize and (re)frame the social media content, its messages and signification.⁸⁵⁴ As real life events and politics create texts and images, these are—even still at the age of the social media—transformed into widespread news stories in the processes of news production, shaped by the dominant news agendas and selection practices of prominent mainstream media outlets. Furthermore, news production and news media itself can be perceived as a part of the *ideological machinery of a given cultural and political sphere*, as has been discussed in chapters 2, 3 and 6.⁸⁵⁵

Furthermore, visual images create a special material, extremely liable for cultural and political contextual framings and re-framings. As *Roland Barthes*, *Susan Sontag* and *Judith Butler* suggest, images show, but cannot

⁸⁵² **Pantti**, 2013, 9.

⁸⁵³ **Campbell, David**: *Thinking Images v.15: Syria, Social Media and photojournalism*. Visual storytelling, Creative practise and criticism -blog. April 26.2011 ; **Pantti**, 2013

⁸⁵⁴ **Cottle, Simon**: *Global Crisis Reporting: Journalism in Global Age*. McGraw Hill, Open University Press, 2009; **Pantti & Anden-Papadopoulos**: 2011, 13. ; **Syria's Socially Mediated Civil War**, 2014, 7-11. ; **Pantti**, 2013

⁸⁵⁵ See for example: **Hall, Stuart**: *A world at one with itself*. In *The manufacture of News. A Reader*. Cohen, Stanley & Young, Jock (eds.), Sage, Beverly Hills, 1973; Chomsky& Hermann, 1988. **Cottle**, 2009, 111-114; **Cottle**, 2006, 75-99

articulate. Even the most atrocious and shocking of images are, according to this view, mute. And thus, contemporarily, at the age of even more frantic global mediation, the meanings and messages of images are produced in their political and cultural environments, according to the contextual and discursive settings, through various uses, naming, framing and circulation.⁸⁵⁶ Captions, positioning, uses of the same image in different settings and circulation—*flows of images*—produce new meanings and create messages perhaps greatly differing from the “original” function of the image. Circulation and presentation, positioning and selection of the images displayed in the mainstream media’s journalistic remediation create further messages for the images.

Therefore I claim that social media images, in the contemporary situation still, to a large extent, cannot escape the framings and meaning production mechanisms of geographically, culturally and politically positioned—sometimes even biased—more conventional mainstream media. Thus, the meanings of these images are created in the realm of political, where silent images of suffering and atrocity constantly flow gathering different meanings and messages in uses and reuses. Especially images of suffering and atrocity—as an influential and highly emotional image genre—essentially address their viewers according to historically, politically and culturally constructed conventions. Cultural, customary conventions in picturing atrocity, well-known iconic images and historical references further construct the meanings and readings of the images.⁸⁵⁷ But as today amateur produced social media images of crisis are increasingly important material through which also the spectators of (Western) mainstream media confront distant suffering, the ways in which the mainstream media deploys, utilizes, frames and signifies the material is of utter most importance when critically assessing the power and uses of social media images and their (international political) framings in the contemporary setting. Thus, what I set to analyze in the subsequent pages of this chapter is the *remediation* and *flows* of the social media originating images, and thus aim to find out how Western (as well as Russian) spectators confronted the Ghouta images through mainstream medias remediation. The social media originating images of the Ghouta chemical weapons attack, their uses in the (Western) mainstream media and international politics offers a case, through which both the technology optimism idea, as well as the causality claim produced by the recent discourse on the political effectiveness and functions of crisis and suffering images may be scrutinized in a contemporary setting.

⁸⁵⁶ Sontag, 2003; Butler, 2009, 63-100; Barthes, 2000 (1957), 109- 159. See also chapter 2.

⁸⁵⁷ On Iconic images and historical references see: Campbell, 2002B, 146-150, 159-160; Sliwinski: 2011, 111-138; Zelizer: 1998, 202- 239. See also Chapters 2.3.2 & 2.4.4.



Chapter 7. Illustration 7.1.

7.3 SOCIAL MEDIA IMAGES IN MAINSTREAM MEDIA: CONTEXTUAL MEANING PRODUCTION

This chapter monitors the uses of the images of the Syrian gas attack within well-known and influential Western mainstream media outlets.⁸⁵⁸ Through the analysis on the utilizations and framing of the images in the more conventional media, I aim to shed light on the processes of meaning creation of citizen created images and to thus deconstruct and understand the current flows of social media images in wider (political) setting.

The surrounding world is strongly divided in its posture, gaze and understanding on the Syrian war. Reclining to what was previously stated on the images flows and contextual meaning production, same images and events tend to be framed, contextualized and thus appear very differently when presented to distinct recipient audiences. That is, mute images gather different meanings and framings in different political and cultural settings, also at the social media era. Therefore, in addition to the inquiry to the uses of these images in Western media, I shall also make a brief and limited inquest into Russian media and the uses and framings the gas strike images gathered there. This is done in order to compare the Western mainstream media's use of the Syria gas strike images with that of the Russian media, and thus the aim is at detecting the cultural/political differences in the display of the same visualized event in different settings.

After the August 2013 chemical attack also social media outputs of the Syrian regime—especially the Instagram account of the president Bashar al-Assad—were extensively addressed and referred to in the Western news media. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning creation procedure and discursive flows of contemporary social media images I shall also analyze the meanings and significations the Syrian regimes social media accounts gathered in Western media.

7.3.1 IMAGES OF THE GHOUTA CHEMICAL ATTACK IN WESTERN MAINSTREAM MEDIA

Soon after the Damascus events, horrific images started to massively circulate in Western media. Picture galleries displaying graphic images appeared at the front pages of prominent news outlets.⁸⁵⁹ Although the news

⁸⁵⁸ This study is for the most part targeted on the uses and flows of the images in the following 2 to 3 weeks from the actual event. For this was the time when the atrocious images were vastly circulated, became to be well known and were referred recurrently in political settings. This was also the timeframe within which the international political solution to the Ghouta crisis was formulated.

⁸⁵⁹ See collections of images used in the Western media: *Syria: Slaughter of the innocents as children among over 1,000 civilians gassed to death*. The Mirror, August, 22. 2013; *Syria's Darkest Day? Opposition Blames Assad as up to 1300 killed in "poison gas attacks"*, The Independent, August 22. 2013; *Syrian Rebels report Chemical attack*, The New York Times, August 21. 2013; *Video Shows Victims of Suspected Syrian Chemical Attack*, The Lede Blog, New York Times, August, 21. 2013 ; *Syria: Footage shows horrific aftermath of alleged gas*

of the Ghouta events originally broke and quickly spread in the social media milieu and via locally produced imagery, social media originating imagery was not the only means of illustrating the story for the wider spectating public. In addition to the local social media images, (Western) mainstream media also widely used visual material produced by them selves/their own sources. Habitually photos taken and produced by professional photographers working for big and influential news corporations, such as the *Reuters* and *Associated Press* (AP) were also used in illustrating the news. Although it was commonly mentioned in the news texts, that the news first emerged in the social media, images depicting the events in the mainstream media, were perhaps surprisingly often produced by the big Western media houses. The two types of images were used alongside in the Western reporting of the event. This seems to be a contemporary standard procedure of (Western) mainstream media.⁸⁶⁰

In the recirculation of Western mainstream media the social media originating images (as well as the widely used visual content produced by influential (Western) news/image agencies themselves) formed into new shapes: Western representations and significations depicting the atrocity became established. The typical image types deployed by Western media in describing the event were the silent and blunt images showing endless rows of dead civilians and children laying on concrete floors, rooms full of dead bodies covered with sheets, and mass graves into which the victims were piled. (See Illustration 7.2) Another prominent type of images in Western media were the chaotic images shot in the midst of the bedlam of the events: survivors of the attack being treated, convulsing, foaming, screaming or

attacks- video. The Guardian, August 21.2013; **First on CNN: Videos show glimpse into evidence for Syria intervention**, CNN, September 8, 2013; **In Shock, Survivor of Attack Says, 'I'm Alive'**, New York Times Project, Watching Syria's War; **Syyrian Punaiset Viivat.** Helsingin Sanomat, August 22.2013; **Syria's darkest hour: Hundreds of children's bodies piled high after nerve gas attack near Damascus leaves up to 1,300 dead**, The Daily Mail, August 22.2013 ; **Haglund vakuuttui al-Assadin syyllisyydestä kaasuiskuun.** September 7 , 2013, Helsingin Sanomat: **Järkyttävät kuvat ja videot : Satoja lapsia ja naisia kuollut kaasuisuudessa Syyriassa?** August 22, 2013, Iltasanomat ; **Syria's Darkest hour: Hundreds of Children's bodies piled high after a nerve gas attack neat Damascus leaves up to 1,300 dead.** August 22, 2013, World observer online.

860 As Mervi Pantti writes, Western media (in 2102/2013) primarily used images they received from news agencies. Some images distributed by news agencies were identified as non-professional – with labels such as 'amateur,' 'opposition,' and 'activist'. **Pantti**, 2013, 9. This also seems to be the case with the Damascus August 21st attack.

Despite of the massive amount of social media imagery of the attack, it is still often easier and faster for media houses to use image content produced by big international image agencies, which they have subscribed to and are accustomed to use for visual content. Often the news of the Ghouta attack in Western media was titled, named and framed in the Western media so that the reader easily got the impression that the images conveying the information were social media originating (rebel images), even if the images illustrating the story (at least partially) were cited to for example Reuters or AP. (See for example **Syria: Footage shows horrific aftermath of alleged gas attacks- video.** The Guardian, 21.08.2013. ; **Syrian Rebels report Chemical attack**, The New York Times, August 21.2013.)

On the uses of social media originating images alongside with visual material produced by influential, more conventional image/new producers and image agencies, see for example: **Pantti**, 2013; **Encyclopedia of social media and politics.** Kerrie, Harvey (ed.) Sage, London, 2014, 30 -31.

nearly lifeless victims of the chemicals. Often these images picture also small children exposed to the poison gas. (See illustration 7.1 ⁸⁶¹)

Within the circulation in the Western media apparatus the images of the attack gathered various framings. Furthermore, the circulation and repetitive framings of the images created recurring, somewhat solid themes. These recurring themes of representation were: 1.) the massive scale of suffering and unlawful slaughter of innocent civilians, and the barbarism of the use of chemical weapons, 2.) use of gas as war crime and the event as a crime against humanity, and 3.) the testimonial power of the atrocious (amateur) images, seen as proofing of the guilt of the al-Assad regime. (Illustrations 7.1 & 7.2)

The images used by mainstream Western media highlighted the amount of the victims – rooms full of bodies and the mass graves – but also the fact that the victims seemed to be civilians, even habitually children. This can be seen as underlining the Syrian war as a civil war, raging midst of the society and in cities inhabited by civilians. Besides the civilian status and vast quantity of victims, the images strongly brought forth the nature of gas/chemicals as a weapon. Before the Ghouta attack, the Syrian civil war had already claimed the lives of nearly 100 000 people. It was the out of the ordinary, spectacular and imposing event and the massive amount of horrific images produced of it that brought the suffering of the inhabitants of Damascus to everyone's sight. Moreover, it was particularly the use of an illegal chemical weapon—dreaded poison gas—that created the newsworthiness of the event, and lead to the massive use of the images in the Western media.

What was clearly eminent in the images was that chemical substances do not pick their victims; poison gas kills everything on its way—young and old, men and women, civilians as well as soldiers. The suffering inflicted by the poison gas was visually brought forth by showing the symptoms of the victims on a medical level: convulsions, bluish skin color, foaming from mouth and nose, close ups on running eyes, as well as the oxygen masks on the faces of unconscious victims that otherwise seem physically uninjured point to and demonstrate that illegal chemical weapons were used. The use and arrangement of the images in the Western news firmly emphasized the nature of gas as a weapon.

The use of chemical weapons is forbidden in the international treaties, which have been committed to and signed by the majority of the international community.⁸⁶² One of the reasons why the use of chemical weapons is deprecated illegal and seen so strongly off limits is that the use of these arms of mass destruction bear a horrific reputation. The strong condemnation of chemical arms can also be seen to be linked with their

861 The collage illustration 7.1 gives a view to the types of images that were prominently used in the (global) mainstream media after the attack.

862 *Convention on Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction*. Geneva, September 3 1992.

appalling visual history; the iconic images of the battle of *Ypres* of the First World War, the gas chambers of the 1940s Jewish genocide and horrific silent images of the Kurd town of *Halabja* gassed by Saddam Hussein in 1988.⁸⁶³ The ways in which the audience perceives and reacts to the images of suffering strongly builds on historical references, which add meanings to the images. The historical references, contextualization and positioning of the images in Western media associated the Damascus atrocity with the previous, iconized and morally strongly condemned historical horrors.⁸⁶⁴

In addition to the emphasis on the (corporal) effects of the use of gas as a weapon, the Western media recurrently referred to the attack as a *war crime*, a violation of international norms and rules of warfare. In Western publicity the act was also repeatedly referred to as a crime against humanity.⁸⁶⁵ Protection of humanity and the human rights frame, in which the gas attack was in many respects presented in Western media, is significant addressing to the Western spectator. As protection of humanity and safeguarding human rights—the humanitarian paradigm—functions as a frame within which the legitimacy of international political actors and states are today, to a large extent, weight by in the global hierarchy, framing the act as crimes against humanity is remarkable.⁸⁶⁶ As argued earlier, the values and principles of protection of humanity and civilian populations are widely held sacred by the Western public. Thus the use of the illegal chemical weapon and the attack on the civilians appeared as an attack against humanitarian ethos of the Western lead international order, as well as violation of the values commonly held sacred by the international community. Thus, the Ghouta events were presented in the Western publicity as something out of the ordinary brutal; as a spectacular case of suffering seen distinct from the “normal” suffering caused by (the Syrian) war.

Another central theme in the Western media’s framing of the images was the guilt of the al-Assad regime for the attack. Although, at least at first there was no legal proof that the Assad’s regime was behind the attack, strong speculation on the guilt was immediately raised in the Western media. Some Western headlines straight away named al-Assad regime guilty of the attack.⁸⁶⁷ Only about a week after the attacks the government of the United States released a report—strongly building on the social media accounts—of

863 **Compassion Fatigue About Syria... Already?** Moeller, Susan. Huffington Post, August, 28, 2013; **Hiltermann, Jost:** *A poisonous affair: America, Iraq and the Gassing of Halabja*. Cambridge University Press, New York, 2007.

864 See chapter 2; **Käpylä & Kennedy**, 2014; **Campbell**, 2002, b; **Malkki**, 1996.

865 **Syrian Chemical Weapons Attack a War Crime, Says EU.** The Guardian, September, 07.2013; **Remarks on Syria, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon**, Seoul (Republic of Korea), August 26, 2013, Ban Ki-Moons Speeches; **Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria.** White House, Office of the Press Secretary. September, 10.2013.

866 **Aaltola**, 2009.

867 See for instance: **Syria: Slaughter of the innocents as children among over 1,000 civilians gassed to death.** The Mirror, August, 22.2013; **Syria’s Darkest Day? Opposition Blames Assad as up to 1300 killed in “poison gas attacks.** The Independent, August ,22.103; **First on CNN: Videos show glimpse into evidence for Syria intervention,** CNN, September, 08.2013.

the attacks, in which president Bashar al-Assad's regime was named guilty.⁸⁶⁸ Early September president Obama showed 13 amateur videos and images of the event verified by the US intelligence to the US Congress. Reclining to the images he reasoned for a military attack against the al-Assad regime.⁸⁶⁹ These images, selected out of the massive amount of images—chosen by political premises, within political processes—were soon taken up and vastly circulated by the Western media. Thus these images ended up describing the situation and the guilt of the Syrian administration for the attack, and consequently directed and governed the Western view on the event.

At the time of the attack the Western political climate and public opinion was readily auspicious to see al-Assad's regime as illegal, guilty of the overall bloodshed in Syrian and responsible for the chemical attack. Even before the attack of August 21st, the al-Assad regime has been predominantly seen in the West as guilty for the bloody war—and as the opponent of the West. Although the Western powers—namely the United States and the United Kingdom—were not at the time officially participating in the conflict, they unofficially financially supported, and even armed the opposition forces.⁸⁷⁰ At the time of the attacks, the Damascus area was mainly in the hands of the opposition forces and namely groups that identify themselves as belonging to *the Free Syrian Army*, an opposition coalition the west was supporting. Thus, the guilt of al-Assad strongly brought forward by the Western media in its reporting and use of the images is not surprising, but rather suits the predominant notions very well. Thus the arrangements of the horrific images describing the suffering of the civilians worked to strengthen pre-existing notions on the war in the West, and the extensive circulation and framings of the images in the Western median merely reinforced the notions of the illegal and brutal rule of al-Assad.

As discussed earlier, particularly in chapter 5, the autocrat rules and dictators of the chaotic and conflict prone global crisis areas are commonly perceived and presented in the predominant Western imagination as the (inhuman) opponents; enemies of Western values, such as democracy, freedom and human rights. In contrast, Western countries are framed as the guardians of these humane values. In the public imagination, and also the political rhetoric of Western powers, the West as well acts as the discipliner—of these evil foreign rulers and regimes, unbinding to the sacred humanitarian principles. By emphasizing the use of gas, naming the act as a

868 **Government Assessment of the Syrian Government's Use of Chemical Weapons on August 21, 2013.** The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, August.30.2013.

869 **Government Assessment of the Syrian Government's Use of Chemical Weapons August 21, 2013; First on CNN: Videos show glimpse into evidence for Syria intervention,** CNN, September 8, 2013.

870 **Human Rights and Democracy Report 2012 – Syria.** Press release, Gov UK, January, 20.2014; **U.S. Considers Resuming Nonlethal Aid to Syrian Opposition.** The New York Times, January, 09.2014; **US to Provide Extra \$195 Million in Aid to Syrian Rebels.** Voice of America, August, 07.2013; **U.S. to send small arms, ammo to Syrian rebels.** CNN, June, 14.2013.

crime against humanity and positing al-Assad as the undemocratic and cruel perpetrator killing his own countrymen—and children—Western media representations of the attack addressed the media spectators in powerful ways. In the Western popular imaginary, the attack of August 21st, at the latest, enclosed Bashar al-Assad into the contemporary political rogue gallery, into the company of Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden and Muammar Gaddafi—as an enemy of humanity.⁸⁷¹

The uses, arrangements and contextualization of the gas strike images in Western media added strong politically and discursively constructed messages into the images. The event was referred to, named and added meaning in the Western media in manners that forcefully froze the image of the events in Damascus in the Western imaginary. The media treatment of the gas strikes structured and governed the Western public opinion on what happened in Syria that night, and built notions on how to react to the situation. What is noteworthy, when thinking about the power of amateur images and social media mediation in altering our view on distant suffering is, how the Western media for the most part presented the events in manners which well suited the preexisting dominant Western preconceptions of the situation in Syria.

871 See chapter 5 of this work.



Chapter 7. Illustration 7.2.

7.3.2 THE HARSH AND AUTHENTIC SOCIAL MEDIA IMAGES

The images published by the Western media were halting, hard to look at, harsh and brutal. Compared with the prevailing contemporary standards of professional journalistic crisis reporting these images, were perhaps out of the ordinary brutal, but they nevertheless forcefully permeated the Western media.⁸⁷² The images frankly showed the faces of the victims, their agonizing last moments and death. Every so often there were warnings of disturbing and graphic images included in the image galleries circulating in the Western publicity. The display of the horrific images was often justified by the notion of responsibility to look. Looking the (amateur) images and thus witnessing the horror experienced by the victims, was in the Western media presented as empathetically engaging with the victims, and as a moral responsibility of the surrounding world.⁸⁷³ Behind this commonly used argument of the imperative of looking, lays the idea that by visually witnessing the suffering of others, the spectators would become emotionally affected, and would thus react to the suffering of others in a compassionate manner, and even make demands for a betterment of the situation. In the Western media the imperative of looking at the Syrian horror images was also rationalized by stating that these particular images will have an influence on the political reactions—even a military intervention—of the Western powers on the situation in Syria. Thus the imperative of looking was further highlighted with the argument, that these images may also have an impact on the political decision making directly affecting Western citizens, e.g. in a form of the planned Western military intervention.⁸⁷⁴ Hence, the Western public was to face the images because of their heavy moral, but also political character.

In the past decades Western spectators have grown accustomed to seeing certain kind of images of crisis situations and war. The disposition and style of amateur images differ from the customary style of professional photographers working for the big, international image agencies and media houses, as well as the representation practices governing the visual communication and fund raising imagery of humanitarian organizations. The questions of ethically representing the suffering of others have been widely debated, both by scholars as well as by humanitarian practitioners. The well-known iconic imagery of professional photographers, picturing distant crisis has been criticized for objectifying the sufferers, picturing them as distanced "others", as well as estheticizing suffering, and even of voyeuristic or pornographic ethos in depicting the suffering of others. As discussed earlier,

⁸⁷² **On the contemporary conventional uses of image of death in the Western media, see chapter 4 of this work. And on the circulation of graphic imagery in mainstream media due to social media: Posetti, Julie: *Is Social Media to Blame for the Increase of Graphic Images in Media?* Mediashift, August 8, 2014.**

⁸⁷³ See, for instance: ***Compassion Fatigue About Syria... Already?*** Moeller, Susan. Huffington Post, August 28, 2013

⁸⁷⁴ ***First on CNN: Videos show glimpse into evidence for Syria intervention*** CNN, September 9th. 2013; ***Warning Graphic Images: Obama administration releases Horrifying Footage of Nerve Gas Attacks in Syria.*** Ny Daily News, September, 9. 2013.

the sufferers of crisis zones have been in past decades often pictured as helpless and passive childlike characters, de-historicized, de-personalized and reduced in humanity, often shown as Agambenian *bare life*.⁸⁷⁵ Oftentimes, the suffering and death in these skillfully shot professional photographs is also quite paradoxically displayed as calm and tranquil, proficiently framed, composited, and aesthetically pleasing, even beautiful.⁸⁷⁶ As has been discussed in the former chapters (namely 2&4) of this study, the styles of professional picturing of distant suffering have changed hand in hand with the changes in the discourses and practices of humanitarian assistance, international politics, international human rights paradigms, discourses relating to the mainstream media's mediation of distant wars and crisis, as well as technical development in the field of visual mediation.⁸⁷⁷

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that many rules, regulations and gatekeepers guard the content and style of professional photographers, whereas, social media images of war and distress produced by amateurs are less regulated, and thus oftentimes in their visual features harsh, brutal and unaestheticized. Amateur and citizen photographers are not confined by the conventions of media houses, self-criticism of trained professionals or institutional ethical instructions. Moreover, amateur images are often out of focus, grainy and hurried, shot in the midst of the mayhem, they are lower in technical quality, less arranged and framed, aesthetically and ethically considered compared to the images of professionals. The low quality and the amateurish style make social media originating images appear unprocessed, authentic and more real. The visual appearance of the images and the idea of citizen-produced content add an impression of truth, spontaneity and objectivity to the images—a notion that these images are not tendentiously selected or positioned.⁸⁷⁸ Moreover, the origin of the photos in social media creates a tendency of seeing the images and their account as unprofessional, and thus more realistic, “unfiltered”⁸⁷⁹ and trustworthy eyewitness accounts, mediating events “as they really happened”.

The *reality effect* of amateur images is furthermore amplified by their heightened *drama power*; they are often perceived as firsthand accounts of

⁸⁷⁵ See Chapter 2.3.3; **Agamben**, 1995.

⁸⁷⁶ **Moeller**, 1999 ; **Mannevo, Mona**: *Reading the Faces of Hunger: Disturbing images of child malnutrition in the World Press Photo competition*. European Journal of Cultural studies, 2013, 1-15; **Käpylä & Kennedy**: 2014; **Kennedy, Dennis**: *Selling the Distant Other: Humanitarianism and imagery Ethical Dilemmas of Humanitarian Action*, The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance, 2009; **Halttunen**, 1995 ; **Butler** 2009, 69.

⁸⁷⁷ For more on this topic, see for example chapters 2 and 4 of this work and for example: **Chouliaraki**, 2013; **Cohen**, 2001; **Campbell**: 2004; **Code of conduct on Images and Messages**. Concord, (The European NGO confederation for relief and development) October, 2006; **Kennedy**: 2009.

⁸⁷⁸ See, **Campbell, David**, 2011 ; *In amateurs we trust: Readers assessing non-professional news photographs*. Puustinen, Liina & Seppänen, Janne: 2011. In *Amateur Images and Global News*, 2011.

⁸⁷⁹ U.S. State Department spokeswoman Marie Harf about the rebel photos: “We would encourage people to take a look at *unfiltered* photos of what's actually happening on the ground”: **US Denounces Syrian president Bashar al-Assad's “repulsive” Instagram site**. ABC-news, September, 12.2013.

the people directly affected by the events—and in the case of the chemical attack perhaps taken by one of the potential victims of the atrocity. Because of their origin as local and amateur produced these images are seen to possess more authority in presenting the events. It seems, that the local amateurs, producing the images of the event has a wider ethical register to represent the pain of the victims—the likes of her—than an professional outsider documenters. Furthermore, professional photographers and reporters—outsiders—are often seen a detaching force, as local amateurs mediating enfolding events are commonly seen as presenting the events in a more real, intimate level, and thus also arousing more empathy in the spectators.⁸⁸⁰

All this seems to relieve social media and amateur images of some of the ethical questions and conventional representation practices governing the representations of suffering and war. Due to this, amateur images of social media images are not ethically judged in the same manner as images produced by professionals, even when they are recirculated and utilized by the mainstream media. This has not only made it possible to show crude war images more easily in the mainstream media, but makes them appear more truthful and objective. On this level, the growing use of social media images by the mainstream media might significantly change how the surrounding world visually encounters distant atrocity and suffering.

The assumption of authenticity and unprocessed, institution free, unpositioned information mediated by the social media accounts, lives on in the public imaginary, despite of the fact that also the communication of e.g. the Syrian rebels is increasingly systematic, organized and tendentious. According to journalistic sources, there are well-equipped media centers, specializing in social media communication also in the Syrian rebel held areas, which are often funded by external (Western) actors. This also goes for the (social media) communication of ISIS. Social media communication has—on all sides of the Syrian conflict—become an increasingly important part of the information fight targeted to strategically influence conceptions and attitudes of the surrounding world towards the situation in Syria.⁸⁸¹

All in all, the utilization and framing of social media content and amateur images within mainstream media's journalistic remediation (and moreover framing images of war as amateur/social media imagery used by the mainstream media as originating from local sources) potentially creates a dangerous illusion of uncropped, unmediated and unfiltered information flows—problems that have been critically assessed by the research community. The notions of authenticity, unfiltered and uncropped images

880 Williams, Andy, Wahl-Jorgensen, Karin & Wardle, Claire. *More Real and Less Packaged: Audience Discourses on Amateur News Content and Their Effect on Journalism Practice*. In: *Amateur Images and Global News*, 2011, 197- 202.

881 *Syria's Civil War Plays out on Social Media*. The Huffington Post ,October, 19.2013; *Syria's digital war explodes on Social Media*. CBC News, Your Community Blog, August, 29, 2013; *Wrong Message in Syria's War Imagery*. The National. May, 16.2013; *Social Media: a Double edged Sword in Syria*. Reuters, June, 13. 2011; *The Role of Social Media in the Syrian Civil war*. Media measurement.

are noteworthy and multifaceted. Information flows originating from local and amateur sources are in reality topically carefully selected, as local 'curation hubs' contemporarily often play a gatekeeping role on the local level. Social media images and messages coming from local sources are generally designed to entail particular narratives.⁸⁸² Moreover it seems that the idea of authenticity social media material is further more constructed and also utilized by the mainstream media in its news production. Even as a significant part of the imagery used by the Western mainstream media actually seemed to be produced by the prominent Western media houses, the news was often run by highlighting the effect of the social media and power of the local amateur images in mediating the events globally.⁸⁸³ Thus it seems, that when it comes to social media originating imagery there is a tendency to present images as unfiltered and spontaneous, although they have in reality been carefully selected out of a mass of images, deployed, circulated and reframed by the mainstream media. Thus the mainstream media tends to name and signify social media originating imagery as unselected and objective eyewitness accounts, which show the situation "as it really was". The illusion of the "reality effect" also obscures the contextual, ideological and political framings and meanings added to the images when circulated and recirculated by the mainstream media. Thus, the reality effect associated with the amateur social media images is actually at least partially created and deployed by the (Western) mainstream news media, while framing its news content drawing from the social media as objective and mirroring the reality.⁸⁸⁴ These effects of social media images and their utilization in the mainstream media are noteworthy, and have a great potentiality to alter crisis meditation and the view of the surrounding world on the suffering of distant others, but on the whole, in ways quite different from what has been suggested within the discourses hailing social media as a revolutionizing force in (visual) crisis mediation.

What is furthermore remarkable and perhaps emblematic for the groundbreaking effect of social media on visual arrangements in regards to crisis/suffering, unveiled by the Ghouta case, is that that the majority of the victims seen in the images were either minors or men. In the prevailing predominant Western humanitarian imagery it has been customary to portray distant suffering essentially by displaying the suffering bodies of women and children. It has tended to be rather unusual to portray the male victims in humanitarian contexts in order to raise compassion in the spectators. The prevailing phenomenon has been explained with the more appealing or "selling" nature of images of victimized women and children. Suffering children and women can be seen to represent fragility and

882 *Syria's socially mediated civil war*, 2014, 8-12

⁸⁸³ See **Pantti**, 2013.

884 See: **Barthes, Roland**: *The Rustle of Language*. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1989, 141-149; **Williams et al**: 2011, 203-206 ; **Pantti**, 2013.

The idea of authenticity also links up with the use of the social media images as *legal proof*, a theme I will get back in more length in the chapter 7.4

innocence, as well as future and hope. Furthermore, these groups have been culturally seen as minors, as groups placed under patronizing, ward and protection, as powerless, and as weaker than men. Also women and children have been seen, in reference to men, as less political and thus more auspicious to arouse empathy. Displaying the suffering bodies of male victims—who could by their physical appearance and age be categorized as soldiers—has thus not been seen as appealing or representable in the context of arousing humanitarian emotions, such as compassion, pity and will to help.⁸⁸⁵

In this respect the Syrian images make an exception: in these images men, even young able-bodied men, seem to be (compared to the customary view) overrepresented among the victims. Adult females on the other hand are extraordinarily scarce among the victims. This is to say, that even though there most probably were women among the victims, photos of the female victims have not been extensively posted to the social media, and consequently images of female victims were absent from the majority of the representations published by the Western media as well. The images as produced by local amateurs and originating in social media certainly have an effect on the matter. The infrequent representation of women among the victims has been explained by local cultural and religious conventions. Local opposition sources have explained that images female victims were not published due to reasons linked with (religious driven) honor and respect.⁸⁸⁶ The invisibility of female victims and the overt visibility of male victims in the Ghouta case is nevertheless exceptional. This anomalous feature, debatably brought about by the novel procedures social media amateur representation, may possibly point to altering of the Western established gendered conventions of representing suffering and affect the ways in which the suffering of the world is seen in the future.

7.3.3 MENDACIOUS IMAGES OF THE EVIL LEADER: THE SOCIAL MEDIA IMAGES OF AL-ASSAD REGIME IN THE WESTERN MEDIA

Wars and conflicts always appear different when observed and rationalized from different angles. This comes apparent when comparing the rebel communication concerning the chemical attack (as well as the Western mainstream media framings) with that of the al-Assad regime. Most of the social media accounts of the locals and the communication of opposition forces named the al-Assad regime responsible for the attacks. Also the Western mainstream media and Western political leaders generally complied

⁸⁸⁵ On the gendered conventions of representing suffering see for example: **Boltanski**: 1999; **Moeller**: 1999; **Chouliaraki**, 2006 ; **Malkki**, 1996. See also chapter 4 of this study.

⁸⁸⁶ *Images of Death in Syria, but No Proof of Chemical Attack*. New York Times, August, 21.2013.

with this perception. On the other hand there were also differing tones of voices: the Syrian administration backing president al-Assad, and the Syrian official media channels, disputed the use of chemical weapons, and accused the “terrorists”— i.e. the opposition—of the attack.⁸⁸⁷

In addition to forceful censorship Syria has within the recent years been reported as one of the most dangerous areas in the world for journalists and civilians using Internet as a political communication tool, ranking 176th of 179 countries according to *Press Freedom Index*. According to the organization *Committee to Protect Journalists*, 21 journalists were killed in Syria in 2013— more than in any other conflict zone in the world at the time.⁸⁸⁸ At the time the al-Assad regime also strived to control Internet communication in the area, by habitually blocking international news sites, shutting down dissident sites, and by attempts to black out Internet in the country.⁸⁸⁹ The conventional official Syrian communication apparatus was in the situation of 2013 firmly in the control of the al-Assad regime. The state news agency *Sana*, big newspaper houses, prominent radio and television stations all promulgated the opinions of the al-Assad regime. The standpoint of the al-Assad regime simply put was that the terrorists—i.e. the multifarious opposition forces—were threatening the legal government of the state, and that the administration was waging a legitimate and limited war against these ‘terrorists’. Civil war was not mentioned in the “official” news.⁸⁹⁰

Also the Syrian government uses Internet and social media in order to proclaim its view on the war. At the time when the horrific rebel images of the Ghouta gas attack spread around the world, al-Assad used social media channels—such as the government *Instagram* account “the Syrian Presidency”, opened earlier summer 2013—to display calm and serene images of the Syrian everyday life. The president’s Instagram account mainly exhibits the president, government officials and president’s inner circle—especially the first lady *Asma al-Assad*—taking care of their everyday tasks, attending to charity work and other peaceful day-to-day political responsibilities.⁸⁹¹ After the Ghouta chemical disaster, these images—and namely the stark contrast that these images form vis-à-vis the horrific images of the Damascus victims—induced the Instagram communication of al-Assad into the limelight of the Western mainstream media. No images were uploaded into the Syrian Presidency account from the day of the attacks. But

887 *Foreign Ministry: Allegations of armed forces using toxic gas in Damascus countryside untrue*. Sana, August 21.2013.

888 *2013 World Press Freedom Index: Dashed Hopes After Spring*. Journalists without Borders; *Järjestö: 52 Toimittajaa tapettu työnsä takia tänä vuonna*. Helsingin Sanomat, December, 18.2013. The difficult situation of communication and journalistic work in the area has also been the reason why social media communication has been so widely used, referred to and depended on also by international media, in order to gain knowledge information from the area.

889 *Syria Profile*. January 30.2014. BBC News; *Syria Conflict: Internet Blackout Continues*. The Guardian, November, 30.2012; *Social Media: a Double Edged Sword in Syria*. Reuters, 13.06 2011.

890 *Sana, Syria’s news agency*.

891 *Syrian Presidency, Instagram*.

the images from days prior and subsequent to the day of the attack present stories of Syrians awarded at the Russian science Olympics⁸⁹², images of political meetings attended by president al-Assad⁸⁹³ and introduce a statement he made to the French newspaper *Le Figaro*, in which he proclaims: “I belong to the Syrian people; I defend their interests and independence and will not succumb to external pressure.”⁸⁹⁴ What hoisted al-Assad's Instagram into a news item in Western publicity were images showing the president himself saluting cheering crowds and depicting the everyday life of the war torn country as overtly tranquil, sunny and serene. Images presenting the president's wife attending to charity work, smiling, dressed in expensive Western style designer clothing, dispensing food and toys to children in need, visiting hospitals and comforting disabled children heaved strong outrage in Western publicity.⁸⁹⁵ After the chemical attack the Syrian president's Instagram account of was widely addressed in the Western media, and mainly faced with disgust and dismay. A headline by the Guardian pronounced Assad's Instagram account showing “the banality of evil”. By making a reference to the well know phrase of *Hannah Arendt*—and the title of the 1961 book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a Report on the Banality of Evil*⁸⁹⁶ she wrote on the trial of Adolf Eichmann, architect of the *Final Solution*, convicted and later executed—strong cultural connotations are added.⁸⁹⁷ The juxtaposition forms a strong connotation between the monstrosity of al-Assad and his regime, and the inhuman aspirations of the Nazi regime strongly seen in the Western cultural sphere as the emblem of utmost horror.

The attempts of the al-Assad regime to exhibit its actions humanely and to brand itself in a positive light through the social media outlet did not convince the Western media. On the contrary, the Assad regime's attempts to polish its reputation was seen as an indication of the malevolent, deranged,

892 **Syrian Presidency, Instagram.** August 18, 2013. (Caption: “Syria's 2 Bronze Medals in Chemistry won by Essam Anouf and Yazan Ghanam during the 2013 International Scientific Olympiad held in Russia.”)

893 **Syrian Presidency, Instagram.** September 1, 2013. (Caption: “President al-Assad meets Dr. Boroujerdi.”)

894 **Syrian Presidency, Instagram.** September 2, 2013. (Caption: “I belong to the Syrian people; I defend their interests and independence and will not succumb to external pressure.” President #Assad to George #Malbrunot, Le #Figaro, 2 September 2013); ***La mise en garde d'Assad à la France.*** Le Figaro, September, 2, 2013 ; **Bashar al-Assad Interview: “Show me the Proof of Regime Chemical Attack”.** The Telegraph, September, 2, 2013.

895 ***The Syrian presidency's Instagram account shows the banality of evil.*** The Guardian, September 6, 2013; ***Presidentin Instagram-tili esittää ruusuista kuua sodan runtelemasta Syyriasta.*** Helsingin Sanomat, September 9, 2013; ***Sickening Instagram account showcases Mrs Assad's fantasy world 'of tending to her people' as, in reality, nation disintegrates.*** The Daily Mail, September 5, 2013; ***Syria posts first lady Asma al-Assad's good deeds on Instagram.*** The Washington Post, September 7, 2013; ***After Instagram smiles, Asma al-Assad becomes 'lady in black'.*** Al Arabiya English, September 2, 2013; ***Asma al-Assad, Syrian President Bashar's Wife Uses Instagram to Showcase Charity Work.*** The Huffington Post, September 5, 2013; ***Bashar al-Assad's Surreal Instagram Feed. A close and uncomfortable look at the Assad family, while they are not killing Syrian civilians.*** The National Journal, September 5, 2013.

896 **Arendt, Hannah:** *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a Report on the Banality of Evil.* Penguin, The Viking Press, New York, 1963.

897 ***The Syrian presidency's Instagram account shows the banality of evil.***

absurd and inconceivable nature of his administration and rule, and the messages turned against their intent (in the West). US Department of State spokesperson *Marie Harf* denounced that the way the Assad regime is using the serene and pretty Instagram images to “gloss over the brutality and suffering it’s causing” is repulsive, and called it as a “despicable media stunt”. She added that the Instagram images are ignoring the horrible atrocities in Syria, and encouraged people to take a look at the “unfiltered photos of what’s actually happening in the ground”—referring to the rebel gas attack images.⁸⁹⁸ The repulsion and outrage over the Instagram photos can be seen to stem from the contrast they provoked compared with the rebel social media images seen as “unfiltered” and conveying the truth in the predominant Western publicity. Thus, the images presented by the al-Assad regime were actually often juxtaposed with the opposition social media images. The social media representations of the al-Assad regime were—in contrast to the rebel images—not apprehended and perceived by the Western media as amateur images, conveying the situation as it is, but rather as arranged, biased and strategically planned PR presentations—thus seen incredible and even false.

It is interesting (and paradoxical) how al-Assad’s sunny images, exhibiting the peaceful everyday life of Syria and the humane conducts of the al-Assad regime, resemble—in style and substance—the public relations images that the Western powers have presented on their actions in the recent wars. Al-Assad images strangely and strongly resemble for instance *Flickr* images presented by the multinational NATO led operation (International security assistance force, ISAF) in Afghanistan discussed and analyzed in chapter 5 of this work.⁸⁹⁹ Both are depicting normal day-to-day routines and official meetings, charity work as well as encounters with the local inhabitants. Both emphasize the humanitarian ethos and nature of the actions, and in both the war raging just around the corner seems to be far away. What connects these two groups of social media images is, that both strive to present the actions of their presenters in a war and conflict area as humane and well organized. Both can be seen as *strategic communication*⁹⁰⁰ efforts, designed to address their target audiences—in these cases the namely allies and “friends”—in order to get them to support the goals and see the actions of the presenter as legitimate. In both cases, the strategic communication seems to be designed to strategically convey messages of humanitarian and legitimate actions, by presenting rather polished,

898 *US Denounces Syrian president Bashar al-Assad’s “repulsive” Instagram site*. ABC-news, September, 12, 2013.

899 See chapter 5 of this study.

900 By strategic communication I mean –following the definition of NATO and the US Department of defense – as an effort to disseminate information of operations, activities and objectives. In addition to this, the goal of strategic communication is to influence the perceptions, attitudes, conceptions, well as actions of the target audience. The objective is to insure the target audience on the rightfulness of the view and interpretation of the communicator/actor, as well as the legitimacy of their action. Strategic communication aims to win over the hearts and minds of the target audiences, and to get them to support their goals. See, chapter 5 and for example: *Principles of strategic communication*. US Department of Defense, August 2008.

humanitarianly arranged images from conflict zones.⁹⁰¹ Thus, quite paradoxically the ISAF Flickr images and the Instagram images of the al-Assad regime can be seen to have shared functions and objectives, as well as shared representation styles.

The shared content of the visual strategic reputation governing attempts—of these two very distinct actors—gives away shared messages, as well as mutual problems and weaknesses that the social media milieu may pose for institutional or governmental users. Visual social media mediation of wars and crises is habitually thought of as a spontaneous means of the rebel/opposition and civilian actors. Attempts of institutional and governmental actors to use social media to promote their goals and actions easily seem as tediously constructed and premeditated. They seem less proactive, more reactive and conscious image building endeavors. Thus they verge the borders of calculated dissemination of biased, or even false information: propaganda. The atrocious social media images of the rebel sources solidified as the iconic and truthful account of the events in Syria in the Western publicity—and contrastingly, the polished, strategically built images of al-Assad turned the Western perception perhaps even more to the negative side than they formerly were.

7.3.4 A COMPARATIVE GAZE: CHEMICAL ATTACK REPORTAGE IN THE RUSSIAN MEDIA

Political climate and attitudes towards the war undisputedly influenced the ways in which images were used and signified in Western media. But when reading and interpreting the position as well as the meanings the Ghouta attack images gathered in the use of the Western mainstream media, it is noteworthy to remember, that the surrounding world was (and when writing this even more so still is) strongly divided and biased in its notions and stances on the Syrian situation. The West at the time strongly positioned against the al-Assad regime, and at the time supported the moderate rebels (namely the Free Syrian Army). On the other hand Russia, along with Iran, China and some others, have intensely supported al-Assad. The political standing inevitably influences the media treatment of the war: what generates a spectacle in the Western sphere may not have even been seen as newsworthy in other parts of the world. This is why—in order to provide a contrast and reference point to the Ghouta gas attack spectacle in the Western media—I shall in the following paragraphs conduct a brief overview on the visibility and use of Syrian chemical attack images in the Russian media. I shall monitor the use of the images and occurrence of the event in

901 See chapter 5.

the Russian media outlets *Ria Novosti*, *Itar-Tass* and *Interfax*⁹⁰² in late August 2013.⁹⁰³

Ria Novosti—a government-own Russian news agency, specializing on foreign news⁹⁰⁴—mainly displayed two reoccurring images (images of the *Reuters*) and one video-clip originating from social media in broadcasting news on the Ghouta gas attack. The video is harsh in its nature: it shows the chaos and suffering caused by the chemical weapons strike, and displays the medical procedures in order to help the victims. The two recurring images both show a child victim of the attack, pictured most probably in a location where the victims of the attack were collected and treated. The other shows a close-up of a weeping little boy, sitting on a blanket, and the other image depicts a small boy in the foreground and other victims behind him. Although these images do, in their visual enunciation, bring forth the suffering of civilians brought about by most likely chemical substance, in the news text the images are not addressed. In contrast to the significations that similar (and partly even the same) images gathered in the Western media, within the arrangements of Ria Novosti the images first and foremost appear to be illustrative. The amount of the images produced of the event, their origin as civilian created testimonials, the suffering they demonstrate or their status as legal proof, or the moral imperative of intervention and action brought by the witnessing the suffering of the Syrian people is not addressed or highlighted within the Russian news contexts.⁹⁰⁵

In covering the Syrian gas strike, *Itar-Tass*—a government owned official main news outlet⁹⁰⁶—did not at all use images of suffering Syrians to describe the Ghouta events. The news concerning the Damascus events were illustrated by using images of well-known and influential international actors, such as *Barack Obama*, *Angela Merkel*, *Vladimir Putin*, *Sergei Lavrov*, *Bashar al-Assad* and *Ban ki-Moon*.⁹⁰⁷ By disregarding the social

902 See the Internet sites of **Ria Novosti**; **Itar-Tass**; **Interfax**.

903 In the chapter concerning the Russian media, I was kindly assisted by senior research fellow **Katri Pynnöniemi** from The EU's Eastern Neighbourhood and Russia—research program of the Finnish Institute of International Affairs, and post-doctoral researcher **Katja Lehtisaari**, specializing in Journalism in Russia at the Aleksanteri Institute, Helsinki. I thank you both dearly for your Russian expertise and help with the language. I also want to thank **Julia Bethwaite** for transliterating the Russian sources for me.

904 This information can be found on the website of the news outlet: <http://ria.ru/>

905 *Posledstviya predpolagayemoy himicheskoy ataki v Sirii. S'yemka ochevidtstva. Ria Novosti*, August 21, 2013; *MID Velikobritanii prizyvayet proinspektirovat' mesto himataki v Sirii, Ria Novosti*, August 21, 2013; *SB OON trebuyet obespechit' pomoshch' postradavshim ot himoruzhiya v Sirii, Ria Novosti*, August 22, 2013; *Kitay prizyvayet vozderzhivat'sya ot prezhdevremennykh vyvodov po Sirii, Ria Novosti*, August 23, 2013; *Prezident Izrailya prizval mir iz "yat' iz Sirii vse himoruzhiye, Ria Novosti*, August 25, 2013; *Velikobritaniya schitayet, chto dokazatel'stva himatak v Sirii unichtozheny. Ria Novosti*, August 25, 2013; *Frantsiya vystupayet za zhestkiy otvet na himataku v Sirii, Ria Novosti*, August 26, 2013; *SMI: v Iordaniyu tayno vyvezeny biomaterialy zhertv vozmozhnoy himataki, Ria Novosti*, August 27, 2013; *Prikaz o himatake pod Damaskom mog otdat' mladshiy brat Asada, Ria Novosti*, August 27, 2013.

906 This information can be found on the website of the news outlet: <http://itar-tass.com/>

907 *Belyy dom: Prezident SSHa v blizhaysheye vremya vystupit s zayavleniyem po Sirii, Itar-Tass*, August 31, 2013; *Konflikt v Sirii dolzhen byt' uregulirovan mirnym putem - Pan Gi Mun. Itar-Tass*, August, 29, 2013; *MID RF: Zayavleniya o gotovnosti SSHa*

media images showing the atrocity and its humane toll, and by employing the images of high-level political actors, the broadcasting seems to signify the Ghouta events as crisis on the level of international relations, rather than as a humanitarian catastrophe. Consequently, the brutality of the event fades into the background. Itar-Tass also for example recurrently illustrated the news of the Ghouta event by combat images and images of the ruins of war, as well as an image of a weapon inspector in his work in the area, but images depicting the actual August gas assault were to be completely missing from their broadcasting of the event in late August.⁹⁰⁸

Overall, the use of the social media images in the coverage of Ria Novosti and Itar-Tass was very scanty, compared to that of the Western media. The news agencies mainly approached the event through the UN weapons inspection operation, by contemplating on the guilty party of the strike (the opposition, the al-Assad regime, or the brother of al-Assad⁹⁰⁹). Quoting the broadcastings of the Western news outlets and comments of international high-level political leaders of the world also mirrored the event in the governmental Russian media. What is remarkable here is that predominantly the images that shocked the Western world did not at all surface in the coverage of the event in Russia. Therefore in another political and cultural surrounding, the event did not appear as an emergency or as a great humane tragedy, as it did in the Western broadcasting. Moreover, it is interesting how the official posture of Russia and Russian politicians on the situation did not surface in the early news. Only about a week after the attacks—27th of August—Ria Novosti reported that Moscow had warned the Western coalition of intervening in the Syrian situation by military means.⁹¹⁰ It is significant that despite of the fact that Russia at the time openly supporting the al-Assad regime, and economically and militarily reinforced his war-effort, in the reporting of Ria Novosti and Itar –Tass, Russia was portrayed as a neutral by-stander in the Syrian situation.

In contrast, to the government linked agencies, *Interfax*—a privately owned news agency, which highlights its independent nature and cooperation with Western media houses such as *Bloomberg*⁹¹¹—widely used the shocking images of pain, familiar from the Western news in its reporting of the event. Interfax also exhibited an image gallery—resembling the Western style arrangements—widely displaying the horrific images of the

vmeshat'sya v siriyskiy konflikt vosprinyaty v Moskve s glubokoy trevogoy. Itar-Tass, August, 26, 2013; *Germaniya primet konkretnyye shagi v otnoshenii Sirii pose otsenki so storony mirovogo soobshchestva - Angela Merkel'*, Itar-Tass, August 28, 2013.

908 *Spetssluzhby Sirii: Primeneniye himoruzhiya stalo by "politicheskim samoubiystvom"*, Itar-Tass, August 22, 2013; *OON: inspektory zavershili sbor ulik v Sirii*, Itar-Tass, August 30, 2013.

909 *Prikaz o himatake pod Damaskom mog otdat' mladshiy brat Asada*, Ria Novosti, August 28, 2013.

910 *SMI: v Iordaniyu tayno vyvezeny biomaterialy zhertv vozmozhnoy himataki*, Ria Novosti, August 27, 2013.

911 This information can be found on the website of the news outlet: <http://www.interfax.ru/>.

attack. The images were also referred to in the news text as exposing the character of the atrocious event. Thus, the suffering of the victims was seen and presented as newsworthy in the broadcasting of Interfax.⁹¹² Overall, the reporting of Interfax seemed multi-voiced compared to the other two Russian news agencies, and relatively resembled that of its Western counterparts.⁹¹³

In the Russian context, the ownership background and the news agencies relations to the government are remarkable. The differences between Itar-Tass, Ria Novosti and then again Interfax in the broadcasting, arrangements and signification the Syrian events can largely be explained by the ties to the Russian regime and political power. But furthermore, the overview into the Russian media reveals how disunited the surrounding world is when it comes to the Syrian conflict. The images that produced a visible spectacle in the Western publicity did not receive any publicity in the state controlled and owned predominant Russian media. This difference demonstrates how even the most atrocious of images need to be hoisted into news items, and how the surrounding culture, politics, ideology and overall societally predominant ethos and ambiance define what kind of meanings and signification (social media) images gather in their use by the local mainstream media. Newsworthiness is a contextual as well as an ideological matter. The comparative gaze into the Russian utilizations and arrangements of the images fortify the argument that also in the age of the social media images predominantly remain mute, their political significance and importance is added and constructed in the ideological apparatus of the (mainstream) media.

7.3.5 CONTEXTUAL SIGNIFICATION OF IMAGES IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The massive flood of social media images describing the gas attack revealed significant new information on the reality of the Syrian war. The notable visibility and status the images gathered in the use of the prominent Western media was ensued partly because of the critical new information they conveyed. Partly their high standing in the use of the Western media can also be explained by the fact that they fitted into the already existing, dominant Western impressions and conceptions of the situation in Syria. Conversely, the negative reception the Instagram images of the president al-Assad received in the Western publicly articulates the same phenomena. The polished images highlighting the humanity of al-Assad, did not fit the frame

⁹¹² *Ot himicheskoy ataki v Sirii pogibli sotni lyudey*, Interfax August 21, 2013; *Situatsiya v Sirii*, Interfax, August 26, 2013; *Turtsiya prizyvayet razobrat'sya s Siriyey*, Interfax, August 22, 2013; *Rossiya ne sobirayetsya voyevat' za Siriyu*, Interfax, August 26, 2013; *Ot himicheskoy ataki v Sirii pogibli sotni lyudey*, Interfax, August 21, 2013.

the West generally has on his regime and the war in Syria.⁹¹⁴ This point is further strengthened, considering how the images that stirred up an influential spectacle in the West were quite differently signified Russian context, in which they did not gather much public attention.

Thus, the newsworthiness of a social media originating imagery cannot solely be explained by its believability, authenticity or the revelatory force it possesses. Rather, the status and visibility of also social media imagery in the use of mainstream media is determined by the dominant mindset of the recipient audience, cultural and political orientation of the context of presentation. The power and significance of an image—still at the age of amateur war images and “social media revolution”—is mainly constructed according to contextual surroundings. The status, level of use and significance of an image is reliant on whether or not it resonates with the receipts outlooks, preexisting culturally prevalent conceptions and overall political atmosphere.

The inquiry into the uses of Syrian social media images—by both the Western and Russian mainstream media—demonstrates how also the social media accounts of contemporary crisis mainly function as raw material for the mainstream media and its meaning creation processes. The mainstream media still today functions as the gatekeeper, which classifies names and frames the material according to its own (politicized) logic and principles. Moreover, the mainstream media also has the power to decide to which degree it chooses to use and exhibit the material, that is, to determine whether or not an event becomes visible on large scale within a local context or furthermore if it forms into a spectacular global event. This phenomenon is clearly observable in the very diverse level utilization of visual material of the Ghouta event by the Western media in comparison to the Russian media. The inquiry to the Syrian case unveils contemporary patterns of (social media) image flows, and demonstrates what happens to the mute images of atrocity while they flow from one context into another within media.

What is noteworthy when critically assessing the optimistic notion on the revolutionary capabilities of the social media and amateur images, is that social media images of war and crisis have, after all, a rather limited potential to change the ways in which distant suffering is encountered in wider representational contexts of the international mainstream media apparatus. Despite the insistent claim on the revolutionary power of social media and amateur images in changing our view into the suffering of others, it may be argued that large scale, global, user generated communication in reality still does not exist, regardless of the new digital technologies and social media which might in a technical sense render it possible. Messages and images that achieve any sort of notable audiences—on a global scale—are even today most often percolated in the many levels of meaning creation, signification and political meaning making while they rapidly flow from a context to

⁹¹⁴ See: **Butler**: 2009, 63-100.

another. Even without going to the problematic of selected flows of images already on the “ground level”—the local gatekeepers and organized hubs of social media messages at the level of the crisis zones—it seems clear, in the current situation that the social media images cannot in most cases escape the cultural and political signification, meaning creation processes and fixed news agendas produced in and by the mainstream media. The hopeful assessments on the power of amateur images in altering the global mediation of distant suffering, as well as the potency of amateur images in narrowing the distance between the sufferers and the spectators—seem to be overly optimistic, and leaves the political dimension of international crisis meditation and ideological logic of the media machinery rather unaddressed. This is why we need to be mindful of the causal social media revolution claim.

In addition to the uses and reuses of the images in different (mainstream) media, the meanings, as well as the significations and the status, capacity and power of the images are also defined in their openly political contexts of utilization. How and to what extent crisis images are taken up in high level political speech, prominent proclamations and how they are used in political rhetoric, legitimation and even international level decision making delineate not only the messages, but also the power and influence they may have on a very real political level. In the following subchapter, I shall take a look at the uses of the amateur war images in the level of international politics, and namely within interventionist discourse of Western humanitarian world politics.

7.4 IMAGES OF THE GHOUTA CHEMICAL ATTACK IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

Soon after the Ghouta attack the atrocious images ascended into a significant status within (Western) international political debate. Images showing the horror of Syrian civilians were used in explaining political reactions to the situation in Syria, and were extensively utilized in political argumentation and rhetoric of Western leaders. The horror images were widely seen as evidence proving the guilt of president al-Assad over the attack, and they also became a reference often employed in legitimizing Western actions into the situation, e.g. the planned Western military operation against the al-Assad regime. The performative force attained by these atrocity images became visible in their uses on the high international level. Sometimes images do not only show, but also do things.

In his speech 26th of August 2013, the Secretary General of the United Nations (UN), *Ban Ki-moon*, referred strongly to the images picturing the outcomes of the attack, while appealing to the international community to act on the Syrian situation: “We have all seen the horrifying images on our television screens and through social media. Clearly this was a major and

terrible incident. We owe it to the families of the victims to act.”⁹¹⁵ The next day, 27th of August Samantha Power, The United States Ambassador to UN Tweeted: “Haunting images of entire families dead in their beds. Verdict is clear: Assad has used CWs [Chemical Weapons] against civilians in violation of int'l [International] norm.”⁹¹⁶ Both of these statements assert the status of (social media) images as references conveying the “truth of what really happened”. They stress the need to act on the situation promptly. Moreover the images are practically presented as legal proof of the terrible occasion, pointing out the perpetrator, al-Assad.

Already months before the Ghouta attacks there was widespread anticipation on the threat of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. In March 2013 UN appointed an investigation—headed by a Swedish scientist Åke Sellström—to probe the allegations of the use chemical weapons in the area. At the time Ban Ki-moon stated that one of the purposes of the international investigation on the matter was to remind that the use of chemical weapons is a crime against humanity and strongly condemned by the international community.⁹¹⁷ Moreover, a year before the Ghouta attack in August 2012, president Obama stated in his speech, that use of chemical weapons in Syria (by the al-Assad regime) would draw a *red line*, after which the US politics would take a dramatic turn in respect to Syria, and after which a US military intervention into Syrian would most likely ensue.⁹¹⁸

The use of chemical weapons is clearly against international, widely acknowledged norms and conventions.⁹¹⁹ Also the public typically morally condemns it. The United Nations that monitors the adherence to these international norms and laws of war, was swift in condemning the incident. The Western powers, United States in the front, have in recent decades outlined their international standing through the paradigms of safeguarding human rights, humanitarian norms, protection of humanity and explained their international military operations by humanitarian objectives and rhetoric.⁹²⁰ The ethos prevalent within the international community as well as the Western humanitarian orientation contrasted with the immense civilian suffering, violation of international norms banning the use chemical

915 *Remarks on Syria, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon*, Seoul (Republic of Korea), 26 August 2013, Ban Ki-Moons Speeches.

916 Power's tweet accessed in David Campbell's Blog “*Visual storytelling: creative practice and criticism*”. *Syria and the power of images*. August 27.2013.

917 Ibid; *Ban appoints Swedish scientist to lead probe into alleged chemical weapons use in Syria*. *UN News Center*, 26.03.2013.

918 *Remarks by the President to the White House Press Corps*. The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, August 20. 2012.

919 See for example: *Convention on Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of chemical Weapons and on their Destruction*. Geneva, 3 September 1992. (Syria has not engaged the convention.)

920 See chapter 2. On the *humanitarian world politics*, the contemporary Western lead world political system, within which Western interventionist politics legitimized by humanitarian means has become central, see: Aaltola: 2009; Barnett, Michael N. *The international humanitarian order*. Security and governance series, Routledge, Oxon, 2010; Douzinas, Costas. *Human Rights and Empire. The Political Philosophy of Cosmopolitanism*. Routledge-Cavendish, New York, 2007; Chandler, David. *From Kosovo to Kabul and beyond. Human Rights and international intervention*. Pluto Press, London, 2006.

weapons. This contradiction combined with the Western dominant political positioning in regards to the Syrian and preexisting anticipation of the use of chemical weapons in the area by al-Assad, all resulted in widespread condemnation of the event by the Western states as well as the international community. And thus the Ghouta events, the guilt of al-Assad and the atrocious images were heaved into a heated discussion on the international high-level.

7.4.1 IMAGES AS PROOF: THE PERPETRATOR BECOMES VISUAL

For decades or even for centuries, one of the central functions of mediated images of distant suffering has been to enable distant spectators to bear witness to the suffering of others inflicted by violent politics, wars and catastrophes. Violent images do not only show and unveil suffering which would otherwise remain outside of the view of distant spectators; they moreover commonly act as proof of violence taking place—habitually images have even been utilized juridical as testimonials of crimes of war. Thus atrocious images of suffering often also point to the cause of suffering—the perpetrator.⁹²¹ In line with this tradition, visual images of the events of August 21st were within the international political discussion concerning the Syrian situation swiftly referred to as offering (legal) proof of not just the suffering of humans, but of the use of chemical weapons, and moreover the offender guilty of the events.

The Western powers quickly assembled reports analyzing and investigating the event. These reports were built on intelligence information, accounts of the local medical workers, as well as amateur/social media images of locals.⁹²² Britain was first to release its report, on 29th of August, only about a week of the events. The report concluded that most probably al-Assad and his regime were behind the attack.⁹²³ The next day, United States released its assessment on the events, the use of chemical weapons as well as the perpetrator. The report used as its core evidence more than hundred videos and thousands of amateur images shot in the area at the time of the attack and right after it. The report stated that the massive amount of coaxial footage proved that the event unfolded as stated by the images (and Syrian opposition sources). It maintained that it was by no means possible to fabricate this magnitude of images. Also in an US assessment, the guilt was pinned on al-Assad.⁹²⁴ The French government's assessment was very much

921 See chapter 2 and for instance: **Sontag**, 2003; **Zelizer**, 1998; **Sliwinski**, 2011, **Butler**, 2009; **Moeller**, 2013.

922 *Nämä todisteet vakuuttivat puolustusministerit*. Helsingin Sanomat, 07.09.2013. In addition to the French, British and US, also Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy for the European Union, condemned the attack as violation of international law, and as a war crime. *Speech by HRVP Catherine Ashton on Syria*. European Commission - SPEECH/13/688. September, 11.2013. Press Releases Database, Europa, EU.

923 *Syria: Reputed Chemical Weapons Use*. Joint intelligence organization, August 29. 2013.

924 *Government Assessment of the Syrian Government's Use of Chemical Weapons on August 21, 2013*. The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, August.30.2013.

alike with the previous in method and conclusions.⁹²⁵ Consequently, the locally produced amateur images habitually mediated via social media, became to function as plausible proof of not only the advancement of the events and the human toll of the attack, but also the offender perpetrating them.

The way in which the Western powers used the visual amateur footage in their reports as *proof* is noteworthy. There is a common stubborn and persistent perception of photographs as transparent records of the real. Thus photographic images have for long served a function of guaranteeing the objectivity and authenticity of news reporting, as well as served a political and juridical proof function.⁹²⁶ It seems that the proof function and status of the images as records of the real in the case of the Ghouta events was fortified by the nature of the visual records as amateur images. Photographs produced by amateurs seemed, also in political contexts, to gather a higher status of trustworthiness and believability than images of professionals. Behind this notion lays, again the idea of amateur images authentic: shot on the spot, locally produced, unframed, somewhat objective, eyewitness accounts of unfolding events.⁹²⁷ The popular notion of photographic amateur images as “picturing the events as they really happened”, is apparent in the Western reports investigating the Ghouta events. The notion of authenticity is in the reports effectively used in a highly political manner. What is furthermore significant in the Western political utilization of the amateur images in the reports is that, in addition to the suffering and the victims that appear in the images on a blatant level, the images the perpetrator of the atrocious event becomes figured visible. Consequently, the evil character of al-Assad—something that is not visible apparent in the images—was through the political use of the images, added into their signification.

Following the Damascus attacks of 21st August 2013, the UN appointed a mission to investigate whether chemical weapons were used in the area. The UN report on the events was released on the 16th of September, about two weeks after the political assessments of the Western powers. The report showed that a chemical substance—sarin gas—was used in the area that day. The UN report was not to investigate the perpetrator of the event.⁹²⁸

⁹²⁵ **French Report Concludes Syria Regime used Chemical Weapons**, CBS News, September, 02. 2013; **Syria/Syrian chemical programme– National executive summary of declassified intelligence**. Paris, September 3, 2013. It is stated in the report that based on the visual footage of the event the severity and scope of the event was calculated: *Based on a methodical technical analysis of 47 original video tapes of the August 21 events, a first counting of the victims, area by area, has been carried out. Based on just this set of videos, no less than 281 death casualties have been recorded, located in the East Ghouta (Ain Tarma, Douma, Erbin, Jobar, Kfar Batna, Qas Alaa, Zamalka) and West Ghouta (Mudamiyat Sham).*

⁹²⁶ This was the case perhaps most renownedly with the Holocaust images, see chapter 2.3.1.&2.3.2.

⁹²⁷ On the (belief on)authenticity and trustworthiness of amateur photographs see for example: *Audience Discourses on amateur news content and their Effects on Journalism Practices.* & *In Amateurs we Trust: Readers assessing Non-Professional News photographs.* In **Pantti & Anden-Papadoupoulos**: 2011.

⁹²⁸ **United Nations Mission to Investigate Allegations of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. Report on the Alleged Use of Chemical Weapons in the Ghouta Area of Damascus on 21 August 2013.** UN, Hague, 13.09.2013.

Nevertheless, regardless of the silence of the UN on the matter, the verdict seemed to be clear in the perception of the Western world. Strongly resting on the amateur images of the event, president al-Assad was solidified as guilty of the atrocious crime against his people, not only in political settings, but moreover the dominant public imaginary of the Western sphere.

7.4.2 THESE HORRIBLE IMAGES DEMAND US TO ACT – IMAGES OF THE GAS ATTACK LEGITIMIZING AN INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION

In addition to the proof function, the images of local origin were abundantly referred to in international political speech surrounding the Syrian situation, and namely utilized in describing the Western political reaction to the use of chemical weapons. Thus, the images played an important role in constructing the (Western) perceptions of the event, as well as shaped the political decision making processes concerning the situation in Syria. Soon after the event, the Western coalition (United States, France and Britain in front) started to plan a targeted military intervention into Syria, in order to deter and punish the al-Assad regime, seen as responsible of the massacre.⁹²⁹ Even though the planned military operation did not eventually take place, the status and use of the images in rationalization, argumentation and legitimization of the military intervention was significant.

President Obama aligned in his speech on Syria, delivered on 9th of September, that the use of poison gas—which was undoubtedly carried out by the al-Assad regime—was not just a violation of international law, and did not only jeopardize the authority of the international ban on the use of chemical weapons, but was moreover a violation of a universally shared sense of the “sacredness of humanity”. He stated that the use of chemical weapons profoundly altered the US assessment of the situation and its stance on the Syrian war. Obama argued that after the use of chemical weapons, al-Assad did not just pose a threat to the Syrians and the security of the nearby areas, but also a comprised a concrete threat to the national security of the United States and the peacefulness of the whole world. The images describing the attack were conspicuously on display throughout the president’s speech. In the rhetoric of Obama the thousands of “sickening” images—shot with cell phones and mediated through social media—demonstrate in an unforgettable and a horrible way what really happened in Syria the night of the attack. Obama warned that the world should not forget what they have seen, and turn a blind eye on the images, for that is what the dictators committing such atrocities want. He pleaded the members of the Congress and citizens of the United States to view the images of dying Syrian children, and to then ask themselves whether they want to live in a world that allows carnages of this

⁹²⁹ *Syria Crisis: UK and US finalise plans for military strikes.* 28.08.2013, The Guardian; *Obama set for limited strike to Syria, as British vote no.* 29.08.2013, New York Times. *Länsimaat valmistelevat täsmäiskua Syyriaan.* August, 28.2013, Helsingin Sanomat.

kind to happen. Obama reasoned and legitimized the planned military operation by making a reference to the images of children “writhing in pain and going still on a cold hospital floor”. In Obama's words, these images show that “sometimes resolutions and statements of condemnation are simply not enough”.⁹³⁰

In early September President Obama also showed images of the Syrian suffering to the members of the Congress. He exhibited 13 amateur images, verified and authenticated by the US intelligence, in order to get the congress to back the military intervention into Syria. As said earlier, these key images also extensively circulated by the Western mainstream media, were soon established as iconic images, portraying the agony of the Syrians brought about by the ruthless use chemical weapons.⁹³¹ Because of the red line—speech, delivered a year before the Ghouta attack—in which the president stated that the use of chemical weapons would result in a hardening US stance and a possible military operation in to Syria—also the credibility of the president was in line.⁹³² By reclining to the horrific images, their testimonial power and by effectively utilizing the emotional and proof power of the images, Obama strived to summon the Congress behind him, to back the planned military operation.

In his statements on Syria, Obama also recurrently referred to the iconized horrific historical events, in which chemical weapons have been used; e.g. the First World War and the Holocaust. He explained that because of the deviant nature of gas—a substance killing everything on its way, soldiers and infants alike—the civilized world has worked for decades to ban these weapons of mass destruction.⁹³³ The references to Holocaust and the memorable historical events of the usage of gas, remind the Western spectator of the horrendous images from the gas chambers of the Nazi concentration camps, which have been in the Western public imaginary established as the ultimate representations of utmost suffering. The Holocaust can be seen as the ultimate visually iconized crime against humanity; the ground zero from which the contemporary institutionalized protection of humanity and universal human rights aspirations have their base at.⁹³⁴ By using historical references, the events in Syria and the photographs produced of them, were connotatively associated with commonly condemned horrific events of the 1910s and 1940s, and the

930 **Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria.** White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 10.09.2013.

931 **Government Assessment of the Syrian Government's Use of Chemical Weapons on August 21, 2013.** The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, August.30.2013; **First on CNN: Videos show Glimpse into evidence for Syria intervention.** CNN News, September, 8.2013; **Obama's shocking case for attacking Syria: Gruesome series of videos taken in aftermath of gas attacks that White House is using in closed-door briefings to persuade lawmakers to back US strikes.** The Daily Mail, September, 07.2013.

932 **Remarks by the President to the White House Press Corps.** The White House, Office of the Press Secretary. August, 20. 2012.

933 **Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria.** The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, September.09.2013.

934 **Sliwinski**, 2011, 83-110; **Zelizer**, 1998.

culturally well-known, iconized pictures produced of these atrocities. The events of the 21st of August in Syria were, by using historical references, added to the grim list of the atrocities that should never have happened.

As discussed in the context of this study, contemporary images of horror and suffering are commonly read and compared to historical representations, and today's atrocities habitually refer to the past ones. Historical references to past events established as crimes against humanity, amplify the force of the appeal, and fortify the emotional power of the images.⁹³⁵ The combination of the historical references and the emphasis on amateur images mediated via social media technology—enabling us to see distant atrocities as they happen—intensify the idea that the contemporary international community (or the West) has the moral duty to prevent the horrors, reminding us of the past calamities from happening again. In the Western cultural sphere, the reference to the Holocaust, amplifies the notion of “never again”.⁹³⁶ References to past atrocities function as a cultural resonance background, which amplifies the emotional message of the images, but also adds new meanings to them. In the rhetoric of president Obama, the notion that we—the human kind and the international community, aware of the current atrocity—cannot just stand by, look and do nothing about it, recurred. Obama framed the images as showing the horrors of the Syrian people as indicating a situation, in which the surrounding world *has to intervene into* in order to make the suffering and instability stop, and to prevent future use of chemical weapons.⁹³⁷

US president Obama was not the only Western head of state politically utilizing the emotional power of the atrocity images. Also, the Secretary of State *John Kerry* similarly aligned in support of military action at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on Syria, 3th of September, as he stated that this was: “not the time for armchair isolationism. This is not the time to be spectators to slaughter. Neither our country or our conscience can afford the cost of silence”. He added: “We have spoken up against unspeakable horror many times in the past”. And further pleaded: “Now we must stand up and act”.⁹³⁸ In his speech on Syria on the 26th of August Kerry also made a strong reference to the “gutwrenching” scenery of the images of the event:

935 See Chapters 2 & 4; **Campbell**, 2002, 142-172; **Käpylä & Kennedy**, 2014; **Sliwinski**, 2011, 83-110; **Zelizer**: 1998

936 See: **Campbell**: 2002, 158-160 **Zelizer**: 1998, 2.

937 **Statement by the President on Syria**. The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, August, 31. 2013; **Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria**. The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, September, 10.2013; **Text of a Letter from the President to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate**. The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, August 31, 2013; **Syria Crisis: Obama wins backing for military strike**. BBC News, 03.09.2013; **Obama lines up key support in Congress for Syria attack**. Los Angeles Times, September 3, 2013.

938 **Kerry, Hagel and Dempsey testify at Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on Syria. Full transcript**. The Washington Post, September 3, 2013.

Last night after speaking with foreign ministers from around the world about the gravity of this situation, I went back and I watched the videos, the videos that anybody can watch in the social media, and I watched them one more gutwrenching time. It is really hard to express in words the human suffering that they lay out before us. As a father, I can't get the image out of my head of a man who held up his dead child, wailing while chaos swirled around him. ⁹³⁹

Likewise, the French president *François Hollande* and the British Prime Minister *David Cameron* appealed in favor of a targeted military operation, rationalizing the operation on the grounds of the horrific scenery the amateur images of the event and its aftermath presented. David Cameron resulted strongly to the emotional power of the images in reasoning why a military intervention was necessary. He stressed that the members of the Parliament whom had not previously seen the images should force themselves to do so. Cameron claimed that the images bare such a horrible statement that after seeing them the atrocity would never fade from the memory. ⁹⁴⁰ In this way the images were presented as telling something otherwise unimaginable, something that must be seen in order to be able to apprehend the situation and its severity. Again the nature of the images as locally produces amateur images—shot on the spot, in the midst of the hurt and mayhem of the events, by local people, potential victims—was in the statements of the Western leaders worked to stress the acuteness of the situation, and the need to act promptly on it. The increased drama of amateur images amplifies their emotional impact; looking at them is like looking at the situation evolving through the eyes of those directly affected by the events. The hasty, shaky and brutal amateur style of the images was stated as showing “what actually happened in Syria”. Moreover the personal tone of the political commentators, presenting themselves as shocked spectators and witnesses: Kerry looking at the images on his free time, after hours of work, at home, as a *father* and Cameron as someone who was personally nearly traumatized, unable to forget the visually encountered scenery—further adds the emotional appeal and drama power of the images.⁹⁴¹ Seeing and witnessing the event via the dramatic visual proof framed as authentic was in the statements of the Western leaders seen to bring about a responsibility to act on the situation. The images were perceived in the rhetoric of Western politicians as pushing about a moral imperative of action and intervention: these images and the suffering they

⁹³⁹ **Remarks on Syria.** John Kerry, secretary of State, August 26, 2013.

⁹⁴⁰ **Syria – Excerpts from the interview given by François Hollande, President of the Republic, to the daily newspaper Le Monde.** France Diplomatie, August.30.2013; **Syria crisis: David Cameron says British military attack must be 'judgment call'.** The Guardian, August, 29..2013; **PM makes case for Syria Intervention.** BBC, Democracy Live, August, 29.2013. ; See also: **Saugmann-Andersen, Rune:** *Remediating Security. A semiotic framework for analyzing hoe video speaks security.* PhD dissertation, Department of political science, University of Copenhagen, 2015, 8-10

⁹⁴¹ *Audience discourses on Amateur News content and their effects on Journalistic practices.* 199-201; See also Saugmann-Andersen, 2015.

showed demanded to be seen, and moreover demanded action—and the right course of action was a humanitarian targeted military intervention of the Western powers. The notions, that one should face the images, not to turn ones gaze away from the “testimonial of the real” they presented, and that the images demanded a specific kind of (humanitarian) action from their (Western) spectators were spectacularly widely used in the political rhetoric.

Western leaders were rigorous in defining the intervention in Syria different from the previous long stretched operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. It was stressed that there would not be boots on the ground, and that the operation would be a limited and surgically targeted, necessary in order to make the suffering stop and to prevent such attacks from happening again. It was deemed to be “a legal humanitarian intervention”, as Prime Minister Cameron described it.⁹⁴² The idea that the intervention was necessary to carry out since it was the moral duty of the West to act in a (militarized) humanitarian manner and to protect the entire humanity from a terrible destiny, dramatically pictured by the horrific images, was repeated in the statements of Western leaders. Thus a notion of the imperative of action set by the images, familiar for example from the times of the CNN-effect discussion⁹⁴³, was widely voiced in relation to the Syria images.

7.4.3 IMAGES OF SUFFERING IN THE AGE OF HUMANITARIAN WORLD POLITICS: WITH WAR AGAINST WAR

The rhetoric of the Western leaders added a humanitarian-interventionist ethos—essential of the contemporary Western international politics—into the images. The rhetoric used in the proclamations of Western leaders in justifying and rationalizing the military operation, explained that the horrors pictured could only be remedied by Western interventionist military-humanitarian acts. As the figure of the perpetrator was added to the images in the proof function, another figure was attached to them in rhetoric legitimizing the military operation: the figure of a moral Western savior, a humanitarian figure, who sets out to save the suffering victims from the amoral evildoers inflicting the pain. The righteous Western political actor was presented as acting according to the moral imperative set by the images, and pictured as using necessary, legal military force in order to protect humanity and to punish the evil villains, enemies of the human kind.

When placed in a historical context of the uses and functions of images of atrocity, it is remarkable how the images of the Ghouta atrocity were in the

⁹⁴² *Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria*. The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 10.09.2013; *Syria crisis: David Cameron says British military attack must be 'judgment call'*. The Guardian, 29.08.2013; *PM makes case for Syria Intervention*. BBC, Democracy Live, 29.08.2013; *Syria – Excerpts from the interview given by François Hollande, President of the Republic, to the daily newspaper Le Monde*. France Diplomatie, 08.30.2013.

⁹⁴³ See for instance: Gilboa, 2005, 28.

contemporary Western political setting and rhetorical use framed and utilized to legitimate a military solution to the situation. In the case of the Ghouta attack images of war-inflicted suffering were dominantly utilized—seemingly quite paradoxically—to promote war as a resource to put end to violence. Historically, prominent notions on the effects of crude images of war have generally been rather divergent. Images unveiling war inflicted suffering and making visible the horrors brought about by war have, at least in the earlier 1900s historical contexts, been seen more often to have a contradictory effect.

The revelatory effect of gruesome images, quite the opposite of the contemporary logic, has historically been dominated by the idea, that visually unveiling the horrors of war, would work to posture the spectator to oppose war, and to direct the thoughts of the spectators towards notions preventing war, even pacifism. As an example of this orientation serves the pacifistic First World War pamphlet *Krieg dem Kriege* assembled by German activist Ernst Friedrich, discussed in chapter 2. Also the Holocaust images as well as the Vietnam War imagery can be seen as examples of such orientation. Nevertheless, images of suffering are extremely ambivalent and utilizable in multitudes of manners. Images of war and suffering civilians have also been commonly used to promote war or to rationalize military solutions also historically, especially in political rhetoric in times of crisis.⁹⁴⁴ Rather, what this historical contextualization suggests is, that images of suffering are—within recent Western international politics and in the era of humanitarian world politics and social media—habitually understood and framed quite differently than previously. Susan Sontag points to this phenomenon in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, while she discusses *Virginia Woolf's* notions on pacifism and images of war in her 1938 essay *Three Guineas*, in relation to the post 9/11 setting. As Woolf at the time of the Spanish civil war writes on the atrocity images of the bombings of the town of Guernica, and makes a claim that these images can only bring about anti-war sentiments, and condemnation of war, Sontag in the post 9/11 raises the question whether anyone still today—even the pacifist—believe that war could/should be stopped. What today is settled for are attempts to bring the violators of the laws of war to justice, and to place other regulations to armed conflicts.⁹⁴⁵ Western waged humanitarian interventions to foreign conflicts causing civilian suffering are habitually today (in the West) seen as means of regulating war, not abolishing war.

This notion of fighting foreign war-inflicted civilian suffering with the resources of Western lead humanitarian military interventions has, as discussed, become more frequent at least the 1990s onwards.⁹⁴⁶ And as war has become to be presented, framed and understood (in the West) as a

⁹⁴⁴ See chapter 2.2.5.; **Friedrich**, 1924; see also **Sontag**: 2003.

⁹⁴⁵ **Sontag**, 2003, 1-5

⁹⁴⁶ See chapter 2.; **Campbell, David**. 2002.

humanitarian resource necessary to civilize global crisis areas, and as military interventions have become a widely accepted recourse in combatting distant human suffering; consequently the anti-war (even pacifistic) potential of images of suffering has lessened. Thus, as the Western leaders appealed to the Western public and politicians, and urged them to look at the images and bare witness to the suffering of the Syrians, while at the same time rationalizing a military involvement, consequently the arrangement of the images suggested that the *humanitarian catharsis* today may be attained by waging war. The political Western spectacle of the Ghouta chemical attack added ideological content and meanings to the images, such as the imperative of military humanitarian action and the spirit of military interventionism. Thus the utilization of the Ghouta images in Western political contexts mirrors the contemporary ethos and spirit of Western international politics, and forms a distinct act at the visual humanitarian theater, which poignantly reflects contemporary Western political framing and utilization of war images and prevalent notions on humanity and its protection at the contemporary era.

7.4.4 FROM THE IMPERATIVE OF INTERVENTION TO A DIPLOMATIC SOLUTION

Human suffering indicated by the Ghouta images was vigorously used in reasoning for the planned Western military operation headed by the US, France and Great Britain. Britain was widely expected to take part in the planned military operation. The British Parliament debated and voted on the participation on 29th of August. In his speech prior to the vote Prime Minister Cameron strongly appealed in favor of participation. He again built his argumentation strongly on the horrific scenery of the images of the attack. Cameron stressed that disregarding the imperative of intervention set by images was the most dangerous thing to do. He also carefully explained, that the planned military intervention was not like the previous wars, but a targeted operation that was morally necessary in the situation. Nevertheless, the British parliament voted—quite surprisingly—against the British involvement.⁹⁴⁷ Up until the Syria vote Britain had participated in all of the major recent Western military-humanitarian operations, from Kosovo to Libya. The Syria vote made a historical exception to this policy.⁹⁴⁸ The no-vote was also most probably a deathblow to the execution of the whole operation. US and France were now basically left alone endorsing military solution, while the EU was entrusting a diplomatic solution⁹⁴⁹ and the

⁹⁴⁷ *House of Commons debate on Syria*. Parliament of the UK, August, 30, 2013; **British Parliament Votes Against Military Intervention In Syria**. The Huffington Post, 29.08.2013.

⁹⁴⁸ On the historical participation of Britain in western military deployments, see: **Häkkinen, Teemu**. *The Royal Prerogative redefined: parliamentary debate on the role of the British Parliament in large-scale military deployments, 1982-2003*. University of Jyväskylä, 2014.

⁹⁴⁹ **Speech by HRVP Catherine Ashton on Syria**. European Commission - SPEECH/13/688, September 11, 2013.

opposing world political bloc—namely Russia and its allies—were forcefully against the operation.⁹⁵⁰

A couple of weeks after the Damascus atrocity—and a week from the British no-vote—September 5th and 6th Russia hosted a G20 Summit in St Petersburg. The economy summit soon turned into a battlefield of different international political footings, divided along the lines of the global blogs supporting or against the al-Assad regime. China and Russia vocally voiced their opposition to the planned Western military involvement.⁹⁵¹ Russian president Vladimir Putin argued, that the Western nations had no solid evidence on the guilt of president al-Assad, and no right to intervene militarily in to the situation of a sovereign state.⁹⁵² The Western powers—as well as South Korea, Saudi Arabia and Japan among other nation taking an anti-al-Assad posture—signed a joint statement on Syria, in which they condemned the Syrian regime as responsible for the bloodshed in Damascus, and appealed for a strong international reaction to the situation.⁹⁵³ At the time of the G20 summit the global political divisions surrounding the Syrian situation were tangible. Nevertheless, at the time of the summit, information on a diplomatic solution into the Syrian crisis, negotiated between Russia and the United States, surfaced.⁹⁵⁴

Soon after the summit, the US Secretary of State John Kerry mentioned in his speech (September 9th in London) that if the Syrian government was to turn over its chemical weapons arsenal to the international community, the military operation could be refrained.⁹⁵⁵ The same day Russian Foreign Minister *Sergei Lavrov* followed Kerry's statement. Lavrov stated that if the military operation could be avoided by turning over the chemical weapons of Syria, Russia would start negotiating with the Syrian government, in order to get it to hand over its weapons to international community for elimination.⁹⁵⁶ 10th of September President Barack Obama mentioned in an interview, that he viewed the Russian proposal offering a possible solution to the situation.⁹⁵⁷ A diplomatic solution to the Syrian Chemical weapons crisis started to emerge. September 14th the United States and Russia published a joint proposal: *Framework for Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons*.⁹⁵⁸

⁹⁵⁰ **Vladimir Putin's News Conference Following the G20 Summit.** St. Petersburg, September, 6, 2013.

⁹⁵¹ **World leaders pressure Obama over Syria at G20 summit.** The Reuters, 05.09.2014; **Divided they stand: G20 ends with East and West still split over Syria action.** The Independent, September 7, 2013.

⁹⁵² **Vladimir Putin's News Conference Following the G20 Summit.** St. Petersburg, September 6, 2013.

⁹⁵³ **Joint Statement on Syria.** St. Petersburg, September 6, 2013. University of Toronto, G20 Research Group

⁹⁵⁴ **Putin, Obama discussed Syria arms control idea last week: Kremlin.** Reuters, September 10, 2013.

⁹⁵⁵ **John Kerry on military strikes against Syria – video.** The Guardian, September 9, 2013.

⁹⁵⁶ **Russia calls on Syria to hand over chemical weapons.** The Guardian, September 9, 2013.

⁹⁵⁷ **Syria crisis: Obama welcomes Russia's chemical weapons proposal.** The Guardian, September, 10, 2013.

⁹⁵⁸ **Framework for Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons.** Office of the Spokesperson, Washington, D.C., September, 14.2013.

This framework was the base for the UN Security Council's resolution 2118, on the disarmament and destruction of the Syrian chemical weapons, which was signed September 27th.⁹⁵⁹ The planned Western military solution to the Syrian crisis thus soon faded away, and was replaced with a diplomatic solution.

This rather sudden turn is interesting when reflected against the political argumentation on the imperative of acting strongly and punishing the evildoer, based on the visual testimonials of the suffering of Syrians. The diplomatic solution, which basically solely meant al-Assad regime voluntarily handing out its remaining chemical weapons arsenal for elimination seems rather light, when compared with Western political arguments stressing severity of the security threat posed by the Syrian regime. High among the Western rationalization of the planned attack were also the need to punish and oust al-Assad out of power, and the monstrosity of the al-Assad regime illustrated by the images. Then, what explains this overnight turn from active warmongering to a diplomatic path?

Recent Western military interventions rhetorically legitimized with the grand narrative of humanitarian war and Western imperative to act strongly on the evildoers, have not turned out exactly triumphant. The low results and high costs—both economically and humanely—of previous military interventions undoubtedly had an impact on the outcome of the Syrian situation. The Western world seemed, at the particular moment in time, to be quite weary of interventionist wars, fought in the name of humanitarianism. The memory and disappointments produced by the long stretched wars in Afghanistan and Iraq most probably had their influence on the democratic system of Britain rejecting the operation. The same phenomena may be seen to have been at work as well in the eagerness of president Obama finally submitting to a diplomatic solution.⁹⁶⁰ On the other hand, and on a more cynical note, one might say that perhaps political interests of the Western powers in Syria were not at the time strong enough to carry a potentially costly military solution. Regardless of amount of human suffering made visible by the images of the event, it seems that the overall situation in Syria was not in the West at the very moment politically scaled as severe enough—the military involvement. From the point of view of strategic interests of the Western powers, Syria was not seen as a necessary—in comparison to the previous cases, in which a military path was taken.

⁹⁵⁹ **United Nations Security Council Resolution 2118 (2013)**. United Nations Security Council, September, 27.2013.

⁹⁶⁰ **War-Weariness**, Charles M. Blow, New York Times, Op-ed, 30.08.2013; **Public opinion and intervention in Syria: 60 years of Gallup polling on U.S. military actions**. Journalists Resource. August.27.2013; **War-weary Britain: "The Iraq war was where it all started for me"**. The Guardian, February, 15.2014; **World Public opinion sharply opposed to Syria strike**. The Huffington Post, September, 05.2013; **Syria debate in US Congress could break a president**. BBC News, September 9.2013; **Factbox: Congress debates Obama's plan for Syria strikes**, Reuters, September 9.2013.

7.4.5 THE CAUSALITY EFFECT IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA ERA

In the light of the Syrian case it seems that at the age of social media, amateur images of crisis are likely to gather wide visibility within mainstream media, to generate increasingly lively debate and to arouse strong tones of voices in international political contexts. Dramatic images of human suffering offer a powerful political tool, which can be emotionally effectively used in order to intensify political arguments and rationalize even heavy political decisions. But the case of the Ghouta attack images, within international political setting, also shows, how the humanitarily drawn narrative of “imperative of intervention” strongly built upon images of human suffering can be swiftly put aside, when political realities acquire this. In this light, within the Western international geostrategic politics, referring to “authentic images of suffering impelling us to act” rather appears as tools of convenience, referred to when politically suitable, but put aside when strategically relevant.⁹⁶¹

On grounds of the Syria-case, it seems—just like with the previous discussions on the causal force of crisis images, namely the Vietnam-syndrome and the CNN-effect thesis—that also in the era of social media and amateur images the (causal) power of images of atrocity is highly debatable. The ability of crisis images to create media noteworthiness, political reactions and moreover actions, is still today subordinate many preconditions: the logic of the mainstream media’s journalistic remediation, prevalent ideological presumptions and preconditions of a given cultural and political sphere, political elite consensus, strategic interests—and calculated political will, rather than an “imperative of action” set by suffering and its visual records.⁹⁶² The visual spectacle of the Syrian gas attack in the Western media and politics, and finally the diplomatic international solution to the crisis suggest, that the dynamic power of social media and amateur images is after all very limited. Just like for example the hope set on the CNN-effect in the 1990s, the political potency of atrocity images autonomously and somewhat causally creating (foreign) political action, still largely remains a myth.

The technology driven causality optimism of images of atrocity in the age of social media, also creates a *myth* in a barthean sense. This causality myth *naturalizes*, conceals and depoliticizes the political nature of framings—as well as the mechanisms of gaining of visibility and noteworthiness—and political utilization of images within mass media and moreover within international politics. It seems that the ideological, culturally and politically segmented nature of the (still dominant) mass media and the strategic (geo)political interests of powerful world political players, are often short handedly taken into account in popular claims as well as research concerning the effects of crisis images at the era of social media technologies. The

⁹⁶¹ See: **Robinson**, 2002.

⁹⁶² See: **Robinson**: 2002; **Hallin** 1986; **Cottle**, 2009.

technology optimism has in part led to a discourse, in which causality claims on the power and effect of social media crisis images are often made. The novel medium by which the message has been conveyed has thus perhaps attracted too much interest, as on the other hand, international power politics and ideological orientations determining our view on the world have perhaps been rather overlooked.⁹⁶³

This is not to say, that images showing suffering would not produce highly visible spectacles, and arouse strong outrage (and just as in the age of CNN effect act as *icons of outrage*) and hoist public condemnation. In this way dramatic images undoubtedly have an effect, and most probably at the age of swift image mediation even an intensified effect.⁹⁶⁴ Moreover, this is not to say, that images of suffering would not often be focally used in political rhetoric, as well as also the in legitimation of political decisions and actions, as they are. Images of crisis and suffering are strong tools in this sense, potential strategic enablers of even heavyweight political actions. Moreover the presumption on the authenticity of social media imagery was in the Ghouta case effectively politically utilized, and this is noteworthy. But, I claim that foreign political actions—such as sanctions, military interventions or other heavy weight acts—are despite any changes in the information technology and media logic, still today dependent on cold power realities and political, strategic interests. Therefore, just as many researchers have stated in relation to the CNN effect, shocking images of human suffering in this sense, often are, par excellence, political and strategic tools. But they do not function on a causal logic.⁹⁶⁵ Therefore, resting on Susan Sontag's argument, it seems that images may give push to actions and strengthen political reactions only if there is enough cultural, ideological and political resonance to prop their messages, and above all, if there is enough political power as well as geopolitical and economic interest involved to reinforce their account.⁹⁶⁶ This logic does not seem to have changed in the era of social media technologies and rabid digital image mediation. The case offered by the Syria chemical attack images seems to reassert the conception that visually witnessing even the most horrendous suffering does not automatically produce certain reactions. In this light the causality claim, according to which seeing more is supposed to lead to reacting more, seems quite invalid, also at the age of social media.

Moreover, resting on the Ghouta case, I claim, that the growing amount of revelatory images contemporarily mediated through social media, does not automatically produce stronger reactions or bridge the emotional empathy gap between the spectators and the sufferers. My claim is not based so much on Susan Moeller's *Compassion fatigue*-thesis on the exhausting effect of flooding suffering images⁹⁶⁷, but rather on Stanley Cohen's idea of the

963 See for example: **Liberation Technology**, 2012.

964 See: **Perlmutter**: 1998, 28; **Campbell**, 2002,157-158.

965 See: **ibid**; **Sontag**, 2003, **Robinson**: 2002.

966 **Sontag**, 1977, 17; **Sontag**, 2003, 80-84.

967 **Moeller**, 1999.

sociology of denial. As Cohen has noted in his seminal book *States of Denial*, even if there is something extremely terrible happening just around the corner, and we know about it, we humans habitually tend to wrap ourselves in a state of denial; calmly walk pass, and do nothing about the suffering of others. This, according to Cohen, actually takes place more often than not. Surrounded by horrors, we go on with our lives. Cohen sees this as a way to cope with a world filled with atrocities, especially in an era when we know so much about the crookedness of the globe we inhabit. Moreover, we get used to the state of things. Accustomed to the suffering of distant others, we might even lean to think that the prevalent state of affairs is how things simply are, and thus, actually even how they should be. This logic, according to Cohen, also expands from the level of individuals into the level of political actors, states and international politics. In this context action (to alleviate the suffering of others or to intervene) is often taken only when it seems inevitable for our own survival, absolutely *de rigueur* for our security or success.⁹⁶⁸ In the light of the Ghouta case, I am inclined to think that this is also the case with images of distant crises and human suffering in the era of social media. Thinking about the power of images in the social media era, it seems that the reliance on the causal political effect of growing number of images mediated through a novel technology, is highly optimistic, and potentially misleading. In the light of the history and the Syrian example, it seems, that technology is not able to change the human nature; the emotional and psychological build embedded deep in us. Perhaps we are inclined to stay in denial.

On the other hand, and on a more positive note, the widely internalized optimistic belief in the ability of crisis imagery in generating heightened care for the suffering of others, thus building a better, more humane world, can be interpreted as a sign of humanity's ongoing progress—or at least as an indication of a commonly shared will into that direction. This tradition of optimism can be traced back to the Enlightenment era, as Kant asked, already in 1798, “is the human race constantly progressing”, pointing to the heightened consideration of distress of distant others at the time.⁹⁶⁹ In this light, then, the persistent surfacing of the optimistic assertion on the power of atrocity images can be seen as an emblem of a persistent belief on the benevolent nature of the human kind.

All in all, the milieu of social media crisis imagery comprises a distinct and an altered theatrical setting through which the suffering of distant others is mediated for the sight of the spectating world. The novel mediation technology and practices created by it, without a doubt, in many ways alter the ways in which we encounter the pain of others, but its capability of

⁹⁶⁸ Cohen, 2001.

⁹⁶⁹ Kant, Immanuel: *An Old Question raised again: Is the Human Race Constantly Progressing?* In *On history*, eds. White Beck, L, Fackenheim, E, Anchor, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1963 (1798)

altering how the human mind works, and furthermore how foreign politics function still remains debatable.

7.5 CONCLUSIONS: THE DEBATABLE SOCIAL MEDIA EFFECT

This chapter set out to investigate whether a contemporary notion on social media enabled unprecedentedly free information and image flows and the amateur images mediated from crisis zones, could and would alter the view of the surrounding world to distant suffering, and enable a more compassionate manner of action in order to put a stop to human suffering. In order to investigate this notion, the circulation, uses and significations of locally produced atrocity images from the August 21st 2013 Damascus gas attack were traced, firstly in Western mainstream media, briefly in the dominant Russian media and thirdly within international political argumentation.

Images originating from local sources, produced by amateurs and swiftly mediated via social media channels, are often associated with attributes such as authenticity, and habitually perceived as unframed and un-cropped records of unfolding, evolving events, mediated with less control and authoritarian governance. Thus an optimistic notion on the altering, liberating, democratizing and even a revolutionizing effect of social media crisis images has contemporarily surfaced both in public discussion as well as in research. I argued, that from time to time in the course of history, notions on new technical means of (visual) mediation in enabling an altered view into the suffering of distant others have been raised. An idea that technological advancements in the field on visual mediation would result in building up of stronger solidarity bonds and, moreover, generating political action in order to more effectively alleviate the suffering of others, has been revived recurrently in the course of modern history. As examples of this technology driven causal optimism on the power of images serve among others the innovation of photography (early 1900th century), the effects of the Holocaust images (1940s), the so-called Vietnam War syndrome discussion (1970s) and more latterly the CNN effect (1990s) as well as the Al-Jazeera effect (2000s). In this chapter, I placed the social media effect as a continuum in this historical saga as a topical manifestation of this historically formed thinking.

By resting to the case of the Ghouta images, I argued, that although digital technology and social media theoretically enables even fragmented groups of crisis areas to voice their views and grievances worldwide, in reality for the sporadic images to circulate extensively into the attention of the wider global publics, they still today need to be harnessed by the more conventional mainstream news media. Conventional mainstream media still acts as a gatekeeper, which disseminates, selects and circulates the material provided

by the new media channels, according to its own culturally and politically formed principles.

Soon after the Ghouta event, the amateur images produced from it were extensively used and circulated by the Western mainstream media. In the processes of the Western mainstream media, the images of the Syrian gas strikes gathered various meanings and significations, which were culturally, ideologically and politically constructed. The images were widely seen as certifying the already prevalent notion of the monstrosity of the Syrian regime headed by president al-Assad. Within the framings of the Western media the horrific images were presented as telling a story of violation of international laws of war, of crimes against humanity and as well as revealing the perpetrator behind the attacks. The main mode of addressing of the images was the humanitarian and human rights paradigm, dominant in the contemporary Western international political and ideological landscape. The meanings the images gathered were largely constructed along the lines of the prevalent Western notions and standings on the Syrian war. Thus, the uses of the atrocity images in Western media also worked to reinforce the cultural and political posture of the Western sphere towards the situation.

Correspondingly, the sugarcoated messages, which the president al-Assad's regime mediated through the social media channels, in order to promote a humane image of the regime and to paint a serene scenery of the everyday life in Syria, were negatively received in Western publicity. Circulating the tidied up images, was seen in the Western sphere as emblem of the deranged nature of the Assad regime, and thus the social media messages of al-Assad placed the regime into an even more despicable light in the Western view. On the other hand, the overview to the Russian media's use of the Syrian atrocity images revealed, how little attention the images gathered in a different political and ideological sphere. In the Russian state owned mainstream publicity the gruesome images were not used to determine the events in Syria, and were not commonly seen as proof of the guilt of al-Assad.

Also in the age of social media and vastly circulating amateur images, the images remain mute; they show, but cannot articulate. Images are signified, their meaning and message are produced in the political and cultural environment of their presentation and reading, according to contextual and discursive settings, through various uses, naming, framing and circulation. The processes of meaning creation happens in the realm of political, where silent images of suffering and atrocity constantly flow gathering different meanings and messages in uses and reuses. Thus the notion of the potential of the amateur images and social media dramatically altering our scenery into the suffering of distant others seems highly debatable: we still mainly see things as we are, not as they are.

On the other hand, the new practices of visual crisis mediation may potentially alter presentation conventions and styles of the imagery through which the surrounding world and its grievances are encountered. Images

produced by amateurs and local non-professionals—and topically extensively displayed in and by the mainstream media—differ in style, focus and framing from the crisis images taken by professionals working for large image agencies and media houses. The Western world has in the past decades grown accustomed to the conventions and style of professional crisis photographers, carefully selected and governed by many codes of taste, decency and representation. In the case of the Syrian gas attack images, for instance the proportionally high representation of men among the victims is noteworthy, when compared to the prevailing conventions on media images of professionals as well as visual representations of humanitarian organizations. Also notions of authenticity—an idea of amateur images capturing unfolding events “as they really were”—amplifies the status of images as (juridical) proof, may have an effect on our view to the crisis zones. Additionally the novel style of social media crisis imagery possibly also alters the style and scope of professional photography of crisis situations. In addition, the notions of authenticity, objectivity, the heightened proof function as well as amplified drama power associated with amateur images may be effectively utilized—and furthermore also constructed and fueled—by the mainstream media in its news production.

The emotional force of the images of suffering was central in the international political debate surrounding the Ghouta chemical weapons attack. The out of the ordinary, sudden and visibly shocking event of the gas attack hoisted the event into a spectacle in Western politics. The clear violation of international norms banning the use of chemical weapons, the suspected crimes of war—or crimes against humanity—were central in the debate of the Western powers and the international community. The amateur images of social media were extensively used in the reports of Western governments investigating the event. The images were seen to prove not only the events taking place in the Ghouta district and the use of gas as a weapon, but also the guilt of the al-Assad regime. Thus, in the proof utility of the images, in addition to the suffering victims, the guilty party—president al-Assad—was embedded in the images.

The images were further utilized in the Western political debate rationalizing the Western response to the situation in Syria. The origin of the images as amateur produced was utilized in Western political rhetoric in order to fortify their drama and testimonial power; and the notion that these images show “things as they really were” was repeatedly referred to in the rhetoric of the Western leaders. In the rhetorical use of the Western leaders the images were also associated into the cavalcade of iconized historical images of condemned past atrocities, such as the Holocaust and the use of gas in the First World War. This further strengthened their drama power and emotional appeal. The images were moreover seen to pose a moral imperative of action, and the proper action was—within the predominant Western humanitarian paradigm—seen to be a targeted Western military intervention into the situation. The visual witnessing of the horrors of Syrian

civilians was in the Western political rhetoric effectively used in legitimizing a military operation. Visually encountering the horrendous suffering was seen to posit a moral duty for the West to punishing the evildoer(s) and to save the suffering humanity by the means of a military operation. Thus, in the Western political use of the images, —in addition to the figures of suffering victims and the evil perpetrator—a third figure was added to them; that of the moral savior, the strong and responsible Western humanitarian “human”. This figure was presented as reacting to the images in a proper manner, and acting according to the moral imperative of intervention set by the suffering.

What was noteworthy in the politically constructed addressing of the images, in regards to historical function of atrocity images, was that the Syrian images were seen to encourage a military solution to the situation. Earlier in history, images of suffering and atrocity have been commonly seen to encourage anti-military approaches, even pacifism. Within the Western frame of interventionist humanitarian world politics, the images were on the contrary, seen to promote a military solution as a means of ending violence. This further proves the argument that images gather their meanings and are signified within the ideological settings and political, discursive frames they are read and interpreted in. The spirit of the Western humanitarian politics and military interventionism was added to the amateur images of social media within the Western political utilization.

In mid-September, 2013, less than a month after the gas attacks, the strong Western moral tones of voices demanding the military intervention on grounds of the immense suffering shown by the images, suddenly quieted down. The planned military operation was segued into a rather feeble diplomatic resolution outlined by the US and Russia. The Syrian chemical weapons crisis was resolved by a plan on international disarmament and destruction of the Syrian chemical weapons. The imperative of intervention set by the atrocious images was swiftly replaced by a politically more suitable diplomatic solution.

What can be said in the light of the Syrian case about the ability of crisis amateur images in generating an altered or a heightened emotional participation, is that still today, images—no matter how terrible they are, who produces them or how they surface—do not automatically produce an outcome or seem to press interventionist decision making. The topical massive amounts of images mediated from the global crisis zones, may produce a spectacle of condemnation and give a push to political/military action, but only if there is enough political interest and will reinforcing their account. Amateur crisis images are effectively utilized and reframed within mainstream media's remediation, and they may function as central icons of outrage. Moreover they tend to be forcefully taken up and utilized in political rhetoric, and effectively utilized in political argumentation when they resonate with overall ideological premises and political strategic goals. But the notion on the enforced power of amateur social media atrocity images in

altering our action on global crisis and distant suffering, looked at from the perspective of (global) mainstream media and international politics, remains highly debatable.

A Retrospect: About a year after the Ghouta chemical weapons attack, an international coalition, with the US in front, intervened into the ever more contested situation of Iraq and Syria by military means. As a response to the growing influence of the Islamic State (ISIS) in Iraqi and Syrian territories, aerial bombings and other measures—much parallel to the ones planned in relation to the Ghouta chemical attack—have been deployed by the US and its allies. The operation has been rationalized by the threat the terrorist groups pose to the world peace at large, as well by the brutal acts of ISIS in the area and the protection of the civilians of the area from the barbaric offences of ISIS.

Also in the case of ISIS and the intervention of the international coalition visual images mediated from the area played an important role. Horrible images of brutally killed Kurds, civilians and children, as well as images showcasing decapitated soldiers fighting against ISIS, permeated the Western view when the operation was discussed. ISIS has a distinct visual strategy, in which it seeks to underline its own barbarity by circulating ultraviolent imagery. ISIS has for example circulated imagery of decapitations of Western journalists captured in the area. These images have alarmed and shocked the surrounding world, and undoubtedly influenced the decision to act on the situation.

September 2015, a year after the US led coalitions intervention; also Russia intervened into the Syrian war, as al-Assad regime pleaded for Russian help to fight the rebel groups and jihadi-terrorist in the area. At latest at this point, Syrian became a desolate world political battleground, in which the blood of the Syrian civilians fuels the chaotic conflict. Russia together with the al-Assad regime have in 2016 heavily bombed residential areas for example in the city Aleppo, killing hundreds if not thousands of civilians. Horrific images of the destroyed city and its suffering inhabitants have shocked the spectating world. But the international community has remained paralyzed in relation to the massacre carried out in Aleppo by Russians and the Syrian regime.

When pondering on the power of atrocity imagery (amateur, local, social media mediated, as well as otherwise) within contemporary international politics, it may be said, in retrospective, that the images of the 2013 Syrian gas attack did not suffice to unite the spectating Western world in arms to fight the perils of humanity, nor have the images of the dying children of Aleppo in 2016. But the images of the ISIS brutality were actively utilized to legitimize the Western led action in the area. Looking at the steady flow of images of the atrocity taking place in Aleppo right now, makes painfully evident how images of suffering still—in the age of social media and swift

amateur image mediation—remain mere useful tools, utilized at convenience in international politics. No matter what horrors we visually encounter, what matters in the end at the level of international politics, are calculated political interests.

8 CONCLUSIONS: THE NECESSITY OF NON-WESTERN HAMARTIA FOR THE HUMANITARIAN HIERARCHY

This study began with a perhaps somewhat laconic statement on the contemporary everydayness of mediated images telling of the suffering of others in the West. But as we have seen, spectatorship of images telling of the suffering of others is not exactly a new phenomenon. In the absence of a direct contact with the sufferer in the realm of politics of pity, as Arendt would put it,⁹⁷⁰ mediated visual representations of suffering bodies have been seen to provide a profound and powerful route into comprehending the pain of distant others. Already the Enlightenment thinkers saw visual record of a suffering body as the most forceful message: encountering a suffering body evokes a sense of sameness, empathy, solidarity and points to the need to protect humanity (life) from pain, calamity and abuses (of human rights) as it reminds one of the shared human condition—vulnerability and precariousness.⁹⁷¹ Therefore, in this study I firstly analyzed the status, position and effects of visual images in the contexts of apprehension of a shared humanity, of the evolution of the ideas of life worthy of protection and (international) humanitarian politics in the Western sphere from the mid eighteenth century onwards.

By mapping out the modern history of visual humanitarian communication from the 1755 Lisbon earthquake onwards, through the uses of images of suffering and calamity within humanitarian connections, this study has shown how resorting to a visual strategy to make the distant spectators to recognize the shared vulnerability of (human) life, to sentimentally connect with the distress of others, and to arouse empathy and a will to alleviate the distress has been enduring over the centuries. It has become clear how visual images have served a focal role in bridging the moral gap between the suffering unfortunate and the safe distant on-lookers capable of alleviating the pain or even preventing suffering. The thesis has shown, as also Sliwinski describes,⁹⁷² that the modern history of the evolution of ideas on humanity—i.e. the historical construction of conceptions on life worthy of protection and the efforts to protect humanity—is a story of pain and terrible events, as well as of courageous campaigners trying to morally educate their audiences of the violations of the humanity of others, attempting to arouse their moral sentiments and conscience and to provide the distant spectators means to alleviate the suffering of others by using visual strategies. By following the visual trail of calamity, war, and

⁹⁷⁰ Arendt, 1990 (1963), 85-89.

⁹⁷¹ Smith, (1759) 2007; see Halttunen, 1995, 304-308.

⁹⁷² Sliwinski, 2011.

atrocities the thesis has made the evolution of the ideas on the protection of human rights and on safeguarding humanity and the widening of the boundaries of what is perceived as life worthy of protection observable. It has been shown how during the nearly 300 hundred years of modern visual humanitarian communication the representational practices and arrangements of images of pain and crisis have reflected, as well as constructed, the predominant thinking on humanity, the perils it faces and the available means to protect life from these perils.

But, as has become evident, the presentation of the images of pain, the visualizations of the pain of others and the spectatorship of such imagery is inherently troublesome. Visually exhibiting the most intimate moments of another person's suffering involves disturbing elements and ethical dilemmas. These dilemmas become evident in the risk of stereotyping, simplifying and othering representations, in their almost pornographic features, of the studied representations of suffering. Moreover, the thesis has shown that the ethical dilemmas are not limited to representational characteristics, but visual images—and especially emotive visual images of suffering—are *per se* ambivalent in their readings, functions and meanings. That is, photographs of pain and horror may give rise to opposing responses: an image of death may arouse a cry for peace in one and bring about sensations of desperate sadness and horror in another, or the very same photograph may spell retaliation, incite more violence, or even arouse emotions of fulfillment and justice being served for the other, or images of atrocious events may simply leave the spectator numb and paralyzed.⁹⁷³

Because images are mute, they are read and given meaning in their representational context, and their significations and messages are formulated by their arrangements.⁹⁷⁴ As has been pointed out, the swiftly *flow* from one context to another (especially in the contemporary times of frantic information mediation) leads to images gathering different framings, significations and meanings along the way. By including this ambivalent and unstoppable flowing nature of images of pain and suffering in the analysis I have revealed the way these images can and have been staged, contextually framed, named and signified, and hence politically utilized especially in times of conflict. The story of visual mediation of images of pain and conflict, as I have proposed in this book, is thus also a story of power, control and governance (of censorship and propaganda), of cultural framing, purposeful arrangement and political utilization.

The historical chapter 2. already showed how the visual representation of pain and suffering (and their spectatorship) has rarely been neutral or coincidental, but rather inherently purpose orientated and strategic. The use of the theater metaphor has enabled me to demonstrate how the spectating audiences are placed as spectators of such hard to look at images, most often with deliberate, contextual intentions to influence, to morally educate, to

⁹⁷³ See also for instance **Sontag**, 2003, 11-12.

⁹⁷⁴ **Barthes**, 1977, 15-31.

arouse certain contextual preferred sentiments, judgments, reactions, and actions. The study into the history of visual humanitarian communication and uses of images in humanitarian settings demonstrates how the representational modes and the ways in which the images were arranged to address their viewers reflect the historical preconditions, predominant mindsets and the dominant 'humanitarian spirit' of the time and context of their presentation. That is, the plot of the humanitarian play follows a certain pattern, that of the classic Aristotelean tragedy. This was already evident in the era of the Enlightenment, but particularly in the contemporary era the humanitarian play, the narrative or the unconscious beliefs underlying the plot, requires a certain stereotypical cast and certain simplicity, as the thesis showed.

The historical chapter evidenced how emotion evoking visual representations of the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 enabled the then-contemporary spectating audiences to imagine a shared vulnerable human family in need of protection. These images represented the dawn of the secular Enlightenment discourse on the protection of humanity, rights of the man, and cosmopolitan morality and they communicated strong sentiments and fostered messages of a shared human kind for the spectators of the era giving rise to the ascending concept of spectatorial sympathy and a thriving 'cult of sensibility.'⁹⁷⁵ As the chapter evidenced, later representations of suffering followed similar patterns and in their turn constructed the cultural discourses of Western humanitarianism. One important later addition to this humanitarian discourse were the images produced of the liberated Nazi concentration camps that were predominantly signified in the Western political sphere as marking the downfall of humanity and the absolute evil nature of the Nazi regime, thus forming a plot of their own. These Holocaust images became the icons of the 'never again' paradigm; they were framed as the ground zero of humanity, which thrust the international community into formulating the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and into furthering the international institutionalization of the protection of humanity. As was asserted, this process of institutionalization demonstrated all the hallmarks of images of suffering being part of and being used for political purposes: Firstly, the Western readings of the images were partly politically formulated, as they also emphasized the nature of the Western forces as the winners of the war, and, secondly, they instituted a new moral compass for the world reflecting the predominant Western notions on humanity and the perils facing it in the post Second World War era.

This process of institutionalization and increasing humanitarianism gave rise to optimistic belief in the political power of images of suffering. In the 1970s, the horrific images of suffering and human loss describing the Vietnam War were politically molded into another 'never again' message but this time for anti-war discourses. Yet, as I wrote, the theory regarding the

⁹⁷⁵ Halttunen, 1995, 303-308.

Vietnam War effect, asserting that images of suffering can alter the course of foreign policy, has been convincingly questioned, as the prevalent sentiments of the time (in the US in particular) had already turned against the continuation of the Vietnam War by the time.⁹⁷⁶ Thus, the history of humanitarian visual communication indicates that, rather than forcefully change politics, images of suffering and human right violations are more likely to be presented, arranged, intended to be read and signified along the lines of the contemporarily prevalent, appropriate contexts of feeling and attitude. And thus, as also Sontag asserts, in the light of the history I concluded that images of the pain of others cannot solely create a moral position, but that they often reinforce an existing one, and, thus, the framings of such imagery also reflect the topical preferred meanings and the humanitarian ethos of their time.⁹⁷⁷

Yet, as the thesis showed, today the everyday life of Western publics is unparalleledly abundant with visual records telling of dramatic destinies and violent experiences of distant strangers. This is due to several parallel singularities. First of all, novelties in the media sphere—such as ever more frantic mediation tempo and global flows of images, induced by, for instance, digital technology and the growing use of social media—bring the tragedies of distant others increasingly vigorously under the sight of safe (Western) onlookers. Secondly, the recent strengthening of the status of humanitarianism within the international sphere and its gradual rise from the margins of the international politics into a central paradigm determining the international community has made humanitarianism a vital source of legitimacy in the present world order to the degree that I have discussed this phenomena in terms of Western humanitarian world politics.⁹⁷⁸ The intensified visibility of foreign suffering and need of help of distant others is, thus, increasingly and intentionally infiltrating the Western sphere due to the heightened role of human rights and humanitarian issues within the contemporary Western international political agenda and its legitimization.

At the focus of this study was to analyze the visual practices that constitute namely the *Western spectatorship* and *Western spectator* of suffering. And thus I set out to analyze the practices that through visual representations of suffering, war and conflict constitute, produce and reproduce conceptions of international politics, the West and the Rest and hierarchies of humanity. I asserted that images of suffering and pain, presented with in the humanitarian frame, are not only central to the functionality of the humanitarian ideology and discourse but also to contemporary Western international politics. I showed how humanitarianism functions as a hierarchical global political system, whilst also being a rather comprehensive mindset that strongly determines how people living within the Western cultural and political sphere perceive the

⁹⁷⁶ Hallin, 1989 (1986) ; Chomsky&Hermann, 2002 (1988).

⁹⁷⁷ See: Sontag, 1977, 17; Sontag, 2003, 80-84.

⁹⁷⁸ Aaltola, 2009, 9.

world around them, their own position as well as the position of the others in the global world: a forceful and infiltrating (unconscious) ideology.⁹⁷⁹ Images of suffering and pain presented within the humanitarian frame are central for the functionality of the humanitarian ideology and discourse, as they interpellate their (Western) spectators and are intended to address their viewers according to the discursive ideological preconditions of the context of their presentation.

Importantly, I proposed that, beyond humanitarian organizational actors and the (mainstream) media, in the recent decades and especially in the humanitized international political frame, the role of the directly political—governmental and military—actors in this regard has become increasingly critical, and perhaps under acknowledged. Today these actors habitually produce and circulate imagery of crisis situations, showcase their actions, and/or regulate the visual material of wars and crisis, as well as push some imageries into becoming well-known (media) spectacles by referring to them in political connections.

In order to evidence this claim, the thesis showed how, concurrently with the rise of the Western humanitarian interventionist military actions in the 1990s, the picturing of war and crisis in which the Western powers have played a part in, has significantly altered and that this change is linked to the humanitarian nature of contemporary international politics. Chapter 3 demonstrated how the picturing of the Gulf War spelled a change in the visual image of Western war. The imagery of the Gulf War was not only strictly controlled by governmental actors, but also for a large part produced, and circulated by them. The Gulf War was presented with a new visual style, centering on technology and the surgical nature of the Western warfare. The political intentions and governance behind this change are evident in the way the journalistic reportage of the war was effectively controlled by new means, such as the pool system. Part of these governmental efforts of controlling imagery served a theatrical purpose. To maintain the goodness and the purity of the morally superior Western savior, the pain induced by the Western war on the local populations of the operational area was effectively hidden, as was also the loss and injury of the Western soldiers participating in the war. The restrictions placed on publishing images of the coffins of deceased US soldiers returning to the Dover Air Force Base serve as an example of the governmental governance of the visibility of war-induced suffering. This new type of a ‘cult of sensibility’ that is both sensitive to Western loss and vulnerability as well as the reluctant to show the suffering inflicted by Western warfare on the inhabitants of the crisis areas serve to create a sterile and surgical imagery of contemporary wars that is linked, if not almost necessitated, by a play scripted along the lines of liberal humanitarianism⁹⁸⁰ in the era of the dawn of the new ‘humanitarian wars.’

⁹⁷⁹ See: **Chandler**, 2002; **Douzinis**, 2007; **Belloni**, 2007.

⁹⁸⁰ **Barnett**, 2011.

This study has shown how the seed of this novel type of visual control and governance of Western wars—first sowed in the 1980s Western military interventions of Granada, Panama and the Falkland Islands, and later further developed in the 1990s Gulf War—have been effectively refined to a new level in the era of War on Terror and the humanitarian wars of the 2000s. Today it is habitual for Western governmental and military actors to produce and circulate imagery describing global crises and wars, and to control, govern, and frame war imagery. Restrictions on visual mediation of Western wars—such as the embedding system of war journalist and photographers reporting Western military operations—have grown stricter, and, thus, despite of the even more frantic media environment, the imagery of Western war in popular publicity/mainstream media of the Western sphere is rather constricted and sanitized. The controlled nature of the Gulf War imagery can be perceived as a historical predecessor of the picturing of the war in Afghanistan.

Chapter 5 showed how the ISAF images, showcasing the multinational operation in Afghanistan, present the coalition action in a humanitarian light, which much resemblances the way we are accustomed to picturing the developmental and humanitarian projects in non-Western areas. In the imagery of the ISAF, Western soldiers are presented in the visual figure of the humanitarian soldier, and the clean, precise and technologically advanced nature of the Western warfare is strongly visually underlined. These images do not show the violent side of the coalition operation, nor do they picture the suffering of the coalition soldiers induced by the warfare. Rather these images market the operation in an up-to-date humanitarian spirit, and they are aimed at legitimizing the operation as humane and necessary securitizing and civilizing project. The images are scripted to address the coalition populations through humane narratives widely accepted within the Western sphere. The contemporary phenomena of shying away from showing violence and suffering in Western war imagery can, thus, be seen as a product of humanitarization of Western warfare, and the increasing intermingle of politicized humanitarianism and Western global interventionist militarism. The scripting of the war play to be presented to Western audiences employs humanitarian discourses and it requires a certain form: the roles of the actors, the consequences of their actions need to be presented in an allegorical way that stays true to the classical roles of a tragedy play.

Humanitarianism as such, and not merely as a mode of legitimizing wars, continues to play a part in contemporary international politics. But this mode of employing humanitarian imagery is not merely utilized by humanitarian organizations, but also Western governmental actors use visual representation describing natural catastrophes and epidemic sickness. As chapter 4 showed, imagery presenting Western military personnel in a humanitarian light were circulated by governmental actors (and also deployed by Western mainstream media) both at the time of the Haiti 2010

earthquake as well as the Ebola epidemic of 2014-2015. These images strongly juxtapose the non-Western weakness, suffering and sickness, with the militarized yet nurturing, civilizing and healing effect of the militarized humanitarian West. And thus I argued, the utilization of suffering imagery offers an emotive and effective route through which the humanitarian Western world order is contemporarily communicated. It can be questioned to what extent are such humanitarian military aid operations, which lack an actual military component, methods of plotting a future tragedy play, in which the Western military forces are again cast in the role of a savior. That is, to what extent are Western militaries used for purely humanitarian aims in order to strengthen a plot in which the Western military acts morally for the eyes of (non-)Western audiences.

What is also notable in the recent Western governmental actors eagerness to circulate their own visual stories of their actions in global crisis zones, is that such tendentious, strategically and politically constructed imageries are not only inclined to influence the ways in which the Western spectators perceive the events, which the pictures describe, but in addition, these imageries are prone to influences the ways in which humanitarian action, as well as humanitarian imagery at large are apprehended by Western audiences. When war/militarism is framed and presented as a humanitarian recourse, the line between humanitarian (neutral/organizational) efforts and military operations gets blurred. Thus also (relatively) neutral humanitarian action, as well as the readings and significations of images presenting these actions are at risk of being affected and reacted to differently.

Chapter 6 showed how the evil plays an important role in the Western humanitarian tragedy play and its plotting through visual images. The imageries building up the enemy narratives of the recent Western advisories—Osama bin Laden, Muammar Gaddafi and Saddam Hussein—were, for a large part, produced by governmental actors. As active participants in script writing of the tragedy play, the Western mainstream media outlets habitually swiftly and eagerly utilized these imageries in their news production. Images picturing the toppling of the statue of Saddam Hussein at the Firdos Square in Baghdad—framed to signify the symbolic victory of the Western coalition in Iraq—quickly spread though out the Western media. Likewise the visually extremely symbolic imagery of the capture of Hussein and his medical examination while incarcerated, both produced by the US officials, became widespread and influential in Western mainstream media publicity. Likewise, the operation to capture and kill Osama bin Laden was thoroughly visualized through material produced and circulated by US governmental actors. These imageries tendentiously produced and strategically framed by directly political actors, constructed to illustrate the events purely from the point of view of the US official actors, reiterate the political narrative of the US practically becoming the only mode of visualizing the events in the Western mainstream media. Thus, these

politically motivated images forcefully shaped the interpretation of (Western) spectators of the operations.

Mainstream media can be perceived as a part of the political apparatus of the area, culture and regime that it functions in.⁹⁸¹ The logic of picturing the punishment and capture narratives of the Western political adversaries unveils the connections of political elite, prevalent political ambiance and the mainstream media in shaping the popular conceptions on foreign politics in cahoots in the contemporary milieu. Western media acted as a force multiplier for the politically constructed and strategically convenient enemy images initially created in high-level political contexts and speeches. The analysis clearly shows that the circulation of the enemy representations within the mainstream media amplified the predominant ideological paradigms and dominant politically appropriate interpretations of the Western enemies—as well as the notions of the virtuous nature of Western politics—that were first and foremost built on political premises of the time.

Control, governance, production and utilization of war and crisis imagery by governmental actors have, of course, been commonplace throughout history. But I claim that today influential Western political actors increasingly take up and refer to visual images of crisis and war in their speeches and proclamations regarding foreign crisis and international events. This visual referencing, I argue, is due to the increasingly central role of humanitarianism, human rights and Western interventionism in the international politics of the recent era. As discussion of the Ghouta chemical weapons attack in chapter 7 showed, by referring to images of suffering and abuses of human rights these actors bring the mentioned visual material into the wider political discussion expanding their public exposure, and, at the same time, frame the images in tendentious and strategic and political ways.

This political motivation behind the way that the images of the Ghouta atrocity were used by the Western mainstream media and political elite became even clearer, when contrasted with those of the Russian political leaders and the Russian media. Firstly, the political choice behind interpreting these images, whether true or not, was revealed by the choice of the Russian mainstream media and political speeches that did not generally regard these images as spectacular or as pointing to the guilt of al-Assad. That is, both in the Western media and the Russian media these images were therefore signified and given meaning along the lines of the prevalent political context of their presentation. Thus, I argue that even today, in the age of citizen journalism, of relatively free, global and social media based mediation, the significations and contextual readings of images of crisis and wars are, for the most part, still largely signified by their regionally segregated, cultural and political surroundings.

Secondly, the analysis of the treatment of the Ghouta attack also questioned the idea suggesting that, if the surrounding world, which is able

⁹⁸¹ Chomsky&Herman, 1988.; Hall, 1981;Hall, 1972.; Cottle, 2009.; Robinson, 2004.

to help, only would see the suffering of others in more effective and direct ways, we would care more and would more forcefully react to the suffering of distant others and act to alleviate the suffering, which constantly surfaces when discussing the effects of suffering images.⁹⁸² This causally formed optimistic belief in the political potency of crisis imagery has been reoccurring in the course of the evolution of the technological means of visual meditation.⁹⁸³ I called this effect 'technologically driven causality optimism'. Yet, the case of the Ghouta images suggests that even though the surrounding world now would be (in theory and from the view point of technology) able to see all the calamities in nearly real-time, in reality we still encounter the world through the particular political and cultural frame and through images, which have been percolated through the mainstream media's ideological machinery. Technology and new means of visual mediation have the potentiality to change a lot in many regards, but it seems that the visual communication enabled by the social media has not ultimately changed the way images of pain, crisis and war are still today, for the most part, contextualized, framed, arranged and politically and ideologically mediated for our awareness by the powers that be. I concluded that, the new technology does not have the power to revolutionize how the political and strategic bearings in a foreign political setting still speak louder than even the most horrendous images of pain, suffering and human loss.

That is, what has remained rather constant is how the images of crisis, war and suffering are produced, arranged and framed, and by whom and with what intentions, and this constancy largely determines how we perceive the turbulent world surrounding us. In the contemporary situation in which governmental and military actors regularly, purposefully and strategically produce, circulate and frame such imagery, more attention and caution should be paid to the utilization of images of suffering by the political, governmental and military actors in international political settings. Although this work has predominantly centered on the Western framings and utilization of such images, more attention should likewise be paid to the non-Western political framings of images of wars, crisis and suffering in international political settings. The West is not the only player in this ample and growingly influential field of visual politics of international (humanitarian) politics. Rather, for example, the Russian framings and utilization of images of crisis, war and suffering in the contemporary international political setting (as was briefly discussed in chapter 7) offer a very intriguing subject for analysis.

Thus, whilst images of suffering create a hope or an optimism regarding their ability to change minds and impact on (humanitarian) politics, the thesis has shown that in reality the impact of images of suffering is curbed by the cultural context of their release and by the media and governmental actors mediating such images. The structure of a theatrical tragedy play

⁹⁸² See: **Cohen**, 2001.

⁹⁸³ **Neuman**, 1996.

guides the script and the role division in disaster stories, not only because of the political will to tell simple stories, in which the West is a victorious savior, but also because of subconscious cultural assumptions. As the thesis showed, one of the key functions of the tragedy play is catharsis: an emotional healing release or an absolution from the vexing feelings aroused by visually witnessing the suffering of others. After being exposed to images telling of the violent or otherwise disturbing destinies of fellow humans, the spectator needs to be provided a route into feeling at ease with her/himself; a sensation of being good, easing the pain, acting morally, helping out—a cathartic release from the sentiments of pity, fear and guilt aroused by spectating the hardships of others. Without a passage to catharsis humanitarian imagery would only leave the spectators feeling miserable, even paralyzed. The ways in which humanitarian imagery suggest or provide routes to attain the catharsis reflects the coeval humanitarian ethos and function of the humanitarian system. As the history of visual images of pain in humanitarian conjunctions shows, the suggested routes to catharsis may come in the form of opposing the slave trade, boycotting products seen to cause suffering, becoming a pacifist, signing a petition, donating to relief aid, or becoming a sponsor of a Third World child.

Importantly, as the analysis into the contemporary imageries, dealt with in chapters 5 and 7 in particular, indicated today consenting to, approving or supporting Western interventionist military actions in foreign areas is also suggested as a route to a contemporary humanitarian catharsis. The ISAF imagery on the war in Afghanistan presented the operation as a channel for a better life for the populations of the operational area and as a means of achieving a more secure and peaceful condition for the wider surrounding world. Thus, in their context, as images targeted to address the citizens of coalition member states, the catharsis they suggested was democratic consent to the operation: a will help the Afghans, to restore the right moral order, to safeguard security and to pave the road to a better world by the means of militarized humanitarianism. Likewise, in the rhetoric of the Western leaders (as well as to some degree also in the arrangements of the images in Western mainstream media), the images describing the suffering inflicted by the use of chemical weapons in Syria were framed as carrying moral imperative of visually confronting the horrors—and then, as a catharsis, consenting to a military intervention planned to oust al-Assad from power. Again, as with Afghanistan, a (targeted) military operation was rationalized as the route to alleviating the suffering of Syrians, forcing al-Assad to stop his illegal warfare against his countrymen and providing security for the inhabitants of the neighboring countries, as well as the rest of the world.

In the cases of the images of Afghanistan and Syria the route to catharsis was suggested to be attainable by supporting the humanitarian order, by propping up Western strength and international power and supporting the right of the Western powers to humanitariously intervene in the affairs of

non-Western sovereign states and foreign areas. That is, war was suggested as the route to a better, more secure and humane world and marketed as a method of preventing war itself. This perhaps is not unique in the history of humanitarianism, since as Michael Barnett notes, some of the greatest crimes of the last few centuries have been carried out in the name of alleviating suffering and improving human welfare. In this way there is nothing particularly new or groundbreaking in justifying and claiming the necessity of the use of violence in order to protect lives from malevolent forces, or in humanitarian military intervention, as it is habitually called today. ⁹⁸⁴ Nevertheless (visually) framing Western war as a humanitarian medium tells a poignant story of the contemporary times, of the humanitarian politics of today as well as of the position of visual images in these militarized humanitarian settings. Therefore what is to be borne in mind, when looking at the images of today's war, is that there has never been a war that was not rationalized as just and necessary; it is only the justifying narratives and the legitimizing components that vary according to time. Thus, the ability to read images, to identify their narratives, to detect their intentions and "to learn to see the frame that prevents us from seeing the frame that blinds us to what we see,"⁹⁸⁵ is urgently needed today.

In addition to offering a route to the humanitarian catharsis, through consenting to or supporting humanitarily rationalized and legitimized military operations, chapter 6 of this study showed how also catching, humiliating and finally killing the political enemies of the West has been presented as a route to a cathartic feeling of relief of restoring of the right moral, humanitarian order. In the cases of Osama bin Laden, Muammar Gaddafi and Saddam Hussein, neutralizing, defeating, humiliating and ultimately killing the foreign leaders opposing the humanitarian order were framed as humanitarian acts. Thus, paradoxically, the emotional cleansing and healing experience was in these cases achieved not by solidary emotions and actions customarily seen as humanitarian, but by celebrating the victory of the Western moral order and the death of these evil characters framed as inhuman, or even non-human. These, in many ways for humanitarian imagery exceptional visual spectacles unveil the concealed violence, embedded deep in the Western humanitarian political narrative.

Supporting wars and celebrating the killing of the enemy were not, however, the only suggested or valid routes into the cathartic state by the images discussed. Also helping the weaker non-Westerners struggling with epidemic illness, aiding them to cope with the after effects of disastrous natural catastrophes (as was discussed in chapter 4), or securitizing areas in turmoil with the overwhelming, militarized Western power were suggested as the right way to act by some of the images presented in the contemporary frame. This was seen in the cases of the Haiti earthquake, the Western African Ebola epidemic. This addressing was also present in the imageries

⁹⁸⁴ Barnett, 2011, 171.

⁹⁸⁵ Butler, 2009.

describing terrorism in Africa, as well as the ISAF Afghanistan images. But consenting to the militarized helping endeavors was not the only passage to catharsis suggested by these imageries: also containing threats such as epidemic illness, terrorism, chaos and flows of migration in the areas of their origin, and preventing the trouble from spreading from the non-Western sphere into the Western sphere can be seen to have been the cathartic message of the images. This was evident in the imagery of the ‘compassionate invasion’ of Haiti, as well as in the imagery of the European refugee crisis discussed in chapter 4. In these cases containment was manifested in the form of efforts in halting migration flows and containing the human masses and complicating their moving and crossing of the political boundaries of humanity—in other words preventing the non-Western humans from moving from the non-Western sphere into the Western sphere. Thus, seeing the risks and threats taken care of in foreign areas can be seen to have been the cathartic and anxiety relieving experience that was suggested by these images. This kind of addressing suggests that, when the Westerners themselves are safe from harm originating from the turbulent non-Western world, the right humanitarian order is restored.

All in all, the analysis of the contemporary images proposes that the recognition of the humanitarily defined global power of the West and its supporting, militarized operations, carried out in the name of Western civilizing, securitizing and life-saving endeavors, can be seen as the most popular way of achieving humanitarian catharsis today. The observably intended readings suggested by the images within the Western humanitarian frame, most commonly claim that supporting or consenting to humanitarianized Western military actions is the most effective way to ease the pain, or even prevent the suffering of the non-Western others. In other words, in the contemporary visual humanitarian tragedy theatre the images are often framed so that catharsis is presented as attainable by supporting the militarized Western moral world order and by maintaining the global hierarchy by confining threats to non-Western areas, as well as by trying to prevent the different strata of humanity from getting mixed.

As the thesis has asserted, humanitarian visual communication is founded on the differentiation of the spectators, and the spectated, the safe (Western) on-lookers, and the (non-Western) suffering victims. From this juxtaposition of us and them, and from the overall hierarchical arrangement central to humanitarian order and communication, also stem the typical, historically formed responses to the suffering of others: development and civilizing efforts. From the same juxtaposition also rise the humanitarily legitimated military operations aimed at changing and—at least on a rhetorical level—enhancing the living conditions of the suffering others. Partly motivated by the framings of images of suffering and their emotional appeal, the Western world has for centuries tried to educate and develop the (non-Western) ‘immature’ individuals of foreign areas prone to suffering by multiple means. The often unspoken intention behind these efforts has frequently been—and

largely still is—to 'civilize' and bring up these global adolescents (the objects of the humanitarian action), in order for them to reach the higher standards of Western way of life (or 'civilization')—and, moreover, to contain the turmoil and instability from spreading from the non-Western crisis areas into the Western regime,⁹⁸⁶ in other words, to prevent the global adolescents from making the tragic mistake—from committing hamartia.

Yet, in the visual theatrical humanitarian arrangement the suffering of the non-Western others—the corporeally displayed consequence of hamartia on the sufferers—is essential for its functioning. In spite of this essentiality, the traditional and historically prevalent mode of visually representing the suffering others in disaster-stricken bare life imagery and through spectacles of vulnerability and bodily weakness (underlining the non-Western hamartia) has from the 1980s onwards increasingly gathered criticism. Because of this criticism, humanitarian (organizational) imagery has been revamped by compiling codes of conduct on how to present images and to convey messages concerning the Third World and other objects of humanitarian actions. Due to this critique, humanitarian imagery has partly evolved and has come to include more positive arrangements, which attempt to address the spectators through 'spectacles of self-determination and hope'. In other words, these representational arrangements have strived to dispel hamartia, that is to say, an essential feature of the theatrical arrangement, and thus they have attempted to bridge the distance and the moral gap between the spectators and the spectated.⁹⁸⁷

In line with these attempts, the contemporary imageries produced by Western governmental and military actors have partly leaned towards such more positive picturing, familiar from the humanitarian organizational settings, and molded their representational practices for their own strategic benefit. This tendency is perceivable, for example, in the images produced by the NATO-led ISAF operation in Afghanistan discussed in chapter 5. As the thesis describe, in these images pain and suffering are predominantly replaced by developmental themes, the distress caused by the war remains largely visually unaddressed, and the coexistence of foreign military troops and the locals is pictured in sceneries of mutual understanding, which dispel cultural difference and replace it with colonializing overtones.

Nevertheless, this more positive (and less suffering-centered) mode of visual representation has not fully extended itself to the entirety of humanitarian imagery. Problems of visually representing the distress of others through positive imagery picturing the recipients of help as active, even happy characters—quite similar with the happy and safe remote (Western) spectators—has been seen to lead to a situation in which the need of help of the depicted individuals (and the groups they represent) has been undermined in the minds of the spectators. This representational practice can be criticized for creating false impressions of the reality of the objects of

⁹⁸⁶ Douzinas, 2007; Duffield, 2007; Koskenniemi, 2001; Baumann, 2004.

⁹⁸⁷ Chouliaraki, 2013; Cohen 2001.

the images by implying that they have the means to act in the world in ways that the average Westerner does. Moreover, the positive fashion of picturing those in need, sprouting from the organizational sphere, has not become widespread within the mainstream news media's representational practices of mediating foreign crisis and distant non-Western suffering. This is despite the journalistic recommendations for picturing (foreign) suffering with more ethical consideration. Thus, in spite of the reconfiguration of organizational imagery, much of imagery of non-Western suffering circulated in the Western mainstream media still predominantly is presented through the imagery of bodily suffering, weakness and turmoil.

Yet, concurrently the visual representations showing Western suffering in crude imagery of bodily pain are, overwhelmingly blocked and governed by cultural norms, media's codes of taste and decency, as well as by direct political control/censorship. As the thesis argued, publishing visualizations of Western suffering is often seen as offending the individual space, personhood, honor and dignity of the sufferer depicted, and thus images of Western pain are rarely circulated in the West. These norms governing the representation of Western suffering do not apply to images presenting non-Western suffering. As was discussed in chapter 4, this uneven representational mode results in humanity being divided into different strata, which are evaluated based on different norms and weighted on a different scale. This prevalent and strongly othering arrangement, located deep in the logic of humanitarian communication can, thus, be seen as a result of the hierarchical system of global humanitarianism and, ultimately, of the power structures of the dominant world order. Thus, the humanitarian hamartia—the tragic mistake leading to suffering and tragedy—of non-Western individuals most often appears to be the grounded in the fact of not being a Westerner and not belonging to the protected, comprehensively insured⁹⁸⁸ global elite.

I argue that the visually manifested suffering and hamartia of the non-Westerners is an essential component of the hierarchical system of humanitarianism and necessary for the functionality of the plot of the humanitarian tragedy theater. Without the visually manifested corporal hamartia of non-Westerners the visual humanitarian communication (in the context of media representations in particular) does not seem to work. On the one hand, this can be seen to have been the case with the 2015 images picturing the refugees in Europe as like 'us', discussed in chapter 4: The cell-phone using, well-clothed and able-bodied refugees were not seen as being entitled to help in Western (anti-multiculturalist/racist) political speech because of their appearance and material belongings resembling the Western style and level of well-being. Hamartia was missing, and, instead, the West saw hopeful and aspiring 'economic refugees.' On the other hand, it has been shown, when refugees are pictured in a state of bodily precariousness, weak

⁹⁸⁸ Duffield, 2007.

and exhibiting traits of cultural difference, it is then again habitually argued that they would not fit in (in Europe/West) and should not come to 'our societies to cause trouble'; in other words, these (non-Western) humans attempting to cross the hierarchical global boundaries were not seen to belong to the same sphere of humanity with the Westerners.

Just as the global humanitarian system thrives on hierarchy, difference and separation of the different strata of humanity, also visual humanitarian communication is founded on the tragic, global, culturally and politically hierarchical difference of the spectators and the spectated and on the necessity of hamartia. As the representational practices of human suffering (and their global, political, and regime-driven difference) follow the functions, practice and spirit of humanitarianism dominant in their era, efforts to change the visual narratives by a conscious and deliberate plan are unlikely to be efficient before the whole system of (humanitarian) global order is transformed. Changing the visual style will not change the political intentionality or the imperialistic, hierarchical logic and the power structures of the manifold (politicized) practices of contemporary global humanitarianism. Because of their muteness, visual representational modes simply trail the overall logic.

Thus it may be concluded that, contemporarily, exhibiting the suffering of others through graphic images of bodily pain, to a large degree, is not about informing the (Western) spectators of distant tragic events of the suffering of others in order to arouse empathy and to provoke humanitarian actions, but rather the images of crisis and suffering seems to be increasingly about indicating the status of the sufferers within the global hierarchy of humanity. Today the humanitarian imagery is a central arena of communicating the world order and manifesting the globally conditional value of (human) life in its inconclusiveness and the limited universality of humanity.

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