Corresponding author:

Lilie Chouliaraki

London School of Economics and Political Science, Department of Media and Communications, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE

Email: t.stolic@lse.ac.uk

Rethinking humanity and responsibility in the refugee 'crisis': A visual typology of news media

Lilie Chouliaraki

London School of Economics and Political Science

Tijana Stolic

London School of Economics and Political Science

Abstract

In this paper, we analyse how news images of the 2015 Syrian migration 'crisis' visualise refugees and how, in so doing, they mobilise various forms of moral responsibility in

‘our’ mediated public life – various practical dispositions of action towards the misfortunes of migrants and refugees at Europe’s border. On the basis of empirical material from European news (June-December 2015), we construct a typology of visibilities of the ‘crisis’, each of which situates refugees within different regimes of visibility and claims to action: i) visibility as biological life, associated with monitorial action, ii) visibility as empathy associated with charitable action; iii) visibility as threat, associated with state security; iv) visibility as hospitality associated with political activism; and v) visibility as self-reflexivity associated with a post-humanitarian engagement with people like ‘us’. In conclusion, we argue that, important as these five categories of visibility are in introducing public dispositions to action towards the vulnerable, they nonetheless ultimately fail to humanise migrants and refugees. This failure to portray them as human beings with lives that are worth sharing should compel us, we urge, to radically re-think how we understand the media’s responsibility towards vulnerable others.

Keywords:

Refugees, responsibility, visibility, emotion, agency

Introduction

Amnesty International's report on the 2015 refugee 'crisis'[i] in Europe was entitled "The global refugee crisis: a conspiracy of neglect" (Amnesty International, 2015a). Targeting the failure of the international community to host the millions who fled Syria and other conflict zones in search of safety, the AI report urged "states to … renew their commitment to international responsibility-sharing" (Amnesty International, 2015b). In light of the subsequent national border closures along the refugees' European route, which effectively blocked their access to the continent in March 2016, Amnesty's call for 'responsibility sharing' raises important questions. How did the visual regimes of news in Europe participate in articulating collective imaginations of the 'refugee crisis'? Which conceptions of refugees did they produce and legitimise in their visual representations? And what forms of responsibility towards refugees were articulated through these representations?

The importance of these questions, however, does not only stem from their political and humanitarian urgency. They are also relevant to academic debate. Emerging research on news reporting of the 2015 crisis has already described such reporting as combining 'sympathetic and empathetic responses', in the early stages of the 'crisis', with 'suspicion and, in some cases, hostility', after the November 13th terror attacks in Paris (Berry et al.,

2015; Georgiou and Zaborowski, 2016). Rather than unique to the recent crisis, however, this combination of empathy with suspicion is an established pattern in the representation of human mobility that, as we show, has long been criticised for de-humanising refugees. Our intention is to go beyond such critiques. Even though questions of humanity remain central to the visualisation of refugees, our interest lies elsewhere. It lies in studying the ways the visual opens up the question of 'what to do' in the face of suffering – what, after Silverstone, we refer to as 'formal responsibility', "the responsibility I have for my own acts, those aspects of life and deed which I can be held accountable for" (2006: 152). Analysing news visualities, then, is about identifying the various performances of responsible agency, which, by recurring in news imagery of the 'crisis', act as forms of 'moral education' (Chouliaraki, 2006). Instead, therefore, of clustering visual patterns narrowly in terms of their potential for 'empathetic' or 'threatening' agency only, our analysis enables a broader range of ethico-political proposals for action to emerge in the news of the 2015 'crisis' across five European countries. How are 'we', Western viewers invited to relate to refugees? What normative dispositions of responsibility towards refugees do these images articulate? And what do these norms tell us about the nature of this 'crisis'? Is this ultimately a 'crisis of migration' or a crisis of responsibility itself?

Our analysis relies on newspaper headline images across five European countries (Greece, Hungary, Italy, Ireland and UK) so as to construct a typology of refugee visibilities, each of which construes different forms of civic agency and responsibility towards refugees – what Chouliaraki (2006; 2008) has elsewhere analysed as the news media's 'politics of pity'. This typology reflects a broad repertoire of practices of responsible agency, from monitorial to empathetic to self-reflexive citizenship. Yet, we argue, none of these tropes enable 'us', the hosting publics, to engage with refugees as actors endowed with their own humanity. In order to grant these people with humanity and voice, we conclude, news visualities need to move beyond notions of 'formal' responsibility, that is responsibility for our own actions as 'active citizens', towards the notion of what Silverstone, after Jonas (1984), refers to as 'substantial' responsibility, "responsibility for the condition of the other" (2006: 152). While the former enables action at the cost of depriving refugees of humanity and voice, the latter bears the potential for 'narratability': visual representations that enable vulnerable others to articulate their own life histories, trajectories and aspirations as irreducibly human endeavours.

Victimhood and threat: a literature review

The role of visual reporting on human mobility crises has been extensively researched (King and Wood 2001; Wright, 2002, 2004), with literature on the recent crisis growing fast (Berry et al., 2015; Chouliaraki, 2017; Georgiou and Zaborowski, 2016; Giannakopoulos and Anagnostopoulos, 2016; Malafouri, 2015; Musarò, 2017). As in broader studies of the media representation of migration (e.g. van Dijk, 1991), visual analysis, too, identifies the refugee as a fundamentally ambivalent media figure. On the one hand, the refugee emerges as a victim of geo-political conflict in need of protection, yet, on the other, she/he appears as a threat to the nation-based order and is to be excluded from 'our' community (Moore, Gross and Threadgold, 2012; Nyers, 1999). This symbolic instability of the refugee, swiftly shifting between speechless victim and evil-doing terrorist, lies at the heart of critical scholarship on refugee visualities. Insofar as the refugee is trapped between these two positions, the argument has it, media visualities are informed by a deep-seated orientalism that continues to reproduce historical tropes of colonial imagery in contemporary portrayals of mobile populations (Malkki, 1996). Let us examine these two positions, in turn.

The *critique of victimhood* takes its starting point from two visual features of refugee representation: massification, which depicts them as a multitude of indistinguishable individuals, for instance, in the portrayals of "impressive but impersonal" images of

people living in the Za'atari refugee camp in Lebanon (Berman, 2016: 102); and passivisation, in the portrayals of refugees primarily as bodies-in-need, deprived of food, clothes or shelter – what Owens (2011: 135), following Agamben, calls "humans as animals in nature without political freedom". Both features, critics claim, contribute to the de-humanisation of refugees (Malkki, 1996). Clustering refugees into one single undifferentiated mass deprives them of their biographical specificity as historical beings (Nyers, 1999), while defining them in terms of their corporeal vulnerability alone degrades them to the status of "sub-citizens" – their physical destitution lacks the legitimacy to articulate political will or rational argument (Hyndman, 2000).

The *critique of evil-doing* forms part of a broader critique of agency in the representation for refugees. It draws upon two visual features of refugee agency: the attribution of sovereignty, which construes refugees as active and hopeful individuals rather than destitute bodies, and, related, the attribution of malevolence, which defines this sovereignty narrowly as the refugees' will to harm 'us'. Similarly to victimhood, then, agentive representation is also accused of depriving refugees of their own humanity, on two accounts. First, the attribution of sovereignty conceals the truth of refugee lives, in that it shows them to be in control of their destinies, ignoring the historical circumstances that go beyond their control: "there is", as Sandvik (2010: 294) says, "something

unsettling about the manner in which individuals in arguably desperate or dangerous situations are attributed agency…as token participants performing for a global audience". Second, the attribution of malevolence reduces refugees to 'faceless strangers' (Banks, 2011: 294) who threaten 'our' safety: from 'speechless emissaries' they become potential terrorists (Malkki, 1996). Instead of a humanitarian response, their criminalised agency mobilises fear and legitimises the securitisation practices that encamp or deport them (Bleiker et al., 2013). By relying on the tropes of powerless vulnerability and agentive malevolence, our public visualities perpetuate the ambivalence of the refugee as either a sufferer or a threat, yet never a human.

These two tropes of visual representation, however, should not be seen as antithetical to each other. Victimhood and threat are, instead, tactically interchangeable moral claims that variously configure the humanity of refugees across time and space. This is the case, for instance, in the shift from empathy for toddler Aylan Kurdi's death to outrage for terrorist-refugees, in the course of weeks – September to November's Paris attacks (Lenette and Cleland, 2016: 77). It is not, therefore, the distinct performative force of each category that de-humanises refugees, as the literature has it, but also, importantly, their substitutability. This performative volatility of news images, which variously constitutes refugees within changing discourses of in/humanity lies at the heart of the

moralising force of public visuality. For it is such shifting claims to humanity that, in turn, regulate the unstable proposals for responsible agency towards refugees in 'our' mediated publicity.

Responsibility: a conceptual and analytical vocabulary

In assessing the moral significance of the visual representation of refugees as dehumanising, critical literature on visual representation is largely negative. It rightly assumes that dominant visual tropes fail to make proposals of responsible agency to their publics, yet it does not go further to explore the conceptual connections between visualisation and responsibility, nor does it appreciate the historicity of this relationship, as the symbolic properties of the visual move and transform across time. It does not, in other words, capitalise on the critique of images to re-think what responsibility means or what it should mean in the context of refugees. Despite this under-theorising of responsibility in visual studies scholarship, the concept figures prominently in literature on media ethics (see Keane, 2003; Silverstone, 2006; Tomlinson, 2011).

It is, in particular, Silverstone's account of 'mediated communication' as a space within which 'an ethics of care and responsibility is, or is not, enabled' (2002: 761) that thematises the relationship between responsibility and the media. Developing a normative account of ethics, Silverstone draws attention to two 'pathologies' of responsibility, both

of which suppress the potential for civic agency towards vulnerable others: complicity, which is about 'us' taking for granted, rather than problematising, the media representations of human vulnerability; and collusion, which is about 'us' treating the predicament of those others with complacency or denial. Collusion locates responsibility for in/action in the 'active audience' and its practices of forgetting, but it is complicity that focuses on 'the vocabulary and discourse of representation, narrative and report' (Silverstone, 2006: 131) – including of course visual discourse. Even though the two pathologies are interrelated, Silverstone insists on the importance to recognise complicity as the specifically symbolic work of de-humanisation performed by the media, in their effort to "translate the properly challenging other both into the comforting frames of the familiar and into excommunicated banishment" (2002: 777).

His moral frames of 'the familiar' and 'excommunicated banishment' are clearly associated with the aforementioned visual tropes of dehumanisation: victimhood, which brings the suffering other close to 'our' heart, and threat, which places her/him at maximum distance. Silverstone goes further, however, so as to explain the moralising function of these claims in terms of the media's psychological mechanism to protect audiences from emotional trauma. Using the reductive figures of victim and evil-doer, he claims, media representations fulfil 'our' "desire for simplicity, comfort and order in our

everyday lives" (Silverstone, 2002: 777). The dehumanisation of refugees, thus, is here causally connected to a conception of responsibility as 'working through' – responsibility that, in its care to protect 'us' instead of 'them', subjects refugees to a "process of repression…not eradicating them but placing them elsewhere" (Ellis, 1999: 58).

While Silverstone's critique of mediation rightly focuses on 'complicity and collusion' as failures of responsibility, it stops short of opening up to two key dimensions of an ethics of visibility: a conceptual and a methodological one. First, it does not explicitly establish the conceptual connection between these failures and the embeddedness of mediation in the historical power relationships of viewing. In turning the (relatively) safe West into the object of protection and treating suffering 'others' as 'hurtful' spectacles, media visualities perpetuate an ethnocentric ethics that remains absorbed with 'our' concerns while keeping 'others' outside of 'our' sphere of responsibility (Chouliaraki, 2006). Second, despite its appreciation of representation, Silverstone's critique does not engage with the meaning-making function of the image. In so doing, it fails to appreciate, what was earlier referred to as the malleability and historicity of visual communication, which, depending on its symbolic properties, may go beyond the dominant tropes to offer alternative options for responsibility.

As against this approach, which relies on pre-existing suppositions about what responsibility or humanity may look like, our approach turns such presuppositions on their head. Far from defining responsibility in terms of pathologies, we adopt an open conception of responsibility as symbolic practice of power that invests the visualities of the refugee 'crisis' with distinct moral claims to action. In so doing, we argue, these claims to responsibility establish the horizon of what we see, relate to, and act on in the refugee 'crisis' – what we refer to as 'regimes of visibility'.

Our analysis, therefore, brackets the dominant tropes of 'victimhood' and 'threat' and treats refugee imagery as a relatively open-ended practice of meaning-making through which its subjects are variously constituted in the media – what we refer to as refugee 'visualities'. If visibility refers, therefore, to the public horizon of what we see and relate to in the media, visuality, as Mirzoeff puts it, is the semiotic domain wherein a specific 'politics of representation', the 'struggle over who is to be represented' and how, is played out (2006: 76). Regimes of visibility are, from this perspective, our principal analytical unit, in that they provide the organising principle around which we reconstruct the specific visualities of the refugee 'crisis' in terms of five key visual configurations: biological life, empathy, threat, hospitality, and self-reflexivity.

Humanity and responsibility in refugee imagery

Even though these visual categories are informed by an empirical study on refugee news in European newspapers across five countries (Greece, Italy, Hungary, UK, and Ireland) at three key moments of the crisis[ii], ours is not a quantitative analysis of news images. It is a conceptually-driven semiotic analysis, whereby our five-part typology emerges out of the dialectic between these newspaper images (51 in total) and our theory-informed questions of humanity (how do refugees appear in these images?) and agency (who or what appears to feel and act with or on them?) (see Chouliaraki 2006, 2008 for the analysis of agency in mediated suffering). It is this dialectic that enables us to map out the patterns of visual practice through which responsibility acquires meaning in the reporting of the 2015 refugee 'crisis' news.

The assumption behind this conceptual typology is that these empirically-grounded patterns stand in a relationship of tension to theory; they are not reflections of a 'universal' conception of responsibility but neither are they random singularities. They are typifications of recurrent visual practices, which work to massify, infantilise, or vilify refugees, therefore standing as illustrations of broader logics of representation across Europe, through which refugees appear to 'us' as human and 'we' are invited to act on/with them. Insofar as these logics reflect and reproduce historical norms of representing self and 'other' in Western public cultures (Boltanski, 1999), our categories

have the status of, what Flyvbjerg calls, ‘paradigmatic cases’ of research: “cases that highlight more general characteristics of the societies in question” (2005: 16). It is precisely these paradigmatic logics that are reflected in the ‘regimes of visibility’ we now discuss: visibility as biological life; as pity; as hospitality; as threat; and as self-reflexivity.

Visibility as biological life

Visualities that depict a ‘mass of unfortunates’ on fragile dinghies or in refugee camps situate refugees within a visual regime of biological life – a field of representation that reduces their human life to corporeal existence and the needs of the body (Boltanski, 1999). This biological subjectivity entails a thin definition of humanity as an ‘anthropological minimum’ (Mehta, 1990) – a humanity fully reliant on Western emergency aid or rescue operations to survive and so inevitably dispossessed of will and voice. Insofar as refugees are portrayed as ‘life’ to be governed, this regime of visibility can be thought of as ‘biopolitical’: a field of symbolic power that produces human bodies as ‘living matter’, subject to humanitarian benevolence of the West (Vaughan-Williams, 2015). Even though these bodies are deeply political, in that they emerge at the intersection of corporeal and geo-political relations of power between the West and the global South, they lack civic status; their dehumanisation is, in this sense, an effect of

these very power relations that claim to sustain them as human bodies, in the first place (Ticktin, 2011).

Which proposals of responsibility does biopolitical humanity articulate? This regime situates refugees and 'us' in a relationship of, what Boltanski calls, 'generalised pity' – a relationship with human suffering "from the standpoint of distance, since it must rely upon the massification of a collection of unfortunates who are not there in person" (1999: 13). Characteristic of foreign news, in imagery of UN camps and/or dinghies in the sea, this visual distance from refugees invites a 'monitorial' relationship with those it depicts. It simply registers the facts of their existence and offers minimal context for their suffering – news, for instance, hardly connect the exodus of Syrian refugees from their country with the escalation of the Syrian conflict. With no causal link between these two, the 'crisis' is regularly portrayed as a humanitarian 'emergency' rather than as a failure of international politics and particularly of Western structures of governance (Calhoun, 2004). Echoing Schudson's 'monitorial citizenship' (1998), this form of responsibility refers to a light-touch 'checking up' on events that enables a vague awareness of the plight of refugees but invites no critical reflections of the conditions of this suffering.

Visibility as empathy

Unlike biological life, the regime of empathy privileges intimate snapshots of individuals or couples, such as a crying child, a mother with her baby or a rescue worker in action. While massification, in the previous regime, takes the perspective of distance and ignores the uniqueness of people as persons, individuation adopts a close-up perspective and has the potential to offer a more humanised representation of refugees. It is, in particular, the imagery of the child that figures as emblematic of the individualised visualities of empathy (Burman, 1994).

An exemplary manifestation of innocent vulnerability, the child has historically operated as an instrument in mobilising tender-heartedness and parental love: "children dramatise the righteousness of a cause" Moeller claims "by having their innocence contrasted with malevolence (or perhaps banal hostility) of adults in authority" (2002: 39). The photograph of the lifeless body of toddler Aylan Kurdi, the Syrian boy who drowned on the coast of Turkey in September 2015, gained iconic status precisely as a signifier of adult failure, the failure to offer protection to a child (El Enany, 2016). It is this sense of failure that challenged the Western self-description of the caring parent and shifted the news narrative of the 'crisis' towards sentimental pity – a self-oriented emotion that celebrated 'ourselves' as a benevolent public as much as it showed care for vulnerable others (Mortensen and Trenz, 2016: 350).

Despite the humanising potential inherent in the individuation of suffering, however, child imagery is held accountable for infantilising refugees; for depicting them predominantly as distressed, clueless and powerless: "Children", as Burman puts it, "…plead, they suffer, and their apparent need calls forth help [...]", echoing "the colonial paternalism where the adult-Northerner offers help and knowledge to the infantilised-South" (1994: 241). Infantilisation may thus aim at mobilising empathy in the name of 'our' common humanity, yet, in portraying refugees as children in need, it ultimately deprives them of agency and voice.

What form of responsibility does the regime of empathy make possible? This is a responsibility of charitable giving, which encourages a relationship of compassion and care, yet also reminds us of the refugees' otherness. They are outsiders both physically, literally on the border, and symbolically, lacking history and complexity. This ambivalent agency ultimately constitutes a moralising response towards refugees, which can momentarily inspire affective responses of guilt but ultimately remains fleeting and unstable, swiftly shifting into rival affective moods of indignation or fear – as indeed happened on the night of November 13th 2015.

Visibility as threat

Visualities of threat, peaking after the November 2015 Paris attacks, consist of masses of refugees walking through motorways on the Balkan route or squeezed in rescue boats; and of aggressive young men wearing balaklavas and participating in riot scenes. Characterised by both massification, as in biological life, and singularisation, as in victimhood, the regime of threat differs from the previous two in thematising not empathy but fear – anxieties that 'our' social order is disturbed by racial and cultural 'others' (Gale, 2004).

Instrumental in the mobilisation of fear is the shift from imageries of the child towards, what Buchanan et al. call, 'threatening young males' (2003: 9) – young men with dark skin who appear to trespass 'our' own space. In contrast to portrayals of bodies-in-pain as signifiers of 'common humanity', visualities of threat rely on the racialisation of refugees, where skin colour and clothing operate as signifiers of evil 'otherness' in 'our' midst – also reflected in animalistic references to 'swarms', 'flocks', or 'cockroaches', in the media. While, then, the emotional proximity to crying children casts refugees as objects of care, the physical proximity of dark-skinned men turns them into '*les enragés*', intimidating 'others' who threaten 'our' safety (Boltanski, 1999: 12–13).

What form of responsibility does this regime make possible? This is a responsibility of ambient threat that prioritises the indiscriminate closing of borders over care for victims

of war (Chouliaraki and Georgiou, 2017). While military security is a constitutive dimension of sovereign nation-states, security is also part of the bio-political apparatus of the media insofar as refugee visualities of aggression and violence legitimise civic dispositions of proactive protection, a "permanent vigilance against global insecurities" (Chandler, 2010: 296).

The implication of this form of responsibility is, thus, not only the vilification of those who are not like 'us'. It is also, importantly, 'our' subjectification into practices of perpetual self-responsibility that validates the vilification and exclusion of others. The popularity of visualities of threat and their 'stop migration' politics, for instance, relies precisely on this 'bio-politics of responsibility', which can swiftly replace the crying child with "the bearded male refugee" and so "rather than compassion, … elicit feelings of apprehension and fear" (El-Enany, 2016: 14). Rather than the visualities of dark skin alone, it seems that it is primarily the substitutability, as innocent children turn into evil terrorists, that operates here as an instrument of security – military or bio-political.

Visibility as hospitality

This visual regime involves imagery of pro-refugee protests across Europe, notably the 'Refugees Welcome' marches in September 2015. They depict masses of citizens marching across city centres, holding banners or placates with messages such as

‘refugees welcome here’, ‘refugees are human beings’, ‘let them in’, ‘be human’, ’20.000? Are you joking?’ etc. Such visualities of concerted action represent acts of hospitality, that is, acts of “welcoming the other in one’s space, with or without any expectation of reciprocity” (Silverstone, 2006: 139). In combining the affirmative posture of conviviality, in ‘let them in’, with the critical spirit of denunciation against ‘our’ decision-makers, ‘are you joking?’, visualities of hospitality work through a reversal of humanisation. In contrast to threat, which sets ‘us’ up against evil ‘others’, this one places ‘us’ in the position of the evil-doer; it is now ‘our’ politicians who harm refugees rather than the other way round. This redistribution of the figures of pity is typical of activist agency – a form of civic agency that seeks to critique the establishment and “help create visibility for the perspectives and experiences of marginalised groups” (Polletta, 2006).

At the same time, however, even though the physical presence of refugees may occasionally figure in these visualities, for instance marching along in a ‘I’m a refugee’ t-shirt, they are themselves largely marginalised by Western citizens. They may be linguistically recognised as human on protest banners but their humanity is undermined by their invisibility as political actors. Despite having important stories to share, they are deprived of, what Arendt calls, “the relevance of speech” (1968/1998: 297) and have

become replaceable and unseen. Mediated hospitality is, it seems, purely symbolic; it is enacted through the portrayal of discursive claims to the humanity of refugees while reserving the actually humanising capacity of public visibility to Western actors.

The form of responsibility that the regime of hospitality proposes is, consequently, an ambivalent responsibility of trans-national solidarity. Drawing on the repertoire of civil society, this responsibility is the only politicised form of solidarity articulated in the space of mediated publicity. Yet, insofar as it is performed on behalf of rather than together with refugees, it subjects them to the de-humanising condition of voicelessness, whereby the defence of their rights takes place at the cost of marginalising their voice. Despite, thus, its public intervention in favour of international law and in support of refugees, the responsibility of solidarity may be subjecting refugees to, what Paik (2016) calls, 'epistemological violence': in the name of politicising their case, marginalised groups are inevitably entangled with Western practices and discourses that ultimately perpetuate their own exclusion.

Visibility as self-reflexivity

Two different types of imagery participate in this regime of visibility: celebrity benevolence, which is characterised by a 'show business' aesthetic, and social media graphics, characterised by a playful reflexivity. The former involves images of celebrities

in support of refugees – Angelina Jolie, Vanessa Redgrave or Susan Sarandon. These are characterised by a focus on the celebrity figure surrounded by refugees, in camps or beaches, hugging, helping or talking to them. In so doing, these images capitalise on the representation of co-presence so as to transfer symbolic capital from the former, famous and prestigious, to the latter, anonymous and destitute, with a view to raising awareness for their predicament and claiming recognition for their cause (Sandvik, 2010). Embodying an 'aspirational' form of agency, these images perform solidarity not only by giving voice to the suffering of refugees but also by routinely educating 'us' into compassionate ways of feeling and acting on them, at a distance (Chouliaraki, 2013). By physically enacting such dispositions of compassionate care, celebrity visualities act as metonymies of empathetic publics at large, inviting 'us' to engage with those excluded at Europe's borders.

The visualities of social media graphics refer to the remediation of tweets about the death of toddler Aylan Kurdi, disseminated by Western as well as Middle Eastern actors. Reproduced in a small number of news outlets, these news pieces present us with re-visualisations of the original death scene, the boy's body on the beach, in a range of imaginary contexts – Aylan in heaven or in a Western child's bedroom. Characterised, on the one hand, by the substitution of photographic realism with the artistic aesthetic of

cartoons or drawings, and, on the other, by a register of confessional intimacy, these remediated tweets establish a relationship of reflexive guilt with their topic. This is the case, for instance, in a drawing of Aylan's body on the shore and an adjacent one, subtitled 'Europe', with a picture of Aylan's clothes hanged to dry – the ironic message being that Europe cares more about procedures rather than human life itself.

Despite their different aesthetic properties, these two visualities, celebrity and aesthetic playfulness, converge in their attempt to humanise refugees through acts of co-presence and confession aimed at validating their predicament of suffering. Yet, both imageries ultimately displace the presence of refugees, as the latter are either overshadowed by the glamorous presence of celebrity or fictionalised by the digital drawings of twitter. Even though this displacement of the other in favour of 'us' is also a feature of the regime of hospitality, the difference between the two lies in the ways each invests the refugee 'crisis' in moral claims. Images of protest, let us recall, focus on combinations of empathy with denunciation, critiquing the exclusionary politics of European elites; these ones, in contrast, replace critique with the self-oriented and depoliticised affectivities of celebrity and twitter culture.

In both cases, echoing earlier image patterns, an ambivalent form of humanity traverses the visualities of self-reflexivity: spoken about, rather than speaking, their case is made

but they are not the ones in control of it. Visually marginalised as part of a glamorous spectacle featuring, what Mostafanezhad (2016: 28) calls, the "aestheticised cosmopolitan celebrity care", or idealised in the amateur illustration of twitter, the irreducible humanity of refugees fades in the background. The form of responsibility that emerges out of these visualities is, what Chouliaraki calls, 'post-humanitarian' (2013:3): a responsibility that retains an ethics of solidarity towards vulnerable others yet, deeply suspicious of politics, turns to the self as its key source of this ethics of care. Be this the celebrity performance or the self-reflexive tweet, it is because 'we' feel this way that refugees are worthy of 'our' attention. In replacing the politicised responsibility of the protest with the post-humanitarian 'narcissism' of celebrity news and tweets, this visual regime ultimately privileges pleasurable and fleeting forms of consumerism while ignoring the de-humanising effects inherent in its communitarian voices. As a consequence, refugees ultimately become the vehicle for a conversation that takes place exclusively by 'us' and about 'us'.

Concluding reflections: visibility and responsibility in the refugee 'crisis'

Our aim, in this article, has been to map out the regimes of public visibility within which refugees turn into objects of our responsibility. This is important, we claimed, because such regimes of visibility organise the 'space of appearance' wherein refugees are constituted through moral claims to humanity and we are invited to respond to them through performances of responsible civic agency. Regimes of visibility, in other words, are key spaces of moralisation that produce and regulate the public dispositions by which we collectively take responsibility of the plight of distant others.

The five regimes of visibility that emerged through our taxonomic analysis make a contribution to existing literature, by complicating its historical tropes of refugee representation, victimhood and threat, in two important ways. First, our typology suggests that these two tropes, far from homogenous clusters of visual representation, are in fact complex categories characterised by internal differentiation. Second, our typology shows that, dominant as they may be, these two tropes do not exhaust the full range of the representational possibilities of the refugee 'crisis'. Let us discuss each insight in turn (under *Problematising the regimes of refugee visibility*), before we conclude with brief reflections on the norms of responsibility that circulate in our spaces of publicity – what Arendt calls the 'space of appearance' (1968/1998) (*Problematising responsibility in the space of appearance*).

Problematising the regimes of refugee visibility: The first insight, that victimhood and threat are by no means homogenous categories of visibility, is grounded on the underlying similarities that have emerged across the five visual regimes. Biological life and empathy, for instance, share the moral claim that the vulnerable other requires our care. They differ however in their portrayals of the other's body and the meaning of care: the body-in-need appears as an anthropological minimum, in biological life, and as an anthropological maximum, in empathy. This distinction between a mass of destitute bodies and a crying baby face is here not only a matter of emotional distance or proximity but also, importantly, a matter of ethical commitment – to a latent form of responsibility in the former, where care is about the monitorial action of 'registering the news', versus a charitable responsibility, in the latter, where care is about shedding a tear, signing a petition or donating goods for the innocent sufferer. While, therefore, their emphasis on the body-in-need evidently situates both categories under the theme of victimhood, their dispositional topologies introduce nuance into this visual regime.

The visualities of threat and hospitality, in a parallel move, work on the assumption that refugee imagery is not only about who we care for but also who we denounce and, therefore, introduce antagonism in their representations of vulnerability. Even though, on the basis of this structural similarity, both categories could be thought of as visualities of

threat, their proposals for responsibility differ drastically. The distinction between a mass of threatening young men approaching 'our' borders and a mass of protestors carrying 'refugees welcome' banners is not only a matter of vilifying or humanising the imagery of refugees but also, importantly, a matter of ethical commitment; commitment to a responsibility of security, which is about protecting 'ourselves' from 'them', in the former, versus a responsibility of hospitality, which recognises the political and moral obligation to protect 'them', in the latter.

The second insight of our analysis is an emerging category that does not complicate but, in fact, interrupts the polarity of victimhood and threat. The visualities of social media, for instance twitter graphics that re-appear in the news, rely on the assumption that it is neither the suffering body nor the presence of an evil-doer that mobilises moral engagement to refugees. It is, instead, 'our' own representations of them, in drawings, collages or retouched photographs, which become the vehicles for 'our' agency. Even though this regime still belongs to the traditional visualities of the body-in-need, it breaks with the previous ones in that it appropriates such imageries in a new, playful aesthetic and subordinates it ethically to a discourse of self-expression. Its aim is digital connectivity with others like 'us' instead of connectivity with the refugee either as victim or as threat. This 'post-humanitarian' visibility is, from this perspective, a new, digitally-

driven regime that avoids questions of political causality and facilitates a self-centred form of civic agency.

By complicating the space of publicity of the refugee 'crisis', our typology further problematises ongoing debates on the pathologies of responsibility. Complicity and collusion, to recall Silverstone, are here proven to be not the only but just two of the many types of relationships that 'we' are invited to practise, as we encounter images of refugees. 'Our' engagement, in other words, with the news' proposals for action, is not exhausted to those two inherently deficient options: comfortable familiarity with the refugees' sameness or fear of their radical otherness. Instead, as we saw, there is a wide range of performances for civic agency that the regimes of refugee visibility articulate for us – monitorial citizenship, tender-hearted benevolence, vigilant nationalism, cosmopolitan activism or self-reflexive confession. The key question is whether this diverse range of proposals manages to redeem the notion of responsibility from a pathological practice of othering to a practice that humanises refugees and recognises their cause.

Problematising responsibility in the space of appearance: To this question, our analytical insights converge with previous literature. In line with existing research, we, too, have established that, despite their internal variation, all regimes of visibility are ultimately

informed by symbolic strategies of dehumanisation. Whether these are strategies of massification, vilification, infantilisation, marginalisation or aestheticisation, the refugee appears in Western spaces of publicity as a deeply ambivalent figure: a body-in-need, a powerless child, a racial 'other', a linguistic token or a sentimental drawing. Even though, as we just saw, 'we' are invited to engage with various proposals of agency, the refugees' own agentive capacity is hardly ever asserted – paradigmatically as evil terrorists in the visualities of threat.

At the heart of this 'crisis' of humanity, we argue in conclusion, lies a crisis of responsibility itself; specifically, a crisis of the notion of responsibility that informs Western understandings of visuality as moral education, namely 'formal' responsibility: "the responsibility I have for my own acts, those aspects of life and deed which I can be held accountable for" (Silverstone, 2006: 152). Even though formal responsibility, the obligation to ourselves for our acts, is important in that, as we saw, it gives rise to a plurality of proposals for civic agency for 'us' as Western citizens, it ultimately fails to grant refugees the opportunity to also "be seen and heard as […] equal", as Arendt (1968/1998: 50) would put it, in the space of appearance. This is because, due to their lack of civic status, refugees are structurally unable to claim voice and agency in Western publicity; they lack, let us recall, 'the relevance of speech'**.**

Future conceptual work on refugee representations, we suggest in conclusion, needs therefore to address this exclusionary bias of formal responsibility. To this end, we propose the notion of substantive responsibility, 'responsibility for the conditions of the other' (Silverstone, 2006). *Pace* Silverstone's own utopian account of substantive responsibility as 'unconditional hospitality' for the 'other' (see Dayan 2007 for a critique), our own approach emphasises instead the relational and narrative character of this form of responsibility. Rather than the self-oriented focus on 'my' actions, in formal responsibility, substantive responsibility begins from the human capacity to establish communities of belonging through the sharing of stories (Cavarero, 2000).

Drawing on Arendt's normative argument that the public performance of voice is a world-disclosing practice, where narration "enable(s) individuals and collectives to *experience*—and not just intellectualise—th(eir) responsibility" (Macphee, 2011: 178), we propose that 'our' regimes of visibility treat the space of appearance as, in principle, open to all. Substantive responsibility here does not necessarily mean that refugees are *de facto* treated as equal participants in this space, but rather that the boundaries around 'who speaks' in the space of appearance become permeable and open to be claimed by a plurality of voices that claim social and political recognition.

It is precisely these boundaries that remain impervious to outsiders in the visual regimes we explored in this article, as refugees have been consistently spoken about and spoken for but never speaking for themselves. To be substantially responsible, in this context, does not only mean to stop silencing others in order to speak for or about them; it also means to stop speaking about them through 'our' own stories. It presupposes, instead, that the lives of others are worthy story-telling material; that, for instance, they appear in images that they have photographed themselves; through actions that portray them as creative and knowledgeable actors rather than as victims or terrorists; as citizens with views on the causes of the 'crisis' and as professionals with ideas and aspirations. Such stories can present refugees not as acted upon but as acting with us 'in a common world', wherein the positions of acting and suffering are interchangeable by all. It is this quality of being able to tell one's own visual stories, to appear as a speaking and acting subject, that Cavarero, drawing on Arendt, theorises as the 'ontological altruism' of narratability (2000: 90) that we recommend be recovered in the visual regimes of our mediated publicity.

These concluding reflections on substantive responsibility are meant to start the process of re-thinking not so much 'best practice' in news imagery, though this is important too, but of the conditions of possibility that enable such imagery to emerge in the first place.

While, as we have shown, the space of appearance is traversed by systemic relationships of power, sovereign and biopolitical, it is important that we turn these relationships into a site of struggle, where the norms of humanity, agency and responsibility are constantly at stake. For it is, ultimately, in this space only that refugees can, if at all, appear to us as actors and reveal their humanness in the presence of equals.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

References

Amnesty International Report (2015a) *The Global Refugee Crisis: a Conspiracy of Neglect*. Report for Amnesty International. Index no. POL 40/1796/2015. Available at: https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol40/1796/2015/en/ (accessed 16 May 2017).

Amnesty International (2015b) World Leaders' Neglect of Refugees Condemns Milions

to Death and Despair. Available at: https://www.amnesty.org/en/press-releases/2015/06/world-leaders-neglect-of-refugees-condemns-millions-to-death-and-despair-4/ (accessed 16 May 2017).

Arendt H (1968/1998) *The Human Condition*. Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press.

Banks J (2011) Unmasking Deviance: The Visual Construction of Asylum Seekers and Refugees in English National Newspapers. *Critical Criminology* 20(3): 293–310.

Berman N (2016) Syria's Displaced: A Photo Essay. In: Dissent. Available at: https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/syria-displaced-photo-essay-zaatari-refugee-camp (accessed 16 May 2017).

Berry M, Garcia-Blanco I and Moore K (2015) *Press Coverage of the Refugee and Migrant Crisis in the EU: a Content Analysis of five European Countries*. Report for the UNHCR. Available at: http://www.unhcr.org/protection/operations/56bb369c9/press-coverage-refugee-migrant-crisis-eu-content-analysis-five-european.html (accessed 16 May 2017).

Bleiker R, Campbell D, Hutchison E and Nicholson X (2013) The visual dehumanisation of refugees. *Australian Journal of Political Science* 48(4): 398–416.

Boltanski L (1999) *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Buchanan S, Grillo B and Threadgold T (2003) *What's the Story?: Results from Research into Media Coverage of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the UK*. London: Article 19.

Burman E (1994) Innocents Abroad: Western Fantasies of Childhood and the Iconography of Emergencies. *Disasters* 18(3): 238–253.

Calhoun C (2004) A World of Emergencies: Fear, Intervention, and the Limits of Cosmopolitan Order. *Canadian Review of Sociology* 41(4): 373–395.

Cavarero A (2000) *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*. New York: Routledge.

Chandler D (2010) Review Article: Risk and the Biopolitics of Global Insecurity. *Conflict, Security & Development* 10(2): 287–297.

Chouliaraki L (2006) Towards an Analytics of Mediation. *Critical Discourse Studies* 3(2): 153–178.

Chouliaraki L (2008) The Mediation of Suffering and the Vision of a Cosmopolitan Public. *Television and New Media* 9(5): 371–391.

Chouliaraki L (2013) *The Ironic Spectator: Solidarity in the Age of Post-*

humanitarianism. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Chouliaraki L (2017) Symbolic Bordering: The Self-representation of Migrants and Refugees in Digital News. *Popular Communication* 15(1): 1–18.

Chouliaraki L and Georgiou M (2017) Hospitability: The Communicative Architecture of Humanitarian Securitization at Europe's Borders. *Journal of Communication* 67(2): 159–180.

Dayan D (2007) On morality, Distance and the Other: Roger Silverstone's Media and Morality [Book review]. *International Journal of Communication*, 1: 113–122.

Van Dijk T A (1991) *Racism and the Press*. London: Routledge.

El-Enany N (2016) Aylan Kurdi: The Human Refugee. *Law and Critique* 27(1): 13–15.

Ellis J (1999) Television as working through. In: Gripsrud J (ed.), *Television and Common Knowledge*, New York: Routledge.

Flyvbjerg B (2005) Case Study. In T Denzin and Y S Lincoln. *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, London: Sage.

Gale P (2004) The Refugee Crisis and Fear: Populist Politics and Media Discourse [Paper in special issue: Fear and Loathing in the New Century. Anleu, Sharyn Roach; Martin, Bill; Zadoroznyj, Maria (eds).]. *Journal of Sociology* 40(4): 321–340.

Georgiou M and Zaborowski R (2016) *Media Coverage of the Refugee Crisis. A Cross-*

European Perspective Council of Europe Report, LSE Media and Migration Project. September 2016.

Giannakopoulos G and Anagnostopoulos D C (2016) Child Health, the Refugees Crisis, and Economic Recession in Greece. *The Lancet* 387(10025): 1271.

Hyndman J (2000) *Managing Displacement: Refugees and the Politics of Humanitarianism.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Jonas H (1984) *The Imperative of Responsibility: in Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press.

Keane J (2003) *Global Civil Society?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

King R and Wood N (2001) *Media and Migration: Constructions of Mobility and Difference*. London: Routledge.

Lenette C and Cleland S (2016) Changing faces: Visual Representations of Asylum Seekers in Times of Crisis. *Creative Approaches to Research* 9(1): 68–83.

Macphee G (2011) Escape from Responsibility: Ideology and Storytelling in Arendt's The Origins of Totalitarianism and Ishiguro's The Remains of the Day. *College Literature* 38(1): 176–201.

Malafouri E I (2015) *'Who are they & why are they here?' A Media Analysis of the Negative Portrayal of Immigrants in the Mainstream Greek press*. Master's

Thesis. Available at: https://dspace.mah.se/handle/2043/20118 (accessed 16 May 2017).

Malkki L H (1996) Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization. *Cultural Anthropology* 11: 377–404.

Mehta U S (1990) Liberal strategies of exclusion. *Politics & Society* 18(4): 427–454.

Mirzoeff N (2006) On Visuality. *Journal of Visual Culture* 5(1): 53–79.

Moeller S D (2002) A hierarchy of Innocence: The Media's Use of Children in the Telling of International News. *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 7(1): 36–56.

Moore K, Gross B and Threadgold T (2012) *Migrations and the Media.* New York, New York: Peter Lang.

Mortensen M and Trenz H-J (2016) Media Morality and Visual Icons in the Age of Social Media: Alan Kurdi and the Emergence of an Impromptu Public of Moral Spectatorship. *Javnost - The Public* 23: 343–362.

Musarò P (2017) Mare Nostrum: the Visual Politics of a Military-humanitarian Operation in the Mediterranean Sea. *Media, Culture & Society* 39: 11–28.

Mostafanezhad M (2016) Angelina Jolie and the Everyday Geopolitics of Celebrity Humanitarianism in a Thailand-Burma Border Town. In L A Richey (ed.)

Celebrity Humanitarianism and North-South Relations: Politics, Place and Power. London: Routledge, pp.27–47.

Nyers P (1999) Emergency or Emerging Identities? Refugees and Transformations in World Order. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 28: 1.

Owens P (2011) Beyond 'Bare Life': Refugees and the 'Right to Have Rights'. In: Betts A and Loescher G (eds) *Refugees in International Relations*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, pp.133–151.

Paik A N (2016) *Rightlessness: Testimony and Redress in U.S. Prison Camps Since World War II*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Polletta F (2006) *It Was Like a Fever: Storytelling in Protest and Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Sandvik K B (2010) Unpacking World Refugee Day: Humanitarian Governance and Human Rights Practice? *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 2: 287–298.

Schudson M (1998) *The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life*. New York: Martin Kessler Books.

Silverstone R (2002) Complicity and Collusion in the Mediation of Everyday Life. *New Literary History* 33(4): 761–780.

Silverstone R (2006) *Media and Morality: on the Rise of the Mediapolis*. Cambridge: Polity.

Ticktin M (2011) *Casualties of Care: Immigration and the Politics of Humanitarianism in France*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Tomlinson J (2011) Beyond Connection: Cultural Cosmopolitan and Ubiquitous Media. *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 14(4): 347–361.

Vaughan-Williams N (2015) *Europe's Border Crisis: Biopolitical Security and Beyond.* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Wright T (2002) Moving images: The Media Representation of Refugees. *Visual Studies* 17(1): 53–66.

Wright T (2004) Collateral Coverage: Media Images of Afghan Refugees, 2001. *Visual Studies* 19(1): 97–112.

Endnotes

[i] Refugee crisis" is placed in quotation marks so as to challenge Eurocentric uses of the term, which point to the one million arrivals in Europe in 2015 as their main cause for concern and policy focus, whilst ignoring the systemic causes that led to this increase in arrivals in Europe – the ongoing conflict-related crises and the capacity overstretch of neighbouring countries to host more than they are already hosting, namely 4.8 million refugees. (https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/02/syrias-refugee-crisis-in-numbers/)

[ii] Our visual analysis draws its data from a Content Analysis of 1,200 news stories on the refugee 'crisis' from broadsheet news outlets in eight European countries throughout July, September and November 2015. The study analysed the language of the 'crisis', mapping out the ideological,

geographical, and temporal differences and similarities across different countries (see Georgiou and Zaborowski, 2016). The present visual analysis takes a narrower focus on the same data material, selecting five countries from the sample and single dates, namely the days immediately following three key events in the 2015 'crisis': the agreement of European leaders on refugee quotas on 13 July, the death of Aylan Kurdi on 3 September, and the Paris Attacks of 16 November. Our four 'regimes of visibility' emerge out of analytical readings of this bank of images, while the fifth, 'hospitality', occurred outside the selected dates (a week after the death of Aylan Kurdi) but we draw it into our typology so as to capture the full range of regimes of visibility across the period studied in a comprehensive typology.