




Time magazine's "Finding Home" analysis: A case of storytelling innovation on distant suffering

Análisis de "Finding Home" de la revista Time: Un caso de innovación narrativa sobre el sufrimiento distante

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ABSTRACT This article aims to analyze an innovative and comprehensive way to report on migration and refugees tackling Time's magazine "Finding Home", a multimedia project held during 2016 mainly through a specific Instagram account. Throughout a year long, it tells the story about three Syrian women and their families who found shelter in refugee camps in Greece, all three of them while being pregnant and looking for a permanent place to settle. This piece of research explores qualitatively how the media is representing migrants and refugees, specifically women and motherhood, to illuminate the practice and develop innovative ways to approach and communicate mediated distant suffering from a peace-oriented approach. It uses a triangulation research design with a multimodal textual analysis and an in-depth semi-structured interview with two journalists involved in the project. This text intends to approach Instagram as an opportunity for innovative journalistic genres, while considering its challenges and constraints, and evaluate if peace-oriented news stories are able to connect with the audience while fostering empathy and solidarity.

KEYWORDS Mediated distant suffering, peace-oriented, migration, innovation, Instagram

RESUMEN Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar el proyecto multimedia "Finding Home" de la revista Time, realizado durante 2016 principalmente a través de una cuenta específica de Instagram, una forma innovadora e integral de informar sobre la migración y los refugiados, contando la historia de tres mujeres sirias y sus familias que encontraron refugio en campos para refugiados en Grecia, mientras las tres estaban embarazadas y buscaban un lugar permanente para establecerse. Desde un diseño cualitativo, esta pieza de investigación explora cómo los medios representan a los migrantes y refugiados, específicamente a las mujeres y su maternidad, con el objetivo de iluminar la práctica y desarrollar formas innovadoras de abordar y comunicar el sufrimiento distante mediado desde una perspectiva de paz. Se utiliza un diseño de investigación de triangulación con un análisis textual multimodal y una entrevista semiestructurada a profundidad con las periodistas involucradas en el proyecto. Este texto pretende abordar Instagram como una oportunidad para géneros periodísticos innovadores, considerando sus desafíos y limitaciones, y evaluar si las noticias orientadas a la paz son capaces de conectar con la audiencia mientras fomentan la empatía y la solidaridad.

PALABRAS CLAVE Sufrimiento distante mediado, orientado a la paz, migración, innovación, Instagram.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Daily, the media builds representations about people who are suffering and who are geographically far from its audience; radio listeners, TV watchers, Internet surfers and social media participants, that from a cosmopolitan point of view are urged to respond to this suffering encounters (Chouliaraki, 2006, 2008; Linklater, 2007; Silverstone 2007). This possibility for engagement on distant suffering through media content and the lack of it, has led several researchers to inquiry about this process. However, this line of research is not very abundant, and the current world situation (both due humanitarian crises and media technologies rapid evolution) is asking for more research and for a more thorough one, that also could point towards more comprehensive and peace-oriented ways for the practice.

As of March 2021, 13.4 million people from Syria need humanitarian assistance, and 6.6 million were forced to leave their country due to the war conflict so they seek asylum in other places (UNHCR, 2022). As a result of this, the media constructed representations on it and frame it as a refugee crisis.

As many others, Time magazine covered the crisis, but they chose to present it in an unusual and innovative way. They developed a special project focusing on the journey of three Syrian women that abandoned their home country along with their families and found temporary shelter in Greek refugee camps, while giving birth to their babies in the middle of uncertainty. From September 2016 to September 2017, a reporting team followed Taimaa, Nour and Illham, while they were "Finding Home", as the documentary is called. The reportage takes a specific approach on storytelling about the daily life of ordinary people: what they cook for dinner, how they sleep at night, their feelings and thoughts, and more specifically, the struggles that entail being pregnant women and becoming mothers during hard times in a refugee camp, hoping for a new home country to build a life.

Finding Home was the cover story in Time magazine on December 26th, 2016, and each of the three family backgrounds are disclosed on the official website, although there is a special and longer storyline about Taimaa and her family, probably because she and her husband decided to keep on participating in the project. The website invites media users to follow the three women journey day by day through the Instagram account (@

findinghome) which opened on December 9th, that same year. Since then, the project has won several awards, mostly related to innovation (Francesca Trianni, 2022). The reporting was also supported by the Pulitzer Center of Crisis Reporting and Merck of Mothers (Time magazine, 2023), institution dedicated to end maternal mortality and improve the quality of maternity (Merck of mothers, 2023).

To address how the media is representing migrants and refugees, specifically women and motherhood and how the audience is responding to it, I will use a multimodal textual analysis and an in-depth semi-structured interview. Both methodologies are part of the same triangular research design which serves as a holistic approach to explore the mediation of distant suffering, acknowledging that the sample to analyze is only one case from the news stories that are available on the topic. As follows, first I will briefly review pertinent literature regarding the mediation of distant suffering and insights that precede this research.

2. THE FOSTERING OF COSMOPOLITAN EMPATHY

The process of distant suffering communication is mediated, as the meaning of what is represented circulates and is transformed through the same process (Silverstone, 1999). In this transformation of meaning between the one who suffers and the one who watches, rest many possibilities of engaging or not (Boltanski, 1999).

In general terms, mediation could be divided into three sites: the text, the audience, and the production, so the interrelation between those three is significant for the interpretation of the message (Silverstone, 1999). Extrapolating this concept of mediation into the specific process of representing distant suffering, Seu (2010, pp.439) suggests three gaps of relationship between mediation sites, that have become diverse areas of research which sometimes overlap but also complement the whole process. The first one concerns "the distant suffering and its representation", the second one deals with "the representations of distant suffering and their reception by audiences" and the third one analyzes the link "between audiences' reception and action". Then, there exists a mediated distance between the 'other' (distant sufferer) and the 'self' (member of the audience) (Silverstone, 2007).

From the previous unfolds a significance of moral level that relies on the social responsibility of the media, because it implies that according to the measure of this distance is how the audience is able to appreciate and consider the others as part of their world and reflect on their conditions. 'Proper distance' or 'proximity' is how Silverstone (2007) would call this adequate degree of separation between the sufferer and the audience. Ideally and consequently, this proximity would facilitate a disposition to empathize, engage and to

help reduce other's suffering. Then, the media are moral agents due its performative property (Chouliaraki, 2008), as they hold power on how they present distant others. How the audience relates to such stories highly depends on media decisions of representation, either text, visual-based or mixed.

Visual representations on distant suffering are especially powerful due its semiotic properties because they allow audiences to relate faster to the victims, as these offer emotional concurrences with common foundations which allow human beings to reflect on the distant suffering (Allan, 2011; Ottosen, 2007). A picture is able to open the scene to the viewer, to explore further than what is captured (Zelizer, 2010). As Chouliaraki (2013, p.111) enounces: "the choice to express solidarity for vulnerable others cannot be only a matter of consensual decision-making but (...) it is also a matter of cultivating the imagination."

Emotional connection is important for engagement, for framing that imaginary, and digital media appears as a great opportunity for that. According to Wahl-Jargensen (2020), although historically neglected from the journalistic practice, the role of emotion has been reconsidered and even promoted among journalists as not to neglect their emotions from the stories they tell (p.188). When media users connect through empathy with vulnerable others who are suffering, their imagination gets motivated, and they may feel compassion and a moral drive to help. Here, "the other" means any human with whom "I'm sharing the world", considering that all humans are equal, share the same dignity and deserve attention from each other, that is what I understand as a cosmopolitan perspective (Beck and Sznaider, 2010; Chouliaraki, 2013; Hannerz, 1996; Linklater, 2007; Silverstone 2007).

At the same time, physical and emotional distance play within this process, as neither distant others nor members of the audience are limited to location terms, but to historical, sociological, cultural and symbolic contexts (Silverstone, 2007). The distance can be "stretched", it may go nearer or even far. Then, a "cosmopolitan empathy" is to be cultivated and modulated (Kyriakidou, 2018) and the moral disposition of the audience is to be facilitated so it could be performed (Ong, 2009). Empirical research on the matter is in its majority regarding media representation, there are other studies focusing on the audience, and some others exploring what happens in the back of media companies that influence journalists work.

In the following paragraphs, I will discuss relevant findings from these pieces of work, to frame my own. These are only a sample of a growing body of research and is not necessarily presented in chronological order, nor due its importance, but in a way that shapes my approach to the topic.

3. ON REPRESENTING MIGRANT WOMEN

Exploring the assumed failure of news texts to portray humanitarian crises, Moeller (1999) was one of the first researchers who exhibited that due to the repetitive and sensationalist approach done by the (American) media about distant suffering, the audience is not capable of engaging with what they see; they are tired and bored of watching repetitive representations. The term *compassion fatigue* was adopted for this lack of empathy and connection.

One of the most referenced works on the topic and that has been used for following studies is the TV news text-based analysis by Chouliaraki (2006) who, among other insights, recommended that distant sufferers need to be represented as agents themselves in order to be humanized, and not as far away distant others who don't share any commonalities with the viewer, which may result in the inability to relate to them; this insight was previously suggested by Tester (2001). More recently, Wahl-Jargensen (2020) has found that the more relatable the news stories are, the more engagement the audience will have with them, as relatability has to do with fostering empathy.

Specifically about migrants and refugees, studies have shown how they could be perceived as sufferers, but at the same time, as a threat to the global order and nation's stability (Chouliaraki, 2012, p.14). This ambivalent representation is constructed throughout the process of mediation, but the starting point in this sequence are the media industries, which play "a primary role in making humanitarian disasters visible and in framing and narrating their significance, and the urgency of their alleviation" (Orgad and Seu, 2014, p.8). The choices made by the media makers impact significantly on how audiences make sense of the story and reflect about it. Different kinds of perspectives, purposes and values support such choices and ways of representation.

Although reporting on war is a widely discussed topic from the journalistic point of view, stories about migrants are scantily found in the news (Chouliaraki, Georgiou and Zaborowski 2017) and particularly women are underestimated both as news correspondents and underreported among the coverage (Jacobson, 2010).

Peace-oriented stories are even less common. This approach calls for a broader frame than the usual sensationalist-breaking news genre to address such catastrophes, as these are not isolated events and sometimes result from older conflicts where more than two parties are encountered (Lynch, 2004: 265). To include the post-war side-effects becomes essential, whether it is good or bad news, happy or sad consequences, humanitarian help, international solidarity demonstrations, forced migration or else (Galtung: 2002; Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005). From this approach, the focus ought to be on the victims, on giving them a voice and in showing further initiatives on rebuilding their territories.

To test how migrants were depicted during the so-called refugee and migration crisis, Chouliaraki, Georgiou and Zaborowski (2017) conducted a content analysis on European press coverage mainly about Syria war (among other countries facing similar situations), intending to compare the different narratives across a selection of eight countries during that 2015. According to the results of the report, very little description of migrants was made regarding age, gender, profession or culture, for example. The same with their opinions; voices of political and elite groups were more often featured than those of the individuals, either migrants or members of the audience, similar findings were mentioned by Chouliaraki (2017) and later confirmed by Al-Ghazzi (2019).

As it is, the general coverage framed that particular migration like a crisis relying on two opposite perspectives of looking at migrants, as vulnerable or dangerous others (Chouliaraki, 2012; Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017) treating them as a big mass of displaced people, as mere statistics (Kogut and Ritov, 2005). This kind of approach would be less likely to inspire empathy (Kyriakidou, 2008) and clearly is not a peace-oriented proposal.

On the other hand, a study by Kogen and Dilliplane (2019) demonstrated that is not about the statistics as such, but the framing of the story as solvable. Adding data like facts and statistics actually can promote willingness to help as it generates deliberative thought towards a problematic where media users can contribute (p.99).

On a gender perspective on conflict coverage, Jacobson (2010) examined Swedish media and confirmed that war conflicts are largely associated with men, diminishing women's voices, both from the victims and from the NGOs and news reporters who work within the area.

4. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION WITHIN SOCIAL MEDIA

Regarding audience research, Höijer (2004) conducted one of the first studies considering the audience. She detected certain patterns on the representation that actually engaged the audience, and these were depicting children, women and elderly people characterized as vulnerable, fragile, impotent, passive and unable to survive by themselves, opposite to what Chouliaraki (2006) as discussed previously. More on this and based on her own focus groups, Kyriakidou (2008) also argues about a missing connection from the audience with distant suffering due to the lack of agency of the other, but also because of the human inability to empathize with thousands of cases with similar stories, as it can become overwhelming, previously suggested by Kogut and Ritov (2005).

Research shows that reception may be rendered by gender (Hoijer, 2004), by age, race, class and religion (Ong, 2014), distrust and even denial they may feel from the appeals discourse (Seu, 2003, 2010), current media habits (Scott, 2014), lay moralities Ong (2015) and audience's own mediated reception of previous disasters rather than on the actual distant other (Kyriakidou, 2014, 2017), among other findings. Therefore, there is not a

general nor a particular response that can be articulated on how the public reacts towards distant suffering (Höijer, 2004; Kyriakidou, 2015; Seu, 2011). Aside from contextual and cultural factors, other studies advocate to focus on what happens outside the media exposure per se, to explore more about the individual process, the internal conversation the media user experiments, as it plays a relevant role forming a cosmopolitan disposition or the lack of it (Von Engelhardt, 2015; Vandevordt (2017).

As media evolves, Internet and social media have confronted traditional media paradigms and it has also implied advantages for communicating distant suffering due its properties like immediacy, peer-to-peer interaction and boundless connectivity (boyd and Ellison, 2007), but it has also provoked the assumption that social media users are or should be more involved, active and engaged with the content (Madianou, 2013). Moreover, mediation also has to do with the structures and features of the medium itself (Thumim, 2012), not only the content.

Madianou (2013) was one of the first interested in exploring this new paradigm, so she analyzed two humanitarian campaigns launched in social media –WaterForward and Kony 2012–, and noted that the response of the audience and the discussion had an orientation of communitarian support among the users, and not a cosmopolitan one. Users would feel empowered when “liking” and “sharing” organizations’ posts or tweets but without further action or without understanding the sufferers’ conditions, later confirmed by Pantti (2015) on YouTube, by Huiberts (2019) on Facebook, Irom (2021) with virtual reality. Also, regarding virtual reality, Van Damme et al (2019) confirmed that new technology does not necessarily enhances engagement with distant suffering and the urge to its alleviation.

Others have investigated the remediation of iconic photographs on humanitarian crises when media users transform the original piece into art or memes and circulate it as a manner of protest (Olesen, 2018). These kinds of engagement fall into what Chouliaraki (2012b) calls post-humanitarianism, which is centered on the self rather than on the distant other.

Is true that social media opens the door to a vast exploration of humanitarian communication possibilities. Yet, the majority of studies focus their research either on humanitarian campaigns by NGOs (e.g., Knudsen and Bajde, 2016; Madianou, 2013) or in the climax of the disaster (e.g., Li and Rao, 2010; Hjorth and Kim, 2011), at the moment when all eyes are on these countries during moments of crisis. Scott (2015) also pointed out that online research was mainly “media centric” rather than “user centric”, a great opportunity to delve more into as well. As it is, neither the aftermath of that crucial suffering that deals with long-term consequences, has not been greatly investigated, nor the performative agency of the media with potential peace-oriented frames. This is why I ask: *How is the representation of Syrian migrants and refugees mediated?* Addressing it from a gender perspective and within a social media environment, specifically looking at the Finding Home Instagram account.

5. METHODOLOGY: EXPLORING INNOVATIVE FORMS REPORTING MEDIATED DISTANT SUFFERING

As there are three sites of mediation to cover, a triangulation method (Jankowski and Wester, 1991) was used to outline the research design, one that considers different kinds of data which at the end are evaluated according to the emerging themes. Two different qualitative methods were used, textual analysis and in-depth semi-structured interviews, both of them exploring the same case but focusing on different sites to examine and to collect data.

The theoretical approach to understand the audience goes beyond the spectator paradigm, one that is more prone to visualize members of the audience as passive, apathetic and indifferent, not capable to relate to distant others' misfortune (Sliwinski, 2011). The "media witnessing" conceptualization (Frosh and Pinchevski, 2009) was used previously by Kyriakidou (2015) and not only conceives a person who is present during a given event, probably willing to testify about what s/he observes. It contemplates the three sites of mediation (text, production and audience) as Frosh and Pinchevski (2009) elaborate that it encompasses: "appearance of witnesses in media reports, the possibility of media themselves bearing witness and the positioning of media audiences as witnesses to depicted events" (p.1). This way, "media witnessing" would offer a more engaging, perhaps idealistic and yet possible response to distant suffering.

5.1 Text analysis: multimodal semiotics

The focus for the analysis was Finding Home's Instagram account and posts were examined using a multimodality semiotic method (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006), which offers the possibility to unfold these posts into modes, and for this study the three modes to consider are the photograph, its caption and the comments that are responding to the post. However, the presentation of the findings considers the post as one single piece. As Alper (2014, p.1239) points out that: "When looking at a photo taken by Instagram, one is not only looking at a version of the past, but present patterns of networked participation as well."

Explained by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, p.46), the people depicted in the picture are referred as "represented participants" and the ones who are both observing it (audience) and producing it (journalists) within a specific social context (ibid, p.119), are "interactive participants"; all of them are involved in the representation. This term is useful for this project since it acknowledges the three sites of mediation as well: the text including its characters (represented participants) and the production and the audience (interactive participants).

There are three categories of analysis: the social distance, the attitude and the contact:


- **Social distance:** Refers to how the refugee(s) is/are framed in the picture, a term with the same name as the one Silverstone (2007) used, a dimension from which producers make choices. It is expected to observe more empathy and engagement when this distance is shorter, proximate.
- **Attitude:** Is what the representation implies by how the person is depicted and from which perspective is the viewer going to appreciate the represented participant. Here the expectation would be to find more interest from the media users when refugees' emotions are shown, when the representation is more horizontal, inviting to connect.
- **Contact:** This is measured by demand and offer; when the represented participant is looking in the eyes of the viewer, asking to have a relation and the facial expression and gestures serve to direct and establish that relation, if to sympathize according to the feeling of joy, pain, hope, or frustration, for example. The contact works as in face-to-face communication, eye contact is the key to start or to cultivate a link between two people.

This methodology considers the frame of the picture to entail a certain relationship according to how far or proximate did the photograph was taken (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006, pp.130-131, 154), as follows:

Table 1: Proximity interpretation. Source: Own elaboration based on Kress and van Leeuwen (2006)

Frame	Distance	Interpretation
Extreme close up	Less than heads and shoulders	Very intimate
Close up	Heads and shoulders	Intimate/personal
Medium close shot	Cut at the waist	
Medium shot	Cut at the knees	Social, informal
Long shot	Half of the height of the frame	Formal, impersonal
Medium long shot	Full	
Very long shot	Wider	Very impersonal, strangers

Looking at the previous table, the prediction would be to find:

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A closer frame • Less distance • More intimacy |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More proximate social distance • More horizontal attitude • Direct contact |
|--|---|--|

Considering these for the textual analysis of each photograph, I relate to how the social media witnesses (the Instagram users) are responding to them. In order to do so, I observed the overall conversation given by the comments of the audience, and since the content is mainly visual as per the platform's main feature, captions are described if necessary as they operate as a complement to explain a bit more the scene portrayed.

For the sample selection, the criterion was based on media users' engagement, considering audience perspective as the guide to analyze from this mediation site, and not necessarily showing a more exhaustive sampling of the different angles of the project. Therefore, the most liked and commented photographs were qualitatively analyzed, acknowledging the possible unbalance, as the account continued to gather followers as time passed by and it is likely that recent posts are more popular than the older ones. This strategy led me to explore the kind of engagement and conversation that followers have with these stories.

A chart was elaborated (Appendix I) considering the posts that were published until May 31st, 2017, the date of the data recollection, resulting in 201 posts within a five months' time frame. Then, the top 11 with more likes and comments were analyzed. Within this sampling, there was also a consideration to include at least one post of each represented women. Nine posts were about Taimaa, one about Nour and one about Illham.

5.2 Interviewing the journalists

Two members of the project participated in the same interview, Aryn Baker, Time magazine's former Africa bureau chief, and Francesca Trianni, Time's staff video journalist at that time; Lynsey Addario, award-winning photojournalist was not able to participate. The interview was held on July 5th, 2017, it was audio-recorded and fully transcribed. For the analysis presentation, the interview was interpreted, excreting relevant responses in light of the research question previously stated and relating it to the literature review (Kvale, 1996).

The combination of these two methods –textual analysis and interviews– complement each other within a triangulation design (Jankowski and Wester, 1991), and helps to shape a deeper approximation to the inquiry which tackles the wide debated issue of distant suffering communication and its mediation, but through a current and critical situation about refugees told by Finding Home, the case of study which I discuss in the next chapter.

6. ANALYSIS: IS THERE A POSSIBILITY FOR COSMOPOLITAN EMPATHY?

As follows, the information is divided into five emergent themes in relation to the kind of engagement the audience had: 1. Showing support, 2. Demonstrating empathy, 3. Getting involved, asking for details, 4. Willing to help and asking how, 5. Self-oriented responses. The multimodal analysis reflects how the three categories of analysis, namely the social distance, the attitude and the contact, relate to how the members of the audience respond. Each post tells an episode on the life of these three Syrian refugees, some of them are a sequence of one particular event, and there will be interesting excerpts of the post comments both from the audience and the journalists (Kvale, 1996).

Please note that there was more than one post to describe each one of the themes, however, I will only show one example per theme in the main text. Appendix II shows the whole analysis if interested.

6.1 Compassion as a result of proximity

Taimaa is one of the three women who protagonize Finding Home. Her stories were the most popular in terms of likes and comments, which indicates a special interest from the audience towards this family, who faced a difficult episode amidst the already hard situation as refugees.

The first post of this sequence is a video with two scenarios: Baby Heln is distressed and crying herself out while her mom is holding an inhaler to help her breathe. It is a close up shot and a close distance from which the viewer feels the demanding look of Heln aching. Taimaa caresses her daughter on the head and tells her some sweet words trying to calm her down. This shot is taken from the top, portraying the baby's serious condition and vulnerable state, which according to Höjjer (2004) would be one reason why this post was so popular.

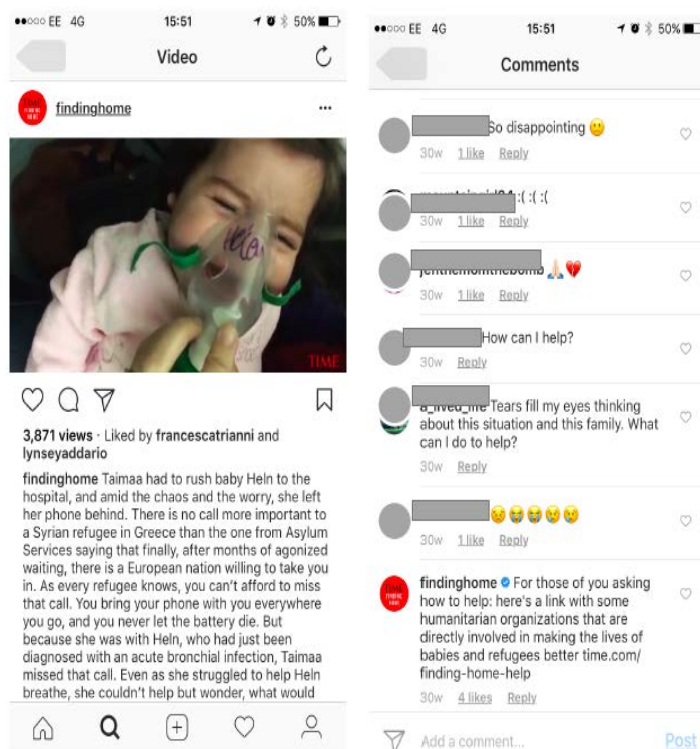


Image 1. Screenshot taken from a Finding Home Instagram account post in July 2017.

Second, from a medium shot and a middle distance one can see a hospital room where 5-year-old Wael is taking a rest lying on the bed, while Taimaa tries to comfort Heln who vigorously cries moving her arm out of distress. There is nobody looking at the camera, so there is no contact. Taimaa is absorbed by the circumstances, her only focus is her daughter. The angle from which this scene is taken is at an eye level and the audio is similar to the other scenario.

The caption adds to the situation as it explains that Taimaa had to quickly take Heln to the hospital, who was diagnosed with an acute bronchial infection. More to that, she left her mobile phone and missed a call from Asylum Services, the ones in charge of relocating migrant families to better opportunities in welcoming countries. The end of the caption reads: "Even as she struggled to help Heln breathe, she couldn't help but wonder, what would happen to her next?" This question, as the represented participant wonders about this family's destiny, is a mediation resource (Thumim, 2012) available from the platform and used by the reporters to suggest a feeling of anxiety to the reader, one that could engage them to keep following the story.

Most of the comments from the followers were supportive like: "Oh Taimaa You're such a fighter! What a wonderful mom you are. I'm sending you love and light my friend." There

is a specific comment: “I remember being at the doctor with my girl struggling to breathe but it was a short drive from my house. Your child is your focus; all else falls away. This is heartbreaking. And this is one beautiful child of so many.” This media user brings this situation into her own experience and then translates it into how many families and children may be in the same struggle, as in a way of getting close to Taimaa’s and then stepping back to relate it collectively. Via this visual content, the user is able to reflect about distant others in general as s/he shapes her/his imaginary of distant suffering (Allan, 2011; Ottosen, 2007; Richards, 2012). Also, Finding Home reporters responded with a link of humanitarian organizations dedicated to assisting these kinds of cases so that people could donate.

6.2 Real faces of real human beings

The same day as the previously discussed post, Finding Home published a photograph taken from a medium close shot but a close distance. One can see a visibly preoccupied Taimaa looking to the right with a tear running through her face and Heln sitting on her lap looking tired. The angle from where the picture was taken denotes equality as it is frontal and from an eye level, imposing a point of view.



Image 2. Screenshot taken from a Finding Home Instagram account post in July 2017.

The caption offered a summary of what happened but explaining that a close person to the family informed them that they had an asylum appointment they couldn't miss the next day, so the restlessness increased while Heln's parents discussed their options. Support comments were the most common, and the appreciation of individual, specific, personal stories from suffering others was noticeable as some members of the audience expressed comments like: "I'm with (username) I can't stop thinking about them. Thank you for putting real faces to this awful situation". It seems that picturing particular faces and acknowledging specific stories might be easier to relate to (Kyriakidou, 2008), and to include them in their daily imaginary, other than reading statistics or watching impersonal events about migration.

The lack of actual human faces and particular stories about the thousands of displaced is not only identified by researchers like Chouliaraki, Georgiou and Zaborowski (2017), but there are members of the audience thanking for offering such, who are also adopting this particular faces and stories as link to the other many who are represented by the former. Also, this user calls herself witness (Frosh and Pinchevski, 2009), as means to recognize what distant others are suffering, including their human identity being represented as realistic as possible (Chouliaraki, 2006, 2012, 2012b).

6.3 Agency propelling responses

Days later, baby Heln was recovering from her bronchial infection and Taimaa recorded a video for the audience which was published on February 10th, 2017. So far, this is the only post where one of the represented participants is actually interacting directly with the audience through the producers' lens, bearing witness of her own situation (Frosh and Pinchevski, 2009) and agent herself (Chouliaraki 2006; 2012; Tester, 2001). Taimaa is sitting in front of the camera which frames her and baby Heln in a medium close shot and from a close distance. The angle is frontal and taken from an eye level, offering equality and making the brief video approachable to the viewers while we hear from a big smile and a kind voice: "Hello, thank you very much I'm happy, hello from Heln." The baby is not looking at the camera but to her left while she yawns and then giggles at something that appears to be another kid who is amusing her, presumably her brother Wael. Taimaa raises her daughter's arm as if saying "hello", and then she starts laughing too, possibly out of nervousness of being in front of the camera speaking in English to a potential audience.



Image 3. Screenshot taken from a Finding Home Instagram account post in July 2017.

The caption explains how the Syrian refugee and Finding Home reporting team are grateful with all the supportive comments received from the followers. It reads: “She asked us how to say “happy” in English and recorded this message.” Taimaa’s demanding contact to the camera with the desire to actually address the audience and express how she feels, englobes the importance of each comment as a sum of global empathy, compassion and human consideration towards distant others, a glimpse of a performed cosmopolitan sense (Ong, 2009).

To watch a refugee speaking to the camera and addressing an audience that has encouraged her to remain strong, is not what is usually see regarding migration representations (Chouliaraki, 2012; Chouliaraki, Georgiou and Zaborowski 2017), and yet it was the most commented and liked post from the sample. The reason for this post’s popularity may have several factors but it could closely be related to the fact that the participant is addressing the audience herself. It may be possible to say that the more human and realistic the represented participant is portrayed, the more connection it would have with the audience. She is also reflecting what peace journalism advocates for, to pay attention to the actual sufferer and offering a voice to the victim (Galtung; 2002). It is a hint saying that it matters to build up toward a presence on the emotional global imaginary, as suggested by Richards (2012).

6.4 Social media engagement

The oblique angle from where the picture was taken shows Taimaa, her husband Mohannad and baby Heln in a long shot leading to a long distance from the camera. It is February 6th, and the women are sitting in a street bench with no demand for the interactive participants. The offered information shows a lost daydreaming look in Taimaa's face while she is hugging Heln and Mohannad carries a paper standing up.

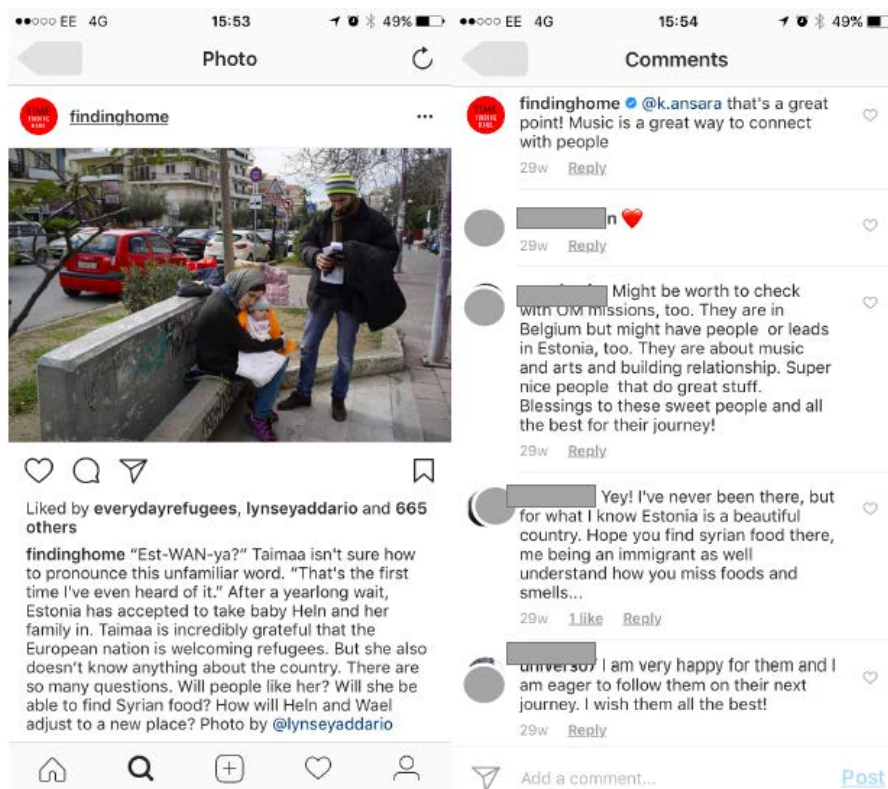


Image 4. Screenshot taken from a Finding Home Instagram account post in July 2017.

From the caption the user can understand that the family has been accepted to live in Estonia, a country of which Taimaa doesn't know anything about. She is quoted in the caption trying to pronounce the country name: "Est-WAN-ya?" Though they are very grateful, they are also worried about the culture, the food and whether they are going to be welcomed by the local people or not.

Comments from the audience are kind and supportive, and as they know that the reporting team is with them and will keep on following them for a while, they speak to them on their own terms. There were also some comments related to Taimaa's professional background as musician users have been following the account for a while as they have learned particular details told earlier in the reporting, they are engaged and thus, able to relate it to the moment they are living now.

6.5 Self-expression vs other-oriented responses

Nour is another of the three women starring this project. A long-shot picture that frames the three members of Nour's family on her refugee tent, taken from a semi-low angle imposing a point of view and capturing the moment when Yousef is holding their one month and half old baby, Rahaf; both looking into each other's eyes, the father contemplating her daughter with a genuine smile. On the back, Nour is concentrated putting her veil on her head, so there is no direct contact to the camera, which is placed from a middle distance. The photograph itself could be a beautiful portrait of how the life on the camp is endured with joy, however, the caption triggered a different reaction of what was expected according to the overall response of other analyzed posts.



Image 5. Screenshot taken from a Finding Home Instagram account post in July 2017.

The caption explains the pilgrimage that this family had to start, contextualizing the picture in such a way that the audience would begin to know them, as it was posted on December 19th, 2016. They were trying to escape from ISIS, which had taken control over their city

and looking for better opportunities to start a family: "Fearing for his life, Yousef fled in late 2015. He and Nour had a quick wedding in Deir ez-Zor, then they started their journey to Europe via Turkey."

Aside from a few supportive or kind comments, some users engaged in the controversies of cultural judgment and women's rights. A user initiated the discussion criticizing this family's decision of running away from Syria with all the risks and dangers it holds, plus getting pregnant and having a child in the middle of it. Comments became aggressive focusing on the discussion of birth control, being a supposed responsibility that this family was avoiding, assuming that Nour had not much of a choice on it due their culture. It resulted in a debate among members of the audience, with judgemental reflections, similar to Knudsen and Bajde (2016) study and self-oriented responses far from the 'other' (Chouliaraki, 2012; 2012b; Madianou, 2013).

7. ANALYZING JOURNALIST CHOICES ON REPRESENTATION

The following findings are drawn from the interview carried out with two members of the reporting team of Finding Home, as previously stated. If interested, the complete transcription is located in Appendix III.

7.1 Mediation matters

As Chouliaraki, Georgiou and Zaborowski (2017) identified, the so called refugee and migration crisis is being represented in an impersonal way and opposite to a peace-journalism model (Galtung: 2002; Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005), the victims are depicted in the exact moment of flight and in big groups, their voices are not being heard either; the repetitive scenes of displaced people trying to escape is becoming 'usual' somehow and the audience is getting used to this, related to what Moeller (1999) argues about compassion fatigue. This was also noticed by Finding Home reporting team, as Francesca Trianni explains the kind of approach they were looking for:

...we realized everyone were getting used to these images of people coming to the shore of Italy, in Greece (...) and we wanted to do something that...we hope people connect to these stories throughout the world and you know, what's easiest to connect to than a baby. Any parent can relate to the idea of, you know, wanting to make sure your baby has the best possible care, and it's safe and love and has future so, we thought that following the story of babies born in a foreign land with no home to go back to, would be the best way to get to people's hearts and ultimately their attention... It's so rare to see refugees portrayed in their everyday lives as parents, as you know couples who fall in love...

Starting from the assumption that babies and parents' daily activities and struggles would

have more link with the audience, is how Finding Home shape their perspective towards the current situation on migration and refugees. This is what Wahl-Jargensen (2020) talks about relatability, it's about the intention of building a connection with the audience and trying to transform that spectator-like behavior (Sliwinski, 2011) to a more committed one.

The mediation process finds one of its corners on the production and who is behind it (Silverstone, 1999), so it could be said that the meaning of the message starts developing from the kind of choices that media producers take. Thus, the decision to start from an empathetic approach with the participants to be represented, could build a case where that empathy can remain throughout the communication process. The power and responsibility of the media is relevant, as its performative component serves as an engagement potential with distant others who may be in need (Chouliaraki, 2008), as Trianni mentions:

These discussions are going to completely define the future of both countries and to be able to have people's attentions at this time, being so hard getting to people to stop and to have people engaged when it's in Instagram or pick up a magazine's story or watch videos and care about someone who's gone through something so different than you, it's huge.

Responsive to the global situation and hostile attitude towards migrants also detected by Chouliaraki, Georgiou and Zaborowski (2017) in the media, Trianni points out the transcendental value of reporting about distant suffering and refugees, as well as the challenge and the importance of getting to the audience.

7.2 Humanizing the crisis

As social media users engage with this project, the storytelling of three intimate stories of three particular Syrian migrant families, has brought attention and consideration for others who are going through similar experiences, as followers engage not only with these families but also are able to imagine those others as per the visual properties of a photograph (Zelizer, 2010). Baker also explained how these women are comforted by audience comments, and how they can reaffirm their human condition versus being part of a statistic of displaced individuals:

The experience of being a refugee in Europe these days...you are one in a million or a million plus, like you are just a number, your whole life is decided by the number on your refugee card and your asylum application card, so to actually have a human connection, to be able to be lifted out of a number into human misery to have a name, I think is really... like soul creating in a way, it sort of given them more strength and realize that like "Ok, I'm not just cough in this massive wheel", you know... "I'm somebody that people care.

Distant suffering communication via social media then, would not just entail how the audience is responding to, but also how the sufferer is acknowledging responses.

Moreover, this affirmation of being someone that others care about and of being agents of their own cause, reminds the sufferer's inherent humanity (Chouliaraki, 2012; 2012b). Baker elaborates:

I think we're...I think the goal of any journalist is to humanize...not any journalist but a lot of journalists, especially in the international and humanitarian fields, is to humanize your subject. So, I think in that way we've been able to do that, and by humanizing these refugees, I think we are, hopefully, getting people to realize that: no, they're not a drain on the economy, no they're not trying to take your jobs, you know. Whatever stereotype it's out there about refugees, we are actually able to break them through a solid example of a real person.

Baker conceptualizes "real person" as in a way of saying "human", trying to convey that notion to those members of that humanity who share the same identity while recognizing the different context they are looking at, as Silverstone (2007) would explain, a balanced degree of proximity.

7.3 Commitment 24/7

Migration means to be moving from one place to another, and so if the journalists are to represent this experience daily, they would have to commit to an unsteady and uncertain trip with social skills requirements, to say the least. This kind of reportage requires time and resources from the media company, sponsors and from the team in charge, it is not a single news piece which will end soon, rather it is a year-long report. Focusing almost exclusively in these three families, following them wherever their luck takes them, demands commitment and support (Galtung, 2002), but it also extends the possibilities for a more empathetic and holistic storytelling in return. Baker shares:

It just means like we can really explore and deepen the reporting in a way that...you know, when I'm on assignment normally I have two weeks maximum to report a story, so to have an entire year...it just changes everything. Baker shares: A one-year-long project would potentially bring people together and be emotionally involved, more than the usual kind of reporting and more than what professional standards would recommend. As a journalist you are supposed to keep professional distance, but you can't. It's one of those things that has been a struggle and in some way, in this case I don't need to keep that professional distance, in my writing I do, but in the engagement and the care, and the love that I have for these babies and for these families...that's quite revelatory.

However, this is a 'risk' that some don't consider as negative (Allan, 2011; Ottosen, 2007; Richards, 2012; Wahl-Jargensen, 2020) because it is what builds a more compelling way of representing distant suffering, one that encompasses the emotional aspect of powerful stories shared through an image-based platform.

8. FINAL REMARKS

The kind of representations created and published by Finding Home have a mediation process (Silverstone, 1999) and it starts with the purpose and on the intention of its producers. As described, they began the process being empathic with the women and asking themselves what they do in certain moments as refugees, which then members of the audience can translate into their own experiences driving into compassion and the possibility to take action. In other words, to find the human commonality among the geographic and cultural difference, a concept called proximity (Silverstone, 2007).

Another decision made by the team was to explore Instagram as a suitable platform, as social media pledges a special engagement within audiences (Butsch, 2014; Madianou, 2013), which to a certain extent, it was accomplished according to the findings.

In conclusion, from all the variety of responses on the sample, it was possible to appreciate cosmopolitan statements, as well as other more oriented to the self rather than to the represented characters, as “the technological potential for global communications does not ensure that people from different cultural backgrounds will also be more understanding of each other” (Paparachissi, 2009, p.234). However, the capacity of the media to educate moral dispositions for distant others is evident, it helps “to habituate us into ways of feeling and acting towards them” (Chouliaraki, 2013, p.111). After all, this potential is appreciated in the study. The journalists’ goal to humanize the so-called crisis of migrants and refugees is exemplified in several posts and responses, so it is successfully achieved looking at the textual analysis and the reporting team interview.

The inquiry of this piece holds a deep concern on the representation of Syrian migrants and refugees as this carries crucial consequences on how the world acknowledges distant others and the possibility of aiding their suffering. The text, the audience and the production, all of them play a relevant role in the mediation of such representations, as this research has demonstrated.

Two general conclusions were found analyzing Finding Home Instagram account. First, to tell long-term stories about refugee individuals rather than large groups of displaced people, and reporting with an empathetic and comprehensive approach, does achieve an equally empathetic and compassionate response to the audience. This way, the three sites of mediation locate these individuals as proximate relatable human beings who are capable of agency and who deserve attention.

Secondly, all kinds of moral dispositions may be indeed cultivated through distant suffering representations and specifically Instagram can serve as a media platform to foster engagement, acknowledging that these dispositions are contingent to different factors other than the quality of the representation solely, and that not all of them are the same. Both cosmopolitan and self-oriented responses were found among the variety of

comments, although the reach of this study can't confirm if some have actually led into specific ways of solidarity action.

This paper investigates an emerging way of doing journalism, of telling individual stories to humanize a global phenomenon usually represented in negative terms. The triangulation method allowed this case to be holistically explored, from the representation (post: photograph and caption multimodal semiotic analysis), the production (journalists' interview) and the audience sites (comments and likes, and overall conversation). The author acknowledges the limitations of the study, specifically considering potential biases with the sampling selection method and the time frame of data recollection.

Overall, new ways of producing and consuming news, like Finding Home, are emerging specially from social media platforms. Even new platforms are arriving each year challenging the journalistic practice into developing innovative styles of storytelling, not only to get media users' attention, but to be able to truly connect with them. This calls for more research into the topic in general, and about mediated distant suffering in particular. Future lines of research are to discover and address these innovative formats, platforms, ways of media production and news consumption, to illuminate the practice and the understanding of media users.

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