

MPC Major Research Paper

Re-Orienting Refugee Representation?
A Multimodal Analysis of Syrian Refugee Representation
on the social media platform *Humans of New York*

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Abstract

This major research paper (MRP) examines a selection of photo-narratives presented by the social media account *Humans of New York*, focusing on a series that documented Syrian refugees in the fall of 2015. It seeks to answer the following questions: *How does the HONY platform frame the Syrian Refugee crisis? Which visual, textual, and multimodal elements are most prevalent in the sample? How does HONY's representations of Syrian refugees contribute to or challenge the discourse of Orientalism and Othering? Does the HONY coverage provide the opportunity for a more humanizing, compassionate perspective?* To answer these questions, I coded the twenty most “liked” posts from the series for various visual, narrative, and multimodal elements. A codebook was developed from the literature review on Orientalism, neo-Orientalism, media representations of Islam, and media representations of refugees, as well as from theories of visual social semiotics, narrative analysis, and multimodal communication. The findings of this MRP question how alternative media platforms may challenge or reinforce traditional tropes utilized by mainstream media to represent a marginalized group such as Syrian refugees. The results suggest that while alternative platforms may challenge aspects of the Orientalist discourse and highlight a shared sense of humanity, the continuity of this discourse is seen to adapt through more subtle manifestations. The *HONY* audience is more likely to affirm representations that fit within the neo-liberal notion of who is an acceptable and “worthy” refugee. Based on the findings, this study is relevant to how professional communicators and audiences engage with media representations of marginalized groups, particularly in the current sociopolitical environment that is witnessing the unprecedented mass movement of displaced peoples.

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“In newsreels or news-photos, the Arab is always shown in large numbers. No individuality, no personal characteristics or experiences. Most of the pictures represent mass rage and misery... Lurking behind all of these images is the menace of jihad. Consequence: a fear that the Muslims (or Arabs) will take over the world.”

- Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 1978, p. 287

Introduction

In this major research paper (MRP), I explore how the Syrian refugee crisis is represented through the social media account *Humans of New York*. Dogra (2013) stated, “we come to know the world through its representations. Representations do not simply re-present facts, but also constitute them” (p. 1). As my literature review will elucidate, I consider how deep-rooted stereotypes have pervaded portrayals and understandings of Middle Eastern people, Muslims, and refugees, and how these traditional depictions create a milieu of fear and anxiety around those deemed “Other.” Several overlapping discourses are implicated in shaping perceptions of Syrian refugees: Said’s (1978) framework of “Orientalism,” the continuation of these tropes post-9/11 referred to as “neo-Orientalism,” and enduring patterns of refugee “Othering” examined by many scholars. While these representational conventions have traditionally manifested in mainstream media outlets, I analyze how an alternative social media platform represents these refugees.

Brandon Stanton is a web photojournalist and creator of the *Humans of New York* (*HONY*) social media account. *HONY* began as a New York City-based photography project cataloguing the diversity of New Yorkers, and later expanded to include profiles of individuals in other countries. In the fall of 2015, Stanton collaborated with the United Nations Refugee Agency to document the migration of Syrian refugees as they fled conflict in their country and sought safety in Europe and elsewhere. Although Stanton’s posts have an audience of over twenty three million people, *HONY* is not bound by a traditional media structure or by any pretense to objectivity or obligation to operate as an unbiased news source. Alternative media can be understood as media that differ from dominant types of (mass) media in regards to their production, distribution and content (Atton, 2001). Although *HONY* has a sizeable audience, I

will consider it an “alternative” media source. My study will engage with a selection of *HONY* posts from the Syrian refugee series to consider the significance of each image and narrative. Each has been analyzed in relation to the tropes identified by other scholars in mainstream media, which rely on the discursive traditions of Orientalism, neo-Orientalism and refugee Othering.

These representational tendencies are highly relevant as thousands of displaced Syrians, many of whom are Muslim, continue to require aid and seek asylum in Western countries. The United Nations reported that the number of refugees was at its highest level ever in 2015, with an estimated 65.3 million people displaced by conflict, making it the largest period of forced migration since World War Two. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has also expressed concern over a “climate of xenophobia” developing in Europe where governments are attempting to cope with the large influx of migrants. He stated that leaders should do more to dispel negative stereotypes of refugees; so far they have failed to address them—or worse, have perpetuated them—which provides a negative example for other countries. The BBC reports that the current state of refugees is leading to increased support for far-right groups and “controversial anti-immigration policies” (June 20, 2016). Representation plays a crucial role in the public perception of refugees and influences sentiment that can contribute to such climates of xenophobia, which is why I have chosen to explore this subject matter for this MRP.

Research Questions

Utilizing the theoretical frameworks mentioned above as well as visual social semiotics, narrative analysis, and multimodality, I aim to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How does the *HONY* platform frame the Syrian Refugee crisis? Which visual, textual, and multimodal elements are most prevalent in the sample?

I will determine which semiotic characteristics are most common and if there are any evident patterns and/or trends in the representation of Syrian Refugee subjects. I will consider

both the visual and textual components of the posts, as well as their mutual (multimodal) relationship, and the overall sentiment the message communicates about Syrian refugees: positive, negative or neutral.

RQ2: How does *HONY*'s representations of Syrian refugees contribute to or challenge the discourse of Orientalism and Othering? Does the *HONY* coverage provide the opportunity for a more humanizing, compassionate perspective?

HONY has been lauded for humanizing the plight of Syrian Refugees. The New York Daily News reported that Stanton has “a remarkable gift of making global politics personal” (Cutler, 2015) while others stated that “*HONY* is helping to dispel the misconceptions surrounding refugees by revealing their humanity” (Haltiwanger, 2015) and allowing readers to “to dig beneath the numbers and reveal the human stories that might make audiences empathise with the suffering of distant others” (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2015). I will evaluate whether the platform presents a channel for perpetuating Orientalist and neo-Orientalist tropes of Othering, or whether it disrupts stereotypes and patterns of stigma and provides an opportunity for the subjects to assert agency and express themselves autonomously. I will also consider how Orientalism can be conceptualized as a discourse and applied to these representations. According to Foucault's (1972) discourse theory, a discourse is a flexible and dynamic system that adapts to changing contexts rather circulating as a fixed set of beliefs. Therefore, it is necessary to consider how the manifestation of the Orientalist discourse might evolve and take on new guises in representations. If traditional tropes such as the depictions of large, distant, expressionless and “Othered” groups are less prevalent, are new patterns of negative representation, stigmatization and stereotyping surfacing?

Literature Review

Orientalism

Edward Said's seminal publication *Orientalism* (1978) is a critique of the overarching discourse comprised of misrepresentations, generalizations, and stereotypes conferred upon the non-Western world, referred to as "the East" or "the Orient." Said posited that Orientalism denotes three interdependent designations. The first designation is the academic study of Oriental peoples and cultures. The second contends that Orientalism is predicated on the creation of a conceptual binary that juxtaposes the progressive, civilized, and superior West, against the backward, uncivilized, inferior East. The third designation states that Orientalism functions as a Foucauldian discourse supported by institutions such as academe, government, and military, and by a vocabulary and media infrastructure (Said, 1978). The origins of academic Orientalism are commonly drawn from the Enlightenment period of the eighteenth century, during which Orientalist studies became widespread and legitimated within the paradigmatic pursuit of classification, modernization, and the "civilizing" mission of the West (Hiddleston, 2009, p. 87-88). Orientalist ideology grew further during European colonization with the study of "primitive" peoples encountered in colonized regions (Said, 1978). Childs and Williams (1997) stated that despite pretensions to objectivity, knowledge produced about the Orient during this era was consistently negative, relying on centuries-old stereotypes and rarely on discernible facts (p. 100). According to the authors, the foundations of Orientalist knowledge were largely based on notions of violence, cruelty, decadence, laziness, irrationality, and disorder (Childs & Williams, 1997, p. 100). Dogra noted that "in Orientalism, clothes, or their absence, were frequently used to project 'difference' and 'distance'" (p. 43). Said (1978) asserted that the Orient is portrayed as being incapable of development and innovation, and in need of "Western methods to improve

itself” (p. 296-298). Furthermore, Samei (2015) noted that in the field of academic Orientalism, each individual study of one part of the Orient would arbitrarily confirm the situation of the rest, mutually affirming stereotypes and misrepresentations (p. 1147).

Another aspect of the Orientalist framework is the binary distinguishing between Oriental inferiority and Western superiority (Said, 1978, p. 42). Drawing largely from Said, Hall (1992) echoed these concerns and argued that a dichotomy of “the West and the Rest” was central to the discourse. Hall (1992) noted that “our ideas of ‘East’ and ‘West’ have never been free of myth and fantasy” and that place and geography are minor components of these perceptions (p. 185). Both Said and Hall argued that these misconceptions became embedded in Western understandings of the East to the extent that they became perceived as universal truths. Said (1978) also stated that it is essential to consider Orientalism as an entire discourse in Foucault’s sense of an “enormously systematic” discipline of managing and producing ideas of the Orient (p. 3). According to Foucault (1981), “in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by a certain number of procedures,” inextricably tied and implicated by various institutions and norms (p. 52). Orientalism operates as a discourse through a “widespread network of institutions and disciplines including anthropology, linguistics, history and physical sciences” (Dogra, 2013, p. 15). Hiddleston (2009) asserted that the discourse of Orientalism operates across networks to define and oppress the Eastern Other (p. 85). Furthermore, Said (1978) asserted that through this discursive tradition, the West is able to both “manage” and “produce” the Orient; speaking and acting on its behalf rather than allowing for self-representation and autonomy (p. 3). To elucidate the patriarchal tendency of Orientalism, Said quoted Karl Marx’s statement: “They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented” (as cited in Said, 1978, xxv).

Understanding the origins and proliferation of Orientalism has been critical for engaging with my research topic, as I have sought to determine whether or not traces of Orientalist ideology can be identified in present-day representations of Syrian refugees on *HONY*. Examples of this discourse include emphasis on difference, backwardness, violence and disorder, and the inclination for Western “authority” to speak on behalf of those deemed incapable and Other. It is also imperative to consider that Orientalism depends on a “flexible positional superiority” which maintains the power balance of the Westerner over the Orient in various relationships and circumstances (Said, 1978, p. 7). Therefore, in addition to the traditional tropes mentioned, I aim to identify potential new presentations of Orientalism in the sample.

Neo-Orientalism

Said’s *Covering Islam* (1982), a follow-up publication to *Orientalism*, explained how the media and experts influence Western perceptions the rest of the world. Said (1982) argued that through media representations, Islam has been consistently understood as a monolithic entity synonymous with terrorism and religious hysteria, which has in turn encouraged hostility towards and fear of Muslims. He noted that Muslims are frequently caricatured as bloodthirsty mobs and terrorists in various media and that these portrayals can be traced back to outdated academic descriptions of Islamic societies (Said, 1982, p. 4-6). While Said’s works highlight the legacy of Orientalism in twentieth century media, several scholars have noted a specific revitalization of this discourse following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, leading to the phenomenon of “neo-Orientalism.” According to Altwaiji (2014), 9/11 was a pivotal moment in Arab-American relations, potently reviving discourses of Otherness and redeploying classical stereotypes of Arab Muslims as being fanatical, violent and intolerant (p. 313). Behdad and Williams (2010) stated that while using some new tropes of Othering, neo-Orientalism is indebted to classical Orientalism, providing a supplement to enduring modes of Orientalist

representation (p. 1). The authors noted, for example, that neo-Orientalism redeploys “the trope of veil as a signifier of oppression,” which in previous forms of Orientalism signified the harem and hyper-sexualization (Behdad & Williams, 2010, p. 3). Altwaiji (2014) also noted that while neo-Orientalism hones in on the Arab world to the exclusion of other regions on the Orientalist map, it continues to rely on a conceptual binary distinguishing inferior Arab and superior Western culture (p. 313). Furthermore, Tuastad (2003) emphasized that neo-Orientalist discourses function to represent conflict in the Middle East as “between civilization and barbarism” (p. 596). Behdad and Williams (2010) suggested that neo-Orientalism occasionally utilizes the voice of Middle Eastern “native informants” who lend their authority and perceived direct access to truth in order to criticize their cultures of origin (p. 3). As a result, these subjects are unintentionally implicated in the perpetuation of a discourse that degrades and positions them as Other.

According to Said, Orientalism has endured for centuries. Its “redoubtable durability” is the result of continuous investment in Orientalism as a system of knowledge by the enabling socio-economic and political institutions, which adapt to new contexts (Said, 1978, p. 7). While Orientalism was initially conceived primarily of India and the “Bible lands” dominated by France and Britain, the conceptual region expanded to the Middle East and “Far East,” primarily dominated by the United States from the postwar period onwards. Many scholars have noted that the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and subsequent wars in the Middle East initiated a heightened wave of prejudice in the form of neo-Orientalism. These events and cultural associations shape the way that Arab Muslims are viewed and understood. These perceptions produce unique consequences for Syrian refugees who seek asylum in some of the countries where they are feared and stigmatized most. In analyzing HONY’s coverage of Syrian refugees, I have

considered whether the representations contain evidence of neo-Orientalist patterns, such as the use of the “native informant” voice to validate stereotypes, emphasis on difference, and placing emphasis on terrorism and religious radicalism. However, in accordance with the flexibility of the Orientalist discourse, new strategies for extending domination may also arise.

Representations of Islam

The media plays a significant role in the dissemination of Orientalist and neo-Orientalist discourses. Rane (2010) noted that over three-quarters of study participants from Western countries rely on mainstream media outlets as their main source of information about Muslims and Islam. This reliance becomes problematic when media primarily employ negative representations. Rane, Ewart and Martinkus (2014) argued that Western media perpetuate Orientalist discourses by utilizing frames that portray Middle Eastern society and Islam as a religion that is “a different, strange, inferior and threatening ‘Other’” (p. 155). In addition, Karim (2006) argued that media coverage prioritizes sources that reinforce stereotypes of Islam rather than feature alternative perspectives that could challenge these understandings. Kamali (2001) also found that news reports aim to heighten public perception of difference by focusing on negative stories involving immigrants, such as honour killings and the legality of religious dress (p. 10-11). With the nearly instantaneous and global penetration of mass media, stereotypes are disseminated with unprecedented speed and reach (Childs & Williams, 1997, p. 101). In addition, Nakamura (2002) argued that the perception of the Internet breaking down cultural barriers generates anxiety for Western subjects, who consequently reassert stereotypes in order to address these fears. In the process of revealing how a post-Internet society will overcome difference, cultural divisions are instead highlighted repeatedly “in order to anchor the Western viewing subject’s sense of himself as a privileged and mobile viewer” of such difference (Nakamura, 2002, p.21). Therefore, advances in communication technology and more frequent exposure to

difference does not necessarily overcome stereotypes, but may reinforce them further. Most scholars consider Orientalism as the historical basis of Islamophobia and believe that mass media, and increasingly social media, play a considerable role in rousing and intensifying it (Rane et al., 2014, p. 38-39).

Behdad and Gartland (2013) argued that photography has a unique role in the perpetuation of Orientalism. According to the authors, photography was crucial to the creation and preservation of “Europe’s distinctively Orientalist vision of the Middle East,” and continuously re-inscribed the region and its inhabitants within colonialist narratives (Behdad & Bartland, 2013, p. 1-2). In addition, Behdad (2013) observed that Orientalist photographs are characterized by excessive textual anchorage through labeling and titles, reflecting a “profound desire to fix the meaning of the image, to deprive it of any symbolic message or alternative meaning” (p. 26). Titles and labels are utilized to control a viewer’s interpretation of the represented subject and to speak on their behalf. The use of titles and labels are intended to offset the “terror of uncertainty, the possibility of any intrusion by the Oriental Other into the life of the European viewer” (Behdad, 2013, p. 26). The propensity to label Eastern subjects effectively distances the viewer from those represented, silences their voices, and perpetuates the perception of “Otherness.”

In my analysis of *HONY* posts, I have considered whether or not the representations, both visual and textual, reinforce stereotypical representations of Islam by prioritizing narratives that construct difference in terms of Orientalist “otherness” through “exotic” clothing and other visual markers of difference as well as through labeling. As discussed in the next section, my analytic framework also draws from scholarly work on the persuasive strategies used by news outlets and NGOs to depict refugees.

Representation of Refugees

My research must also be sensitive to the stereotypes placed upon those with refugee status in addition to the stereotypes conferred upon Muslims. In their study of the way media outlets largely silence the voices of refugees, Philo, Briant and Donald (2013) found that between 2006 and 2011, merely 3% of news articles about refugees contained statements from the refugees themselves (p. 56, 94). In addition, the authors found that the language utilized in media stories was more likely to be negative toward, rather than supportive of, policies for taking in refugees (Philo et al., 2013, p. 56). Haynes, Deveraux and Breen (2014) identified several key negative frames in mainstream news media discourse of refugees: as economic threat, as social deviants, as illegal aliens, and as a threat to national integrity. These frames are utilized to present refugees as “other” and to portray the system of asylum as inherently lacking in legitimacy (Haynes, Deveraux & Breen, 2014). Behrman (2014) also noted that refugees are presented as “an undifferentiated mass, lacking the skills and the sophistication of the settled citizenry” (p. 249). Despite the fact that they are frequently fighting for their lives, refugees are often represented as lacking agency and as unreasonably demanding and undeserving of Western assistance (Behrman, 2014, p. 268). Elemental words such as “influx,” “wave,” and “flood” are frequently used to describe the movement of refugees, connoting fear of their impending “importation of otherness” (Breen, Devereaux & Haynes, 2006, p. 10).

Bleiker, Campbell, Hutchison and Nicholson (2013) also observed that media representations play a critical role in framing both public perception and political discussion of refugees (p. 402). The authors revealed that social-psychological studies show that close-up, portrait-style photos are most likely to evoke feelings of compassion in viewers, whereas group shots are more likely to create emotional distance (Bleiker et al., 2013, p. 399). In their studies of refugees, they found there was a tendency to show refugee subjects in large groups and lacking

recognizable facial features, leading to “visual dehumanization” (Bleiker et al., 2013, p. 406). Furthermore, Slovic (2007) suggested that putting a human face to suffering is significant in generating emotional responses as well as a willingness to take action (p. 83). According to Batziou (2011), emotional expression can function as a “bridge” between the subject and viewer, “as a symbolic language with common and recognizable codes,” allowing the viewer to identify with them emotionally and spiritually (p. 45-48). Batziou (2011) noted that press photographs use particular techniques to frame immigrants as Others, including the use of spatial distance and the depiction of expressionless faces (p. 41). The majority of the press photographs analyzed by Batziou (2011) were taken from a “safe” social distance and lacked such emotional expressiveness, in effect dehumanizing, distancing and “Othering” the immigrant subjects (p. 48, 56).

Similarly, scholars Jenni and Lowenstein (1997) presented the “identifiable victim effect,” which suggests that subjects who can be clearly identified as victims “produce a greater empathetic response, accompanied by greater willingness to make personal sacrifices to provide aid” (p. 236). The authors suggested that vividness is a possible factor for the effect, occurring when the victim’s story is highly emotional and unfolding in real time, and positions them as particularly sympathetic, helpless or blameless (Jenni & Lowenstein, 1997, p. 237). In addition, Small and Verrochi’s (2009) study of print advertisements of charitable organizations found that people experience more sadness when they view a sad-faced image, and that this shared experience of sadness can allow viewers to express empathy with the subject’s suffering. Furthermore, their study found that providing a description of a victim’s plight further raised levels of sympathy (Small & Verrochi, 2009, p. 786). On the contrary, literature on NGO

representation has been critical of portraying passive, sad-faced “victims” in their campaigns, which may disempower the subject and highlight their lack of agency (Dogra, 2013).

In addition to the representational tropes associated with being a largely Muslim group, Syrian refugees are also vulnerable to mass media’s tendency to frame refugees in a negative, dehumanizing, and distancing manner. In my analysis, I have considered whether the representations of Syrian refugees utilize tropes such as narratives of refugees as “others” and as “threats,” and visual representations of refugees at a distance, in large groups and with unrecognizable facial expressions. I have also considered the extent to which the *HONY* posts construct a more humanizing perspective by representing the refugees in portrait-style and expressive individual images that allow the viewer to connect and empathize with the subjects depicted.

Visual Social Semiotics

The term “semiotics” denotes the study of signs, which is largely based on the work of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes. Harrison (2003) stated that the process of semiosis occurs when some content or meaning (the signified) is manifested in a representation or expression (the sign) (p. 47). The author noted that the field of semiotics serves as a framework for a wide array of “signifying practices,” such as posture, gesture, writing, speech, and photography (Harrison, 2003, p. 47). While inclusive of formal semiotics, Lemke (1990) described social semiotics as the study of how signs are utilized to construct and understand social and communal life (p. 183). Social semiotics thus acknowledges cultural specificity in the production and use of such signs and signifiers. Jewitt and Oyama (2001) defined visual social semiotics as “what can be said and done with images and how the things people say and do with images can be interpreted” (p. 136). Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) developed an inventory of the main compositional structures that have been established in the tradition of visual social

semiotics and analyzed how these structures shape the production of meaning (p. 1). The authors stated that an image performs several different functions simultaneously in order to create visual meaning. The *ideational* metafunction refers to how a photo may represent certain ideas about the world, while the *interpersonal* metafunction considers how the photo engages the viewer (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 42). Finally, the *textual* metafunction evaluates how the various semiotic components work together to create meaning in the text.

The interpersonal metafunction suggests that distinct semiotic features shape the relationship between the producer and receiver of a sign (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p.42). In this metafunction, features such as image act and gaze, social distance and intimacy, and the use of perspective (frontal and oblique angles) are analyzed to determine the quality of viewer engagement (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 43). The “demand” gaze has the feature process that allows the viewer to experience a sense of engagement with the represented participant, and the frontal angle perspective creates strong viewer participation, implying that the subject is “one of us” (Harrison, 2003, p.53). Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) also asserted that the distance of the represented participants from the camera determines the level of intimacy the viewer associates with them (p. 124). Intimate distance (head and face only) and close personal distance (head and shoulders) connote a stronger sense of intimacy than images with a far social distance (containing the whole figure with space around it) and public distance (torsos of many people). The interpersonal metafunction is therefore highly relevant to my area of research and more specifically to the analysis of the identifiable victim effect. The interpersonal metafunction and associated concepts suggest that intimate distance photos of individual victims are more likely to generate sympathy from viewers and that photographic distance can reinforce social difference and Otherness and dehumanize refugees.

Components of the interpersonal metafunction are helpful for determining how various frames and visual styles are utilized in the images posted on the *HONY* Instagram account. My research has reflected on how these visual representations relate to the literature on patterns of Othering and dehumanization inherent in traditional Orientalist and refugee representation.

Narrative Captions & Agency

Traditional mass media coverage tends to perpetuate Orientalist discourse and tropes (Childs & Williams, 1997; Behdad & Gartland, 2013; Rane et al., 2014). Contrasted with traditional editorial reporting style wherein statements from refugees constitute a small fraction of the content in a given news story, alternative/social media platforms such as *HONY* provide the opportunity for a variety of sources and voices to be expressed. On *Humans of New York*, each photo is accompanied by an excerpt of first-person narrative provided by the subject. As such, the *HONY* refugee series permits refugee subjects to provide their own testimony as the caption, allowing subjects to assert their own voice and enact agency in a process of representation that traditionally silences them. Green and Brock (2000) noted the significant power of narrative and presented the transportation model, which suggests that a narrative has the ability to transport and immerse the reader in a story. They found that narratives may inspire strong emotions and motivations in the reader and that individual attitudes and beliefs can be changed by the narrative experience (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 702). Aguirre (2005) also noted that personal narratives are powerful rhetorical tools, with the ability to “challenge a master narrative that seeks to portray the weak or powerless... in negative images or social contexts” (p. 147).

The process of allowing subjects to relay their stories themselves also disrupts the conventional practice whereby a journalist or editor provides a title, effectively speaking on behalf of the subject. As mentioned previously, Behdad (2013) noted that titling and labeling

encourage Orientalist discourse by controlling the viewer's interpretation of a subject. Genette (1980) identified two different types of narrators: a *homodiegetic* narrator, who provides a first-person perspective, and a *heterodiegetic* narrator, who provides a third-person perspective. The subjects featured in *HONY* are categorized as homodiegetic narrators, as their narratives are their own lived experiences. Alesch (2007) noted that homodiegetic narrators wield significant power as “the very elements that make a narrative told by a homodiegetic narrator compelling—its supposed truth value, coupled with the insistence that it be accepted on its own terms—can make it disconcerting” (p. 94). Chouliarki (2013) noted that the substitution of the journalist for a citizen or ordinary person on newer media platforms invokes greater authenticity in the act of witnessing. Rather than prioritizing the “intrinsic value of facts,” the citizen witness utilizes testimony and personal opinion, which makes them “the most appropriate voice to tell the story of suffering” (Chouliarki, 2013, p.147). Clark, Couldry, MacDonald, and Stephansen (2015) also found that narrative storytelling on digital platforms provide the opportunity for individuals to exercise agency (p. 935).

While much scholarship focuses on the agentic potential of personal narrative, there are other important implications of personal narrative to consider. Chouliarki (2013) warns that this reconfiguration of news production-consumption relationships may not necessarily overcome present hierarchies, “but may actually reproduce these hierarchies in the course of addressing them” (p. 170). Furthermore, neo-Orientalist discourse may also manifest through the testimony of the “native informant” who utilizes their authority to further perpetuate stereotypes conferred upon the non-Western world (Williams & Behdad, 2010). As members of the stereotyped group, the “native informant” lends legitimacy to stereotyped ideas. In analyzing the *HONY* posts, I have considered whether the first-person narrative caption provides a platform for Syrian

refugees to exercise agency and offer a compelling, transformative narrative, or whether the perspectives shared serve to perpetuate Orientalist stereotypes.

Multimodality: the Visual-Textual Relationship

Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) highlighted the importance of reading a text through each of its semiotic modes, referred to as “multimodality.” The authors emphasized that rather than interpreting each of these semiotic modes separately, they should be decoded in conjunction as an “integrated text” (p. 177). Belle, Gillaerts, van Gorp and van de Mierop (2013) noted that the contemporary digital context is particularly conducive for the merging of several modes in hybrid texts and narrations (p. 24). Birdsfell and Groarke (1996) contented that images and text function together in the construction of both meaning and argument. The authors added that verbal context accompanied by an image provides a degree of nuance and achieves a different meaning than if the text were to occur alone (Birdsfell & Groarke, 1996, p. 6). Bergstrom (2008) noted that while our vision is instantaneous and linked with emotion, text embodies common sense and critical reflection, as it must be decoded and processed (p. 222). He stated that the combination of the two, referred to as *interplay*, reinforces the message as a whole “as the intellectual, verbal element is united with the emotional, visual one” (p. 223). Goin (1997) argued that in the field of ethnography, a photograph that accompanies text acts as reinforcing evidence to visually validate the ‘reality’ of the setting and the author’s description (p. 67). Powell, Boogaarden, De Swert and de Vreese (2015) considered the combination of visuals and text in the framing of news stories and found that visuals evoke a heightened emotional experience compared to text alone. Their studies determined that the addition of an image made the accompanying text more salient, “whose structure in turn guided participants’ interpretation and support for intervention” (p. 1011).

Barthes's concepts of *anchorage* and *relay* are also useful in the analysis of the text-image relationship. The notion of anchorage asserts that the caption's function is to elucidate the image, directing the viewer through its intended meaning (Barthes, 1997, p. 40). Relay, alternatively, occurs when text and image exist in a complementary relationship, saying different things, but expanding the meaning of the message (p. 157). Stathakopoulos, Theodorakis and Mastoridou (2008) analyzed the interactive relationship between the visual and verbal in advertisements, referred to as "resonance" (p. 629). The authors found that advertisements were more affective and enjoyed by viewers when there was reinforced resonance between the visual and verbal components of each text, which is the function of anchorage (p. 643).

The combination of image and text can produce a highly salient communicative message. I have evaluated the visual and textual components of each post, and determined how these components function together: whether they create a resonant, repetitious message ("anchorage") or on the contrary, a complimentary message ("relay"). Reflecting on the literature on representations of Orientalism, Islam and Refugees broadly, I have also considered the overall impact of the visual-textual communication, and coded whether the multimodal message contains a negative or positive sentiment.

Methodology

Data Collection Method

Humans of New York began as the photography project of Brandon Stanton in 2010. The initial goal was to photograph 10,000 people on the streets of New York City, and post the photos to a blog. Eventually, Stanton also began interviewing his subjects and including a short excerpt of the conversation alongside their photos. *HONY* later expanded to platforms beyond the blog and now also exists as a Facebook page, Instagram account and Twitter account. Stanton now publishes each post on his blog, Facebook, and Instagram accounts, and occasionally also on the Twitter account. He has 17.6 million followers on Facebook, 5.3 million followers on Instagram, and 425,000 followers on Twitter, for a total of over 23 million followers on social media. While the audience of *HONY* initially consisted mostly of young people in their twenties, it has greatly expanded over the years (Bosman, 2013). In particular, Stanton credits the social media platforms for allowing him to find his audience and facilitating the expansion of *HONY* (Mann, 2016). The photoblog has also been recognized by a variety of news outlets including *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *The Huffington Post*, CNN and Associated Press, which have provided significant exposure for Stanton's efforts. As the *HONY* audience continues to grow at a rapid pace, Stanton has noted that it is difficult for the audience to maintain a consistent culture. However, the ongoing ability for the platform to raise significant awareness and funds for charitable causes provides insight "into the nature of these people and the nature of the community being a positive place" (Mufson, 2013). Although Stanton generally claims to be apolitical, his project choices tend to reflect an inclusive and progressive perspective. However, his audience may not necessarily hold the same viewpoints.

To engage in my content analysis, I have captured twenty samples of *HONY* posts, including both the image and text caption. There were two periods of time in which Stanton chronicled the experiences of Syrian refugees. The first series was from September 26 to October 6, 2015 where Stanton travelled to Greece, Hungary, Austria and Croatia. The second series was from December 2 to December 17 2015, when he travelled to Turkey and Jordan. I captured 10 samples from each series manually from his Instagram page: www.instagram.com/humansofny/. From each series, I have selected the top ten posts with the highest number of “likes” each one has received on Instagram. This sample will therefore reflect the most resonant posts from each series on the Syrian refugees. Selection of the most “liked” posts was made on the same day (May 20, 2016) and reflects the amount of engagement each post had up until that day.

Limitations

The data and methodology do have limitations. I have selected my sample based on the posts with the most “likes” under the assumption that these are the most popular or resonant posts. However, a post may have been highly impactful to the viewer without receiving a “like” due to the content invoking sadness, which seems contrary to the specific function of “liking” it. Furthermore, there is currently no method of collecting data on user demographics for social media accounts that are not controlled personally. A 2015 PEW study found that the demographic of Instagram users tends to be young adults between the ages of 18 and 29 years of age. While the dominant Instagram demographic is evidently implicated in how many “likes” each post receives on Instagram, *Humans of New York* is also accessible on Facebook and as a website/blog, platforms more familiar to older demographics. Although comments are publically accessible, measuring sentiment from the comments section was beyond the scope of this project. This MRP analyzes the manner in which Syrian refugees are represented in popular postings on

the *HONY* account, rather than measuring viewer sentiment in response to these representations. It is important to highlight that this sample is not necessarily reflective of the representations in *HONY*'s entire Syrian refugee series, but of the posts that were most resonant with the audience. Therefore, the findings and analysis that accompany this MRP may provide commentary that is more indicative of the perceptions of the audience and their preferences in the images and narratives they like to consume, and less so of Stanton's individual artistic/political manner of representation. A random and/or more exhaustive catalogue of *HONY* posts would provide a better understanding of the average manner of representation offered through this platform.

Method of Analysis

To accommodate the multimodal nature of my data samples, I analyzed twenty *HONY* photo-narratives using a mixed-method or multi-modal content analysis that combines visual social semiotic analysis and narrative analysis. This analysis involved a three-step process: (1) analysis of the visual aspects of each image; (2) analysis of the textual elements of the caption, and; (3) analysis of the modes together to determine if they produce a salient rhetorical strategy. The codes used for my analysis were developed from several scholars referenced in my literature review, in addition to some emergent codes from the data sample. All findings have been coded in a codebook.

For the first step of my content analysis, I coded the visual elements of each *HONY* photo. Reflecting the body of literature that identified the tendency for refugees to be depicted in large groups with non-expressive facial expressions (Batziou, 2011; Bleiker, 2013), I coded the number of represented participants (RP's) as well as their emotion/expression. Visual social semiotic analysis was employed to code several visual elements present in each image. Several of my coding categories are drawn from Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) interpersonal

metafunction performed by images (the relationship between the represented participant and the viewer) including gaze, distance, and angle. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) asserted that when participants look directly at the camera (“demand”), a connection is formed between the viewer and the subject (p. 117). Conversely, when the subject is looking away from the camera (“offer”), they become the “object of the viewer’s dispassionate scrutiny” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 119). Furthermore, according to the identifiable victim effect, an image with “offer” gaze encourages the viewer to remain detached from the represented participant, while “demand” can increase levels of viewer empathy (Jennie & Loewenstein, 1997). I also analyzed and coded photographic shot distance, which relates to the perceived sense of intimacy or distance between the viewer and subject. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) outlined six distances that are associated with descending levels of intimacy: intimate distance, close personal distance, far personal distance, close social distance, far social distance, and public distance. This semiotic function of photographic distance is also supported by Batziou’s (2011) theory of the visual dehumanization of refugees.

Kress and van Leeuwen’s representational metafunction also considers the meaning translated through the angle of the shot. The frontal angle suggests viewer involvement with the subject and “an even playing field,” while a more oblique angle creates a sense of detachment or notion that “it is ‘their’ world, something we are not involved with” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 136). The use of an oblique angle could therefore suggest notions of Otherness and difference. In addition to these categories drawn from visual social semiotics, I have also coded the gender of the subjects and visual markers of difference/exoticism that may reflect the Orientalist use of clothing to represent “difference” and “distance” (Dogra, 2013).

Category	Codes	Description
Number of Represented Participants (RP's)	1	One represented participant (RP)
	2-3	A small group of represented participants
	4-9	A medium sized group of represented participants
	10+	A large group of represented participants
Gender	Male	The represented subject(s) are male
	Female	The represented subject(s) are female
	Mix	There are both male and female RP's
Gaze	Offer	The RP is looking outside the picture or at someone or something within the image. In this case, the RP becomes an object of contemplation for the viewer, creating less engagement than that of the demand
	Demand	The RP is looking directly at the viewer. A demand generally encourages the viewer to feel stronger engagement with the RP as a human subject
Distance	Intimate	Head and face only
	Close personal	Head and shoulders
	Far personal	From the waist up
	Close social	The whole figure
	Far social	The whole figure with space around it
	Public	Torsos of several people
Horizontal Angle	Frontal	The RP is presented frontally to the viewer. This angle creates stronger involvement on the part of the viewer as it implies that the RP is "one of us"
	Oblique	The RP is presented obliquely to the viewer. This angle creates greater detachment since it implies that the RP is "one of them"
Emotion/ expression	Happy/positive	The expression of the RP(s) is happy; smiling, laughing
	Sad/negative	The expression of the RP(s) is sad; crying, frowning, or otherwise appearing upset. This code will also include emotions such as anger, fear and grief
	Neutral/no emotion	The expression of the (RP)s is neither positive or negative
	Cannot see facial expression	The RP's face cannot be seen. Therefore the viewer cannot determine their facial expression
Visual marker of difference/exoticism	Yes	Visual marker of difference such as "exotic" or religious clothing (such as a head covering) or action such as sitting on prayer mats on the floor
	No	No apparent visual marker of difference

For the second step of my content analysis, I coded the textual modality of each *HONY* caption. Feldman, Sköldberg, Brown and Horner (2004) noted that the information a storyteller chooses to divulge in a narrative is valuable as it reflects what is significant to them and provides their interpretation or “evaluative commentary” (p. 148). De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2015) noted that social media present a novel context for storytelling and can incorporate multimodal methods (p. 329). Drawing from the work of these scholars, I explore the manner in which personal narratives in *HONY* provide audiences with insight into the experiences of Syrian refugees. Although Stanton chooses the portion of his conversation to highlight in the caption, the narrative is provided through the testimony of the subjects themselves. I analyzed each narrative caption of text and coded for several themes developed from the literature review.

My study gives particular attention to the relationship between narrative and agency. More specifically, the analysis is designed to determine whether the narrative highlights the capacity of refugees to control their present and future situation or whether the narratives convey a lack of agency through a plea for help or expression of dependence. These codes were informed by literature that stated Orientalist discourses stereotype non-Western “Others” as helpless and dependent on Western aid. I also coded the narratives for content that emphasized the refugee experience, or “refugeeness,” which may have the effect of reducing the subject’s identity to his or her refugee identity and experience and in this way constructs him or her as an “Other.” Contrary to the emphasis on difference and distance, I also coded for narratives that emphasize a sense of commonality and shared experience of the human condition between refugees and viewers through the use of “an ideology of universal humanism” (Dogra, 2013, p. 95). Said (2003) wrote: “My idea in *Orientalism* was to use humanistic critique to open up the fields of struggle, to introduce a longer sequence of thought and analysis” (foreword, p. xvii).

For Said (2003), humanism's strength is the emphasis it places on reflection, debate, rational argument and moral principle rather than arbitrarily yielding to the "abstract ideas that celebrate American or Western exceptionalism, denigrate the relevance of context, and regard other cultures with derisive contempt" (p. xx). While the term "humanism" has been criticised by some postmodern scholars for glossing over geopolitics and historical events, it can effectively invoke a moral logic wherein all human beings have the right to basic needs and to be free from persecution. I coded for humanism in the narratives as an emphasis on mutual humanity or shared common experience that readers could identify with, and content that provides insight into the RP's life and identity outside their refugee status.

I have also coded for narratives that discuss terrorism, ISIS, or any type of religious radicalism, reflecting the literature of Orientalism and neo-Orientalism that indicates that media representations frequently conflate Middle Eastern "Others" with terrorism and radical Islam (Said, 1982; Altwaiji, 2014). Finally, I have coded whether the narratives provided by the Syrian refugees in the *HONY* posts reflect the function of the "native informant" on Islam and Middle Eastern culture, reflecting Behdad and Williams' (2010) theory that first-hand authority is frequently utilized to perpetuate negative stereotypes.

Category	Description	Example
Asserting agency	Capacity, condition and state of exerting power; control of situation and ability to determine future.	"I practiced German for 17 hours a day... I tried to meet as many Austrians as possible. After seven months, it was time to meet with a judge to determine my status. I could speak so well at this point, that I asked the judge if we could conduct the interview in German. He couldn't believe it. He was so impressed that I'd already learned German, that he interviewed me for only ten minutes." (Sample 3)

		“I just want to get back to work. I want to be a person again. I don’t want the world to think I’m over. I’m still here.” (Sample 17)
Lacking agency	Plea for help, asking for aid, expressing a need for the West to intervene	“The smuggler put 152 of us on a boat. Once we saw the boat, many of us wanted to go back, but he told us that anyone who turned back would not get a refund. <i>We had no choice.</i> ” (emphasis added) (Sample 4)
“Refugeeness”	The content of the narrative is about the RP’s experience as a refugee, emphasizing their identity as such	“George is my refugee dog. We’ve been through many horrible things together.” (Sample 20)
Humanism	The content of the narrative emphasizes a sense of mutual humanity, or shared common experience that readers can identify with.	<p>“He told me: ‘Do not be ashamed. I have also lived through a war. You are now my family and this is your house too.’” (Sample 2)</p> <p>“So he gave me clothes, food, everything. He became like a father to me. He took me to the Rotary Club and introduced me to the entire group. He told them my story and asked: ‘How can we help him?’” (Sample 3)</p>
Terrorism/radicalism	The narrative contains a mention or discussion of terrorism, ISIS, or religious radicalism	n/a
“Native informant” view of Islam/ Middle East	The RP expresses a negative position towards the Middle East and Islam, which may perpetuate understandings of difference and violence as inherent to the region and culture.	“I’m done with religion and politics forever.” (Sample 13)

The final step of my content analysis was to code whether the two modalities of image and text function together to produce an impactful semiotic message, considering the rhetorical strategies of anchorage and relay (Barthes, 1997). I have also coded the overall semiotic tone of

the multimodal communication as having a positive, negative or “mixed” sentiment. Dogra (2013) noted that representations of the developing or majority world produced by non-governmental organizations typically fall under the scope of a negative/positive divide. As discussed in my literature review, many scholars have pointed out the tendency for media to perpetuate (neo-) Orientalism and negatively represent Muslims and refugees (Said, 1978; Childs & Williams, 1997; Kamali, 2001; Philo et al., 2013). Thus, the final step in my content analysis was to evaluate the overall sentiment produced by the textual and visual components of the *HONY* post to determine whether participants were negatively or positively portrayed. Negative sentiment was coded when the dominant effect of the *HONY* post reinforced colonial discourses, supported the binary of “West” vs. “the Rest”/the Orient, emphasized notions of Otherness and threat, and/or utilized any classical tropes of (neo-)Orientalism. Positive sentiment was coded when the overall effect of the *HONY* post served to deconstruct binary divisions of “us” vs. “them,” emphasized refugees’ potential and agency, challenged stereotypes, and/or presented narratives that highlight notions of shared humanity (Haynes, Devereux & Breen, 2006, p. 5). If a post was found to have a combination of positive and negative sentiment, it was coded as “Mixed.”

Category	Codes	Description	Example
Modality interplay	Anchorage	The visual and textual components of the sample create rhetorical continuity, translating the same message.	In Sample 1, the photo presents a man from behind looking out to the sea and the caption reads: “I hate the sea now. I hate it so much. I don’t like to swim it. I don’t like to look at it. I hate everything about it.”
	Relay	The visual and textual components of the sample exist in a complimentary relationship, saying different things but expanding the message.	In Sample 5, the photo presents a man with young girl who is presumably his daughter. While both RP’s are smiling and the daughter is petting a kitten, the text communicates a much more somber message: “I wish I could have done more for her. Her life has been nothing but struggle. She hasn’t known many happy moments. She never had a chance to

			taste childhood. When we were getting on the plastic boat, I heard her say something that broke my heart. She saw her mother being crushed by the crowd, and she screamed: ‘Please don’t kill my mother! Kill me instead!’”
Overall sentiment	Positive	The overall effect of the <i>HONY</i> post serves to deconstruct binary divisions of “us” vs. “them” by highlighting refugees’ potential and agency, challenging stereotypes, and/or presenting narratives that draw on notions of shared humanity.	In Sample 7, the photo presents a Greek man smiling man in a bakery. He explains that he once moved to Australia and did not speak the language or have any possessions. He now brings bread to the Syrian refugees at the port every morning, “because I know what it feels like to have nothing.” The narrative created by the photo and text highlights the mutual experience of need and the human capacity to help one another, even across cultural boundaries.
	Negative	The overall effect of the post reinforces colonial discourses, including the binary of “West” vs. “the Rest”/the Orient, emphasizes notions of otherness and threat, and/or utilizes any classical tropes of (neo-)Orientalism.	In Sample 9, a man is depicted with a sad expression, holding a photo of another man who is revealed to be his brother. He explains that a sniper shot his brother and that the road to the nearest hospital was dangerous. While he does not mention war explicitly, the violence highlighted in the narrative reinforces ideas of the Middle East as a site of conflict and danger. He also states that he is trying to get his brother to Germany “because I hear that maybe the doctors there can help him” reinforcing colonial narratives of the West needing to assist the East.
	Mixed	The overall effect of the post contains a mix of positive and negative sentiment: some elements appear to perpetuate representational tropes while others challenge them.	In Sample 6, a couple is presented watching over their sleeping child. In alignment with representational tropes, their expressions are somber, the woman is wearing a head covering, and their status as refugees is emphasized, as they are sitting/sleeping on the ground. However, the text that accompanies the photos challenges these tropes, reading: “Everyone here has been very nice to us. When we got to the beach, there were people there who gave us food and a hug. A priest even gave us this carpet to pray on. He told us: ‘We have the same God.’”

Findings & Analysis

I have coded for various elements of the visual, textual and multimodal components of the top twenty most “liked” *HONY* posts on Syrian refugees, developed from themes of Orientalism, neo-Orientalism and patterns of refugee representation. My initial findings allow me to answer my first research question regarding the prevalence of themes and semiotic elements in the sample. To answer my second research question, a discussion of the nuances and elements open to in-depth interpretation and reflection will follow

RQ1: How does the HONY platform frame the Syrian Refugee crisis? Which visual, textual, and multimodal elements are most prevalent in the sample?

The first layer I analyzed was patterns of visual representation found in the sample of *HONY* posts. For the number of Represented Participants (RPs), the dominant code in the sample was an individual RP, occurring in eleven of the total twenty posts. The next most prevalent number of RPs was a small group (2-3 subjects) occurring in seven of the posts. The medium sized group (4-10 subjects) occurred in only two posts, and no posts contained a large group of more than ten RPs. Regarding the emotion/expression of the RPs, ten posts (50%) contained RPs with a happy expression while only four had a sad expression. Five posts depicted the RPs with a neutral face, and in one post the face of the RP could not be seen. In regards to the eye contact in the data sample, the majority of the RPs were shown with a direct “demand” gaze, found in seventeen posts (85%). Only two posts contained RPs with an “offer” gaze, and in one post the face of the RP could not be seen. The most prevalent shot distance of the photos was from a “far social” distance (whole figure with space around it) occurring in eight posts, while the “close personal” distance (head and shoulders) occurred in seven of the posts. There were two posts that depicted the RPs from the “far personal” distance (from the waist up) and another two posts used

“public” distance (torsos of several people). Only one post used “close social” distance and none of the posts depicted the RPs from an “intimate” distance (head and face only). All twenty posts were shot from a “frontal” horizontal angle; none were taken from an “oblique” angle. Ten posts (50%) depicted male RPs, while only three posts depicted exclusively females. Seven posts contained a mix of male and female RPs. Finally, seven posts (35%) contained some type of visual marker of difference or exoticism, such as a head covering or marker of religious difference, while thirteen did not contain any such visual indication.

Visual Modality

Category	Codes	Total	%
Number of RP's	1	11	55
	2 to 3	7	35
	4 to 10	2	10
	10+	0	/
Emotion/Expression	Happy/positive	10	50
	Sad/negative	4	20
	Neutral	5	25
	Cannot see face	1	5
Gaze	Offer	2	10
	Demand	17	85
	Cannot see face	1	5
Distance	Intimate	0	/
	Close Personal	7	35
	Far Personal	2	10
	Close Social	1	5
	Far Social	8	40
	Public	2	10
Horizontal Angle	Frontal	20	100
	Oblique	0	/
Gender	Male	10	50
	Female	3	15
	Mixed	7	35
Visual Marker of Difference/Exoticism	Yes	7	35
	No	13	65

Turning to patterns of textual representation found in the sample of *HONY* narratives, the category of “Asserting Agency” was found to occur only three times in the sample of narratives, while the category “Lacking Agency” was coded seven times. An emphasis on the refugee experience (or “Refugeeness”) was prevalent in nearly all of the narratives, coded a total of seventeen times. Narratives that featured an emphasis on humanity and humanism occurred in ten posts comprising half of the sample. No narratives in this sample of *HONY* posts included a reference to religious radicalism, terrorism, or ISIS. Four narratives from the sample reflected a “native informant” view of the Middle East/Islam, expressing negative attitudes of the region or religion. Finally, six of the twenty posts in the sample included the “Western intervention” of Brandon Stanton’s voice.

Textual Modality

Category	Total	%
Asserting Agency	3	15
Lacking Agency	7	35
"Refugeeness"	17	85
Humanity/Humanism	10	50
Terrorism/radicalism	0	/
"Native informant" view	4	20
"Western intervention" (Brandon)	6	30

My analysis of multimodal interplay in *HONY* posts found that the majority of the posts used “anchorage” between text and image, wherein one modality reinforces the other. Only two posts used “relay,” wherein the modalities operated in a complementary way. Nearly half (nine) of the posts conveyed a “mixed” multimodal sentiment, with some aspects reinforcing dominant narratives of representation for Islamic/refugee subjects, while other aspects worked to challenge these tropes. Six posts were found to translate an overall “positive” message through both

modalities, while five posts utilized multimodal representation to portray the RP's in a dominantly "negative" manner.

Multimodality

Category	Codes	Total	%
Multimodal Function	Anchorage	18	90
	Relay	2	10
Multimodal Sentiment	Positive	6	30
	Negative	5	25
	Mixed	9	45

Overall, the most common manner of visual representation in the *HONY* sample was an individual male RP with a happy expression, "demand" gaze, shot from a far social distance and frontal angle, with no visual marker of difference. The most common theme in the narrative was "refugeeness," followed by "humanity." The most common multimodal relationship was one of anchorage with a mixed sentiment.

RQ2: Do *HONY*'s representations of Syrian refugees contribute to or challenge the discourse of Orientalism and Othering? Does the *HONY* coverage provide the opportunity for a more humanizing, compassionate perspective?

As established in the Literature Review, media coverage of Middle Eastern "Others" and refugees tends to utilize tropes of difference, distance and fear drawn from the broader discourse of Orientalism and its East/West binarism. I was inclined to analyze the coverage of Syrian refugees in *HONY* due to the platform's evident efforts to present these subjects in a different light. As my initial findings suggest, the representation on the *HONY* platform challenges traditional representation in many ways. However, as a discourse, Orientalism is not uniform or monolithic, and there are many ways that Orientalist expressions can evolve through different historical contexts. Some of these more flexible displays of Orientalism can be found in my data sample.

It was noteworthy to discover that there were no depictions of large groups (more than ten represented participants) in my sample and only two occurrences of medium sized groups (four to nine represented participants). Most of the *HONY* images in my sample featured individual subjects (eleven occurrences) or small groups of two to three people (seven occurrences). This finding was contrary to the representational tradition of visually dehumanizing refugees by portraying them in large groups with no discernible facial features. Furthermore, it conflicts with Said's (1978) statement that "in newsreels or news-photos, the Arab is always shown in large numbers. No individuality, no personal characteristics or experiences" (p. 287). While refugees and Middle Eastern "Others" are frequently represented as "an undifferentiated mass of dark people, the 'teeming masses' of the Third World" (Escobar, 1995, p. 210), in the *HONY* sample they are predominantly portrayed as individuals and small groups, with identifiable emotional expressions and experiences shared through their narrative captions.

Furthermore, the gaze and angle that are predominantly featured in my sample reflect a more empowering manner of representation. The entire sample (100%) represented Syrian refugee subjects from a horizontal frontal angle, creating a strong sense of viewer participation and indicating that the RP is "one of us" (Harrison, 2003, p.53). Furthermore, nearly all of the samples featured RPs with the more inclusive and empathy inducing "demand" gaze rather than the more detached and scrutinizing "offer" gaze (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Jennie & Loewenstein, 1997). It is interesting to note that ten posts or half of the sample featured RPs with a happy expression whereas only four posts presented RPs with a sad expression. While the literature suggests that subjects with sad faces are more likely to evoke feelings of sympathy, the prevalence of happy-faced RPs may suggest that invoking sympathy is not the sole purpose of

the *HONY* series. Rather, the more positive facial expressions may serve as a commentary on Syrian refugees' perseverance and attempt to cope with their difficult reality. The predominance of happy faces may also be the outcome of Stanton's choice to interview refugees who had been cleared for resettlement in the United States and who are therefore shown to be happy and hopeful for the future. Regardless, it is noteworthy that nearly all of the visual representations contained discernible facial features and expressions that are said to "humanize" refugees; only one post contained an RP whose face could not be seen because the photo was shot from behind the subject (Small & Verrochi, 2009).

My analysis of the distance between the subjects and the camera was fairly inconclusive, with a variety of camera distances used to portray the RPs. However, it is noteworthy that mainstream representations of refugees tend to be from a "public" distance (torsos of several people) whereas only two *HONY* samples used this type of shot, with the majority being closer to the subjects and inspiring a greater sense of intimacy. There was also a high degree of diversity in regards to the gender of the RPs in my study. Dogra (2013) asserted that many NGO campaigns focus on images and narratives of "innocent children" and "deserving Third World women." Malkki (1996) also noted the visual prominence of children and women in representations of refugeehood and argued that this pattern reflects not only the reality that most refugees are women and children but also "the institutional, international expectation of a certain kind of helplessness as a refugee characteristic" (p. 388). Half of my sample featured male subjects, while only three posts represented female subjects exclusively, and the remaining seven contained a mixture of male and female. This finding suggests that *HONY* diverges from traditional modes of refugee representation, which employ "feminization" to reinforce tropes of refugees as helpless and in need. While I did not initially code for the presence of children in the

HONY posts, it appeared that eight of twenty posts, or 40% of the sample, contained children in the photograph. Finally, approximately one third of the sample (seven of twenty posts) contained a visual marker of difference. Although such visual markers may function to highlight a sense of “Otherness,” it is important that representations do not erase cultural difference completely in attempts to bridge cultural groups. It is also noteworthy that many photos that contained such visual markers were some of the most “liked” by viewers.

Malkki (1996) pointed out “that photographs and other visual representations of refugees are far more common than is the reproduction in print of what particular refugees have said” (p. 386). Furthermore, the author noted that the personal accounts of refugees tend to be disqualified “almost a priori” while the discourses of other agents such as refugee experts or relief officials monopolize narratives about refugees (Malkki, 1996, p. 386). Consequently, the *HONY* platform is significant for its structure that prioritizes the voices of the subjects themselves, in this case the Syrian refugees who would likely be silenced in traditional methods of representation. However, it was notable to find that nearly one third of my sample (six of twenty posts, or 30%) contained a narrative from someone other than the refugee himself or herself, contrary to the usual formula. This finding suggests that viewers may be more inclined to “like” a post when it contains the authoritative voice of “the West” to validate the experience of the refugee. Malkki (1996) noted that humanitarian discourse often includes a Western “intervener” role, which emphasizes refugees as an object of assistance and management (p. 377). This notion is reflected in Sample 18, which features a comment from President Barack Obama, and was the most “liked” post in the entire sample:



“Last Night President @barackobama wrote a very sweet welcome note to the scientist in Tuesday's story.”

The inclusion of the President's comment increased the newsworthiness of the post, and also appears to have helped it garner the most “likes.”

Daniel (2002) points out that newsworthiness is highly implicated in refugee discourse, and also “determines

which stories will be counted as ‘true,’ ‘just,’ and ‘deserving’” (p. 280). It is significant that the stamp of validation evoked by the Presidential comment appears in a post about a male in a conventional profession who, in his original post, asserted his success and desire to continue working and being productive in America. This finding suggests that ideas of productivity, success and authoritative validation are involved in viewers' decision to “like” a particular representation of a refugee. Although the narrative provided by “the Scientist” suggests refugee empowerment, the underlying discourse is grounded in neo-liberal values of individualism and self-reliance.

Chouliarki (2006) is critical of disaster news that “dehumanises sufferers through the absence of their agency” (p. 97). In my sample of *HONY* narratives, I coded “asserting agency” only three times, while the code “lacking agency” occurred more than twice as often, a total of

seven times. Regardless, it was significant for the sample to reveal any trace of refugees asserting agency and expressing competency, as Said noted that the word “refugee” has become a political one, suggesting large groups of “bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance” (Said, 2000, p. 181). The majority of the sample (seventeen posts) spoke about their experience as a refugee in their narrative caption, which I coded as “refugeeness.” Given that Stanton’s role was to document the lives of refugees, it is unsurprising that the narratives are predominantly about the refugee experience, even if this reinforces viewers’ understanding of these individuals as such. A greater narrative emphasis on the lives of the subjects as something other than refugee would help to challenge representational tropes. Nevertheless, it was noted that in nearly half of the posts in my sample contained a narrative emphasis on humanity and humanism, which invokes a sense of a mutual human condition, rather than emphasizing difference and distance. A recent study by van Schaik (2016) found that in a sample of mass media representations of Syrian refugees, only 14% were coded as “individualized people like us” (p. 51). The author goes on to note that these types of representations include articles that write positively about refugees, with an emphasis on acceptance and inclusion. Within this theme, refugees are “no longer understood as ‘the backward Other’ but rather as persons like us” (van Schaik, 2016, p. 51). While this theme was only found in a fraction of mainstream representations of Syrian refugees, it is clearly visible in the majority of the *HONY* samples in this study.

Literature on Orientalism and neo-Orientalism establishes that, in contemporary Orientalist discourse, terrorism and religious radicalism are assumed to be inherent to Islam and Middle Eastern cultures (Said, 1982; Altwajji, 2014). However, my sample of twenty *HONY* posts contained no mention of or reference to religious radicalism, terrorism, or the acronym

“ISIS.” However, there were some instances in the sample that reflected the “native informant” function of neo-Orientalism, wherein a subject from the Middle East expresses a negative opinion of the religion or region of origin. For example, Sample 13 states: “[w]hen we get to Michigan, I’m not going to turn on the television again. I’m done with religion and politics forever.” This narrative suggests that the subject is turning their back on their religion and country of origin, while indirectly alluding to the United States as a safe haven or as savior, and suggesting that religious and political violence do not exist there. While not necessarily essentializing the culture or denigrating the region as a whole, several narratives made reference to violence, upheaval or danger. The narrative from Sample 14 references “the war” and the bombs that came with it, while Sample 9 states “a sniper had shot my youngest brother.” Although these narratives may be pointing to geo-political causes of unrest out of the subject’s control, the reference may implicitly reinforce stereotypes of Arab disorder and violence for readers.

In regards to the relationship between the visual and textual modalities of the posts, the majority of the sample (eighteen posts of twenty) reflected a multimodal “anchorage” relationship, wherein the message conveyed by photo and text reinforce one another. Only two posts reflected the “relay” function in which the photo and accompanying text communicate different messages. Due to the restrictions of the social media platforms on which *HONY* operates, the results of this code are not compelling as there is less opportunity to create dissonance such as by imposing text upon an image, changing the font or size of the text, etc. Regarding the overall sentiment created from the multimodal post, the results of my sample were highly diverse. Nearly half (nine of twenty posts) of the sample contained a “mixed” sentiment from the multimodal message, with some positive and some negative aspects. Six of the posts

conveyed an overall “positive” message, while five posts conveyed an overall “negative” sentiment through both modalities. While more positive frames may be beneficial for humanizing refugee stories, Bohr (2015) stated that such representations “run the risk of creating a photographic imbalance towards feel good stories, while the true horror of the refugee crisis remains rather unrepresented” (quoted in van Schaik, 2016). Furthermore, negative stories have been found to be more newsworthy (Esses, Medianu & Lawson, 2013), which may be necessary in order to capture the attention of an audience. Therefore, the variety of positive, negative and “mixed” sentiments of the sample of *HONY* posts may reflect attempts to represent refugees in a more balanced manner, highlighting both their struggles and hardships as well as their agency and individuality.

Conclusion

The aim of this MRP was to consider how an alternative media platform, the social media account *Humans of New York*, represents Syrian refugees and how these representations might contribute to or challenge the historical discourse of Orientalism and Othering. Based on the literature review, codebooks were created to analyse the visual, textual, and multimodal elements of the twenty most “liked” Instagram posts. Through my analysis, I found that in the most “liked” posts, the most common manner of visual representation was an individual male RP with a happy expression and “demand” gaze, shot from a far social distance and frontal angle, with no visual marker of difference therefore appearing “like us.” The most common narrative theme was “refugeeness,” followed by “humanity.” The most common multimodal relationship was one of anchorage with a mixed sentiment. Many of the most prominent visual elements of the sample challenge representational tropes of Orientalism, which suggest that this alternative, social media platform does provide the opportunity for a new perspective of a frequently marginalized and stereotyped group. There are many breakthrough elements in *HONY*’s representation of Syrian refugees. Presenting RPs as individualized people with unique experiences and complex emotions, rather than as an “undifferentiated mass,” and enabling the participants to provide their own testimonial narrative rather than being spoken for by a Western authority, sets *HONY* apart from the vast majority of media depictions of this group.

However, I would also like to address the flexibility and adaptability afforded by the discursive nature of Orientalism, which may put the West in a “whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand” (Said, 1978, p. 7). While most *HONY* posts feature Syrian refugees as narrators, several posts presented Stanton’s voice rather than that of the subject, and in fact all of the posts are framed through the lens of a

white Western male. While Stanton does mobilize efforts to raise funds for various groups he documents, including Syrian refugees, he does gain fame and popularity in the process of displaying his subjects and relaying their personal narratives and struggles. As one critic suggested in *The New Yorker*, *HONY*'s refugee series could be considered voyeuristic and engaging in the "cavalier consumption of others," which may also mirror the tendency for the West to consume and fetishize the Orient (Cunningham, 2015). Theories such as the identifiable victim effect suggest that witnessing vivid suffering inspires greater empathy and action. However, Adams (1998) suggests that globalization has produced information systems that allow us to witness the suffering of distant others as a spectacle, "with emotional involvement but without action, as if studying historical tragedies rather than current events" (p. 103). In a discussion of Bauman's social spaces, he asserts that modern mass media creates an "ultimate aesthetic space" distanced from moral and cognitive space, alienating subjects from their various virtual realities, and reducing persons to "spectators and unwitting performers" (Adams, 1998, p. 103). Although I have conceptualized *HONY* as alternative media rather than mass media, it is possible that a similar disjuncture between moral, cognitive and aesthetic space could occur. While this MRP focused on how Syrian refugees were represented from a visual semiotic and narrative perspective on this specific platform, it did not attempt to gauge the affective response and sentiment of the audience in relation to these representations. This considerable limitation suggests the need for further research on this topic with a focus on public sentiment, and would also benefit from comparing alternative media representations to those provided by mass media outlets.

Additionally, a tie between recent forms of Orientalism and neoliberalism is significant. The two most liked posts of the entire sample were individual "white-passing" men who asserted

agency, intelligence, and success. Sample 18 showed a comment from Barack Obama welcoming ‘the Scientist’ to the United States, a man who had explained his many accomplishments and successes in a preceding post. Sample 3 portrayed a man who explains that he taught himself German by studying for seventeen hours a day and eventually gained Austrian citizenship. That the stories of these men were the most validated by the audience is noteworthy, as it may reflect that refugees are appreciated and accepted for their perceived economic “value,” rather than simply due to their status as refugees fleeing danger. Neoliberalism is highly involved in the construction of citizenship with an emphasis on the enterprising individual, and thus comes into play in the representation and interpretation of refugees seeking citizenship. Within this framework, Syrian refugees may be more palatable to audiences (i.e. more “liked” on social media) when they emphasize a type of neoliberal “worthiness” rather than their misfortune. In an interview with CNN, Stanton himself noted that the refugees who had been approved for resettlement in the United States usually benefitted from exceptional circumstances or were highly educated, often with accreditations such as a Ph.D (December 11, 2015). In addition, neoliberal ideology also increases potent nationalistic and xenophobic rhetoric, which intensifies challenges that all Syrian refugees face.

Finally, narratives about refugees, including those in *HONY*, commonly fail to acknowledge the responsibility or incorporate a criticism of colonial actions and legacies in the creation of crises abroad. While *HONY*’s anecdotal narratives of individual refugees may provide a more “humanizing” perspective of the crisis, emphasizing such stories as justification for aid minimizes historical context of the event and removes colonial responsibility. This tendency of Western “historical amnesia” is not unprecedented. In 1979, Foucault spoke about the Vietnamese refugee crisis and acknowledged that Western intervention in former colonies often

resulted in enduring tensions and antagonisms, which later led to displacement and refugee crises. However, the significance of Western responsibility is rarely included in prominent narratives of refugee movement, for this pattern of omission is a component of the discourse itself. Failing to acknowledge the weight of colonial actions and continuously attributing refugee crises to the “inferior” nature of these regions further perpetuates the Orientalist discourse (Bagelman, 2015; Kelly, 2010).

Until further studies can be conducted to assess audience sentiment of various representations of Syrian refugees, or to analyze *HONY*’s entire refugee series compared to it’s most popular posts, this MRP has argued that alternative media platforms may allow for some aspects of Orientalist representation to be challenged. However, it has also argued that the discursive nature of Orientalist rhetoric allows for it to adapt and manifest in new ways. In the present context, Orientalism appears to draw on aspects of neoliberal ideology, where there is an apparent potential to bridge distance and Otherness when represented subjects exhibit economic “value” from which potential host countries can benefit. Furthermore, the widespread tendency to erase Western responsibility for the causes of the refugee crisis in the media reflect the persistence of Orientalist discourse to dehistoricize events in order to continuously maintain a guise of superiority in varying contexts. My findings also reveal that the continuity of this discourse may be subtle, and that online communities can be shown to tacitly re-affirm existing subject positions. By considering the techniques of representation and their historical relationships to power, this study offers novel insights into the way that social media can be leveraged to challenge some aspects of the Orientalist discourse, while also revealing its potential to adapt to new outlets and socio-political environments.

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Appendix A: Sample of *HONY* posts

Sample 1 (Waters edge, behind)

136k likes; 3,222 comments



“After I told my father that I’d made it to Europe, I wanted nothing more than to turn that lie into the truth. I found a smuggler and told him my story. He acted like he cared very much and wanted to help me. He told me that for 1000 Euros, he could get me to a Greek Island. He said: ‘I’m not like the other smugglers. I fear God. I have children of my own. Nothing bad will happen to you.’ I trusted this man. One night he called me and told me to meet him at a garage. He put me in the back of a van with twenty other people. There were tanks of gasoline back there, and we couldn’t breathe. People started to scream and vomit. The smuggler pulled out a gun, pointed it at us, and said: ‘If you don’t shut up, I will kill you.’ He took us to a beach, and while he prepared the boat, his partner kept the gun pointed at us. The boat was made of plastic and was only three meters long. When we got on it, everyone panicked and the boat started to sink. Thirteen of the people were too scared to go. But the smuggler said that if we changed our minds, he would keep the money, so seven of us decided to go ahead. The smuggler told us that he would guide us to the island, but after a few hundred meters, he jumped off the boat and swam to shore. He told us to keep going straight. The waves got higher and higher and water began to come in the boat. It was completely black. We could see no land, no lights, only ocean. Then after thirty minutes the motor stopped. I knew we all would die. I was so scared that my thoughts completely stopped. The women started crying because none of them could swim. I lied and told them that I could swim with three people on my back. It started to rain. The boat began to turn in circles. Everyone was so frightened that nobody could speak. But one man kept trying to work on the motor, and after a few minutes it started again. I don’t remember how we reached shore. But I remember I kissed all the earth I could find. I hate the sea now. I hate it so much. I don’t like to swim it. I don’t like to look at it. I hate everything about it.”

(Kos, Greece) (4/6)

Sample 2 (Waters edge, front)

137k likes; 4,415 comments



“The island we landed on was called Samothrace. We were so thankful to be there. We thought we’d reached safety. We began to walk toward the police station to register as refugees. We even asked a man on the side of the road to call the police for us. I told the other refugees to let me speak for them, since I spoke English. Suddenly two police jeeps came speeding toward us and slammed on the brakes. They acted like we were murderers and they’d been searching for us. They pointed guns at us and screamed: ‘Hands up!’ I told them: ‘Please, we just escaped the war, we are not criminals!’ They said: ‘Shut up, Malaka!’ I will never forget this word: ‘Malaka, Malaka, Malaka.’ It was all they called us. They threw us into prison. Our clothes were wet and we could not stop shivering. We could not sleep. I can still feel this cold in my bones. For three days we had no food or water. I told the police: ‘We don’t need food, but please give us water.’ I begged the commander to let us drink. Again, he said: ‘Shut up, Malaka!’ I will remember this man’s face for the rest of my life. He had a gap in his teeth so he spit on us when he spoke. He chose to watch seven people suffer from thirst for three days while they begged him for water. We were saved when they finally they put us on a boat and sent us to a camp on the mainland. For twelve days we stayed there before walking north. We walked for three weeks. I ate nothing but leaves. Like an animal. We drank from dirty rivers. My legs grew so swollen that I had to take off my shoes. When we reached the border, an Albanian policeman found us and asked if we were refugees. When we told him ‘yes,’ he said that he would help us. He told us to hide in the woods until nightfall. I did not trust this man, but I was too tired to run. When night came, he loaded us all into his car. Then he drove us to his house and let us stay there for one week. He bought us new clothes. He fed us every night. He told me: ‘Do not be ashamed. I have also lived through a war. You are now my family and this is your house too.’” (Kos, Greece) (5/6)

Sample 3 (Smiling with Austrian passport)

237k likes; 7,418 comments



“After one month, I arrived in Austria. The first day I was there, I walked into a bakery and met a man named Fritz Hummel. He told me that forty years ago he had visited Syria and he’d been treated well. So he gave me clothes, food, everything. He became like a father to me. He took me to the Rotary Club and introduced me to the entire group. He told them my story and asked: ‘How can we help him?’ I found a church, and they gave me a place to live. Right away I committed myself to learning the language. I practiced German for 17 hours a day. I read children's stories all day long. I watched television. I tried to meet as many Austrians as possible. After seven months, it was time to meet with a judge to determine my status. I could speak so well at this point, that I asked the judge if we could conduct the interview in German. He couldn't believe it. He was so impressed that I’d already learned German, that he interviewed me for only ten minutes. Then he pointed at my Syrian ID card and said: ‘Muhammad, you will never need this again. You are now an Austrian!’” (Kos, Greece) (6/6)

Sample 4 (Widow crying)

230k likes; 23,400 comments



“My husband and I sold everything we had to afford the journey. We worked 15 hours a day in Turkey until we had enough money to leave. The smuggler put 152 of us on a boat. Once we saw the boat, many of us wanted to go back, but he told us that anyone who turned back would not get a refund. We had no choice. Both the lower compartment and the deck were filled with people. Waves began to come into the boat so the captain told everyone to throw their baggage into the sea. In the ocean we hit a rock, but the captain told us not to worry. Water began to come into the boat, but again he told us not to worry. We were in the lower compartment and it began to fill with water. It was too tight to move. Everyone began to scream. We were the last ones to get out alive. My husband pulled me out of the window. In the ocean, he took off his life jacket and gave it to a woman. We swam for as long as possible. After several hours he told me he that he was too tired to swim and that he was going to float on his back and rest. It was so dark we could not see. The waves were high. I could hear him calling me but he got further and further away. Eventually a boat found me. They never found my husband.” (Kos, Greece)

Sample 5 (Petting cat)

163k likes; 4,683 comments



“I wish I could have done more for her. Her life has been nothing but struggle. She hasn’t known many happy moments. She never had a chance to taste childhood. When we were getting on the plastic boat, I heard her say something that broke my heart. She saw her mother being crushed by the crowd, and she screamed: 'Please don't kill my mother! Kill me instead!'" (Lesvos, Greece)

Sample 6 (Sleeping on mat)

147k likes; 1,899 comments



“Everyone here has been very nice to us. When we got to the beach, there were people there who gave us food and a hug. A priest even gave us this carpet to pray on. He told us: ‘We have the same God.’” (Lesvos, Greece) (2/2)

Sample 7 (The baker)

228k likes; 5,328 comments



“My father was a farmer and we had eight siblings. I went to Australia when I was fifteen because my family didn’t have enough to eat. I was on a boat for forty days. When I got there, I couldn’t find a job, I couldn’t speak English, and I had to sleep on the street. I know what it’s like. So everyday I drive the van to the port and hand out bread to the refugees. My son is my business partner. He says, ‘Baba, please. It’s fine to help. But not every day.’ But I still go every day because I know what it feels like to have nothing.” (Kos, Greece)

Sample 8 (Young girl, looking away)

160k likes; 2,786 comments



The extent to which refugee children have been conditioned by their environment is heartbreaking. We wanted permission to take this young girl's photograph, so we asked if her mother was nearby. Her eyes filled with the most uncontrollable fear that I've ever seen in a child. 'Why do you want my mother?' she asked. Later, her parents told us how the family had crouched in the woods while soldiers ransacked their house in Syria. More recently they'd been chased through the woods by Turkish police. After we'd spent a few minutes talking with her parents, she returned to being a child and could not stop hugging us, and laughing, and saying 'I love you so much.' But I went to sleep that night remembering the terror on her face when we first asked to speak to her mother.

(Lesvos, Greece)

Sample 9 (Photo of brother)

140k likes; 3,027 comments



“A friend called me at work and told me that a sniper had shot my youngest brother. I rushed to the clinic and he was lying there with a bandage on his head. I unwrapped the bandage to help treat the wound with alcohol, and small pieces of brain were stuck to it. The doctor told me: ‘Unless you get him to Damascus, he will die.’ I panicked. The road to Damascus went straight through Raqqa and was very dangerous. It took ten hours, because we could only take back roads and we had to drive very far out of the way. My brother was in the back seat, and after a very short time he started to vomit bile. Water was pouring from his eyes. I didn’t know what to do. I was so scared. I thought for sure he was dying. But somehow I got him to the hospital. He’s paralyzed now and his speech is slow. His memory is OK. He can remember old things. He needs an operation in his eye. We used to do everything together, and now he can’t do anything. He can only move his hand. I’m trying to get him to Germany because I hear that maybe the doctors there can help him.”

(Lesvos, Greece)

Sample 10 (Father holding son)

181k likes; 4,066 comments



“They told me to meet them at a certain address with the money. It was an old abandoned house. They told me to wait for a silver car to come, and to throw the money inside. After a few minutes a car came. I threw the money inside and it drove off. Soon another car pulled up, the door opened, and my son was thrown out. I didn’t believe it was my son. It was like I was born again. I picked him up and I started running and I didn’t stop until I reached a place full of people. Both of us cried as I ran.” (Hegyeshalom, Hungary) (3/3)

Sample 11 (Family in airport)

137k likes; 2,081 comments



I've just returned from a trip to Jordan and Turkey, where I had the unique opportunity to interview twelve Syrian families that have been cleared for resettlement in America. These families have just reached the finish line of a multi-year screening process, and it was quite an emotional experience to meet with them at this juncture. The life of a refugee in America is by no means easy. But for these families, their resettlement has finally brought the possibility of an end to years of intense hardship. I'm very much looking forward to sharing their stories with you over the coming days.

Sample 12 (Couple at home)

125k likes; 2,706 comments



(2/3) “We met because of a wrong number. But we ended up speaking for a few minutes, and at the end of our conversation, he asked if he could call again. Soon he was calling me every day. It never felt romantic. I never felt that he had bad intentions. It just felt like he needed someone to talk to. He would tell me every little detail about his day. We’d talk for hours. Those phone calls were the highlight of my days. I was a refugee too. I was also lonely. So I’d sit in my room and wait for the phone to ring. Eventually we met in person. But I’m seven years older than him. I never once expected him to mention marriage. But then one day he asked if he could come speak to my family.” (Amman, Jordan)

Sample 13 (Man with children at home)

151k likes; 3,402 comments



(3/3) “Ever since we had our first child, I stopped watching the TV. Everyday I used to watch the news and obsess over what was happening back in Syria. But once we had children, I had to realize that I couldn’t change anything, and the worrying wasn’t helping my family. We learned recently that we will be moving to a state called Michigan. I’m a pessimist, so I’m not going to believe it until we are on the plane. But my nephew is there and he says it’s like heaven. He says it’s very green and has nice nature. When we get to Michigan, I’m not going to turn on the television again. I’m done with religion and politics forever. I only want to worry about milk and diapers.” (Amman, Jordan)

Sample 14 (Family of four, candid)

132k likes; 2,368 comments



“He cried a lot as a baby. By the age of two he wasn’t speaking or eating. Our local doctor didn’t know what was wrong, but we found a good doctor in Damascus, and he told us that our son had autism. The doctor recommended a therapist. On the first day of therapy, he was too scared to even enter the office. But after a few months of treatment, he was able to concentrate and even write the alphabet. He went to therapy every week for the next few years. It was really helping him. He was learning so many things. But when the war came, the roads were closed. We couldn’t go to therapy anymore. The bombs affected him very badly. He gets scared easily. He’s even afraid of the dark. But the bombs scared him very much. He hasn’t been to therapy for years. We have no money or insurance here in Turkey. We are very isolated. It seems that all the progress has been undone. He used to want to learn. He used to get his books out of the bag and bring them to us. But now he just throws them away. He can’t sit still. I’m afraid that we’ve lost too much time now. But my husband is optimistic. He thinks that we will find the right doctor in America.” (Istanbul, Turkey)

Sample 15 (Boys in airport)

129k likes; 2,847 comments



(4/4) “We are going to a place called Clearwater, Florida. I don’t know a lot about it. I saw Florida on the television and it looks like it’s close to the sea and has a lot of plants. My dad says the people are friendly and there are a lot of friendly kids there. I really hope that we can have a small farm and a horse when we get there because my grandmother really loves animals. I’d like it to be a square farm with lots of flowers and rabbits. I also hope there is a good tree in Florida because I’d like to build a tree house where we can have some adventures.” (Istanbul, Turkey)

Sample 16 (Couple on couch)

150k likes; 3,725 comments



(4/4) The whole purpose of my trip to Turkey and Jordan was to interview refugees who had been approved for American resettlement. So when this couple showed me the letter saying they'd been 'deferred,' I was a bit confused. But I continued the interview anyway. As I learned the rest of the couple's story, I noticed my UNHCR facilitator typing on her phone. After a few minutes, she came over to me and showed me the screen. It was a text message from the main office. It said: 'They've been approved. Would you care to tell them?' So it was my great honor to inform this couple that they were going to America. This portrait was taken thirty seconds after they learned the news. (Gaziantep, Turkey)

Sample 17 (The Scientist - thinking man)

150k likes; 6,746 comments



(7/7) “I still think I have a chance to make a difference in the world. I have several inventions that I’m hoping to patent once I get to America. One of my inventions is being used right now on the Istanbul metro to generate electricity from the movement of the train. I have sketches for a plane that can fly for 48 hours without fuel. I’ve been thinking about a device that can predict earthquakes weeks before they happen. I just want a place to do my research. I learned today that I’m going to Troy, Michigan. I know nothing about it. I just hope that it’s safe and that it’s a place where they respect science. I just want to get back to work. I want to be a person again. I don’t want the world to think I’m over. I’m still here.” (Istanbul, Turkey)

Sample 18 (The Scientist + President Barack Obama comment)

237k likes; 9,503 comments



Like Comment Share

Amanda Bastidas, Sarah Shapiro, Niyada Phadungat and 283,365 others like this.

[Top Comments](#)

20,929 shares



President Obama As a husband and a father, I cannot even begin to imagine the loss you've endured. You and your family are an inspiration. I know that the great people of Michigan will embrace you with the compassion and support you deserve. Yes, you can still make a difference in the world, and we're proud that you'll pursue your dreams here. Welcome to your new home. You're part of what makes America great.

6,770 · 14 hrs

Last night President [@barackobama](#) wrote a very sweet welcome note to the scientist in Tuesday's story.

Sample 19 (The Scientist repost/update)

133k likes; 3,598 comments



Yesterday I got an email from Edward Norton, asking if he could host a fundraiser for the scientist in Tuesday's story. I said: "Of course Edward Norton. Also, you were awesome in Birdman. Also, let's hang out." - I've rarely been shaken by a story more than the scientist's. His life had been so tragic, but throughout the entire interview, he kept returning to his desire to help mankind. He didn't want to die before making a contribution to humanity, and he felt that he was running out of time. While listening to him, I kept imagining how difficult it would be for him to focus on any sort of research while starting a new life in America. Despite his lofty accomplishments, he might have to take whatever job (or two) he could get just to keep up with rent. Hopefully this fundraiser will change that, insuring that he can focus his amazing mind on his dream of changing the world. Please consider donating. [LINK IN BIO](#).

Sample 20 (Aya with dog, George)

138 likes; 4,530 comments



(7/11) “George is my refugee dog. We’ve been through many horrible things together. I found him in Baghdad when he was just a puppy. My father and I were driving down the road and I saw some teenagers holding George by the ears and hitting him. I jumped out of the car and begged them to stop and gave them all the money I had. George was so thin and dirty, and the doctor said he was very sick and he’d only survive if I took perfect care of him. And look at him now! He’s been with me through Iraq, Syria, Turkey... everything. Whenever he sees me crying, he jumps in my lap and uses his paw to pull my hands away from my face.” -----
 As of now, 2% of the HONY community has signed the petition supporting Aya’s appeal for American resettlement. It would only take 6% the community to reach a million signatures. Please consider adding your voice. Link in bio.

[illegible]

Codebook 2: Textual Elements

[illegible]

Codebook 3: Multimodal Elements

[illegible]