

Fleeing Syria – Jessica Sheffield



"Syria Bombings Push Hospitals 'Beyond Breaking Point'." 11 Feb. 2015. Photograph. Al Arabia News. Web. 3 March 2015.

While images can be interpreted in a multitude of ways, these interpretations depend on the time period, culture, and individual. One key aspect of images that influence how people understand a picture is the effect that the image has on the viewer's emotions. In a photograph presented by Al Arabian News, a news source "launched in August 2007 as a bridge between the Arabic-language television channel and the English-speaking world" ("About Al Arabia"), people are seen walking, with a terrified countenance, along a road that is completely covered with wreckage. The photograph is linked with an article about the limiting effects of the Syria Civil War on health care. As an Arabian news source targeted at English speaking readers, Al Arabia News focuses on readers in the Western world. However, Al Arabia News fails to point out that, while having a global audience, several of their readers could be of Arabian descent and

still live in a Western culture. The Al Arabia News photograph appeals to its viewers by using pathos primarily through the viewpoints of physiology and international relations.

A generalized analysis provides the viewer with a connection to pathos. The image portrays movement, which is evident from the woman in the center, but also from the people behind the woman. Every person in the image is standing, some with their arms in midair and others with one foot in front of the other, indicating walking or running, showing that the image contains commotion among the people. The people are walking or running in conjunction with the centralized woman facing the photographer shows that the photographer is taking the photograph as the bombing is happening. Giving the impression that the bombing is still happening puts the viewer in the middle of the Syrian's distress. All of the debris surrounding the people is covered with a gray dust and all of the people are dressed in dark colors, such as shades of brown, navy blue, and black. In Western culture, dark colors are typically associated with evil or devastating situations. The dark colors, therefore, compliment the shattering effects of the bomb. Thus, both the movement and the color aptly portrays the Syrian's emotions to the viewer.

Adding to the generalized analysis, there are three main lines created within the image that cause slight shifts in the viewer's perspective. The first line is the woman walking on the debris covered road with the trail of people behind her. Because the viewer's eyes are first focused on the woman, the viewer can clearly see the woman's expression of fear. Then, as the viewer follows the line of people, they continue to see looks of panic, as is present on the man dressed in kakis with a striped navy blue and white long sleeve shirt with a tan colored vest. The fear on the people's faces further connect to the viewer's emotions because the viewers could potentially feel sympathetic or have experienced similar situations and emotions. The second line

is created by the road that the line of people are on. Parallel to the road are immense pieces of debris from the bomb, such as crushed cars and buildings. Then, the road itself is completely covered with small pieces of rubble. The line of wreckage gives the viewers the impression that nearly everything was destroyed as wreckage takes up the majority of the image, which appeals to the emotions of the viewers. The final line is due to the photographer's choice of the perimeter for the photograph. The photograph is cut off close to the heads of the people along with the location of where the height of the debris ends. By cutting the top of the picture to be slightly above the people and debris illustrates that the viewer is not seeing the entirety of the moment in the photograph but instead only what the photographer chooses to concentrate on. Because the image narrows the point of view to a specific spot, the viewer does not know if the destruction continues past the line of people and debris or if the destruction is instead localized like the image suggests. The focusing of the image from the line at the top also aids in emphasizing the woman. By not adding in the extra space of background above the woman, the woman is then in a more centralized position in the photograph, thus shifting the viewer's focus. The three lines allow the viewer to absorb the emotions throughout the entire photograph by forcing their eyes to move across the image.

The photograph can be analyzed through a physiological perspective by connecting how emotions, in this case the image's use of pathos, is connected to sight. According to the textbook, *Human Physiology: From Cells to Systems*, "Sensory stimuli can have a profound effect on our emotions...the sight of a loved one...can gladden, sadden, arouse, calm, anger, frighten, or evoke a range of other emotions" (Sherwood 182). The visual pathway for sight passes through the thalamus, part of the limbic system responsible for emotion, on its way to the occipital lobe, the part of the brain responsible for processing sight (Sherwood 155, 208). The limbic system is

triggered upon the forceful shift of the viewer's eyes across the image due to the three lines in addition to the seeing the dark colors associated with destruction. Therefore, the act of viewing the Al Arabian photograph is directly linked to the emotion factory of the viewer's brain, which is activated upon seeing the emotionally intense photograph.

Connecting to the background of the image is the context and article which the image is associated with. Beginning in 2011, Syria entered a civil war. The Syrian Civil War started as a result of pro-democracy protests in response to teenagers painting revolutionary slogans on school walls. ("Syria: The Story"). Police forces subjected the protestors to gun shootings, which resulted in a larger backing of the demonstrators and the conflict eventually spreading nationwide ("Syria: The Story"). Furthermore, the image is presented with an article titled, "Syria bombings push hospitals 'beyond breaking point,'" which focuses on the decreasing health care available in Syria due to the bombings ("Syria Bombings"). However, the photograph does not pair well with the article. The photograph does not visibly contain a person who is injured, at least physically, as all of the people are standing, walking, or possibly running. The image does suggest emotional injuries as the expressions on the people's faces show feelings of petrification.

The photograph and article not coinciding leads into the woman fleeing Syria. Additionally, "more than 3 million people have fled Syria since the start of the conflict, most of them women and children" ("Syria: The Story"). The idea of people fleeing Syria is undoubtedly shown in the photograph through the movement of the woman in the center. The woman is understood to be walking due to the position of her legs, with one in front of the other. It can be assumed that the woman is fleeing due to the items she possesses. She is also wearing a fur coat. The coat is mostly black and has buttons in the front. However, there are brown vertical stripes

running the entire length of the coat. The rest of the people in the image are not wearing coats, and some even have their sleeves pushed up their arms, which illustrates that it is not cold outside. Because it is not cold outside, the woman does not need to wear the coat to stay warm, thus, the coat is probably an item of high importance or worth a great amount of money. In the woman's right hand and along the length of her forearm she possesses three handbags. Two of the handbags are black with metal embellishments and the third one is a sky blue color with a hard plastic appearance. Carrying multiple handbags instead of just one shows that the bags, like the fur coat, are either important to her or have a high marketable value. Due to the horrified look on her face, the fur coat, and numerous handbags, she is probably fleeing Syria to begin a new life. Plus, the location of the woman in the center of the image and closest to the photographer gives the impression that she is highly important. If the woman fleeing Syria is seen as significant by the viewers of the photograph, then the importance of fleeing Syria is also increased.

Through an international relations perspective, the idea of the woman fleeing leads into the concept of people leaving Syria to obtain healthcare, which connects back to the disconnect between the Al Arabian photograph and linked article. International relations, in association with health care, is supported by The Guardian, a news source covering international news ("About Guardian"), and Bulletin of the World Health Organization, a journal focusing on health within the United Nations ("About WHO"). In an article titled, "Syrian Crisis Fuelling Public Health Emergency, Doctors Warn," published in The Guardian, a father states concerning his daughter, "In Qamishli [north-east Syria] nobody could help, so we decided to come to Turkey. She has breathing problems" ("Syrian Crisis"). This quote shows that people are having to leave Syria to obtain appropriate health care. Plus, according to the World Health Organization, people are

fleeing to Jordan, especially women and children, as healthcare becomes limited (“Syrians Flee”). Together, these quotes connect back overall to the point that the Al Arabian image does not coincide with the article it is published with while also pointing out that people are fleeing Syria to obtain healthcare. This emphasizes the statement by the World Health Organization that it is typically women and children fleeing because the main focus of the Al Arabia image is a woman. The concept of people, especially women and children, fleeing Syria to obtain better healthcare appeals to the viewer’s emotions especially because Western society typically view women and children as vulnerable.

Therefore, in a general overview of the Al Arabian photograph, emotion is triggered in the viewers due to the use of color, movement, and distinct lines. These visual aspects affect the appeal to pathos in the viewer due to human physiology and how emotions are highly connected to sight. Despite the image not corresponding with the article in which it was presented, the photograph connects from an international relations perspective. Upon analyzing the context associated with the photograph, it is evident that many people, primarily women and children, flee from Syria to other countries to obtain the health care that their country is lacking as a result of the Syrian civil war. Thus, the Al Arabian photograph, when analyzed through a physiological and international relations viewpoint, greatly appeals to pathos in its viewers.

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