



THE AL-ASSAD REGIME: Social Media and Visual Culture in Syria

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ABSTRACT

The Syrian conflict has been mediated through social media, shaping visual narratives that influence both domestic dynamics and international perceptions. Bashar al-Assad's regime, opposition groups, and external powers have leveraged these platforms to construct ideological narratives, disseminate propaganda, and mobilise global audiences. Drawing on the Paris School's emphasis on semiotics and culture, this study examines how images and videos construct representations of power, violence, and resistance. From the perspective of the Toronto School, social media redefines the public sphere and decentralises information within a post-truth context. Social media therefore performs a dual function, simultaneously enabling resistance and reinforcing narrative control, shaping a visual culture of conflict.

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1. Introduction

Visual culture has been understood as a set of meanings, encompassing both significances and affects, that constitute a way of conceiving and understanding the world. It operates as a visible medium produced by human beings for the formation of meaning, prompting different communities to produce, reproduce, respond to, and transform those meanings derived from culture within clearly delineated power relations. Moreover, the rapid social, political, economic, and technological changes occurring globally are giving rise to new actors within what theorists such as Manuel Castells describe as the *Global Network Society*. This society is structured through numerous interwoven networks that are made visible through social media, which in turn create spaces for the production, reproduction, and transformation of meanings and realities. These networks serve as essential vehicles for shaping the global narratives within which contemporary reality is debated.

Thus, drawing on the communication theories proposed by the Paris School and the Toronto School, it is possible to critically analyse the images of the conflict in Syria, which have been disseminated and mediated through the new discussion spaces of the digital world. Roland Barthes and other authors associated with the Paris School focus on understanding how images transmitted via various analogue and digital communication channels function as cultural texts that generate multiple meanings. Barthes, based on the concept of the creation of *myth*, argues that visual representations are neither spontaneous nor improvised, but are instead linked to ideological connotations that reinforce or challenge hegemonic narratives. In the context of Syria, images depicting destruction, displacement, and resistance shared on platforms such as Instagram or X (formerly Twitter) can be understood as symbolic constructions that both sensitise global audiences and reinforce specific political discourses.

The Toronto School, led by Marshall McLuhan, offers a complementary framework for analysing how media shapes not only the content of images but also the ways in which they are received and interacted with. According to McLuhan's assertion that *the medium is the message*, social media can be considered an interactive and decentralised form of communication that profoundly transforms the experience of war. The immediacy and global reach of digital platforms position users as witnesses and, at times, actors in the conflict, thereby amplifying the complexity of communication dynamics.

In this context, analysing visual culture in the case of the Syrian conflict and its relationship with social media brings the Paris and Toronto schools closer together in an interdisciplinary manner. This approach allows an examination not only of the explicit and implicit meanings of images, but also of the structural effects of digital media on the construction of global narratives concerning war and human suffering.

Accordingly, the study of images of the Syrian conflict disseminated via social media constitutes a topic of considerable relevance and novelty within communication studies, as it combines three fundamental dimensions: visual culture, the dynamics of digital media, and communication theories. This triadic relationship intersects with the need to analyse visual culture from the perspectives of object production, visual practice, and dissemination and circulation, elements that Yepes Muñoz (2021) draws upon to construct the concept of *visual culture* in a world where flows of visual information shape perceptions of reality. Consequently, this study enables an exploration of how symbolic representations on platforms such as Instagram and X (formerly Twitter) influence the construction of global narratives, sensitise audiences, and reinforce or challenge ideological discourses.

From the standpoint of its originality, this approach is significant because it links the classical postulates of communication schools on the semiotics of images with the reflections of Marshall McLuhan and extends to the construction of the *network society* proposed by Castells, highlighting the structural influence of digital media. This interdisciplinary dialogue not only enriches understanding of the functioning of contemporary communication scenarios, but also provides critical tools for decoding the multiple layers of meaning embedded in images circulating within the digital ecosystem.

In addition, communication studies benefit from this type of analysis because, by focusing on global conflicts in the contemporary context, it reconceptualises the bridging role that communication plays across all areas of societal inquiry. This approach highlights that the war in Syria has generated a substantial volume of images that not only document reality but also transform it, rendering social networks spaces for the production and contestation of meanings. This underscores the importance of approaching analysis through the interrelation of the visual, the ideological, and the technological structures that shape human interaction in the digital age.

In terms of impact, this work has the potential to contribute to the advancement of contemporary analyses of the relationship between media, culture, and power, as well as to offer new perspectives on the role of users as prosumers of narratives in crisis contexts. By examining how these visual representations are constructed and circulated, communication studies produce applied knowledge that can inform the interpretation of similar phenomena in other global contexts.

In line with the above, this study seeks to answer the following question: How do images of the Syrian conflict, distributed on social media, function as cultural texts that construct and transform global narratives with diverse ideological connotations? It further examines how these images generate structural effects that shape cultural meanings and power dynamics within the framework of digital visual culture.

2. Methodology

The methodology employed in this study adopts a qualitative approach to explore the meanings and discourses of visual culture as expressed through the accumulation of representations, symbols, and messages emerging from specific sociocultural contexts. Drawing on Roland Barthes' approach, we propose a semiotic examination of images as signs, ideologies, and myths. According to the French author, myths naturalise social and cultural constructions, disseminating them as seemingly unquestionable truths. Consequently, all images can be analysed across denotative, connotative, and mythological levels through the identification of the discourses that reproduce symbolic power.

This qualitative method, grounded in Barthes' postulates, conceives of the image as a coded message to be deciphered hermeneutically. It employs an inductive approach through which patterns are derived from the image itself to construct diverse narratives. Accordingly, the analysis is conducted on three levels: denotative, which presents the image in its most literal sense; connotative, which captures the implicit meanings arising from visual elements and their cultural context; and mythological, in which the construction of myths and discourses serves to reinforce underlying ideologies. The procedure for image analysis is therefore as follows:

- Contextualisation of the image derived from a symbolic meaning within a particular culture. It may respond to criteria linked to its impact on public opinion or its function within a discourse.
- Denotative description: This is a detailed description of the elements that make up the image. Colours, shapes, objects, people, and any other components must be identified, but limited to what is strictly observable.
- Connotative description: The colour and its emotional charge, the visual elements, and the social discourses implicit in the composition must be linked.
- Myth creation: It answers questions such as: What ideas are naturalised? What historical or political aspects are being distorted? What is the impact of myth on the construction of social meanings?
- Finally, critical interpretation consists of deconstructing the identified myth in order to analyse the implications of discourses in the consolidation of discourses of power.

3. Visual Culture, Communication, and Conflict

Visual culture, communication, and conflict are central to understanding the contemporary dynamics of social interaction and power. Visual culture is conceived as the ensemble of images, symbols, and visual practices that shape the perception and interpretation of the world, emerging as a strategic field within conflicts, since images function as persuasive tools that convey meanings and values. Communication, in turn, acts as the connector of all visual representations with social, political, and cultural discourses, shaping narratives that can both exacerbate tensions and foster understanding.

In conflict contexts, visual representations become contested terrains in which identities are negotiated, actions are legitimised, and collective memories are constructed. This underscores the importance of critically analysing how these interactions influence power dynamics and modes of resistance. Each of these concepts contributes to the establishment of a conceptual framework for analysing one of the most harrowing conflicts of this century: Syria.

3.1. Visual Culture

The 1990s witnessed the end of the Cold War and the emergence of postmodernity, which shaped cities through the proliferation of skyscrapers and the formation of socio-political identities closely linked to gender and ethnic issues. However, with the advent of the twenty-first century, this materialised visual culture gave way to a society mediated by social networks and digital platforms, which enabled the redistribution and expansion of the visual field on screens far smaller than those prevalent at the end of the twentieth century.

Furthermore, Mirzoeff (2015) presents seven perspectives on visual culture: 1. the media are social media; 2. vision constitutes sensory feedback; 3. visualisation employs technology to represent the world as a space of conflict; 4. the human body functions as an extension of networks that generate clicks, links, and selfies; 5. what is seen and understood on screens is reproduced; 6. understanding involves a mixture of seeing and learning not to see; 7. visual culture encompasses the ways of seeing and the occurrences within them (pp. 21–22). These perspectives enable contemporary societies to communicate under the principle of instantaneity, using images as the primary discursive elements that facilitate the transition from textual to visual modes of expression.

It is pertinent to note that, from the perspective of visual culture, visual rhetoric can be linked to this field, which, according to Fontanille (2001), posits that images are not merely objects of perception, but components of a complex semiotic system. Images therefore do not simply represent; they generate meaning through compositional, relational, and contextual scenarios. Fontanille further asserts that images must be analysed in terms of their articulating elements, namely form and content (visual structure and message), because images are never neutral. They exert effects on audiences through colour, composition, contrast, and visual metaphors, which acquire significance only when anchored in a specific cultural and historical context.

In this way, images function as sign systems that organise our understanding of the world, as Mitchell (1994) observes in *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, which examines the complex relationship between verbal and visual representations and the sign systems that shape our conception of the world. For Mitchell, the pictorial turn provides an ideal setting for the development of discursive practices that extend beyond the boundaries of language.

Thus, the relationship between image and text occurs through autonomous systems of representation, in which images are not merely visual artefacts but structures that shape people's perceptions and behaviours, and consequently influence public opinion. Images produced within visual culture, understood as performative acts, are examined not only from the perspective of visual culture itself, but also through cultural, social, and political lenses, which reinforces the notion of symbiosis. This is characteristic of the hybridity of images as objects endowed with vitality, which reject stasis and establish an inseparable connection with their viewers through emotion.

Accordingly, images function as symbolic agents that must be considered as possessing a quasi-autonomous life, almost to the point of becoming visual fetishes. This emerges from the disproportionate nature of culture produced by mass media and the ideologies that construct meaning and maintain power structures, which act as determinants of emotion that, when disseminated widely, contribute to collective thought.

Visual culture is now inescapable in everyday life. Zunzunegui (1989) asserts that perception forms the foundation of semiosis, arising from the interplay of perception, thought, self-awareness, experience, and mirrored experience (p. 15). In this sense, the image constitutes a construction of interpretation, created and recreated to elicit acceptance or rejection by society, while simultaneously connoting the defining features of contemporary visual culture.

3.2. Communication

Communication is understood as an essential phenomenon in human life. It constitutes a continuous practice that shapes the manner in which we engage with the world through a triad encompassing the natural, the creative, and the cultural. In this sense, communication refers to a process of exchanging meaning that extends beyond verbal language to include the infinite codes and signs in which images play a central role in influencing the development of societies.

Over several decades, the concept of communication has evolved. Contemporary studies increasingly regard it as a dynamic process that transcends the mere transmission of messages, conceptualising it instead as the construction of textual and audiovisual references. Jensen (2014) emphasises that

communication is not unidirectional, but rather a process in which participants continuously negotiate the production of signs and meanings through mutual and collective engagement. Furthermore, Chilwa and Samoilenko (2019) highlight that communication is not solely reflective within a rational exchange; it also encompasses emotions, perceptions, and visual representations, which collectively structure our interpretation of the world and its social relationships.

In this regard, the image does not function merely as a complement to the linguistic sign, but rather as a conducive framework for the emergence of a form of language with its own properties, which exceed the capacity of textual denotation and provide space for emotional connotation. Ritchin (2013) argues that the evolution of the media and the advent of social networks have foregrounded the image as a constructor of meaning. Contemporary societies are saturated with visual information, which transforms the interpretation of reality, as images are no longer merely illustrative but constitute the central axis of daily communication. This prominence derives from the speed with which visual content is consumed and appropriated, in contrast to written or spoken language.

Consequently, these new media known as social networks, have consolidated the predominance of visual language in contemporary communication. Platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram have transformed the ways in which users produce and consume messages. Mirzoeff (2011) notes that, in the digital society, images construct identities; through them, political discourses and social connections are formed, and channels of participation in so-called social uprisings are defined. For this reason, visual literacy constitutes an urgent requirement, as interpreting images demands specific skills that are not innate but must be acquired and cultivated with precision, even more so than reading and writing.

This learning process may be termed visual communication, as the construction of collective memory and identity depends upon it. Rose (2020) has demonstrated how images succeed in embedding narratives within the social and collective imagination, influencing decision-making processes. One example of such narratives is the documentation of internal conflicts, immortalised in photographs and disseminated with immediacy in the global network society, which allows the concept of new forms of citizenship to be constructed and reconstructed. This iconicity transcends socio-cultural boundaries and surpasses the limitations of verbal language.

However, despite the centrality of the image in communication, questions have arisen concerning the fidelity of reality as depicted. The development of digital editing tools and the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) have prompted concerns regarding the veracity of media representations. Ferrara (2017) highlights the challenges posed by visual misinformation, emphasising that the media are not only producers of images but also bear the responsibility of establishing critical mechanisms to assess the authenticity of images circulating within the public sphere. Such scrutiny is essential, given the potential impact on the credibility of information and the propagation of hate speech on social media.

In summary, the image constitutes an essential component of contemporary communication, complementing, and at times replacing and transforming, verbal discourse. Communication in the twenty-first century entails recognising and understanding the power of the visual in the construction of meaning and in shaping the ways in which human beings interact with one another and their environment.

3.3. Visual Conflict

The third major concept is conflict, which cannot be approached solely through the general notion of power exercised by a political entity via competitive behaviour (Durosell, 1998, p. 269). War extends beyond the battlefield; it is also waged in the minds of individuals through the consumption of images. Consequently, history is mediated by visual culture, serving as a central axis for constructing war narratives and mobilising societies, as individuals align themselves with the so-called 'cause' and internalise the conflict.

In times of war, the control of images is fundamental, as propaganda functions as a symbolic weapon. Recruitment posters during the Second World War, for example, encouraged citizens to join the fight, punish the enemy, and reinforce a sense of national identity. Brea (2010) emphasises that images are not merely informative; they also construct subjectivities and emotions that can be mobilised for political purposes.

The media thus play a central role in the relationship between images and war. Since the nineteenth century, with the advent of photography, wars ceased to be recounted solely as narratives of heroic deeds in books and instead became direct, often brutal, visual testimonies. According to Sontag (2023), the American Civil War was among the first conflicts to be documented through images, offering the population a limited yet tangible view of the devastation of war. This trend intensified during the First and Second World Wars, when television news programmes transmitted images from the front lines, allowing society to experience war not as a distant story but as a visually immediate and palpable reality.

This relationship between images and war reached its zenith during the Vietnam War, when television brought images of bombings, wounded soldiers, and devastated villages into homes, generating an unprecedented emotional impact on public opinion. As Baudrillard argues, war began to operate in the physical realm while simultaneously intensifying in the symbolic space of the media, where the perception of conflict became a distinct battleground. This afforded public opinion the capacity to demonstrate that visual culture not only legitimises conflicts, but also interrogates them.

In the contemporary context, with the immediacy of social media, war has entered a new dimension of analysis. Conflicts in Syria, Ukraine, and Israel, among others, are documented not only by mainstream media but also by citizens armed with mobile phones, who capture and disseminate images in real time without editorial constraints. This development has transformed the narrative of war, challenging the hegemony of governments and traditional media. Fontcuberta (2016) observes that the overabundance of images in the digital age can produce two effects: first, the raising of collective awareness through social action; and second, the emergence of a form of visual anaesthesia, whereby repeated exposure to scenes of violence normalises acts of war and desensitises viewers.

Nevertheless, the image of war is never neutral; it is mediated by intentions, contexts, and audiences. The same event can be represented in divergent ways, depending on the interests of the sender. Photographs of 11 September 2001, for example, have been employed both to justify military actions in the Middle East and to denounce ongoing attacks against Americans. Butler (2009) asserts that the visual culture of war and conflict not only reveals, but also conceals which lives and deaths are deemed worthy of visibility, while others become paradoxically invisible, converging into the global narrative of the conflict. Images do more than narrate; they transform stories into patriotic fervour, nationalism, scepticism, fear, compassion, anger, or grief. The visual culture of war is far from a mere reflection of reality; it constitutes a parallel reality in which meanings are constructed and deconstructed to comprehend, or, at times, obscure, the contextual conflicts in which human beings are embroiled.

Accordingly, war can no longer be defined solely by the legitimate or illegitimate use of weapons; it is, above all, constituted by images. These images enable the development of a critical understanding of the visual culture surrounding social groups. In this sense, discerning who produces an image, within what context, and for what purpose is often more significant than the image itself.

4. Visual Culture of the Conflict in Syria

One of the most complex contemporary conflicts, marked by multiple layers of analysis, is the war in Syria, a conflict that underwent a pivotal transformation in December 2024 with the departure of Bashar al-Assad's government. Nevertheless, it was preceded by thirteen years of critical conflict during which global media constructed visual narratives shaped by seven factors identified by Forigua Rojas (2018): 1. Sunni discontent; 2. the Islamist opposition's desire for revenge; 3. the fear of Alawite Shiites and their internal allies of losing power to the Islamist opposition; 4. the fall of authoritarian dictatorial governments; 5. the response of regional actors to Iran's empowerment; 6. Iran's response to threats to its political interests; and 7. the neglect of other social actors' interests in the pursuit of establishing democracies without recognising the historical and relational roots of the region.

The origins of this conflict, however, lie in the French colonial mandate of the early twentieth century, during which political fragmentation catalysed the independence process and ultimately consolidated the Baathist regime. This regime inaugurated an era of authoritarian rule, characterised by centralisation within the Baath party and absolute societal control through diverse repressive mechanisms. According to Hinnebusch (2012), the accession of Bashar Al-Assad, who succeeded his father in 2000, aimed to maintain this power structure, albeit introducing global changes that threatened the stability of his rule. The crisis reached a critical juncture in March 2011, when the Syrian social uprising erupted amid the broader context of the Arab Spring, aligning with the emergence of

social movements that consistently challenged the authoritarian regimes of the Middle East and North Africa.

Thus, the initial social narratives centred on exposing issues of democratic openness, human rights violations, and persistent government repression. According to Phillips (2016), the escalation of violence resulted in a civil war in which both national and international actors defended their respective geopolitical interests. Consequently, Kurdish militias, the Islamic State, and various foreign powers, including Russia, Iran, and the United States, acted as architects of numerous narratives that sought to interpret and construct the Syrian reality, disseminating these narratives through digital networks as examples of a global conflict scenario.

Social media, therefore, emerged as the new arena for the construction of war narratives. Platforms such as Twitter and Instagram took precedence, while Facebook, which had less penetration under Bashar's regime, nevertheless influenced perceptions of the conflict. As Morozov (2011) argues, digital networks served as tools for social mobilisation, information dissemination, and propaganda. Simultaneously, they were used both to promote democratic principles and to reinforce state control, an ambivalence that illustrates the dual nature of the digital world.

Moreover, one of the most significant aspects of the digital culture surrounding the Syrian conflict was the manner in which citizens documented and shared the lived reality of war. Journalists and activists utilised mobile phones and social networks to denounce atrocities committed by the regime, thereby providing direct testimony of the violence and suffering endured by civilians amidst bombings and clashes between the warring actors. Yassin-Kassab and Al-Shami (2016) highlight that various organisations, such as the White Helmets, gained international recognition for their humanitarian work and for disseminating images that have successfully raised, and continue to raise, global awareness. Nevertheless, information has also been manipulated; as McIntyre (2018) observes, cognitive biases are exploited by those who distort information in order to discredit alternative sources.

The information war has been as intense as the military confrontation itself, characterised by the creation of fake accounts, the proliferation of bots, and the dissemination of millions of competing narratives that render polarisation around the conflict increasingly unmanageable. As Lynch, et al. (2014) observe, the official accounts, Western interpretations, and narrative constructions advanced by rebel groups diverge significantly. This argument aligns with Tüfekçi (2017), who, drawing on the Toronto School of thought, identifies algorithmic construction as a key factor in amplifying hate speech and legitimising violence.

These dynamics generated informational bubbles that reinforced identities and ideological positions, thereby impeding the formation of consensus regarding the conflict. What emerged instead was an endless proliferation of discord that transformed social media into spaces of denunciation and resistance, as well as sites of radicalisation and propaganda. Through these new arenas, combatants were recruited by various armed actors, and ideologies, whether governmental or civic, were propagated, thereby reopening the debate on freedom of expression and censorship on the Internet (Conway et al., 2019).

At the international level, the Syrian war was narrated through markedly divergent lenses. Western powers persistently denounced the humanitarian crisis and the fight against terrorism, whereas Russia sought to legitimise the Syrian government as a central actor in combating extremism. Consequently, as Kraidy (2016) contends, social media functioned as an extension of the media war, saturated with both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses. De Angelis (2020) further argues that identities have been transformed through this process, with Syrian diasporas across Europe, primarily composed of refugees, growing and establishing networks to expose the hardships of exile. Images, in this context, constitute the lived archive of the conflict's historical memory, which is now being reconstructed within an immense and fragmented sea of information.

4.1. Images of Syria

The visual culture of the Syrian conflict has played a fundamental role in constructing global narratives surrounding the war, the humanitarian crisis, and the resilience of its people. These images are not merely records that immortalise events or decisions; they function as communicative agents that document reality and enable public opinion to exert direct influence on the decision-making processes of nations.

As outlined in the methodology, the analysis follows the logic proposed by Barthes to examine how such images contribute to the creation or dissolution of myth within contexts of conflict. Three photographs, disseminated through social media and traditional news outlets, will be analysed in order to elucidate the political and social implications inherent in the production and consumption of images during wartime.

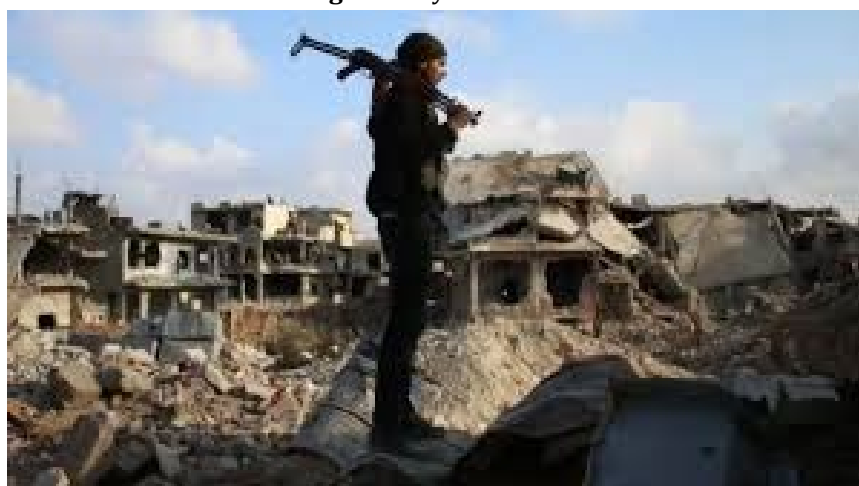
Figure 1. The city of Aleppo in Syria



Tosco, P. (2015). The city of Aleppo in Syria [Photograph]. Eldiario.es.
https://www.eldiario.es/desigualdadblog/siria-origenes-causas-conflicto_132_4304772.html

- Denotative level: The image shows a man wearing a kufiya walking among rubble in what appears to be a city destroyed by war. The buildings have collapsed and there are other people in the background of the image in the same situation. It is a close-up photograph looking into the depth of the photo in a devastated environment.
- Connotative Level: One of the symbols of cultural identity and resistance is the wearing of the keffiyeh. The rubble reflects the Syrian conflict, but at the same time there is the desolation of man and resistance in the face of the adversity of war.
- Myth Construction: It documents a specific event in the broader narrative of the Middle East conflict, becoming a sign of war and destruction that shapes the archetype of suffering in the region. In addition, the image reinforces the resistance of society or the victimisation of those who abandon their places of origin, becoming a visual element that reinforces values such as empathy, indignation, pain, and anguish typical of a situation of armed conflict.

Figure 2. Syria in ruins



AFP. (2016). Photograph in "7 Questions to Understand the Origin of the War in Syria That Has Been Bleeding the Country Dry for Years". BBC Mundo. <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-internacional-37451282>

- Denotative level: An armed person, apparently in a war context, surrounded by rubble and destruction. The person's posture suggests vigilance or preparedness. In the background of the image, there are collapsed buildings amid a lot of rubble.
- Connotative Level: The devastation surrounding the person, who appears to be a soldier or fighter, suggests a war scenario. The physique of the human being and the landscape evoke the narrative of the conflict in Syria or Iraq. The elevated position implies resistance but also gives power to the image.
- Creation of the Myth: This image is part of the myth of the hero used to represent the struggle for freedom. Similarly, it reaffirms the recurring myth about Middle Eastern states in constant confrontation. Therefore, the figure symbolises dominance over the landscape of destruction, a metaphor for military power or resistance.

Figure 3. Syria in its streets



Alhalbi, A. (2021). Photograph in "Syrian War: Causes, Summary and Key Points of A Decade of Conflict". El Periódico. <https://www.elperiodico.com/es/internacional/20210315/guerra-siria-causas-resumen-11575708>

- Denotative level: The image shows the devastation in a destroyed urban environment. Men carrying babies in their arms can be seen, with a small child in the background and buildings with severe structural damage.
- Connotative Level: On a symbolic level, the image evokes human suffering in a context of conflict. The figure of the man with a baby in his arms reflects the narrative of despair and protection. It also demonstrates the vulnerability of children, moral duty, and the tragedy of humanity.
- Construction of the Myth: A protective father who sacrifices himself for his children reinforces the discourse of paternal heroism. Similarly, the suffering of civilians is emphasised, presenting war as a chaotic and devastating situation. Finally, it is the innocent victim who symbolises the innocence of children in the face of conflict, highlighting the symbols of global injustice.

5. Conclusions

Visual culture is fundamental to understanding the contemporary world; through images, the media become powerful platforms that document social events and construct meanings and narratives with profound influence on public opinion. Since Roland Barthes' contribution and his theory of signification and the construction of myth, images have been analysed through denotative and connotative processes. Accordingly, examining each image from Barthes' perspective entails understanding how visual culture shapes perceptions of the Syrian conflict and mediates the imposition of ideological and political discourses.

At the denotative level, the photographs present the literal representation of events. They are visual records depicting the destruction of cities, forced displacement, street violence, and the suffering of victims. At this stage, the images assume an ostensibly objective character, appearing as direct reflections of reality, documents of fact seemingly unmediated by the photographer or the media. However, this neutrality is disrupted at the moment of image selection for mass dissemination, as media

institutions determine, through editorial processes, what will and will not be published. Consequently, the denotative level is inevitably shaped by the social and political interests of the media outlet.

At the second level, the interpretative layer is introduced, in which images of war acquire cultural and symbolic significance. At this stage, photography conveys emotions such as compassion, sorrow, or desolation, depending on how the image is framed and contextualised within the media. This indicates that visual resources and visual culture may be employed within humanitarian campaigns or political propaganda to intensify or modify meaning. Thus, visual culture operates as a process of interpretation that actively shapes emotional responses.

Finally, the construction of myth through images of the Syrian war transforms them from mere visual documentary records into symbols that reinforce the narratives of contemporary cultures, appearing almost unquestionable as geopolitical visual discourses. Consequently, visual culture not only facilitates interpretation of the conflict but also determines how it is remembered and understood over time.

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