

Then and Now: Evolving Representations of Children in UNICEF Photographs

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Abstract

Photography of the child has contributed to international recognition of children's rights when situations of conflict compromise or threaten these rights. International organizations like the UN and UNICEF have long used photography as a way to raise funds for their initiatives, as well as increase awareness of conflicts around the world. In this paper, I first discuss what makes photography relevant and powerful in the international arena: its transnational appeal, its impact on the individual, the concept of humanitarian photography, and the theory surrounding image-making itself. I then go on to describe the evolution of the UN's visual strategies and children's rights due to the changing nature of conflict. Next, I go into case studies of 1) the UNICEF photography campaigns post-WWI 2) trends in UNICEF photography since then and 3) UNICEF photography in the present-day Syrian conflict. These case studies show that although UNICEF portrayals of children have changed significantly, several elements in UNICEF photographs and texts have remained constant. The UNICEF photographs contribute to the following ideas: 1) the nature of conflict over the years has remained unchanged and all conflicts are the same 2) international organizations continue to succeed in resolving conflict 3) the West is distinctly separate from other nations 4) photographers are in a position of dominance compared to their subjects and 5) women and children are vulnerable, passive, and above conflict.

Humanitarian Photography

Humanitarian photography carries with it both benefits and detriments. A term that officially arose in the 1990s, humanitarian photography is defined by Heide Fehrenbach as "the mobilization of photography in the service of humanitarian initiatives across state boundaries" (Fehrenbach & Rodogno, 2015, p. 1). In today's photograph-saturated mediascape, there exists a body of iconic images immediately recognizable to viewers worldwide. Images include Steve McCurry's "Afghan girl" (Simons, 2015), Kevin Carter's Pulitzer prize-winning photo "The vulture and the little girl" ("The vulture and the little girl," 2013), and, most recently,

Nilufer Demir's picture of a young Syrian toddler lying dead on a beach (Griggs, 2015). Some commentators argue that this barrage of photographs has caused "compassion fatigue" (Moeller, 1999) among viewers, while others argue that effective photographs still provoke emotion and thought in viewers. Regardless, the universal renown of and familiarity with these images makes them iconic. Viewers are able to see places and people without physically visiting them, making photographs powerful facilitators of education, awareness, fundraising, and national and international politics and aid.

The existence of transnational organizations has been made possible in large part by photographic diplomacy which serves to flatten the "barriers of nation, language, and even illiteracy," to create "global imagined communities" spanning beyond traditional national borders (Allbeson, 2015, p. 383, 397; Linfield, 2007). Azouley speaks of the "civil contract of photography" in which photography is a way to educate viewers on their rights and help others secure their rights, to instill political responsibility, and to promote global citizenship. Furthermore, she claims that photographs are dynamic entities that viewers must critically "watch" instead of passively "look" at (Azouley, 2008, p. 14).

The practice of humanitarian photography began long before the term was coined, as part of international efforts started in national contexts by Western states, as a way to assert superiority. Notably, all major international organizations and photographers on the ground hailed from the West, bringing the practices of photography and humanitarianism as "Western inventions" and "peculiarly Western practices" (Fehrenbach & Rodogno, 2015, p. 3) rooted in Christian morality. Photography could then be viewed as "moral rhetoric masqueraded as visual evidence" (Fehrenbach & Rodogno, 2015, p. 6) and a tool to establish moral and political superiority (Allbeson, 2015; Briggs, 2003; Miller, 2014) as "we in the industrial west watch others, elsewhere, suffer" (Fehrenbach & Rodogno, 2015, p. 2).

International organizations often claim that photographs of humans across the world foster "friendly association between cultures" and "international understanding" (Allbeson, 2015, p. 401). However, scholars argue that images alone often do the exact opposite. Decontextualized images with little text ignore the diversity and specificity of the photographed individual's experiences. The viewers are presented with a universalized experience, often representative of the organization's principals and goals (Allbeson, 2015; Barthes, 1973). Furthermore, a single type of photograph, like that of the "starving child" (Miller, 2014, p. 380; Rekittke & Paar, 2010; Tolmie, 2013b), can be universalized to represent an entire continent's humanitarian and political state (Miller, 2014). The act of image-making itself is "constructed and intentional" (Allbeson, 2015, p. 393) and not ideologically neutral. The camera is a window to the world, but the photographer chooses which parts of the world to include, exclude, and highlight in the frame. As soon as he or she

takes a photograph, the image is “all that there is of the real” (Debrix, 1996, p. 69). If they have not experienced the scene where the photograph was taken, viewers have no “basic reality” to refer to (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 11). The image represents a 3D world in two dimensions, leaving a dimension that can be partially reconstructed by text—this makes the text a significant component accompanying the image. However, as image making is a political act (Azouley, 2008), captions and accompanying text may also be of that flavor.

The act of taking photographs creates a power dynamic between the photographer and the subject, especially in the case of humanitarian photography, where the subject is “subordinated by the presence of the photographer who manufactures the goals and desires of the dominant power to provide information, raise awareness, and support” (*Rashad et al.*, 2013). Susan Sontag claims that “to photograph is to appropriate the thing appropriated” and specifically in context of photographing conflict and atrocity, “photographs objectify: they turn an event or a person into something that can be possessed” (Sontag, 2003). This illustrates the existence of ethical dilemmas in photography. Another such ethical worry is that viewers may become “habituated to the horror” (Jurich, 2014, p. 14) when confronted with a constant barrage of images of atrocity. Azoulay expresses a different concern regarding the impact of atrocity photography overload on viewers—the “habituation to a spectatorial type of looking lacking both critical interrogation and civic duty” (Jurich, 2014, p. 14). In response to the concept of image overload, DJ Clark, the creator of *Imaging Famine* poses an interesting question: “What happens when atrocity is not pictured and photographs are instead suppressed?” (Miller, 2014, p. 381). The world remains unaware of what happened.

The Changing Nature of Conflict, Children’s Rights, and Photography

“War-making and picture-making are congruent activities.”

—Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (Sontag, 2003, p. 66)

While the nature of conflict and the definition of children’s rights have co-evolved, informing UNICEF’s photography of children, some aspects of UNICEF’s photographic campaigns have remained the same. In the later part of the 19th century, the trend was to view childhood as a state of innocence, safety, and play, with emphasis on nurture and the idea that neglect of children, although not directly harmful, has negative effects (Fass, 2011). Through photography publications like *The Children of the Poor* (Riis, 1892), social reformers and journalists like Jacob Riis made the general public cognizant of the impact of poverty on children (Fass, 2011). Alongside efforts to remove children from hazardous labor, western countries adopted measures to provide schooling, hygiene,

nutrition, and medical care to all children, and the 20th century was declared the century of the child (Fass, 2011).

With World War I, however, for the first time in history, photographs like those in David Seymour's *Children of Europe* (Seymour, 1949) showed the direct violence against children and women throughout Europe and widespread starvation of children due to embargoes (Fass, 2011). When the League of Nations was established, children were included among populations whose rights were explicitly spelled out (Fass, 2011).

With the outbreak of World War II, children died in millions, directly targeted and subjected to similar atrocities as adults (Fass, 2011). There was an outcry for a children's charter to bolster protections for children since their stated entitlement to a childhood was not enough to protect them from intentional harm (Fass, 2011).

After World War II, photography has been deployed for the purpose of internationalism in a manner that universalizes Western values to further the organization's agenda (Allbeson, 2015). Through the use of media and photography to "construct visions and images of a global reality in its absence" (Debrix, 1996, p. 69), the UN attempted to mobilize a New World Order, or New World Disorder (Anderson, n.d.) as Benedict Anderson called it, with itself as a central actor in international politics. In 1959, the UN adopted the Children's Rights Convention (CRC) (Fass, 2011). Photographs directly contributed to the creation of the CRC, by increasing awareness of children being victimized during conflict (Fass, 2011). Since then, these photographs—immensely successful for fundraising—also contributed to the sentimentalization of childhood, poor children, and refugees as passive, vulnerable, and voiceless objects of pity (Fass, 2011).

During the Cold War, due to the limited abilities of UN interventions, state interests often took the central position, and the UN was rendered "utopian and ineffective" (Debrix, 1996, p. 71). Post-Cold War, the UN Secretary General announced the rebirth of the UN in neoliberal international politics. Highlighting the increasingly fragmented international environment, the UN's visualization strategies were geared towards re-empowering sovereign states to find stable and safe havens in the international arena. In response, the next several decades saw the mass production and consumption of "starving child" images representing the state of the African continent as well as a rapid increase in successful peacekeeping missions, mostly in Africa and Latin America (Murphy, 1996). Over time, such images contributed to the realization that the passivity of children could be taken advantage of, and in 1989, changes were made to the Child Rights Convention that stated that children "could and should act for themselves" (Fass, 2011, p. 26) and that they have a right to participation. This, however, has had minimal impact on the photographic portrayals of children (Fass, 2011).

Post Gulf War, liberal economic transactions empowered by state-transcending technology and networks set up a neoliberal world order. The

UN took more liberal views on foreign policy and collective security, and more countries were deploying forces in other nations “with UN backing” as opposed to “under UN command” (Murphy, 1996, p. xiv). This blurring of borders continued with an increase in media coverage of war and the power of “visual realities” (Debrix, 1996, p. 79) in shaping the international image of sovereign states. In the mid-1990s, the UN saw a wave of failures, where the organization was not able to stabilize conflict in Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and Somalia (Murphy, 1996). Conflicts transitioned from occurring between states to within states, and the UN was increasingly stretched to conduct complex tasks with missions in Africa and the Middle East. Alongside military involvement, these tasks ranged from “helping to build sustainable institutions of governance, to human rights monitoring, to security sector reform, to the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants” (“History of Peacekeeping: The Present,” n.d.). In 2010, the UN launched the New Horizon Initiative for capacity development and bolstering of membership as the “blue helmets” deploy to increasingly volatile and complex environments (“History of Peacekeeping: The Present,” n.d.). While the nature of conflict has evolved, UNICEF representations of those conflicts have not changed, as seen in the continued photographic portrayals of children as above and beyond conflict and the lack of context about conflict given in photographs and captions.

UNICEF Photography in Post-WWII Europe

Post-WWII, UNICEF photographs of children were used to create a vision of a unified Europe. *The Children of Europe* (Seymour, 1949) publication by David Seymour of Magnum Photos in 1949 was UNICEF’s first large international photographic campaign (Tolmie, 2013a). The collection contains 51 black and white images of both male and female children in various environments performing different tasks. Environments include ruins of city buildings and streets, makeshift homes and schools, and reformatories (however, in many photos, the exact environments are neither obvious nor clearly spelled out in captions). Tasks shown include illicit activities (Fig. 1g), play (Fig. 1k), productive labor (Fig. 1d, e), and educational activities (Fig. 1c, f). Tasks and environments vary by gender. Males are largely photographed in the city ruins and reformatory (Fig. 1a, k) and are shown doing illegal activities such as getting free rides, smoking stolen cigarettes, and trading in the black market (Fig. 1g). Females are largely shown indoors (Fig. 1b, c) except while participating in education-related activities such as helping to build a school (Fig. 1d) or learning in an outdoor classroom setting (Fig. 1f). Although gender roles are clearly defined for women and children, there are many photos in which it is difficult to discern the gender of the child. In all photos, it is difficult to identify the subject’s nationality although all pictured subjects are white Europeans. This ambiguity furthered the goal of “universalizing”

the European child through photography, appealing to viewers of all nationalities and creating a seemingly unified vision of Europe.

In terms of facial expression, most children portrayed have serious expressions on their faces (Fig. 1b, c, e, g, h, k), often while looking straight at the camera. Many of the males shown have scarred or dirty faces or are crippled (Fig. 1g, h), whereas almost none of the females portrayed has any facial or bodily deformities or scars.

The complete family unit is not portrayed a single time within the collection. Only mothers, most nursing infants (Fig. 1i), are shown in the photographs, with captions that portray helplessness, while fathers are not shown at all.

The captions, at most 2-3 sentences long, show children as both helpless and capable (Fig. 1a-l), and several photos are grouped under one caption. The majority of captions contain no specific details regarding the photographed subject (name, age, sex, nationality), their stories, or the conflict that so deeply affected them, thereby uniting Europe through photographic representations of the quintessential European child. Most captions are questions directed to the viewer, using “we” and “you” to create a dialogue between the photographed subject and the viewer and to express a concrete unmet need that children cannot complete without adult intervention. Yet many of the captions describing photos of children engaging in productive labor reiterate the potential of children to be contributing members of the rebuilding process—if aided by adults (Fig. 1c).

Overall, the photographs depict children as vulnerable yet capable, with a large emphasis on education and rebuilding, while eliminating their individual and political contexts to universalize them. Portraying sites of past destruction as sites of potential, photographs highlight children as the future, but they make this future conditional on external aid from adults. These photographs have been immensely successful at garnering the attention and the funding from the viewers, who are left feeling a sense of moral responsibility but a lack of concrete ways to act other than to donate (Allbeson, 2015).



FIGURE 1 (a-d) shows a set of images of children taken from *The Children of Europe*, as cited in Seymour, 1949. This campaign portrays children as vulnerable yet capable, with a large emphasis on education and rebuilding, while eliminating their individual and political contexts to universalize them.



FIGURE 1 (e-h) shows a set of images of children taken from *The Children of Europe*, as cited in Seymour, 1949. This campaign portrays children as vulnerable yet capable, with a large emphasis on education and rebuilding, while eliminating their individual and political contexts to universalize them.



FIGURE 1 (i-l) shows a set of images of children taken from *The Children of Europe*, as cited in Seymour, 1949. This campaign portrays children as vulnerable yet capable, with a large emphasis on education and rebuilding, while eliminating their individual and political contexts to universalize them.

Trends in UNICEF Photography in Africa During 1960s-1980s

In the late 1960s, Nigeria experienced a civil war that resulted in international aid efforts. A little over a decade later, the Ethiopian famine attracted similar international attention. Through campaigns like these, photographs of children became ways of separating the West from the “other” (Allbeson, 2015, p. 408; Briggs, 2003) and imposing Western values on other nations. Iconic photographs of “the starving child” and the Madonna-and-child in Nigeria and Ethiopia, during the civil war and famine respectively, have been used to define the “third world” and its needs (Briggs, 2003, p. 179) and to play upon the “cultural values associated with familial and social stability” (Briggs, 2003, p. 184). These images frame the decision to intervene in foreign conflicts as a “debate over whether to save women and children...to assist individual mothers in preserving their families” (Briggs, 2003, p. 181) rather than seeing the economic, political, and military considerations underlying the problems these photographed individuals and their nations faced. The images are taken as a call to “alleviate the Madonna’s immediate need rather than demand political or economic change” (Briggs, 2003, p. 184). This has perpetuated the idea of Western aid organizations as heroes on rescue missions.

UNICEF photographs have often portrayed “dirty imagery,” defined by Rekittke and Paar as “reality free of cosmetics” (Rekittke & Paar, 2010, p. 223), in a delicate fashion, attempting to balance between the extremes of negative and positive, mortifying and harmless, to engage viewers. Starting in the 1960s, messages were universalized through the dehistoricization of the “starving child” and the “anonymous corporeality” (Malkki, 1996, p. 388) of children in photographs.

Since the campaigns in Nigeria and Ethiopia, UNICEF has increasingly focused on contextualizing images and naming subjects in captions to prevent the unethical exploitation of children through photography. Ellen Tolmie, senior photography editor at UNICEF (1990-2013), speaks about picturing atrocities and the use of photographs to prevent atrocities, acknowledging that photographs can fuel the perpetuation of atrocity. To address these concerns, she stresses the increased importance of contextualization and the balance between picturing too little versus too much—for example the faces of child soldiers are deliberately not shown in many UNICEF photographs (Miller, 2014). This omission, however, raises the question of whether the mere portrayal of children as passive victims—with or without context—contributes to their victimization.

In her article on UNICEF photography and children, Ellen Tolmie makes several recommendations regarding the UN and humanitarian photography. She highlights the need for reform in the UN so that not only major state actors and the private sector but also “global citizens” (Tolmie, 2013b) take charge in the international arena and combat growing inequality that affects children especially. With respect to photographers,

she recommends that they remain close to their subjects to get visual evidence while factoring political considerations that shape UNICEF's work. Photographers drive UNICEF's "commitment to photographic excellence to testify to the situation of children...[to] mobilize global constituency for children because [photographs] presents clear evidence of their realities" (Tolmie, 2013b). This comes with a concession that "people are tired of endless consumer pitches and yearn for a genuine connection with reality... clichéd representations of the child in relation to international aid and development—most frequently encountered in the 'starving African child' iconic image or its opposite, the 'happy aid recipient child'—no longer really work in raising awareness or funds for children" (Tolmie, 2013b). In contrast to David Seymour's terse and nonspecific captions, captions now almost always include names of children and/or the cities pictured. However, these individual names and stories alone lack meaning to viewers who know nothing about the particular conflicts being pictured; empty details regarding the subject may not therefore succeed in contextualizing the image. In addition, the settings in which photographers capture images may be limited to refugee camps, UNICEF centers, etc. (Rashad *et al.*, 2013). The types of photographs and photographic essays that emerge tend to be more positive and portray hope and optimism for a better future for the pictured children.

Trends in UNICEF Photography During Early 2000s

In response to oversimplification of the starving child in Africa, UNICEF made efforts to modify its photographic campaigns during Tolmie's tenure (1990-2013). This resulted in some changes in photographic representation of children, while other trends remained constant.

General Role of the Child

Several specific aspects of the photograph can be analyzed for trends: The child's 1) activity—are they playing, working, or passive 2) body—are they healthy and expressing emotion or neither and 3) environmental conditions—are they in a refugee camp, school, home, or indeterminate. Overall, children are seen doing activities related to: education, mobility, passivity, and survival-related work.

In the past 10 years, trends show several changes in photographic representations of children used by UNICEF including: 1) fewer children doing labor, both survival-related and especially productive labor 2) more references to play in both photos and accompanying text and 3) portrayal of childhood as time of leisure and play (Clark-Kazak, 2009).

More general trends during that time period include 1) a recognition of children as innocent yet "surviving and acting with purpose" (Fass, 2011, p. 27) instead of entirely "passive," although this trend is not as visible in UNICEF photographs (Fass, 2011) 2) the importance of empowering children by giving them a voice in the form of accompanying text. Several norms persisting in transnational organizations' photographs

of children include the 1) large emphasis on children and schooling (Fass, 2011) 2) mostly healthy bodies 3) mostly indeterminate emotion seen in facial expression 4) environmental conditions portrayed most to least in the following order—indeterminate, refugee camps, and schools and home (Rashad *et al.*, 2013). Compared to the hard truth approach of the media, transnational organizations use more positive depictions of children, underscoring development efforts and organizational successes in the developing world (Rashad *et al.*, 2013).

Despite changes during Tolmie's tenure, children are still largely portrayed as passive, innocent, and primitive recipients of a Western benefactor's goodwill. Children are also used to highlight the dangers of world and the safety of home, and an abused child is portrayed as one whose innocence has been lost (Rashad *et al.*, 2013). Photographic representations of children are still often used to characterize a nation's social order (Rashad *et al.*, 2013). Several challenges with photographic representations persist in the 21st century: over-representation of women and children and the elevation of the Western nuclear family.

Gender and Age Group Specific Roles

In her commentary of age and gender specific photographic representations, Malkki claims that women and children are over-represented in refugee photos and portrayed as helpless and in need of protection and a voice. Clark-Kazak partially contests this claim in her paper on the photographic representations of refugees in the early 21st century by quantitatively demonstrating that adults are pictured more than children. However, she maintains that children and mostly girls are shown as vulnerable and are the second most-photographed group; children are also over-represented in UNHCR reports. UNHCR photographers are categorically instructed to “keep an eye out for ‘emotional stories with a positive outcome, especially stories about women and children’” (Laurent, 2015) when on assignment, and women, children, and elderly are counted as high-risk populations both in photographs and texts (Clark-Kazak, 2009; Malkki, 1996).

Female Child versus Male Child

Photographs portray female children more often than they do male children, especially when depicting refugee children. In the texts pertaining to sexual violence and reproductive health, references are made mostly to women and girls as recipients, indirectly implying that males young and old do not need the services or education pertaining to these issues. In addition, texts regarding education mention females as targets of educational campaigns, with males often not mentioned at all. In the few instances where young men are mentioned in the text, they are usually portrayed as “sources of violence...as former or potential combatants, or perpetrators of sexual and gender based violence” (Clark-Kazak, 2009, p. 15).

The Family Unit

For photographs of refugees, associated texts assume the Western nuclear patriarchal family as normal and an indicator of stability. This standard arises in part from Western belief in the “white heterosexual family as fundamentally caring and committed to the well-being of local non-white and working-class children, as well as infants, youth, and families around the globe” (Briggs, 2003, p. 182). Children who live alone or in households headed by women or older children are portrayed as vulnerable; the photographs thus ignore the possibility that the nuclear family may not always fulfill the needs of a child (Clark-Kazak, 2009). At the same time, the idea that “maternal care is necessary for a family to survive” (Briggs, 2003, p. 184) portrays the mother as necessary but not sufficient to sustain a stable family.

UNICEF Photography in Current Syrian Conflict

In response to the current conflict in Syria, UNICEF has generated a colossal amount of visuals of children, including photographs, videos, slideshows, blogs, and #childrenofsyria and #nolostgeneration campaigns. As quoted on “The Children of Syria” webpage, “Refugee children and migrant children are children first” (“#ChildrenofSyria,” 2015). The website currently showcases approximately 336 photographic essays, 7 special featured reports and numerous situation reports including monthly humanitarian highlights and results, and monthly archives from January 2013 onwards (“#ChildrenofSyria,” 2015) (Fig. 2 a-d). Generally speaking, the photographic essays contain stories of Syrian children and families, many in context of UNICEF aid and showcasing resilience and hope (Fig. 2 b-d). The situation reports show trends in disease, education, and UNICEF disaster responses. Statistics immediately visible on the website include the following numbers: 8.3 million children in need in Syria and neighboring nations, 2.2 million Syrian children living as refugees in neighboring countries, 2.8 million Syrian children out of school, and 5000+ Syrian schools rendered unusable. The “take action” tab on the website offers two options for site visitors: “donate now” and “add your voice,” (“#ChildrenofSyria,” 2015) the latter done by posting a message to a public message board.

The March 2014 UNICEF publication *Under Siege: The devastating impacts on children of three years of conflict in Syria* includes 19 photographs (UNICEF, 2014), many of which are similar to those in Seymour’s *The Children of Europe*. For example, the first photograph in the publication shows a woman and her child walking amongst a staggering backdrop of partially destroyed buildings and rubble in the Syrian city of Maarat al-Numaan (Fig. 3d). This is strikingly similar to the first photograph of Seymour’s publication, where three boys walk through the post-war ruins of an unnamed city (Fig. 1a). Similarly, both publications use captions to label women and children as vulnerable

groups. Several photographs in both publications show children engaging in educational activities and receiving treatment or medications.

While the overall themes of photographs are similar, there are differences. In the *Under Siege* publication, the majority of children and cities are named as opposed to being left anonymous, and the detailed captions include short stories, many told by children in their own voice “I,” (Fig. 3a, j) as opposed to *The Children of Europe*’s general, terse captions defining “we” and “you.” In *Under Siege*, most photos show children alone or with other children, although parents are active in the dialogue presented in captions. Facial expressions of most children are serious, with no males smiling (Fig. 3a, h) but 3 females smiling (Fig. 3a, e, f). Females are shown in city ruins, and more often outdoors (Fig. 3d-f, j). Both males and females are shown engaging in play and educational (Fig. 3e-h, j) activities in a larger proportion of the photos compared to *The Children of Europe*, which portrays more productive labor, and the one Syrian boy photographed engaging in productive labor is quoted saying that he wanted to return to school (Fig. 3a). In contrast to *The Children of Europe*’s portrayal of a hospital as a “jail” (Fig. 1l), the *Under Siege* publication portrays hospitals and health centers as safe havens with an emphasis on early prevention of deficiencies and immunizations against infectious diseases in the wake of potential outbreaks (Fig. 3i). The psychosocial impacts of war in Syrian children are more clinically and anecdotally documented, with recorded cases in both males and females (Fig. 3j), while photographs of psychosocial impact cases show only females (Fig. 3c, j). Photographs often portray UNICEF aid workers, donning some clothing or accessory with the UNICEF symbol, directly assisting Syrian children (Fig. 3b, c). In *The Children of Europe*, although adult mentors like doctors or teachers are occasionally present in photographs (Fig. 1j), they fit more homogeneously into the frame for several reasons—they are of similar ethnicity to the children, their garments do not contain the UNICEF symbol, and the photographs are not in color. As humans see in color and not monochrome, color photographs, as opposed to black and white ones, portray the frame more closely to what the human eye can see. That adds another layer of complexity to the *Under Siege* images: certain colors may illicit specific emotions and can be associated with certain groups—the UN and blue, for example (“History of Peacekeeping: The Present,” n.d.) (Fig. 2c & 3b, c, g, h). Colors can visually heighten differences among groups and emphasize them without the use of words. Many children are still depicted as “happy aid recipients” (Tolmie, 2013b) with photo essays centered on pictures of kids playing with UNICEF-given toys and captions that highlight an increase in happiness levels of children after receiving UNICEF aid (Youngmeyer, 2014).

Overall, in contrast to Seymour’s publication of 51 pictures and terse, nonspecific captions, the *Under Siege* Publication on Syria contains more text than pictures, with the text substantially contextualizing images and

giving personal details on children, their families, their stories, and their needs. The need statements are relatively unchanged: the right to quality education, healthcare, nourishment, safety, and childhood experience. Although children's voices are more strongly represented in the Syrian publication, children are still portrayed as passive and vulnerable and as the future of the nation. While captions mention the bombs and shelling that impacted Syrians, they give no concrete details about the conflict or the involved parties. Rather, they portray children and their families as somehow above politics and conflict with a desire for peace (Allbeson, 2015; Clark-Kazak, 2009; Malkki, 1996). Similarly, Seymour's captions offer no detail regarding the conflict that brought the children of Europe to the situation in which they were photographed.

As stated earlier, the nature of conflict has become more complex, yet UNICEF has and continues to avoid explaining the multilateral political conflict that directly affects the photographed children. This results in an oversimplification of conflict (Rashad *et al.*, 2013) that facilitates and funds the perpetuation of Western involvement in countries with UNICEF programs. Although the issue of decontextualization of photographs is technically solved by the inclusion of detailed personal facts and stories about the subject, UNICEF continues to represent the child as innocent and apolitical in both texts and photographs. This appeal to simplicity—in the foreground of conflicts that are supposedly beyond the general public's understanding—continues to generate donations (Rashad *et al.*, 2013) from regular viewers who are otherwise not presented the opportunity for concrete action to rectify the situation of the child.

Current UNICEF campaigns showcase past successes alongside current crises in order to encourage donations. In December 2015, the UNICEF website showcased a photographic essay titled "Refugees in Europe: then and now," which includes 17 diptychs of 1950s refugees and modern refugees in Europe (UNICEF, 2015). 15.5 of 17 diptychs depict children in a prominent role, and each diptych juxtaposes a black and white post WWII photograph of a European refugee with a colorful HD photograph of Syrian, Afghan, or Iraqi refugees taken in 2015 (Fig. 4a-d). The activities performed in each pair of photos are nearly identical, with captions indicating nearly identical geographic locations of both photographs. Overall, this photographic essay universalizes the identities of children and refugees, conveying the message that all refugees are the same. By extension of logic then, the drastically different conflicts that created the refugees and affected the children are effectively homogenized, with the message that all conflicts are essentially the same. This has huge implications—first, that UNICEF's involvement in Europe post-WWII was largely successful ("Our history: UNICEF past, present and future," 2015), and with the current photography UNICEF essentially asserts that it will be successful once again. Second, this simplifies the complexity of the modern conflict for donors, encouraging them to donate

so that UNICEF can continue its successful interventions in the global community.

The awareness, empathy, and donations that come with universalized imagery of the child have the potential to improve the state of children worldwide. However, ignoring context and considering all conflicts as essentially the same may be a dangerous oversimplification and may promote the notion that Western nations and international organizations understand and are capable of solving all conflicts, without regard to their complexity and differences.

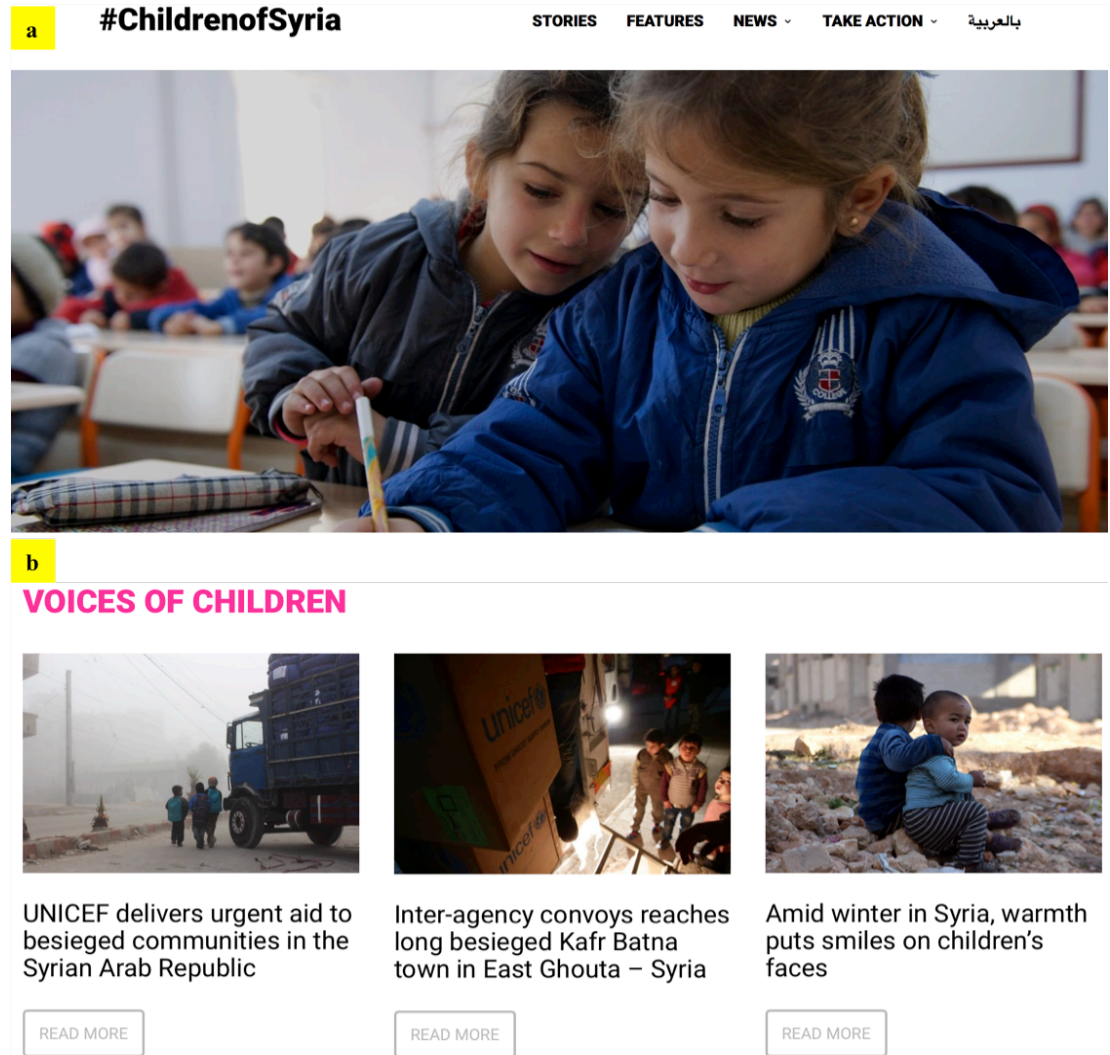


FIGURE 2 (a-b) shows a set of images from the #ChildrenofSyria website as cited in UNICEF. 2015. This website showcases UNICEF's official photographic essays and reports on the Syrian conflict. The photo essays contain stories of Syrian children and families, many in context of UNICEF aid, showcasing resilience and hope.

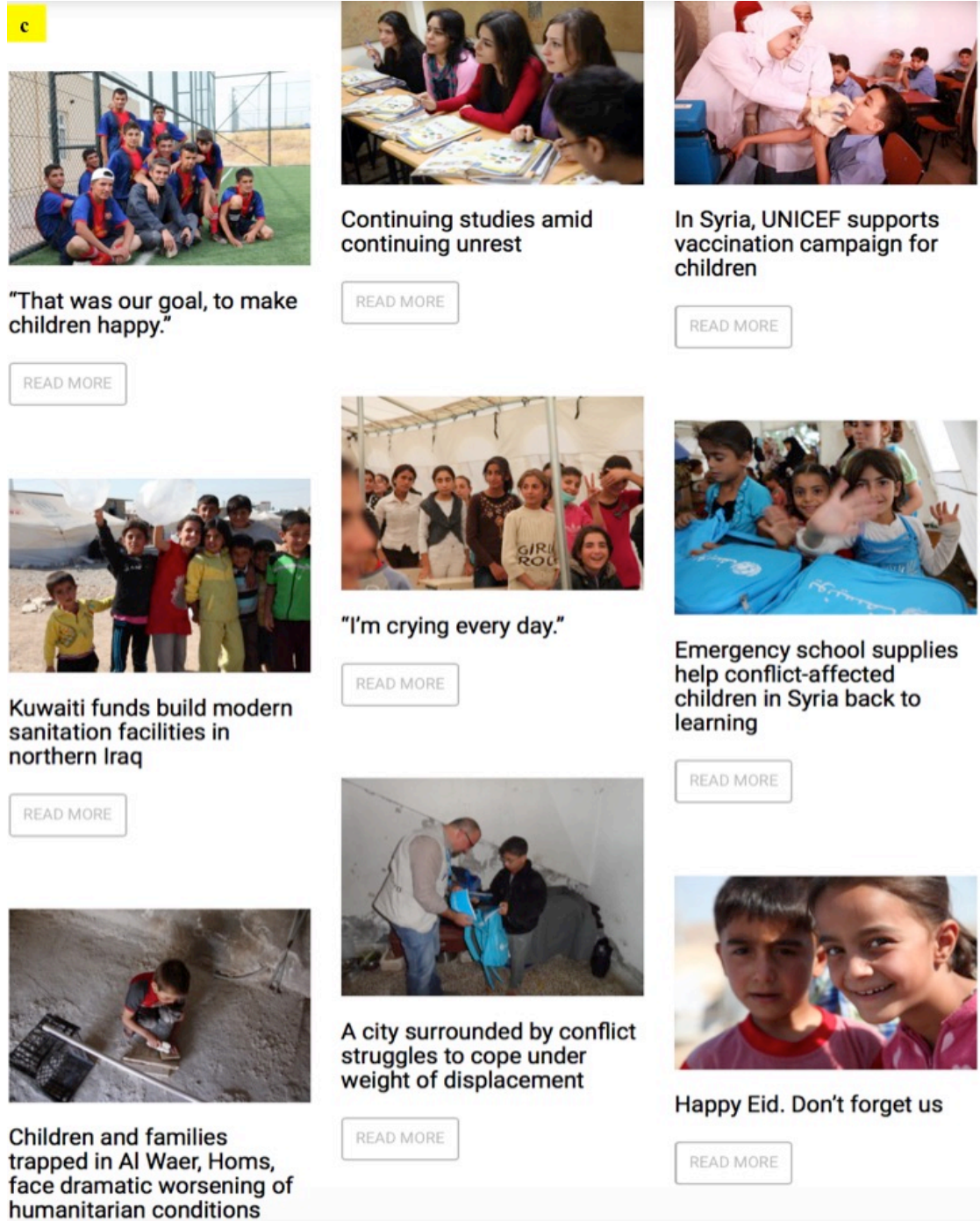


FIGURE 2 (c) shows a set of images from the #ChildrenofSyria website as cited in UNICEF. 2015. This website showcases UNICEF's official photographic essays and reports on the Syrian conflict. The photo essays contain stories of Syrian children and families, many in context of UNICEF aid, showcasing resilience and hope.

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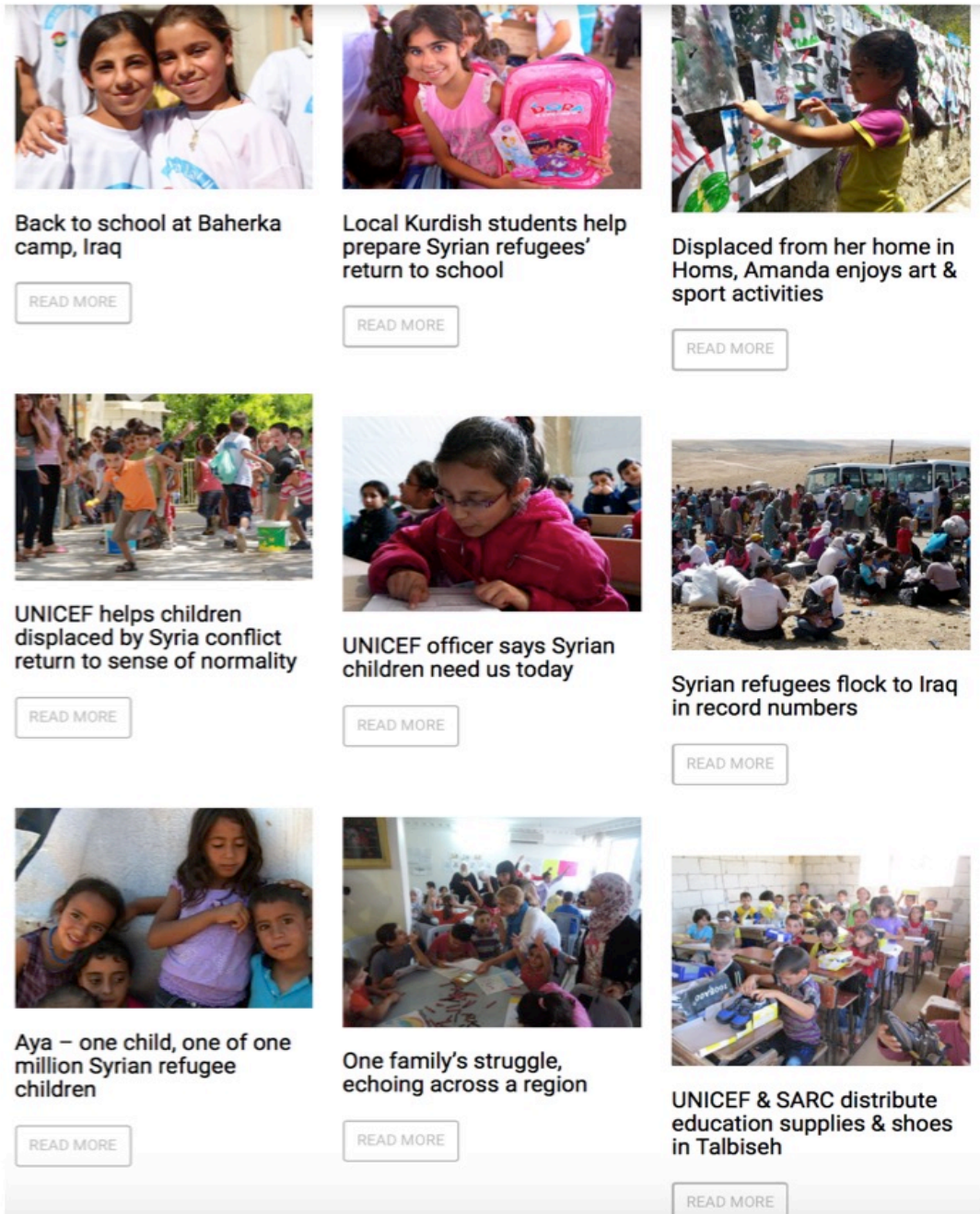


FIGURE 2 (d) shows a set of images from the #ChildrenofSyria website as cited in UNICEF. 2015. This website showcases UNICEF's official photographic essays and reports on the Syrian conflict. The photo essays contain stories of Syrian children and families, many in context of UNICEF aid, showcasing resilience and hope.

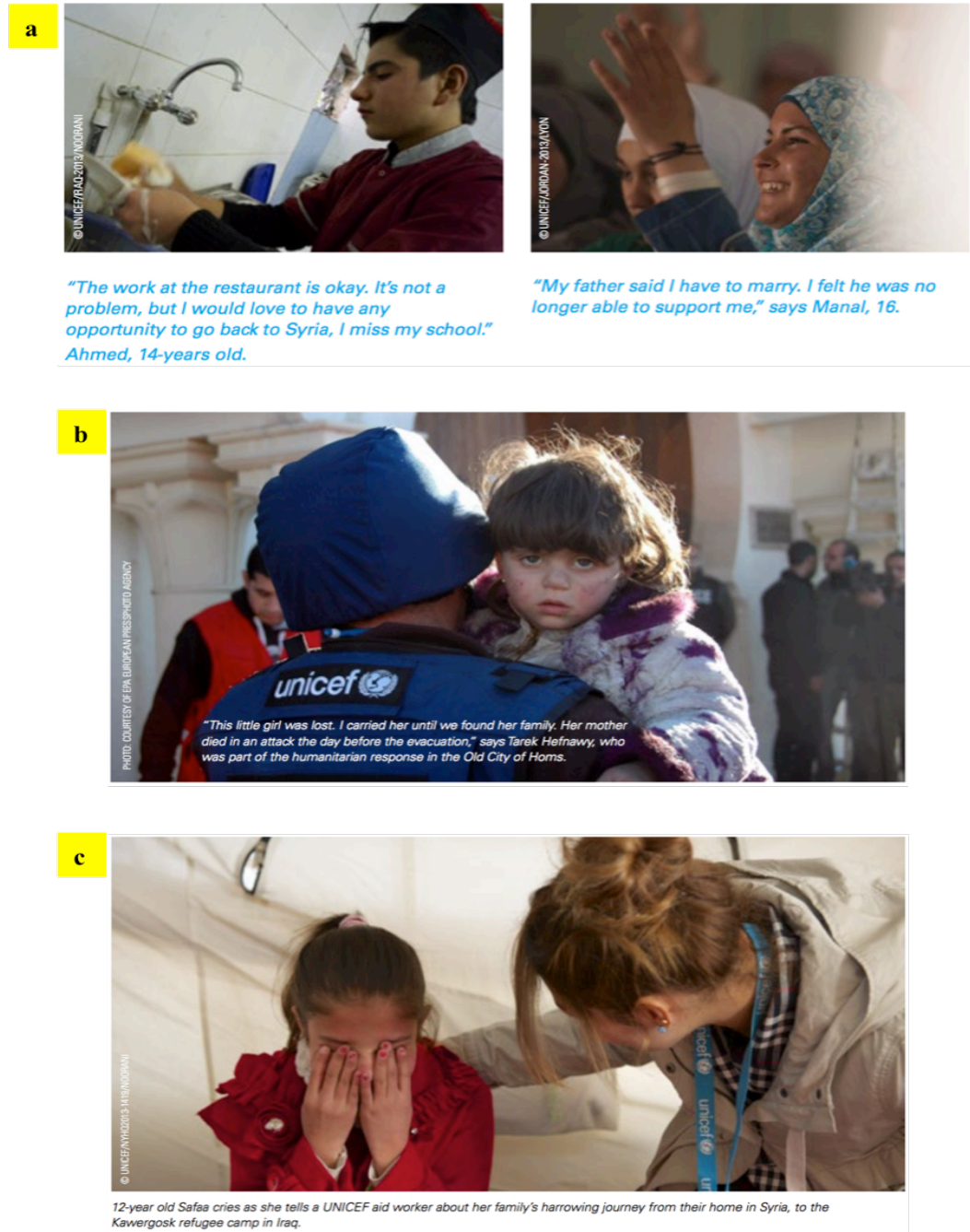


FIGURE 3 (a-c) shows a set of images from *Under Siege: The devastating impact on children of three years of conflict in Syria*, as cited in UNICEF. March 2014, illustrating UNICEF's current emphasis on contextualization of images and certain aspects of children's lives – like play and psychosocial well-being. However, the content of the captions still oversimplify the conflict, and UNICEF continues to represent children as innocent and apolitical, while portraying itself as a savior.

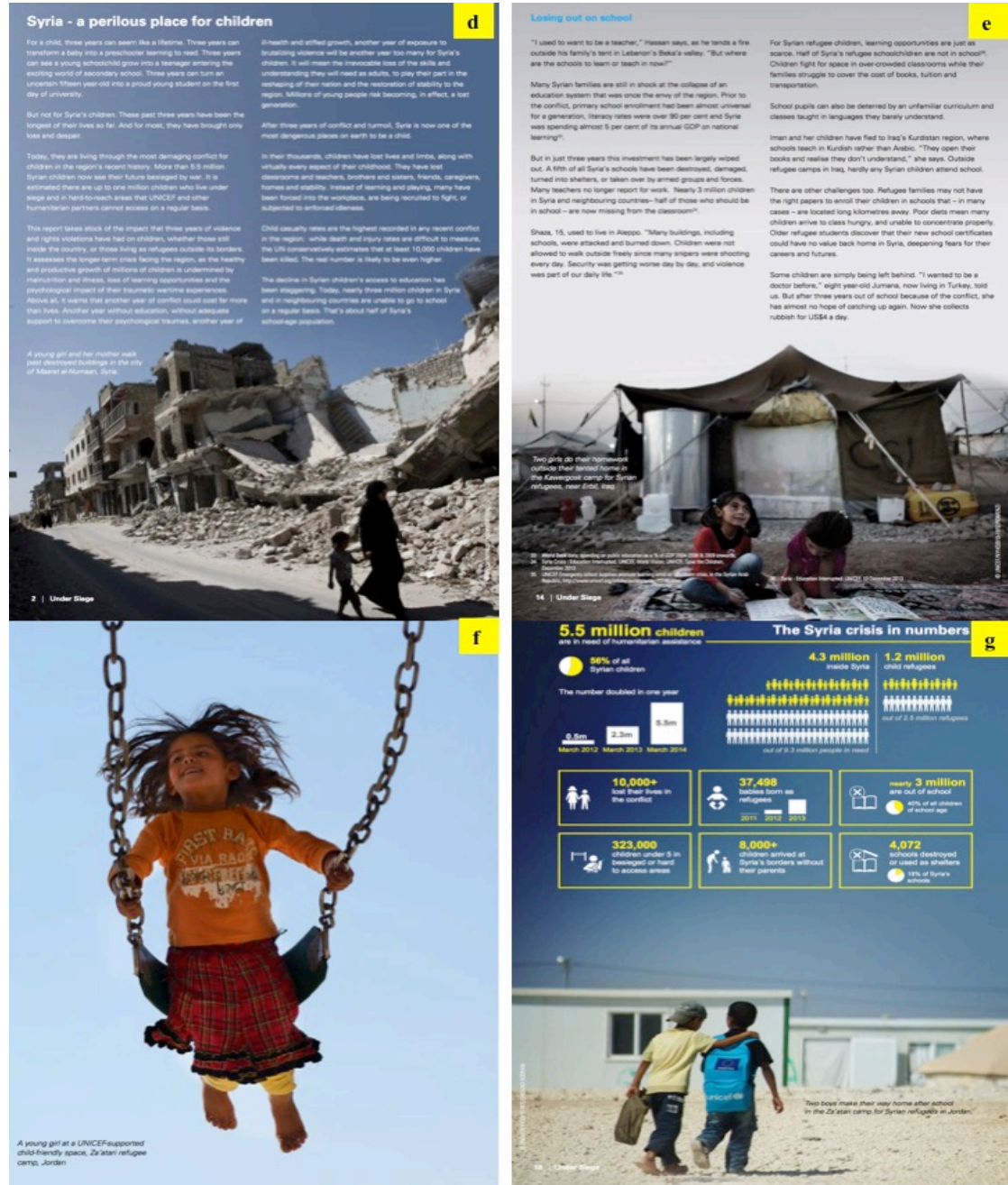


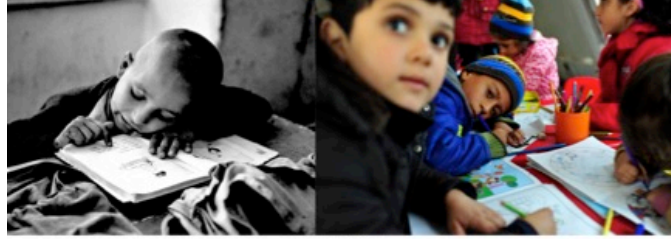
FIGURE 3 (d-g) shows a set of images from *Under Siege: The devastating impact on children of three years of conflict in Syria*, as cited in UNICEF. March 2014, illustrating UNICEF's current emphasis on contextualization of images and certain aspects of children's lives – like play and psychosocial well-being. However, the content of the captions still oversimplify the conflict, and UNICEF continues to represent children as innocent and apolitical, while portraying itself as a savior.



Boys study at a UNICEF-supported tent school in the Kawergosk refugee camp near Erbil, Iraq.



FIGURE 3 (h-j) shows a set of images from *Under Siege: The devastating impact on children of three years of conflict in Syria*, as cited in UNICEF. March 2014, illustrating UNICEF's current emphasis on contextualization of images and certain aspects of children's lives – like play and psychosocial well-being. However, the content of the captions still oversimplify the conflict, and UNICEF continues to represent children as innocent and apolitical, while portraying itself as a savior.



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a

A boy refugee reads a book in Greece circa 1955. Children draw in a UNICEF-supported child friendly space, equipped with educational materials and toys for children passing through Presevo, exhausted from their long journeys, in Serbia in 2015.



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b

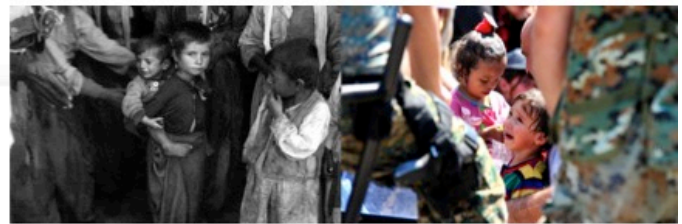
Circa 1945 in Greece, families occupy small partitioned spaces as their temporary living quarters in a displaced persons bureau. In 2015 in Germany, a refugee shelter at Tempelhof Airfield, used during the 1948 Berlin Airlift, now houses 2,000 refugees.



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c

In 1949 in Italy, a girl smiles as she has her measurements taken for a new dress at the Santa Genoveva Institute, an orphanage in Naples. In 2015 in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Syrian, Afghani and Iraqi refugees collect winter clothes distributed in Tabanovce.



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d

A young boy holds a crying child in a camp for displaced persons in Kavaja, Albania circa 1945. In 2015 in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, a crying child is comforted near Gevgelija. Long and uncertain journeys leave children frightened and vulnerable.

FIGURE 4 (a-d) shows select images from *Refugees in Europe: Then and Now*, as cited in UNICEF. 24 December 2015, which universalizes the identities of children and refugees, conveying the message that all refugees and conflicts are the same. It also implies that UNICEF has been and will continue being successful in managing conflict.

Future Directions

The portrayal of children by international organizations continues to impact norms in global politics and culture. With this large scope for impact comes the potential for photography to effect change. UNICEF's photographic representations of children have evolved over the years since UNICEF's conception in 1946.

Seymour's post WWI publication *The Children of Europe* portrayed children without individual and political context, universalizing them as vulnerable yet capable members of society. This concept of universalization was especially salient in UNICEF's campaigns in Nigeria and Ethiopia in the 1960s-1980s, when the image of the "starving child" became representative of the entire African continent. Since then, UNICEF has increasingly prioritized contextualization of images through the inclusion of names and stories, as is most noticeable in the current UNICEF photographic campaigns on the Syrian Civil War.

These representations have several implications for the portrayed subjects. Photographs still often portray women and children as passive victims, helpless and in need of rescuing. The act of photography itself creates a power dynamic between the subject and the photographer, who dominates the interaction as a representative of the larger interests and goals of his or her organization. Photographs are still a way of creating and maintaining the separation of West from the other, with UNICEF portrayed as the effective Western savior of the world's children. Children also continue to be depicted through photographs as somehow above conflict. As specifics of conflict are deemed irrelevant, the context surrounding conflict is often not provided in captions, leading to the oversimplification of conflict and the treatment of all conflicts as the same. As Tolmie suggests, these pitfalls may be overcome by giving photographed subjects agency. The inclusion of details like names of individuals and cities is not an entirely effective step, yet it is a step in the right direction, as it emphasizes the need for context.

Additional measures by UNICEF may resolve some of the above pitfalls. Portrayals of individuals playing non-traditional roles can challenge a stereotype for the single photographed individual (Clark-Kazak, 2009). Moreover, that individual's experience can be universalized yet again to represent the experience of the entire group that the individual is associated with. The power dynamic between the photographer and the subject may be removed if the subjects become the photographers and share their experiences of their environments. Efforts are underway to have refugees photograph and share their experiences; this may provide insight into how the photographer-subject power dynamic has impacted photographs and global perceptions of individuals and conflict to date (Fricker, 2013).

Finally, international organizations may benefit from using the human centered design process to inform their initiatives. UN agencies ask for detailed documentation of the subjects they photograph, but UNHCR, for

example, does not have a feedback loop connecting them to their target population (Warnes, 2015). Feedback from refugees regarding the aid they receive, their current experiences, and what will bring their dignity back has the potential to give international aid organizations actionable items to bolster their initiatives and increase satisfaction among the refugees these programs aim to serve. In sync with the complex political, social, and cultural environments they originate from, photographs continue to have the power to effect positive change.

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