Selfies at the Border: A Terror Management Reading

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> There are ways of framing that will bring the human into view in its frailty and precariousness, that will allow us to stand for the value and dignity of human life, to react with outrage when lives are degraded or eviscerated without regard for their value as lives. And then there are frames that foreclose responsiveness […]
>
> —Judith Butler, *Frames of War*

This article investigates selfies as a cultural practice, examining the innate agency in selfie taking, positioning selfies as a form of resistance. The analysis considers the way Syrian refugees are framing themselves and are being framed, in a variety of photographic images depicting "Europe's migration crisis" (Crawley and Skleparis). Through an application of Ernest Becker's discourse on the 'terror of death', which is the basis of the social psychology concept of terror management theory, the research asserts the significance of participation and composition in selfies. It questions both literal and conceptual framings of these images and interrogates the ethics of recognisability and response in relation to the multiple frames of conception through which we view and interpret human life.

 The analysis will consider the efficacy of selfies in maintaining and reclaiming individual identities amongst those displaced by current conflicts. I argue that selfie taking and the networked dissemination of those images via social media offers refugees a means of documenting and communicating a personal narrative that opposes the mediatised homogenisation of displaced individuals and families. These networked images locate real bodies, in real time, in real space; they place-make. Sharing selfie images to the network is an act of human agency and cultural

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significance that combats the de-humanising linguistic descriptions, such as 'swarms' (David Cameron, ITV News July 2015) and the more insidious animalistic implications of the term migrant; the etymology of which lies in the seasonal migration of animals. By applying terror management theory I will also suggest that participation in the selfie practice by refugees asserts their position in contemporary networked culture and therefore maintains an 'anxiety-buffer' that mitigates against the paralysing fear of mortality. In order to mobilise an analysis of selfie taking as a practice that is significant to the aporia of death, I offer a deconstruction of self-shot images and a consideration of the performative space in which they occur.

Through a converse application of terror management theory I suggest that images of refugees in the process of taking selfies not only trouble Western dominance but also pose a threat to the 'anxiety buffer' that protects the narcissistic heroism driven self-esteem of Western subjects. The appropriation of the selfie process in images presented by the main- stream British media and their consequent use in right wing anti-immigration memes will be problematised. Capturing refugees in the act of selfie taking overrides the agential loop inherent in the original image. This article will consider the threat that selfies taken in this context pose to Western dominance, suggesting that the images and the networked technology required to participate in this cultural practice are a symbol of modernity that in the hands of the 'Other' troubles Western authority.

It is important at this point to acknowledge my positionality. As a selfie-ing subject I have an affinity to the practice of selfie taking but the stability afforded to me by my white, British identity marks me as 'Other' to the individual subjects referenced in the case studies. Proposing that by acknowledging this position the work can transcend the voyeurism associated with ethnography or dismantle the power dynamics inherent in writing about the 'Other' would be naïve. Writing from within the current crisis, a persistent and traumatic state, is also problematic as it precludes the objectivity afforded to the position of witness. Trauma theorist Dori Laub noted that "no observer could remain untainted, that is, maintain an integrity… that could keep itself uncompromised" (Laub 81). We are not observers of this crisis; as global citizens we are marked and shaped by it. To invoke a Levinasian ethical reading our very subjectivity is formed through our subjection to the 'Other'. Our experience of, encounter with and response to the 'Other' is the primacy of ethics; the encounter with the Other makes an ethical demand upon us, one that marks us even if we refuse it. Therefore, it must be acknowledged that the framing of the analysis herein does not come from an independent point of reference. What is absent or deliberately omitted from a constructed frame is political in its self. This concept will be applied to the reading of specific images in this article, but it also applies to the analytic schemata it utilises in such application. The subjectivity that shapes this analysis is symptomatic of the

impossibility of un-cleaving any emotional response to the disturbing, terrifying, current global situation.

I employ the term refugee in this analysis to refer to individuals displaced and in transition but I am mindful of the complexity and plurality of this definition and sensitive to the tensions, overlaps and intra-action of the "policy categories, vernacular usages and social science understandings of migration" (Crawley and Skleparis 50). There is no agenda in this analysis to delineate between voluntary and forced migration but rather to critique the phenomena of anti-immigration memes that are fuelled and steered by a fetishized categorisation of the binary definitions of migrant and refugee. The analysis attempts to negotiate the polarity that structures the politics of the present crisis; white / colour, west/ non- west, have / have not, and explore the complex overlapping of referential frames.

The first part of this article will be dedicated to a brief overview of terror management theory (which shall be referred to as TMT) and an indication of how and why this theory can be used as a means of framing the practice of selfie taking. However, whilst some of the central tenets of this theory are salient with my analysis of the selfie phenomenon it is also a highly problematic framework and the following analysis is cautious. TMT offers a reconceptualization of narcissism that is useful in resisting the moral panic and "pathology-based rhetoric" (Baym and Senft 1592) that the selfie phenomenon has garnered. However, TMT is born of the privileged, Western, academic school of thought. Its structure employs a disconcerting tendency to universalisms, symptomatic of much of the 'pale male' thinking that has dominated the Eurocentric academy. TMTs assertion of a binary difference between human and animal, the generalised use of the term culture and the grandiose concept of 'worldview' imply a singular, universal understanding of human subjectivity that negates the multiplicity of human experience. There is no singular authentic human experience just as there is not a homogenous experience of displacement. These universal claims and the overly general approach to the connections between categories such as mortality, terror and culture made by TMT need to be overtly problematised as part of any analysis that utilises this theory.

TMT is a theory of social behaviour proposed by Jeff Greenberg, Tom Pyszczynski and Sheldon Solomon in the early 1990s. The social psychologists drew on the philosophy of Ernest Becker who had written extensively in the 1970s adopting "a multidisciplinary view, considering the work of Freud, Rank, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and Darwin, among others, in an effort to delineate the motivational underpinnings of human behavior." (Arndt et al.199) Becker drew connections between heroism, narcissism and self-esteem, suggesting that culture ultimately provides humans with a state of existence that mitigates the indeterminacy of the universe and the inevitability not only of death but of absolute annihilation.

TMT posits that the cognitive ability to imagine and conceive of countless possible future outcomes that may involve pain, tragedy, trauma and death is a source of perpetual anxiety for humans. Becker's hypothesis was that humans created culture as a means of confronting and controlling the problem of death; "humans thus live within a shared symbolic conception of the universe that is culturally created and maintained [...] these cultural worldviews imbue the world with meaning, order, stability and permanence, and by doing so buffer the anxiety that results from living in a terrifying and largely uncontrollable universe in which death is the only certainty" (Greenberg et al. 96). Becker put forward these arguments in the books *The Birth and Death of Meaning* (1962, 1971) and *The Denial of Death* (1973) where he laid out the paradoxical necessity that we require "the ever present fear of death in the normal biological functioning of our instinct of self-preservation, as well as our utter obliviousness to this fear in our conscious life" (Becker 17).

In TMT, facing mortality salience and managing existential fears does not climax with the notion of death but rather in the concept of total annihilation, the total destruction and obliteration of subjectivity. According to TMT, cultural worldviews operate as a means of assuaging the terror of human awareness of death and fear of annihilation by providing a set of standards and practices through which individuals can affiliate themselves with others. Security is maintained through the belief that one is a valuable member of a significant and meaningful community and world and will continue to be, even posthumously. Religion, nation, local community, family units, friendship groups all provide the individual with a set of standards against which they are judged and a lasting place in the culture, immortality for those who live up to the prescribed standards. According to the tenets of TMT, in order to maintain an existence in which individuals are not paralysed by an awareness of their own mortality, humans commit themselves to maintaining self-esteem through a belief in cultural worldviews.

TMT posits that this goal of immortality is created and sustained by cultural worldviews in a variety of ways; directly in the case of religion where members live by a set of prescribed values in order to move on to an afterlife of some sorts post death. But, also indirectly through the belief that they are part of something that will endure after death. Intrinsic to this is the ability to conceive of one's own subjectivity and to be self-reflexive; to take up a place in culture and self-regulate behaviour according to set values in order to establish a secure position that is of value, and therefore permanence in the external world. Establishing the value of self to the not-self stabilises and maintains self-esteem and is a means of transcending the threat of total annihilation that would accompany death in the absence of cultural membership.

TMT suggests that our self-esteem is bolstered by our engagement in culture and our engagement in culture is fuelled by our subconscious drive to maintain and develop our self-esteem. Together this creates an 'anxiety buffer' which means

that "terror [is] sufficiently mitigated so as not to paralyze the continued performance of the routines of everyday life" (Berger and Luckman 101). Becker suggests that self-esteem and basic self-worth is inseparable from narcissism. Basic narcissism is intrinsic to understanding the concept of heroism, it is an absorption with the self that allows us to maintain this 'anxiety buffer'. Drawing on Freud's psychoanalytic theories of narcissistic tendency, Becker suggests that humans assert their primary value in the universe, and are conditioned to "stand out, be a hero, make the biggest possible contribution to world life" (Becker 4).

Narcissism then exists on a spectrum, at one end there is the propensity to view almost everyone but ourselves as expendable. It is the belief that bad things happen to other people, the absolute absorption with the self that places the subjective beyond the reach of mortality. Conversely yet simultaneously, narcissism also fuels our urge to cosmic heroism; laying down our lives for a cause we believe in, running in front of a bus to save a child in the road. Humans are capable of self-sacrifice and generosity but, Becker suggests, ultimately these acts are also linked to heroics and are based on a symbolic understanding of such acts of heroism as meaningful, culturally significant and valuable.

The initial trend in selfie criticism by the media at large has been to pathologise selfie taking as vain and frivolous, applying a superficial application of narcissism as conceit. As Anne Burns has suggested, these accusations of narcissism "act as shorthand to chastise those whose photographic self-depiction is perceived as self-absorbed or crass" (1720). This vernacular ascription of narcissism is in part due to the term *selfi*e, the puns it generates (selfie-obsessed, selfie-ish etc) and the ensuing theme of egotism (Burns 1720). Populist understandings of narcissism are defined as a preoccupation and obsession with the self, a sentiment that is applied to selfie taking in an overtly gendered and patronising way. The following analysis applies a TMT conception of narcissism as a facet of self-esteem that is intrinsic to human capacity to function in the world. This approach to narcissism, as a factor in mortality salience, will be applied to the practice of selfie taking, specifically by refugees, and furthermore to the reception of these images.

Selfies are a significant practice in contemporary, networked, popular culture. Considering selfie taking through the lens of TMT, the practice has a role to play in the maintenance of an 'anxiety buffer' that exists to protect human subjects against the fear of death. However, as stated above, TMT is a complex theory of social behaviour and there are various criticisms that can be levied against it. The TMT of the early 1990s implies idyllically and erroneously that all 'cultures' and 'worldviews' are afforded the same value without any acknowledgement of the complexity of intersectional oppression. Instrumentalising TMT to analyse individual subjective experiences in this article is not a negation of the complexity and plurality of experiences of humanness, cultures and worldviews or an erosion of heterogenous experiences of 'otherness'.

Technology structures our lives at both macro and micro levels. World politics and the global economy exist through networked communication that collapses both space and time in the name of progress. We have laptops, tablets, fitbits and various other pieces of networked technology. We organise ourselves, privately and politically using complex and instantaneous forms of networked communication; email, virtual calendar reminders, notifications, text messages, photographs. Smart phones provide portable and affordable accessibility, tethering us to the world wide network in all but the most remote places. Forced to flee smart phones are a priority.

Classified by the World Bank in 2007 as a lower middle-income country, Syria is subject to this technological infrastructure. As refugees continue to make their way West they seek sim cards, Wi-Fi spots and power to charge their smartphones alongside more traditional forms of aid such as food, water, clothing and shelter. The use of this technology is not frivolous; smartphones are a survival tool. They are used to communicate with loved ones, to access trusted news sources in a familiar language, to research the immigration policies and procedures of countries ahead, for medical advice, the location of aid and to maintain contact with other refugees in transit, sharing information about the safest routes. GPS and Google maps are vital for navigation and, now available to all those with a smart phone, they are reducing the reliance on human traffickers. Refugees are using smart technology for a panoply of reasons. However, as Theresa Senft has noted, the ubiquitous rise of the selfie is economically and technologically tied to the global saturation of smartphones, specifically those equipped with a front facing camera; where there are smartphones there are selfies. In addition, the emergence of applications such as WhatsApp and Snapchat have positioned digital images, including selfies, as central to online communication.

The selfie requires no introduction; the practice of taking one's own photo and then sharing that image with others via social media has become embedded in to daily life with remarkable speed. In 2014 more than a billion selfies were posted to social media sites and the word was crowned the Oxford English Dictionary's word of the year. The estimate in 2015 was that in Britain alone we took 35 million selfies per month and globally up to 93 million selfies per day. As media scholar Liz Losh asserts "the selfie has become a truly transnational genre" (1).

Discourse in popular culture has been slow to move on from the initial impulse to pathologise selfies as an example of mental illness and narcissism. There has been a tendency to turn to poststructuralist modes of thought and apply the discourse of philosophers such as Jean Baudrillard and Guy Debord to read selfies as symptomatic of a hyper-real society that constantly mediates experience and commodifies it through specularisation. But selfie scholarship is burgeoning with nuanced and complex analyses that move beyond the notion of vanity or the accusation of fetishization. Trends in selfie research agendas include a visual culture approach that responds to images as representations to be read and

interpreted, or as visual signifiers of specific communities and ideologies. There is a strand of enquiry that considers selfies as a development in online self-representation, identity creation and image management that coincides with neo-individualism and such things as the emergence of micro-celebrity. However, there is also significant scholarly interest in the performative function of selfie taking. In 2015 Teresa Senft and Nancy Baym co-edited a special section of the *International Journal of Communication* entitled "Selfies". In the introduction to this section Senft and Baym had the inaugural task of creating a framework for understanding the selfie through which the interdisciplinary contributions to the issue could be brought into dialogue. In their own words, they laid the "groundwork for treating the selfie phenomenon with the nuanced attention is deserves" (1589). Their primary assertion was that the selfie is both "cultural artefact and social practice" (1589). In the same special section, communication and cultural theorist Paul Frosh asserts that a selfie is a "gestural image" and we "should not understand its aesthetics purely in visual terms" (1608). Similarly, Edgar Gomez Cruz and Helen Thornham have considered selfies as a socio-technical phenomenon, "a performative and mediatory practice" (6).

A selfie operates as a gesture that sends different messages to individuals, communities and audiences but in the first instance it conveys immediacy and co-presence. Selfies are more than representational images they constitute wider social, cultural, and media phenomena. If we take a holistic approach to the practice we can situate the phenomenon in a wider context of ritual and behavior and consider selfies in relation to 'worldviews' and meaning making. Moving beyond selfies as either representational or the output of intentional agential authoring, to consider the practice itself as "embedded in the concept of performativity" (Gomez Cruz and Thornham 6), foregrounds the social complexity and significance of selfie taking.

Maziad Aloush is a Syrian school teacher who led a band of approximately 20 refugees from Syria, through Turkey to Greece, then up through Macedonia and Serbia, then across into Hungary and then Austria, a path known as the West Balkan route (Cohen and Knefel). He documented his journey through selfies, posting real-time images to Instagram.

Judith Butler asserts that "some humans take their humanness for granted while others struggle to gain access to it […] some humans qualify as humans; some do not" ("Frames" 76). Refugees continue to be subject to an array of dehumanising linguistic descriptions such as swarm, swamp, flood, migrant and even cockroach (by the infamous British media personality, Katie Hopkins). Here language acts as a homogenising tool that erodes individual identities to frame refugees as an encroaching and overwhelming mass threat to borders, security and economy. I suggest that by virtue of the in-extractable 'self' in selfie, Aloush's images demonstrate a reclaiming of the individual as subject.

These images both visually and ideologically frame Aloush as an individual with a personal narrative. The literal and conceptual frames of these images collide and become mutually reinforcing. The constructed dramaturgical framing via the lens of his phone implicitly and performatively informs our interpretation of Aloush through multiple ideological frames of recognisability. Ultimately subjects are constituted through constructed norms, these selfies position Aloush inside the frame of progressive culture, technology and communication practices and are part of the performative reiteration of that frame.

Fig. 1. Aloush on the West Balkan Route

Here the foregrounding of Aloush's face renders the image instantly recognisable as a selfie. Holding the camera aloft, probably horizontally with two hands and looking up into it, the angle visibly attests to Aloush's participation in the composition of the image. Selfies possess an innate and unique agential looping gaze in which the photographer and object share the same subject position.

Choosing to only capture the top of his face in order to include those following in his path, Aloush asserts himself as both photographer and subject of the image; it's his choice to frame this place, at this moment, in this way. The composition of the image leads to our understanding of Aloush as leader of this group, we see where he has been (the position occupied by the person at the back) and the sense of motion implies his continued mobility. Frosh suggests that selfies connect the "bodies of individuals [and] their mobility through physical and informational spaces" (1608). The mobility communicated in this image mirrors the circulation of the image itself as it moves beyond the phone it was taken with to the various platforms from which it is consumed, liked, shared, commented on and appropriated.

Aloush's use of Instagram as a platform for sharing his selfie images signifies his continued participation in a culturally symbolic. He maintains his position and membership of an online, networked community despite his encounter with the trauma and horror of war and subsequent geographical displacement. From a TMT perspective it is increasingly important to maintain and defend the fragile, socially constructed 'anxiety buffer' in the face of danger when reminded of our own mortality and vulnerability. The atrocities of war, armed conflict between societies, the savagery and indeterminacy of violence threatens the order, predictability and permanency established by 'culture'. The internet is a shared culturally constructed space and through participation in the rituals, phenomena and practices associated with being a member of this space, Aloush asserts his value as a networked subject. His status as a refugee, someone in transit, does not negate his ability to fully participate in selfie practice. The image is instantly recognisable as self-shot, it has efficacy as a selfie and through it Aloush asserts his ability to achieve 'culturally prescribed standards of value' (Greenberg, Pyszczynski and Solomon 1991: 97). The selfie here is significant in ways that move beyond self - representation or the memorialisation of a specific moment in time, or even a means of communication. Participation in cultural practice(s) imbues the world with order, stability, predictability and permanence, it is the act itself that is the valuable currency rather than the image produced. Aloush was in possession of the technology, the power, access to the network, membership to and knowledge of the cultural practice and the freedom to participate; these elements come together to form a dialogue of power relations. The power dynamics implicit in this nuanced relationship between user and technology sit alongside the visual narrative of the selfie image. The image produced displays an agential looping gaze that transcends objectification, the embodied act of selfie taking functions as a symbol of cultural membership.

Drawing on Judith Butler, Jenna Brager analyses a group selfie that includes the Lebanese teenager Mohammed al-Chaar. He was killed moments after the image was taken by a car bomb. 16 year old al-Chaar posed for the selfie with a group of friends on a street in Beirut on Friday 27th December 2013. He can be

seen here second from the left wearing a red sweatshirt and looking up in to the camera, held by Omar Bekdash, in a typical teenage group selfie image. He was mortally wounded when the gold vehicle just behind the group exploded. Mohammed Chatah, ambassador to the United States and the likely target, was also killed in the attack perpetrated by the terrorist group Hezbollah in support of Bashar al-Assad and the Syrian regime. However, it was the death of al-Chaar that sparked viral social media support and an outpouring of sympathy and anger which gave rise to the hashtag #notamartyr. The English-Arabic hashtag campaign responded to the politicisation of civilian deaths in Lebanon and mobilised the practice of selfie taking (whilst holding a piece of paper bearing '#notamartyr') to assert "the authors right to live in Lebanon without dying for Lebanon, for the victims of violence to not be described as martyrs" (Brager 1661). Brager argues that "the practice of selfie-taking makes the third-world selfie taker legible as a 'grievable' subject for Western […] spectators" (1661). She asserts that this viral campaign was successful because it positioned participants as members of the same cultural practice as Western selfie takers. However, Brager's association of legibility with grievability is problematised when applied to refugees. Aloush's selfies seem to attest to "the familiar as the criterion by which a human life is grievable" (Butler, "Frames" 27), however the framing of the selfie process by British media and the appropriation of the practice (as opposed to the images) stands in contradiction to this. The image below depicts a group of male refugees celebrating their arrival on the Greek Island of Lesbos. Here, rather than relatable to Western media consumers, it is precisely through their participation in selfie culture that these refugees are framed as a threat to the West.

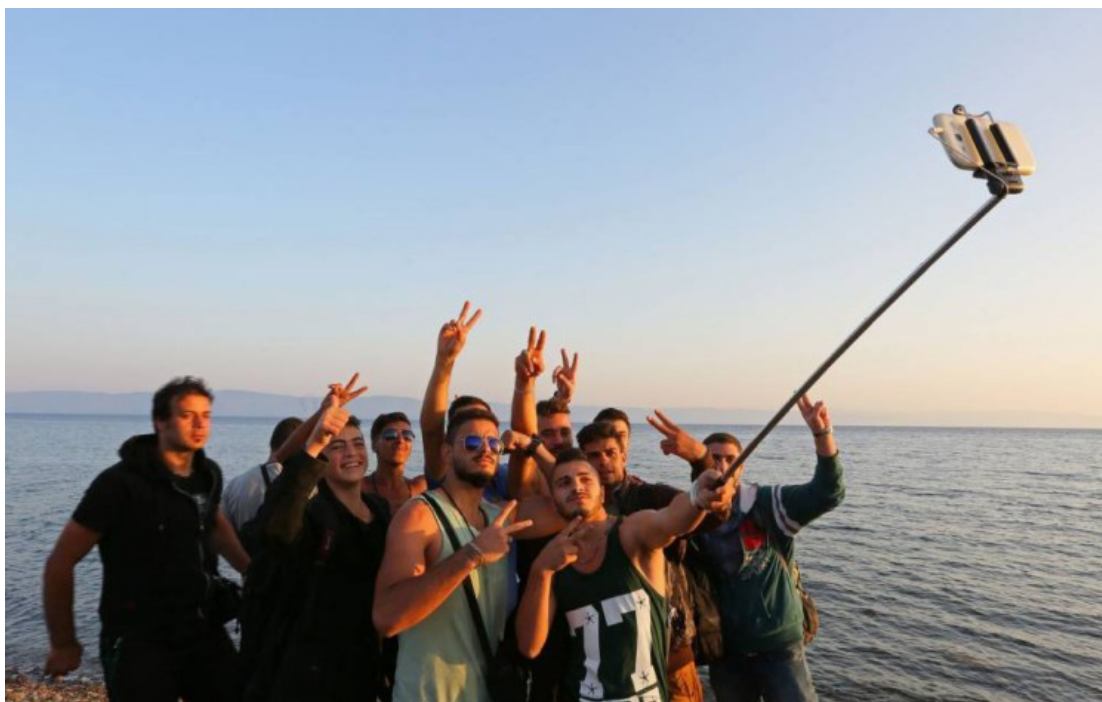Fig. 2. The selfie taken by Bekdash in December 2013.

Fig. 3. A group of young men posed for a selfie on Eftalou beach after reaching the island of Lesbos in a rubber boat from Turkey.

Both mainstream formal media reports and social network anti-immigration memes use images of refugees in the *process* of taking a selfie rather than a self - shot image. Mobilising scopic regimes that objectify and frame the subjects of the image, this compositional separation deploys the asymmetry of power relations between viewer and viewed. In these images the photographer is positioned outside of the frame in a traditional hierarchical subject / photographer relationship, a format that mirrors the Orient / Occident binary.

Edward Said suggested that "in discussions of the orient, the orient is all absence" (208) and these images attempt to remove the 'self' from these selfies. The concept 'to be framed' is complex but one understanding is 'to be set-up' to be affiliated and defined by an untruth. Publicly depicting a personal practice, these images frame refugees in a number of problematic ways. Generally, the images depict groups rather than individuals mobilising the rhetoric of mass threat discussed earlier. Furthermore, the shoreline acts as a semiotic signifier of a definitive border crossing which echoes the insidious notion of encroachment. Here refugees are considered through the frame of what Sara Ahmed (2008) terms the 'bogus'. Echoed by Rustom Barucha's suggestion that "the spectre of 'Muslim' haunts and infiltrates the language of terrorism in our time" (71), refugees are

branded as terrorists attempting to infiltrate our borders in order to aid or commit acts of violence. Terror attacks such as the atrocities committed in Paris on Friday 13th November 2015, the suicide bombings carried out in Belgium on the 22nd March 2016, the nightclub shootings in Orlando Florida on 12th June 2016 or the Bastille Day attack in Nice 14th July 2016 have served to further conflate the identification of Muslim / refugee / terrorist.

Fig. 4. Anti-immigration meme

The impossibility of identifying those masquerading from those genuinely in need of assistance denies Ahmed's 'bogus' a fixed referent. So, the fear and hatred engendered accumulates affective value through anticipation; subsequently scepticism and mistrust become justified in the name of protection. There is disapprobation over those who are considered without resources appearing with the accoutrements of privilege that again mobilises the notion of 'bogus'. Whilst the practice of selfie taking makes the 'Other' legible to the Western spectator, it is paradoxically, this legibility and 'likeness' that the accusation of 'bogus' adheres to. It is through this participation in a Western cultural practice that the identification of refugees as 'Other' is problematized, yet the charge of inauthenticity rushes in to bolster the East / West division. These images continue to polarise

West and 'Other' by positioning the ideological frames of selfie taker and genuine refugee as mutually exclusive.

James O'Malley, writing for *The Independent* online, provided a mainstream counter argument to the orientalist discourse surrounding the accusation of 'bogus' in the article "Surprised that Syrian refugees have smartphones? Sorry to break this to you, but you're an idiot. You don't need to be a white westerner to own a relatively cheap piece of technology" (O'Malley 2015). O' Malley focused on economics and the global progression of technology to address the absurdity of criticising the prevalence of smart technology amongst those displaced by the conflict in Syria. This is necessary counter rhetoric, but it foregrounds the technology rather than the practice of selfie taking as a performative phenomenon and gestural action.

A TMT perspective can be applied to the negative reception of these images by the right-wing West in responses typified by the twitter hashtag #refugeesNOTwelcome. In one of the posts to this hashtag two images are shown side by side, in one a naked starving African child stands emaciated in the red dust of a migrant camp and the other shows two men being searched and detained by customs officials at a dockside. The text beneath the child reads 'this is a real refugee' whilst the caption below the men pronounces 'these are not these are soldiers of Islam' followed by 'don't let the media fool you'. The image of the child is familiar to Western audiences from charity campaigns and television appeals such as comic relief. Pictures like it form the rhetoric that implies that these images of starvation and destitution constitute the 'real' suffering of others, "the homogenizing imagery […] that helps create sufficient distance" (Walker Rettberg & Gajjala 180) between the third world and the privileged.

TMT suggests that when self-esteem is threatened individuals attempt to posit a distance between groups that they belong to and groups that they do not. There is a clear geographical, economic and cultural distance between Europeans and those African refugees in the red dust camps. Yet migrants who look and dress like Westerners present the reality of mortality salience without critical distance. The Western 'anxiety buffer' is threatened by those that look like *us*, participating in a practice that *we* subscribe to, that renders an image of place that looks like *here*. Western spectators meet the refugee selfie taker in a performative space that iterates sameness as opposed to difference. Selfies are in and of themselves "a re-enactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established" (Butler, "Gender" 191), they are part of our symbolic socio-cultural construction. This sense of re-enactment and re-experiencing is critical to TMT as it leads to the establishment and legitimisation of cultural worldview.

Migrants with smart technology who participate in online culturally symbolic rituals, phenomena and communication practices thus locate themselves as part of the same cultural worldviews as Europeans and Americans thereby troubling the 'heroism' of the West. The images of refugees that do not coincide with

our understanding of 'poor' or 'needy' destabilise the narcissistic survival mechanism that relegates trauma to the realm of the other.

Ariella Azoulay asserts "there is nothing inherent to the technology of photography that creates discriminatory or oppressive situations for different populations" (127). Passivity and agency are always a question of context, a photo in and of itself is neither empowering nor disempowering. Meaning is created through the complex relationship between platform, framing, symbolism and ideology. The interpretation of an image is heavily influenced by its literal framing in specific contexts. This leads to a kaleidoscopic ascription of ideological frames, determined by those in control of the environment in which the images are circulated.

Frames are iterative, they necessarily break and are remade with each reproduction and therein lies their "vulnerability to reversal, even to critical instrumentalisation" (Butler, "Frames" 10). An application of TMT can elucidate the ontologically performative value of the selfie phenomenon. The practice of taking one's own photo and sharing that image via social media does not represent subjective identity and cultural membership but actively constructs it through the act of participation. This analysis is part of a reversing and instrumentalising process, a necessary breaking and re-framing of these images so as to invoke new ways of reading, recognising and responding.

The subjective analysis in this paper is inseparable from my position of white privilege and acknowledging this does not automatically mean that the analysis transcends the bind of canonical otherness. This is not a mere logocentricism, but a symptom of my own (and everyone else's) position inside, outside, betwixt and between multiple frames of conception. I have attempted to discuss selfies from a range of perspectives considering the technology required, the images produced and the politics that structure authorship and agency. However, I have also striven to foreground selfies as a performative, "socio-technical phenomenon" (Gomez Cruz & Thornham 6). I propose that selfies are a fundamental part of popular culture, implicitly tied to self-esteem, with significant performative and political potential.

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