Semiotics of Humanitarian Photography

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Abstract

Communication campaigns by major organizations in the field of development have been heavily dependent on humanitarian photography to motivate and attract donors. This genre of photography serves its purpose by informing, surprising and attracting the attention of a broad audience. It captures real life and real problems people in need have to deal with in remote areas of the world. This paper delves into the use of visual semiotics in the context of humanitarian photography and for the purpose of fundraising by case study research of recent communication campaigns as implemented by major players in the field such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Global Fund to Fights AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, Doctors without Border, CARE and Save the Children. The purpose is to identify key issues which allow for the elicitation of a sign framework specific to the fundraising genre and its idiosyncratic use of visual signs in photography based on a broad theoretical basis of semiotics. The analysis focuses on the content and methods of signification of photography in each case study. The effectiveness of humanitarian photography and important aspects of its function is discussed in the scope of its use as a communication medium for development.
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Introduction

The world is not a fair place for everybody. Not everybody has the same access to food, medication and basic human treatment. In fact, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) of the United Nations, more than 1.3 billion people live with under 1.25 $ per day and almost 1 billion people are chronically hungry (OCHA, 2012) without counting the millions of people suffering from HIV and lacking basic access to medication and human dignity. Development is not an easy or cheap business. On the contrary, it is highly important, it costs a lot and the contribution of private actors plays a significant role in funding development actions. According to OCHA from 17.1 billion dollars in humanitarian aid in 2011 4.6 billion came from private donors and 12.5 billion from governments. This paper will specifically examine the semiotics of related communication campaigns for mobilising private donors.

Fundraising activities today make an extensive use of the power of the image to motivate people and ask them to participate financially in development efforts. The still image, the photograph, staged or not, makes a moment in time immortal and infinitely reusable for creating emotions, doubts, questions and ultimately, as in our case, for motivating. The online version of fundraising activities is gradually becoming a dominant substitute of traditional fundraising and the role of digital photography as a cost-effective and direct medium for provision of content to an extensive Internet audience cannot be neglected. The easiness of replication and distribution of photographic messages in digital form through social networks and web 2.0 infrastructures constitutes photography and furthermore, video, instruments of mass participatory communication.

Photography can emotionally affect people depending on how it is used. This use could take many forms such as, for example, shocking the viewers (Sontag, 2003) in the form of war photography or stimulating their fantasies in the form of pornography. One of the main characteristics of photography as a medium is the underlying value of “credibility” and “authority” it carries. Sometimes we are predominantly disposed to believe that the content of a photograph has taken place even if we were not present at the specific point in time and space. This is in fact the reason why photography can be used as “hard” evidence in legal instances. This is also the reason why the police believe who we are by showing our identification document bearing a face photo. In contrast to another types of visual media such as painting, where the creator can have the final word on the representation of reality (or even fantasy) on the canvas, we are inclined to accept that photography just represents reality in its finest detail without the artistic influence of the photographer. Sometimes, however, we are ready to challenge the belief that the mechanical imprint of reality, which photography is based on, cannot be tampered with. In many cases in Sontag’s work on war photography there was no reality depicted in the photos but instead a “modified” version of reality based on the photographer’s “artistic” view. It is here where the discussion about the ethical issues in “staged” photography is born since something which is not true appears as such due to the "authoritative" power of photography. It is this power which can be also used for malicious purposes, can mislead the audience and can be the basic element of propaganda and fanaticism.
Research Question

This paper will investigate the use of photography in a number of humanitarian campaigns under the lens of semiotic analysis. It is the study of signs contained in an image in its essence which can be beneficial in understanding the process of representation and meaning involved in communication. This paper addresses the composition of photographs used and their semiotic extensions in order to identify common concepts and expressions. A number of five case studies selected from recent fundraising campaigns are analysed using the theoretical concepts of semiotics in view of identifying common patterns in the way which modern communicators use photography and semiotics to convey the fundraising message and motivate for action. This analysis will not focus on technicalities of photography (how lines are used, framing, style and further characteristics). The purpose is to identify possible common selections of subjects, use of linguistic messages and logos, the concept of "misery saturation" and other. This paper is not about technicalities of photography as such.

Background

The field of semiotics or the study of the science of signs has emerged from the field of linguistics and is based on the work of pioneers such as the American philosopher Charles S. Peirce (1839 - 1914) and the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857 - 1913). They both addressed the issue of objects (real or mental representations), the signs which refer to them and the production of meaning based on sign structures and paradigms. The term semiotics derives from the Greek word for sign ("semeion" - σημείο) which refers to "what stands to someone for something in some respect or capacity" (Cobley, 1999). What is important, however, is not only the sign itself but the relations between signs in a specific context. It is the structure of signs which produces meaning in the same way a set of structured words can create a meaningful text.

As one of the founding fathers of semiotics Saussure proposed a simple model of the concept of a sign which considered the sign as an inseparable mental instance of a signified and a signifier (Saussure, 1914). The signifier is the actual material form of the sign which has as a result the cognitive representation of the meaning of the sign. Following Saussure’s example the word “dog” in its spoken (structured sound image) or written form (structured written characters) is the signifier which stands for the signified concept of the animal. A sign, therefore, can be considered as a dyadic concept formed by the signifier and signified which are related in an arbitrary fashion as defined by social convention. This (signifier/signified) dyad produces meaning by its difference from the other signs in the context of use. In order to use signs for communication we have to acquire the necessary knowledge about the community rules and syntax which govern their “appropriate” and “legitimate” use. Furthermore, the abstract relation of a signifier to its signified can change over time adding a diachronic dimension to the concept of signification.
Peirce, on the other side, proposed a different model for defining the concept of a sign and elaborated a triadic theory. A sign according to Peirce (1894) consists of the "representamen" (the sign itself) referring to an "object" by means of an "interpretant". In other words, a sign is a "representamen" which stands for an "object" in some capacity which is the mental effect or result of this signification. The ability of the "interpretant" or the mental image of a sign to stand for a further "representamen" can lead to the production a further sign triad (which itself can be extended in the same way). This chain of infinite associations generated by a sign triad is the process of "unlimited semiosis" (Cobley, 1999). Furthermore, according to Peirce, signs can be classified according to the relation between the "representamen" and the "object". He categorized the signs whose "representamen" physically resembles the "object" as "icons", those whose "representamen" has a causal relationship with the "object" as "indexes" and the ones whose relation between the "representamen" and the "object" is abstract and conventionally defined as "symbols" (Cobley, 1999, p.33).

In the world of signs and their signification process the keyword “structure” defines an extensive area and school of thought named as “structuralism”. This theoretical approach places elements of culture in a larger framework of meaning and cultural context which has been defined by society. The meaning of signs in each society is subsequently defined by the inter-relation between the signs themselves in the cultural context in which they appear. For example, the bowing as an official way of interpersonal greeting in many Asian countries has the same use as a body language sign as the handshake in Europe (it stands for the same object). It is the context which assigns meaning to this sign which would be otherwise difficult to be understood by somebody in Europe who has never encountered before this way of salutation.

An important characteristic of the process of communication has been demonstrated in the field of technological studies in the model proposed by Shannon and Weaver (Shannon et. al., 1949). It is the process of encoding and decoding a message in order to become capable of passing through the medium used for communication. Therefore, a code is needed in the form of a structured and abstract set of rules and concepts which allows for a message to be encoded and transmitted to the receiver. This is what Saussure (1916) was referring to in his linguistics work by defining the “langue” and “parole”. The “langue” is the official set of rules or templates which stand for the official language/code whereas the “parole” is an instance of the “langue” which is created for the specific moment and communication need. If someone has knowledge of the “langue” (the code) then he is able to decode the transmitted message.

This model has the advantage of been a simplified information transport paradigm and its application in media and communication studies would not be of great value. It lacks many basic characteristics of human communication which include the concepts of relationship between sender and receiver. It considers the receiver as a passive receiver of information ignoring the presence of feedback or other interaction between sender and receiver. Furthermore, it does not allow for the concept of the dynamic change of the codes and participant through time. The most important, it does not take into account the context of the participants. The interpretation of the message in human communication is heavily dependent on the historical, social and cultural context of the participants and cannot be considered as a simple information exchange as in the
case of machine to machine communication. Generally, this model is a technical model which focuses on the efficient transport of information as content and not meaning. According to Shannon (1949) himself "...the semantic aspects of communication are irrelevant to the engineering problem".

The reason why we refer to this model in the case of media studies is to extend on the concept of "noise". It is important for successful communication not only to use the same encoding schemes but to also have a low level of "noise". This "social noise" can stand for the different cultural and contextual situations which can interfere in the process of signification and subsequently introduce ambiguity. The variety of symbolic signification in a society can also contribute to increased levels of "social noise" which can impede efficient communication. It could be also argued that the level of "social noise" varies between different communities and time periods.

We encounter in some societies richer encoding schemes that allow for reduction of "noise" such as the Eskimo people, for example, who have a very large number of words for describing snow compared to Africans. It is indeed interesting to notice these asymmetries in the development of languages dictated by the need to reduce "noise" in the communication process by allowing communication processes to develop based on the specific needs of a society. Therefore, one would expect an increased level of "social noise" in communication between people belonging to different communities if there is an extended adaptation and specialization of their language in different domains. Some languages can have a competitive advantage in information content in specific domains than other. Speakers of different languages can communicate through the process of translation. However, the communication efficiency of this process is usually lower than the communication between speakers of the same language. In other words, it often occurs that there is no translation equivalent between two languages and the closest match is selected. Therefore, "noise" is introduced in the process due to the cultural differences enveloping the use of each language and this can be further extended in the case of a single language which varies according to local cultural conditions. Language as a structural framework evolves through time and exists in a cultural context.

Body language is an excellent example of a structured language we use in everyday life without even noticing. When people communicate they convey much more information by their gestures, body postures and facial expressions than actually by verbal cues. In fact, most of communication is achieved in a non-verbal structure by combination of different body signs. This paper will address the use of another type of language, the photographic language, which initially seems to have a less clearly structured form than, for example, a written text. However, this “analogic” language of photography compared to “digital” languages such as written text or music notes can have higher information carrier capacity than “digital”. It is broadly known that an “image stands for a thousand words”.

A photograph, the analogic representation of reality, compared to a text describing it, the digital version of the same reality, has an advantage over the information content which it can carry. Moreover, one could argue that in comparison to speech or text, a visual signifier is more
precise and can allow for communication even when there is no word defined to describe its signified. However, this interpretation does not have a fixed meaning for every reader. The differences in domain knowledge in a society can render visual signs meaningful only for some, not for all. An example would be the interpretation of the "bindi" in "Access to Life". This would not be even considered a sign by a large part of people lacking the domain knowledge - they would probably consider it a scar or something similar. For the ones who would, indeed, consider it a sign then again not all interpret it in the same manner since, as a sign of tradition, the signification could vary from one community to another. The variety of interpretations constitutes "noise" in the communication process since different cultural parameters can alter the intended meaning for the recipient. Furthermore, the asynchronous character of photography (one can view a photograph taken more than 100 years ago) adds a temporal feature to the concept of "social noise". The purpose and scope of what the photographer captured some time ago were both bound to the contemporary social context. The message seems to "age" during its transmission and it may be difficult for the reader of today to interpret it because he may lack the historical knowledge of the context at the creation of the message. The truth is, though, that the content of the message does not change - it is the social context which changes and renders the interpretation of the message different.

According to Barthes (1977) a photograph is the perfect “analogon” of reality and it can represent reality as such within the limits of transformation from a three-dimensional space down to two dimensions and further reductions in size, proportions and colour. Any effort applied to describe this analogue form of reality using a digital code (for example language) would not be precise since the concept of mapping the analogue world in digital structures would lead to loss of information. Moreover, it seems that there is no code which intervenes in the encoding of a photograph like in other imitative arts such as, for example, painting - a photograph is simply a mechanical copy of reality in space and time. However, this can be challenged if a photograph is "set up" and a "fake" reality is depicted instead. The intervention of the photographer can give a whole new meaning to a photograph since he has the option to decide on the composition, position of the objects from a viewing angle, perspective or lighting. The way a photographer chooses the proper lens, shutter time and positioning of the camera appears similar to the selection of the proper brush and colour by a painter. In fact, the mechanical reproduction of reality gives a new meaning to reality itself. Walter Benjamin (1938) compared the painter to the cameraman as the magician to the surgeon according to their distance from reality. A painter like a magician keeps a distance from reality and can see the whole picture. A cameraman with the help of technology can penetrate reality like a surgeon and approach it from many different aspects.

Barthes suggested that the reading of a photograph and the creation of meaning depends on a series of processes related to the historical and social context. A photograph and the objects depicted in it can create a second level of meaning by connotation. The value of a photograph is hidden in the connotations it can generate for its viewers based on their experience. A photograph may look the same to everybody on a denotation level. People will see and will describe the same things in an image but different meaning is created for them on the connotation level depending on their personal cultural and social experience. A second meaning
can be "coded" in the image and "imposed" to the reader. Barthes argued that it is difficult to separate the denotative and connotative part of the photographic message.

The analysis of visual signs is not an easy task. Photography carries messages in a highly analogic code (Crow, 2010, p. 71) in contrast to text which is based on digital encoding. The visual signification in photos compared to other types of images (paintings, cartoons and other) has a highly iconic nature - the sign vehicle resembles the object to be communicated (Peirce, 1894). Photography could be considered as one of the most transparent media and it can be argued that it is not only the high iconicity but also the high indexicality which could be attributed as a core property of this method of reality reproduction. In other words, a photograph could stand as a sign which not only resembles reality (what was in front of the camera lens at the time when the snapshot was taken) but it is also an index which confirms that the object or place photographed actually existed. Like footprints on a beach which show that somebody has been there and has walked on the beach before, a photo could show that something existed before and this indexical property has been predominant in analogic photography as indisputable evidence of reality.

However, even though photography stands for the most "honest" medium which represents reality "untouched" by the photographer, it is surely not. The techniques of photomontage and the creation of photographs mixing reality and imagination exist since the advent of photography. Their use in the field of propaganda especially during the last world war was extensive. Modern digital techniques have simplified today the creation of imaginary photography. Digital photography and computer graphics have made it difficult to be sure if what is shown in a digital photograph is true or constructed. Today it could be that there are photographs with high iconicity and no indexicality at all - there can be photographs that are not photographs at all as well as digital actors who do not exist elsewhere than the creator's imagination.

Even without manipulating a photo the photographer can intervene in the content of the message conveyed by "staging" a photo. This photo would seem real but, in fact, it would represent a "fake" reality. The most famous example is Robert Capa's falling soldier taken in 1936. It captures a moment during the Spanish Civil War when a republican soldier falls down after being shot. There has been considerable debate whether this is a real or a "staged" photograph. For more than 75 years this argument still creates concern about the issue of authenticity in photography. The ethical implications of showing a modified reality has led to the inclusion of safeguards in the code of ethics of many professional societies related to photojournalism. The National Press Photographers Association (USA) in its code of ethics states "...Do not manipulate images or add or alter sound in any way that can mislead or misrepresent subjects..." (NPPA, 2012). Similarly in the code of ethics of the Associated Press: "...AP photos must always tell the truth...we do not stage, pose or re-enact events...we do not alter or digitally manipulate the content of a photograph in any way..." (The Associated Press, 2013). Humanitarian photography, authentic or not, has a significant impact and the following chapter focuses on its specific use.
Case Studies

The following communication campaigns address a range of humanitarian issues and have been recently implemented by major humanitarian organizations worldwide. The photographs were retrieved from the Internet in the form of web banners or posters and are included in the annex of this paper.

Access to Life (The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, Switzerland)

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria is an international humanitarian financing organization based in Geneva, Switzerland, with the mission to attract resources from private and public donors and finance projects for the prevention and treatment of AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Since its establishment in January 2002 the Global Fund has committed more than $ 22.9 billion in support of more than 1000 projects in 151 countries (The Global Fund, 2013). The organization has recently launched a campaign which includes selected photographs taken in the field. This campaign includes photographs promoting the positive effects of the ARV (antiretroviral) medication on HIV patients. This campaign is based on a “before - after” antithesis paradigm in which the photographs are used to show the positive effects of medication and the improvement of the lives of patients. There is a large set of photos and this paper will address a representative sample.

There are two photographs included in the "Access to Life" campaign which show a woman initially lying on a bed and then the same woman outside in the street. Without any text on the picture it is rather difficult for the reader to understand what the problem is or what these photos are supposed to show. However, even if he is not aware of the title of the photos, he can notice that the woman lying on the bed comes from somewhere in India even if he has never been there because of the physical characteristics of the woman and the “bindi” (the decorative spot on the forehead) which is a traditional religious decoration of the forehead usually encountered in this area. It is important to notice that this specific sign could not be interpreted without the necessary knowledge of the local context in India. Furthermore, few of us would actually comprehend the significance of the specific colour of the “bindi” even if we knew what it is. In the “before” image it has a dark colour (negative) whereas in the “after” image it is red (positive). The actual meaning of the colour requires deeper knowledge of the local culture and tradition.

Apart from the notion of geographical location one could use the term of “social” location to describe the social context embedded in the picture. We can notice that the woman is alone, lying on the bed in a dark room with no one else present around her. The absence of the others stands for a “zero” sign (Sebeok, 2001, p.40) which implicitly signifies the isolation and social exclusion. However, the reader can implicitly interpret again her isolation without knowing that the woman suffers from HIV or another type of disease. The dark walls of the room constitute a strong sign of her isolation. This aligns syntagmatically with the implicitly observed lack of people and society interest for the patient. In contrast to the "before", the "after" photograph shows the same woman walking outside in a crowded public street together with another
woman, probably a friend. There is no isolation anymore and she is shown to have a normal public life.

What is common between the “before” and “after” images is the woman who is shown to lie on a bed looking away from the photographer and sad in the "before" picture while in the “after” picture she looks and smiles back to the photographer expressing her happiness. It is important to focus on the signification of the bed as a sign. The woman lying on the bed on a connotation level signifies sickness, weakness and lack of energy. How do we know that this woman is sick? There is nothing which states this, no related text or anything which could assist in the interpretation of the sign. It is the pose, however, (Barthes, 1977) of the woman lying there awake which carries the meaning. She is awake on the bed and looks away avoiding eye contact. Her pose signifies that something is wrong and she is not simply sleeping but she can be sick and she may suffer, in contrast to her joyful appearance in the “after” photo. However, in order to be complete, it is important to refer to the significance of the context which “prepares” the reader. Since we encounter this photo in an online communication campaign against HIV, we already have a clue about what these photos are about.

The lighting and colours in the photo can be also considered signs of substantial value. The dark “before” image and the luminous “after” one align to the contrast of night and day, of sickness and health, of death and life which are all connotations generated by the metaphoric use of lighting in photography (Crow, 2010, p.42). The woman wears clothes of the same colour (purple) in the “before” and “after” photographs which can be probably chosen in order to show the continuity between them. In other words, it is the same person we are talking about and the same coloured clothes emphasize this fact and allow us to focus in parallel on her face and body structure. The connoted message of these photographs is that the woman (which is the only common object between the two photos) has remained the same but everything else has changed. She is healthy now, full of life and accepted by the society. She can have a normal life like the other healthy people and she is able now to look in peoples’ eyes with human dignity and self-confidence.

The face of the woman is clearly visible in both photos. Faces, as visual elements, are one of the most attractive elements in photography. The eyes and the mouth especially, as strong carriers of the psychological condition of a person, attract the eye first. Her body covers a large area of the image in a horizontal format and a large area of the background is hidden. In her static, motionless condition she turns to the light source (supposedly a window to the outside world - her isolation is evident). It is a simple scene with colours which contrast the background to the foreground (purple dress - dark walls).

In the second frame one should notice the motion and liveliness introduced in her life. The blur but bright city background introduces many motion vectors, for example, the motorcycle, the road markings, her and her friend walking down the street. The rule of two thirds (an image "should" be divided in nine parts by two horizontal and two vertical lines placing the important objects along these lines) is applied - there is nothing at the centre of the frame and the two
women are positioned adherent to the two thirds principle. Visual weight has also been given to
the two women since they cover most of the frame.

When the woman looks back at the photographer without avoiding his presence, as in the first
photo, her body language captured by the lens is a “coded iconic message” (Barthes, 1977).
The photographer participates implicitly in the event (Sontag, 1973), one can feel that the
woman is aware of the photographer’s presence in both photos and her interaction with him is
interpreted in terms of body language code. It would be nice to know what this woman has to
say but photography is not able to capture this. It is the nature of the medium which allows for
loss of information of the real event but then again the lack of verbal communication allows for
flexibility of interpretation. The “non-coded iconic message”, which according to Barthes is
simply what the photo contains, cannot be easily separated from what the photo stands for. It is
the coding structure which provides semiotic value to the objects and presents this woman as
sick, weak and unhappy without any textual (linguistic message) explanation attached.

The "before - after" paradigm has been extensively used in the field of marketing. Various
products related to diet supplements, plastic surgery or other similar categories have been
advertised in this way presenting the situation “before” and “after” the use of a product. It is also
of significant importance to note that usually the two photos describing the situation evolve from
left to write following the way of text reading in the western world. This is to further intensify the
causal relationship implied by the sequence of photos. It is the product or, in our case, the ARV
medication which has changed the life of the woman. She was sick and unhappy "before" but
she is happy "after”.

Candies for the Pain of the Other (Médecins Sans Frontières, Greece)

The Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) is a French humanitarian non-
governmental organization with headquarters based in Geneva, Switzerland, which was
established in 1971 by a group of French doctors and journalists who believed that the right for
medical care was above any kind of discrimination as well as national borders. The organization
is funded by mainly private and public donors and provides medical care and support to people
in more than 60 countries. Its internal structure comprises of 5 associations or operational
centres in Amsterdam, Barcelona-Athens, Brussels, Paris and Geneva (Médecins Sans
Frontières, 2013).

After the success of the Spanish department, the Greek Department of MSF launched a
fundraising campaign with the message “Candies for the Pain of the Other” (translated in
English of “Pastilies gia ton Pono tou Allou” - “Παστίλιες για τον πόνο του άλλου”). The term
candies used here is the closest translation for the term “Pastilies” which is a kind of medical
candies (medicine used for sore throat, for example, without medical prescription) in a "soft"
medical capacity. The similarity of this title with the title of Susan Sontag’s book “Regarding the
Pain of Others” is noticeable.
This fundraising action has as a business model the promotion of packets of “pastilies” from the sales of which an amount is contributed to finance the activities of the Médecins Sans Frontières (to be precise a box costs 1.60 € and from this amount 1.00 € is donated to MSF). The MSF department has created a series of visual communication videos for this purpose and images which can be found at their thematic website included in the annex. This series includes videos showing Greek celebrities (including the Spanish actor Javier Bardem as guest star) who promote the concept of helping the others by purchasing a box of "pastilies".

We will focus our analysis on the image which shows a boy of a young age staring at the photographer with a sad look on his face which is shown in black and white colour and occupies the half right of the image. The other part of the image shows a box in red colour with the motto text of the campaign in Greek (“Παστίλιες για τον πόνο του άλλου” - “Candies for the pain of the other”) in white bold characters. The logo of the MSF is also visible on the box. The motto of the campaign is again repeated in red colour on the background and an explanation in Greek (“A simple way to help the ones in need. Ask them from your pharmacy”) follows. A final piece of information present on the photograph is the thematic website location and three icons related to social networking functions.

What is evident in this case is that there is no “before” - “after” paradigm present but only a unique picture. However, the antithesis of the problem and its solution is evident by showing a sad boy (the facial expression constitutes non-verbal communication and a strong sign of emotional status). A smile, as body language, conveys meaning and its interpretation seems to be similar in all cultures. A smile, or the lack of it which constitutes a “zero” sign (Sebeok, 2001, p.40), does not have to be motivated (Crow, 2010) in order to be understood in a specific context. These “primitive” signs and their global meaning can have strong impact. The view of the sad boy calls for feelings of sympathy and can motivate for action. The very young age of the boy emphasizes the need to help since a child at this age requires somebody to take care of it in a paternal/maternal capacity. Which mother or father (having or not children at this age) would not be emotionally affected by this picture?

The black and white colour coding used by the photographer is also a sign. Black and white photography adds a nostalgic and dramatic tone to the subject with its simplicity in form and abstraction. The boy’s face is an iconic sign but not exactly. It is in black and white so it is not an identical representation of reality. It does not state but it suggests the interpretation of a boy being unhappy. Moreover, the use of black and white attracts the viewer to focus on the content by removing the colour noise. In other words, the use of monochromatic imaging simplifies and enhances the value of the sign. It is evident here that the use of strong red colour for the box of “pastilies” in contrast to the black and white for the child creates emphasis. It is the combination of the two colour signs which places the reader between the problem (“a boy in pain and distress” - black and white) and the solution (“the box of pastilies” - red). The use of red colour is not random. Red stands for a broadly accepted sign of danger, alert, pain and creates medical connotations since red is the colour of blood in most of cultures.
The image follows the rule of two thirds and brings balance from left to right by presenting the "solution" first (red box and linguistic message) to the "problem", the boy whose face fills the whole right part of the image. The lighting for the boy creates shadows around the eyes which look from a downward position to the reader. This is an important signifier of the need for paternal/maternal love and affection. All this on a monochromatic background easily ignored while the focus of the reader is captured by the two main objects, boy and message.

A characteristic which bears this image is the use of text which assists the reader into "guided" connotations. The text on the image is an example of the parallel use of analogue codes, the iconic representation of the boy and the medicine box, together with digital codes such as a written text message (in Greek). The cultural and contextual specificity of this digital code or language is clearly demonstrated here since readers who do not understand the code used (Greek language) could not decipher the meaning of the picture. They would understand, however, that this is an alphabet and not random white marks on a red background.

The text on the image constitutes a "parasitic" message (Barthes, 1977). It guides the reader and provides a reference point for the interpretation of the image. Barthes suggested that the function of text caption on a photograph can take two forms. In his work “The Rhetoric of the Image” (1964), Barthes argues that the linguistic message contained in the well-known Panzani advertisement allows the viewer to fix on the desired meaning, guides his interpretation and shows what the photograph is actually about. This role of the linguistic message has been identified by Barthes as the “anchorage”. Text on an image can also function as "relay" (Crow, 2010) being complementary to the image and bearing meaning which cannot be found in it. The linguistic message in Greek answers to the question of “what is this box” or “what does this box contain”. The size and shape of the box create multiple connotations for the viewer. Moreover, the logo of MSF on the box associates the reader with the idea of a medication pack, a pack of pills which one can buy from the pharmacy. This is familiar from the social context of the use of medication against disease and pain (pain itself is a sign or, better, a symptom, according to the ancient Greeks). What is interesting, however, is the linguistic message which explains that the box contains medication for the pain of the others. The use of a metaphor by the creator of the message and the indexicality of the box as a sign of relief of pain (medication) carry the meaning of how valuable the participation of each private donor can be. In the same way someone can buy medicine to relieve his own pain, he can also relieve the pain of the others. It is the boy in black and white who is both an "index" (there are many more children suffering) and an "icon" (they look like him) of the “others”.

Special attention should be given to the use of the MSF logo on the box. A logo is a sign easily recognizable, is associated with a brand and carries the connotation of quality and standard. It is a motivated sign which means that the reader needs some previous experience in order to assert its significance. The MSF logo will confirm to the donors, who already have knowledge of the humanitarian field and are acquainted with Médecins Sans Frontières, that this campaign is sponsored by a reliable, accountable and well-respected humanitarian organization.
Walk in Her Shoes (CARE, UK)

CARE stands for Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere and is an international humanitarian relief agency established in 1945. It operates as a confederation of twelve national members and two affiliate members. Every member has the status of a non-governmental organization in the respective country. CARE operates in 84 countries supporting more than 1000 humanitarian projects against poverty and delivering emergency humanitarian relief (CARE International, 2013).

On the website of the UK member of CARE we come across a photograph of the "Walk in Her Shoes" campaign. This campaign is about the everyday life of women in the developing world and this photograph shows that they have to walk long distances in order to secure water (we would say "fresh" water here but this would be a wrong “semiosis” for a reader coming from a developed country) for their families. The photo available in the annex is part of a collection which covers different aspects of the campaign.

It is a normal sunny day full of light somewhere in Africa where this woman lives. She is on her way to somewhere on a road, possibly a road for vehicles, carrying a big container on her back and looks back to the photographer. At the left side of the picture we can read the name of the campaign in bold capital letters "Walk in Her Shoes" together with the logo of CARE International. The “o” character in “Shoes” is replaced by the sign/symbol of a human footprint.

What is the purpose of this photograph? There have been many photographs about the extreme poverty, famine and suffering which people have to endure in these remote areas of the world. As Sontag (2003) observes, the exposure of the reader in an increasing amount of images of suffering “hardens” them against pain and misery. The more pictures people get to see of pain and suffering the more indifferent they become. It requires much more shocking subjects to attract their attention and feed their taboo voyeurism. They can get satisfaction from the safety and convenience they feel when they encounter pain and suffering which is not present in their everyday world but exists far away in the remote, under-developed areas.

Only few people would find this photo shocking at the same level as war photography. Here the suffering of people is implicitly denoted. There is a woman who carries an oversized container and walks on a road somewhere in Africa. The landscape defines the local context - somewhere in Africa under the sunny landscape on a road to somewhere. The woman is dressed with local clothes and looks back at the camera having a desperate, tired and surprised look. It is difficult to establish the age of this woman but she has wrinkles on her forehead probably as a result of her daily walk under the bright sun. No other information is given about the age of the woman (although we know from the text surrounding the photo that she is a girl of only 14 years of age). Therefore, it would be semiotically valuable to include the name and the age of this girl in the photo without the need to go through the context.

The format of the image is horizontal. It forms a panorama in an attempt to express the vastness of the surround environment and the concept of great distance. The woman appears
not in the middle of the frame but in perspective to the never-ending road which fills up the frame. The eye follows the horizontal flow of the frame and encounters the body of the woman heading to the same direction. The road serves as a leading line for the eye to follow and bends just before it disappears in the background. The perspective used allows for space for the woman to move forward.

This photo can attract the reader’s attention not through shocking but through specific localization and visualisation of the problems and suffering of everyday life of people in poverty. We also need water in our everyday life but it is easy for us to have access to clean water in our homes. It is not the same, however, for this woman who has to walk a long distance and carry water in a container. The emphasis exists in the length of the road which is probably made for vehicles. We do not know where it leads to when it disappears in the background of the photo but we know that it is long. This woman has to walk a lot back to her family since the lack of other people, animals, cars or any buildings ("zero" sign in semiotics) shows that she seems to be in the middle of nowhere. Her body faces the long road and only her head turns to the direction of the photographer to acknowledge his (and ours) presence. The implied motion attributes a temporal dimension to the long and strenuous walk. The road in the background literally fills the whole frame with the sky appearing only at the top of the image and this perspective attempts to connote the substantial length of the road back home. Moreover, it is easy to notice the lack of emphasis in the signs which denote the conditions under which this woman has to transport water. She probably needs to do this under extreme heat and sunlight something which is understated in the photo (we can see some vegetation and the landscape does not look very dry). Furthermore, the feet of this woman are not shown, we do not know if she walks barefooted or she wears shoes. Is this done deliberately in order to allow for a flexible interpretation?

The water container signifies by its size and type. The size of the container stands for an unmotivated sign - it is natural knowledge that something of a bigger size is also heavier. It does not require any cultural or contextual knowledge to interpret this and the antithetic combination of a fragile, weak woman carrying a heavy container strapped on her back over a long distance is the "coded iconic message" of the photo. Instead of shocking, this campaign operates on the level of compassion and admiration of the strength and dignity of these people in need. The change in the mind-set here shows that there is an opportunity for fundraising campaigns to be based not only on the pity for the unlucky, which, like war photography, has diminishing impact (something like the law of diminishing returns in economy), but on their consideration as equal human beings struggling under difficult conditions in remote harsh areas. By implicitly comparing how a simple thing for the western world, such as water, can be a tough reality for some others, feelings of surprise and sympathy are motivated.

This is what the linguistic message embedded in the photo urges us to do. If you dare, just “Walk in Her Shoes”. With this imperative tone and big bold capital letters the photo captures our full attention. The use of bold capital letters in written text can signify power in the form of command, aggression or strong emotions. Such is the truth of this argument that there have been many cases of employees been fired because of implicitly aggressive emails written in the
same format. Moreover, the imperative tone of the linguistic message enables the photo to “confront” us in the same way we could be confronted by a real person who would challenge us to “walk in her shoes”. This “de facto” authority of photography reaches the point of “personification”. It is the photo which addresses the reader: “hey, I am talking to you, do you see this? WALK IN HER SHOES, if you can and if you dare”. In the linguistic message embedded in this photo we also encounter an interesting inter-mixing of textual and symbolic signification. The sign of a human footprint appears to replace the “O” character in the word “shoes”. We have already mentioned that we cannot be sure if this woman is wearing shoes or is barefooted. This sign appears to be missing from the “coded iconic message” but is textually “coded” in the linguistic message which serves as a relay (Barthes, 1977) to the image. Meaning is created by the antithesis of the signification between the word/sign “shoes” and the symbol/sign of the footprint (which is one of the first signs used by humanity as they appear on early cave drawings). Finally, the logo of CARE International is clearly present under the linguistic message assuring the reader that there is a well-known and reliable organization behind the campaign.

It Shouldn’t Happen Here (Save the Children, UK)

The Save the Children organisation is an international non-governmental organisation established in the United Kingdom in 1912 with the purpose of improving the lives of children in need all over the world. Apart from the UK-based organisation there are in total 30 affiliated members. The Save the Children International network operates in more than 120 countries worldwide. Its mission statement is a world where every child has the right to survival, protection, development and participation (Save the Children, 2012).

This case of fundraising campaign has a specific interest since it addresses the problems and issues of development in the western world. It may seem at least strange, if not unbelievable, to discuss about child poverty in developed countries such as the United Kingdom. According to the Save the Children UK (2012), there is an estimation of 3.5 million children in the UK who live in poverty. This figure sounds unbelievable even if we distinguish between what can be considered to be poverty in the western developed world and what in developing countries where children die of hunger and disease. Nevertheless, the semiotic analysis of the campaign “It Shouldn’t Happen Here” is interesting because in this case the people in need are not remote but they live next to us.

This campaign comprises of a series of photos showing children in poverty and a representative sample is the one which appears on the homepage of the campaign showing a sad little girl looking back at the camera. On the left side of the image there is the text “Child Poverty: It Shouldn’t Happen Here” in bold letters. The background of the photo is blurred and only the characteristics of the little girl are clearly visible. This photo shares a lot of common “photographic” language with the other cases presented above. The girl looks directly in the camera and “addresses” a “why” to the viewer. She looks sad under a neutral lighting without a smile (everybody knows that happy children smile, a purely unmotivated sign). The girl is white
and does not look like a little girl coming from Africa or another "known" developing place. In fact, it looks like this girl comes from and lives in the UK. She is also dressed with western clothes matching her age. It is easy to understand that the selection of this girl as an index of children in need has been deliberately done in order to represent the fragility of children (girl more fragile than boy, little girl more fragile than older girl) in general as well as the proximity of the problem which is not remote but a reality close to us.

This photo bears great similarity to "Cadies for the Pain of the Other". Apart from the choice of colour, the structure of the frame appears very similar. Linguistic message and faces are used in balance from left to right following the eye flow. The blurred background conceals the context of the photo. We do not know where this photo is taken or where this girl lives. The dark colours of the background, which eventually fade into solid black, serve the purpose of promoting the face of the child and give a dramatic tone to the living conditions she is subjected to. Since the background is not clearly shown, it is a natural consequence that the attention of the viewer focuses on the two parts of the photos which are shown in detail, the face of the little girl on the right and the linguistic message on the left. Moreover, the dark background carries the tone of unhappiness and sadness.

The presence of the linguistic message “anchors” the photo to the situation and assists the viewer to understand what the photo is about. Bold capital white letters on the black background explain the situation. The phrase “It Should Not Happen Here” carries the meaning of the campaign. The use of the keyword “Here” is important because it emphasizes the proximity of the problem. The antithesis generated captures the attention of the audience which is surprised to learn that poverty, which is traditionally considered to be a remote problem, a problem of the “others” who live “there”, can also be a problem of “us” who live “here”. Poverty should not happen here (the text expects the reader to be informed about poverty somewhere else) and something has to be done about this. The antithesis “wakes up” the reader since he has to encounter something out of the ordinary. Furthermore, it entails the questions of “why” and “how” and “what can be done” to bring the situation to “normal”.

**Health Care in Danger (International Committee of the Red Cross, Geneva)**

The Health Care in Danger campaign was launched by the International Committee of the Red Cross in 2011 to raise awareness of violence targeting medical personnel in conflict areas and the difficulties encountered in delivering vital and life-saving assistance to victims. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is one of the oldest and most important humanitarian organizations today. It was established back in 1863 in Geneva with the mandate to provide humanitarian help to people affected by armed violence. This year (2013) the ICRC celebrates 150 years of humanitarian action and service to the people of the world.

The campaign focuses on the realities and atrocities encountered in armed conflicts where ICRC operates and it shows the unjustified loss of human life due to lack of respect for international humanitarian law. International legal instruments (for example the Geneva
Conventions of 1949) were established in order to put a limit to the brutality of war and to protect non-fighting parties such as civilians, medical personnel, prisoners of war, wounded fighters and others.

The campaign consists of photos taken by prominent photographers in conflict affected areas. A representative photo, included in the annex, shows a mother wandering around an abandoned part of a city carrying a baby in her arms. The background of the picture shows a demolished neighbourhood. The destroyed residential buildings stand as evidence of recent hostilities. There is still black smoke in the air and some destroyed vehicles can be seen at the side of the road in the background. The mother is wearing old, torn and dirty clothes and seems to be alone in the area. Her face and hair are hidden from view and she seems to hold a baby with her skinny hands. The baby is not shown and it is completely covered by a piece of clothing. Finally, there is also a linguistic message present on the image and the logo of the ICRC.

This photo can be easily classified in the war photography genre. It demonstrates the brutality of war and the devastation it incurs not only in the material world (the buildings, roads and vehicles in the picture) but also in the souls of the people affected (like this mother holding her dead baby in her arms). This analogy present in the photo is the key element which provides a reference for comparison of human misery caused by war. It is evident that this neighbourhood was attacked not a long time ago (smoke still coming out). The size of damage incurred during the hostilities emerges from how this place looks like now and how it should have been. This total devastation is a reality for this poor woman. We cannot see her face since it is covered and has all her attention focused on her baby without acknowledging the presence of the photographer (he is a powerless observer like us). War destroys human lives and even the ones of the survivors. The archegen love relationship between a mother and her baby is used to demonstrate the effects of war and the totality of destruction which it can bring to humanity.

What is the location of this scene? There is a sign in the photo which could assist in locating the event in space and time. The veil or cover which this woman uses to cover her hair is a tradition encountered in the Balkans. This is probably a scene taken during the ethnic conflicts in former Yugoslavia back in the 1990s.

The image itself has dramatic colour tones under a dark lighting. The background is visible in balance with the main object of the picture which is the woman. The colours of the destroyed buildings in the background match the colour of bones. In combination with the black holes from the bombardment the buildings appear like human skulls - a connotation of death. The woman occupies the middle of the picture and her diagonal position adds motion to the frame - she "runs" away from the scene coming towards our direction. The presence of the lines of the bombarded road guides the eye in parallel to her path away from danger. Her clothes blend in with the background - contrast exists between has hand and the white cloth which covers the baby which is the second focal point of the image.

If we ignore the linguistic message present, this photo stands as one of the numerous war photos in modern history. However, most of the communication value here exists in the textual message which explains the photo. It is surprising for the reader to know that the baby is dead.
since it would be impossible to derive this from the photo. Not only is it dead but the cause of death is not the direct effect of this conflict. The narrative tone of the message coming from the mother establishes an interpersonal dialogue between her and the reader. It is the mother who narrates what has happened until the moment the photo was taken.

The mother identifies the cause of death of her baby which did not die because her midwife was killed in explosion or because her labour was difficult without proper assistance. The baby died by an implicit effect of war - an attack on medical personnel. This is what causes surprise to the unsuspected viewer who would normally assume that the baby died in the course of hostilities. The words of the mother state that the baby's loss of life could be avoided and is unjustified since it is not part of the “justified” civilian casualties of war. It is irrational, indeed, to distinguish between justified and unjustified deaths in the field of battle but from an international humanitarian law perspective hostilities against non-combatants or medical personnel are considered “illegal” (Geneva Conventions, 1949). There is, therefore, an ironic construct hidden in the photo which serves as the rhetorical vehicle to convey the meaning - the consequences of hostilities against health care personnel. The irony exists because people would expect a death caused by an explosion or other direct war casualties and not because of an attack against health care. The irony in the context of this photo is composed by the photo and the linguistic message present and both are needed in order to carry the desired meaning. The photo without the message would not be able to allow for this interpretation.

Since the concept of the photo is now obvious as narrated by the mother, the message which urges for action is set by the ICRC as the intermediate third person interrupting our dialogue with the mother: “Violence against health care must end". The words “life” and “death” are respectively in red and white which are also the colours of the ICRC logo (a red cross on a white background). This logo/sign is the first internationally recognised official symbol for medical personnel established back in 1864. It was initially a distinctive insignia for combat medical personnel. From a semiotics point of view the use of red colour is commonly accepted as standing for danger, alert or threat. In a medical context, it can iconically stand for the colour of blood.
Analysis

The semiotic analysis of photographs such as the ones presented in this paper does not abide to the dominance of one dogmatic analytical model. Sonneson (1988) identifies models in pictorial semiotics necessary for the analysis of images in a similar way to how this is achieved with textual analysis in the linguistic field by extracting abstract rules from collection of written texts. By using the concepts of the narrative, the taxonomical rhetorical and the systematic rhetorical models the case studies presented in this paper constitute a set of texts which belong to the specific genre (they emanate from the field of humanitarian action and fundraising communication) and can be further analysed for our purpose of defining the elements of a specific framework of fundraising.

From a general point of view it is easily observable that the photos describe an unpleasant and wrongful situation although the level of shock and tragedy does not reach the gruesome level of war photography. One could actually argue that humanitarian communication campaigns stand for a “light” version of war photography without being repulsive for the viewer but in the same time shocking and attractive. The selection of the theme usually includes people in need - specifically people coming from fragile groups such as children.

Furthermore, it is not possible to avoid questions about the temporal dimension. One would intrinsically know that the event depicted in the photos has taken place sometime in the past since photography has this un-matching ability to “freeze” time. The real question, however, which would come up, is if something similar actually happens right now. It is interesting to notice that in all case studies explored there was no indication of history as such. The scenes captured do not contain underlying historical cues and they reflect the contemporary period. They all seem to happen now in another remote place at a safe distance from the viewer (an exception here could be the campaign about children poverty in the UK).

The concept of modality in semiotics refers to the connection which the signifier maintains with the real or imaginary world. Do the photos of these campaigns refer to real or imaginary situations? In other words, could it be that the photos were “set up” to trick the audience into believing a reality which does not exist? Our perception is that the nature of the photographic medium can motivate the audience to perceive the content as real to a great extent. What does actually convince us that the situation depicted is real? Apart from the campaign about child poverty in the UK, an “outlier” case in our study, all the other campaigns seem realistic enough to the average viewer. Prior contextual knowledge is necessary for the realistic appearance to be validated by the viewer. A western viewer would find more credible the argument that there is poverty, lack of water or medicine in Africa than child poverty in the UK because it is not the first time he comes in contact with this reality.

One of the most distinguishing features which we encounter often in fundraising photography is the concept of imposing a linguistic message in the form of caption on the photo. This intertextuality feature has been historically a common practice in the field of visual communication and varies from a simple explanation of the image to a more “codified” key of
interpretation. Is this actually necessary? Is it because a picture does not actually “stand for a thousand words” or the scene depicted is not “set up” by an experienced photographer therefore it does not contain the proper “photographically directed and edited” message? The question which arises at this point is why is there a need for a linguistic message to fix the meaning of the photos?

It seems that the value of the linguistic message is carried by its repeatability and branding. The interpretation of a photo is a personal and individual experience. If we suppose that somebody would like to describe what he has seen or experienced, this would probably never be a precise description. The meaning and motivation behind the photo campaign would be difficult to extend and broadcast. The linguistic message, which usually contains also the title of the campaign, shares common characteristics with branding. The message, like the logo, adds to the repeatability of the photographic message as a whole. It is a desired behaviour from the communicators’ point of view to ensure broad communication impact. Moreover, the logo of the organization supporting the fundraising campaign justifies the validity of the campaign. It is the authority of the name of the organization which provides assurance to the audience that this is a serious campaign, with serious actors behind it and the money collected will be spend in an efficient and effective manner. The question about where does this authority come from can be answered by Barthes (1972). It is "mythology". Signs are generated by myths and cultural conventions of society and in turn as a “cultural feedback” system they contribute to the extension or rejection of "myth" in society. In our example, we tend to trust the validity of these organizations because of their “mythical” position in our society - our trust contributes to the further “mythification” of their activities.

Citing the title of the "Rhetoric of the Image" (Barthes, 1977), we can turn to the discussion about the rhetorical tropes employed in communication campaigns. If rhetoric, the ancient science or art of persuading and convincing people about specific issues, can be extended from its initial form of speech to the linguistic form of writing, there would be few arguments against its use in visual form. The concepts of metaphor and irony dominate our selection of campaign photos (for example the ironic death of the child in the "Health Care in Danger" campaign who died unexpectedly not by the war itself but by the illegal attack to medical personnel). An indispensable component of the visual rhetoric approach in the case of fundraising is the direct interpersonal style employed. The subjects in need (children, young women) approach directly the audience in a face to face contact. They look back at us without asking for our help. The purpose of this kind of photography is to place the viewer in the position of being aware of the situation but unable to take direct action. He could, however, help by donating. This is necessary for the specialised actors - the ones with their logo present - to act on behalf of him. A vital point in this process is to convince the potential donors that their contribution counts because it may be that the problem appears so huge that any effort or contribution is considered to be meaningless. An example is the case of the HIV patient whose life changes using ARV medication. It requires a lot of effort to convince the audience that HIV and its consequences can be substantially alleviated by modern medicine. Fundraising photography does not only raise awareness but has the purpose of motivating and urging for action. The campaigns do not only offer a feast for the viewer’s eyes but they expect their action in exchange.
The viewer uses his perception on the visual data, the pixels stored in the photographic film or digital medium, to transform it into information about the scene shown. The features of the contained signs are extracted and we know that the part of the photo depicting the woman is an index of the woman who was in front of the camera at the time when the photo was taken. The third level of signification is the one which transforms information to knowledge and this process requires more than human perception. It requires social and contextual knowledge which may not be possessed by everyone. The process of signification, therefore, is a feedback system which requires an amount of knowledge to create more knowledge. In our examples, the photographs serve the purpose of informing the viewer about the situation and their effect is the creation of knowledge and the materialization of the decision to act.

It has been evident during the analysis that photography can be used as a highly transparent medium-carrier of other types of signification systems. For example, human body language, as a non-verbal code, has been utilised to convey the psychological state of the subjects in need. The severity of the situation to be resolved is reflected on their faces. Furthermore, we should not ignore the concept of visual perspective and analogy which is another system of signification embedded in the transformation of reality to representation. It may be, for example, that the distance which the young woman needs to walk in the "Walk in Her Shoes" campaign is shown in perspective in order to connote a very long distance. The photo is taken from a close distance and this provides for the representation of depth and distance.

If we attempt to isolate and identify the partial elements which compose an instance of the fundraising message, we would encounter similarities in the patterns employed. The tone and style used is similar. Weak people, such as young women and children, are in need, unhappy and they do not deserve it. It is their body language which transparently passes this message through the photographic medium. It is of crucial importance to convey to the audience that these people are unable to change their situation by themselves. This can be identified as one of the key points of the study since there would be no communication impact if they do not appear helpless and alone. We can, therefore, talk about a kind of “informative” and “persuasive” photography which has as a main purpose to convince the audience. The main focus is on the human elements or the humanitarian aspect of the problem. We could say that the “problem” has a human face (women and children) which is depicted in all case study photos. The absence of men is evident and naturally it is assumed that also men face similar problems. It would be difficult, however, to promote adult men as helpless in our current social context which broadly contains patriarchal elements. People are the main element of this type of photographic expression and this dictates the relationship between the foreground and the background. Since the foreground is extensively occupied by them, the meaning of the background is reduced only to the necessary. For example, the little girl of the "Save the Children" campaign appears in front of a blur undefined background and the same undefined background concept appears in the "Candies for the Pain of the Other". However, the importance of the background to define space (the African landscape in "Walk in Her Shoes") or both space and time (the bombarded landscape in "Healthcare in Danger" signifies not only space but time also) cannot be neglected as an inseparable part of the message.
Since the interpretation and impact of a sign depends on our previous experience, the design of a fundraising campaign encounters difficulty in placing the western donor audience in a situation similar to the photographed subjects. The message has to be close to their everyday reality in order to be cohesively interpreted. For example, the role of medication for alleviating the pain of the others is a common reality since the concept of pain and medication is something familiar and non-ambiguous.

Furthermore, it is necessary to make a remark on the concept of different signification of signs depending on which level - iconic, indexical or symbolic - they operate. A good example would be the use of the red colour in the photographic content or the logo of the different humanitarian organisations. In iconic terms the colour of red resembles blood and signifies danger, alert and calls for action against some threat. It is interesting though that the same colour is used to signify love and passion which normally do not maintain any iconic relationship with red. Their signification exists on a symbolic level based on a socially established convention. In fact, it goes back to Greek mythology when red roses rose from the blood of Adonis, the god of beauty and desire. Ares murdered Adonis because of jealousy of Aphrodite's love for him, probably the first love crime ever recorded. The mythological implications define the symbolic value of red as the colour of love and passion without any need for iconic resemblance. This example shows that there are cases where a sign can signify different things based on its iconic, indexical or symbolic/mythological value. This provides the opportunity for communicators to use the same signs in different configurations and syntheses according to the necessary aspects of the message to be communicated. In a kind of “controlled ambiguity” the designer of the campaign sets the boundaries for the desired interpretation based on knowledge of the target audience. The viewer is generally “guided” in his interpretation and necessary space is given for applying his own social and cultural background.

Moreover, one could support the daring idea that signs can be categorized also by the amount of knowledge required for their interpretation. Signs, which carry a physical signification and can be interpreted by everybody without any cultural knowledge required, are part of the first category. We can encounter further signs which require a cultural background for their interpretation and can be interpreted by a group of people sharing the same culture. Finally, personal signs have a meaning only for a person and are drawn from his personal experience. In our examples one could identify highly iconic "physical" signs such as the size of the water container in the "Walk in Her Shoes" campaign which implies heavy weight and difficulty of carrying it. An example for a "cultural" sign would definitely be the "bindi" on the forehead whose signification is based on cultural norms and is known to the people belonging or been acquainted with the specific culture. The concept of a "personal" sign requires a personal relation to the situation. We would say that the woman in "Healthcare in Danger" could stand for a "personal" sign to a relative or friend who personally knows her in real life. What is common in all three categories is the participation of the receiver in the production of meaning which can have a personal, a common cultural/societal and a general/global meaning. The impact of these signs depends on whether their syntagmatic statement tells us a different story than the one we know. In other words, the more different, unexpected and motivated a photograph is, the more attention it can raise.
There are cases when a sign is expected in a syntagmatic composition but is missing. This missing sign has been defined as a "zero" sign. The concept of the “zero” sign is a useful tool which allows for flexibility of interpretation. A sign, which signifies by its absence (Sebeok, 2001), can serve as a convenient placeholder for the receiver of a message to fill it in with a “created” and “customized” sign generated in the process of "unlimited semiosis". “Walk in Her Shoes” is a good example. We encounter both a linguistic sign, the word “Shoes”, together with a “zero” sign, the absence of the view of the woman’s feet. They both refer to how this woman has to walk and carry water to her family, barefooted or not. The interpretation depends on the viewer's stance and use of the “zero” sign. He can fill it in according to his personal experience and expectations with "infinitive" possibilities of meaning (Barthes, 1972).

The interpretation of the "zero" sign depends on the reader's experience when reading an image and it is definitely much more than "zero". We have encountered this in most of cases, for example, in "Walk in Her Shoes" (lack of clear view of the feet, absence of people or animals in her path), in "Healthcare in Danger" (the absence of the view of the woman's face), in "Access to Life" (the absence of friends/family next to the patient). The concept's strength not only derives from flexibility of interpretation but also "surprises" the reader who expects to encounter a sign syntagmatically aligned to the sign structure established in the image. The lack of information about how is this woman is walking calls for the attention of the reader, who is challenged to decide how to fill this gap in the signification syntax.

There has to be a balance between the presentation of the problem (fundraising is all about presenting a problematic situation to the donor audience to be funded for solution) and the “saturation” of the audience. In other words, the message has to be simple in order to be understood. In the same time, it has to be unique in order to attract human interest and not to be rejected as just another message about the “poor people out there”. Something new is expected each time, something that the donors are willing to spend time on if we want them to give money for a cause without any obvious material benefit for them. The important parameter which needs to be taken into account is the concept of comparison of the problematic situation to the audience reality. In broad terms, photography presents a different reality than the one to which the audience is accustomed in its everyday life. It is this difference which urges for action because there is no balance. The attention of the audience is captured and maintained using this differential approach in the same way humans cognitively understand the world - by observing and classifying differences in concepts. An example, which can materialize this concept, is the photo of the woman struggling to bring water to her family. The purpose of this action is a basic need for everybody - water to drink. The way, however, this is implemented in the developing world is different than the donors’ world, less efficient and highly strenuous, much more than just opening the tap. This example implies an antithesis which has its own psychological meaning. It appeals to the insecurity of humans by assuring them that the problematic situation does not affect them, it is a problem of the remote others. Humanitarian photography functions in duality. In one way, it informs viewers about problems which other humans need to face and reassures that they are in a much better and more secure situation than the others. It is a "pacifier" which provides pleasure to the viewer providing the confidence of a better life. In another function, it provides food for thought and action fighting
against the problems our fellow humans have to deal with. Donation, therefore, can be metaphorically considered by some as the symbolic price we pay to live our western lives better and more secure than other people in need in remote areas of our world.

If we were to define humanitarian photography as a new genre, this genre would bear characteristics of journalist photography as well as elements of documentary photography and advertising. The humanitarian nature of this genre is to bring the remote problem at our doorstep, to report from the field and motivate for action. Therefore, there is a core element of journalism which reports on the problem. However, as we have seen, there is a marketing touch on the reported reality. It is not only "just the facts". Humanitarian photography is much more than a documentary. It urges for action, it sells "the pain of the others" in order to attract donations by sharing the marketing elements of the advertising photography genre. There is a balance in the photos between the reality "as it is", objectively reported (the basic characteristic of journalism), and the "staged" reality, which is the reality with some of its elements deliberately emphasized in order to affect the viewers, touch their souls to stir reaction. There are ethical implications about the "staging" of reality for humanitarian purposes. The debate of capturing not exactly the truth as it is but a further "enhanced" humanitarian version of it is not only similar to the moral question about a "white lie" but also depends on the level of truth in an image. This varies according to the good or malicious intentions of the photographer and the purpose which he serves. Finally, humanitarian photography seems to share specific characteristics with war documentary. It attempts to capture the attention of the audience by showing the unusual, the shocking side of the life of the others. It calls on our inherent insecurity to provide "pleasure" of viewing. We are assured that misery is remote and cannot affect us - we feel safe.
Summary

During the analysis we focused on the main characteristics of photography as an “authoritative” medium and the commonalities between different cases of fundraising. Communication campaigns usually share an intelligent design by combining visual and linguistic signification in an appeal message to show our intrinsic humanitarian sensitivity. Humanitarian photography intends to convince us that our contribution can actually make a difference without saturating our appetite for consumption of the misery of the others. Moreover, it attempts to bridge the distance between us and the others by establishing a personal link. It brings their problems into our personal space where they cannot be neglected. In other words, they seem so close no that we cannot remain untouched. For humanitarian organisations, the selling of the "pain of the others" has turned into a commodity.

Different semiotic codes, from body language of people in need to colour language of photographic content, find their way through the transparent photographic medium. Similar to rhetoric in speech, photography benefits from rhetorical schemata to impress, shock, convince and sensitize the donor community. Without a pre-defined visual vocabulary (nothing similar to a vocabulary in linguistics) but with different styles of expression one could consider photography to be “visual poetry”. This intense and rich in connotations expression form has been, without doubt, one of the most valuable characteristics of this communication medium. Heavily connoted photography was used with the purpose of emotionally affecting the reader. It is not only on the informative (denotation) level that humanitarian photography operates. It attempts to "bruise" and capture our souls like a "punctum", as Barthes names this quality of the image in his Camera Lucida (1981), which delivers the main idea and makes the story out of a photograph - what people in need experience and cannot be easily described in words.

Designing an effective photographic campaign requires further research on identifying how people are affected by the pain of the others. The photographic "langue" is not "defined" - photography operates on the level of "parole". More like art, we interact with photography in an aesthetic and psychological context while it offers the unique possibility of re-living the moment. We cannot remain untouched by reality. Who could argue with this while looking at the couple hugging each other under the rubble of the Bangladesh disaster?
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Annex

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During the authoring of this paper a photo of the Bangladesh disaster appeared in the news. This image does not belong to the campaign photos of our study. A garment factory building collapsed killing more than 1000 workers trapped inside the rubble. Photographer and activist Taslima Akhter captured a dead couple hugging each other before their tragic death. Together until the end, they are not only just simple bodies of cheap labour workers and cheap lives. Their lives and dreams deserve to have the same value.