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### **The failure of cosmopolitanism and the reinforcement of hierarchical news: managing the visibility of suffering throughout the Multimodal Analysis of the *Charlie Hebdo* versus the *Baga* terrorist attacks**

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MSc in Media and Communications

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Managing the visibility of suffering throughout  
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**Maria Paola Pofi**

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**ABSTRACT**

This dissertation project analyses two examples of terrorist attacks that in January 2015 struck one European country (France) and one non-European country (Nigeria), in order to compare the ways in which suffering is portrayed by the Western media through a *Multimodal Analysis* of 16 newspaper articles. After the international shock and the resonance of the news about the Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris, many controversies arose, especially through the Internet, due to an evident lack of media coverage of the Boko Haram massacre of civilians in the city of Baga. Through the insertion of the research along with the debate about the ethical role of the media and the potential of mediation to shape a cosmopolitan sensibility (Chouliaraki, 2008a), the concurrence of these two events has been the cause for investigation into the ways in which the management of the visibility of distant misfortunes invites the spectator to experience the suffering, and how this experience might activate a moral and practical response toward the sufferer. The outcomes demonstrate how the international information flows are not able, in these specific cases, to shape public dispositions beyond the Western community, and how, on the contrary, they appear circumscribed within hierarchical relations of power between the West and the non-West.

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**INTRODUCTION**

It can be easily affirmed that the main factor which characterizes the current global interconnected society is the interlacing of two broad social phenomena: the experience of globalization, which has led toward ‘the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole’ (Robertson, 1992:8), and the proliferation of new media, considered as a powerful vehicle through which representations about the world are shaped and spread across national and international boundaries. Due to globalisation, which

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‘concerns the intersection of presence and absence, the interlacing of social events “at distance” with local contextualities’ (Giddens, 1991:21), people witness an ever-growing number of events they have not experienced themselves but that are, conversely, mediated. Throughout their consistent and persistent work of reporting ‘otherness’ (other people, places and cultures) the media have assumed the role of the bearer of symbolic meanings and the propagator of values, ideologies and beliefs that provide the images for interpreting the world (Gamson et al, 1992).

The starting point of this project is the evaluation of media as ‘key intermediaries in the mediation of distant suffering and the global production and dissemination of images and stories of disasters and atrocities’ (Orgad, Seu, 2014:8). One of the most crucial questions that characterize social and political theories nowadays seems to concern the ways in which the Western world relates to distant suffering (Chouliaraki, 2006c). Within this field, the media are not only considered as a genre of information but also as a genre of imagination, as Silverstone sustains: ‘through their routine choices of image and world, they help us imagine what we cannot experience: the reality of other’s people suffering and where we stand in relations to them’ (Chouliaraki, 2008b:333). Numerous studies on the mediation of distant suffering have followed two main strictly connected directions: the first is related to the ‘new visibility’ (Thompson, 2005) acquired by previously hidden practices and events through media narratives and to the process through which this mediated knowledge comes to signify; the second one is linked to the practice of ‘witnessing’ (Peters, 2001) and the resulting ethical and social role that the media assume.

Scholars who focused on the role of media representation as ‘an active process of meaning production’ (Orgad, 2012:17) agree with the statement that considers representations ‘fundamentally and inextricably inscribed in relations of power’ (Orgad, 2012:25). By legitimating specific narratives and marginalizing others, the media produce perceptible social effects: they declare what kinds of things become ‘social facts’ and ‘social realities’, affecting the process of ‘categorization’ and thus enabling people to order the social world as a structured space (Couldry, 2001:158). Chouliaraki, indeed, affirms that the symbolic power of media representations consists especially in its ability to manage the visibility of suffering and, in so doing, to reproduce the moral deficiencies of global inequalities (2008b:329). The social consequence of the media’s work concerns the audience’s moral position. Debates about the ethics of the media have focused on the different types of audience engagement with distant ‘others’ and the extent to which mediated suffering may embed notions of global citizenship and cosmopolitanism or otherwise cluster the spectators in their existing communities of belonging (Boltanski, 1999; Chouliaraki, 2006a).



Although the literature already offers a rich body of research focused on the Western representation of distant (non-Western) suffering, the specific goal of this project is to make a comparison between the media reporting on two terrorist attacks that appear overall to be characterized by a temporal and modal proximity but at an emotional and geographical distance. By including a European country, the intent is to extend the scope of the research beyond the commonly investigated non-Western context and critically reflect upon the differences that emerge. The debate that has arisen from the restricted media attention on the Baga attack has been the cause for reflection, not about the quantitative media coverage but on the modalities employed by Western newspapers to marginalize the African event and legitimize the European one. The concurrence of such events appears as an up-to-date case study to investigate the ethical implications that these ways of managing the visibility of suffering invited the Western public to make a moral response for the Nigerian and French victims, and their own positions in comparison to them. The ultimate aim is to understand to what extent media discourses reproduce structures of domination and inequality within global news production as a reflection of the hierarchical structure of the world, which, ultimately, could be considered as a practice of neo-colonialism.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### *The Making of News*

Representations consist of images, descriptions, explanations and frames for understanding what the world is and why and how it works in particular ways (Hall, 1997 in Orgad, 2012:17). The aim of this research is to investigate the systems of representation that emerge throughout the process of news production, taking newspaper articles as the object of analysis. Since from among the millions of events that occur daily in the world, only a tiny proportion becomes visible as 'potential news stories' and of this portion only a marginal part is produced as the day's news in the news media (Hall, 1973 in Harcup, O'Neill, 2010), it is essential to investigate the process through which news is selected and/or created.

Galtung and Ruge's work on the structure of foreign news (1965) has long been considered as one of the landmark studies in the field of journalism. The main aim at the heart of their work was to understand how events become news and they identified a series of 12 factors that seemed to provide a definition of newsworthiness. However, they have received some criticism especially for the implicit assumption that there is a given reality 'out there' that the news gatherers can either include or exclude (McQuail, 1994:270). Indeed, one of the most shared assumptions within the recent study on news production is that news items are

constructed (Schudson, 1989; Gieber, 1964; Fishman, 1980; Cohen and Young, 1973; Tuchman, 1976). As Vasterman sustains, 'news is not out there, journalists do not report news, they produce news. They construct it, they construct facts, they construct statements and they construct a context in which these facts make sense. They reconstruct 'a' reality' (in Harcup, O'Neill, 2010).

Some scholars assert that the 'news values' identified by Galtung and Ruge did not provide an entire explanation of the news composition, underestimating the ideological structure underneath them, as stated by Hall (1973) applying a Marxist perspective influenced by the work of Gramsci, or the influence that political and economic factors might have over the process, as asserted by McQuail (1994). These two positions reflect the two main approaches according to which the news production process is analysed: the political economy and the constructionist one.

#### *The Political Economy Approach*

The political economy approach connects the outcomes of news production to the political and economic structure of the news organization. Most recent studies and critics, going beyond the micro perspective that characterized the studies in the 1960s, which mainly focused on the internal demands of media organizations (Schudson, 1989:266), have shifted the interest to the macro context in which media messages are produced. What has been investigated is the increasing concentration of control and ownership of media industries and the way this new setting might influence the content of the news. Bagdikian developed the best-known study about the media monopoly issue, revealing that in the US 'twenty-three corporations control most of the business in daily newspapers, magazines, television, books and motion pictures' (in Gamson et al, 1992). The restricted amount of giant corporations that dominate the business inevitably reduces the range of information and imagery produced, therefore obstructing the fulfilment of democracy. Moreover according to Murdock (1973), there is plenty of evidence to demonstrate that news 'coincides with' and 'reinforces' the 'definition of the political situation evolved by the political elite' (in Schudson, 1989:268).

One of the most recognised analyses of the political economy perspective in the US is the work by Herman and Chomsky in which the *Propaganda Model* is shaped, defining mass media as instruments of power that 'mobilize support for the special interests that dominate the state and private activity' (in Klaehn, 2002:148). This, however, does not involve a process of control since meanings are 'filtered by the constraints that are built into the system' (Klaehn, 2002:150), so that media outcomes are integrated into the institutional framework of society and act according to other ideological sectors. In this way, the news

values identified by Galtung and Ruge can be conceptualized as a 'cultural map' that journalists use to help them make sense of the world (Hall et al, 1978 in Harcup, O'Neill, 2010). This interpretation leads the debate towards the second approach.

#### *The Constructionist Approach and the Framing Theory*

The rejection of an objective journalism due to a lack of an objective reality to be reported (Molotch, Lester, 1974) is strongly connected to the constructionist approach (Gamson, Modigliani, 1989), whose main driving force is based on the assumption that news is socially constructed. The anthropologist Sahlins writes that an event cannot be just considered as an occurrence in the world, 'it is a relation between a certain happening and a given symbolic system' (in Schudson, 1989:275). Following the cultural view, Gamson and Modigliani affirm that every policy issue has a culture, a flow of discourses that evolves over time and that, in turn, provides meanings and interpretations thereupon (1989:2). The symbolic devices embedded in those discourses constitute a set of interpretative 'packages' which activate the cognitive process through which individuals make sense of the same event or issue by using the kit of symbols and meanings provided by these interpretative packages.

The notion that each package has an internal structure, whose core is a central organizing idea (or frame) used to make sense of the world (Gamson, Modigliani, 1989:3), reflects one of the most well-known arguments about the power of a communicating text: the *Framing Theory*. This theory refers, on the one hand, to the typical ways in which news content is shaped by journalists within a 'familiar frame of reference' and 'according to some latent structure of meanings' and, on the other hand, to the audience reception and use of these frames that induce them to see the reality as journalists do (McQuail, 2005; Tuchman, 1978 in Van Gorp, 2007:61). Framing involves two main processes: the selection and the salience of particular aspects of a perceived reality in such 'a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described' (Entman, 1993:52). The word salience means the highlighting of some bits of information in order to make them 'more noticeable, meaningful or memorable to audiences' (Entman, 1993:53) using strategies aimed at affecting the individuals' process of information, such as the repetition or omission of specific features and the association with culturally familiar symbols. Although the presence of frames within a text does not guarantee a universal effect on an entire audience, the notion of framing implies the presence of common effects over a large proportion of recipients, providing them not only with information about a given reality itself, but also guidelines about how it should be structured and interpreted (Van Gorp, 2007).

### *The Structural Hierarchy of International News*

Other studies have specifically investigated which determinants might affect the structure and process of international news flows and coverage within a global setting. Some research has taken the 'story frame' as a potential condition of influence (Wanta, Hu, 1993) that, however, does not seem to affect this study since the two types of stories analysed come under the same category: terrorism. What appears more interesting is another branch of studies centred on the content of foreign news in light of the political-economic dominance of some countries or the 'new world information order' (Wanta, Hu, 1993:252). What has emerged mainly is a first world bias in news selection and reporting (Schiller, 1978; Hacque, 1983; Giffard, 1984) and the presence of a structural hierarchy among countries within international communication evaluated as an influential determinant in shaping the content, direction and amount of flows of news, especially between developed and developing countries (Chung, 1998:529). Debates around the new world information and communication order find their roots in the deep imbalance of distribution of financial resources and communication technologies, generally connected to historical phenomena of colonialism-imperialism and contemporary economy practices.

Chung, taking as a conceptual starting point the Wallerstein's *World System Theory* (1974), which divides the world structure into three main spheres of economic-political-cultural and social relations (core, semi-periphery and periphery), tried to understand 'why countries become news in the way they do' (Chung, 1998:528). He demonstrated how a hierarchical pattern emerges and how therefore 'all countries are not created equal to be news in international communication' (1998:547). Finally Dencik, investigating the role of 'global journalism' in representing an emerging 'global moral order', discovered how the modalities in which global issues are covered on *BBC World News* reflect an 'increasingly economically pressured world'. The research shows not only a biased North-Western perspective but also a 'nation-state-centred ordering and categorization of global news' (2013:124). The global dominance of Western news agencies and networks, would thereby affect not only the agenda of global news but also its form, which appears increasingly homogenised according to Western models (Thussu, 2003).

### **Media Reporting Distant Suffering**

According to Cohen, 'the mass media have a near monopoly in creating the cultural imagery of suffering and atrocities' (2001: 168). Through their reporting work, the media select, filter and frame events, places and people with the consequence of not only contextualizing issues and setting the political agenda, but also of putting the spectators in touch with distant others

and, in so doing, feeding their knowledge and consciousness about a world to which they otherwise would have no access.

Moeller's research (2006), focusing on the media coverage of numerous international disasters which have occurred in the last ten years, highlights how not all of them command the same attention of the world. What emerges, overall, is that some disasters of unimaginable proportions remain partially reported or ignored by international media, so that hierarchies of places and human lives exist in the coverage of foreign news (Chouliaraki, 2006a) as Boyer (1985) cynically maintains in his sentence: 'one dead fireman in Brooklyn is worth five English bobbies, who are worth fifty Arabs, who are worth five hundred Africans'. The reporting of distant suffering has long been on the agenda of media scholars, whose concern, however, seems to have shifted from the structural and organizational factors of the coverage, to its content and form, an issue which I will be analysing in the next two paragraphs.

### *Reporting the Other*

When dealing with representations of 'Others', one of the basic theoretical concepts is that of 'difference'. Saussure, using a linguistic approach to investigate how culture works, highlights the need of contrast between opposites since 'without it meaning could not exist' (Hall, 1997: 234). The use of binary opposition allows us to catch the diversity of the world held in its extremes and, in so doing, to assign meanings. Derrida goes further, adding the notion that neutral binary oppositions are rare and that one pole is usually the dominant one. Douglas also recognizes the existence of a classificatory system of meanings within a given culture, with the aim of creating a structured vision of the world (Hall, 1997:236). Signifying practice appears, thus, inevitably involved in the creation and reinforcement of power relations of domination and oppression (Orgad, 2012:30).

The media's primary cultural role, as Silverstone sustains, is a 'boundary work' (in Orgad, 2012:30) that, in its work of meaning production, operates in the constant creation and reproduction of difference. Practices as binary opposition or stereotyping are usually employed in media representations with the attempt to 'fix in place, other people or cultures from a particular and privileged perspective' (Pickering, 2001:47). The aim is always to hierarchize, exclude, criminalize, hegemonize and marginalize practices and populations that diverge from what, in a specific historical moment, is seen as central, safe, legitimate, normal and conventional (Orgad, 2012:54). This polarizing practice, however, is anything but new, since it finds its roots in historical phenomena such as colonialism and imperialism, through which Europe has been able to historically shape itself as 'everything that the Others are not'

(Orgad, 2012:52), which is civilized, advanced, rational and powerful in opposition to the primitive, uncivilized and exotic Orient (Said, 1995).

The common element that seems to associate the considerable body of research on media representations of otherness, indeed, is the Western-centric perspective of analysis that reflects a cultural prism of ethnocentrism and Western interests (Cottle, 2012:4). Indeed, the critique that comes from the Third World, accuses the news reports of being ideological products of Western self-image and superiority that, ultimately, reinforce Western hegemony (Nohrstedt, 1986: 423).

According to the BBC war reporter Martin Bell, the reporting of disasters 'has changed fundamentally' from reporting mainly technical aspects to representing people: 'the people who provoke them, the people who fight them and the people who suffer from them' (in Höijer, 2004:516). Many recent studies within the field of humanitarian communication have started to focus on the photographic and discursive imagery of 'otherness' produced by aid campaigns with the aim of heightening awareness and collecting funds. What has emerged is the recognition of some victims as more 'suitable' or 'ideal' than others (Höijer, 2004; Dogra, 2012; Moeller, 2006; Cohen, 2001). A study conducted by Dogra about representations of global poverty has shown that 42% of international NGO's messages report a child, and almost 30% show a woman. She explains how the universal appeal of children is able to provoke 'visceral emotion' in the audience through topics such as need, vulnerability and hope (Dogra, 2014:33), while the female figure often holds the concept of the 'feminisation' of the developing world. The use of shocking images to incite feelings of compassion, moreover, has been criticized for denigrating the dignity of the victims and reproducing stereotypical representations (Dogra, 2014).

Conversely, another branch of studies, based on the reporting of disasters, acknowledges that newsworthy victims are also those who are 'familiar, relatively easy to identify with and not too responsible for their suffering' (Cohen, 2001:173), so the ones within the area delimited by the West, perceived as deserving our empathy better than others (Höijer, 2004) simply because they are recognized as being 'like us'. These studies have clearly brought to light some critical questions about the relations of power between the West and the 'Rest' (Hall, 1997) and the construction of hierarchies of places and human lives in media representations, where the voices of non-Westerners are symbolically annihilated (Butler, 2004:247).

### *Examples of Reporting Suffering*

The reporting of distant suffering has been approached following different theoretical and empirical perspectives. Cohen, for instance, analysing images of suffering, explained how some characteristics of the story seem able to increase the likelihood of the event receiving media attention and becoming recognized: the story should already be a story, the event congruent with the society's political interest, the nation depicted should already have been in the news or have an obvious national interest, the victims should be considered as suitable, the story presented in a vivid, graphic and dramatic form and bad events personalized (Cohen, 2001).

Chouliaraki (2006a), conversely, studying a range of news broadcast by the global channel *BBC World* and two national European channels, identified three main categories of news. Each of these is characterized by a specific combination of verbal and visual elements that, in turn, engages the audience according to different levels of proximity and agency: *Adventure News*, *Emergency News* and *Ecstatic News*. Finally, other scholars have focused on the Western bias in reporting news about disasters and pain. Nohrstedt, for instance, analysing Western newspaper and magazine coverage of the 1967-70 Nigerian Civil War, demonstrated how 'the results confirm the influence of ideological factors, notably traditional colonial images and current foreign policy' (1986:421). The visualization of the 1990 Gulf War showed the technological supremacy of the West, linking the ideals of Western humanity and moral superiority in stark contrast to those of the dark, inhumane, and morally inferior enemy (Konstantinidou, 2008:145). Finally, the 'war against terrorism', which Britain and the USA declared in 2001, was transformed by the media into a battle between good and evil, where the USA and its allies would 'eradicate evil from the world' (in Konstantinidou, 2008:145).

What generally emerges within this field is the impossibility of marking shared guidelines for the depiction of distant suffering and its moral consequences. Chouliaraki, indeed, criticizes the general macro-perspective approach used to investigate the relation between media, suffering and public engagement. According to her, the use of the 'grand question' cannot be answered with the 'grand theory' but, conversely, through the analysis of particular examples of media reporting suffering (2006c).

### **Moral Proximity**

The intensification of the individual awareness of the suffering of remote others challenges the Western spectators to not only include these strangers into their moral sphere but also requires them to take an ethical position and have a practical response toward each instance

of suffering. Boltanski (1999), indeed, affirms that irrespective of how suffering is portrayed, it always entails a specific ethical disposition, independently from people's own evaluative judgment on these dispositions as undesirable or desirable.

#### *Compassion Fatigue versus Pity*

The action of witnessing can lead towards two main public moral responses. The first one recognizes the distance that media connectivity establishes between the comfort zone of the spectators and zone of suffering of the victims, nullifying the urgency of moral engagement and agency (Chouliarakai, 2008a). This view finds its validation in Moeller's (2006) argument about *Compassion Fatigue*, which identifies the reason behind the trivialization of suffering and the irrelevance among the audience, with the safe position of the audience and the daily media bombardment of images of atrocities and pain. The second approach, on the other hand, holds that the daily flow of images and discourses about the pain of others may open people's imagination toward distant realities with the likelihood of activating a reflexive process through which the spectator 'comes to recognize such realities as a potential domain of his or her own action' (Chouliaraki, 2008a:373). This approach recognizes different types of compassion, which Boltanski (1999) distinguishes as three main categories of emotional engagements with the distant victims which come from the particular way in which the suffering is portrayed: denunciation, sentiment and aesthetic.

#### *Cosmopolitanism versus Nationalism*

Chouliaraki claims that, although the ways in which suffering is portrayed continue to be controversial, it seems that the manifestation of the symbolic power of the media has shifted from a focus on neo-colonial practices of Western domination to an increasing interest in ethical issues. The focus is therefore on the extent to which international information flows may contribute to the emergence and spread of a cosmopolitan sensibility, expanding the sense of responsibility and action beyond the West (Chouliaraki, 2008b).

The experience of simultaneously witnessing global events has led to the emergence of positions that sustain the idea of the 'world as a single place' (Robertson, 1992), a 'world in which there are no others' (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 2006) or the notion of a 'global village' (McLuhan, 1964), all of which suggest the existence of a global 'we' (Giddens, 1991). This perspective is the one that Chouliaraki (2006c) defines as 'optimistic', so the one according to which media reporting would be able to put the spectator 'into a broad community of fellow-spectators' (2006c:6) but also 'give rise to new communities of belonging' (2008b:331), generating a global moral imagery. Although Chouliaraki's study concerns the role of television, it is possible to connect the concept of simultaneity to the action of reading as well.



Anderson (1991), indeed, analyses the mass ceremony created by the simultaneous consumption of newspapers as one of the first activities in the 18<sup>th</sup> century that enabled the formation of an ‘imagined community’ as the nation. The spectators, even if temporarily, are asked to perceive suffering as a problem to be solved and are invited to consider their commitment as a matter of their own judgment (Chouliaraki, 2008b:343), thus pushing obligations outside of their own territories. This seems to reflect Beck’s idea of ‘cosmopolitan empathy’ that describes the capacity and will to take the perspective of the other, putting oneself in the position of the suffering victim (2006:6).

The ‘sceptical’ (Chouliaraki, 2006c) position, conversely, sustains the function of international media to ‘cluster transnational populations around their already existing communities of belonging’ (2008b:331). According to this argument, news of suffering serves the interests and needs of a specific media public. In this way, the stories are shaped in a way that tends to humanise the distant sufferers of the West as ‘like us’ and to de-humanize non-Western ones, because their pain does not touch the Western moral consciousness. Consequently the community of belonging, that usually corresponds with the West or the nation, is used as a reference point for the comparison with distant others and as a primary frame through which respondents make sense of the events (Kyriakidou, 2009:491).

In her research, Chouliaraki (2008b), analysing a set of ordinary and extraordinary news, both within national and international contexts, highlights the predominance of ways of managing the visibility of suffering as still being unprepared to break down the walls of the existing community of belonging. Cottle, indeed, referring to studies that theoretically and empirically engage with media discourses, claims that media cosmopolitanism ‘can be culturally thin, relatively infrequent, limited to exceptional forms of media representation, or the work of exceptional journalists only, and generally overshadowed by mainstream agendas that reinforce national self-interest and parochial identities’ (2012:1). Finally, as Berglez maintains, there is the ‘need to distinguish between reporting news from different parts of the world and reporting that provides and understanding of the world as a single place or a platform on which to legitimately base the emergence of a global citizenship’ (in Dencik, 2013).

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

This research project stems from two broad theoretical approaches: the management of the visibility of suffering and post-colonialism.

## **The Management of the Visibility of Suffering**

Theories about the mediation of suffering appear useful as a guide for the empirical research. Through the categories of news identified by Chouliaraki in her works (2006a; 2008b), the intention is to investigate the combination of visual and discursive practices that newspapers use to tell stories about suffering and how, in so doing, they place the spectators in a particular ethical relationship with the sufferer. Within this field, the *Analytics of Mediation* method is conceptualized as a framework for the study of media as a mechanism of representation that construes the suffering within specific 'regimes of pity' (Chouliaraki, 2006b), which are the products of the ways in which the media put the relation between the spectator and the victim into a meaning. The crucial point is that despite the different ways in which the scenes and the victims of suffering are represented, the media seem to 'construe a hierarchy of news that corresponds to a broader hierarchy in global relations of power and reflects the historical fact that some places and therefore some human lives deserve more news time, more attention, and more resources than others' (Chouliaraki, 2008a:375).

## **Post-Colonialism**

The previous statement clearly brings the theories about the mediation of suffering towards the underlying structures of domination and inequalities incorporated within the global news flows as a reflection of the hierarchical structure of the world, which, ultimately, could be considered as a practice of neo-colonialism. Since the research is specifically based on the comparison between two events which occurred in a Western and a non-Western country, theories about post-colonialism are useful in order to insert the analysis about the politics of representation within issues of power and inequality. The *Postcolonial Theory*, indeed, going beyond the broad historical facts of decolonization, takes as a key point 'the realities of nations and people emerging into a new imperialistic context of economic and sometimes political domination' (Robert, 2001:57).

The contribution of scholars such as Said (1995), who showed how discourses about the Orient worked in favour of the West depicting the East as inferior, or by Mudimbe, who conceptualized colonialism as the process aimed at organizing and transforming non-European areas into fundamentally European creations (1988:1), lay the foundations for Postcolonial Studies. Mudimbe explains, indeed, how the idea of Africa 'was conceived and conveyed through conflicting systems of knowledge' (in Ogude, 2012:11), highlighting how it represents an ideological and political entity which was invented with the advent of European expansion and then continuously reinvented by the West. As Kapoor (2002) suggests, the

*Postcolonial Theory* is mainly based on a post-structuralist approach that promotes a cultural perspective, linking imperialism and agency to the politics of representations aimed at producing a world of meanings. The central point is that such representations are never neutral, but, adopting Foucault's discourse theory, they are inscribed within relations of power and domination. The current concern within the field, reflecting the aim of this research, is that behind phenomena such as globalization and multiculturalism 'the reproduction of capitalism and reinforcement of existing power relations' (Orgad, 2012:35) are hidden.

### **The Objective of the Research**

Within the numerous, and sometimes controversial, theoretical and empirical perspectives that the literature about distant suffering offers, this research has the aim of investigating the very core that emerges from the review, which considers 'trans-national media as agents of symbolic power' (Chouliaraki, 2008b), their work inextricably implicated in the 'reproduction of capitalism and reinforcement of existing power relations' (Orgad, 2012), and mostly unable to expand the moral and practical public engagement further than the already construed community of belonging, as is the community of Western public life (Chouliaraki, 2008a). The *Analytics of Mediation* method will be used in order to critically analyse the visual and verbal strategies employed by the Western newspapers to shape the news of the Paris and Baga terrorist attacks, trying to explain how such ways of reporting invite the Western spectator to experience distant suffering and how this experience is implicated in his/her perception of the world and his/her place in it.

### **Research Questions**

RQ1: How do media representations produced by Western newspapers work in legitimizing certain narratives and marginalizing others?

RQ2: How do these ways of managing the visibility of suffering invite the spectators to make a moral response and agency for the victims?

RQ3: How do Western media create the structure of domination and inequalities within global news production and how do these reflect a hierarchical structure of the world?

## RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

### Methodological Approach

In order to address the research questions, a qualitative approach of textual and visual analysis will be used. Although the cause for reflection on these two specific events has come from the controversies that have emerged because of the restricted media coverage of the Baga attack, the choice has not fallen upon a quantitative method. First of all this is because the aim of this research is not concern with the objective and systemic description of specified characteristics and dimensions embedded in the texts (Hansen, 1998), as content analysis, for instance, would be. Secondly because a quantitative approach of textual analysis would not be suitable in order to investigate the process through which images and language come to signify.

For this social research, the text is approached according to Foucault's interpretation: 'a system of representation' (Hall, 2001) that must be investigated. Foucault, indeed, sustains the idea that although things can have a material existence in the world, it is only within a discourse that they are transformed into meanings and, therefore, produce knowledge. Discourse, evaluated as a 'social practice' by Fairclough (1992:63), establishes the rules that govern what can be considered 'acceptable' for a certain topic within a specific historical period. The results, which are valuable for the purpose of this research, are firstly that discourse influences 'how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others' and secondly that knowledge, consequently, appears as inextricably involved in power relations (Hall, 2001).

Among the variety of approaches used to critically analyse verbal and visual materials, a *Multimodal Analysis* has been chosen due to its particular concern with 'texts which contain the intersection and integration of two or more semiotic resources, or "modes" of communication, in order to achieve the communicative functions of the text' (O'Halloran, Smith, 2012:2). In this way language is integrated with other resources (in this case images and footage) to create meaning in 'multisemiotic' phenomena such as printed material (O'Halloran, 2011).

The specific multimodal approach that has been followed is the *Analytics of Mediation* (Chouliaraki, 2006c), which specifically integrates the *Multi-Modal* with *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA). The intersection of these two approaches seems to meet the needs of the research project perfectly: to address concerns about the ethical and political role that the

media played in the so called 'global village' (Chouliaraki, 2006c) and in the relations of power and ideologies underlying discourse (Fairclough, 1992).

Indeed, the term 'analytics', as Chouliaraki explains using a Foucauldian perspective influenced by Aristotle, has the aim of describing 'how discourse manages to articulate universal values of human conduct at any historical moment and how, in so doing, it places human beings into certain relationships of power to one another' (2006c:8). The core of the approach, therefore, is to investigate the 'regime of meanings' (Chouliaraki, 2006c) and so the possible signifying relations and combinations that emerge from the medium, that are called 'regimes of pity' in the study of suffering. This term refers to the range of semiotic practices that shape suffering as a 'meaningful spectacle' (Chouliaraki, 2006c:9), which engage the spectator into taking a moral and practical position towards the sufferer. In this way it is possible to understand representation (discourse) as a model of political and ideological practice aimed at creating, naturalizing, sustaining or changing the meanings of the world (Fairclough, 1992). The final goal, therefore, is to bring to light those aspects of reality that are 'obscured by an apparently natural and transparent use of language' and consequently to identify relations of power exercised through discourse (Fairclough, 1995 in Carvalho, 2008). The *Analytics of Mediation* is developed following two main perspectives according to which the technology creates meanings about suffering by marking specific forms of difference: the distinction between hypermediacy and immediacy, categories that Chouliaraki mentioned using Bolter and Grusin's terminology (2006c):

- *Hypermediacy*: analyses the difference within the medium of meaning-making, thus within the semiotic system itself, combining marks that are both visual and discursive. Multi-modality is the approach used to investigate how the hyper-mediated environment of newspaper representation is structured in order to create a regime of pity and therefore a regime for the representation of suffering.
- *Immediacy*: analyses the difference outside the medium of meaning-making and so within the 'asymmetries of power that traverse the social world and in the historical and political relations within or between social groups' (Chouliaraki, 2006:19). CDA is the approach used to investigate how linguistic and visual choices embedded in the texts explain the power of the media to mediate the world, in particular to represent it as a structured space.

### **Limitations of the Methodology**

In spite of the stimulating character of *Multimodal Analysis*, it has, like all types of critical discourse and visual analysis, been charged with being ‘ideologically committed’, interpreting and not analysing, and its methodological heterogeneity has been evaluated as misleading (Carvalho, 2008:162). The methodological pluralism, though, can also be judged as a strength, rather than a weakness, as Carvalho suggests, since the partial ‘freedom’ of the procedure allows the adaptation of the methodology to the specific theoretical background and case to be investigated.

Basically the main drawback of this kind of qualitative analysis is the likelihood of a biased reading position that can be of estrangement or engagement with the texts, leading toward an involuntarily subjective interpretation. It can be claimed, in this specific case, that although my nationality does not correspond with the two events being analysed, my reading position could be affected by my geographical and cultural involvement within the community of belonging represented by the ‘West’. Despite this possible criticism, however, I have undertaken my empirical research after a year of studying in this field that has helped me to develop certain skilled competencies. In addition, I have been reading, watching and listening to the news about the two terrorist attacks for several months now, after having made the decision to begin this project and having become more informed about the facts.

Another possible criticism could derive from how reliable the findings are and the risk of generalization. Although it is perfectly reasonable to investigate how newspaper representations produce moral responses among their readers, declaring their position in comparison with the sufferers in the two specific cases analysed, the desire to fully understand how these representations might also influence their imagination of the world can also be risky. For this reason, it is indispensable to bear in mind the influence that previous or subsequent discursive positions about similar issues can have on their overall public interpretation. My point is that this research will highlight how the Western narratives on the Paris and Baga attacks can contribute towards influencing people’s consciousness about the world as a structured place but that they are not the reason behind it.

### **Research Design and Sampling**

Since the core of this project is to investigate the role of Western newspapers in reporting suffering, the selection of newspaper articles has been delimited by this first criterion.

The point of departure is that the structure of global media flows and counter-flows is based on the distinction between the Global North and the Global South, as the post-colonial concept of Orientalism sustains. Indeed, I conceptualize the term 'West' by making reference to Said's (1995) demarcation of the Orient through an epistemological and ontological distinction with the Occident. In order to explain how the relations between the West and the Orient are bonds of power, domination and hegemony, Said uses as an example the specific experience that developed between France, Britain, US and the Orient at the end of the World War II. This is the initial reason that led me towards the choice of analysing the newspapers of Britain and the US as representative of Western journalism. Even though the West is not exhaustive in these two national and cultural contexts, nor is it considered as an homogenous 'entity' due to the historical, political and cultural differences between and within them, the West, as a cultural category, can be defined in terms of a shared legacy concerning its values and the power relationships it has sustained (and still sustains) with the global South.

The following step is the 'time plane', as Carvalho (2008) suggests, which is the identification of the time sequence of the published texts. This is not a negligible issue since previous or subsequent discursive positions can have effects on the overall interpretation by the audience. My choice was to select newspaper articles published between the day of the Paris attacks, 7<sup>th</sup> January, and 15<sup>th</sup> January, 2015, the date in which Amnesty International published satellite images revealing the effects of the attack in Baga.

Furthermore, priority has been given to those articles that unite a descriptive character with a newspaper assessment of the events. Overall, 16 newspapers were selected, four of which have already been analysed in the pilot study of this research project (63112, 2015). The choice to put these articles together was suggested by the interesting features that emerged from their critical discursive reading and by the willingness to carry on with the project by adding the visual analysis that, conversely, had not been taken into consideration in the pilot. In order to extend the final research, therefore, 12 new articles have been chosen, as shown in the tables below (next page):

The critical analysis of the 16 newspaper articles follows the two main interrelated approaches *Multi-Modal* and *Critical Discourse Analysis* as the *Analytics of Mediation* approach prescribed. The specific sub-analyses included in each approach are reported in the next chart, following the steps and the questions that Chouliaraki suggests in her works (2006a; 2006c) and taking the numerous cases of suffering reported as a guideline.

<b>THE BAGA TERRORIST ATTACK (NIGERIA)</b>				
	Nation	Publisher	Title	Date
<i>Pilot Articles</i>				
1	U.S.	NY Post	Nigeria massacre deadliest in history of Boko Haram: Amnesty	09/01/15
2	U.K.	BBC	Boko Haram crisis: Nigeria's Baga town hit by new assault	08/01/15
<i>New Articles</i>				
3	U.S.	The New York Times	Dozens said to die in Boko Haram attack	09/01/15
4	U.S.	The Washington Post	Boko Haram's campaign of terror in Nigeria is only getting worse	14/01/15
5	U.S.	NY Daily News	Nigeria terror group Boko Haram kills 2000 people in one attack, official says: report	10/01/15
6	U.K.	The Guardian	Boko Haram: satellite images reveal devastation of massacre in Nigeria	15/01/15
7	U.K.	The Telegraph	Boko Haram raze Nigerian towns in 'most destructive' attack yet, says Amnesty	15/01/15
8	U.K.	The Times	Boko Haram 'kills 2000' as it burns Nigerian Army town	09/01/15

<b>THE CHARLIE HEBDO TERRORIST ATTACK (FRANCE)</b>				
	Nation	Publisher	Title	Date
<i>Pilot Articles</i>				
1	U.S.	NY Post	Gunmen shout 'Allah!' as they massacre 12 at French newspapers	07/01/15
2	U.K.	BBC	Charlie Hebdo: Gun attack on French magazine kills 12	07/01/15
<i>New Articles</i>				
3	U.S.	The New York Times	Terrorists strike Charlie Hebdo Newspapers in Paris, Leaving 12 dead	07/01/15
4	U.S.	The Washington Post	The Charlie Hebdo killings are the deadliest attack on Western journalists in decades	07/01/15
5	U.S.	NY Daily News	Charlie Hebdo massacre: Gory newsroom scene revealed while French Police hunt for terror suspects	09/01/15
6	U.K.	The Guardian	Charlie Hebdo attacks: 'It's carnage, a bloodbath. Everyone is dead'	07/01/15
7	U.K.	The Telegraph	Paris Charlie Hebdo attack: 7 January as it happened	07/01/15
8	U.K.	The Times	Islamists kill 12 in attack on French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo	07/01/15



<b>ANALYTICS OF MEDIATION</b>					
<i>Multi-Modal Analysis</i>			<i>Critical Discourse Analysis</i>		
Mode of News Representation	Narrative Realism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceptual Realism</li> <li>• Categorical Realism</li> <li>• Ideological Realism</li> </ul>	Space-Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Singularity</li> <li>• Concreteness</li> <li>• Multiplicity</li> <li>• Mobility</li> <li>• Specificity</li> </ul>	
Verbal-Visual Correspondence	The Visual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No Visual</li> <li>• Intensive Visualization</li> </ul>			
	The Verbal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Description</li> <li>• Narrations/ Story Telling</li> <li>• Exposition</li> </ul>	Agency	Public Action at Distance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agora</li> <li>• Theatre</li> </ul>
	The Verbal-Visual Relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indexical</li> <li>• Iconic</li> <li>• Symbolic Meanings</li> </ul>			
Aesthetical Quality	Historical Topics for Representation of Suffering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pamphleteering</li> <li>• Philanthropy</li> <li>• Sublimation</li> </ul>			

## **RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION**

In order to offer a clear explanation of the analysis undertaken, I will not answer the research questions separately. Indeed, as I will demonstrate soon, since the queries are strongly connected, each discursive and visual strategy used to manage the visibility of suffering for the two events (RQ1) has direct consequences for the interpretations of the other two sub-questions related to the moral and power implications (RQ2 and RQ3).

### **Mode of Representation**

Even without a careful reading of the newspapers articles, considerable differences emerge in comparing the way in which the two different stories were represented. Overall, the pieces reporting on the Charlie Hebdo attack are longer and more complex than the ones reporting on the Baga attack. In addition to the length, the element that immediately strikes the reader is the abundance of visual materials that complete and enrich the narration of the Paris event. Not all the texts that present the Baga attack are supported by visual material and when they are, it is less in quantity and variety. This first analysis, although superficial, supplies the first important information about the ways through which the reader comes to evaluate the events. The pieces reporting the Paris attack, in their aesthetically complex representation, allow the reader to become a witness to the event, furnishing all the materials to understand and 'take part' in the facts and the feelings expressed in the lines of the texts and the visual representations. The great variety of material provided, in addition, has the power to link the story expressed in the texts to the expressive strength and efficiency of the images and footage that show the spectator how the world has responded to the horrific attack and invite him/her to join its denunciation. In this way, although the articles furnish clear descriptive information about the event, evoking the tangible reality of the facts, overall they convey a great level of moral participation and feelings, that gives rise to a form of realism named 'categorical' (2006c).

In stark contrast, the pieces reporting on the Baga attack do not appear able to convey the same level of public moral engagement. Firstly there is a lack of detail about the event within the texts and this simple narrative strategy is not integrated with enough visual material to let the reader into the story. Although the facts are reporting using strong words and shocking maps, the sense of suffering and participation does not come out. What seems to emerge, conversely, is a kind of 'ideological realism', a reality that appeals to the reader's consciousness about what the world is (Chouliaraki, 2006c). The reality of this narrative,

thus, comes from the Western imagery that depicts a developing, still uncivilized, country which is difficult to access and where suffering is something recurrent and commonplace.

### **Verbal and Visual Correspondence**

In order to analyse the multi-modal combination of the two representations, I followed three main steps: analysis of the verbal mode, the visual mode and their relationship.

#### *Verbal Mode*

I analysed the text narrative function in reporting five main components of the story (the evaluation of the events, the victims, the persecutors, and national and international involvement and response) in order to discover what specific sense of reality is evoked in the readers' minds. Basically, my interest was in bringing to light the kind of knowledge about the terrorist attacks that the reader could have acquired through the consumption of newspaper articles. This analysis is extremely important since, as Choualiaraki suggests, the verbal narrative 'performs fundamental classificatory activities: it includes and excludes, foregrounds and backgrounds, justifies and legitimizes. It separates 'us' from 'them' (2006c:15).

The Baga terrorist attack is reported using a sketchy factual report followed by a sequence of third person opinions and declarations. There is neither a clear plot nor a sequence of facts and recognizable characters. The main element that characterizes the report is uncertainty due to the lack of reliable sources. This narrative approximation is clearly explained in many parts concerning both the facts: 'If the reports ... are correct' (Appendix1, Art.14) 'It has been very difficult to verify what happened' (Appendix1, Art.8) and the number of the victims: 'Hundreds, perhaps thousands, were killed' (Appendix1, Art.8) 'No witness or official was able to give a precise number of the dead' (Appendix1, Art.10). What is provided, therefore, is just a panoramic overview that universalises the event, without providing specific details that can help the reader to understand and experience the story. Despite this, however, some information emerges from the choice to incorporate numerous people's statements, that compensate for the lack of details about the facts, with personal viewpoints, judgments or experiences (just in a couple of pieces). Although they do not create a complete narrative, the reader receives some clues about the uncontrolled and unmanageable situation that an entire city faces. Most of these statements, however, come from Amnesty International's spokespersons, who appear to be the main source that knows the 'truth' about the tragic facts of Baga, along with the governmental institutions' delegates, whose releases contain clear evaluations of the attack, making reference especially to the complex and

corrupted political situation that characterizes the country, and talking about the victims with emotional estrangement. It is clear how the objective story does not come out in the articles. The presence of a Western organization as the only one being capable of managing the consequences of misgovernment and violence, has a strong impact over the definitions of the characters of the story and their roles. The distance between the expert and civilized part (Amnesty, the West) and the uncivilized, barbaric and corrupted one (Nigeria) emerges quite clearly.

The Charlie Hebdo representation, conversely, even though reported within the restrictions of a written text, holds the characteristics of live footage, allowing the reader to become a witness to the unfolding of the events. This is created through the narrative mechanism of the story-telling: ‘eleven-thirty am, in Paris. Corinne Rey (...) had just picked her daughter from a nearby crèche, when (...) two masked and armed men (...)’ (Appendix1, Art.7), which includes a great rigour in reporting detailed facts expressed in a chronological plot that creates moments of involvement and suspense, especially in the chase after the terrorists. Here, as well, statements’ of public and political figures are reported but their function differs considerably from the ones previous analysed. What emerges is a strong and global condemnation of the terrorist attack and a heartfelt solidarity towards the victims, which blows up in a global and shared moral engagement with the country.

After this first overview, I then analysed and compared how the articles reported and described especially the events, the victims and the responses:

#### Evaluation of the Events:

The Boko Haram’s assault on the city of Baga is evaluated overall as a ‘catastrophic assault’ (Appendix1, Art.12) and a ‘deliberate attack on civilians’ (Appendix1, Art.8). The attack is perceived as something recurring and usual, since it was not just a single episode but a part of a long series of ordinary assaults that have hit different areas of the country: ‘Nigeria’s Baga town hit by a new assault’ (Appendix1, Art.2), that indeed has raised ‘fear of a humanitarian crisis’ (Appendix1, Art.2). The Paris attack, on the other hand, appears to the world’s eyes as something shocking and unprecedented: ‘We are shocked and surprised that something like this could happen in the centre of Paris’ (Appendix1, Art.9). The attack is described as an evident declaration of war against the most cherished of Western values: ‘Act of exceptional barbarity, against a newspaper, a symbol of liberty’ (Appendix1, Art.13).

Victims:

An overall sense of carelessness and dehumanisation towards the Baga victims is evident through the use of terms such as ‘bodies’ (Appendix1, Art.14,3,6) and ‘corpses’ (Appendix1, Art.2) to refer to the undefined number of people who died. Some statements, in addition, convey a feeling of moral estrangement: ‘The stench of rotting corpses’ (Appendix1, Art.2). The victims are described by Amnesty International as being ‘mostly women, children and elderly’ (Appendix1, Art.3), considered as the most vulnerable and helpless ones. In the Charlie Hebdo attack the overall victims are 17 of whom 12 were well-known journalists and cartoonists. Specific details about their identities are shared together with their pictures. The editorial staff, overall, is praised for its historical working merit and courage in defending freedom of speech.

Terrorists:

With regard to the Boko Haram group the information is very concise. All that the articles mention is the meaning of its name: ‘Western education is sin’ (Appendix1, Art.14) and their intent: ‘Islamists have imposed the crudest form of Shariah (...) on these places’ to ‘strangulate the city, and make it the capital or their caliphate’ (Appendix1, Art.10,16). The story told in the articles is that Boko Haram has been able to advance undisturbed and thus acquire great power in Nigeria, especially due to a lack of government action. Conversely, specific details about the terrorists’ identities and actions are reported in the Paris attack, where not only personal details and pictures but all their movements and words are reported. For instance we know that they drove ‘a black Citroen – registration number CW518XV’ (Appendix1, Art.7), and the words they shouted during the attack: ‘We’ve killed Charlie Hebdo’ and ‘We have avenged the prophet’ (Appendix1, Art.7).

National Response:

Although the Boko Haram actions are strongly condemned by governmental institutions that use expressions such as ‘Boko Haram is the evil’ (Appendix1, Art.8), it seems that there is not the same determined will to fight it: ‘Impossible to formulate a comprehensive strategy for addressing the threat’ (Appendix1, Art.10) and protect people. Clear cues about government’s unreliability and corruption are revealed. What emerges is the existence of complicated political relations behind Boko Haram’s advance: ‘Critics condemn President Jonathan as ‘shameless’ as he launched his party’s re-election yesterday, despite the carnage’ (Appendix1, Art.14); ‘The 20,000 square kilometres of Nigeria that have fallen under Boko Haram’s control have done so ‘under Jonathan’s watch’ (Appendix1, Art.14); ‘The government has frequently given false and inaccurate information about the Islamist insurgency’ (Appendix1, Art.12); ‘A lack of equipment,

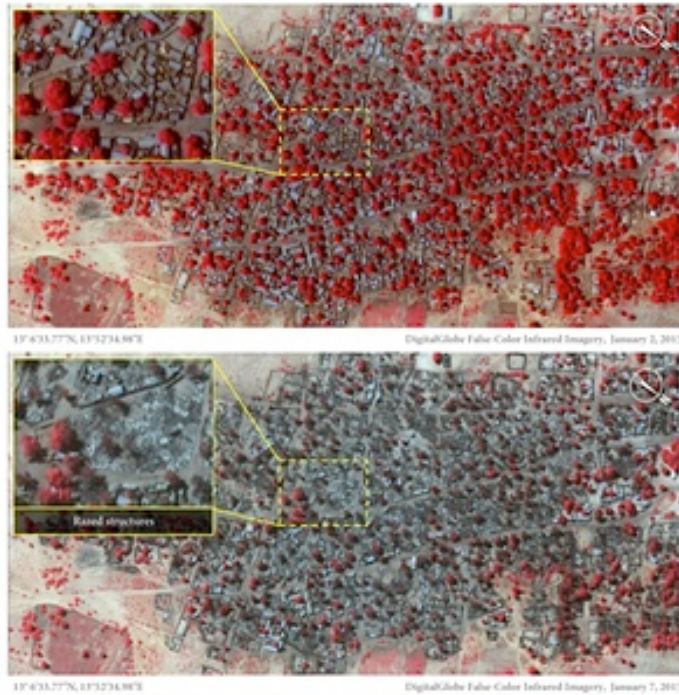
tactical mistakes, human rights abuses and internal discord have severely hampered its army's ability to contain (...) Boko Haram's increasingly sophisticated aggression' (Appendix1, Art.16). The incompetence and unreliability of the Nigerian government, in stark contrast with the efficiency and power of the American one, is clearly stated: 'the US and other interested governments must step up pressure on Nigeria to address issues such as systemic corruption and low morale in the military' (Appendix1, Art.16). The French president, Hollande, instead, responded suddenly and effectively to the attack, strongly condemning it and taking prompt measures to protect citizens and prevent possible future attacks. Through his public speech, he has been able to generate feelings of daring among the country: 'Our greatest strength is unity' (Appendix1, Art.11) or 'We are threatened because we are a country of liberty' (Appendix1, Art.1).

#### International Response:

The Paris attack provoked an ample resonance with shock waves through Europe and beyond. It rapidly raised global indignation, both from international citizens and from institutions that condemned the attack and offered support. President Obama, the Queen, European leaders, President Putin and the Holy Father voiced horror and solidarity with France. A strong sense of alliance among these powers that become a single 'we' came to light in some declarations, as with Cameron's one: 'We [Cameron-Hollande-Merkel] stand absolutely united with the French people against terrorism and against this threat to our values – free speech, the rule of law, democracy' (Appendix1, Art.11). The Baga attack articles do not mention how the world responded to the events. The only reference to a Western position is the one represented by the NGO Amnesty International, which was depicted as a rescuer. With this exception, there is a total lack of international condemnation.

#### *Visual Mode*

Overall the visual collection in the Baga attack is quite poor and mostly composed of maps. The use of this visual strategy for placing the event and showing its aftermath has only a descriptive function, preventing any possibility of emotional engagement. The most representative map of the events is the satellite view of Baga, published by Amnesty International, that shows two images taken before and after the attack in order to clearly demonstrate a city burned to the ground. No other visual information is provided to show what happened in the city and how the assault took place. What the reader can understand is just a set of red dots (the city before) and then a set of grey dots (the city after). Although this representation clearly demonstrates the catastrophic consequences of the attack, it reports an abstract and inhabited place, furnishing no cues about the living context and the human pain.



Another type of map is the classical geographical one that locates the country of Nigeria in the African space by framing it in a square, and then shows a close-up of the place of the attack, pointing it out with a dot. Despite its simplicity and clarity, even this type of map decontextualizes the city from its geographical entity and, in so doing, creates a strong moral distance between the suffering and the Western reader.



(Appendix1, Art.2)



(Appendix1, Art.10)

The few images



provided failed completely in their intent to clarify and enrich the texts. Most of them report two main subjects: the Islamist extremist group Boko Haram, and survivors of the attack. The pictures of the Boko Haram group do not provide any further information about its identity and purpose, but conversely reinforces Western imagery about its barbarism and violence. The Islamist extremists, indeed, are framed within pictures that show them wearing military clothes, their body position and facial expression conveying a sense of threat and violence and in the background we can see Islamist flags, shotguns and military vehicles.



(Appendix1, Art.2)



(Appendix1, Art.3)

The other set of images depict ‘ghost’ inhabitants who are walking in a ‘ghost’ city. The background is completely destroyed and abandoned and there are no signs of life. The only few people depicted are so far away that they do not differ much from the dots in the map. Their faces and expressions are not shown, they do not evoke pain and their suffering is represented only in that empty and silent background.



(Appendix1, Art.14)



(Appendix1, Art.3)

Interestingly, the choice of some articles includes images which are not from the Baga attack in particular but come from different periods and different cities, as in the cases reported



below that depict people gathering around a crater after a car bomb exploded in a market area near Maiduguri airport, or of children in a camp for internal displaced people in Yola in November. The choice to include them in articles reporting the Baga attack expresses the clear lack of cultural and geographical identity of Nigerian people and places, reflecting the Western imagery of Africa as a single country and their suffering as something so usual and recurrent that every image can be adapted to other circumstances.

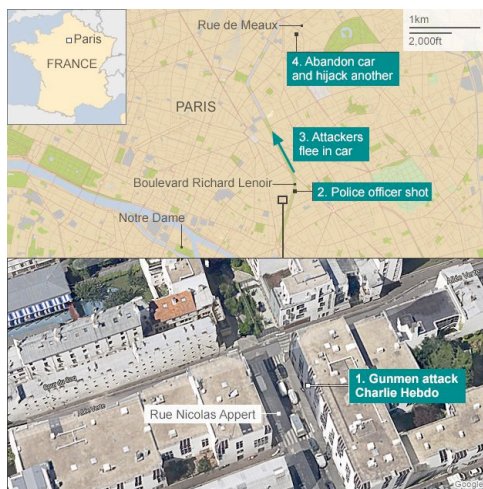


(Appendix1, Art.10)



(Appendix1, Art.6)

The visual material provided in the articles reporting the Charlie Hebdo attack, as already stated, is much more complex and diversified than the one just analysed. Here, too, many maps are used but their role is completely different from the Baga ones. They are elaborated, and some are virtual reconstructions of the neighbourhood where the attack took place. A clear explanation of the streets, buildings, the route terrorists took and the places of the main events is given. Their role is integrative and explanatory of what has already been stated in the texts.



(Appendix1, Art.1)



(Appendix1, Art.11)

The visual material provided, especially videos and images, follows the different stages of the attack: the police officer shot after the attack in the offices of the French satirical newspaper, the assailants' escape, the manhunt, the killing of hostages and policemen in a supermarket and finally the capture. Overall, the articles furnish images that follow the itinerary, especially portraying the police and rescue forces in different scenes, offering the public live updates about the events, creating also a strong sense of truthfulness and immediacy.

The image that undoubtedly has become the most representative of the attack comes from the footage, shot by witnesses, which portrays two armed gunmen shooting a police officer on the street near to the offices of the French satirical newspaper.



(Appendix1, Art.3)



(Appendix1, Art.5)



(Appendix1, Art.3)



(Appendix1, Art.3)

The other set of images concerns the aftermath of the attack, the public demonstration of solidarity on the streets of Paris and other European cities and numerous citizens generating footage that testify the public involvement and indignation for the attack. Thanks to these images and videos the two symbols of the Charlie attack emerge: the slogan 'Je suis Charlie' and the pen raised up as a sign of 'freedom of expression'.





(Appendix1, Art.9)



(Appendix1, Art.11)

### *Verbal and Visual Relationship*

The articles reporting on the Charlie Hebdo attack seem to establish two different types of relations of meaning between the verbal and the visual, and consequently two distinct claims in relation to the reality of suffering. Through the use of descriptive language and the indexical correspondence established between verbal and visual, what is offered by these articles is an account that allows the reader to be involved in the event. This perceptual realism, however, does not complete the story since the reference to a psychological realism is also evident. The claim to emotion and in particular to a sense of humanity and justice is strongly evoked through the use of a story-telling strategy and the use of images that show symbols of global solidarity which are immediately recognizable to the readers.

In the case of the Baga attack it is not possible to make any claim to facticity since, as demonstrated in the analysis, there is not a relationship between verbal and visual. The use of images and discourses that contain iconic and symbolic meanings gives rise to a categorical and ideological realism, an abstract reality created through associations based on familiar relationships between images or conventional knowledge and values (Chouliaraki, 2006c). This happens especially through those images that portray people framed in a background of destruction, or children in a refugee camp, that suddenly evoke the idea of desolation and poverty. Especially the images that do not relate to the Baga attack, deprive places and people from their identity and particularity, assigning them to a generic status of 'Africa'. In addition, discursive and visual strategies evoke in the reader a set of cues that reflect the overall Western imagery of the country: bodies on the street, a ghost city, state corruption, violence, a lack of control and the government's incapacity to deal with the threat.

### **Aesthetic Quality**

The aesthetic quality describes the ‘overall semiotic effects on the news’ (Chouliaraki, 2006c:18), which Boltanski (1999) gathers in three main historical topics for the representation of suffering: the topic of denunciation, the topic of sentiment and the aesthetic topic.

As already stated, the Baga devastation is not reported through an objective perspective. There is a clear preponderance of strong and shocking words, which, however, do not explain the facts, and images that depict the imagery of Africa as a whole, rather than the attack itself. What is represented, thus, is an ‘a-prospectival objectivity’ (Chouliaraki, 2006a:134) that does not offer any cues about the historical, economic and political difficulties that affect the country and that have led toward the uncontrolled and unmanageable situation in which the Boko Haram group seems to have acquired power. It is clearly stated that the attack on the city of Baga is the ‘largest and most destructive’ (Appendix1, Art.8,12), implying that this is not the first, but what the reader is not offered are the instruments to enable an evaluation of why this is happening. In this kind of aesthetic representation, the public does not need to be convinced of the actual truth of the facts, since all they feel is a general sentiment of pity, not towards the victims, who seem not to exist, but towards an entire city or perhaps an entire country. As Chouliaraki explains, such sentimentalism in relation to philanthropy, paradoxically, cancels out its own moral appeal to action (2006c). The relation between the reader and the suffering is, therefore, interrupted, leaving no likelihood for agency and no demand for explanations and solutions.

In the representation of the Charlie Hebdo attack, conversely, the reality of the facts is not overcome despite the strong presence of emotions. The aesthetic quality of this news enters into the political practice of pamphleteering, in this case the public denunciation of and indignation towards a terrorist attack against the West. Here the victims are not only the editorial staff of the newspaper since what has been killed primarily is a value that is supposed to be the cornerstone of the Western culture with which all of the readers identify: the freedom of expression. This, therefore, explains the international denunciation and moral involvement that led millions of people to act. Agency, in this case, materializes in the public identification with the sufferers and in demonstrations of solidarity that exploded, more or less noisily, all over Europe. It is precisely the common threat that raised a sense of common vulnerability within the Western community, together with the identification of a common

enemy embodied by Islamist extremism .The antagonism here is established around a series of symbolic contrasts between the West (democratic and free) and Islam (primitive and savage).

### **Space-Time**

The multimodal narrative that characterizes the Charlie Hebdo news is reflected in a complicated spatio-temporal regime. The story is constructed as a montage, connecting pieces of spatial and temporal realities into a coherent story. The news reports on elements of concreteness, specificity and mobility. The reader recognizes, first of all, the space of suffering as concrete, where people live and act, in this case the offices, but also the city as a whole, especially during the chase after the terrorists. The specificity of time and space of the suffering is offered by verbal and visual cues that render the happening as unique, so that the same event could not have happened anywhere else. This is guaranteed by the linguistic descriptive material which mentions the names and details of the victims, assailants, streets and buildings. What is provided is a geographical representation that the Western spectator recognizes as familiar, along with the victims' faces that individualize the images of the sufferers. Finally, mobility is linked to the composition of the news as a montage, which is able to connect the space-time of the suffering with the one of safety. In this particular case the two zones coincide. If Baga (or Africa as an entirety) is perceived as a place of suffering so far away, geographically and ideologically, that it cannot reach us, the Paris attack destroys our safe place, making us all feel under threat. It is precisely the fusion of the two spaces that annuls the distance between the victim and the spectator and activates the possibility of agency in the Paris case.

In the Baga news, instead, the distance between the African violence and pain remains distant from our safe space. The dynamics of the attack, the victims, and the whole environment that surrounds the suffering, does not reach our homes and does not undermine our lives. In addition, the space-time is not characterized by specificity, since the articles clearly mention the city of Baga but do not give any clues about details that the pieces about Paris do. The suffering is roughly distributed, not only in the space circumscribed by the destroyed village but in all of the country, since the articles suggest that other cities in the past have been hit and probably will be hit by new assaults in the future. This generalization adds to the chronotopicity, the characteristic of mobility, both in time and space. The result is that the pain, in Nigeria, is portrayed as a multifaceted and dynamic reality that can make more than one appearance and manifest itself in more than one specific place and time. Sorrow, therefore, is a condition that seems to be inherently linked to African lives.

### **Agency: the Failure of Cosmopolitanism and the Reinforcement of Hierarchy of News**

In the Baga attack, the visualization and narrative of suffering overall fail to humanize the victims who are just bodies strewn along the streets of the city. The sufferers, thus, are reduced to an 'impersonal group of unfortunates' (Chouliaraki, 2006a:105) without any identity. This verbal construction that shapes irrevocably the sufferer as 'Other' is reflected in the reader's mind and provokes an interruption of his emotional potential. In this way Nigerian people and spaces remain so far from us, so unfamiliar, incomprehensible and inaccessible that the disposition of the cosmopolitan spectator vanishes completely. The sense of suffering is evoked through the use of those maps that show a 'non-existing city' and those images that depict desolate spaces where just a couple of people wander around in the background, representing the stereotyped imagery of Africa which has already been established in the Western culture. Even though the spectator was moved by the emotion of compassion for the bleakness of the landscape and the misery of its 'virtual' inhabitants, these feelings would not activate any kind of agency toward them.

The well-known victims of the Charlie Hebdo attack, on the other hand, whose images and identities filled the pages of Western newspapers, provoked first of all incredulity and afterwards dismay, and a strong sense of identification, since they were people just 'like us'. Learning about the killing of famous journalists while they were working in their offices has completely torn down the borders that delimited 'our' safety zone and put all of us in danger. This, in turn, has shaped a 'universal value of common humanity' (Chouliaraki, 2006a:165) reinforced by the awareness of a future that appears uncertain and risky both for the readers (us) and the sufferers (Paris). Another important characteristic of this news is the topic of denunciation that has involved an entire community of belonging (the West). The assailants have an identity and a face but they are just representative of a bigger threat hidden behind them: al-Qaeda or, more generally, the Islamic extremism that is reported in all the articles as the main enemy of the West. This concept reflects those studies carried out on the ability of media-generated global risks and threats to produce new forms of cosmopolitan connectivity (Beck, Levy, 2013), so that the perception of us all being threatened by a common danger would enable people 'to view themselves as citizens of the globe' (Urry, 1999:319).

The virtual or realistic mobilization that unites Western institutions and citizens, based on the appeal for justice and democracy, however, does not unfold the possibility of

cosmopolitanism since it involves just the solidified Western community in a threat that involves Western countries.

The comparison of these two cases unveils how Western news media are explicitly implicated in the political reinforcement of the hierarchies of places and human lives, which reflect the opposition between West and non-West. As Chouliaraki sustains, news stories 'reproduce an implicit order of space relationships, which prioritize places that are already relevant and culturally familiar to spectators, but they further hierarchize the relevance and acuteness of the sufferers' pain for the spectators, distinguishes between human lives that are worth mourning for or saving and other that are not' (2006a: 110).

## **CONCLUSION**

In this empirical research I have approached the term symbolic power according to Chouliaraki's definition: the ability of the media to manage the visibility of suffering in such a way that they reproduce the moral deficiencies of global inequalities (2008b:329). The verbal and visual strategies identified within the analysis have clearly demonstrated how the symbolic power of Western news media materializes through two main practices: the first is linked to the process in which the representation of distant suffering comes to signify and therefore produce knowledge in the audience; the second practice arises as a consequence of the first one and is connected to the public moral dispositions toward the mediated suffering.

Discourses and images about Nigerian and French people and places come under the stereotypical neo-colonial narratives based on the opposition between West and non-West. The imagery of the West emerges from the texts in terms of a legacy concerning its shared values and power, in contrast with the poverty, violence and disorder that characterize the African continent. Public engagement and response to the events appears strictly connected to the different ways in which suffering is portrayed, however, both the cases demonstrate how the news is not able to construe a space of cosmopolitan connectivity (Chouliaraki, 2008a) since the reference public is the community to which the spectator already belongs. This, in turn, reinforces the idea that within the so-called 'global village' (McLuhan, 1964) not only do cosmopolitan dispositions fail to materialize, but what is reinforced is the hierarchical flow of international news. The texts contain the presence of dominant ideologies that sustain systemic global inequalities dependent on historical phenomena that arranged specific places (Africa) and human lives in a subordinate position in comparison to others (Europe).

The research does not seek to challenge journalistic objectivity and professionalism, but the outcomes reveal how the meanings underlying the social construction of the realities of the two news stories are ‘naturalized’ so that they are acquired as taken-for-granted assumptions by both those who create the news and those who consume it. This reinforces the argument according to which the first world biased process of meaning-making (Schiller, 1978; Hacque, 1983; Giffard, 1984) does not appear as such, either to the reader or to the producer who, indeed, may be largely unconscious of it (Gamson et al, 1992). Western media may appear to work through an impartial representation of facts and in so doing, shape a reality that claims to embody the ‘truth’ about suffering. But, as demonstrated in this research, they also distribute different ‘regimes of pity’ through different types of news that, through a process of selection and construction, declare which suffering carries the most weight for the Western spectator (Chouliaraki, 2008a).

It would be interesting, in order to drive the research forward, to undertake another qualitative study, for instance through interviews, in which spectators are asked to reveal their own hierarchies of suffering and compare them to the one that emerges from the critical evaluation of news media coverage.

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**APPENDIX 1: News media used for the empirical research:**

N° Article	Newspapers	Author	Date	Website
Art.1	BBC	/	07/01/15	<a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-30710883">http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-30710883</a>
Art.2	BBC	/	08/01/15	<a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-30728158">http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-30728158</a>
Art.3	NY Daily News	David Boroff; Stephen Rex Brown	09/01/15	<a href="http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/charlie-hebdo-shooting-suspects-hold-gas-station-manager-article-1.2069964">http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/charlie-hebdo-shooting-suspects-hold-gas-station-manager-article-1.2069964</a>
Art.4	NY Daily News	Virginia Power; Meg Wagner; Rachelle Blinder; Larry Mcshane	10/01/15	<a href="http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/boko-haram-kills-2-000-people-attack-report-article-1.2071454">http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/boko-haram-kills-2-000-people-attack-report-article-1.2071454</a>
Art.5	NY Post	Bob Frederiks	07/01/15	<a href="http://nypost.com/2015/01/07/gunmen-who-killed-12-at-newspaper-were-calm-controlled/">http://nypost.com/2015/01/07/gunmen-who-killed-12-at-newspaper-were-calm-controlled/</a>
Art.6	NY Post	Associated Press	09/01/15	<a href="http://nypost.com/2015/01/09/nigeria-massacre-deadliest-in-history-of-boko-haram-amnesty/">http://nypost.com/2015/01/09/nigeria-massacre-deadliest-in-history-of-boko-haram-amnesty/</a>
Art.7	The Guardian	Jon Henley; Kim Willsher	07/01/15	<a href="http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/07/charlie-hebdo-shooting-paris-magazine-target-raid">http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/07/charlie-hebdo-shooting-paris-magazine-target-raid</a>
Art.8	The Guardian	Sam Jones; Monica Mark	15/01/15	<a href="http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/14/satellite-images-reveal-devastation-boko-haram-massacre-nigeria">http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/14/satellite-images-reveal-devastation-boko-haram-massacre-nigeria</a>

Art.9	The New York Times	Dan Bilefsky; Maïa de la Baume	07/01/15	<a href="http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/08/world/europe/charlie-hebdo-paris-shooting.html?_r=0">http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/08/world/europe/charlie-hebdo-paris-shooting.html?_r=0</a>
Art.10	The New York Times	Adam Nossiter	09/01/15	<a href="http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/10/world/africa/dozens-said-to-have-died-in-boko-haram-attack.html">http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/10/world/africa/dozens-said-to-have-died-in-boko-haram-attack.html</a>
Art.11	The Telegraph	Barney Henderson; Andrew Marszal; David Millward	07/01/15	<a href="http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/11332098/Paris-Charlie-Hebdo-attack-January-7-as-it-happened.html">http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/11332098/Paris-Charlie-Hebdo-attack-January-7-as-it-happened.html</a>
Art.12	The Telegraph	David Blair	15/01/15	<a href="http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/nigeria/11345905/Boko-Haram-raze-Nigerian-towns-in-most-destructive-attack-yet-says-Amnesty.html">http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/nigeria/11345905/Boko-Haram-raze-Nigerian-towns-in-most-destructive-attack-yet-says-Amnesty.html</a>
Art.13	The Times	Charles Bremmer	07/01/15	<a href="http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/europe/article4316408.ece">http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/europe/article4316408.ece</a>
Art.14	The Times	Ruth Maclean	09/01/15	<a href="http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/africa/article4317972.ece">http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/africa/article4317972.ece</a>
Art.15	The Washington Post	Christopher Ingraham	07/01/15	<a href="http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonkblog/wp/2015/01/07/the-charlie-hebdo-killings-are-the-deadliest-attack-on-western-journalists-in-decades/">http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonkblog/wp/2015/01/07/the-charlie-hebdo-killings-are-the-deadliest-attack-on-western-journalists-in-decades/</a>
Art.16	The Washington Post	Editorial Board	14/01/15	<a href="http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/boko-harams-campaign-of-terror-in-nigeria-is-getting-only-worse/2015/01/13/d697d4d6-9a9c-11e4-96cc-e858eba91ced_story.html">http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/boko-harams-campaign-of-terror-in-nigeria-is-getting-only-worse/2015/01/13/d697d4d6-9a9c-11e4-96cc-e858eba91ced_story.html</a>

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