

## **Multiple Rooms with Brought Down Walls: Aleppo's 'Holocaust' and Democracy of/in the American Century**

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### **Introduction**

In his philosophical enunciation of the postmodern condition, Baudrillard postulates two formulas for decoding the cultural politics of postmodern societies. First is the precession of simulacra, defined in terms of "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyper-real" where "the map ... [and] engenders the territory" (Baudrillard [1981]. 1988, 1). Second is his conception of clean war, which is "a promotional exercise ... whose product never become known", where "the media promotes war, the war promotes the media and advertising compete with the war" (Baudrillard [1991] 1995, 29-31). These two formulas signal Baudrillard's engagement with the reality problematics of the capitalist consumer culture and the onset of what he terms as the ecstasy of communication (Baudrillard 1988). For Baudrillard, the ecstasy of communication becomes the organizing principle for the postmodern social order and the operating mechanism of its social practices regulation. The latter is administered through the acquired organicity of digital technology—defined in terms of the individuals' total immersion in a network of semiotic exchange as "terminals of multiple networks" with the individual figuring as "pure screens, switching centers for all the networks of influence" (Baudrillard 1988, 127-133). This conception of the organicity of digital technology was instrumentalized and politicized in both Critical Media Studies and Translation/Adaptation as a framework to studying the engineering of a social practice and its ramification with respect to conflict representation and democracy crisis. In Media Studies, Kellner (2009) premises the crisis of democracy on the digitally propelled victory of media spectacle over media event (of the previous century) and its instrumentalization as "a dominant form of defining and contesting existing social and political realities" (Kellner 2009, 6)—in distinction from the early era of television where spectacle was celebratory and reproductive of the existing

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social order. For Kellner, media spectacles are global in scope—organized by the state in case of war, governing or election. The idea of effect and its corollary of politics/war implementation by other means became the subject of investigation. Translation Studies especially with the Cultural Turn (1980-90), which simultaneously propelled the narrative and the still in progress medial turn. Positioning Translation within the realm of conflict, Baker's narrative account (2006) specifies the socio-political function of translation as a tool of intercultural mediation that involves an instrumentalized renarration of conflict through and in accordance to the reservoir of narrative frames of the target receivers. This reservoir constructs and reframes reality to direct cognition and propels a reception effect with a specified outcome. From a different angle, Littau's investigation of mediality and intermediality calls for attention to the reframing potential of media technology, especially with respect to their enframing function and their effect on reception, cognition and reality construction. The end point of these disparate parameters is the development of critical paradigms for the postmodern communication problematics, its implication for the social and democratic practices, and in the post-Cold War schema of the pursuit of politics/war by other means. The remit of Soft Power theory (Nye 1990), and the pursuit of politics by other means of cultural diplomacy have been prefigured as "the lynchpin of public democracy" in the Arab world (US Department of State 2005, 1) with amorphous dynamics operative through instrumentalization new media uses, non-state actors, their media spectacles and narrative accounts. The end is pushing forward the canonicity of the democratic march and Anglo-American non-interventionism. The Syrian crisis (2011-1016) provides a case in point. Its reality communication does not just engage non-state actors, mega media spectacle and new media technology. Its digitally mediated war account embodies an interconnection between mediality, narrativity and spectacle, bringing to the fore the question of access to media representation and the particular trajectory for democracy march mediation in Syria.

This paper investigates the interconnection between mediality, narrativity and the digital mediation model of democracy march in the Syrian context. The paper particularly tackles the reality problematics of postmodern warfare and its implication for the digital communication of the Battle of Aleppo, in addition to the reality representation of its holocaust narrativization and the media spectacle of the White Helmets. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, the paper utilizes the concepts of the simulacra and clean war (*Baudrillard* [1981] 1988; [1991] 1995), socio-narrative (Baker 2006), mediality and intermediality (Littau 1996,



2011, 2013, 2016) and spectacle (Kellner 2009). The paper examines the narrativization of the media event of the Battle of Aleppo (2012-2016) within the 'holocaust' frame and through the media spectacle of the White Helmets. The paper inspected online materials (from the 270 entries dealing with the covering of Aleppo's 2016 crisis), the White Helmets' Website, their Oscar award winning Netflix documentary-entitled *The White Helmets* (2016) and their featuring of Time Magazine cover. The paper aims to answer three questions: how was the battle of Aleppo narrated through the holocaust frame? How and why was Aleppo's war account constructed as media spectacle within the Holocaust narrative? How can an investigation of mediality in cultural translation scholarship illuminate democracy mediation management and cultural diplomacy implementation models, especially in connection to the problematics of access to media representation and digital media circulation? The paper conducts its analysis along three axes. First is the extra text, which deals with the disciplinary narratives (Baker 2006) bringing forth the 'New Middle East' and the 'American Century'. Second is the intertext, which traces the intersection between the disciplinary narrative of democracy, the public narrative and the official handling of the democracy march in the Middle East. Third is the hypertext. This axis addresses the hybrid nature of information-congested texts in the hypertextual environment and the impact of the technologically regulated interface on narrative control and the production of unanimous gaze. The paper argues for the following. First is the prefiguration of the White Helmets as the simulacra of the clean war, providing for the spectacle of 'next generation leaders' (Times cover 2016) and Aleppo's ensuing 'holocaust' narrative frame. Second is the temporal and spatial framing of Aleppo's 'holocaust' narrative frame and the spectacle-centric machination of the real-time Holocaust of the American century. Third is the political machination of the New Empire, which operates its bid for "totalitarian democracy" (Engdahl 2009) through the media-regulated message. The latter supplants and configures the reality on the ground to-and-through the constructed virtual reality that is media managed in accordance to corporate capital stranglehold and in tune with the prognostic vision for a New Middle East. Ultimately, the paper draws attention to the interface between digital communication industry and geo-politics, especially with respect to the implication of the former in the imperial technologies of covert-control and machination for social engineering of unanimous digital gaze, through multiple chat rooms. "Multiple rooms" is the proposed schema for the implementation model of what has been dubbed as the project for the New American Century<sup>1</sup> -- operative in the Syrian crisis through the multiple medially



mediated en-framing of the Nazi-like state and its tactile alternative other (the White Helmets).

### **Multiple Rooms with *No/One* Roof: Mediality, Narrativity and the Primacy of Commodification as Communication**

The high-tech capitalism of electronic media culture is characterized by what Baudrillard ([1981] 1988) diagnoses as the implosion of the 'real' and the onset of the 'hyper-real'. Baudrillard's diagnosis arises from the new positioning of commodity and communication in the cultural economy of postmodern societies. Configuring Marx's take on the use-value of commodity, Baudrillard injects Marxist historical materialist analysis of society with semio-linguistic lens to argue for the reign of sign as the primary value system regulating the abstraction of exchange of the postmodern social practice. In this postulated system, commodities become the vehicle of communication and the material technology for the mediation of a symbolic exchange where consumption figures as the stage for the production and reproduction of meaning, through an ever-ending interplay between the sign and signifier. The reign of commodity as sign gives rise to commodification as a structure of signification and the onset of spectacle as an organizing principle to the relationship between commodity and consumer, sign and signifier, object and subject and the politico-cultural and the social. The effect is the primacy of spectacle as constitutive of the sign-mediated relationship between object and subject and sign and signifier. As Baudrillard states: "We consume the product through the product itself, but we consume its meaning through advertising" (Baudrillard 1996, 181).

This sign-mediated dimension of the spectacle figures in Baudrillard's scheme as the operating mechanism of the simulacrum and its precession as a defining mode for reality mediation and resurrection. Simulacrum (pl simulacra) is the proposed critical category for decoding the abstraction of postmodern symbolic exchange that engineers a social practice operative through "liquidation of all referentials ... by their artificial resurrection in systems of signs, which are a more ductile material than meaning ... a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself" (Baudrillard 1988, 2). Whence, the hyper-real is structured through simulation models, the logic of which is genetic miniaturization "produced ... from matrices, memory banks and command models ... no longer measured against some ideal or negative instance" (Baudrillard 1988, 3). This operational dimension of the hyper-real is regulated by the consumption demand for a spectacle—"the image of the models from which they proceed, in a generalized cycle" (Baudrillard 1988, 174). Unlike the image-centered



representation of modernity, the spectacle is neither a reflection nor a pervert veil to basic reality or even the absence of reality, it rather "bears no relation to any reality whatever; it is its own pure simulacrum" (Baudrillard 1988, 4). Kellner defines spectacle as "media constructs that are out of the ordinary and habitual daily routine which become special media spectacles ... technologically mediated events, in which media forms like broadcasting, print media, or the Internet process events in a spectacular form" (Kellner 2009, 1). Unlike media event<sup>2</sup> (theorized in the context of the earlier era of television), media spectacles constitute an "important arena for political contestation", specifically due to their disruptive overture and the disrupting multi-media mediation of the new millennium technologies (Kellner 2009, 5). The latter's ever-expanding sites (Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, You Tube), and new domains for interactive spectacles give the illusion of agency and global access while ensnaring the individual within the confines of media regulated interfaces in accordance to the agendas of different forces. Kellner identifies four levels of spectacles; each operates towards an influence with a specified outcome. The first level involves the media events that celebrate the society ethos and enculturates the individuals into institutional values and their modes of conflict resolution—"media extravaganzas like the Oscars and Emmies, or sports events ... which celebrate basic values of competition and winning" (Kellner 2009, 3).

The second level engages with politics in the form of news that are mediated through the logic of spectacle and sensationalism—the cultural war and its corollary War on Terror. Third is the spectacle of catastrophe—events that designate the failure of the system and infrastructure. The fourth level is identified as mega-spectacle—"a situation whereby certain spectacles becomes the defining events of their era" (Kellner 2009, 5). Mega spectacle could either be a commodity spectacle (McDonalds or Nike defining the era of consumerism) or socio-political drama reigning over time. The War on Terrorism and the Gulf war qualify as mega-spectacle with global outreach. Concurring with Baudrillard's four successive stages for simulation and image, mega spectacles are pure simulacrum with the facticity of media event filling the vacuum of the non-event to pursue politics by other means—politics by the means of spectacle like in the Gulf war and its sequel War on Terror. Kellner's account on mega-spectacle resonates with both Baker's socio-narrative account (2006) in *Translation Studies* and Littau's intervention (2011, 2016) in *Cultural Translation* scholarship through mediality and intermediality.

Socio-narrative (Baker 2006; Harding 2012), also labeled the sociological narrative approach, refers to the primacy of narrative as the constitutive and



constructivist frame for human cognition, communication and participation in reality-making and exchange. This accorded epistemological status to narrative in reality-comprehension and construction was instrumentalized in Translation Studies to investigating the micro and macro translational choices and strategies that translators adopt to construct and configure reality through their interactive rapport between and across the narrative schema at their disposal. Historicity and context becomes the tool for narrative construction and enforcement on lived experience—discerned and analyzed through narrative framing strategies (Harding 2012). For Baker, framing figures as an analytical tool and discursive site for translational re-narration administered through the strategies of labeling, space allocation, repositioning of participant and temporal and spatial framing. Temporal and spatial framing involves "selecting a particular text and embedding it in a temporal and spatial context that accentuates the narrative it depicts" (Baker 2006, 112). Translation, thus, becomes a processed action of renarration through the conscious practice of navigation between narratives—defined as the "diffuse, amorphous configurations ... that cut across time and texts" and cultural contexts within the same language (Baker 2006, 4).

Inter-textuality (the connection between source and target text) and inter-narrativity (the relatedness between source and target narrative) figure as the parameters for tracing the transposition of narrative configuration and remediation between language and cultural divides, and across time and space. Adapting insights from inter-textuality, inter-narrativity involves the narrative traces in other narratives (the feature of relatedness in Baker's theory), and the simulation dynamics of narrative whereby narratives signifies each other through their interaction with historicity and contextualization in an ever-ending self-referencing structures of signification. Baker identifies four types of narratives: first, ontological or personal narrative; second, public narratives, stories elaborated by and circulating among institutions larger than the individual; third, conceptual or disciplinary narratives, "the stories and explanations that scholars in any field elaborate for themselves and others about their objects of inquiry" (Baker 2006, 39). Fourth is the meta- (master) narrative, which are pervasive and abstract accounts that hold on to the lives of individuals for decades and persist as the driving force for social and political practices due to their symbolic reproduction of instinctive human value and fear. Initially, a public narrative of war stories horrors, the Holocaust was accorded the status of master narrative due to their constructed symbolic exchange value as pure evil and their positioning as stark antithesis to the ascending progressive narrative of democracy and democratic world order (Baker 2006, 46). The latter was a public



turned meta- by the consorted efforts of educational, political and media institutions, especially in the aftermath of the Cold War. The Holocaust, belonging to the fourth order of Baudrillard and Kellner's notion of mega-spectacle, was turned into a pure sign and source narrative—tactfully instrumentalized to pursue politics by the other means of narrative signification and legitimization.

For Littau (2011, 2016), mediality and intermediality figure as the critical categories to decoding the primacy of communication technologies as structures of signification and reconfiguration of the real into the hyper-real. Against the long entrenched "discursivization of culture" of social sciences, Littau argues for "technologies as agents of cultural change", and the "primary modeling system" for the postmodern knowledge production and mediation: "modelling is technology ... [and] technology [is] a model means ...[mediating] physical states towards specific outcomes ... creating an abstract pattern ... [and] a physically instantiated programme of actions" (Littau 2016, 84, 263). Technologies "do not simply serve ... conserve; material carriers are constitutive ... tools have the power to 'enframe'" (Littau 2011, 262); "they environ thought and mediate it accordingly" (Littau 2016, 84). In the hypermedia context of postmodern production, the hyper-text becomes the medium-cum-message mediated through "the window environments [which] disperse fragments of text, insert fragments into other texts, can connect, dis- and interconnect texts, images and fragments thereof, and thus ... enacts intertextuality *par excellence* (Littau 1997, 91). Littau (2011) proposes intermediality as a category for decoding the mediation mode of the hyper-text. An update of intertextuality, intermediality focuses on trans-media storytelling along two lines. First, intertextuality in its narrow representational sense deals with question of affect and the migration adaptability of the narrative to the media it is modeled after. Second, in its connection to remediation, it examines "the relations between media ... [and] the convergence, absorption and competition between media struggling within 'one' medium, art form, and even in 'one' work of art" -- cross media relations (Littau 2011, 28). The theoretical and application frameworks of intermediality engage with the macro-questions of the connection between commodification and communication technology, and "the centralization of the culture industry... commodification of culture ... [and their impact] on the fact that the same texts and characters circulate in different media' ... [with] criss-crossing storylines ... [and] borrowing serial fragments" (Littau 2011, 29). In its designed rapport with narrativity and spectacle, intermediality provides for the tool that addresses the question of access and modes of digital representation through commodification



of the new holocaust of the New American Century. The latter pursues politics by other means through media decontextualized and dehistoricised reality producing the non-event of clean warfare, the reconstruction of whose mechanism requires the historicization of the old-cum new struggle for supremacy of corporate capital stranglehold and contextualization the facticity-reality of what has been represented over the multifarious digital media platforms (over the span of six months from April to December 2016) in terms of 'Aleppo holocaust' through the spectacle of Syria's 'White Helmets'.

### **The New 'American Century' and the White Helmets: Clean War Spectacle and the Non-event Facticity of Information Congested Cyber Space**

Coined by Time Publisher Henry Luce in 1941, the 'American century' was formulated to incite American policy maker to redefine America's national defense strategy and enter the war to effect what Luce envisioned as the messianic mission of the United States "to promote, encourage, and incite the so-called democratic principles throughout the world" (Luce 1941, 161). Dropped out in the Cold War period, the idea of 'American century' (comparable to the description of Britain's imperial century between 1815-1914) was taken up by the neo-conservatives of the US establishment in the post-Cold War period (1997), materializing into "Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century-A Report for the Project of the New American Century"—PNAC (Donnelly 2000). According to Engdhal (2009), the PNAC constitutes the codification of the neo-conservatives (most of whom were trained in Mackinder's geographical formula for world hegemony-the Heart Land Theory (1904, 1919,1943)<sup>3</sup> post-Cold War agenda for "full spectrum dominance" (total control of the high seas, land, air, space and even outer space and cyberspace) through a post-modern warfare model. The latter is premised on the development of a synergy between communication technology, controlled media spectacle and media-structured engineering of new language, reframing the normative categories of international politics. The War on Terrorism is a case in point, specifically due to "the symbiosis between media and terror ... modifying international politics and existing reality ... [and] destroying basic international norms and changing concepts such as: aggression, state terror", national sovereignty and foreign intervention (Engdahl 2009,208-209). The cultural endgame is the restructuring of the real through the hyper-real, waging wars through clean spectacles and policing the world order through cosmetically engineered façade of non-interventionism.<sup>4</sup>



In his analysis of the symbiosis between media and war in the context of the Gulf and Balkan Wars, Baudrillard ([1991] 1995) argues for the non-reality of the 'non-event and non-war' of post-Cold War through tripartite proclamation: "The Gulf War Will Not Take Place", "The Gulf War: Is It Really Taking Place?" and "The Gulf War Did Not Take Place". Baudrillard's point is not that the war did not happen or 'take place'. Rather, its televised filtered reality and real-time CNN coverage implodes "war ... history ... all communication and signification" (Baudrillard [1991] 1995, 49) in the Hollywood production of "the spectacle of [American] virtual power". The latter operates through the "involution and encrustation of the event in and by the information" (with the "principle of simulation [governing] all information ... [through] the structural unreality of image and their indifference to truth), and designates "the "victory of the model ... *more important than victory on the ground*" (Baudrillard[1991] 1995, 55, 48 47). The designed effect of the model is "clean war, white war, programmed war", and "pure and speculative", specifically due to its speculative unfolding in an abstract, electronic and informational space: "TV functions as medium without message, giving at last the image of pure television" (Baudrillard[1991] 1995, 63). The designated aftereffect is "the consensual and policed New World Order" (Baudrillard [1991] 1995, 53), where pure promotion of war brings forth the virtually mediated "non war ... the absence of politics pursued by other means.

Similar with innovative difference, the Syrian War (2012-2016), media produced in terms of 'Civil War' through the second millennium touch-up symbiosis between media and war, is pillared on the non-event and non-war of postmodern warfare that restructures the facticity of the real through the hyper-real and cyber-reality of the clean mega spectacle of the White Helmets. The latter's facticity in the hyper-informational-reality of the cyberspace is hard to get by, particularly because of the involution and encrustation of the media non-event in the information congested vacuum of the cyberspace and the regulation of the message by the mediality of the hyper-text. Nevertheless, few facts warrant attention in the pursuit of Baudrillard's "skeptical intelligence" before the spectacle of war and "the illusion of massacre" (Baudrillard [1991] 1995, 58).

#### FACT 1

The White Helmets' Website<sup>5</sup> was created on 11<sup>th</sup> of August, 2014 by an organization named The Syria Campaign via a mailing address in Beirut. Its launch and the group's virtualized hyper-reality was established around the same time of the official declaration of the formation of US-led coalition "to degrade



and ultimately defeat" the Islamic State (10<sup>th</sup> of September 2014) (McINNIS 2016). Turkey's initial proposal to the UN for a border buffer zone (Feb 2012) was revived in terms of a 'no-fly zone' especially over rebel-held territory in Eastern Aleppo in 2014.

#### FACT 2

The Syria Campaign Website,<sup>6</sup> launched in 2014, is "an independent advocacy group campaigning for a peaceful and democratic future for Syria"(The Syria Campaign About us). As an independent, non-profit organization, it received its "Seed funding by The Asfari Foundation ... accepted funds from the Rockefeller Brothers Foundation and other anonymous donors" (The Syria Campaign About us). Notwithstanding the White Helmets' overarching visual presence in the website (out of 17, 10 images for Syrian heroic rescue workers), the Syria Campaign's main advocacy is for a 'no-fly-zone'; the White Helmets' website directs visitors to a request to sign up a petition for a 'no-fly zone' to "stop the bombs" in Syria (White Helmets website).

#### FACT 3

The Syria Campaign created a website (<http://takingsides.thesyriacampaign.org>) to host its 50 page anti-UN report, where the UN humanitarian agencies are indicted for loss of impartiality and neutrality as a stooge of the Assad regime with the UN logo (atop the page) drenched in blood. The White Helmets figuring as the redemptive foil for the UN lack of humanitarian work. In October 2016, the White Helmets, along with 70 aid groups sent a letter to the UN announcing their refusal to co-operate with the UN relief work as long as it recognizes the Syrian regime; the PDF file of the letter has been removed from the website ([www.sams-usa.net](http://www.sams-usa.net)) with a redirection request to Syrian American Society Webpage.

#### FACT 4

Founded in collaboration with USAID's Office for Transitional Initiatives, the White Helmets has been receiving over 23 million dollars in funding and training and continually trumpeting the call for a no-fly zone through crucial moments of the conflict. In May 2015, White Helmets' spokesperson, Raed Saleh met privately with US and EU officials to push for a no-fly zone. In June 2015, Farouq Habib, "Mayday Rescue managing the training and equipping program for rescue teams in Syria known as the White Helmets" according to his phrasing, testified before the US House Committee on Foreign Affairs calling on "the greatest power in today's world, the United States, along with other international powers ... to stop the killing machine operated by the Assad regime ... through imposing a no—fly zone" (Mayday Rescue 2015). According to



Blumenthal, the USAID'S OTI has been "the wing that has promoted a regime-change around the world" (Blumenthal 2016) through the call for no-fly zone. No-fly zone has been the instrument for the democracy march inducing regime change in Yugoslavia, Iraq and Libya. In PNAC (2000), no-fly zone is positioned among the constabulary duties of the US military power to maintain international peaceful order.

FACT 5

Commenting on the critique of no-fly zone, James Sadri, the Syria Campaign Strategist, says: "There's a kneejerk reaction to Syria to say, 'It's Iraq or it's Libya,' but it's not. It's an entirely different conflict" (qtd. in Blumenthal 2016). Reading into Sadri's testament, Blumenthal argues that what the Syria Campaign promotes as 'a different conflict' is particularly due to the credible transition modeled and mediated through the White Helmets.

**The White Helmets as Media Mega-Spectacle: Pure Promotion and Public Relation Diplomacy of Transition**

A work of 'pure promotion' (where the end of promotion is promotion not product), the White Helmets represent a model of public relation diplomacy for strategic communication and implementation of a transition operation—operative through language-based rebranding of virtual alternative to the current regime. Linguistically, the label 'White Helmets' is a creative translation from the Arabic version الدفاع المدني السوري, the literal translation of which is Syria Civil Defense. This catchy translational label not just obscures the institutional origin of Syria Civil Defense—founded in 1953 and a founding member of International Civil Defense Organization with 113 as their public number operating inside the entirety of Syria (Beeley. V Sep. 2016). The label rebrands and remodels their largely promotional activities along the visual grammar of Western imagery (Kress. Van Leeuwen 1996) with whiteness as the centerpiece for projecting and framing the group's sanctified and sanctioned aura and the undisputable redemptive humanitarianism of their premise, presence and activities. The headgear of the *real* Syria Civil Defense is red (Beeley 2016). James Le Mesurier, an ex-British military, urban search and rescue trainer, established the Turkey-based non-profit organization of the Mayday Rescue in 2014, providing for the training of the White Helmets and their identification by "the signature headgear they wore in fields" (Blumenthal 2016).<sup>7</sup> More importantly, the epithet 'White', along with the adjunct label Syria's first responders, invokes the Holocaust narrative frame through tying their action to the basic human value of goodness and purity and hence constructing their



symbolic exchange value and identity in terms of pure goodness standing in stark opposition to the pure evil of the red-blooded carnage of Nazi-like Assad regime. This conceptual foiling through the verbal resources is supported by the visual non-verbal resources of their mega spectacular image production in Netflix and Time magazine.

In 2016, Netflix, initially an online streaming services, produced its short documentary on the White Helmets, which won "the Oscar for Best Documentary Short in 2017, two Nobel peace prize nominations, and has a 100% score on Rotten Tomatoes (possibly the most impressive of the accolades)" (Carton 2018 par 4). The tagline of the Oscar award winning Netflix documentary *The White Helmets* (2016) quoted from the White Helmets' website and cited by a White Helmet member as the group motto, is "to save one life is to save all humanity". A replica of Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993)—"whoever saves one life, saves the world entire", the tagline renarrates and reframes the Syrian war story and the White Helmets' conflict interface through what Baker (2006) terms 'a public-turned meta' 'framing' narrative of the Holocaust. The White Helmets are allocated Schindler's role as "saviors of humanity and white 'first responders' to the cold-blooded carnage of Nazi-like Assad. The documentary visuals explode the distinction line between the text, intertext and hypertext. The majority of visuals, taken from video footage posted on the White Helmets' website, deals with the White Helmets members' sporadic appearances in the course of the 40 minutes timeline. The members, playing the role of secondary narrators, are engaged in mundane activities of speaking, eating, singing and commenting with no substantial war event. Their out-of-war framed presence simultaneously substantiates the claims of on-ground reality and fills the vacuum of the documentary non-event through a masquerade of real time effect. Shot off the ground (inside the rescue center with no image of the battlefield), the film (criticized for its non-war and non-documentation) is an encapsulation of Baudrillard's insight into the masquerading effect of the "prostitution of image ... No images of the field of battle, but images of masks, of blind and defeated faces, images of falsification ... not war taking place over there but the disfiguration of the world" (Baudrillard [1991] 1995, 40).

However, despite the criticism or specifically on account of it, the documentary produced its designed effect—the celebratory promotion of Syria's rescue heroes as the regime's doppelganger packaging. The film orchestrates the spectacle of the regime's blood-drenched war (without a single image of bloodshed or war event) through the unbreakable resistance of its clean war combatants for life and survival. It above all produces a spectacular spectacle for



the chaotic creative delivery of an alternative order for Syrian civil re-ordering without Western overt intervention. The outcome is a clean war spectacle and a pure simulacrum of a holocaust with self-referential sign, whose exchange value is the next generation leaders.

In October 2016, Time Magazine<sup>8</sup> featured the White Helmet on its cover. En-framed by Time's iconic red border, the cover design instrumentalizes the contrast between the pitch-black background and the red color of the magazine iconic signature to frame the picture of White Helmets in the middle. The middle picture, drenched in greyish white, features the White Helmets (pastel like shade verging on black-white) aboard the rescue vehicle giving their back to the viewer. They are positioned on the horizontal axis towards the right side—"the right side is known as *new ... and not yet known*" (Kress. Van Leeuwen 1996, 9). The masthead is framed with the phrase "Plus: Next Generations' Leaders". The middle picture is footed with the White Helmets' tag-line and the number of lives saved by the first responders—"Whoever saves one life, saves all humanity: Syria's White Helmets and the 60,000 lives they saved". The elements placed in the lower section represent the real; the elements placed in the upper section represent the ideal—"frequently represented as a dream or aspiration and the real, the more mundane" (Kress. Van Leeuwen 1996, 9). As such, the overall effect of the graphic design is a dream-like picture of humanity with the 'next generations' leader as the verbal enunciation of the dream and aspiration of redemptive humanity from the ashes of tyranny. The tagline and the numerical quantification of the lives saved poses as the real mundane reality substantiating their astral representation. This interaction between verbal and non-verbal resources not just demonstrate the concerted effort towards the spectacular manufacturing of holocaust mega spectacle in Aleppo through an angel-like stature of the self-scarifying humanitarianism of its 'first responder. It calls attention to the narrative arrays (disciplinary and public), their interconnection/inter-narrativity and intermediatity that enabled the transposition of the meta- and mega stature of Holocaust frame within the Syrian context and in connection to Aleppo's hyper-textual mediation. In a nutshell, the invocation of Holocaust in/with Aleppo invites the question of the symbolic exchange sign value for the cultural transposition of the Holocaust narrative frame on contemporary Syrian context within the scheme for the New Middle East in a new American century. In the post-War period, the Holocaust has been constituted as a structure of deterrence with a strictly watched articulation parameters—legally codified through the charge of Holocaust denial<sup>9</sup> and the violation of Godwin Law.<sup>10</sup>



## **Aleppo's 'Holocaust' of/in the 'American Century': Temporal and Spatial Framing and the Interconnection of Conceptual and Public Narratives**

The post-Cold war period brought about a number of disciplinary narratives to re-narrating the emerging world order and architecting a modeling system for mapping the world's un-democratized frontiers. Huntington (1991, 1992, 1996) premised the future clash and conflict on civilizational and cultural conflicts (not ideologies) and pinpointed Islamic and Eastern (Chinese) cultures and religions as the chief perpetrators of violence and conflict threatening Western democratic peace and order. Huntington's theoretical formulation furnished the basis for the Islamic exceptionalism thesis and its later modulation into "An 'Arab' More than 'Muslim' Democracy Gap" (Stephen & Robertson, 2003) or "Arab, not Muslim, exceptionalism" (Stephen & Robertson, 2004). The modulation was done within the now entrenched framework and stakes of the New Empire and in accordance to the tactile revisiting of the governability of democracy produced by the Trilateral Commission.<sup>11</sup> Huntington was a chief member in the Trilateral Commission and Zbigniew Brzezinski was its director. In 2006, one year after the inauguration of Bush's Doctrine (known as Freedom Agenda),<sup>12</sup> Peters, an Army Lt. Col. and a pro-war strategist, made a proposal for a New Middle East with a map charting how a better Middle East would look like. The map figures in Peters' *Never Quit a Fight* (Peters 2006). Published in *Armed Forces Journal* under the title "Blood Borders: How a Better Middle East Would Look" (Peters 2006), the article argues against the blood borders of the non-organic and "unjust border drawn by self-interested Europeans", and for a "radical remapping ... to reflect the organic frontiers of religion and ethnicity" (Peters 2006 p. 1). Syria figures among the "losers" in Peters' classification and is reduced to Damascus with a bid for its future unification with Sunni Iraq. Iraq is the second loser in Peters' scheme in favor of carving out a Kurdish independent State since, "A Free Kurdistan, stretching from Diyarbakir through Tabriz, would be the most pro-Western state between Bulgaria and Japan" (Peters 2006, 2). Peters' proposed map resonates with Oded Yinon's "A Strategy for Israel in the Nineteen Eighties," an essay first published in Hebrew in KIVUNIM (Directions), A Journal for Judaism and Zionism:

Syria will fall apart, in accordance with its ethnic and religious structure ... there will be a Shi'ite Alawi state along its coast, a Sunni state in the Aleppo area, another Sunni state in Damascus hostile to its northern neighbor, and the Druzes who will set up a state, maybe even in our Golan,



and certainly in the Hauran and in northern Jordan. This state of affairs will be the guarantee for peace and security in the area in the long run, and that aim is already within our reach today. (Yinon 1982, 23)

In 2006 in a press conference in Tele Aviv, US Secretary of States, Condoleezza Rice celebratory announced "the birth pangs of a 'New Middle ' and the State Department's intention on "pushing forward to the New Middle East and not going back to the old one" (cited in Harnden 2006). Rice's statement was hot on the heel of the inauguration of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Oil Terminal in the Eastern Mediterranean, which would facilitate the emerging economic power of the Heart land and hence the need for blocking the advancement through circle of conflict zones in the Middle East (Nazemroya 2006). The announcement came in the aftermath of revisionist scholarship of "Good versus Bad Muslim" and moderate versus extremist Political Islam (Mamdani, M. 2002; Hamzawy 2005).

Aleppo's entry into cyber reality and real-time coverage (2013-2014) comes after the "Syria Regional Option-Final Report" (2013), a report produced by the USAID's Office of Transition Initiative with Aleppo<sup>13</sup> (cited 19 times; Damascus 5 times; Adlib 1 time) as the main target for the capacity building of civil society in Syria. Its entry also intersects with both the Arab Syrian Army encirclement of rebel-held territories and the cyber launch of the White Helmets' website via The Syria Company in 2014. Aleppo's entries into the 'holocaust' framing narrative (ranging from 280 to 450) lead to a plethora of on-line material (genre: social media to online newspapers; dates: October to December) with the names of prominent news agencies (BBC, CNN, TIMES, Sky News, Times of Israel, Haartz, CBN, ITV News, Vocativ, The Austrian, ...to cite but few) relaying the 'holocaust' story of Aleppo and humanity's oblivious disregard to state-sponsored atrocities. Titles include "Arab-Israeli Newscaster: Aleppo Onslaught is a 'holocaust'" (The Times of Israel Dec 2016), "Syrian Conflict: Surgeon Says Life in Aleppo is 'like a holocaust'" (BBC Nov 2016), "'Holocaust in Aleppo', says Mayor"(Sky News uploaded YouTube Oct 2016)," Holocaust Aleppo" (Syrians are tweeting #Holocaust Aleppo uploaded You Tube Sep 2016), "Syrians Call Obama and Putin 'Partners for the Holocaust in Aleppo" (Vocative Sep 2016), "Remember the Holocaust and Don't Forget Aleppo" (Huffington Post Dec 2016), "How did the world remain silent during the Holocaust? Exactly the way ..." (Haartz opinion Oct 2016), "Syria is suffering 'a small holocaust', says Israeli chief rabbi" (The Independent Oct 2016), "New Holocaust in Syria as bombs kill dozens in Aleppo" (ITV News Sep 2016), "A Daily Holocaust: Can Aleppo Survive Russia's Mideast Ambitions" (CBN Oct 2016), "Aleppo



Mayor blames the West for doing nothing over 'holocaust' in the city" (Sky News Oct 2016 ), "Mayor of Aleppo hits out at the West for failing to halt 'holocaust' killing" (Mirror Oct 2016), #holocaust Aleppo hash tag on twitter (Sep 2016), Holocaust Aleppo@Holocaustaleppo on twitter (Sep 2016 creator blocked)... and the list goes on.

What of interest in afore mentioned titles is not just the unanimous agreement of the different media outlet on the message—Aleppo's holocaust. It is rather the linguistic manners, typographical means and medial mode through which the 'holocaust' is positioned with and ascribed to Aleppo. Unlike Baker's examined case for the instrumentalization of the Holocaust in the context of Afro-American Struggle,<sup>14</sup> Aleppo's 'holocaust' is mostly relayed in lowercase with instances of uppercase warranting qualifiers—'daily' and 'new'—or put in conjunction with the classic Holocaust or phrasal qualifiers—"of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century"(The Independent Oct 2016; ITV News Sep 2016). Moreover, lexical items like "diaspora, descendants and survivors" that activate facets of the Jewish narrative and take the analogy with the Jewish Holocaust beyond the question of numbers killed are absent. Not only are Syrian-Russian airstrikes the centerpiece of Aleppo's crisis, the number of civilians killed and saved in Aleppo figures as the vehicle for relaying Aleppo's 'holocaust' and White Helmets' redeemer-like stature—UN estimates about 40,000 people killed in Aleppo; the White Helmets is estimated to have rescued between 40,000 (US State Department April 2016) to 60,000 (White Helmets) (al-Jazeera August 2016 in correction to 24,000 proclaimed in April 2016; Times Cover Magazine Oct 2016). Furthermore, despite the multiplicity of sources and variation of interlocutors, the framing narrative remains largely hung on the lexical items of 'carnage', 'genocide', 'massacre', 'burning' (positioned against 'silence' and doing nothing in reference to the international community), which keeps recurring in the majority of the posted material. The latter's visuals (pictures and video footage) are likewise intermediated (largely from White Helmets' page) with the interface of each resource leading up to links from other resources recurring and substantiating the same input. The effect is orchestrating a plethora of voices and multiple entries for the same output— or rather multiple rooms with one narrative roof—in the typical intermediation of online resources of the hypertextual environment. More importantly, the usage of 'holocaust' with any suffering is not just provocatively "threatening and possibly offensive [to members of the Jewish community], since it undermines the unique suffering that the Holocaust narrative has"(Baker 2006, 53). It is "radically wrong"



according to Gerstenfeld, an Anti-Semitism expert and author of *Abuses of Holocaust Memory: Distortions and Responses* (2009), since:

Most or all of the key elements of the Holocaust ... do not apply to the horrible Syrian war and its carnage. What is central to the Holocaust is ... a state aimed at murdering systematically all members of a certain ethnicity, wherever they were in the world. None of the parties in the Syria war even remotely aim at something similar. The Holocaust was a genocidal program carried out systematically and — however horrible it sounds — “efficiently.” There is no similar systematic and “efficient” program by anybody in Syria, not even ISIS. (Cited in Blum 2016)

Yet, against the taboo like stature of the Holocaust and its strictly watched articulation parameters (in legislation as much as ethics), the analogy of the Holocaust suffering with Aleppo's is liberally used in Western media as much as the official discourse. Aleppo's humanitarian crisis figures in US Presidential election 2016-2017 with attributes of "war crimes" and "carnage" propelled by Russian and Syrian forces in East of Aleppo (Transcript of the Second Debate Oct 2016, 35, 44). These liberal usages not only pose as a stark violation of Godwin law, they also enlist the codified legal offense of Holocaust denial. They in effect enact a narrative closure and control over the Syrian Nazi-like augury of 21<sup>st</sup> century humanitarian carnage bringing about the Holocaust of the second millennium. The latter's real-time coverage is issued towards the end of the battle for Aleppo (October-December). The Syrian government forces, holding 95 % of the Aleppo territory in December 2016 with 1.5 million populations, were then launching an offense to capture the remaining 5% of the rebel-held Eastern Aleppo with 300,000 civilians.

### **Conclusion**

This paper tackles the question of symbiosis between culture industry and postmodern warfare in the context of Syria war story. The paper particularly addressed the interconnection between mediality, narrativity and the digital mediation model of democracy march in Syria. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, the paper examined the new media management mechanism of casting Aleppo's war account within the Holocaust narrative frame and its interconnection with the media production of the mega spectacle of the White Helmets. Through the questions of access and reality problematics representation within the postmodern scheme, the paper inspected online



materials (from the 270 entries dealing with the covering of Aleppo's 2016 crisis), the White Helmets' Website, their figuration on Times Magazine Cover and their Oscar award winning Netflix documentary-entitled *The White Helmets* (2016). The aim is to highlight the interface between cultural translation, smart media meaning-making management and management grid of New American Century and New Middle East. The paper reached the following findings. First, Aleppo's non war account was casted in the Holocaust narrative frame through the White Helmets's mega spectacle, Second, the White Helmets' mega spectacle is the work of pure promotion, producing a simulacra of clean warfare 'future generation leaders' to the present orgy of Nazi-like regime. Third, the White Helmets are the product of American Cultural diplomacy that synergizes soft power war tactics (new media resources, new language reframing and image-centric mediation) to produce the digital imprinted identity of non-partisan human rights agency pushing for a No-Fly Zone and thence military invention through the façade of non-interventionism, Fourth, Aleppo's real-time coverage and ensuing Holocaust renarration is issued towards the end of the war in the aftermath of the Syrian Arab Army advance into rebel-held territory. The temporal positioning of its virtual occurrence in digital media speaks of a soft war tactic to reverse the war scheme to the benefit of the rebels. This schemed reversal is globally mediated through the cyber reality pin-pointing to the wide-reach access of the rebels and the mechanism of agential public opinion control. Fifth, in tune with the by-now established commodification of culture of the post-modern, the agential public opinion control, operating through semblance of global citizenry wide reach access to communication technology and cyber-reality, draws attention to the political machination of the New American Century with its innocuous bid to full-spectrum dominance and total control of public opinion, through the media-regulated message and its abstracted enforcement of the prognostic vision for a new world order and a New Middle East. Ultimately, the paper posits a scheme for a refurbished model of the American democracy march in the Middle East operating through imperial technologies of covert-control and social engineering of unanimous digital gaze through multiple chat rooms of the window screen. The end of this multiple rooms, in the Syrian Case, is better allied actors and better-looking Middle East (Peters 2006)—executed through warmonger's media managed cyberspace and war-clad cultural diplomacy pursuing politics by the other means of non-partisan media spectacle.<sup>15</sup> Human Rights Watch's mistranslation of the Syrian Arab Army's evacuation warning to the civilians in Aleppo provides a testament of the absence of non-partisan entities in the multiple rooms of the New American



Century bid for full spectrum dominance.<sup>16</sup> The mention of safe passages was omitted, and the overall effect is a menacing tone through the addition of "annihilation"— back translated "إبادة" (*ibada*) is non-existent in the Arabic original.

## **Endnotes**

1. *Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century* (2000) is a report for the project of the New American Century composed by a group of neo-conservative think-tanks in 1997. The aim of the report is to secure the post-cold war US position as a unanimous global leadership and the state of Pax Americana of international peace through reconceiving the warfare along two warfare strands: large wars and theatre wars. To preserve American preeminence, the report advocates for a new re-visioning of military capabilities to meet the requirements of conducting simultaneous theatre wars that would secure US strategic concerns, military strategy and constabulary operation. The report cites the Gulf and Balkans wars among the theater wars that "could hardly have been fought and won without the dominant role played by American military might" (9). The latter epitomized the model for modern high-technology warfare, which warrants innovation and enhancement if the US vies to remain the "arsenal of the 21<sup>st</sup> century" (12).

2. According to Kellner, media events "celebrate and reproduce the social system" through the ritualistic construction of dominant values and beliefs orchestrated by the tacit complicity between the state and media (Kellner 2009, 5).

3. Sir Halford Mackinder, the master of Anglo-American geo-politics, articulated his geo-strategic thesis for the geographical formula for world hegemony (known as the Heartland or the Pivot of History) in "The Geographical Pivot of History" (1904) submitted to the Geographical Royal society. He again presented a revised version of the Pivot paper "Democratic Ideals and Reality" (1919) and latter in "the Round World and the Winning Peace" (1943) in the American Foreign Affairs. Mackinder geographical formula for world hegemony is summed up in the following dictum:

Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland;

Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island;

Who rules the World-Island commands the World.

In Mackinder's scheme, "East Europe" is the Balkans, the Ukraine, Belarus, Poland, 'European' Russia and the Baltic states. The "Heartland" stretched from the Volga to the Yangtze rivers and from the Himalayas to the Arctic Ocean. The "World-Island" is the entire contiguous landmass of Europe, Asia, the Middle East and Africa - so, basically everywhere except the Americas and Australia. Mackinder participated in the Paris Peace Conference at the end of WWI on behalf of the British Foreign Office. He directly oversaw the break-up of the four losing Eurasian empires (German, Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman and Russian) into arbitrary statelets "in order to close the gates of



the Eurasian heartland to Britain's enemies and maintain an international status quo favourable to the interests of the Anglo-Saxon nations" (1919). The endgame is the encirclement and prevention of development of Euro-asian partnership that would unseat the Anglo-American empire economic supremacy and dominance—a geo-strategy fully taken up by the US neo-conservative segment in dealing with Russia, China and Iran.

4. According to Engdhal (2009), the geo-political end point of the PNAC is expansion of the NATO eastward through "multiple, simultaneous major theater wars", the end of which is "conducting constabulary missions which preserve the current peace" (PNAC 2000)—geo-politically premised on encirclement and weakening the possibility of the rise of Euro-Asian bloc to economic power and hence to World Dominance.

5.



6.



7. According to Beeley (2016), White Helmets founder Le Mesurier, who graduated from Britain's elite Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, is said to be an 'ex' British military intelligence officer involved in a number of other NATO 'humanitarian intervention' theaters of war, including Bosnia, Kosovo and Iraq, as well as postings in Lebanon and Palestine. He also boasts a series of high-profile posts at the UN, EU, and UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

8.



9. In 2005, the European Union considered enacting common rules banning or restricting the use of Nazi symbols and promotion of Nazi ideology, including Holocaust denial. However, the EU's Executive Commission eventually recommended against such EU-wide legislation, due to the interjection between the charges against holoucaust denial and freedom of speech, the only exemption to the latter is hate speech.



As a result, countries that do not specifically criminalize denial of the Holocaust do prosecute individuals who promote hate speech. The line dividing these two types of conduct – Holocaust denial and hate speech – is murky and individuals engaging in Holocaust denial usually do so in the context of making Jew-hating statements. These individuals are then prosecuted for violating hate speech prohibitions.

10. Godwin's law (or Godwin's rule of Hitler analogies) is an Internet adage (ethical discursal manners for internet and cyber discussions) that asserts that "As an online discussion grows longer, the probability of a comparison involving Hitler analogy to end discussion is high"—that is, if an online discussion (regardless of topic or scope) goes on long enough, sooner or later someone will compare someone or something to Hitler or his deeds. Advanced by American attorney and author Mike Godwin in 1990, Godwin's law originally referred specifically to Usenet newsgroup discussions. It is now applied to any threaded online discussion, such as Internet forums, chat rooms, and comment threads, as well as to speeches, articles, and other rhetoric where *reductio ad Hitlerum* occurs.

11. In a review of Huntington's *Third Wave: Democratization in Late 20th Century*, Small (1992) reads Huntington's argument for democratization in light of the latter's position as The Trilateral Commission ideologue. The Trilateral commission, formed in 1973 by private citizens of the world to discuss the crisis of democracy, sought to renew belief in the governability of democracy. Their tactics, published in *The Crisis of Democracy* (1975), was a consolidation of its administrative basis and creation of what the Trilateral Commission dubbed as administrative "fascism with human face" (Small, 1992, 57). This administrative fascism constitutes the thrust of Huntington's argument in *The Third Wave* (1993) where democratic transition is accessed by "procedural definition of democracy", not in the classical sense. The latter holds democracy's chief purpose is to provide for the general good and legitimacy of rule through people's will. For Huntington, procedural democracy is an end in itself, not a means to economic development or meeting people's will. This definition furnished the criteria of democracy for the scholars empirically testing the exceptionalism thesis.

12. In his second inaugural address (2005), Bush pledged America to the worldwide spread of democracy and freedom as an antidote to tyranny and radicalism. Known as Bush's freedom march or Freedom Agenda, the speech augured a shift in the American position towards its allied autocratic states. Though reported as strikingly different, the Obama's doctrine figures as the culmination of Bush's doctrine with adjusted rhetoric and reformulated tactic designed to audaciously reclaim the American dream through accommodating the only organized alternative to Arab autocracy—moderate Muslim Brothers and moderate Islamism. Thenceforth or rather due to, the end of Arab exceptionalism was brought forth to bring in the rise of moderate Islamism or rather moderate rebels against autocracy and potential partners in warding off the threat of transnational terrorism inside the West.





13. Aleppo is Syria’s financial and industrial hub with an old city listed as UNESCO heritage and "25 percent of the Syrian population ... producing 40 percent of the country’s gross domestic product" (USAID 2013, 16). Aleppo came late to the Syrian spring—one year after the outbreak of nationwide protests in July 2012. Aleppo's coming into war was the result of rebels' control of the eastern part of the city (starting Feb 2012) and subsequent seizure of Nabul and Zahara, two Shia villages in July 2012. The latter's capture had the effect of auguring a war of attrition—what mainstream media labeled as Syria Stalingrad—that was to last for four years until their recapture by the regime forces. It is held that the regime’s battling strategies were centered on those two villages and their defense (*Internationalist 360* 2016; Fiske 2016).

14. In examining the narrative framing of the Black Holocaust (2006), Baker argues that the "historicity [of the Holocaust] is put to creative use in an activist agenda ... through the conscious capitalization of *Holocaust*" (2006, 53). Several lexical items, namely "Diaspora, testimony, descendent, and survivors", are used to simultaneously activate the "various facets of the Jewish narrative" and take the analogy with the Jewish Holocaust "beyond the question of numbers killed and suffering endured" (53).

15. The projected outcome is a "political framework for the endgame in Syria" hinged on a "model for decentralization" where Assad's Shiite foothold is reduced to a "statelet" in Damascus and Syria is fragmented among regional powers—North Western Syria to Turkey and the Gulf, South Western Syria to the Southern front and Northern and Eastern Syria's Euphrates River Valley to American Allies—Syrian Defense Forces (Kahl 2017, 10). This carving of Syria along the Euphrates line not only resonates with Raleph's blood-less borders for the New Middle East. It converges with Yinon's scheme for Israel's regional supremacy through the dissolution of Syria into statelets: Shia Alawi along the coast, Sunni in Aleppo, another Sunni state in Damascus and "the Druzes who will set up a state, even in our Golan" (Yinon 1982, 23). Trump's recognition and declaration of Israel's sovereignty over Golan Heights is a premonition coming true—designed as a strategic diplomacy tactic to prevent "the immediate takeover of valuable natural resources and infrastructure in Eastern Syria by Iran, Assad, and Russia" through providing for a leeway for American forces re-entrance into the west of the Euphrates River (ISA 22 Mar 2019). According to the Institute of the Study of War, "the U.S. is significantly more vulnerable east of the Euphrates River. Iran, Assad, and Russia are building up forces west of the Euphrates River and using outreach to local tribes to gain footholds on its eastern bank" (ISA 22 Mar 2019).

16.

Source Text	Target Text
	



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