Wendy S. Hesford

VIOLENT

Children's Human Rights

EXCEPTIONS

& Humanitarian Rhetorics

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CHILDREN'S HUMAN RIGHTS AND HUMANITARIAN RHETORICS

Wendy S. Hesford

This book is dedicated to my children, Mia and Lou Fei

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Handprints and Humanitarian Violence at the Border

On July 10, 2019, the US House Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties held a hearing on the treatment of migrant children separated from parents at the US-Mexico border. The hearing was titled "Kids in Cages: Inhumane Treatment at the Border." Yazmin Juárez, a Guatemalan citizen seeking asylum, was among the witnesses. Fleeing domestic violence, Juárez and her daughter faced another form of violence at the US-Mexico border—the violence of American exceptionalism. With tears in her eyes, Juárez recounted the death of her twenty-one-month-old daughter Mariee six weeks after she was released from an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention facility in Texas. "We came to the United States, where I hoped to build a better and safer life for us," Juárez told the subcommittee in Spanish. "Instead, I watched my baby girl die." "When I walked out of the hospital that day, all I had with me was a piece of paper the doctors made with Mariee's handprints." Ms. Juárez described how "painful" it was to "relive this experience." But, she said, "the world should know what is happening to . . . babies and children inside . . . ICE detention facilities. My bright beautiful girl is gone, but I hope her story will spur America's government to act, so that more children do not die at the hands of this neglect and mistreatment."

Testimonies about the separation of children of color from their families haunt US history, from children bought and sold under slavery, to the Indian

Removal Act in the 1800s, when Native American children were taken out of their homes and put into boarding schools, to children separated from parents in World War II Japanese internment camps, to the racial disparities in the incarceration of youth of color and dispossession directed toward communities of color and gender-nonnormative families. The power of Juárez's testimony and tears lies foremost in attesting to the life and loss of her daughter, and in its capacious exposure of the consequential rhetoric of crisis and violence of American exceptionalism. Taking up the material rhetoric of her tears, and, more broadly, the humanitarian mediation of children's human rights, *Violent Exceptions* examines how the figure of the child-in-peril is appropriated by opposing political constituencies for purposes rarely having to do with the needs of children at risk, and how childhood innocence accrues value in American political discourse as an antidote for political violence. The humanitarian figure of the child-in-peril, predicated on racial division, is central to conservative and liberal logics, especially at times of crisis whereby politicians leverage humanitarian storytelling as a political weapon. *Violent Exceptions* illustrates how threshold politics, to which children's human rights are also tethered, contour humanitarian representations and policies toward children traversing liminal identities and spaces, and extract value from this liminality. The stakes of these extractions are especially steep for children growing up and moving within and between liminal zones. Children's rights and lives are at stake. In other words, the child-in-peril is not simply a trope but a constitutive material-rhetorical force through which the violence of the exception takes hold.

In its focus on Yazmin Juárez's tears and anguish, media coverage of the hearing summoned iconic repertoires of motherhood, specifically the conceit of the grieving mother. The framed photograph of Juárez holding her daughter, which stood beside her and was projected onto large screens as she testified, reinforced the humanitarian framing of the border crisis, especially for US audiences. The emotional purchase of Juárez's tears, however, resided in the testimonial transaction (Whitlock 162), namely in triggering the tears of US representatives, particularly several newly elected women of color. During Yazmin's testimony, the camera panned to and then fixated on US Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who was reportedly "moved to tears" (Sharman). At the hearing, US Representative Rashida Tlaib (Michigan), the daughter of Palestinian immigrants, thanked Juárez for telling her story and then turned her colleagues' attention to the administration's hardline immigration agenda: teary-eyed, she exclaimed, "We don't need new laws. We need morality." She continued, "We need an administration that understands there are human rights violations happening" (Montoya-Galvez). These women's

tears, when taken in the broader context of their critique of the administration's policies, signify an investment in humanitarian sentiment and imply political solidarity in their shared recognition of maternal suffering and sacrifice. In her speech on the floor of the House of Representatives in support of H.R. 3239, the Humanitarian Standards for Individuals in Customs and Border Protection Custody Act, Speaker Nancy Pelosi exclaimed, "The humanitarian situation at the border challenges the conscience of our [country]. Yet the Trump administration has chosen to approach the situation with cruelty instead of compassion" (Pelosi).

In his televised "Address to the Nation on the Crisis at the Border" on January 8, 2019, the third week of a partial shutdown of the US federal government, President Trump likewise framed the situation at the US-Mexico border as "a humanitarian crisis—a crisis of the heart and a crisis of the soul." But for whom is this a crisis? Trump claimed, "Last month, 20,000 migrant children were illegally brought into the United States, a dramatic increase. These children are used as human pawns by vicious coyotes and ruthless gangs." Not only did Trump manipulate the 20,000 statistic, which does not refer to the number of children smuggled into the US but to the total number of children, parents, or legal guardians caught together at the border, his exclusive focus on coyotes and gangs shifted the humanitarian gaze from migrant children to US citizens as the true victims. The president's nativist rhetoric reinforced the notion that all Americans are "hurt by uncontrolled, illegal migration." "Among those hardest hit," he argued, "are African Americans and Hispanic Americans." He continued, "I've met with dozens of families, whose loved ones were stolen by illegal immigration. I've held the hands of the weeping mothers and embraced the grief-stricken fathers." "America's heart broke," he said, "when a young police officer in California was savagely murdered in cold blood by an illegal alien, who just came across the border." The president then delivered a litany of gruesome murders: an "Air Force veteran was raped, murdered, and beaten to death with a hammer by an illegal alien with a long criminal history," and "an illegal alien was recently charged with murder for killing, beheading, and dismembering his neighbor." He asked, "How much more American blood must we shed?"

President Trump claimed the power of the white humanitarian benefactor to gift those whom he construed as deserving of humanitarian recognition, such as "weeping [US citizen] mothers," and withdrew recognition from those fleeing violence and those exposed to the inhumanity of the administration's policies. The spectacle of violence that the president's litany of crimes created erased the humanity of those presently detained and discounted the lives of the children who have died in US custody or soon after their release,

such as Mariee Juárez. Not only was his characterization of illegal crossings as an "invasion" misleading, since the numbers of illegal crossings remain below higher levels of earlier years; the president also pitted differentially oppressed groups against each other—a strategy deployed to uphold white authority. Additionally, far more Americans have been injured or killed by white supremacist citizen terrorists and domestic violence than have been victims of violence by undocumented immigrants. Yet the administration has not afforded these victims the same level of humanitarian concern.

The hypocrisy of the administration's depiction of the US-Mexico border as a humanitarian crisis lies not only in its zero-tolerance and family separation policies but also in its criminalization of humanitarian aid. Under the Trump administration, US Border Patrol agents have harassed humanitarian groups and charged members with felonies for assisting migrants crossing the desert. "Trumpian humanitarianism requires not just a wall between Mexico and the United States," as Elizabeth Cullen Dunn perceptively notes, "but one between the present and some imagined dystopian future, one in which invaders wreak death and destruction on American citizens" (3). Whereas Trump seizes humanitarian rhetoric in ways that reinforce white nationalist and anti-immigrant sentiment, liberals extend humanitarian appeals to express their outrage against the administration's policies, specifically the detention and forced separation of children from their families at an increasingly militarized border.

As rhetoric and communication scholars, we should ask: *How can rhetorical methods and perspectives help us better understand the competing and often conspiring humanitarian and security imperatives at the border? How might rhetoric and communication scholars work to expose the differential recognition of the lives and rights of some children and not others? To what degree are we implicated in these transnational testimonial circuits? And, most importantly, what ethical and political responsibilities do such implications incite?*

Numerous scholars have argued that humanitarianism in its focus on emergency situations circumvents deliberative political publics and analyses of structural violence. Cultural anthropologist Miriam Ticktin puts it well: "Humanitarianism's investment in the category of humanity has always been grounded in the protection of exceptional, suffering individuals, not in care for the masses" (2011, 81). Inderpal Grewal similarly observes, "Within advanced neoliberalism . . . rights have been replaced by humanitarianism and social security with state security" (2017, 13). *Violent Exceptions* seeks to advance critical children's human rights literacies attuned to these replacements but also to the growing critiques and distrust of human rights, which includes questioning the import of liberal humanism and humanist con-

structs. The goal of this book is not simply to argue for greater inclusivity as a means to remedy exclusions but to interrogate the exceptions perpetuated by normative systems of incorporation and recognition. *Violent Exceptions* demonstrates how the humanitarian figure of the child-in-peril turns public attention away from systemic violations of children's human rights and the *violence of the ordinary* (Das) and reframes this violence as exceptional. Attention to these exceptions and how they function as political and ethical covers for conditions of precariousness reveals the violence of recognition and its erasures.

Across the globe, we have seen an increase in the surveillance and militarization of national borders; new measures of securitization, detention, and deportation; denigration of the free press, and attacks on human rights. Throughout Europe and the US, xenophobia, nationalism, and Islamophobia have acerbated anti-immigrant perceptions of refugees as national security threats. The rise of the global right depends not only on the cultivation of fear, suspicion, and the devaluation of difference, but also on the violent mechanisms of exceptionality. The figure of the child-in-peril takes on particular rhetorical and ideological functions in this increasingly precarious moral world order. The US withdrawals from UNESCO (October 2017) and from the UNHCR (June 2018) have held children's human rights hostage to the Trump administration's stance on Israel and turned its back on victims of rights violations by all parties in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Likewise, the administration's zero-tolerance immigration policy defies the principles of international law on refugee rights and US federal laws, including the 1997 Flores settlement, which requires the US government to release detained undocumented children within twenty days, and its rescission of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals has been deemed by the Supreme Court "arbitrary and capricious," in violation of the Administrative Procedure Act. If human rights is to have a political afterlife beyond these usurpations and the humanitarian paradigm, human rights scholars, teachers, and advocates will need to do the critical work of examining human rights' vulnerabilities and contradictions, namely its underlying hierarchies of recognition and violent history of exclusions; hold to account the privileging of civil and political rights over economic and social rights; and proffer a new vision of global welfare, collective responsibility, and interdependence.

While US political representatives continue to grapple with the crisis at the border at the level of public policy, human rights lawyers continue to struggle to provide legal assistance to those in US detention facilities, humanitarians continue to risk arrest as they assist migrants on their dangerous trek, and art-activists mobilize their craft as vehicles for social commentary.

Taking up that work, it is incumbent upon us as rhetoric and communication scholars and teachers to bring the insights and methods of our fields to facilitate critical engagement with and imagine new solutions to these global concerns and challenges, and to identify when humanitarian and national security discourses, as they have been by the Trump administration's zero-tolerance border policies, are mobilized to justify human rights violations. A materialist-rhetorical approach provides indispensable tools for understanding the exceptions that contour the history of children's human rights and humanitarianism and their present formations. More specifically, a materialist-rhetorical approach enables us to turn not only to the history of child separations in the US but also to the legacy of gendered and racialized carceral logics and the commodification of reproductive labor, including the commodification of maternal grief.

Media depictions of Juárez as a "migrant mother" exemplify the commodification of the *captive maternal,* Black feminist scholar Joy James's term to describe "those most vulnerable to violence, war, poverty, policy and captivity; those whose very existence enables the possessive empire that claims and dispossess them" (255). James continues, "It is not their victimization that marks them; it is their productivity and its consumption" (256). Here, "migrant mother" invokes Dorothea Lange's iconic (1936) photograph of Florence Owens Thompson, a distressed thirty-two-year-old migrant farmworker and mother of seven children, and the iconography of maternity central to New Deal discourses (Kozol 1988, 20). Like Lange's "Migrant Mother," depictions of Juárez as a "migrant mother" foreground gender suffering in order to garner sympathy and moral obligation. However, unlike Owens Thompson's, Juárez's motherhood was held hostage by the state's incarceration of her baby. James also notes, "Material conditions, refugee or immigrant status only slightly determine one's status as captive. The resolve and ability to resist captivity through the use of a fulcrum, even if leverage engenders disarray, is a form of politics" (259). James frames the fulcrum as the offspring of the historical convergence of democracy and slavery (256). "Think of an old-school seesaw on the playground," she suggests. "The weight of those seated . . . determines who is elevated to the highest position and who scrunches their knees up with their bottom on the ground" (257). James argues that "leverage" as a concept is key to the recognition of "power and predation" (257) and uses the term *fulcrum* to reference the captive's use of "her power against [her] captor and captivity" (257). Like that of many "captive maternals" before her, Juárez's testimony hinges upon her courage to leverage the pain of losing a child into the power of maternal grief as a form of politics. Yet even as Juárez leverages her pain as a form of oppositional politics, her pain gets swept up into larger

material-rhetorical formations of American exceptionalism, to which politicians on the left and right turn at moments of crisis.

In spotlighting the "weeping mothers" who are citizens of the US and whose "loved ones were stolen by illegal immigration," the president turned public attention away from the experiences and grief of Central American parents whose children had died in US custody and/or from whom they had been separated. The withholding of humanitarian recognition and public erasure of these lives is a form of theft. To think about the political power of Yazmin Juárez's testimony therefore is to contemplate the predatory dimensions of US immigration policy. In its focus on structural and embodied power imbalances and the material and discursive as co-constitutive forces, material rhetoric is well suited to revealing these predatory and carceral logics. (See the introduction for additional detail on material rhetoric as a methodology.)

Privileged white citizens of the US are commonly hailed as humanitarian benefactors, who derive their power from their presumably unmarked status as white. White entitlement, citizenship status, and class privilege safeguard me, as they do millions of others, from the likelihood of becoming a victim of the US carceral systems and security state. Yet the privilege acquired because of US citizenship status is not uniformly experienced. My status as a citizen and tenured professor of English at The Ohio State University affords me individual privileges and benefits (health insurance, job security) and enabled me, before the COVID-19 pandemic, to move freely across most national borders. These privileges also emerge from the history of white settlement of Indigenous lands in central Ohio, where the Shawnee, Miami, Lenape, and Wyandotte peoples cared for the land, and which Ohio State occupies. Like other transracial and gender-nonconforming families, however, my family is vulnerable to white nationalism, xenophobia, racism, and homophobia, and, like all women, I am vulnerable to violent masculinities. Being a part of the targeted demographic for state appeals to humanitarian sentiment, especially during presidential election cycles as an inhabitant of a purple state, also carries particular ethical and political responsibilities, which direct my efforts to expose humanitarianism's proximity to whiteness as an unmarked category. The issues that *Violent Exceptions* addresses certainly condition my life experiences, but these experiences are not the subject of this study. Nor does this book claim that the figure of the child-in-peril is equivalent to or representative of particular children or childhoods. Rather, this study turns to the constitutive force of the sociopolitical imaginary to investigate the material-discursive convergence of humanitarian and human rights imaginaries, which the figure of the child-in-peril brings into being. *Violent Exceptions* calls for a materialist-rhetorical analysis of how and why

certain figurations of childhood and the child-in-peril gain political traction in US public discourse and come to matter and for whom.

Yazmin Juárez's testimony bears witness to the unique circumstances of her daughter's death. Yet her testimony also attests to the long and painful history of struggles for children's rights in the US. Mariee Juárez's handprints testify to her life and the trauma of her death, but these small, colorful painted impressions also call upon us not only to resist the inhumanity of the carceral state but also to envision global forms of political caring and justice.

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While I sit in relative safety working in my home in a Columbus, Ohio, suburb during the stay-at-home directive in the spring of 2020 completing the final revisions of this manuscript, COVID-19 has changed my life. My life has changed with new child- and elder-care concerns and fear for a member of my extended family with the virus in an intensive care unit in Manhattan, New York, and for my mother living alone over 500 miles away. COVID-19 has heightened my concern for how my own daughters must navigate their physical safety and emotional well-being as young Asian American women growing up in the context of the coronavirus and the virus that is anti-Asian-pathogen racism. I have deep concerns about the social and economic risks that the pandemic has raised for the most vulnerable among us and the rise in human rights violations and state violence by authoritarian leaders and police who justify abuses as a matter of national security and law and order.

As the scholar and teacher of critical rhetoric and human rights, more than ever I see the urgent need for humanities research to understand and endure this crisis and for rhetorical studies research and pedagogy that explicitly engages the attribution of human value to some communities and nations and not others. While this project was completed as the pandemic reached North American shores, the insights that it reveals are pertinent to understanding how American exceptionalism has shaped the pandemic and its differential impact on poor children and children of color. Just as humanitarian

responses are limited in their focus on short-term approaches, the COVID-19 pandemic, like all states of emergency, turns public attention away from structural inequities and reframes violence as exceptional. It is incumbent upon us as rhetoric and communication scholars to engage the challenges that COVID-19 has made excruciatingly visible and to recognize the differential risks and exposure that some communities have been forced to endure. Additionally, the pandemic prompts scholarly and activist engagement with the political utility and/or limitations of human rights for addressing systemic inequities.

In the spirit of gratitude for those who inspire critical human rights work, I want to express my appreciation to those who have supported me throughout the process of writing this book. Gratitude to colleagues over the years for sustaining collaborations at Ohio State, from the Human Rights: Confronting Images and Testimonies Conference (2010) to the Global Human Rights, Sexualities, and Vulnerabilities Symposium (2013) to the Black Lives Matters in the Classroom Conference (2016) to the Girls of Color: Resistance and the Politics of Empowerment Symposium (2018) to the Naming Injustice: Rights and Resistance Across Queer Migrations and Trafficking Workshop (2018) to the Anti-Racist Methods, Pedagogy, and Mentoring Forum (2020) and the Global Arts + Humanities Human Rights Pasts and Futures Digital Dialogues (2020–21).

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Children's Rights and Humanitarian Rationalities

> Violence lies at the heart of the exception.
>
> —Dion Fassin

The February 1, 2016, *Time* magazine cover features a closely cropped image of Sincere Smith, a Black two-year-old boy whose face is covered in a rash caused from drinking and bathing in the poisoned water in Flint, Michigan. "Every time he gets into contact with the water, he's burning and itching," Ariana Hawk, the boy's mother, told reporters. The majority African American population of Flint, a Midwest postindustrial town, had been fed high dosages of lead, E. coli, and carcinogens for nearly twenty-one months through their public water supply. Regina H. Boone, the *Detroit Free Press* photographer who took the shot, claimed that the image "put a face to this issue." But what kind of moral and political work did this image perform? What storylines did Sincere Smith's bodily story and face have to fit in order to be recognized, and to whom was it recognizable? Did this image help frame what are essentially human rights violations against the children of Flint in primarily humanitarian terms?[1]

Water may be the universal solvent, but clean water is neither universally available, nor are all bodies equally vulnerable to the toxins it carries. Access to water, water management, and exposure to environmental toxins and the harm that exposure to them causes are gendered, raced, and classed in particular ways around the world. The United Nations reports that in 42 countries, 100 percent of populations have safe drinking water, but the US is not one of them. In the US, 0.8 percent of the population does not have access

to clean water.² Who are these 2.5 million people? What do these statistics reveal? What do they conceal? Those most vulnerable to contaminated water are young children from marginalized communities. Unlike statistical abstractions, however, water does not dissolve the toxic particularities of racial, gender, class, age, or citizenship status. Yet it was not until the images emerged of young vulnerable children, such as Sincere Smith, that the story about Flint gained national attention. Indeed, the cover image juxtaposed with the title "The Poisoning of an American City" positioned the child as a stand-in for the city. In addition to the citizen residents exposed to carcinogenic drinking water, hundreds of undocumented Flint residents were unable to obtain bottled water because of security and identification checks at distribution sites and their legitimate fear of deportation, and these residents also were not counted for in the publicly released statistics (Settlage).

Engineered by local, state, and federal government bodies, the toxic enterprise in Flint went from a local outrage to a national and then international news item only after Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, a local pediatrician, held a news conference in September 2015 sharing data on the rising lead levels in the blood of her young patients. The report, like the *Time* magazine cover image, essentially directed public attention away from thinking about the poisoning of young children as a violation of their human rights toward the medical humanitarian register, which reinforced neoliberal calculations of the value of Black children's lives in terms of the cost to protect them (Athey, Ferebee, and Hesford 3). Through this media coverage, we see the material intimacies of humanitarian and neoliberal moral economies in recoding "domination as misfortune, injustice as suffering, and inequality as exclusion" (Fassin 6). Through this coverage, we see the constitutive function of the material rhetoric of the humanitarian figure of the child-in-peril and its blunting of the political potential of human rights. Lead poisoning is an embodied articulation of neoliberal mechanisms of the governance of matter. The Flint water crisis exemplifies the "violent geographies of fast capitalism" and the "slow violence somatized into cellular dramas of mutation, particularly in the bodies of the poor" (Nixon 449). Like bodies of water across the globe, the Flint River is a haunt for stories of environmental racism "pulled beneath the surface of our skin in a persistent undertow" (Neimanis 36). Crucially, Flint residents and social activists turned public attention to anti-Black racism and the dehumanization of the Black bodies and communities in the US (Eligon). I begin this introduction with this cover image and media coverage of the Flint water crisis because they exemplify "the vicious porosity between humans and our environment" (Tuana 193) and the exploitation of this porosity, permeability,

and accompanying liminality as a technology of power. Environmental toxins. Toxic vulnerabilities.

The environmental crisis in Flint, Michigan, emerged from the city's economic problems, brought on by the mismanagement of resources, corporate greed, and neoliberal tax incentives. When General Motors sent many of its jobs to the nonunion south and overseas in the 1980s, the population of Flint rapidly declined. Along with the city's shrinking tax base, Wall Street downgraded Flint's credit rating, which made it even more difficult for the city to recover or attend to its failing infrastructure (Moore). In November 2011 Governor Rick Snyder appointed an emergency manager to address the city's $15 million budget deficit. As a cost-cutting measure, the manager shifted the city's water supply from the Detroit Water and Sewage Department (DWSD) to the Karegnondi Water Authority (KWA). But KWA's pipeline was under construction and would not be ready for several years. Therefore, in April 2014 the manager drew the city's water supply from the Flint River Water Service Center, which had been inoperative since the 1960s. By May 2014 residents reported that the water coming out of their faucets was brown and foul-smelling, and that bathing in it caused skin rashes and hair loss. The city assured residents that the water was safe. As suggested earlier, not until September 2015, after Dr. Hanna-Attisha reported on the increasing blood lead levels of children in Flint, did officials acknowledge the scope of the problem.

Governor Snyder reconnected the Flint water supply to DWSD in October 2015. In November 2015 several residents filed lawsuits against the state. By December 2015 several government officials had resigned, including the director of the Department of Environmental Quality and later the EPA's regional administrator. In January 2016 the governor declared a state of emergency. Soon thereafter, President Obama declared a federal emergency that freed $5 million in aid for the city. Flint received $28 million in state aid and grants from the federal government. In February 2016 leaked documents revealed that the governor's office had been warned about the contamination a year before. In March 2016 an independent Flint Water Advisory Task Force concluded that the state had mismanaged the shift in water supply and exacerbated the problem through its prioritization of financial issues and reliance on companies lacking the scientific expertise necessary to monitor the safety of the water. The report also pointed to the failure of the EPA for not more aggressively intervening to protect the residents of Flint and declared the crisis a "clear case of environmental injustice." The 2017 Michigan Civil Rights Commission Report likewise concluded that the Flint water crisis reflected a "deeply embedded institutional, systemic and historical racism."

The broad culpability of the local, state, and federal government officials who failed to anticipate and then acknowledge predictable consequences of cutting costs on proper water treatment spotlights how mechanisms of exceptionality—declared states of emergency—alibi systemic injustices and neoliberal capitulations to profit (Athey, Ferebee, and Hesford 1).[3] The *Time* magazine cover photograph of Sincere Smith therefore points not only to how "human[s] [are] perpetually interconnected with the flows of substances and the agencies of environments" but also to how these environments are themselves agencies of the state (Alaimo 2012, 476). In her essay "Toxic Cities," Terressa A. Benz likewise demonstrates the impact of neoliberal economics and legal decisions in promoting environmental racism and a racialized caste system of "worthiness" in which minority communities bear the burden of exposure to environmental toxins (49–50). How, then, to account for these material intimacies and the differential exposure of marginalized communities to environmental toxins and the denial of their basic human right to clean water? The Flint water crisis compels us to question how and when the humanitarian figure of the child-in-peril accrues value in the documentation of structural violence or its obfuscation, and the consequences of these accruals and obfuscations for the advancement of children's human rights. As I argue throughout, the global insubstantiality of children's human rights is bound to the paradoxes of humanitarianism and state-of-exception mechanisms to which the political rationalities of neoliberalism and liberal internationalism are attached. *Violent Exceptions* focuses on the global fragility of children's human rights and the failure of humanitarian orientations to address underlying structural inequities that perpetuate precarious childhoods.

Resilience and the Humanitarian Paradigm of Human Rights

Violent Exceptions focuses on strategic deployments of the humanitarian figure of the child-in-peril and humanitarian orientations to children's human rights at the turn of the twenty-first century in American political discourse. Human rights and humanitarianism may converge in practice, but scholars and practitioners alike distinguish between their anchoring concepts, principles, and goals. Literature on the relationship between human rights and humanitarianism distinguishes human rights as incited by state violations of individual rights and entitlements, and humanitarianism as incited by emergencies and life-threatening conditions affecting mass populations (Barnett 2018, 325). Human rights and humanitarianism are both concerned with

human suffering, but, as historian Michael Barnett rightly notes, they are "oriented toward different domains of human suffering" (325).

In *Humanitarianism and Suffering: The Mobilization of Empathy,* social anthropologist Richard Wilson and historian Richard Brown point to differing human rights and humanitarianism approaches to agency (24). Human rights subjects, they observe, are often construed as political agents "pursuing claims, immunities, privileges, and liberties," whereas humanitarian beneficiaries are often construed as passive recipients of charity (8). Wilson and Brown identify a confounding tension between human rights and humanitarian desires to alleviate suffering wherein humanitarian claims essentially overwrite rights-based claims. In the name of humanitarianism, for example, slaveholders sought to improve the conditions for slaves, but they did not uphold the rights of slaves, because doing so would have nullified their enslavement (11). Historically, children's human rights also have been held hostage to the paradoxes of humanitarianism and violent exceptionalities on which they are based. Not only have figurations of the child-in-peril helped sustain these paradoxes, actual historical children have had to and continue to endure them and the harm they produce.

Many world religions have principles of human conduct that oblige one to help those in need, and philosophical commitments have long inspired acts of compassion and charity. But the term *humanitarianism* was specifically used to refer to such acts in the late eighteenth century in Europe and the Americas. In *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism,* Barnett delineates the history of humanitarianism into three ages: the Age of Imperial Humanitarianism (late eighteenth century to World War II), the Age of Neo-humanitarianism (World War II to end of the Cold War), and the Age of Liberal Humanitarianism (end of the Cold War to the present). Powerful nation-states have mobilized the figure of the child-in-peril across all three ages in the history of humanitarianism in attempts to consolidate power and/or to exonerate themselves and indict other nations, visual figurations chief among them (see chapter 1).

Influenced by Enlightenment philosophy, new ideologies of humanity, and a new doctrine of sympathy (i.e., Rousseau and Smith), the Age of Imperial Humanitarianism fueled Eurocentric ideas of international community and advanced the civilizing missions of European expansion and colonialism (Barnett 2011, 30). The League of Nations' Child Welfare Committee and children's human rights campaigns, such as Save the Children, emerged during this period, with the latter focusing on child labor in Iran and China, child marriage in India, and primary education in Africa (93). After the Cold War the Age of Neo-humanitarianism established new links between security and

foreign aid. As nation-states became more central to humanitarian action, humanitarian agencies increasingly emphasized principles of neutrality and impartiality (31). The Age of Liberal Humanitarianism brought a new focus on liberal democracies, globalization, and human rights as the best routes to peaceful and progressive societies (9). Organizations that were once limited to development, such as the World Bank, joined the humanitarian cause, and humanitarian agencies responding to disasters across the globe grew exponentially, with many agencies expanding their focus beyond emergency relief to include human rights.

In our present Age of Liberal Humanitarianism, neoliberal policies default to humanitarian organizations to cover services that the state had before assumed. Rights-based approaches to humanitarianism may have gained popularity in the 1990s, but these approaches, Barnett suggests, have been more or less silenced by the perpetual US war on terror (2011). Since the 1990s, and certainly after 2001, the discourse of *resilience humanitarianism* has surged in recognition of the present state of perpetual crises. Humanitarian studies scholar Dorothea Hilhorst uses the term resilience humanitarianism to refer to the emphasis on individual overcoming and/or adapting to perpetual states of emergency. Distinct from earlier ages of humanitarianism rooted in exceptionality, discontinuity, and crisis as a temporal emergency, she argues, resilience humanitarianism is anchored in crisis as normality (Hilhorst 7). Resilience humanitarian may counteract exceptional notions of crisis and thereby appear to address systemic conditions in its focus on local capacities and institutions, but in practice the neoliberal ideology of resilience reinforces hierarchical power relations by depicting local institutions and communities as incapacitated (8). Moreover, in its focus on individual resilience and adaptation, resilience humanitarianism "underestimates the relational and negotiated nature of aid" (10), thereby preventing a more progressive vision of "mutuality or capacity sharing" necessary to counteract exaggerated claims about the continuity of capacity (8) and to forestall an eventual "politics of abandonment" (6). Finally, resilience humanitarianism risks propping up the economies of violent conflict and in so doing undermines the potential of international human rights laws to counter violence (8). Without a focus on systemic structural inequities and human rights interdependencies, resilience humanitarian shifts attention away from the millions of people living in impoverished conditions, forcibly displaced from their homes because of violent conflicts, racial dispossession, and the destabilizing effect of global climate change, to focus only on perpetual adaptations to inequities.

Resilience has emerged as an expectation of humanitarian action, as Hilhorst suggests (7). But, as *Violent Exceptions* demonstrates, resilience and

exceptionalism collude in turning public attention and funding away from state obligations and protections and international coalitions. In its conscription to neoliberal logics, resilience humanitarianism reinforces the exceptional. As Inderpal Grewal importantly observes, neoliberalism enables humanitarian governance "through the production of insecurity at individual and state scales," and, conversely, "neoliberalism requires humanitarian governance" (2017, 16). I propose that resilience discourses entwine neoliberal and humanitarian dependencies. Thus, in contrast to Barnett's sharp focus on human rights' encroachment on humanitarianism, *Violent Exceptions* turns its attention to humanitarianism's encroachment on human rights. To foreground humanitarian framings of contemporary children's human rights is neither to conflate human rights and humanitarian traditions nor to claim humanitarianism as the origin of human rights. Rather, it is to highlight the resilience of humanitarianism in structuring nostalgic historiographies of human rights and contemporary configurations of children's rights.

In *Inventing Human Rights: A History,* historian Lynn Hunt argues that Enlightenment humanitarianism provided the psychological foundation for the development of modern human rights, specifically the idea that one should care about and have compassion for distant suffering others. As historian Thomas Laqueur argues in "Bodies, Details, and the Humanitarian Narrative," integral to the late eighteenth-century culture of sentimentalism, the humanitarian narrative accounted for the suffering of ordinary people aimed to elicit "sympathetic passions" and a "common bond between those who suffer and those who could help" (178). However, as literary scholar Lynn Festa observes, eighteenth-century sentimentalism also created gender, racial, and class divides between those deemed worthy of compassion and those who did not fall within the parameters of white benevolence (104). In such cases, humanitarian identification masks the power relations that human rights aims to expose.

In his critical review of *Inventing Human Rights,* historian Samuel Moyn concedes that humanitarian sentiment may have broadened the rights tradition, but it did not determine it (2014, 5). Claims to connections between the rise of eighteenth-century humanitarian sentiment and rights do not account, he argues, for "many of the central notions of the rights of man [and] other sorts of juridical guarantees, the right to practice one's religion, the liberty to speak one's mind or publish freely, and, above all, the protection of private property" (6). Hunt's concentration on "spectacular wrongs" (i.e., torture) as "the most grievous affront to morality," Moyn argues, "obscures structural wrongs that are less easy to see" (7). Human rights emphasis on atrocity prevention only arose, Moyn asserts, after the Cold War and in response to the

failed idealism of social welfarism and the perceived extremism of anticolonial sovereignty (110). While attention to systemic structural violence is a crucial consideration, it is also important not to underestimate the racist logics at work in and policed by "spectacular wrongs," especially torture and state violence (Athey, personal correspondence).

In *Human Rights and the Uses of History,* Moyn defines three stages of the conceptual evolution of human rights, the latter of which corresponds to Barnett's Age of Liberal Humanitarianism. The first he defines as the National-Welfarist stage (1940s), the second as the Anti-colonialist stage (1960s), and the third as the Humanitarian Paradigm of Human Rights stage (1970s–present). The humanitarian paradigm of human rights, he argues, "arose on the ruins of revolution, not as its descendant" (13). The international focus on genocide as a human rights concern and the "amalgamation of the humanitarian concern for suffering with human rights as both a utopian idea and a practical movement" didn't emerge until the late twentieth century (2010, 220). In short, Moyn is critical of nostalgic historiographies that in effect aim to salvage human rights from humanitarianism's imperial past (2014, xvi). Attuned to materialist critiques of human rights as "a rhetoric that makes the cage of globalizing neoliberalism more bearable" (17), Moyn nevertheless concedes: if human rights is to reconcile its past, it will need to admonish utopian visions that mask the realities of power and to relinquish its attachment to liberal internationalism, generally understood as a foreign policy doctrine that promotes the formation of global structures, such as the United Nations, and a liberal world order. In contrast to isolationist or noninterventionist foreign policy doctrines, liberal internationalism allows for liberal states to intervene militarily or through humanitarian aid in other sovereign states to pursue these goals. If we are to understand humanitarianism's influence on the development of the modern concept of human rights, then it must be through attending to humanitarianism's role as a prong of liberal internationalism as well as its imperialist history.

Transnational feminists and postcolonial scholars have presented trenchant analyses of the role of human rights and humanitarianism in undermining the collective actions of anticolonial, anticapitalist, and anti-imperialist movements (Abu-Lughod; Atanasoski; Festa; I. Grewal 1998, 2005, 2017; Kapur 2006; Kozol 2010; Spivak 2003; Terry). Building on this formative scholarship, I argue that the figure of the child-in-peril has played a foundational role in the advancement of the contemporary humanitarian paradigm of human rights. Human rights may focus on long-term goals to eliminate the causes of suffering, whereas humanitarianism concentrates on the alleviation of suffering and short-term goals (Barnett 2011, 16); but sourced by neolib-

eral economies of resilience, these traditions converge in their mediation and mitigation of children's human rights. *Violent Exceptions* recognizes that the figure of the child-in-peril takes on particular features in the present age of advanced neoliberalism, but this project situates these figurations as part of the historical trajectories and legacies of settler and imperial humanitarianism. The humanitarian paradigm of human rights may have taken root in the mid-to-late twentieth century, but its paradigmatic features and tropes have a much longer history. Attention to this genealogy reveals the centrality of the figure of the child-in-peril to the history of humanitarianism and, more specifically, to the formation of the nation and the myth of American exceptionality. The humanitarian paradigm of human rights enacts moral and legal principles as well as affective structures.[4] *Violent Exceptions* focuses on how the material rhetoric of humanitarianism mediates children's human rights and aims to elucidate how neoliberal ideologies and exceptional logics structure ethical obligations as well as their disavowal

A World Without Innocence

In "A World Without Innocence," cultural anthropologist Miriam Ticktin claims that the political and moral concept of "innocence inserts hierarchy into the concept of suffering" (587) and underscores the politics of rescue and protection (586). In *Suffering Childhood in Early America,* American studies scholar Anna Mae Duane provides a comprehensive analysis of strategic appropriations of humanitarian sensibilities in early American colonial literature, politics, and culture, specifically highlighting the symbolic role of colonial metaphors of childhood in mediating the violence of settler colonialism and slavery (3). European colonialists drew upon infantilizing metaphors to assert power over colonized subjects and to justify slavery. Not only did the figure of the child serve as a mechanism through which the violence of colonialism and horrors of slavery were historically navigated but, as Duane rightly notes, historical children experienced extreme vulnerability and suffering throughout America's transition from a colony to a nation. During this transition, the figure of the "threatened child" also emerged as "an analogy for the colonies' relationship with a tyrannical mother country" from which they sought independence (4). Duane observes, "American rebels metaphorically aligned themselves with an unjustly suppressed child who was being denied the natural right to freedom" (12). She continues, "The child was a site of incredible political potential for the white men who would draw on the image of an unjustly restrained youth to justify rebellion against the home

country" (16). In early America, power was asserted and populations were disciplined through infantilizing metaphors and figurations of the vulnerable child, the threatened child, and the revolutionary child. Scholars and activists have long critiqued the spectacle of the suffering child in American cultural and political discourse, but few can deny its power as a centerpiece in humanitarian configurations of otherwise structural injustices, as the image of Sincere Smith demonstrates.

Scholars across the disciplines have drawn attention to shifting conceptualizations of the child, childhood innocence, and suffering children in Western culture (Ariès; R. Bernstein 2011; Duane 2010; Higgonet; Sánchez-Eppler; Scheper-Hughes and Sargent; Suski; Ticktin 2016; among others). While the child emerged as a distinct category in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, scholars attribute the prevalence of conceptions of the child as an "archetypal figure of innocence" to the eighteenth century (Ticktin 2016, 579). Before the eighteenth century, children were understood as small adults in need of discipline and as inherently sinful and in need of Christian salvation (579). By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, children emerged as "innocent and sinless, absent of sexual feelings, and oblivious to worldly concerns" (R. Bernstein 2011, 4). Invoking Judeo-Christian notions of innocence, Enlightenment thinkers situated the time of innocence prior to and apart from social and the political life. By the end of the nineteenth century, legislation against the ill treatment of children and the development of child protection policies fortified childhood as both a moral and a political category in Western Europe and North America. But these moral and political configurations did not apply to all children. Thus, we need to ask, which children have had and continue to have access to childhood innocence and to the protections that such designations warrant? What norms monitor this access and thereby determine which children are recognized as rights-bearing and as deserving of a future? How do race, gender, class, sexuality, and disability factor in these determinations and their consequences?

For over a century, as queer cultural studies scholar Kathryn Bond Stockton observes, "Anglo-American cultures have deemed the child to be a latency, a certain kind of interval . . . that the general public thinks it can 'protect'" (513). Yet, as Stockton points out, because of privilege, only certain children are perceived as worthy of the status of innocent (514). In *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights,* Robin Bernstein, a scholar of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century American material culture, highlights the sentimental ideology of childhood innocence and its link to racial and gender formations of citizenship and rights. Bernstein notes that childhood innocence is historically "raced white," with white but

not Black children having access to the asset that is childhood innocence and thereby the protections it procures (4).[5] In the mid-nineteenth century, bifurcated visions of white and Black childhood construed white children as synonymous with innocence and with the ability to feel pain and Black children as invulnerable and as impervious to pain. The presumed inability of Black children to feel pain placed them outside the sentimental category of childhood and normalized violence against them. Proslavery advocates mobilized these racial constructs through the figure of the pickaninny to counter abolitionist humanitarian appeals to Black children's humanity (55). Although these representations were not monolithic, as there were different depictions of white middle-class and working-class children, most representations of Black children at the time were denigrating (33). Racialized innocence calibrated which children were deemed worthy of moral sympathy and rights. Abolitionists such as Frederick Douglass understood the stakes, and therefore "asserted black children's ability to feel pain so as to argue, in Douglass's words, that 'SLAVE-children *are* children'" (20; emphasis in original). In sum, childhood innocence played a pivotal role in US racial projects and in contests over race and rights (2). "Childhood innocence . . . secured the unmarked status of whiteness, and the power derived from that status" (8). Like normative futurity discourses ("children are our future"), childhood innocence is a privilege to which only certain children have access, as the perpetuation of state violence against Black children illustrates (see chapter 4), making the question of childhood temporality a political one.

By the mid-nineteenth century, sympathy had become deeply politicized (Abruzzo 139). The ability to experience pain was linked not only to the recognition of one's humanity but to worthiness of citizenship (R. Bernstein 2011, 50). Abolitionists expressed moral revulsion at the infliction of pain on others and brought the suffering of the enslaved to the foreground through illustrations of cruelty. While abolitionists used humanizing tactics to counter slavery's cruelty, which included humanizing slave children, proslavery advocates deployed tropes of the child and infantilizing discourses to justify slavery. For example, proslavery advocates construed slaves as childlike and therefore as requiring the oversight of paternalistic whites. Slavery apologists also mobilized the vulnerable figure of the slave child to bolster benevolent slaveholders humanitarian narratives, namely that they were providing orphaned children protection (Duane 2010, 15). Similar contrasts characterized the material rhetoric of reconstruction, wherein northern abolitionists continued to use stories of slavery's cruelty to push for the rights of southern Blacks, whereas former slaveholders returned to proslavery humanitarian rhetoric to navigate the new racial terrain (Abruzzo 230–31) and to bolster their arguments

that emancipation would contribute to Black poverty, starvation, and misery (236).

Humanitarian appeals also structured Indigenous child removal policies in the late nineteenth century across several continents, including Australia and North America. The removal of Indigenous children from their homes and communities and their placement into boarding and residential schools were based largely on representations of Indigenous populations as filthy and backward (Maxwell 982). In addition to the figure of the "debased native child," as sociocultural anthropologist Krista Maxwell notes, emergent understandings of "children as distinctly malleable and vulnerable" facilitated the actions and arguments of settler colonial elites (982). For example, settler colonialists mobilized the discourse on childhood malleability to advance moral arguments to Christians about the need to rescue Indigenous children (982). Maxwell coined the term *settler humanitarianism* to describe how sympathy for Indigenous children construed as victims of their culture aligned with the goals of settler colonialism and the genocidal logics of elimination (976). "Humanitarian reason," Maxwell argues, "enabled settler societies to craft enduring mythologies of national benevolence" (985), revealing humanitarianism's deep entanglement with settler colonialism, imperialism, and racism.

White constructs of racial innocence continue to halt the recognition of Black children's humanity and rights. In the post-Ferguson era, rights recognition requires that the Black body occupy the social position of absolute victim, a humanitarian mode of recognition afforded only to the youngest of Black children and even then only temporarily. Sincere Smith was the face of the Flint water crisis at two years old, but at four years old and no longer a resident of Flint, he and his mother, no longer in the public eye, were deemed ineligible for the government assistance offered to Flint residents afflicted by the contaminated water supply. The retraction of recognition points to a fundamental tension in humanitarianism's focus on children who are at once exceptional and exemplary (Ticktin 2011, 84) as well as to the adultification of Black children (see chapter 4). Sincere Smith may have emerged, albeit temporally so, as an exceptional humanitarian subject, but the conditions of his victimization were not unique. Indeed, poor white and minority children across the US are far more vulnerable to environmental toxins than privileged children are. The poisoning of Flint's water supply and harm to the African American community is not an exception but the rule. The global poor, people of color, and Indigenous communities bear the burden of environmental violence and the effects of resource extraction and siting of hazardous facilities and dumping of toxic wastes in their communities.

To clear the way for the development of "political, moral, and affective grammars beyond innocence" (577), Ticktin claims that a "world without innocence . . . would embrace this contaminated reality and let it be the site of new political emergence" (2017, 588). The Flint water crisis poignantly illustrates these contaminated material and symbolic realities. But in a world where contaminated realities are "politically induced condition[s] in which certain populations . . . become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death" (J. Butler 2004, 35), we would be remiss if we were to ignore the degree to which innocence serves as the basis for the differential constitution of children as human rights subjects. We may live in a world without innocence, but innocence as a heuristic exposes differential investments in the past, present, and future of certain children and not others. *Violent Exceptions* is therefore invested in understanding how the humanitarian paradigm of human rights affixes innocence, liminality, capacity, and/or futurity to children-in-peril and the implications of these affixations for the advancement or curtailment of children's human rights. Whose best interests do these affixations serve?

Children's Rights: Whose Best Interests?

Mid-twentieth-century iterations of the humanitarian paradigm of human rights coincided with the development of international children's rights laws, namely the formation of UNICEF (1946), the inclusion of clauses on children's human rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), and the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959). These developments followed the earlier League of Nations adoption of the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1924). Humanitarian rationalities lie behind these legal advances. Before the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), children's human rights instruments framed children as vulnerable and innocent beings and violations against them as symptomatic of adult exploitation or neglect and, in some cases, as consequences of the "structural violences of war, unregulated labor, and poverty" (Lindkvist 212). In the early to mid-twentieth century, children's rights protections, as religious studies and human rights studies scholar Linde Lindkvist notes, "were coupled with calls for humanitarian action, either in the form of transnational philanthropy or institutionalized, development assistance" (212). The humanitarian orientation to children's human rights was most visible in the drafting of the UNCRC around debates on female genital mutilation, human trafficking, and child soldiers (216). In chapters 2 and 3, I look at how the humanitarian paradigm of human rights continues to dominate the US focus on children's human rights

violations outside of its own borders through its support for the two Optional Protocols to the UNCRC, which focus on child prostitution, human trafficking, and the recruitment of children into armed forces, but not the UNCRC itself. The US international focus on child trafficking and child soldiers illuminates how the US's selective adoption of the UNCRC Optional Protocols facilitates figurations of the "foreign" child-in-peril to advance conceptions of American exceptionality.

Although the category of the child is contested and childhood is differently configured across cultures, the UNCRC set the international legal category of the "child" as individuals under the age of eighteen.[6] One of the challenges of establishing political status for children is that under modern law, the possession of rights is premised on the concept of the autonomous subject and that subject's capacity to exercise rights. It was not until the 1989 UNCRC that children were construed as "bearer[s], not merely . . . object[s], of human rights" (Bhabha 2006, 1529). The UNCRC may recognize the child as a rights holder; however, the Convention does not unequivocally position the child as a moral agent capable of exercising those rights. "If having a right is contingent upon some characteristic, like capacity," as legal scholar Katherine Federle has argued, "then holding the right becomes exclusive and exclusionary" (343). These contingencies underwrite the best-interest principle of children's rights (UNCRC, Article 3)—an area that is particularly salient to consider in the context of this study because it is through the best-interest principle that childhood becomes a juridical site of exceptionality—an exceptionality affixed to children's liminal cultural and political status. While there are many ways to track the contingencies that shaped the drafting of the UNCRC, including the politics of the Cold War, the best-interest principle and analogous translations of national interests, wherein the nation is construed as a vulnerable or threatened child, illustrate how humanitarian and paternalistic sensibilities tether the figure of the child-in-peril to the sovereign and to futurity. The humanitarian paradigm of human rights underlies the legibility of the best-interest principle as a category of children's rights.

While attention to the best-interest principle increased in the late twentieth century, as social anthropologist Naomi Glenn-Levin Rodriguez notes, the humanitarian framing of "acting in the name of the best interest of the child, particularly through discourses of salvage, civilizing, and rescue, has been an active part of US policy since the nation's establishment" (157). The state deployed paternalistic humanitarian discourses to justify the forced removal of Native American children from their families as well as orphan abductions (see Linda Gordon). Best-interest principles foreground child protection and parental rights and assume that children's best interests and parent's custody

rights are in sync (Rodriguez 155). Yet, as Rodriguez observes, because the "principle translates normative conceptions of "good" parents or "ideal" family situations," and these translations are "are invariably informed by presumptions about race, class, citizenship, and nationality," best-interest principle applications are rarely value-free legal decisions (156). Indeed, in her research on legal interpretations of the best-interest principle in cases involving parents who are not US citizens or residents, Rodriguez found that racism, classism, sexism, and nationalism reside in the "discretion that gives the best-interest principle its force" (160). The very programs and principles that are designed to protect children far too often serve as arenas for disciplining and policing families of color (155). Rodriguez therefore calls for the state not only to consider a child's particular familial and social circumstances but to question how the best-interest principle and attendant cultural biases disproportionately impact families of color (163). In sum, within the context of US immigration law, the best-interest principle may appear to prioritize a humanitarian orientation, where the immigrant child is judged not by whether they meet certain entry requirements but by whether it is in their best interest to stay in the US. However, as Rodriguez's study demonstrates, the application of the best-interest principle has not halted the separation of children or the deportation of parents who are not US citizens (163).

The UN General Assembly adapted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on November 20, 1989. Although 195 countries have since ratified the Convention, making it the most widely ratified international human rights treaty in history, thirty-one years later the US has yet to do so. Initial resistance to the UNCRC unfolded in the context of the Cold War, where US delegates framed the UNCRC as an "Eastern bloc treaty," and conservative politicians, including President Ronald Reagan, mobilized human rights to advance anticommunist positions and emphasized civil and political rights in order to subjugate economic and social rights (Lindkvist 218).

While US progressives critique the differential applications of the best-interest principle and cultural biases that contour the juridical space of discretion and racial exclusions, conservatives continue to mobilize the best-interest principle to relegate discretionary power to parents. For decades, US conservatives have drawn on the best-interest principle to frame their opposition to the ratification of the UNCRC and to create a climate of fear surrounding children's rights. Conservative organizations such as the Heritage Foundation, the Family Research Council, Concerned Women for America, and the Home School Legal Defense Association argue that the UNCRC is part of an international conspiracy to undermine US sovereignty. Lawyers affiliated with the conservative right claim that, if ratified, the CRC would trump US

domestic laws. However, there is no legal precedent of an "American law-yer having convinced any American court that a human rights treaty created a new cognizable right in the US" (Gunn 126). While such arguments may not bode well for the point of ratification beyond the symbolic, they do beg for an analysis of the anchoring concepts that structure the symbolic, which encompasses both discursive practices and lived relationships. Conservative groups have also argued that the treaty could potentially eliminate parental rights. The argument that the UNCRC would strip parents of their rights to educate and discipline children and turn parents into children of the state is also contradicted by the Convention's Preamble and other provisions (Articles 3, 5, 8, and 9) that recognize the family as fundamental to a child's development (Browning 160). Conservative politicians' strategic embrace of the best-interest principle counters the UNCRC's assertion of children's participation rights (Article 12), and agential notions of children's human rights, which the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child have asserted are "beneficial for the child, for the family, for the community, the school, the State, and for democracy" (Lindkvist 225).

Central to the affective investment in humanitarian and overtly paternal-istic constructs of the vulnerable child is a projected nostalgia for the even-tual loss of childhood and childhood innocence. Robin Bernstein puts it well: childhood itself and the "historical process through which children and child-hood coproduce [and give body to each other] occurs through surrogation" (2011, 22). "Performance, like childhood," she claims, "is by definition always in the act of disappearing: performance and childhood are both paradoxically present only through their impending absence" (23). I want to suggest that it is precisely this sentimental construal of childhood as an emblem of loss that wedges the best-interest principle in between parental rights and the nation as vulnerable child. Anti-immigration groups construe undocumented children as parasites feeding off the nation-state and argue that the Fourteenth Amend-ment, which allows for granting birthright citizenship to children born in the US to undocumented immigrant parents, enables a "native humanitarianism" (Oliviero 2018, 75). The anti-immigration movement argues that the vulner-ability of the nation to foreign invasion justifies the selective investment in certain children's birthrights and not others. Here we see how conservative critiques of the state as humanitarian benefactor are deployed in ways that limit children's rights. Conversely, the image of Sincere Smith achieved iconic status precisely by turning public attention away from the state as violator to a humanitarian framing of the problem of environmental racism. The humani-tarian figure of the child-in-peril often stands in for the state and as a cover for political and state violence.

Across the case study chapters, I illuminate hierarchical scenes of recognition in the production of children as violated subjects and subjects with rights. For example, as I discuss in chapters 2 and 3, the US ratification of two Optional Protocols to the UNCRC, one on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and the other on the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography, but not of the UNCRC itself, reinforced the hierarchical positioning of the US as humanitarian benefactor of children of the global South. These humanitarian investments, as I discuss in chapter 4, contrast with the US disinvestment in and adultification and criminalization of children of color in the US. These differential humanitarian investments position some children and their childhoods as exceptional and thereby deserving of rights recognition or as exceptions and thereby denied rights recognition. *Violent Exceptions* argues for the recognition of the limits of the humanitarian paradigm of human rights to address systemic violence and to scale the magnitude of the risks that imperil the human rights, lives, and futures of children growing up in the midst of violent conflicts, racial dispossessions, and environmental degradation, and in contexts governed by the rise of authoritarian regimes and leaders.

Child-in-Peril: United States of Exception

Imperil: to put at risk of being harmed, injured, or
destroyed; to expose to danger, injury and loss.
—*Oxford English Dictionary*

Traditional legal definitions of a state of exception refer to the state's suspension of the law as a result of a declared or perceived state of emergency. In political philosophy, a state of exception refers to "efforts within the Western legal tradition to extricate sovereign power entirely from the . . . law; or, in a related move, to legislate for the law's own suspension" (Humphreys 2006, 679). The Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben uses the concept of the exception to distinguish "between citizens in a juridical order and outsiders who are stripped of juridical political protection" (Ong 5). In other words, violent exceptions are rooted in the modern state and the liberal legal tradition. Governments have taken regular—in some countries constant—recourse to the state-of-exception mechanism at moments of national crisis. Governments often qualify the designation of a state of emergency through the framework of perceived vulnerabilities—such as the construal of the nation as vulnerable to external and non-white contagions or invasion. Critical analyses of states

of exception amplify the paradoxical powers of the law to both humanize and dehumanize (Esmeir).

American exceptionalism is a political ideology grounded in the idea of personal freedom, initially religious liberty, individuality, laissez faire capitalism, and the US as a unique, superior power and moral authority—as the "City on the Hill." Common usage of the term dates to the late 1920s, but the term has been "retroactively assigned to the distant origins of America" (Pease 10). American exceptionalism operates as a state fantasy, as American studies scholar Donald Pease observes, which suppresses the horrors and legacy of the Native American genocide, American slavery, and American empire (8). Exceptionality haunts US history, from its "founding as a republic of slavery" (Kerber 745) to the race-based politics of removal and exclusion, which include the 1830 Indian Removal Act, 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, internment of American citizens of Japanese descent and Japanese citizens during World War II, profiling and incarceration of Black and Brown bodies, including children, and forced deportations and detention of Central American refugees crossing the US-Mexico border, including unaccompanied minors.

In her formative work *Saving the Security State,* transnational feminist studies scholar Inderpal Grewal demonstrates how neoliberal formations of the "exceptional citizen" provide imperial states the biopolitical leverage to designate who will live and who will die (9). Grewal argues that, tasked with saving the security state, "exceptional citizens—white, male, Christian—[are] endowed with sovereignty to target black and brown Others . . . through modes of war that incorporate militarized humanitarianism and surveillance" (21). President Trump's white nationalist and nativist "Make America Great Again" rhetoric is just one recent example of how exceptionalist logics contour American politics, and how the figure of the "exceptional citizen," which includes vigilantes at the US-Mexico border, is mobilized as a protector of the vulnerable nation-state. As discussed in the preface, President Trump's framing of the US-Mexico border as "a humanitarian crisis" has reserved humanitarian recognition solely for US citizens injured by undocumented immigrants. Trump claimed the power to *gift* those whom he construed as deserving of humanitarian recognition and to withhold recognition from those fleeing violence and those exposed to the inhumanity of the administration's policies, including child refugees in US detention facilities.

Exceptional logics, laws, and outlooks have had a grave impact on how democratic governments, such as the US, frame children's rights and respond to rights violations. The humanitarian figure of the child-in-peril is central to both conservative and liberal logics. Under the Trump administration, child-

hood innocence appears to be reserved for white, heterosexual, able-bodied citizen children. The administration's differential recognition of childhood innocence and children's rights lies in its anti-immigrant, anti–Native American, and anti-LGBTQ directives. These directives include efforts to rescind Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) protections and birthright citizenship, and hardline immigration demands such as the zero-tolerance immigration policy, which increased the deportation of unaccompanied minors and the separation of undocumented children and their parents, many seeking asylum from violence in their home countries, primarily Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. The stakes of Trump administration policies are high for American Indian and Alaska Native children and tribal communities as well, especially with decreased funding for the Bureau of Indian Affairs and dismantling of the Affordable Care Act, which will likely have devastating effects on tribal communities, particularly the Medicaid expansion program that provides care for nearly 300,000 American Indians and Alaska Natives. Moreover, cuts to programs such as the Supplemental Assistance Nutrition Program (food stamps), Medicaid, and Community Development Block Grants will disproportionally impact African American communities. Gendered and racial exceptions are violent, and they are insidious.

The designation child-in-peril signifies a state of emergency, insecurity, uncertainty, and vulnerability. *Violent Exceptions* theorizes the figure of the child-in-peril as a *state effect.* My invocation of the concept of "state effect" is derived from French philosopher Michel Foucault's theory of the state not as an *object* but as a *process* that permeates the body, behaviors, actions, and time of individuals (Sawyer 136; emphasis added). State effect points us toward microanalyses of networks of power. In *The Birth of Biopolitics,* Foucault argues, "The state is nothing else but the mobile effect of a regime of multiple governmentalities" (77). Neoliberal governmental and humanitarian rationalities together frame the child-in-peril as exceptional. More broadly, I use the term *exception* to refer to both legal exceptions to which governments often turn at moments of national crisis and, in the more commonly used cultural sense, to refer to an entity, identity, or person that is perceived as deviating from the norm, and which in doing so also reifies the norm. In other words, exceptionality polices the normative. The exception, as political science scholar Katharyne Mitchell importantly reminds us, "derives its power and legitimacy from hierarchies of embodied difference that 'make sense' to a given society at a given time" (103–4). Childhood exceptions and exceptions to childhood, which include the withholding of the status of child from certain children, amplify the regulatory functions of childhood in the distribution of resources and public attention. *Violent Exceptions* is interested in how figura-

tions of the child-in-peril place difference within a paradigm of exclusion and inclusion, which not only serves to designate the exception but also monitors the thresholds for humanitarian and human rights recognitions.

In this study I focus on the iconic figurations of the child-in-peril that have far-reaching political effects and instances where the endangered child serves as a catalyst of crisis in the US sociopolitical imaginary. My focus is not solely on the circulation of icons or variations thereof—but on the "making" and "mattering" of them. In its focus on how and why certain figurations of the child-in-peril come to matter and for whom, *Violent Exceptions* seeks to redirect research in rhetoric and communication studies as well as critical human rights scholarship to the material rhetoric of the emergency and to the consequences of humanitarian orientations to children's rights. With regard to the latter, I argue that humanitarianism often serves as an antidote to political violence and rights violations against children. In *Global Icons: Apertures to the Popular,* global media studies scholar Bishnupriya Ghosh puts it this way: "A complex materialist critique guides the critic to view affective emergencies around icons as articulations of both specific social demands and unmoored desires for a possible sociality" (10). *Violent Exceptions* likewise attends to the emergence of iconic images and stories about children-in-peril as constellations of various material-discursive forces that anticipate them and facilitate their public uptake. *Violent Exceptions* not only considers how humanitarian discourses privilege certain children's lives, rights, and futures over those of others, but also looks toward resistant reading practices and cultural and political formations that challenge these exceptions.

Building on social anthropologist Aihwa Ong's *Neoliberalism as Exception,* I formulate the theoretical concept of *childhood as exception and exception to childhood* to trace how neoliberal notions of violence, which includes the privatization of risk and resilience and normalization of insecurity, shape human rights and humanitarian discourses and policies (Lorey 11).[7] In *Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary,* social anthropologist Veena Das importantly reminds us of the instability of the concept of violence and the political contests and stakes over what can be named as violence. Not only is the concept of violence unstable; not all acts of violence are transparent (80). Part of my project therefore is to consider what is and is not named as a violent exception. *Violent Exceptions* engages both the violence of exceptionality, which includes legal exclusions and the violence of the law, and incremental, accretive, and systemic violence that are nevertheless framed as exceptional. Finally, *Violent Exceptions* foregrounds how the iconic figure of the child-in-peril erases slow violence—the violence of the ordinary—from which the spectacle of the imperiled child emerges.

Methodology: Material Rhetoric and New Materialisms

Violent Exceptions brings together materialist-rhetorical approaches and genealogical frameworks to study how iconic figurations of the child-in-peril, particularly humanitarian figurations, and accompanying concepts of vulnerability, capacity, resilience, and futurity structure US politics in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Iconography is a knowledge-making practice in which the materialization of an icon endows it with power (Hariman and Lucaites). The materialization of an icon embodies cultural logics of recognition. In *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy,* rhetoric and communication studies scholars Hariman and Lucaites demonstrate how photojournalism and iconic photographs ritualize trauma and public memory and perform identities that advance US liberal-democratic politics. *Violent Exceptions* builds on this and other formative scholarship on iconography and sentimental storytelling in US media and figurations of the child in American literature and material culture as these particular practices intersect with the politics of difference (Adelman; R. Bernstein; Castañeda; Duane; Wanzo; Woodhouse).

In *Figurations: Child, Bodies, Worlds,* for example, feminist interdisciplinary studies scholar Claudia Castañeda argues for an understanding of the child as "a becoming rather than a being: an entity in the making" (1). In her analysis of how figurations of the child as malleable and incomplete accrue value in medical and scientific discourse and transracial adoption, Castañeda importantly moves beyond "literary uses of figuration" understood "in terms of signification or representation" alone (3). Instead, she approaches the figure of the child as "the simultaneously material and semiotic effect of specific practices" (3). Castañeda argues, and I concur, that "each figuration of the child not only condenses particular material-semiotic practices, but also brings a particular version of the world into being" (4). We see this dual process at work in the *Time* magazine cover image of Sincere Smith in its figuration of the young African American child as a humanitarian subject and in the mobilization of images of children-in-peril as an affective public means to manage the crisis. *Violent Exceptions* embraces Castañeda's understanding of the "double force" of figuration as a "constitutive effect and generative circulation" (3). Distinct from Castañeda's study, my study invests in a materialist-rhetorical analysis of political crises to which contemporary figurations of the child-in-peril defer, and in how these deferments perform the exceptionalities that underwrite the global fragility of children's human rights.

Violent Exceptions does not simply call for better representations but rather for an analysis of how and why certain representations come to matter

and for whom. *Violent Exceptions* examines how and why certain configurations of childhood innocence and futurity gain political traction and delimit public understandings of and responses to structural injustices. Indebted to earlier articulations of rhetorical materialism (McGee [1982] 2009), rhetoric's materiality (Greene [1998] 2009), and technologies of production and power that govern rhetorical subjects (Greene 50), which importantly advanced a view of rhetoric as a material force that mediates social relations (Biesecker and Lucaites 3), *Violent Exceptions* pushes against representational accounts that uphold material and discursive dualisms. Instead, *Violent Exceptions* foregrounds the material and discursive as co-constitutive, and uses the term *material rhetoric* to refer to this co-constitutive process.[8] For all the symbolic work that Sincere Smith has been deployed to enact, including as a figure in this introduction, as scholars we must also acknowledge the trauma that he, his family, and the Flint community have endured, and we must do so without surrendering to facile causal arguments about the relationship between the material and the discursive. The material rhetoric of the child-in-peril is neither all-encompassing nor equivalent to lived experience, but instead emphasizes the co-constitutive production of the child-in-peril out of a multiplicity of forces.

Violent Exceptions couples rhetorical materialism and new materialist conceptions of differentiated agency, capacity, and rhetoric, which afford critical attention to material-symbolic modalities and assemblages of power. *Violent Exceptions* also brings foundational works on exceptionality and precarity into critical conversation with materialist-oriented scholarship in a range of areas, including Black feminist studies, childhood studies, disability studies, human rights, migration and refugee studies, Indigenous studies, feminist studies, queer studies, rhetoric and communication studies. My interest in iconic images and life stories of children-in-peril also requires attention to the transnational, and in the case of this study, to what a transnational perspective reveals about American exceptionality and its role in the formation of global icons. My project engages the transnational in a number of ways. First, drawing on Ghosh, I approach the "global" not as a totality but "as a series of contingent linkages" (21). Second, I focus on media technologies, networks, and artifacts that are global in their reach, that imagine a global public as their addressee, and that offer the "cultural means for forming or deforming attachments to the 'global'" (11). Third, the global migration of media content opens up space for joining transnational feminist and new materialist methodologies that take "account of the entangled materializations of which we are all a part" (Barad 384) in order to newly engage conversations about material rhetoric and the ethics of relationality (Arola). *Violent Exceptions* views

the local and the global not as binaries but as circuits of exchange through which the figure of the child-in-peril is mediated and environs within which actual children move, including child migrants, child refugees, child soldiers, transnational adoptees, and children who are victims of war. If the critical objects of study circulate globally, then the contextualization of these objects needs to take into account how they are "re-territorized, re-signified in consumption to embody 'local' aspiration" (B. Ghosh 16). Moreover, as Castañeda observes, and I concur, "local figurations of the child are also always imbricated in global processes" (6). Each chapter locates the local-global in the relational material-discursive contexts in which the child-in-peril takes on meaning. This study focuses how the figure of the child-in-peril, derived from English-language resources and translations, mediates American exceptionalism in its various guises.

In *Still Life with Rhetoric: A New Materialist Approach for Visual Rhetorics,* rhetorical studies scholar Laurie Gries puts forth an iconographic tracking method of analysis that enables her to trace the movement and transformation of images. Complicating more or less static notions of the rhetorical situation, Gries draws on Jenny Edbauer Rice's rhetorical ecological model, which allows for the study of the "distributed emergence and ongoing circulation of rhetoric" and the "transituationality and the divergent transformations rhetoric experiences within a viral economy" (16). Like Gries, I embrace the rhetorical ecological model, approach the "image as event" (334), and study images as "a dynamic network of distributed, unfolding, and unforeseeable becomings" (335). My primary goal, however, is not to identify the movement and transformation of images unfolding in time but to emphasize what these movements and mediations tell us about assemblages of power and the disciplining discourses and judgments that undergird them and that they uphold. In contrast to epideictic approaches to iconography that celebrate the movement and remixing of images, I take a more deliberative forensic (genealogical) approach.

With the publication of *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault altered his methodology from an archaeological approach, which emphasized how discourses were formed (Garland 369)—to a genealogical approach, which he described as writing a "history of the present" (*Discipline* 31). In contrast to *archaeology*'s focus on "discontinuities that mark off the present from its past," as sociologist David Garland notes, *genealogy* emphasizes how contingent historical processes and struggles over meaning shape the present (371). Genealogical methods investigate how disciplines and their methods function as mechanisms of power and foreground the value attributed to universal categories and normative judgments as part of its investigation. As a method of

analysis, genealogy does not seek out final truths but focuses on the discursive and material practices through which truths and nontruths or exceptions are constructed (Tamboukou 8).

The study of iconic figurations of the child-in-peril in contemporary US political discourse necessitates a materialist-rhetorical approach, as the formation of cultural icons involves a struggle of forces. The emergence of Sincere Smith on the cover of *Time* magazine may exemplify the humanitarian "moment of arising" and the "entry of forces" (*The Foucault Reader,* 1984 83–84) into the battle over the meaning and consequences of the administration of the poisoning of Flint water's supply. But that Sincere Smith was poisoned and is therefore even in the social position to emerge as a humanitarian subject is itself an outcome of historical inequities and racial discrimination in housing. Indeed, he is also a victim of the power of humanitarian discourse and its framing of the crisis. Extensive coverage of humanitarian donations and delivery of bottled water to Flint residents in the early days of the crisis served as evidence to some that the emergency was over. But the land remembers otherwise. Bodies remember otherwise.

I am particularly interested in thinking through the critical potential of new materialist approaches to genealogical criticism. I see the genealogical as central to materialist-rhetorical modes of analysis, as genealogical methods draw attention to how history is narrated and mobilized to serve particular disciplinary and political agendas. In *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning,* feminist theorist and physicist Karen Barad develops the notion of diffraction as both an object and a method of study. Diffraction, she claims, is "a physical phenomenon that lies at the center of some key discussions in physics and the philosophy of physics" and "an apt metaphor for describing the methodological approach [. . .] of reading insights through one another in attending to and responding to the details and specificities of relations of difference and how they matter" (71). In contrast to classical physics, wherein diffraction is understood as coming into being when light, water, or sound waves encounter an obstacle upon their path, in quantum physics, diffractivity is understood as inherent, and in certain conditions single particles can produce diffractive patterns (Barad 83). For Barad, diffractive reading troubles representationalism and its construal of the knowing subject, object represented, and representation as ontologically separated entities. Barad uses the term *intra-action* to challenge representationalism and notions of agency as a property of the individual and to refer to agency as a dynamism of forces (141). The concept of intra-action allows us to focus on agency as emerging from material-discursive entanglements. Thus, like Barad, I am invested in "intra-acting material-discursive

relations and practices" (Mauthner 265);⁹ however, my rhetorical emphasis places even greater emphasis on how discourses are mobilized, by whom, within what contexts, and with what effects. For example, *Violent Exceptions* highlights that the material rhetoric of the child-in-peril, which affords power to humanitarian logics, defines its "rhetorical capacity" and "prospect of mattering" (Stormer 2016, 310).

A materialist-rhetorical emphasis makes explicit how discourses gain traction and become differentially attached to bodies. As political theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe write, "Any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre. We will call the privileged discursive points of this partial fixation, *nodal points*" (112; emphasis in original). Iconic figures might be understood as "partial fixations" or as "nodal points" that encapsulate a history of knowledge-making practices even if they engage the public only for a short period, as did the image of Sincere Smith. Specifically, I am interested in the material-discursive conditions that make these fixations and nodes legible. Foundational to humanitarian representations of the child-in-peril, for example, is the philosophical tradition of liberal humanism and its underlying ocularcentricity—the seeing-is-believing paradigm chief among them (see Hesford 2011). This paradigm captures the prominence of the notion that representation reflects reality in human rights and humanitarian advocacy. As a counterpoint to "reflection as a pervasive trope for knowing," Barad argues, "diffraction is attuned to difference" (71), how differences materialize and the differences that matter (89). "The point is not merely that knowledge practices have material consequences," Barad argues, "but that practices of knowing are specific material engagements that participate in (re)configuring the world" (91).

New materialists theories of the "trans-corporeal subject" (Alaimo 2018), "intra-action" (Barad), and "agentic capacity" (Bennett) offer important counterpoints to the liberal sovereign subject of human rights and human exceptionalism. New materialist scholar Stacy Alaimo theorizes the "trans-corporeal subject" as a new materialist sense of the "human as perpetually interconnected with the flows of substances and the agencies of environments" (2016, 112–13). Drawing on Barad's influential scholarship, Alaimo traces how the (post)human is always already part of intra-active networks and systems that are simultaneously material, discursive, economic, ecological, and biopolitical" (133).¹⁰ In other words, if we were to understand Sincere Smith as a transcorporeal subject, our focus would shift from framing the poisoning of the Flint residents as a humanitarian emergency to a symptom of systemic racism, and call forth remedies that link social justice to environmental sustainability.

While there are clear distinctions among new materialist theorists, all are invested in a process of "thinking with matter" and thinking about causation in more complex ways (Coole and Frost). Attention to "matter's liveliness does not mean," however, "that issues of language and representation are effaced" or that human agency is erased (Braidotti and Hlavajova 243). The new materialist notion of "differentiated agency" focuses not on an intrinsic capacity to act but on the systems that produce being. I share new materialists' interest in differentiated agency, but in some expressions new materialist methods risk "horizontalism": wherein "relations are not understood to exist in a context of hierarchies of power" (Cudworth and Hobden 138). The problem with horizontalism is that it does not sufficiently focus on how actors and actants assert political influence in the distribution and management of risk, crisis, vulnerability, and futurity—issues at the heart of this study. Scholars across fields, including rhetoric and composition studies, have critiqued new materialist theories for their insufficient attention to power relations and questions of gender, race, sexuality, debility, and indigeneity (Arola; Clary-Lemon; Chen; Hinton and Liu; Lozano; Powell et al.; Sackey et al.), the reproduction of "white optics" (Sullivan 2012, 303) and exceptionalist formations of "whiteness-as-humanness" (Hinton and Liu 130). Queer studies scholar Mel Chen critiques posthumanist notions of vibrancy and agency that lack attention to racialization and sexualization. Postcolonial and queer studies scholar Jasbir Puar points to the underlying "settler colonial mentality implicit in any invocation of futurity" and to how, for example, "blackness remains ontologically incongruent with emphasis on futurity" (2017, 85–86).

The *Time* magazine cover image of Sincere Smith reminds us that, like sediment, environmental racism is embodied and intergenerational. Bodies remember. Water remembers. In *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being,* Black feminist studies scholar Christina Sharpe contends, "Africans thrown, jumped, dumped overboard in the Middle Passage; they are with us still, in the time of the wake, known as residence time" (19). "Human blood is salty, and sodium . . . has a residence time of 260 million years" (41). Water is both a conduit and archive for "contaminated communications" (Neimanis 35). The Flint River and Flint residents embody these ghosted histories. The Flint River is a "gathering place for stories of racism and colonial oppression" (36). Material rhetoric, like genealogical analysis, is archival in the sense that water and the body are archival. Water is history. Bodies are history.

To study how and why certain children's bodies, images, and stories come to matter and to whom, and which children are imagined as having a future, is to emphasize the material rhetoric of historical logics, power relations, and embodiments. *Violent Exceptions* rejects historical methods that focus

solely on the celebration of great moments and situate great leaders at the center of the movement of history. As scholars working in the Afropessimist tradition and critical race studies powerfully demonstrate (Sexton; Sharpe; Spillers; Wilderson; among others), we cannot understand the precarity and embodied histories without accounting for the hierarchies of power that continue to form the material and symbolic fields in which Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color are construed and subjectivities formed. Such accountings require a rigorous rhetorical materialism that "focuses on the conditions of intelligibility and recognition" and, as Butler reiterates, on "what bodies are allowed to matter" (Butler quoted in Colebrook 72), without sacrificing attention to the links between "intelligibility and recognition" and the legacies of settler colonialism, slavery, and racial capital.

New materialist studies scholar Natasha S. Mauthner's methodological articulation of *diffractive genealogy* is particularly helpful in this regard. Mauthner defines diffractive genealogy as "a practice that does not take the ontology of the world as already constituted" but instead "accounts for the ontological practices through which these genealogies, and their objects of study, are constituted" (265). "Diffractive genealogies and metaphysical practices," Mauthner notes, "are ways of simultaneously exploring and enacting method—they act as both agencies of observation and objects of investigation" (264). Diffractive genealogy as a methodology denaturalizes humanist representational methods and their rationalities (270). Diffractive genealogy does not minimize attention to the material world but rather engages the material intimacies between discourses and practices. *Violent Exceptions* likewise diffracts humanist representation, critiques discourse and knowledge production, while making space for residual and emergent materialities, with the goal of creating new methodological alliances between genealogical and materialist-rhetorical critiques.

To do so, I also draw upon the formative work of scholars at the intersections of rhetoric and communication studies and the interdisciplinary traditions of border studies, critical human rights studies, critical race studies, disability studies, Indigenous studies, postcolonial studies, and queer studies. *Violent Exceptions* is indebted to scholars' intersectional approaches that unsettle disciplinary epistemologies and exclusive histories, including the most recent critiques of the exclusive histories in the institutionalization of rhetoric and communication in the US (Arola; Asante; Chakravartty et al.; Chávez; DeChaine; L. Flores; Na'puti; Powell et al.; Ruiz and Sánchez; Shome; Sowards; among many others). *Violent Exceptions* also finds inspiration in transnational feminist studies of international movement politics and policy. In *Power Interrupted: Antiracist and Feminist Activism inside the United Nations,* Sylvanna

Falcón calls for a robust systems approach to intersectionality that highlights "multidirectional exertions of power" and "relational positionality" in its focus on "how systems of power and domination can intersect to position individuals and collectives in shifting and often contradictory locations within geopolitical spaces, historical narratives and movement politics" (19).

To puzzle out these relationships and to mitigate these risks, rhetoric and communication scholars need to recognize not only human and nonhuman entanglements but also the malleability of "political identities and the durability of power relations" (Washick and Wingrove 68). I am thus sympathetic to critiques of new materialisms that point to how certain articulations may "fail to contend with the complex ways in which already existing materializations—enacted in durable social structures that sustain injustice—have a hand in delimiting what the world might otherwise become" (Jung). Scholars have turned to Indigenous epistemologies as a corrective to claims to the "newness" of new materialisms (Arola; Pratt; Rosiek; Snyder; Todd). However, these corrections, as several of the aforementioned scholars have noted, run the risk of trapping the Native subject within essentialist notions of Indigeneity if they position the Native subject solely as an object of analysis and mastery. As important as it is to acknowledge the exclusionary genealogies of new materialisms, it is also important not to romanticize Indigenous knowledge but to engage scholarship that troubles the normalizing logics of settler colonialism. Thus I uphold a relational understanding of materiality as emergent, which aligns my approach with new materialism, without sacrificing attention to the disciplinary politics of knowledge production and state power in the management of life and death.

Violent Exceptions brings together new materialist scholarship and materialist-rhetorical approaches to the biopolitical and theories of the human. Scholars such as Barad have rightly critiqued the latter for its lingering anthropocentrism and humanism; yet, as social theorist Thomas Lemke notes, Foucault's "genealogies make problematic any stable concept of the 'human' or the 'subject'" (3). Lemke highlights the posthumanist elements of Foucault's idea of a "government of things," accounting for "the interrelatedness and entanglements of men [sic] and things, the natural and the artificial, the physical and the moral" (4). Although Foucault may not have "systematically addressed the question of how things affect humans," as Lemke observes, his "conceptual shift to a 'government of things' . . . makes it possible to extend the territory of government and multiplies the elements and the relations it consists of." Moreover, this shift makes it possible to account for "the diverse ways in which the boundaries between the human and the non-human world are negotiated, enacted and stabilized" (Lemke 20). To attend to these intra-

actions is to examine the "link between the matter of government and the government of matter" (18).

To attend to these intra-actions is also to acknowledge the links between the history of racial and Indigenous dispossessions. The Indigenous peoples who live in Flint, Michigan, a city on Anishinaabe tribal land, have dealt with the dispossession of their land and water since white settlers arrived. Indeed, during the process of replacing unsafe pipelines in the Fifth Ward, a location with the highest level of lead contamination and poverty (Hanna-Attisha et al.), city contractors discovered a Native American burial ground. The Flint water crisis continues to reveal the intertwined legacies and afterlives of white settler colonialism and racism (Mays) and the consequences of treating water as a utility rather than an entity (Sackey 391). Materialist rhetorical research must attend to these intra-actions in studying environmental and political violence. Hence, *Violent Exceptions* accesses these intra-actions through its analysis of how the humanitarian figure of the child-in-peril serves as the link between humanitarian governance, racial capitalism, and the regulation of bodies and matter.

While my project does not focus explicitly on the environment, new materialist feminist eco-criticism has been highly generative in helping me think beyond the anthropocentricity and limits of liberal humanist notions of agency, capacity, vulnerability, and futurity. New materialist philosophy has sparked advocacy for nonhuman rights and the rights of nature. There is now precedent for the juridical status of rivers and for water democracy. Influenced by Indigenous activism and epistemologies, the New Zealand Ministry for treaty negotiations ruled that the Whanganui River should be entitled to certain rights and recognized the Maori Whanganui Iwi as custodians of the river. If the Flint River and residents were treated in a more democratic fashion as entities within a political ecology deserving of legal protections, then different decisions would have been made that linked the health of the river to that of the residents. Advocacy for "the rights of nature" have importantly shifted environmental discourse from a focus on better use of natural resources "towards better co-existence" of human and environmental ecologies (J. L. Smith 107). While this articulation preserves rights as a category of privilege, here the emphasis on co-existence importantly reframes the anthropocentricity of rights and moves us beyond the humanitarian self/other binary.

I return to the *Time* featured article for which the cover image of Sincere Smith served as an illustration. Josh Sanburn, author of the feature "The Toxic Tap," asks: "How can government fail at a job so fundamental we take it as a given?" To which he responds, "The answer is a disastrous combination of bad

policy, shortsighted decisions and bureaucratic malfeasance" (35). All these factors certainly exacerbated the problem in Flint, but what this characterization fails to consider is how government agencies and corporations together created the precarious conditions that perceivably left no other option given their severity than for the state and federal government to declare a state of emergency. In the end, the storyline that Sincere Smith's embodied experience and visible face had to fit in order to be recognized *is* this exceptional story. This exceptional story highlights the larger crisis to which *Violent Exceptions* responds and to which the epigraph refers—"violence lies at the heart of the exception" (Fassin 194). The government's declaration of the poisoned water supply in Flint as a state of emergency may have released much-needed state and federal funds, but this designation also let neoliberal economic policies and corporate greed off the hook for the impoverishment of the city and its residents. Not only have the children of Flint been poisoned by a contaminated water supply; their bodies, like those of the children unduly held in ICE detention facilities at the US-Mexico border (see preface and chapter 1), must weather the crisis of democracy—a crisis bound to the exception. The crisis of democracy points not only to democratic discontent and dissatisfaction with systems of government in a time defined by the rise of the global right and authoritarian leaders and regimes but also, as argued earlier, to the limits of liberal internationalism and its deferment to state-of-exception mechanisms, humanitarianism interventions chief among them.

Structure of the Book

Chapters in *Violent Exceptions* draw critical attention to differential processes of valuation and devaluation through the metastructure of juxtaposition. These juxtapositions function as a method of interpretation that engages the politics of comparative judgments. The juxtaposition of texts and contexts enables certain critical conversations. *Violent Exceptions* juxtaposes cases that US mainstream media and public discourse have not necessarily reported as related. Juxtaposition therefore functions as a diffractive apparatus, as an estrangement, a technique of argumentation, an interpretive method that engages exceptionality as a violent politics of comparison. Juxtaposition not only reveals correspondences but exposes value hierarchies and inspires new genealogies. What happens, then, when publics are introduced to unlikely comparisons and analogies? What do such juxtapositions risk and reveal? Juxtaposition is a diffractive genealogical method to the extent that it aims to reveal the underlying rationalities and differentials and the violence of value;

that is, how valuation seeks an "other" from which to distinguish value rendered intelligible. As postcolonial feminist theorist Donna Haraway put it, "Diffraction is a mapping of interference [. . .] A diffraction pattern does not map where differences appear, but rather maps where the effects of differences appear" (1992, 300). Similarly, the cases juxtaposed within and across the chapters reveal the effects of differential recognitions and aim to perform productive interferences and resistant readings.

The juxtapositions herein might be imagined as a formalist uptake of Butler's notion of "up againstness" (2021, 134), which she describes as the "unwilled proximity and unchosen cohabitation [that] are preconditions to our political existence" (145). I hope to immerse readers in an active navigation of my archive, to keep inquiry in the foreground and not to foreclose meaning. In this regard, part of my project is to contribute a method that engages readers in the interpretive process through unsuspected though resonate juxtapositions. As an "analytic of relation," diffractive methodology recognizes the strategic deployment of modes of social and disciplinary organization and bounded units but is not itself wed to them (Lowe and Manjapra 26). In so doing, I "will" the "unwilled adjacency" to further expose exceptionality as a mode of subjection. Attuned to the differentials and rationalities that support the figure of the child-in-peril in political discourse puts humanitarian rationalities into a more critical light.

Violent Exceptions is the first book-length study of the material rhetoric of exceptionality as it develops in and travels through figurations of the child-in-peril and narratives about childhood innocence, development, and futurity in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century US politics and culture. My examples foreground children whose images and stories have materialized across global media networks and therefore to which multiple publics have had access, and that are communicated in or have been translated into English. Specifically, my archive consists of truth-telling genres and platforms, with emphasis on visual culture and the politics of visuality, including documentary video and film, photorealism, autobiography, biography, memoir, testimonies, government and nongovernmental agency reports, citizen journalism and activism, legal instruments and public policy, and news and social media platforms.

Archives are themselves rhetorical performances. Thus I consider as my archive not only the truth-telling texts and contexts in which they appear but the shifting and often contradictory meanings attributed to them. I am particularly interested in how truth-telling genres make legible liberal ideals about childhood innocence, vulnerability, capacity, and futurity, and how these ideals shape children's human rights and humanitarian advocacy. In focusing on

truth-telling discourses, I do not summon uncritical notions of authenticity or truth. As in past work (2011), I approach "truth-telling" as inherently rhetorical and genealogical, as crafted within the limits and in the interests of specific personal, political, and/or social projects. Who gets to tell the truth, in what form, and with what relation to power? How does the child-in-peril figure in truth-telling relations? These questions are also at the heart of the project.

The monograph consists of five rhetorical case studies chapters, each constituting an analytical essay of materialist-rhetorical criticism that makes its argument and theorizes through genealogical tracings and critical juxtapositions. While all chapters address how the figure of the child-is-peril is mediated by exceptionality, each prioritizes certain geopolitical conflicts, liminal identities, and genealogies as they are shaped by multiple modalities of power (gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, ethnoreligious, national, and international). In this regard, *Violent Exceptions* draws on intersectional scholarship as it pertains to rhetorical studies, and, more broadly, on the theory and practices of Black feminists and scholars of color who employ intersectionality as both a political orientation and analytic.

Chapter 1, "'No Tears Here': Humanitarian Recognition, Liminality, and the Child Refugee," examines how violent exceptions travel transnationally as instruments of domination, exclusion, and devaluation to govern the lives and movement of child migrants, child refugees, undocumented children, and child victims of war. I open this chapter with a discussion of the iconic images of Omran Daqneesh, the five-year-old boy who was rescued from rubble caused by a military strike on a rebel-held neighborhood in Aleppo, Syria, and three-year-old child refugee Alan Kurdi, who drowned, along with his five-year-old brother and mother, when their boat capsized off the Turkish coast. These two images and their narrative entailments exemplify US media coverage of the refugee crisis and war in Syria and how certain children's lives, and not others, are visible as grievable lives.

While such images may work against the exclusionary rhetorics of refugees as national threats or terrorists, these two images also point to a structuring liminality at the heart of liberal internationalism and humanitarian sentiment. The image of the child wounded by war therefore not only represents a temporal crisis (a stalled or stolen childhood) but leverages the language of trauma, shock, and debilitation and in this regard mediates one of liberal internationalism's central contradictions—militarized humanitarianism. If Omran Daqneesh stands in both for the traumatized child—exceptional in his apparent stoicism—and for the child beneficiary of humanitarian rescue, Alan Kurdi's image came to stand in for "everychild"—exceptional in his identifiability and racialization as white. These rhetorical identifications

both reveal and attempt to circumvent debilitating racial logics that criminalize migration and contribute to dangerous crossings.

The chapter then turns to the international best-selling memoir *The Boy on the Beach: My Family's Escape from Syria and Our Hope for a New Home,* by Tima Kurdi, aunt of Alan Kurdi, and her attempts to help her family escape the violence in Syria. Kurdi traces the development of her and her brother, Abdullah Kurdi, Alan's father's, public persona as humanitarian advocates for Syrian refugees—a development that the writing of the memoir enfranchises. The memoir also traces how various stakeholders have mobilized the photograph of Alan on the beach to advance their own political agendas while rhetorically exonerating the reader of such appropriations. To offset the widespread humanitarian framing of the suffering or deceased Syrian child, I turn to the documentary film *Cries from Syria,* which offers firsthand accounts by civilian victims, journalists, and local youth activists about the Syrian civil war. *Cries from Syria* not only broadens the truth-telling archive but highlights how the figure of the wounded child has directed local civilian activism within Syria. *Cries from Syria* focuses on several boys from Daraa, detained, tortured, and killed by the Assad regime for their activism. In depicting children as political agents, the film turns away from the sentimental register of neoliberal humanitarianism to call for government accountability and recognition of international culpabilities and, in so doing, problematizes liberal assumptions about empowerment. In contrast to humanitarian appeals to recognize the plight of young Alan as a representative of universal humanity, *Cries from Syria* emphasizes the pivotal political role of youth activists fighting state violence.

The humanitarian narratives and images of Syrian child refugees that dominate US mainstream media also contrast with the anti-immigration movement in the US construes Central American child migrants and children of undocumented parents as "foreign" contaminants, anchor babies, and parasites feeding off the nation-state. With few exceptions, we have not seen the same humanitarian focus in support of Central American and Mexican children crossing the US-Mexico border to escape violence. Whether it is the bombed-out buildings of Aleppo, capsized migrant vessels in the Mediterranean Sea, or the militarized US-Mexican border, these environs are contested political spaces managed by agencies and policies that have exacerbated the dangers of border crossing. These border zones and crossings are notably also sites of migrant activism. In the conclusion to this chapter, I focus on "TENDER R/AGE: RABIA TIERNA" an art installation project that explicitly responds to the detention of "tender age" children and situates these forced separations within a longer history of children's rights violations at the hands

of the US government. In sum, this chapter examines how the humanitarian threshold politically and morally adapts in relation to who crosses and who surveys border crossings.

Chapter 2, "Trafficking Global Girlhoods, Terrorism, and Humanitarian Celebrity," examines the emergence of Nobel Peace Prize–winners Malala Yousafzai and Nadia Murad as global bio-icons and how their stories have served as placeholders for the global North's political and economic investments in the war on terror and the routing of these investments through celebrity humanitarian figures. This chapter provides a rhetorical genealogy of the iconography of global girlhoods in humanitarian, human rights, and human security texts and contexts and the neoliberal development logics that underwrite them. For example, development and ableist discourse collide in casting girls of the Middle East as debilitated by the violence of cultural norms. These rhetorical patterns are proliferated by news media and governmental representations as well as by subjects and editors through the writing and marketing of their best-selling memoirs.

Public engagements with Malala Yousafzai's memoir, *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban,* in the global North, for example, are bound by composite images of repressed Muslim women and normative story lines that turn on simple oppositions, such as freedom and constraint, and colonist divides between "First" and "Third World" girlhoods.[11] Through a materialist-rhetorical analysis of the transnational mediation of Malala Yousafzai's image and life story, this chapter demonstrates how Malala navigates the exceptional narratives projected onto her, including that of the exceptional Muslim, and highlights the contingencies that propel her life story to the foreground.

By way of critical juxtaposition, this chapter then turns to the more recent case of gendered terrorism and the global iconicization of Nadia Murad, and the marketing of her best-selling memoir, *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity and Fight Against the Islamic State.* Murad writes as a twenty-one-year-old Yazidi woman who was kidnapped and enslaved by ISIS. In this chapter, I examine how Nadia Murad becomes "legible" as a Yazidi (non-Muslim) terrorist victim and human rights subject within US and UN international contexts, including through the collapse of the categories women and children. Although Malala and Nadia's stories are caught between debates about women's victimization and agency, Nadia's story is also caught between the discourses and policies that undergird the US war on terror and war on trafficking, namely the US adoption of the UNCRC Optional Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons as yet another claim to American exceptionalism. This chapter therefore considers how the lexicon of sexual

slavery associated with early feminist abolitionist antitrafficking campaigns functions as a discourse within the US war on terror. In the case of Nadia Murad, the identity categories of women and girls are collapsed in depictions of gender-based violence. Murad's story is framed for the international community to spotlight her resilience and transformation from terrorist victim to human rights witness and activist. The juxtaposition of representations of Malala Yousafzai's and Nadia Murad's life stories and best-selling memoirs directed toward readers in the global North helps us understand the exceptional role that young female victims of Islamic terrorism play in the context of the US war on terror, how the violated female body is mobilized as a site of political and cultural crisis, and how conservative media have appropriated Yazidi women's stories of victimization to reinforce notions of the US as a morally exceptional Christian nation.

Chapter 3, "Humanitarian Futures: Disability Exceptionalism and African Child Soldier Narratives," underscores how war produces disability and how humanitarianism consumes disability and contours American exceptionality through the cultural and legal representations of the African child-in-peril. Specifically, this chapter focuses on strategic mobilizations of children disabled by war in the global South as politically and morally productive for the global North. Chapter 3 examines how humanitarian images and stories of the African child-in-peril fail to attend to how neoliberal forms of war, economics, and governance debilitate entire populations. Iconic figurations of African child-of-war amputees, such as the transnational adoptee and Sierra Leonean amputee Memuna Mansaray and former African child soldiers, reveal how disability exceptionalism operates transnationally as a neocolonial project to leverage the global North's political and moral appeal to humanitarian frames, including humanitarian orientations to children's human rights. Disability exceptionalism serves as the global North's prosthesis and promise to rehabilitate the inhumanity of the "other" as it turns our attention away from global injustices and from the transnational complicities and causes of war.

Chapter 3 includes an analysis of US media reporting and humanitarian responses to the plight of Sierra Leone child-of-war amputees as well as US and human rights reporting on child soldiers in Africa, the rights of children involved in armed conflicts, children as political subjects, and group-differentiated vulnerabilities. In international law, namely the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, the figure of the child soldier exemplifies the thoroughly contingent status of the child-in-peril as a "righted" subject and the constitutive function of vulnerability in legal subjectivity. The boy-child soldier has long marked the *threshold* of vulnerability in international human rights law

and human rights reporting. But increasingly narratives about the experiences of female child soldiers have emerged within international antislavery and antitrafficking campaigns, many of them faith-based. This chapter therefore juxtaposes Ishmael Beah's memoir, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier,* with Faith J. H. McDonnell and Grace Akallo's *Girl Soldier: A Story of Hope for Northern Uganda's Children* to expose the gendering of moral universalism and sociopolitical mechanisms of exceptionality that attribute value to certain children's lives and not others and the gendering of rehabilitation and resilience. Like chapter 3, this chapter highlights how the US embrace of the UNCRC optional protocols but not of the UNCRC itself directs public focus to violations of children's human rights outside the nation's borders.

Chapter 4, "Humanitarian Negations: Black Childhoods and US Carceral Systems," offers a materialist-rhetorical genealogy of the politics of recognition that structures the racialization of childhood innocence, children's rights, and criminalization of Black childhood in contemporary US politics, law, and culture. To elucidate the differential recognition of racialized childhoods in international and domestic US politics and law, this chapter reveals the consequences of withholding of these roles and rights from Black youth in the US, especially victims of police profiling, vigilantism, and state violence. For example, the state's refusal to recognize Trayvon Martin's legal status as a child and yet mass circulation of the records regarding Martin's school suspensions, with little-to-no coverage of the racial distribution of punishments under Florida's public schools' zero-tolerance disciplinary policy, point to the entrenchment of anti-Black universals in the juridical imaginary. Not only did Martin not survive his childhood; his legal status as a child did not survive him. The criminalization of Black children, debilitating logics of racism, and the relative absence of attention to the human rights of children of color in the US draw attention to the cruel fact that it is far more typical for Black children to achieve iconicity post mortem.

Chapter 4 focuses on the paradoxes of liberalism and theories of recognition at the roots of these paradoxes. Recognition may be imagined as a shared communicative act, but to ask the question "Who survives recognition and its negations?" is to importantly engage the limits of a politics of recognition for addressing racial injustice. To challenge humanitarian negations is to engage in a materialist-rhetorical genealogical project that draws attention to the logics and legacies of carceral systems, including the architectures of slavery. To attend to these violent genealogies and their afterlives is not to endorse an "apocalyptic imaginary," such as that which defines certain iterations of Anthropocene ethics. To raise such questions and caveats is also not to forgo the possibility of resistance in nonrecognition and opportunities for

nonnormative subjectivities. But rather to raise such questions is to approach the politics of human rights and humanitarian recognition and their limits as a strategy for addressing racialized state violence, and to better understand recognition's entanglement with carceral systems. In addition to looking at the State of Florida vs. George Zimmerman trial, and the #BlackLivesMatter and #FergusontoGeneva movements, chapter 4 focuses on *Rest in Power: The Enduring Life of Trayvon Martin,* a memoir by Sybrina Fulton and Tracy Martin, to further highlight differential recognitions of Black childhoods and Black suffering.

Chapter 5, "Queer Optics: Humanitarian Thresholds and Transgender Children's Rights," draws on critical human rights, queer studies, transgender studies, and disability studies scholarship to counter the rigidity of identity-based frameworks and the exceptional ocular logic that sustain heteronormative state policies and violence. Cultural and legal differences in the treatment of youth bodies that become public under the law are strikingly apparent in the challenges that transgender children face in accessing public facilities in US public schools. Public access policies as they pertain to LGBTQ youth demonstrate the extent to which heteronationalist notions of reproductive futurity and ability—the capacity to control one's body—uphold the gap between the legal recognition of discrimination against sexual minorities and confounding cultural systems of identification. Specifically, this chapter focuses on recent legal cases in the US, including the case at the center of the documentary film *Growing Up Coy,* about a six-year-old transgender child who was banned from using the girls' bathroom in a local school in Colorado. *Growing Up Coy* reveals the complicity of discourses of child protection and childhood innocence in rendering LGBTQ children both hypervisible and illegible. In addition to examining how truth-telling technologies and genres (international and domestic law, documentary film, legal testimonies, news media) govern LGBTQ legal identities and struggles, the chapter highlights how transgender children navigate the paradoxes of visibility. The risks of visibility for transgender children seeking access to public bathrooms of the gender with which they identity, and often designation of a "special" bathroom for transgender children, not only "out" such children but potentially expose them to greater harm. Additionally, transgender children are denied access to normative futurity discourses grounded in notions of heterosexual reproduction. While able-normativity casts children with disabilities as without a future and queer subjects as unreproductive obstacles to heteronormative futures, the space for agency that neoliberal discourses allow for the transgender disabled child are particularly confounding. This chapter also analyzes two additional documentary films, *Getting Out* (2011) and *She's Not a Boy* (2018), that elucidate the

obstacles to the recognition of transgender and intersex children's rights and the links between these obstacles and the optics of queer liminality. *Violent Exceptions* concludes with a discussion of the promise of "unbecoming" as a means to shift from the atomistic subject of LGBTQ antidiscrimination law and the required social in/visibility of LGBTQ identity called forth by public policies.

Finally, the coda, "Walls as We See Them," serves as the book's closing bookend, echoing the preface in its focus on children living at the US-Mexico border. In a brief analysis of an art-activist installation at the border and its mobilization of humanitarian tropes of childhood innocence to critique the inhumanity of US immigration politics, the coda calls for critical human rights imaginaries that look beyond the legal realm toward relational life worlds.

"No Tears Here"

Humanitarian Recognition, Liminality, and the Child Refugee

"Harrowing image shocks the world" (*Daily Mail*). "A wounded child shocks the world" (*NPR*). "Shocking image emerges of Syrian child" (*Guardian*). On August 17, 2016, these headlines and this image of five-year-old Omran Daqneesh appeared on front pages of newspapers across the world, including the *New York Times,* the *Times of London,* Spain's *El Pais,* Italy's *La Repubblica,* and the *China Daily.* As an NBC reporter put it, "The blank and haunting gaze of the 'boy in the ambulance' rescued from the bombed-out buildings in Aleppo turned the world's eyes to the besieged city." "Within hours," a *New York Times* reporter declared, the photograph "captured the world's attention." The video of Omran pulled from the rubble of the August 17, 2016, airstrike elicited metonymic readings of Omran as a symbol of the endangered children of Syria and of the struggles of refugees of war.[1] Ali Daqneesh, Omran's ten-year-old brother, was among the deaths.

Sudanese social media artist Khalid Albaih generated international buzz with his widely tweeted political illustration "Choices for Syrian Children," which pointed to the devastating choices for Syrian children growing up in the midst of the civil war. The illustration featured Omran Daqneesh sitting on the oversized orange ambulance chair with the caption "If you stay," juxtaposed with an image of Alan Kurdi, the three-year-old Syrian Kurdish refugee whose body washed ashore on a beach in Turkey with the caption "If you leave." To understand the emergence of Omran Daqneesh and Alan Kurdi

as global icons of the impact of the Syrian civil war and refugee crisis on children, we need to understand the political mediation of their images and stories and the material-rhetorical contingencies that occasion humanitarian recognition.

In March 2011 President Bashar al-Assad cracked down on prodemocracy protesters inspired by the "Arab Spring." Among the protesters were residents from the town of Daraa who demanded the release of fifteen local teenagers whom the regime-backed police force had arrested, detained, and tortured for defacing school walls with antigovernment graffiti. The circulation of photographs of the teenagers' bruised bodies sparked local demonstrations. (These protests are discussed later in this chapter in my analysis of the documentary *Cries from Syria*.) Violence continued to escalate across the region between Syria's religious groups—the Sunni Muslim majority and President Assad's Shia Alawite sect. Syria's Kurds seeking the right to self-govern added another dimension to the conflict. Political instabilities enabled ISIS and al-Qaeda to establish strongholds in the region. As Syria's civil war deepened, the region also became a battlefield for international geopolitical rivalries, with Russia and Iran (the Syrian government's main allies) and the US, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia backing different sides. In 2013 there were several deadly gas attacks, which killed government soldiers as well as civilians. The US and its allies blamed the Assad regime, which denied the allegations. In 2014 the US launched limited airstrikes against the Islamic State inside Syria, and the UN Security Council in 2015 reported that Assad continued to resort to chemical weapons in opposition areas that were populated by civilians. Under the guise of helping Assad fight ISIS, in 2015 Russia actively entered the conflict and targeted rebel groups, including those backed by US opposition forces.[2] In February 2017 Russia and China vetoed a UN Security Council resolution calling for sanctions against the Syria government for its use of chemical weapons. On April 4, 2017, at least 58 people were killed in what was reported as a nerve-gas attack in the rebel-held Idlib province. Two days later, the US fired a barrage of cruise missiles at the military base from which the attack was allegedly launched. In May 2017 President Trump approved military plans to arm the Kurdish YPG to retake the Syrian city of Raqqa from ISIS militants. Russia and Trump agreed to a limited ceasefire but the ceasefire did not hold, as just a few weeks later Syrian warplanes bombed Damascus. By 2018 the Assad regime had regained control of several of Syria's largest cities, though some areas remained held by rebel groups and by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces alliance. More recently, in October 2019, President Trump decided to clear the way for a Turkish military operation against America's Kurdish allies in northern Syria.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reports that nearly half a million people have died during the Syrian civil war, one fourth of them civilians (nearly 12,000 of them children), and that there may be up to 100,000 more undocumented deaths. The Syrian civil war has left 1.5 million people with permanent disabilities, and 86,000 have lost limbs. Over 6.1 million have been internally displaced, and another 5.6 million have fled abroad. Most have fled to Lebanon, Jordan, or Turkey. The United Nations Population Fund for Arab States (Spencer 2016) reported that at least one million refugees escaping from Syria were of childbearing age, and at least 10,000 were pregnant when they fled. These circumstances, the director of the UN Population Fund has noted, have created "a lost generation of children who have not gone to school, who are not registered, who are stateless" (Spencer 2016).

"One reason the photo of Omran tugged at so many heartstrings around the world," the *New York Times* photo-editor Craig Allen writes, "is that the boy—with his innocent stare [. . .] triggers in many a sometimes hard-to-come-by emotion in today's world: empathy." *New York Times* reporter Anne Barnard interpreted Omran's "innocent stare" not only as awakening empathy among readers inured to distant suffering but as evidence of his "tragic resign[ation] to the bombs, blood, and screams that run through his world." These interpretations, however, tell us less about Omran Daqneesh and his family's situation and more about distant observers' empathic identification with the child-in-peril as a liminal subject. It was not the particularities of Omran's biographical life that were iconicized but his shocked facial expression and the performative transference of trauma and liminality from the child to the distant observer.

The transference is captured in CNN news anchor Kate Bolduan's coverage of the story. During her prime-time report, Bolduan's eyes filled with tears: "What strikes me is that we shed tears, but there are no tears here." Bolduan's tears *for* or perhaps *on behalf of* Omran turns the audience's attention away from Omran's story to its public reception and mediation. Not only did the photograph "became the core of the story more than the body pictured within it"; so did Bolduan's tears (Adelman). As media studies scholar Rebecca Adelman astutely notes, "Omran Daqneesh's suffering essentially disappeared at the very moment it became visible. Observers read Daqneesh's blank face as an invitation to laminate their own feelings onto, and over, the photo." In this regard, Omran is not recognized as a subject beyond subjection or humanitarian obligation.

As material rhetoric, Bolduan's tears engage the moral economy of sentiment, which includes a long tradition of ritualized weeping as a form of spiritual cleansing that enables religious conversion and salvation—hence the

phrase the "gift of tears" (Weisl 131). Within CNN's coverage of the rescue of Omran Daqneesh, not only do Bolduan's "gift of tears" serve as a symbol of her compassion for the children of Syria, but her tears are "gifted" to the audience in a shared act of contrition that signifies the helplessness of the distant observer. In this regard, Bolduan's tears enact the paradox of humanitarianism. Tears may signify the salt of humanity, but they do not exonerate culpability or wash away the inhumanity of American exceptionality.

New York Times reporter Anne Barnard claims that the conception of Omran as "an emblem of despair" lies in "the relatively familiar look of Omran's distress." "Omran, as he is carried from a damaged building in the dark," she argues, "could be Everychild." Indeed, the metonymic transformation of Omran as "the face of Aleppo" is predicated on the rhetorical universalization of Omran as Everychild. Yet, this perception is anything but universal. Here, the young white boy is universalized as the empathetic victim deserving of humanitarian rescue. In other words, within the historical context of US exceptionality, Bolduan's tears evoke tropes of the white benefactor of the distant other. We might ask, for example, would the threshold of catastrophe have been crossed if the child were older? Which thresholds take precedence? What sociopolitical work does the humanitarian threshold perform? To what degree and with what consequences do threshold politics reify violent exceptions?

Similarly, in his address at the UN Leaders' Summit on Refugees on September 20, 2016, President Obama mobilized Omran Daqneesh's rescue story to convey what he described as a "refugee crisis of epic proportions." President Obama's deployment of Omran's story, like Bolduan's engagement, shifted public attention away from the crisis in Syria to the US as humanitarian benefactor. Obama concluded his speech with a reference to a young, white American boy named Alex from Scarsdale, New York, who, after seeing the image of Omran Daqneesh sitting silent and bloodied in an ambulance in Syria, wrote President Obama a letter. In his letter, Alex asked the president to rescue Omran, whom Alex inaccurately framed as an orphaned child refugee. Alex invited Omran to live with his family. "Since he won't bring toys," Alex wrote, "I will share my bike and I will teach him how to ride it. I will teach him addition and subtraction. My little sister will be collecting butterflies and fireflies for him. . . . We can all play together. We will give him a family and he will be our brother." Obama praises Alex's humanity and claims, "We can all learn from Alex." "Imagine the suffering we could ease, and the lives we could save and what our world would look like if, seeing a child who's hurting anywhere in the world, we say, 'We will give him a family and he will be our brother.'" Here President Obama makes Daqneesh's vulnerability legible via

another young white boy's affective response and savior narrative. While the president's response may imply a figurative brotherhood in contrast to Alex's literal appeal to provide an American family for Omran, both Alex and the president's embrace of "gifting" Omran a family framed the Syrian civil war and refugee crisis in terms of humanitarian rescue. Alex's "gift" foregrounds the extent to which "political rights . . . have been downgraded to humanitarian favors" (Oliver 2017, 2) and how, within the US domestic context, Omran Daqneesh has served as a placeholder for the imperiled child of the Syrian civil war and child refugee crisis.

The issue here is not only that humanitarian rescue overrides political solutions and rights recognitions but that humanitarian reason affixes the child-in-peril, in this case Omran Daqneesh, to a liminal identity, temporality, and spatially. This material-rhetorical affixation serves, in large part, as the occasion for humanitarian recognition. Justice for Omran is suspended in this liminal space. As I have suggested, it is not the violations of children's rights that are the focus but the affixation of the child's liminality that facilitates the perception that a moral threshold has been crossed—a crossing that is the determination for humanitarian recognition. The liminal figure of the child-in-peril mediates not only neoliberalism's contradictions but also the paradoxes of humanitarianism. Neoliberal logics of human security and humanitarian governance capitalize on trauma and crisis, as President Obama's address exemplifies, and the extraction of value from this liminality and vulnerability. Attention to humanitarianism's structuring liminalities, including the foundational figure of the child-in-peril, exposes the normative equilibrium among conditions of inequality that the threshold implies—a threshold defined by the risk-capable, not those who are "at risk" (Tadiar 21). Alex's "gift of family," like CNN news anchor Kate Bolduan's tears, implies that the threshold can be managed by the risk-capable. Finally, the American "gifting" of tears and of family is inconceivable without past and present policies that violate the rights of immigrants, migrants, refugees, the undocumented, and the Indigenous, and strategically mobilize the figure of child-in-peril as a cover for the governing of insecurities and violent exceptions. Thus, we must also ask, which children survive human rights and humanitarian recognition?

Humanitarian Recognition and Threshold Politics

To account for the violence of the exception and its erasures, this chapter demonstrates the links between humanitarian recognition and threshold politics to which such recognitions are tethered through a material-rhetorical analy-

sis of the moral and political thresholds that contour representations of children caught up in the Syrian civil war, the European refugee crisis, and those detained at the US-Mexico border. In *Spectacular Rhetorics,* I argued that the politics of human rights recognition are underwritten by trauma and subjection (29) and mediated by historical contingencies and technologies through which struggles for recognition are played out (52). Here I build on this earlier work by elucidating how the figure of the child-in-peril, namely figurations of the child refugee, often serves as a humanitarian cover for political violence. Framing political violence against children in humanitarian terms encumbers if not outright eviscerates the political utility of human rights. *Violent Exceptions* is therefore concerned with hierarchies of recognition and the structures that support them and turns to material rhetoric to identify hierarchical formations and assess their sociopolitical consequences.

The truth-telling texts and contexts under consideration in this chapter are those targeted for Western, primarily US audiences, and include legal texts and contexts, journalism and news media, documentary video, memoir, and academic scholarship. I argue that the figure of the child refugee operationalizes the humanitarian threshold as a site of political and moral struggle. I use the term *liminal subject* to demarcate a transitional phase, a period during which the individual awaits incorporation into a particular social structure, or, in the case of the Scarsdale boy in President Obama's address, a familial structure. Derived from the Latin *limen,* the word *liminal* means "threshold." I argue that humanitarian politics proceeds according to the logic of the threshold. Humanitarian politics and its optics leverage the figure of the child as liminal subject to frame actual or anticipated catastrophic events as exceptional, as nonnormative, even when the circumstances that condition the "crisis" are systemic.

Lebanese artist Helen Zughaib's powerful installation "Eat the News," from her exhibition *The Arab Spring: Unfinished Journeys,* emphasizes the centrality of the figure of the child in humanitarian representation and consumption. "Eat the News" (see figure 1) is composed of five place settings, a dining table with a white tablecloth, candlesticks and napkins, and ceramic plates, each with a newspaper collage of images of children who have been injured or killed in the context of the Syrian civil war and the Arab Spring and its aftermath. "Eat the News" diffracts rather than reflects the humanitarian fixation on the child-in-peril and in so doing prompts consideration of the optics of humanitarian representation and, more broadly, the role of media in propping up humanitarian orientations to systemic violence (Chouliaraki 2013).

To the extent that the humanitarian threshold erases the history of its emergence, it functions as a false indicator of crisis, which both elevates and

FIGURE 1. Helen Zughaib, "Eat the News," installation including ceramic dinner plates, enamel and newspaper collage, table, glassware, napkins, silverware, candlesticks, 2016.

isolates a tragic event for consumption. The threshold is rhetorical and situational, and therefore it is indistinguishable from the conditions of its emergence and consumption. The threshold's convenient suspension of these histories and conditions obfuscates its violent genealogies and, more broadly, the ethical failures of humanitarian politics. "Eat the News" does not seek humanitarian recognition from or identification with distant audiences but rather prompts critical consideration of public consumptive participation and complicity in the humanitarian paradox and its grounding in violent exceptions.

Threshold politics refers to the discursive catastrophization of an event or series of events and the articulation of the "accumulation of evils" and "emergency statements that call people to respond" (Ophir 70). Threshold politics, as suggested above, involves the determination of that "intangible moment, crossing of a line that should change one's attitude from ignorance and indifference to careful, interested attention, from interested attention to action, or

FIGURE 2. Detail, ceramic plate with enamel and newspaper
collage. From Helen Zughaib, "Eat the News," 2016.

from acting at a distance to actual intervention" (70). These determinations, however, are not drawn solely by state actors or sovereign powers but "may be drawn and redrawn by many social actors" (73). The humanitarian threshold mobilizes vulnerability and liminality and in this regard operates as a form of biopolitics engaged in the determination of which forms of life are deemed socially valuable and which are not—a determination that "Eat the News" effectively elucidates in drawing attention to images that are widely circulated and the narratives that accompany them. For example, the "unintentional killing" headline on the close-up of one of the five plates (see figure 2) draws attention to the broader collateral-damage narrative that governments mobilize to characterize violence that impacts women and children or to legitimize humanitarian interventions.

A single image, as in the photograph of Omran Daqneesh, or a set of statistics, such as reports that more than half of Syria's population of 18 million have been displaced by the violence, 6 million internally displaced, and nearly another 6 million fled abroad, can prompt the perception that a threshold has been crossed. While statistics may signify a nonliminal characterization, they are a mechanism through which human value is made intelligible. Like

quantification, iconic images of children-in-peril also function at the level of biopolitics in that the extraction of value involves the universalization and decontextualization of the precarious subject. In neoliberal moral and political economies, as political theorist Isabell Lorey reminds us, precarity is not the exception but the rule, and this rule implies a perpetual state of crisis. Unpredictability, instability, and precarity function as ordering principles in neoliberal economies and humanitarian governance. Sociologist Craig Calhoun notes, "Order is [construed as] normal; disorder is exceptional, no matter how frequent" (47). The humanitarian figure of the child-in-peril serves as a catalyst of crisis propelled by the precarity of the neoliberal international order, land dispossession, economic inequities, and environmental degradation. Nation-states are not the only forces that produce and govern precarities. Humanitarianism governs precarity through its response to systemic problems as if they were exceptions. Humanitarian acts may propagate the very liminal identities and temporalities to which they respond. Indeed, liminality is integral to the emergency imaginary. The liminal figure of the child-in-peril is often mobilized in ways that suture the moral and political economy of sentiment to humanitarian governance.

The humanitarian rescue narrative rhetorically performs a particular kind of moral and political work for distant observers and nations. The Syrian civil war, international proxy war, and the perpetual US war on terror constitute "the affective emergencies" around which Omran Daqneesh emerged as a global bio-icon (B. Ghosh 10). On the one hand, Euro-American media mobilized the video of Omran as evidence of the inhumanity of President Bashar al-Assad's regime and its allies and as justification for the ongoing proxy war on terror. Euro-American media reported that Assad regime–backed airstrikes were responsible for the August 17, 2016, attack on Aleppo because, they claimed, rebels lacked the necessary air power to conduct such a strike (Barnard and Saad).

On the other hand, Syrian progovernment media have argued that rebels were responsible for the attacks and that the footage of Omran was opportunistic "war porn propaganda" spread by antigovernment groups, including the White Helmets, whom Assad supporters have characterized as "foot soldiers in 'rebel held' areas of Syria" (Turbeville).[3] Supporters of the Assad regime have also questioned the motives of Mustafa al-Sarout, the videographer who shot the footage of Omran; Al-Sarout is affiliated with the Aleppo Media Center, a network of citizen journalists and antigovernment activists (Osborne). Chinese state television argued that the image was part of a Western "propaganda war aimed at creating a 'humanitarian' excuse for Western countries to become involved in Syria" (Dearden).[4] Even Mohamad Kheir

Daqneesh, Omran's father, has expressed anger over the use of his son as a political pawn and media icon (McKirdy and Tawfeeq). Humanitarianism's moral *ethos* emerges through its articulation of the figure of the child as a liminal subject. Powerful nations often mobilize this material-rhetorical affixation in their determinations of humanitarian emergencies and rationales for imperial interventions and military occupations, and, as I discuss in the following section, surrender the child-in-peril to humanitarian reason.

Childhood Liminality and the Humanitarian Photograph

> Humanitarian imagery is moral rhetoric
> masquerading as visual evidence.
> —Heide Fehrenbach and Davide Rodogno 2015, 7

Contemporary images of the child-in-peril in humanitarian campaigns are rooted in modern notions of universal humanity, which are based not on the particularities of kinship, religion, or nationality but on the perception of moral equivalences. Crucial to the humanitarian imaginary therefore is the concept of ethical universalism, which conceptualizes all of humanity as deserving of moral recognition (Calhoun 34). All religions have principles of moral conduct and obligation to help those in need without consideration of self-interest, but the concept of humanitarianism specifically gained traction in the mid-nineteenth century with the formation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (1863) (Barnett 2011). The public traction of the term *humanitarianism* coincided more or less with the invention of new visual technologies. Invented in 1839, photography played a key role in the development of a cosmopolitan vision of humanity as well as racialization of difference. Along with the ascendency of evolutionism from the 1860s on, humanitarian photography participated in the visualization of racial hierarchy (Lydon 15). The visual humanist tradition precipitated photographic exhibitions such as The Living Races of Mankind (1902) and later UNESCO's Human Rights Exhibition (1951) and the Family of Man Exhibition (1955), which sought to advance notions of universal humanity. Yet, these exhibitions have been critiqued for their "simultaneously exoticizing and incorporative affects" (Lydon 119).

In their analysis of humanitarian campaigns in Britain, Europe, and the US from the late nineteenth century through World War II, historian and humanitarian studies scholar Heide Fehrenbach and International Development Studies scholar Davide Rodogno observe that the figure of the child-

in-peril appeared in humanitarian campaigns as well as in rights campaigns that focused on the development of child labor laws.[5] In the late nineteenth century, humanitarian organizations and missionary societies embedded photographs in their newsletters to publicize human suffering and to protest atrocities such as enslavement in the Belgian Congo in the 1890s, the massacre of Armenians in World War I, and famine in South Africa (Fehrenbach and Rodogno 1123).[6] In the early twentieth-century humanitarian campaigns, children were often photographed with their mother in visual compositions that echoed the Christian trope of the Madonna and Child (1143). After World War I, organizations such as Save the Children deployed images of the lone suffering child to build support for relief for famine-stricken areas (1143). International civil organizations and NGOs relied on similar iconography and "innocence-based solidarity" to advance their cause (Manzo 635). Although the "moral figure of the child" has been mobilized to advance "a self-conscious globalism" (Malkki 58, 84), as scholars note, humanitarianism's moral *ethos* is bound to the inhumanities of colonialism and imperialism. Humanitarian photography may have called attention to colonial exploitation, but it also provided a rationale for colonialism. The humanitarian paradox resides in the historical collusion between humanitarianism and imperialism.[7] This double-edged moral message also survives through powerful nations' selective determinations of humanitarian emergencies (Calhoun 39).

From World War II to the end of the Cold War, humanitarianism broke with its earlier focus on the progress of humanity and redefined its primary purpose as responding to emergencies. After this period, the United Nations increasingly *responded* to humanitarian emergences, a shift from its forty-year focus on peace (Calhoun 52). The figure of the child-in-peril appears in humanitarian campaigns throughout this period up to the present age of liberal humanitarianism, which is increasingly defined by neoliberal notions of the limited state and growing attention to economic, environmental, and health security and terrorism (Barnett 2011, 162). During this phase, organizations that were once limited to development, such as the World Bank, joined the humanitarian cause (164). The idea of the emergency was a formative dimension of humanitarianism's genealogy. Humanitarianism is distinct in its focus on the emergency, as Calhoun notes, "both simply in the sense of urgency and in the deeper sense that this underwrites an exception" (54). "Emergency," Calhoun continues, "is a way of grasping problematic events . . . [that] emphasizes their apparent unpredictability, abnormality, and brevity and that carries the corollary that response—intervention—is necessary" (55).

The child-in-peril occupies a liminal space within the genealogy of humanitarianism and its emergency imaginary. The child-in-peril represents

the convergence of liminal identities, temporalities, and spatialities.[8] Childhood studies scholar Karen Wells notes that in Western contexts, childhood is defined as "punctured by a series of liminal moments that include birth, infancy, the acquisition of speech, and the transition to a gendered adulthood" (2015, 3). Drawing on the scholarship of anthropologist Victor Turner, Wells argues that the "liminal body [is] suspended between states" (5). Turner observes that liminal individuals are perceived and treated as if they have "no status" and "nothing to demarcate them" (1967, 98). Liminal subjects are "betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony" (1969, 95). While there are instances when the view of childhood as a temporary "state" may legally benefit children, children's rights are more often curtailed by these temporal frameworks, which forestall recognition of children as moral, cultural, and political actors. Moreover, only certain children benefit, or are perceived to benefit, per my earlier discussion, from their attachment to the "state" of childhood innocence.

Thus, I use the term *liminality* in this chapter to characterize subjects suspended between life and death but also as a descriptor for in-between identities, temporalities, and spatialities, as in the media affixation of liminality to Omran Daqneesh. Disputed territories, such as Eastern Aleppo, where Omran Daqneesh lived, are liminal spaces, in that they are zones of political indeterminacy, defined by the prolonged Syrian civil war. Indeed, for some children liminality may be a perpetual state or identity, such as undocumented children, who are viewed as "being betwixt and between home and host" (Thomassen 18), or children caught in the crossfires of war, suspended at every moment between life and death. Liminality hails the distant observer, whose consumption of the suspension between life and death performs the humanitarian paradox. When the suspension ceases to exist or is resolved, the distant observer's humanitarian attention shifts.

Omran's shocked expression signifies the convergence of the liminalities that undergird the global recognition of Omran as a humanitarian subject. Omran stands in for the exceptional child wounded by war—exceptional in his apparent stoicism. The highly circulated image of Omran sitting shocked and silent in the ambulance echoes another famous war image, American photographer Thérèse Bonney's photograph of the exhausted young French boy and child refugee fleeing Nazi bombardment. Omran also stands in for the child-subject beneficiary of humanitarian reason, the latter of which occupies a central position in the contemporary moral order and theory of the modern state (Fassin 247). Philosopher Didier Fassin notes that "humanitarian reason" emphasizes suffering as a motive for action and imagines for its benefactors a sense of shared humanity with its recipients (251). As the extensive coverage of

CNN News anchor Kate Bolduan's tears for Omran illustrates, humanitarian reason has a "salutary power . . . because by saving lives, it saves something of our idea of ourselves" (Fassin 251). Humanitarian reason, like humanitarianism's moral *ethos,* has its source in Christian traditions and ancient traditions of charity. The "double valence of suffering"—the image that both "repels and attracts"—is also a rhetorical property of humanitarian reason (251).

In *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present,* Fassin does not explicitly focus on the genealogy of the child-in-peril, but the last few pages powerfully elucidate the paradoxes of humanitarian recognition and racialized moral economies as it relates to the child refugee.[9] In the final chapter, Fassin includes an English transcription of a letter written by two Guinean children, Yaguine Koita and Fodé Tounkara, who were found frozen to death in the undercarriage of a plane into which they climbed in Conakry, Guinea, en route to Brussels, Belgium. They carried their birth certificates, school report cards, family photographs, and a letter they had both written. The letter, addressed to "Your Excellences, members, and officials of Europe," began: "It is a distinctive honor and deep trust to write this letter to talk to you about the aim of our trip and our suffering—we the children and the youth of Africa. Members and officials of Europe, we are appealing to your graciousness and solidarity to come to our rescue. Please, help us. We are suffering enormously in Africa. We have problems and suffer from lack of children's rights." Throughout the letter, the two teenage boys, age fourteen and fifteen, rhetorically project and complement the imagined European addressees' love for nation and children: "We beseech you, for the love of your continent, for the sentiment you have for your people and above all for the love of your children that you love so dearly like life."

In his commentary on the letter, Fassin points to the "cultural and literary code of supplication" (256) and argues that this intercontinental journey "touched the heart of Western societies" because its authors invoked the "language of humanitarian reason" (256). Koita and Tounkara employ the language of suffering and aid ("help us, we are suffering enormously"), the language of life and sacrifice ("you find that we expose and sacrifice our lives") within humanitarian reason's own field of engagement ("to combat poverty and put an end of war") (256). Yet it was Koita and Tounkara's deaths, more so than the cause they represent, that prompted humanitarian recognition. As Fassin notes, their words "turn back toward us [Euro-Americans] the image we want to present to the world and because their death puts our powerlessness to the test" (256). The living letter and the mortal fact (death) are intertwined. Their deaths may amplify the liminality of the child dying to live, but as a speech act the letter is never dead. Composed from a point of transition, the letter is

always a liminal moment in that it is continually replayed and incomplete. If the boys had lived, their letter might have been read as an asylum appeal. But their death requires readers to understand the letter in a different way, which is to recognize the failures of humanitarian reason and the sacrifice of children as humanitarian actors. Humanity surrenders. Humanitarianism yields.

In the next section, I extend my discussion of the global mediation and translation of the visual spectacle of the Syrian child-in-peril into an instrument of humanitarian reason through an analysis of literary formation narratives and framings of the threshold. In transporting the photograph and video footage of Alan Kurdi, a child refugee of the Syrian civil war, to the international literary stage, these works throw into relief how the figure of the child-in-peril, in this case, child refugee, assists the transformation of human rights victim to humanitarian actor.

Literary Visibility: "Humanity Washed Ashore"

The moral outrage over the photographs of Alan Kurdi, the three-year-old Syrian Kurdish boy whose corpse washed ashore on Golden Beach in Akyarlar, Turkey, on September 2, 2015, echoed the global media's empathetic response to the rescue of Omran Daqneesh, and likewise helped determine the crossing of a moral threshold. Alan Kurdi drowned in the Mediterranean Sea, along with his five-year-old brother, Ghalib, and mother, Rehanna, when their boat capsized off the Turkish coast. Only his father, Abdullah Kurdi, survived. Natives of Damascus, the family were fleeing the intractable violence of the Syrian civil war. The image of Alan Kurdi lying lifeless at the edge of the sea is quiet, yet disquieting. The photograph transforms the liminal edge of the sea, a place of leisure, into a tragic resting place. The sea that took his life now laps the shore. The humanitarian aesthetic ebbs and flows.

Turkish photographer Nilüfer Demir took the photograph of Alan Kurdi for the Dogan News Agency, which published the image of the child at the edge of the shore as an emergency worker approached. The photographer also posted the image on Twitter with the hashtag #KiyiyaVuranInsanlik, which translates as "humanity washed ashore." Within twelve hours of the posting, the photograph had been viewed on 20 million screens (T. Kurdi 154). The *New York Times* also published the "less jarring" image of the Turkish police officer cradling the child's body "to avoid the appearance of trafficking in sensational images for profit" (R. Mackey). The *Los Angeles Times,* by contrast, published a close-up image of the boy. Editor Kim Murphy defended the paper's decision: "The image is not offensive, it is not gory, it is not taste-

less—it is merely heartbreaking, and stark testimony of an unfolding human tragedy that is playing out in Syria, Turkey and Europe often unwitnessed." In the range of these editorial decisions, we see how media attempt to navigate the tension between voyeurism and witnessing.

Responding to the intensified media coverage and impact of Alan Kurdi's death, *New York Times* op-ed writer Charles Homans asked on September 3, 2015, "Why this boy?" Whereas most photographic images of vulnerable children are designed to elicit pity in their intended audience, Homans argues, the image of the boy on the beach evokes not pity, but rather *empathy*. "In the geography of empathy," Homans continues, "the boy on the beach occupies an unusual position. He is at once an emissary from a distant war of unfathomable, baroque atrocity and a figure of awful closeness . . . for a moment at least, you are looking at a photograph that hurts just as much as it should" (2015). Homans presumes that the "hurt" we should feel emerges through identification, which presumably facilitates the shift from pity to empathy. Prompting readers' self-reflexivity, Homans asks: "Is it wrong to be more jarred, more ravaged by this image simply because the child looks as if he could have wandered off your neighborhood playground [. . .] Because this child, unlike the anonymous, dust-shrouded corpses you've seen in other photographs, bears all the outward signs of being cared for as you care for your own?" White children signify universal humanity within the American imaginary, and this trope certainly appeared to contour depictions of Alan Kurdi in American news media.

Peter Bouckaert, director of emergencies at Human Rights Watch, similarly reflects on his identification with the image of Alan Kurdi in his dispatch "Why I Shared a Horrific Photo of a Drowned Syrian Child." "Staring at the image," he says, "I couldn't help imagine that it was one of my own sons lying there drowned on the beach. . . . It is not an easy decision to share a brutal image of a drowned child. But I care about these children as much as my own. Maybe if Europe's leaders did too, they would try to stem this ghastly spectacle."[10] Rhetorical identification may enable some distant observers to empathize with the plight of Syrian children growing up amid war, as clearly the image of Alan Kurdi had for Bouckaert and Homans, but an ethics based on rhetorical identification alone obfuscates significant material differences, as well as the culpability of international actors in perpetuating violence and political instability.

In the recent international best-selling memoir *The Boy on the Beach: My Family's Escape from Syria and Our Hope for a New Home,* Tima Kurdi, sister of Abdullah Kurdi, narrates the material intimacies and liminalities that defined and continue to impact her family. The memoir focuses on her unre-

lenting attempts to help her family escape the violence in Syria. The narrative structure aligns with the novel genre of the bildungsroman—a coming-of-age story about an individual protagonist who moves from the private to the public sphere. In *The Boy on the Beach,* author Tima Kurdi traces the development of her public persona as an advocate for Syrian refugees—a development that the writing of the memoir enfranchises. Distinct from the Anglo-European bildungsroman, however, wherein war stereotypically serves as a rite of passage to maturity for a male protagonist, Tima Kurdi and her family are civilians caught in the middle of an unrelenting civil war, and it is the family's failed escape from that war that serves as the trigger for her and her brother's transformation from private citizens to global humanitarian subjects.

In contrast to the episodic coverage of Alan Kurdi in US headline news, *The Boy on the Beach* elucidates the consequences of the enforcement of anti-immigration policies. The memoir empirically grounds these policies and situates the photograph of Alan Kurdi in relation to them. The autobiographical contextualization of the photograph, however, is no less mediated. Marketed to a cosmopolitan audience, readers are likewise positioned as potential humanitarians, as the memoir prompts them to consider their ethical engagement with the Syrian conflict and its representation. Unlike humanitarian memoirs that follow the logic of the Western rescue narrative, *The Boy on the Beach* highlights the failure of military humanitarianism at the borders. In this regard, the memoir puts pressure on the genre of the traditional bildungsroman and its nationalist emphasis by transporting the genre to the international literary stage.

Tima Kurdi, who emigrated to Canada at age twenty-two, traces her family's struggles to escape war-torn Syria and to navigate the bureaucracies and restrictive laws concerning asylum seekers. Home to nearly two million displaced Syrians, Turkey's 1951 Geneva Convention obligations limits asylum rights to Europeans.[11] As Kurdi notes, "Syrian refugees who had made it to Turkey were still officially considered illegal . . . They could not legally exit the country; they could not access work permits or even receive much humanitarian aid, at least until October 2014, when the restrictions relaxed a bit" (97). *The Boy on the Beach* throws into relief these liminalities and those that exclusionary border-security measures produce.

The memoir opens with an idyllic depiction of the tight-knit Kurdi family, their homeland, and their local multicultural community. In 2011, once the civil war overtook Syria, Tima Kurdi devoted herself to helping her remaining family there flee. She sent them money and investigated immigration possibilities, including private sponsorship to move her family to Canada. Much of the story focuses on her committed attempts to sponsor them, and

on her lingering guilt and depression after the death of her sister-in-law and two nephews. Tima Kurdi emphasizes the links between the Islamic terrorists' torture of her brother Abdullah and her tortured self. She is especially haunted by having urged her brother to take her money to repair the teeth that had been ripped out by terrorists, money he first rejected but later used to fund the deadly crossing of the Mediterranean. She relentlessly questions her past actions, including having given her brother the money for the sea crossing that resulted in such devastating loss. As she puts it, "I reserved the most vicious condemnations for myself" (xxiv). The memoir is flooded with "what-ifs and if-onlys" and self-questioning: "If only the Canadian government's policies had been less restrictive. If only the family had made that sea crossing successfully" (167). "Why did you send Abdullah that money for the smugglers? Why didn't you send him more money, so that he could take a safer, seaworthy boat? . . . I'm still lost at sea, drifting. Sometimes I float. Other times I sink like a stone and drown" (xxv).

Abdullah Kurdi acknowledged her efforts to sponsor his family, but his recognition does not minimize her anxiety, depression, or guilt. "You and Anna and Kitt are doing your best to help us, we know. But it seems that the world will only recognize us as human beings if we have the right papers, which are impossible to get" (98). As time goes by, Tima emerges from her despair to shine a spotlight on her family's story and becomes an international advocate for Syrian refugees. Although she characterizes her advocacy as politically impartial, her representation of the crisis is not without critique. Midway through the memoir, she writes, "The refugees were victims of terrorism and global geopolitics, yet they were increasingly viewed with the same suspicion and hostility as the terrorists they had barely managed to escape" (112).

Unlike Alan and Ghalib Kurdi's stories, which are violently halted, Abdullah Kurdi's story, like Tima's, mimics the narrative logic of the formation story. Like in the traditional European bildungsroman, Abdullah's incorporation into the public sphere takes the form of a movement from private to public figure. Tima Kurdi characterizes her brother as a typical boy having grown up in a middle-class family. Although the family struggles, their home life before the war is depicted as happy. Tima Kurdi also depicts her brother as a devoted husband, who made significant sacrifices, including a two-hour daily commute to work through dangerous territories under the control of rebel groups. One day, along his commute from Kobani to Sham, he was abducted by terrorists. The men yelled, "You are a Kurd, and all Kurds are *kafreen,*" meaning "You are not true Muslims. . . . They also accused him of being a Peshmerga fighter. . . . Every Kurd is going to be killed." He was beaten and tortured for

more than a week. The terrorists yanked out all of his teeth one by one. After the terrorists concluded they had the wrong man, he was released with "only the stumps of a few deeply rooted molars" (57). The inclusion of these scenes of torture in the memoir exposes the intimacy of violence and bodily vulnerability and further challenges liberal notions of the sovereign self and nation at the heart of humanitarianism.

After Abdullah had worked for a short time in Turkey, his wife and children joined him. Life was difficult for refugees in Turkey, and Rehanna and Abdullah eventually decided to pay a smuggler to transport them across the Mediterranean. Rehanna, Ghalib, and Alan drowned during the family's second attempt at the dangerous crossing. The Turkish government eventually transported his wife's and children's bodies to Kobani for the funeral, and from that point on, as Tima put it, "The authorities treated him with the dignity and humanity that he and his wife and children had been denied for so many years" (156). Once Abdullah settles, having accepted an offer of political asylum in Erbil, Kurdistan, he begins to do charitable work at a refugee camp in Erbil and, along with his sister, founds the Kurdi Foundation.

Abdullah Kurdi's journey echoes the bildungsroman to the extent that the narrative focuses on his separation from his family, community, and nation; long passages of time dwelling in liminal zones and states of mind; and reintegration into society. The memoir personifies both brother and sister as well as imagined readers as global citizens within an international system of rights and responsibilities. The memoir, however, also chronicles the failures of these "democratic" systems, and in this way puts pressure on these systems as well as on the normative, reformist genre of the bildungsroman and its idealization of the liberal public sphere. In this regard, the memoir resets the conditions of visibility for the widely circulated photograph of Alan Kurdi and reveals what headline news has obfuscated—the material intimacies, locationalization of the geopolitical, and the violence of the ordinary (Das 136).

While Tima Kurdi acknowledges how various stakeholders have mobilized the photograph to advance their own political agendas, she exonerates the reader of such appropriations. Through second-person address, she aligns the reader's gaze with her own: "When you saw the photograph of that little boy, my dear nephew Alan, dead on a faraway shore, you become a part of our family. You shared our horror, our heartache, out shock, and our outrage. You wanted to save him, but you knew it was too late. In your grief, you reached out, and by doing so, you grabbed hold of my hand and pulled me to you. You joined my family's chorus of grief. You helped save me from drowning" (xxvi). Midway through the memoir, she returns to the photograph of Alan on the beach and highlights the paradox of humanitarianism and its emergency

imaginary: "You are simultaneously overtaken by panic and urgency—a need to act quickly to remove him from harm's way before it's too late. Then you realize, it's already too late. You cannot save him" (146). The second-person address reminds readers that because of forces more powerful than parenting, we can't save him. During one trip to Istanbul, we learn that Tima stopped off at a local flea market with her father and brother, bought several gifts for her nephews, and helped her brother "pick out a red T-shirt, jean shorts, and black sneakers for Alan" (85). That her nephew Alan died in that very outfit magnifies the tragedy in unexpected ways for Tima and for the reader, in that the image reminds us of how acts intended for good can inadvertently become usurped by violence.

Within the context of the memoir, the photograph of Alan Kurdi lying facedown on the beach signifies both Tima Kurdi's hope for her nephew's future and his devastating death. The familial intimacies of life and death are further illustrated through the book's photographic insert, which likewise alters the reader's interpretive frame. The portfolio of family snapshots is chronologically arranged as the book's centerpiece, and images span from life before the birth of her nephews to their death. The sequence includes snapshots of family celebrations: Tima at a Damascus hair salon before she emigrated, a portrait of Rehanna and Abdullah holding their oldest son, and an image of Alan and Ghalib as toddlers smiling with a big teddy bear between them.

Following these celebratory family photographs are a series of photographs taken after the deadly crossing, including one of Abdullah standing in front of the bombed-out ruins and rubble of his neighbor's home, and a close-up of him holding a pair of Alan's shoes with the toys he managed to save in the background. These images are followed by a sequence of Abdullah and Tima overlooking a refugee camp in Kurdistan, and several images of the two with heads of state, including the prime minister of Canada and the president of Kurdistan. Then, preceded by a blank white page, the final image appears—the iconic photograph of Alan Kurdi lying on the beach, which includes the dates of Alan's birth and death and the words "Rest in Peace." This composition reclaims the photograph as a familial tribute and in so doing strips away the abstraction of the exception. Like the letter written by the two Guinean children found frozen to death in the undercarriage of a plane en route from Guinea to Belgium (discussed earlier), the photograph replays for Tima a tragic irony of the promise and fragility of childhood and of the journey of refugees.

Similarly, to draw attention to the refugee crisis and as a tribute to Alan Kurdi, activists lay facedown on a beach in Morocco dressed in blue jeans and

red tops, mobilizing the material rhetoric of loss. Journalist Rachid el-Belghiti, who participated, proclaimed, "We are here to say that the Mediterranean should remain a space for sharing and exchanges, not a barrier for those who are victims of dictatorships, civil wars and terrorism" (Parfitt). Chinese artist Ai Weiwei also staged a photograph of himself lying facedown on a beach on the Greek island of Lesbos. As much as these are attempts to break down geopolitical boundaries of sympathy, acts of solidarity at the borders can easily slip into a sentimental humanitarian register that overlooks the repressive border policies that criminalize migration and produce liminal zones. Indeed, "humanitarian time," as cultural anthropologist Miriam Ticktin points out, wherein "one is always reeling from crisis to crisis," facilitates these oversights (2016, 263). "There is only time for the present: for the shock of death, not its relentless afterlife," Ticktin continues. "Yet trauma has its own temporality [that] forces one to be and live in time differently" (264).

The contradictory logics of humanitarianism abound, as turning the refugee crisis into a humanitarian matter fails to recognize the problem as a political crisis caused by geopolitics and by economic, legal, and environmental injustices on a global scale. For instance, the Mediterranean Sea is a highly monitored liminal space, managed by Europe's border agency Frontex, separate authorities involved in maritime surveillance, and networks of migrant activists who track maritime rescues and aid migrants in distress. Watch-TheMed regards itself as part of a "transnational 'underground railroad' that supports unauthorized mobility" (Stierl 2016, 571–73).[12] Even though the "high seas" are considered free zones over which no state can exercise full sovereignty, states monitor navigation and control maritime resources. In this way, the sea is a kind of infrastructure through which vessels and bodies move.

The 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOSU) established the rights and responsibilities of states over their own territorial waters as well as the "high seas." The UNCLOSU specifies that states have an obligation to rescue people in distress at sea, regardless of nationality or status. Moreover, if a person rescued makes known a claim for asylum, international refugee laws must be upheld. Despite these legal obligations, many European states have been reluctant to enforce their obligations to operate rescues, and many have deported intercepted migrants ("Rights at Sea"). Migration studies scholar Maurice Stierl argues that "the Mediterranean has been made to kill through contemporary forms of militarized governmentality of mobility which inflict deaths by first creating dangerous conditions of crossing, and then abstaining from assisting those in peril" (565). Since Alan Kurdi died, at least 8,500 more refugees have been lost in the Mediterranean Sea, and many more are missing and unaccounted for.

The sea has a story. The sea remembers.

In contrast to the material particularities of *The Boy on the Beach,* international best-selling author Khaled Hosseini's *Sea Prayer* reads as a eulogy for missing refugees and the unaccounted for.[13] I turn to this literary work to further highlight the gravitas of humanitarianism as a signifier for university humanity and its limits. Hosseini indicates that his poem was inspired by the photograph and story of Alan Kurdi. The fictional narrator, a father, speaks directly to his son Marwan as he sleeps on the beach on the evening before the family's journey across the Mediterranean. The poem begins with the father's blissful memories of a happier and idyllic life in Homs before the onset of the Syrian civil war, memories that his son does not share.[14] Throughout the prayer, the narrator highlights the violence of representation as well as the value of unification through the implied reframing of these denigrating taxonomies through the egalitarian ideal of universal humanity.

The community of refugees on the beach, "all of us in search of home," is at once fixed on a national homecoming and as a part of a global community of refugees. Although the narrator hears his wife's whispers over the tide, "Oh, but if they saw, my darling. Even half of what you have. . . . They would say kinder things, surely," all he can forecast is his inability to protect his son and the indifferent agency of the sea. The father prays and gives way to the convergence of forces out of his control—to the sea. The father speaks:

> Because all I can think tonight is
> how deep the sea,
> and how vast, how indifferent.
> How powerless I am to protect you from it.
>
> All I can do is pray.
>
> Pray God steers the vessel true,
> when the shores slip out of eyeshot
> and we are a flyspeck
> in the heaving waters, pitching and tilting,
> easily swallowed.
>
> Because you,
> you are precious cargo, Marwan,
> the most precious there ever was.
> I pray the sea knows this.
> *Inshallah.*

> How I pray the sea knows this.
> —*Sea Prayer,* Khaled Hosseini

The father's prayer suspends movement; both father and son are at the threshold between life and death—a liminal state. Readers who are aware that *Sea Prayer* was inspired by the photograph of Alan Kurdi are likely to read the prayer as an elegy, as a pronouncement that comes before the acceptance of death. The father's prayer is resonant with Abdullah Kurdi's recollection of his last moments with his children. "During one momentary break in the waves, he got a look at Ghalib's face. Ghalib's mouth was hanging open, and white froth was coming out. He wasn't breathing. His eyes were open, but they were like glass." Abdullah tells his sister, "I held on to the boys for as long as I could, trying to keep their heads above water I could not bear to let them go. But I was no match for those waves. One after the other, Ghalib and Alan slipped from my grasp. It was like the sea opened its mouth and swallowed them" (Kurdi 190). Holding on, like a prayer, Abdullah gives way to the sea.

The widely circulated photograph of Alan Kurdi symbolizes the congealing of material and discursive forces as well as the promise and failure of humanitarianism to address the inhumanity of borders and border politics. In the context of global media reports on the plight of refugees, this image has overshadowed the thousands of unnamed child refugees who continue to die crossing the Mediterranean Sea. Indeed, the week before Alan Kurdi's death, the bodies of dozens of African children washed up on the beaches of Libya. A recent joint UNICEF-IOM report, *Harrowing Journeys: Children and Youth on the Move Across the Mediterranean Sea, at Risk of Trafficking and Exploitation,* documents the abuse, trafficking, and discrimination against children from Sub-Saharan Africa. According to the UNHCR, there are 3 million refugees in Africa, 12.5 million internally displaced, and another 700,000 who are stateless (Momodu). The largest refugee camp in the world is in Kenya's Dadaab for example, where more than 420,000 refugees live, and on average for twelve years (McClelland). The relative lack of global media coverage of the deaths of African children and attention (empirical and statistical) to Syrian children crossing the Mediterranean Sea raises important questions about which children's lives are deemed globally grievable and under what conditions of visibility the plight of child refugees can be seen. This differential recognition—this overshadowing—which also occurs in the quantification of lives and deaths—points to the racialization of childhood, with the white-identified child Alan Kurdi construed as deserving of the global humanitarian gaze. Whiteness eclipses Black suffering.

My focus on the two children who have become global icons for the Syrian civil war—Omran Daqneesh and Alan Kurdi—exposes how the politics of catastrophe maps vulnerability and futurity onto certain children's bodies—but not others—and how these children take on the burden of representation in global humanitarian discourses circulated by media, activists, artists, and writers. In the next section, I turn to the documentary *Cries from Syria,* about President Bashar al-Assad's political targeting of teenage boys who critiqued the regime and the mass demonstrations the regime's actions sparked to further expose the strategic mobilization of and challenge to humanitarian reason. *Cries from Syria* and its attention to children as political actors echoes a shift within some instantiations of humanitarian discourse from depictions of children solely as victims to children as political actors; however, the film does not uncritically endorse resilience humanitarianism and its neoliberal focus on self-reliance.

Cries from Syria: Children as Political Actors

Cries from Syria, a 2017 documentary directed by Russian-born American Evgeny Afineevsky, offers a firsthand account of the brutal toll of the Syrian civil war on Syrian civilians, especially children. The film is composed of footage captured by small camcorders and mobile phones, and testimonies excerpted from hundreds of hours of interviews that Afineevsky conducted with Syrian civilians and activists. Afineevsky claims that among the project's exigencies is that Syria's "'lost generation' needs to be heard." US reporters describe the film as an "unsparing, must see documentary" (Issa) and as "required viewing for any public official involved with shaping any laws or policies regarding the fate of Syrian refugees" (Goldstein). The film, as the Los Angeles reporter notes, is composed of "harrowing footage," "unbearably graphic images, combined with unbridled, often deeply tragic interviews with a cross-section of Syrian civilians."[15]

    Cries from Syria focuses on the traumatic experiences of fifteen teenage boys from Daraa who were detained and tortured by Assad's police forces because they had been identified as partaking in antigovernment actions. In February 2011 a young teenage boy defaced a local school wall with graffiti that read "It's your turn doctor." The graffiti referred to Assad, who was trained as a doctor. School officials reported the incident to the police, and the father of one of the boys turned his eldest son over to the criminal security department for fear of retaliation against other family members. The Assad regime

labeled the teenagers terrorists. Reports and images of police violence against the detained teenagers, including an image of Hamza Al-Khateb, whose body was badly bruised and swollen after he was tortured and held in captivity for twenty-two days, sparked mass antigovernment demonstrations. Half a million people soon joined the antigovernment, prodemocracy protests across the region. In this regard, empirical evidence—photographs and testimonies—facilitated collective action and its quantification.

The death of twenty-six-year-old peace activist Ghaith Matar likewise roused local protesters, and this time the international community. Matar protested peacefully, but regime-backed security forces nevertheless arrested him. Four days after his arrest, the regime returned his tortured body to his family. Matar's death, like the assault on the public expression of the teenagers, marked the crossing of a political threshold—the right to peaceful assembly and protest. Liminality in this case is attached to the public sphere as a precarious space wherein only certain viewpoints are tolerated. Ambassadors from the US, Japan, France, German, and Denmark attended Matar's funeral, and Matar thereafter became a powerful symbol of peaceful resistance in Syria. After years of protracted violence and protest, in June 2018 Assad's armed forces raised the Syrian flag over Daraa—which some scholars have claimed served as the epicenter of the civil war.

In *Cries from Syria,* the torture of both young adults and minors constitutes the surpassing of a moral and political threshold. *Cries from Syria* positions youth not only as political activists but also as witnesses. In what appear to be scripted utterances, children between the ages of six and fourteen, many identified as orphans, narrate the circumstances of the Syrian civil war, reporting that missiles with poison chemicals had been aimed at their schools, and that their journey through Turkey was dangerous. They had to travel on roads littered with bombs and suffer the Turkish army shooting at them at the border.

The filmic chapter 1, "The Dawn of Revolution," opens with footage of rough seas, audio of cries, and the voice of Abdullah Kurdi: "There were 12 of us and the boat was overloaded. The boat capsized into the sea I tried to catch my wife and children in my arms. But one by one, they drowned." Immediately after his narrative, a close-up video clip of Alan Kurdi on the beach appears, the sea lapping over his face and body. The camera then zooms in on the boy's lifeless body and digitally paints it red while transforming the figure of the child into the country of Syria. The sea swallows Alan, and out of the sea the nation emerges. The digital transformation of the child into the nation suggests a shared vulnerability. It is as if Syria re-emerges in its infancy, as the "cradle of civilization," to lose its childhood to political instabilities. Imme-

diately after the emergence of Syria from the sea, for example, viewers are presented with an overview of key shifts in the history of political powers in Syria, from the 1963 Syrian coup d'état, to the 1971–2000 dictatorship of Hafez Al-Assad, to the 2000 handover of power to his son Bashar Al-Assad after his father's death, to the 2010 emergence of the Arab Spring.

The director explains that the integration of the video footage of Alan Kurdi is meant to connect the atrocities against civilians living in the midst of the Syrian civil war with the photograph that shocked the world. Yet, in contrast to the humanitarian appeals to recognize the plight of young Alan as a representative of childhood innocence and universal humanity, *Cries from Syria* emphasizes the pivotal political role of youth activists at the local level fighting against state violence and international anti-immigration rhetoric and policies. Along with disputes about how to settle refugees in Europe, the anti-immigrant rhetoric of the far right has gained traction across Europe and the US, as have policies that destine refugees and migrants to a state of political liminality. The "unfolding of human tragedy" is predicated on misrepresentations of young male migrants and refugees who are readily construed as dangerous criminals, as gang members, and as national security threats in arguments to limit migration.[16] Several activists in the film likewise point to the violence of state-centered moral and legal taxonomies, and to the contingent nature of international recognition and protection, which is captured by a young girl who addresses the viewer directly: "How can you see this genocide." "I beg you to put an end to this war." In framing the Syrian civil war as genocide, *Cries from Syria* implicates the antidemocratic Assad regime as having committed crimes against humanity.

At end of the film, as video footage of the rescue of Omran Daqneesh appears onscreen, Syrian activist Kholard Helmi, tears falling down her checks, says, "We are not terrorists. We are not asylum seekers. We are people like everyone of this world, with kids, with lovers, with husbands, wives. And we still have dreams like everyone else in the world. In 5 years, my dream was to bring the change we all aspire to this country. But now I don't know what my dream is. For all the bloodshed, to see my brother, to go back home. I don't know. I don't know." Here Helmi speaks from the position of the precarious subject, who hails distant viewers to identify and engage in a process of relational witnessing. Within the context of the film, her tears might be said to embody and perform the struggle for both humanitarian recognition and social change. Although the film includes video footage of Alan Kurdi as well as the rescue of Omran Daqneesh, *Cries from Syria* resists the sentiment of the humanitarian register that defined the framing of this same footage in global media, particularly in US media. Instead, *Cries from Syria* offers an antisenti-

mental appeal through its political critique of how sentiment and humanitarian and human rights recognitions are manipulated by those in power. *Cries from Syria* does not primarily seek a sympathetic moral response from its viewers but prompts audiences to recognize the violence of humanitarianism and to seek new forms of political recognition, which includes the recognition of children and youth as political actors and witnesses.

President Bashar al-Assad's chemical attacks on Syrian civilians crossed another humanitarian threshold in the eyes of the international community. The widely circulated photographs of Syrian child victims of the April 4, 2018, chemical attack prompted President Trump to authorize a cruise missile strike against the Syrian government's air base from where the attack had been reportedly launched. The president's advisors told reporters that two photographs in particular persuaded the president to act: an image of "young listless children being splashed with water in a frantic attempt to cleanse them of the nerve agent, and an image of an anguished father holding twin babies, swathed in soft white fabric, poisoned to death" (DeBonis et al.).

The White House's construal of the role of these two photographs in shaping the administration's militarized humanitarian response positioned the president as the moral witness and the US as the exceptional moral regime. In other words, the rhetorical force of these two images lay not in the photographic referents—the Syrian children—but in the moral observer. The Trump administration's humanitarian framing of its military response to Assad's chemical weapon attack against Syrian children, and yet its concurrent upholding of Executive Order 13769, which denied the entrance of Syrian refugees fleeing Assad's and ISIS's violent attacks, illustrates how humanitarian recognition and national security directives conspire to secure the vision of the US as an exceptional nation, and how the figure of the child-in-peril is exploited in service of political directives.

Carceral Humanitarianism: "Children, Caged for Effect"

A spectacular image of children caged amid the rubble of bombed-out buildings in Douma, a city near Damascus, which appeared on the front page of the *New York Times,* exemplifies how social actors redraw the threshold and how the threshold itself "is a scene of contest, struggle, and dissent" (Ophir 70). This photograph appeared on February 20, 2015, accompanying an article by Anne Barnard entitled "Children, Caged for Effect, to Mimic Imagery of ISIS: Activists Borrow Shock Tactics to Spotlight Wider Carnage in Syrian War." As the headline suggests, the image "echoe[s] the Islamic State video in which the

caged Jordanian pilot, in an orange jumpsuit, was burned alive." The image implicitly asks: why has the murder of one pilot captured the world's attention when the deaths of thousands of Syrian children have not?

Media activist Baraa Abdulrahman (a pseudonym) staged the protest. He is the person holding the torch that appears in the foreground of the image. In an interview, he noted, "Some of the children in the cage . . . were frightened and cried" (cited in Barnard 2015). But he justifies his decision to create the spectacle of children caged amid the bombed-out buildings to draw international attention to the vulnerability of Syrian children: "Our kids are getting killed every day. These sights, people now are used to them." Abdulrahman gambles on the power of the spectacle of caged children to shock and provoke the crossing of a moral or political threshold. But the children's tears also signify fear, and in that regard their tears protest inclusion as actors in this staged spectacle. The threatening arm that extends the torch could be read as the state arm of terror of the Assad regime and the Islamic State; yet it also implicates Abdulrahman, who is reportedly associated with the Army of Islam, the dominant rebel group in the area (Barnard 2015).

In November 2015, two days after the Syrian government shelled a suburb outside Damascus and killed at least forty people, rebel forces invoked the iconography of the cage in their fight against the regime. The rebels caged the prisoners they had captured, including Syrian Army officers and civilians, and exhibited them as human shields to protect rebel-held areas from further bombardment. Video clips and photographs of the caged prisoners appeared on social media under the hashtag #CagesofProtection. These videos provoked revulsion from all sides, including from the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which has connections to opposition activists. Reportedly, the Sunni Islamist group had copied the strategy from regime-backed forces, which likewise mobilized the iconography of the cage as a terrorist tactic (Mackey and Samaan).

The activist spectacle of caged children may have supported an antigovernment position in the region, but its circulation in US media also pointed to the hypocrisy of American exceptionalism as well as to criticism of activists' use of children as political pawns. The photograph evoked the US war on terror and images of detainees at Guantanamo Bay, who were reclassified as enemy combatants. This photograph raises important ethical questions, including whether and to what ends the activist installation may itself have traumatized the children. Whether the children's families consented to their participation or not, the performance held children hostage to the activist representation of political violence. Thus, while one might read the activist photograph as a diffraction—that is, as a critical installation that aims to draw

greater attention to children as collateral damage—but diffractive methods are not immune to implication but are themselves events.

If the *New York Times* publication of the spectacle of caged children had crossed a representational threshold, images of Mexican and Central American children separated from their parents and detained in cages and pens across the US had crossed several lines—moral, political, and juridical. Images and stories of traumatized young children separated from their parents and minors held in cages tipped the scale, triggering moral outrage from US elites across the political spectrum. The Trump administration had gone too far. Threshold politics takes root once again, and this time as a manifestation of carceral humanitarianism. Political philosopher Kelly Oliver coined the term *carceral humanitarianism* to refer to the "control and manage[ment of] populations and their movements" through the construction of refugee camps and detention centers (2017, 5). "Carceral humanitarianism is the outgrowth of humanitarian warfare in which war and aid are two sides of state sovereignty" (7). "These two pillars, humanitarian aid and humanitarian war," she continues, "operate according to an autoimmune logic by which the greatest threat to survival is also what sustains them, bloody wars, terror attacks, and human suffering" (37). Humanitarianism is both "the cure and the poison" (15). Moreover, humanitarian war and humanitarian aid proceed under the signs of exception and emergency.

The Trump administration declared at one point that the separation and detention of children was meant to deter families from crossing the border— in other words, that *children were caged for effect.* President Trump indicated in a statement in October 2018 that the separations could deter immigration. He said, "If they feel there will be separation, they don't come" (Shepardson). After political pressure, President Trump signed an executive order on June 22, 2018, ending the practice. In December 2018, nearly 15,000 migrant children were held in government custody across the country (Burnett). At the time of this writing, April 2019, the US Border Patrol had detained 58,474 immigrant families along the US-Mexico border (A. Flores).

The Trump administration's politics of deterrence exploits the intersection between humanitarian and militarization as modes of governance, which were heightened in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the US, when the US Border Patrol was incorporated into the Customs and Border Protection Agency under the direction of the Department of Homeland Security. As Jill M. Williams observes, the "linking of border enforcement and terrorism" expanded the geography of immigration enforcement and the number of deportations by allowing non-federal-level enforcement agencies to enforce immigration laws (12). The US border enforcement strategy

known as prevention through deterrence, which emerged in the mid-1990s, has operationalized the reorientation of migration routes away from urban areas to the deserts and mountains of southern Arizona. As Williams puts it, "Border Patrol officials hypothesized that pushing migration routes into more difficult landscapes would increase the mortal dangers associated with unauthorized crossings, compelling migrants to simply decide not to attempt illicit crossings" (13). These difficult terrains serve as a "moral alibi" for the nation-state's abdication of responsibility for migrant deaths (Doty). As of this writing, dehydration and exposure remain among the causes of most migrant deaths during border crossings. Since 2000 nearly 3,000 people have died crossing the border in southern Arizona. In 2019 alone, as reported by the Missing Migrants' Project, there have been 1,397 migrant fatalities worldwide. Additionally, although migrants' and refugees' perilous crossings through the desert are not equivalent to the risks that volunteers face, humanitarian efforts are also not without risk. For example, US citizen Scott Warren, a volunteer with the humanitarian group No More Deaths, was arrested for giving food, water, and shelter to migrants. He faced twenty years in prison for "shielding" migrants from US border police. On June 11, 2019, the case resulted in a hung jury. Nevertheless, humanitarian assistance at the border has been and continues to be criminalized, as humanitarian aid workers are charged with misdemeanors and felonies.

In contrast to its militarized humanitarian response to President Assad's chemical attacks against Syrian children, the Trump administration's response to children fleeing violence in their home country and crossing the US-Mexico border has been to dehumanize them and to criminalize those who help them, which further reinforced exclusionary notions of citizenship and national belonging. As rhetorical studies scholar Jennifer Wingard suggests, such processes are akin to *branding* bodies and circulating privileged gender, racial, and sexual identities at the cost of "the humanity of those it brands" (23). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that there has been a significant increase in asylum seekers arriving in the US from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras in response to violence in the region ("Women on the Run"). In contrast to international law, which requires that individuals fleeing political violence be recognized as refugees, the Trump administration's family separation policy, which then US attorney general Jeff Sessions announced on April 6, 2018, has criminalized families crossing the border in order to justify their detention or deportation. The Trump administration views its mission as the defense of a weakened, feminized nation under siege. It has deployed the sensationalist rhetoric of national vulnerability and ressentiment to justify its repressive policies, which

has reinvigorated white masculine nationalism and vigilante border patrol groups, such as the Minutemen Project, and attempted to erase centuries of US settler colonialism (Oliviero 2018, 73). The Trump administration heightened this anti-immigrant sentiment and rhetoric of a nation under siege in its depiction of migrant caravans approaching the border during the 2018 US midterm elections. The administration deployed this rhetoric of invasion to justify its zero-tolerance national security policy at the border, which illustrates how bordering as a "constitutive state choreographed performance" regulates bodies and identities (DeChaine 8). Moreover, as Karma Chávez importantly notes, the administration's emphasis on national security obfuscates the violence committed in the name of the state (2012, 60).

A vivid example of this rhetoric lies in Trump's elevation of "angel families," namely relatives of individuals killed by undocumented immigrants, and repeated call to protect white citizen families. Trump has used their stories to stave off criticism of his zero-tolerance policy. "You never hear their side," Trump said. "These are American citizens permanently separated from their loved ones. [. . .] They're not separated for a day or two days. They are permanently separated because they were killed by criminal illegal aliens." Here we see the rhetoric of conservative vulnerability politics, which channels fear and vulnerability to characterize threats to the standing of dominant groups who determine which precarities matter (Oliviero 2018, 229). The undocumented immigrant, like the refugee, represents "a disquieting element in the order of the nation-state . . . by breaking the identity between the human and the citizen and that between nativity and nationality" (Agamben 1996, 20). This "disquieting element" has been deployed in anti-immigrant arguments over birthright citizenship and through the Trump administration's implementation of the zero-tolerance policy.

Over the years, legislation has been introduced to end automatic birthright citizenship for children born in the US to undocumented immigrant parents.[17] Birthright citizenship is guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment of the US Constitution, which states that all persons born and naturalized in the US and subject to the jurisdiction thereof are citizens of the US and of the state in which they reside.[18] In their efforts to impose stricter immigration laws and to "restrict who may give birth to citizens within the nation's boundaries" (Roberts 205), anti-immigration groups have characterized US-born children of illegal immigrants as "anchor babies"—as parasites feeding off the nation-state—and the Fourteenth Amendment as enabling a "naïve humanitarianism" that, like immigration laws and the welfare state, offers up entitlement programs (Oliviero 2018, 75). This rhetoric "reactivates racist discourses of women of color's primitive, excessive procreation, where

uncontrolled reproduction threatens to breed out the legitimate white population" (75). Conservative vulnerability politics is nostalgic for a homogeneous white nationalist ideal. Like the rhetoric of the Trump administration, the anti-immigration movement's designation of the nation-state as vulnerable to contamination and foreign invasion functions as evidence for their selective investment in upholding certain children's birthrights and not others'. Children of undocumented immigrants raised in the US since they were young are likewise ascribed a liminal political status.

Political philosopher Giorgio Agamben claims that refugees represent "the ultimate 'biopolitical' subjects; those who can be regulated and governed at the level of population in a permanent 'state of exception'" (Owens 567).[19] Agamben construes refugees as figures who expose the "'fiction' of national sovereignty and all associated legal and political categories such as 'people,' 'public,' 'human rights' and 'citizen'" (Owens 567). Agamben, like Hannah Arendt, to whom he is indebted, sees the refugee as a "limit concept" that calls into question the fundamental categories of the nation-state (1998, 134). Moreover, Arendt suggests, "the loss of a polity itself expels [the refugee] from humanity" (297). In contrast to common representations of refugees "as objects of humanitarian intervention . . . [or] as undesirable elements disruption to the national order," some scholars turn to Agamben's figure of the refugee and see the embodiment of a new "political community to come" (Limbu 267). Although Agamben does not address the specific circumstances of children, his notion that the "problem of defining the state of exception . . . concerns precisely a threshold . . . where inside and outside do not exclude each other but blur with each other" (2005, 23) well describes the liminal position of the child refugee and child born in the US to undocumented immigrants.[20] Whereas international human rights law on the status of refugees prescribes the nation-state as a potential protector of liminal legal subjects, anti-immigration platforms construe the liminal subject as a threat. In both cases, liminality, like humanitarian recognition, serves the interests of nation-states, not those of human rights.

The Trump administration's zero-tolerance policy reinforced the power of the state through the production of spatial and temporal liminalities resulting from the separation and detention of nearly 3,000 children from their parents crossing the US-Mexico border. Many parents were charged with a federal misdemeanor for entering the country illegally. Some parents were sent to federal court and their children taken unaccompanied and placed in the custody of the US Department of Health and Human Services. In sharp contrast to previous administrations, the Trump administration prosecuted parents traveling with children over adults traveling alone (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

Indeed, the Trump administration began separating families who crossed the border legally in October 2017, long before then attorney general Jeff Sessions announced the zero-tolerance policy, in April 2018. Moreover, the administration had left in place requirements to prosecute immigrants who entered the country illegally, including children and asylum seekers. As Jeffrey Davis points out, in punishing refugees and portraying asylum seekers as criminals, the US violates the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which it ratified in 1968. Ravina Shamdasani, spokeswoman for the UN Commission for Human Rights, said that the separation of children from families under the policy of criminally prosecuting those crossing the border "amounts to arbitrary and unlawful interference in family life, and is a serious violation of the rights of the child" (qtd. in Cumming-Bruce).

Despite President Trump's "rhetoric of righteous victimhood" and the commonplace political maxim that children are beyond reproach, the administration's policies have "impose[d] disproportionate, sometimes fatal burdens on children—especially black and brown ones" (Huq). In addition to the separation and detention of thousands of children at the US-Mexican border, Trump's travel ban, imposition of work requirements for federal welfare and health benefits, and rescinding of policies that encouraged educational institutions to account for historical exclusion of minorities from the public sphere have disproportionality affected poor children and children of color (Huq. Yet, it was the administration's separation of children from their families that triggered public outcry. What exactly prompted the moral outrage? Was it the numbers of children detained? Was it the images of detained children in chain-link pens and cages? The detained children become liminal subjects within these in-between spaces. What threshold had been crossed? Had the threshold itself changed?

Deportation rates peaked under the Obama administration, with 648,783 removals and returns in 2012 (Zong and Batalova). Had the threshold been exceeded because of opposition to President Trump and/or because of a sense of advocacy for the children? And why hasn't the outcry about the carceral state's detention of noncitizen children not also elevated public condemnation of state violence against incarcerated US citizen children of color? US citizen children of color, as I discuss in chapter 4, are less readily, if at all, afforded recognition as humanitarian subjects. Part of the differential outcry is because the Central American and Mexican child refugees are viewed by many child advocates in Congress through a humanitarian lens—which downgrades their political right to asylum to a humanitarian favor (Oliver 2017, 2). This incorporation of "human rights into humanitarian standards" (2), Oliver notes, "produces refugees as either security risks or charity cases" (3). The suspicion

of refugees as either being or becoming security risks—this projection of lim-inality—underwrites the Trump administration's zero-tolerance policy.

Before the Trump administration's implementation of the zero-tolerance policy and the forced separation of children from parents, families were allowed to enter the US to apply for asylum, and their detention depended on court rulings, legislation, and the availability of detention space. The 1997 case *Flores v. Reno* requires that the US government release children without unnecessary delay into the custody of their family or licensed programs. *Flores v. Reno* also indicates that children should be held in the "least restrictive" spaces available. "The 2008 Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act codified parts of the settlement into federal law," and "in 2015, a federal judge in CA ruled that the *Flores* requirements apply not only to unaccompa-nied minors but also to children apprehended with their parents" (Cillizza). As I mentioned in the preface, Trump's policies hold up a mirror to American history and the legacy of family separations. Given this violent history, the present threshold is a false indicator of violent exceptions. In other words, these are not exceptional circumstances but part of a long, violent history of state-sanctioned violence and separations of children of color from their families in the US.

On one day alone, June 18, 2018, newspapers throughout the US and abroad featured stories about the separations and images of children in chain-link-fence cages. The iconography of the cage echoed throughout US and international news and social media advocacy. *Vanity Fair* ran an article entitled "Kids in Cages and Other Scenes from Trump's 'Zero Tolerance' Bor-der" (Soboroff). The report describes a scene similar to a prison panopticon. *The Atlantic* ran an article entitled "Are Children Being Kept in Cages at the Border?" (Graham), which described the debate over how to characterize the detention and containment of the separate children. Are they pens or cages? In addition to images of children in 30 × 30 foot wire-mesh chain-link pens, an audio recording of children's cries from one of the detention sites sparked public outcry by Democratic and several Republican senators.

Speaking out against the policy, local lawmaker Jose Rodriguez described the separations as "totally inhumane" and as a practice that "should be con-demned by anyone who has a moral sense of responsibility" *BBC News*). Most reprehensible to politicians and publics were reports on a new group of "ten-der age" children, including babies, who were separated from their parents and taken to Border Patrol centers across the US. The American Academy of Pediatrics warned in early June 2018 that these separations constituted "highly stressful experiences," especially for very young children, as suggested by the widely circulated drawings of several migrant children once they were

released from US detention, and that forced separations "can cause irreparable harm to lifelong development by disrupting a child's brain architecture" (*BBC News*). Drawings by migrant children depicting themselves in cages in US border custody compel us to contemplate the dual role of national security and humanitarian efforts. Children held in detention centers and cages signify the violence of confinement as a form of humanitarian governance. The dual role of confinement in the protection and violation of children's humanity became devastatingly clear when news spread of the conditions of some of the centers and the death of children in US border custody (see preface).

TENDER R/AGE: "Who Cries for Them?"

> Thresholds are changing. Thresholds are telling.
> They tell stories of what has been normalized.
> They tell stories of when we go past what,
> when the new what has our next outrage.
> But what of the old what? Who cries for them?
>
> —AL *TENDER R/AGE*

Rhetorical studies scholar and art-activist Adela C. Licona's latest project, "TENDER R/AGE: RABIA TIERNA—An Outcry of Collective Outrage," explicitly responds to the separation and detention of "tender age" children. The project situates these forced separations within a longer history of children's rights violations at the hands of the US government and the carceral state.[21] "TENDER R/AGE" consists of 63 crowdsourced childhood photographs assembled as paper-doll cutouts, printed on cardstock and propped up with triangular cardboard wedges, that are then displayed across an installation space (see figures 3 and 4). A placard with the exclamation "NO CAGES" accompanies each photograph. The cutouts are placed among a stark white context that, Licona notes, "impl[ies] an overexposure and that speaks to conditions for the production of hypersurveillance practices." Licona continues, "The images evoke children cut out of contexts, separated and decontextualized, which is what is happening to them as a result of (forced) migration and of enduring the violence of numerous states (the states they fled, traveled through, and the US state)" (Licona and Luibhéid 56).

The project also features first-person testimonies of a diverse group of participants (documented, undocumented, white, black, brown, Native, heterosexual, and queer), some directly engaging the iconography of the cage, and others sharing experiences of living on the border, and generational

FIGURE 3. TENDER R/AGE :: Teeni, Michelle, and
Ragini :: No Cages ¡Jaulas No! Adela C. Licona
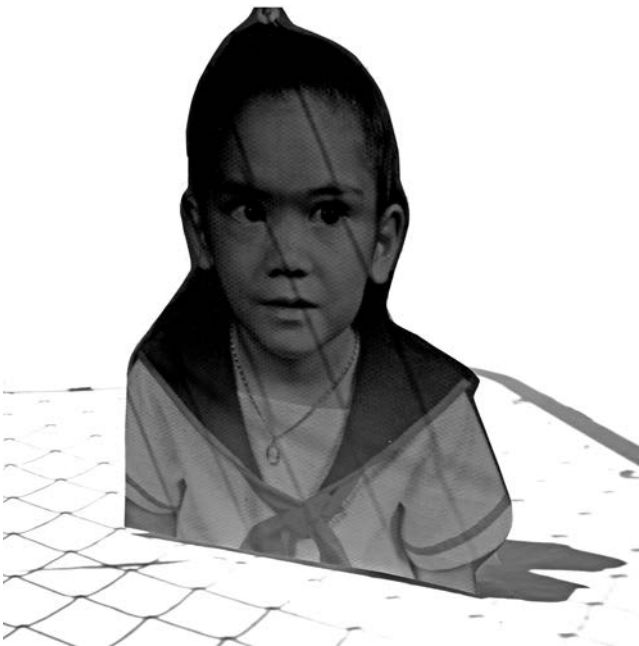
FIGURE 4. TENDER R/AGE :: Patti :: No Cages
¡Jaulas No! Adela C. Licona

memories of children separated from parents in the World War II Japanese internment camps, among others. In addition to the photographs and first-person testimonies, the project includes a 1.14-minute soundscape that emulates the "ecologies of division and displacement" (Licona). The soundscape consists of wailing human and nonhuman sounds, such as that of mourning doves, cicadas, and whales, as well as excerpts from the audio files of cries of some of the caged children, which circulated in mainstream media. Soundscape artist John Melillo and Adela C. Licona vividly characterize the soundscape as a "sonic expression of sorrow and outrage" of the "caged, the separated, the encroached upon, the displaced, as well as those of us witnessing" (Licona).

Licona indicated that she decided not to include the widely circulated photographs of the children held at the border because "using the images of the actual children could add exploitation to the trauma being enacted on them" (personal correspondence). Licona's decision not to use actual photographs from the traumatic scenes at the border may at first appear to be at odds with the decision to use the sounds of crying children and captors. However, as Licona notes, "This sound collage works together with [crowdsourced] photographs and words to express a sensual experience of collective outrage at the injury of imposed division across (non)human contexts" (Licona and Luibhéid 58–59). Licona indicated that she is well aware of the potential of crowdsourced images "to function to always temporarily extend the period of awakened empathy" rather than as interventionist acts, and of the risk of "slip[ping] into a sentimental humanitarian register that overlooks the repressive policies that criminalize migration" (personal correspondence).[22]

The chain-link panel that hangs above the cardboard photographs casts a shadow over the images as well as the spectator. In her commentary on the project, Licona notes, "We are all living in the shadows of these cages." But what does it mean to live in the shadow of these cages? Who lives in the shadows? Whose lives do the shadows darken? The shadows prompt recognition of what lingers and what is left behind. They prompt recognition of the history of family separations. In this regard, "TENDER R/AGE" offers a counterclaim to claims of American exceptionalism and to those who argue that the practice of separating children from their parents is un-American. The project calls for recognition not only of the history of separating children of color from their parents in the US but also of the violence of threshold politics, especially when the identification of the threshold is predicated on the myth of American exceptionality and historical erasures. As one contributor to "TENDER R/AGE" suggests, "Thresholds are telling. They tell stories of what has been normalized." "TENDER R/AGE" seizes the limits of threshold politics by

offering an alternative intervention to the state's criminalization of migrants and to the Trump administration's use of "children as 'bait' or 'hostages'" (Licona and Luibhéid 48). Threshold politics also deflect ethical responsibility, as seen in right-wing arguments that blame the deaths of children in US custody at the border as the fault of the families fleeing violence in their home countries. In sum, the threshold politically and morally adapts in relation to who surveys the border and controls the narrative. Border walls, like prisons, may represent the most visible appendage of the carceral state, but carceral state power also operates, as this chapter has shown, through differential recognition and the strategic appropriation of humanitarian time and modes of governance. Finally, reading representations of the figure of child migrant and child refugee diffractively and genealogically reveals not only how liminality serves the political interests of the nation-state rather than those of human rights but also "how the staging of the world in representation," as postcolonial studies scholar Gayatri Spivak puts it, "dissimulates the choice and need for 'heroes,' paternal proxies, and agents of power" (1999, 264). Humanitarian modes of representation have significant political repercussions and serious limitations, which include silencing marginalized voices, upholding hierarchies of recognition and political exchange, and exploiting the child as a liminal subject. Notwithstanding these limitations, the child migrant and child refugee throw humanitarian recognition into crisis, prompting the transformation of the scenes of political recognition and expanding the parameters of political exchange.

In chapter 2 I highlight how the material rhetoric of global girlhoods and gendered violence mediates the imperatives of state and local power, and, more specifically, how US media and politics appropriate the narratives and images of women and girls who are victims of Islamic terrorism in the Greater Middle East, namely Pakistan and Iraq, in ways that reinforce the national mythology of American exceptionalism. In focusing on the global mediation of Malala Yousafzai's and Nadia Murad's life stories and activism, and their own navigation of these mediations, this chapter reveals the extent to which the humanitarian paradigm of human rights traffics in exceptionalities and the need for more critical engagements attuned to these exceptions.

CHAPTER 2

Trafficking Global Girlhoods, Terrorism, and Humanitarian Celebrity

On October 9, 2012, fifteen-year-old Malala Yousafzai, an advocate for the educational rights of girls, was shot by a masked Taliban gunman while riding home from school on a bus in Mingora, Pakistan, a region in the Swat Valley from which the Pakistani army had claimed to have eliminated the Taliban. A bullet grazed Malala's skull and lodged in her neck. Two other girls, Kainat Riaz and Shazia Ramzan, were injured during the shooting.[1] All three survived, though it was Malala's story that triggered an outpouring of international support and widespread media attention. Soon after the assault, Ehsanullah Ehsan, the chief spokesman for the Pakistani Taliban, who preach a hardline form of Sunni Islam, claimed responsibility for the shooting and characterized Malala Yousafzai, also a Sunni Muslim, as "the symbol of the infidels and obscenity" (Da Silva and McCartney). He confirmed that Malala had been pursued because she had "become a symbol of Western culture" ("Malala Yousafzai's Courage"). If she survived, he vowed, Taliban "militants would try again to kill her" ("Malala Yousafzai's Courage"). He decreed, "Let this be a lesson" (Walsh, "Taliban Guns Down").[2]

Soon after the shooting, protesters, including Pakistani civil organizations such as the National Student's Federation, the Pakistan Peace Committee, and the Women Action Forum, gathered in Karachi and Islamabad to condemn the Taliban. This support for Malala reflects her biography and prior visibility. Malala Yousafzai is well known in the region for speaking out for the educa-

tional rights of children; she has given interviews for national radio, television, and international papers; and just months before the shooting she led a UNICEF-sponsored delegation of children's rights activists to Peshawar to meet with local politicians (Walsh, "Taliban Guns Down"). Her entrée to international media came in 2009, when she wrote an anonymous blog (though her identity was soon revealed) for BBC Urdu about her life in the Swat Valley under Taliban rule. Later that year, *New York Times* correspondent Adam B. Ellick featured her in a documentary film. In October 2011 she received Pakistan's first National Youth Peace Prize, and in 2014, she shared the Nobel Peace Prize with the Indian child's rights activist Kailish Satyarthi. Counter to the Taliban's attempt to silence Malala, the brutal assault turned her into a global humanitarian icon and agent for political moderation. As one reporter put it, Malala has become a "potent symbol of resistance to the militants' extremist ideology" (Walsh, "Girl Shot by Pakistani Taliban"). On October 13, 2012, leaders from Pakistan's secular liberal political party, the Muttahida Quami Movement, protested against the assassination attempt. Even Jamaat ud Dawa, the charity wing of a militant Islamist group, described the attack as a "shameful, despicable, barbaric attempt" ("Malala Yousafzai's Courage"). The prime minister of Pakistan, Raja Pervez Ashraf, characterized Malala as "the true face of Pakistan," and the Taliban's targeting of her as an indication of its fear of "the power of her vision" (Walsh, "Taliban Reiterate" A5).

In becoming a symbol for Pakistani moderates, Malala Yousafzai has also become a symbol for the West—a humanitarian symbol and celebrity. This signification draws on a legacy of orientalist contrasts between the US as an exceptional democratic Christian nation and an oppressive and monolithic Muslim Middle East—contrasts that reinforce American moral exceptionality. Speaking to a group of American Girl Scouts, then secretary of state Hillary Rodham Clinton characterized Malala as "very brave in standing up for the rights of girls" and the Taliban as "threatened by that kind of empowerment" ("Malala Yousafzai: Reward Offered"). Malala's advocacy for educational rights carried her safely into the folds of Western liberalism as an individual subject contesting subjection. But it was not only the gendered violence of the Taliban that spurred Western media interest; the assassination attempt also fueled narratives about the attack as an assault on childhood innocence and the logic of reproductive futurism, which links childhood futurity to national identity. As discussed in the introduction, childhood is variously construed across cultures. In the Islamic tradition, when a child turns fourteen she is considered an adult (Yousafzai, *I Am Malala* 231). Yet, within Euro-American contexts, Malala Yousafzai, now an adult, continues to shoulder the representational burden as the "foreign" Muslim girl onto

whom the future of democratic literacy has been written. Within international human rights campaigns, children's educational rights are tethered to humanitarian rationalities and tropes. Global girlhoods likewise are bound to the humanitarian paradigm of human rights through intersecting international education, development, and national security discourses and policies, and through these often competing discourses, global girlhoods mediate the imperatives of state and local power.

In chapter 1 I focused on the transnational mediation of the images of child refugees whose stories arose from the war-ridden zones and treacherous topographies of the Syrian civil war—the Mediterranean Sea and a barrel-bombed building in Aleppo—to those separated from families and detained at the US-Mexico border. The chapter highlighted the differential recognition of Syrian and Central American child refugees in transnational media and US domestic and international politics, and contrasting configurations of the US as humanitarian benefactor or victim. This chapter examines the link between the international recognition of the human rights of women and girls in the Greater Middle East (a designation that includes Pakistan and Iraq) and the spectacle of gendered terrorism, namely images and narratives that construe the female body as a site of subjection and crisis. Taken together, these two chapters demonstrate the reach and capacity of media and political ecologies beholden to the principles of humanitarianism to reinforce the national mythology and intensify the power of American exceptionalism.

Specifically, in this chapter I focus on the global iconicity of two young women who were victims of Islamic terrorism—Malala Yousafzai and Nadia Murad. Although Nadia Murad is not a child, the global iconization of her story and related rallying cries for international and US humanitarian interventions in Iraq and Syria, like Malala Yousafzai's story, reproduce paternalist nationalist narratives in their collapse of the categories women and children.[3] The title of Nadia Murad's memoir, *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity and My Fight Against the Islamic State* (2017), reinforces this collapse. Attention to the conditions of intelligibility expose how representations of the human rights of women and children in the Greater Middle East aimed at the US are tied to how violent conflict, war, and terrorism are understood. In my analysis of the political framing of Nadia Murad's story, for example, the material rhetoric of human trafficking and terrorism converge in ways that fortify American exceptionalism. To focus on the framing contexts is neither to undermine the strength of these young women who have faced and continue to face material risks in speaking out about their experiences nor to diminish their global influence. Rather, my goal is to consider how the humanitarian paradigm of women and children's human rights conditions their international celebrity

as human rights advocates. A materialist-rhetorical approach to the complex constitutive relations among multiple narratives of gendered terror and victimhood help us understand how the trafficking of these narratives can function as mechanisms of state coercion as well as potential sources of resistance.

In *Global Icons: Apertures to the Popular,* postcolonial and global media studies scholar Bishnupriya Ghosh refers to the *bio-icon* as the formalized life story that focalizes the iconic image. For Ghosh, global icons "offer the cultural means for forming or deforming attachments to the 'global' as that absent social totality that encompasses us all" (11) and "bear an indexical charge for collectivities that place social demands through them" (12). Ghosh importantly turns our attention to "the affective emergencies around icons as articulations of both specific social demands and unmoored desires for a possible sociality" (10). Icons are always epistemological (requiring shared cultural knowledge), but they also "reorient ontological becoming toward the possibility of a social to come" and collective aspirations (27). Yet these collective aspirations can also paradoxically serve as rationalizations for nationalist exceptions. If global bio-icons are tied to their capacity to aspire, as Ghosh suggests, to which collective aspirations, we might ask, are Malala and Nadia's experiences and stories tied? Are their stories tied to teleological narratives of progress where emancipation equals the acquisition of rights? In what ways do US domestic concerns about border insecurity intersect with or fracture these teleological narratives? Are Malala and Nadia valued solely as witnesses to the violence of Islamic terrorism? To what degree does the celebrity of Malala and Nadia represent US investments in and exploitation of excess as a means to preserve government interests and national security agendas?[4] In the next section, I focus on exceptionalities that activate and anchor the celebrity of Malala Yousafzai and Nadia Murad as global icons and the mediation of their life stories across global media platforms. Malala Yousafzai's humanitarian appeals to literacy as a form of freedom and security and Nadia Murad's call for international humanitarian intervention to address human rights violations against the Yazidi reveal how the humanitarian paradigm of human rights traffics in exceptionalities.

Trafficking Exceptionalities

The emergence of Malala Yousafzai and Nadia Murad as global icons rests on a collective affective investment in their transformation from victims of Islamic terrorism to human rights witnesses and humanitarian celebrities. Their global public transformation aligns with the aspirations of liberal inter-

nationalism—a distinctive post-9/11 American internationalism—and UN-based global feminism stemming from the late 1970s and early 1980s. Global feminism has been a key player in the international women's and children's human rights movement. Yet, as transnational feminists justly note (Alvarez; Barlow; Basu; Falcón; I. Grewal; C. Kaplan; Spivak), global feminism's selective focus on violence against women and girls of the global South has fortified perceptions of the global North at the summit of the hierarchy of humanity. The UN comprises multiple agencies, including antiracist feminist forums; however, global feminism remains the prevailing UN orientation to gender-based violence (Falcón), as does education as development and literacy as empowerment. To understand the global iconicity of Malala Yousafzai as a celebrity humanitarian activist for girls' right to education, therefore, we need to apprehend the genealogy of global girlhood(s) in international development and humanitarian discourse, which has incorporated global feminist concepts of empowerment in configuring girls of the global South, particularly Afghanistan and Pakistan, as worthy of investment. The configuration of Malala rests on exceptionalism's alignment with these imperatives, an alignment based on Malala's perceived embrace of neoliberal democratic ideals. More specifically, to understand the designation of Nadia Murad as the Yazidi Malala, we also need to apprehend the convergence of human trafficking and terrorism in the exceptional discourse of religious freedom, a convergence that Christian conservative media coverage of Islamic terrorism has mastered in its defense of America as an exceptional Christian nation.

This convergence surfaced in US antitrafficking and counterterrorism legislation under the George W. Bush administration. In his September 23, 2003, address to the United Nations, President Bush established a direct moral link between sex trafficking and terrorism. Similar to his characterization of terrorism, Bush depicted global sex trafficking as a "special evil" and as a violation of "moral law." The US Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 likewise defines "trafficking in persons [as] an evil requiring concerted and vigorous action by countries of origin." The moral imperative and humanitarian orientation of the US 2000 Trafficking Victims Protection Act can be traced to its "legislative ancestor"—the International Religious Freedom Act (Zimmerman 35). These convergences inform the underlying logic of the US ratification of the UNCRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, and its focus on trafficking as a transnational crime, which has obfuscated the global economic conditions that exacerbate the problem of human trafficking.

Equally troubling obfuscations are also readily apparent in conservative media coverage of white nationalist terrorism and anti-Muslim violence

pursued in the name of Christianity in the US. The spectacular focus on the brutality of Islamic terrorism, including the mass circulation of videotaped beheadings and front-page headlines about the enslavement and rape of Yazidi women and girls, has re-energized the "clash of civilizations" thesis made popular by Samuel Huntington. This focus on the spectacle of torture has also renewed American investment in an undifferentiated "Muslim World" and "Middle East" beyond its own borders—an investment that negates Muslim reformist efforts as well as the transnational identities Muslim Americans have developed as a critique of American exceptionality (Z. Grewal 83). Additionally, monolithic notions of the "Muslim World" exclude the nearly two billion Muslims who live outside the Middle East and the indigenous Christian and Jewish populations and other religious minorities living in the region (6). The stakes of such imaginings are high and include the increased surveillance of American Muslims and the perpetual subjection of the populations of Muslim-majority countries to economic sanctions and missile and drone attacks (7–8). Thus, even as we encounter Malala's and Nadia's celebrity through global media networks, as iconic figures they are reterrorized in ways that interpolate the national mythology of American exceptionality.

Yet, as living agents, Malala and Nadia also actively navigate these exceptions and the exceptional narratives projected onto them. Malala draws on liberalism's focus on individual rights, but she does not prioritize liberalism's and global feminism's focus on bodily violation. In her pursuit of peace as a precondition for rights, Malala also challenges exceptional configurations of violence as means to freedom and instead presents literacy, specifically, girls' right to education, as a means to freedom. Nadia draws attention to bodily violation, namely sexual violence, but she too deploys rights arguments as tools to address the rights of women and girls within their religious communities.

The juxtaposition of Malala Yousafzai and Nadia Murad as global bio-icons foregrounds the complex geopolitics of representing gendered terrorism and the circumscription of vulnerability and agency through rights-based development and security logics. Attention to these logics and their genealogies complicates an otherwise narrow politics of representation by shifting attention to material-rhetorical contingencies and hierarchies of valuation. The genealogy of the spectacle of gender-based terrorist violence also requires the contextualization of Islamic terrorism in relation to the instrumentalization of sexual violence by a range of political actors in both the pre- and post-invasion periods in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Kurdish Region of Iraq (Al-Ali).[5] A materialist-rhetorical reading draws attention to regional, national, and international complicities in the manifestation of militarized and neoliberal gender

norms and patriarchal power relations that exacerbate gender-based violence and terrorism (Al-Ali 14). Finally, attention to these global interdependencies can serve as the grounds for a more ethical response to the trafficking of exceptionalities, American exceptionalism chief among them.

The Malala Effect: Exceptionally Familiar

The United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights, Navi Pillay, released a statement on November 25, 2012 (a little over a month after the shooting), called "The Malala Effect," in which she admonished the international community to remember that "Malala's case is not an exceptional one" (1). Had Malala been less prominent," Pillay argued, "her attempted murder might have passed more or less unnoticed. Despite all the advances in women's rights around the world," Pillay continued, "violence against girls and women remains one of the most common human rights abuses—and the assault on their fundamental right to education continues in many countries. Such attacks on education unfortunately take place all over the world, including in Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and Latin America" (1). Indeed, Malala herself draws our attention to the tragic fact in her decision to donate her $50,000 Nobel Peace Prize award to efforts to reconstruct schools in Gaza.[6] Moreover, according to the *UN 2012 Education for All Global Monitoring Report,* "Pakistan has the second largest number of children out of school in the world," and "nearly half of rural females have never been to school." Malala's message aligns with the UN "Literary for All" campaign and might be understood as a capstone to the UN Literacy Decade (2003–13). Yet, as I have noted, Malala's link between literacy and nonviolence moves us beyond the literacy myth in accounting for material and political forces that encumber children's right to education.

For Pillay, the "Malala Effect" denotes the selective attention and individualizing and celebrity motifs of international news media. *Time* magazine's decision to feature Malala Yousafzai on its December 2012 online cover as the No. 2 Person of the Year (runner-up to President Obama) and later in 2013 as one of *Time*'s 100 Most Influential People in the World exemplifies the American consumer's insatiable appetite for the *exceptional individual.* But Malala Yousafzai is not simply a passive subject onto whom liberal recognition is conferred. Malala invests in and stakes claim to the international liberal imaginary in a variety of ways, most notably through the rationality of rights discourse and her erudite navigation of international news and social media platforms. Indeed, her rights talk qualifies her as *exceptionally familiar*

to Western audiences. In the US, Malala is perceived as exceptional because she is both "different than" fundamentalist Muslim women with whom she is compared and "more 'like us'" (Sensoy and Marshall 303).

Not only is Malala Yousafzai cast as an exceptional Muslim girl; her father, Ziauddin Yousafzai, who often appears with her at public events and is clearly an influential force in her life, is also cast as an exceptional figure—a Muslim male who is not the Western stereotype of the monster-terrorist, rights-denying premodern, less-than-human Muslim man. Within the context of the US war on terror, both Malala and Ziauddin are cast as alternatives to the "suspect nation" of Pakistan, which, as of this writing, the US and its allies continue to subject to missile and drone attacks (Husain). The Pakistani government has to some degree supported the US war on terror by deploying its military to counter and capture terrorists and by making its airspace available to the US military, support for which the US government has provided its government resources. But throughout these engagements, both countries have questioned the other's commitments, and the US government has repeatedly suspected Pakistan of harboring terrorists.

The "Malala Effect" is rooted in the logic of exceptionality. The "Malala Effect" points to a material-rhetorical process whereby configurations of exceptionality are bound by composite images of repressed Muslim women and girls and normative story lines and appeals that turn on simple oppositions, such as freedom and constraint, and colonist divides between First and Third World girlhoods, and, in the case of Malala, between Muslim and non-Muslim girlhoods. Exceptional "Third World" girls are foundational to the workings of liberal internationalism, liberal empire, and neoliberal forms of governance. As scholars of rhetoric, we should follow the lead of Navi Pillay, who turns attention to the mechanisms of exceptionality that structure the terms of public engagement with Malala's story. Public representations of Malala and Malala's self-representations provide a critical occasion to explore the challenges of counteracting neoliberal forms of deliberation and creating global publics that address struggles for social justice without collapsing differences into simple identifications and soft alliances. The "Malala Effect" compels us to reassess the sociopolitical paradigms, including the humanitarian paradigm of human rights, and material-rhetorical contingencies that propel certain images and narratives to the foreground and normalize certain meanings through repetition. My reading of the "Malala Effect" implies certain methodological moves, which contrast with unidirectional analyses that treat cultural or national differences as if they were discrete entities. Instead, I aim to bring a transnational genealogical focus that attends to the sociopolitical logics and assemblages of power that structure human rights communica-

tion across differences conditioned by complex global histories and relations. I argue that the "Malala Effect" is part of a global rhetorical ecology beholden to the principles of neoliberal and humanitarian governance, which includes the "girling" of human rights and the commercialization of female subjection and resilience.

The "Third World" Girl Effect: Exceptionality Contained

Jasmine Gardner, a reporter for the *London Evening Standard,* characterizes the widespread support for Malala Yousafzai as a social movement. Indeed, Malala's campaign for girls' education has gained the support of the United Nations, the Office of Gordon and Sarah Brown and *A World at School,* the petition platform Change.org, UNESCO, the US feminist NGO Vital Voices, which established the Malala Fund, and the commitment of high-profile celebrities such as Angelina Jolie and Madonna. The international initiatives launched in Malala's name to broaden public awareness of the plight of girls in the global South are framed largely by the discourses of global feminism (with its focus on *women's and girls' rights* as *human rights*), humanitarianism (with its focus on *human security*), and neoliberalism (with its focus on *human capital*).

Across public and private sectors, investment in the human rights of marginalized adolescent girls of the global South is cast as one of high returns. The construal of adolescent girls as enterprising subjects is consistent with the marketing of human rights as necessary for the propagation of neoliberal capital (K. Wilson 328). Girl empowerment campaigns are increasingly part of the corporate social responsibility portfolios of multinational corporations headed in the global North, such as the Nike Foundation's "The Girl Effect," which imbues girls of the global South with the promise of agency and value-added human capital. "The Girl Effect" was formed in 2004 by public-private partnerships among the NoVo Foundation (a Buffett foundation that awards grants to advocacy groups, with an annual giving of $50 million), the Nike Foundation (the philanthropic wing of the multinational sports giant), and The Coalition for Adolescent Girls (Switzer 346).[7] Together, NoVo and Nike committed over $90 million to support "The Girl Effect." In October 2013 Malala Yousafzai appeared in a feature story for "The Girl Effect" as both signatory to and spokesperson for "The Girl Declaration," which places "girls at the center of the next generation of global development" (8). In June 2014 Malala appeared again on the Girl Effect website with the headline "Girl Heroes: Malala the Voice of 250 Million Girls."

Malala Yousafzai's focus on the need to invest in girls' education is part of the broader neoliberal discourse of rights and development, which approaches global poverty as a "manageable, pragmatic problem that can be dealt with by a concerned public and by educating girls, one at a time" (Sweis 28). Projects aimed at adolescent girls from rural villages in the global South make up a significant part of these global development programs. In her analysis of the adolescent female as a site of international investment, Michelle Murphy exposes the "affective bonds between Western liberal feminisms and financial logics" (4). Constituted as the "poorest of the poor," she observes, "The Girl functions as an alibi for a host of devaluations produced in capitalist and violent terrains that render life disposable . . . Reinvigorating old tropes that ethnicized colonialism through the figure of the women in need of rescue, the Investable Girl as a figure of both feminisms and capitalism is always already a national security solution with a neoliberal [and, I would add, humanitarian] twist" (5). Murphy thus asks, "What dreams for the future appear sensible in neoliberal times, and for whom does the free market dream?" Relatedly, we might ask, whose dream does Malala's story support? To whom does Malala's dream for global democracy appear sensible? The free market dreams for adolescent girls in developing nations.

The transnational intersection of governmental and nongovernmental development programs is readily discernable in Malala's case. Malala served as the inspiration for the GIRLWITHABOOK Project, a fundraising campaign to build a library at a Citizen Foundation School in Pakistan. The project receives support from the Global Education Fund, the UN's Education First initiative, and Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn's Half the Sky movement. The Half the Sky movement donates funds to Girls Educational and Mentoring Services, Girls UP, the Fistula Foundation, and several other NGOs. Girls UP works through the UN to promote leadership development for girls around the world. Student volunteers from Girls UP attended Malala's October 11, 2013, address at the World Bank headquarters.[8]

Despite a notable increase in the focus on girl empowerment and gender mainstreaming by multinational corporations and international governmental and nongovernmental agencies enjoining the UN Millennium Development goals, Jackie Kirk, Claudia Mitchell, and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh argue that "the girl child herself tends to be a silent figure" (21). They write that the girl child "is seen as a passive object suffering a series of interlocking oppressions and discriminations taking place at the family, school, community, and state levels" (21). Over the last two decades, global development discourse has incorporated feminist concepts of agency and empowerment in configuring girls of the global South as deserving of investment. However, this discourse never-

theless continues to configure women and girls of the global South as objects upon whom the power of the public voice and future must be conferred. Third World girl rescue and empowerment narratives are also entangled in cosmopolitan discourses that maintain the fantasy of transnational intimacy for the consumer class.

Echoing the platform of the World Bank, which construes investment in adolescent girls in poor countries as "smart economics," "The Girl Effect" maintains that investing in a girl—before she is married, out of school, pregnant and HIV positive—is the ultimate solution to end poverty.[9] The "girl effect" refers to the "purported outward ripple of positive social and economic benefits resulting from investment in adolescent girls" (Switzer 2018, 8).[10] Education-as-development imperatives may represent a shift from earlier depictions of "Third World girls" as passive victims to self-regulating agents, although girls' agency is construed in large part to fit with neoliberal economic arrangements. "The Girl Effect" promotes education as development but does not address the education-as-development paradox, which includes the consequences of the militarization of education, that is, that education in the context of insecurity facilitates gender inequity; "female schoolchildren and teachers become the victims of terror attacks at a disproportionately high rate" (Grover 53). The Human Rights Watch 2013 World Report indicates that Islamic militants regularly attack students and teachers in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, and other conflict-affected areas. Indeed, attacks against educational institutions are 108 percent higher in Pakistan than in any other country.[11] "The Girl Effect" also does not address "global structural inequities" (Switzer 2013, 355). Issues lost in the Education for All Movement, like the Girl Effect movement, include the violence that girls face at school. One reason why the education-as-development focus has gained so much traction in the international arena is that it "provides the appearance of a neutral, purely humanitarian rally point for international donors" and corporate philanthropy (Grover 7). "The Girl Effect" situates private–public economic collaborations as a solution to global poverty, but it does not address how the privatization of aid and the globalization of capital contribute to the problem. Like "The Girl Effect", the Malala Effect performs affective and ideological labor, producing value for the nations, institutions, and global platforms through which Malala's story circulates.

In "Missionary Girl Power: Saving the 'Third World' One Girl at a Time," girl studies and education scholars Özlem Sensoy and Elizabeth Marshall highlight the mass-marketing of Muslim girls in distress for the consumption of North American youth.[12] The packaging of "'First world' girls as the saviors of caretakers of the 'Third world' (read brown/Muslim) girls" is "mired in this

colonial history where Islam is objectified as the obverse of Euro-American societies that self-identify as 'the West'" (296). Western media representations of Malala Yousafzai's story invoke these discourses of colonial paternalism, but they also repackage them as neoliberal narratives about "Third World" girl empowerment (302). Thus, as we consider the international production, circulation, and reception of Malala Yousafzai's story, we need to be attuned to these histories and to present contingencies that propel certain narratives to the foreground and restrain others. Anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod puts it well: "We need to be suspicious when neat cultural icons are plastered over messier historical and political narratives" (34).

Malala Yousafzai's life experiences may unsettle common representations of children in international news as "unworldly" and as "innocent of politics and history" (Malkki 62). But it was not long before elite international media lessened Malala's political agency by transforming her into a diminutive humanitarian subject. This diminutive portrayal further vilified the Taliban and placed Malala, as a girl child, at the pinnacle of the "hierarchy of innocence" (Moeller 2002). Not surprisingly, media coverage of her recovery attached Malala's exceptionality to her vulnerability. After emergency treatment in a Pakistani hospital, and six days after the shooting, Malala was relocated to Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham, England, known for its critical care unit for patients with gunshot wounds and major head injuries.[13] Video reports on Malala's condition appeared on several news websites accompanied by photographs of a poised Malala wrapped in a pink and red floral head scarf, sitting in a hospital chair in Britain reading colorful get-well cards from children across the world, a teddy bear at her side. The omnipresence of Malala's father reinforced perceptions of her as a child. Similarly, in her research on the figure of the child in transnational media representations, cultural anthropologist Liisa Malkki notes that what often survive in media are diminutive depictions of children configured as ambassadors of peace (71). Thus we must ask, whose interests are served by the distillation of Malala Yousafzai's political struggle for children's rights through humanitarian frameworks? When asked about the decision to transport Malala to Britain, for example, an unnamed senior US official claimed, "We never saw this in a political light. This was a humanitarian story, not a political one" (Walsh, "Pakistani Girl"). Couching Malala's story in humanitarian terms not only defused the ongoing adversarial relationship between the US and Pakistani governments; it also translated a political struggle into the palliative rhetoric of humanitarianism with its presumption of political neutrality.

Yet, a comparative analysis of mainstream international media coverage of the Taliban's assassination attempt against Malala Yousafzai and the Afghan

and Pakistan civilian casualties caused by NATO-led drone attacks reveals the relative inattention to international stories that implicate the US as a violent actor. In the *Dissident Voice,* Edward S. Herman reports that fourteen feature stories on Malala Yousafzai appeared in the *New York Times* between October 10 and 28, 2012, and only one story about the three children who died as a result of an Afghan strike by the NATO-led coalition appeared during that same period, and it was located in the paper's midsection. A study from the Bureau of Investigative Journalism at the City University of London reports that US drone strikes in Pakistan have killed between 411 and 884 civilians and 168 and 197 children ("Covert"). In contrast to the unnamed children in Afghanistan and Pakistan killed by drones, Malala Yousafzai is not a nameless casualty of war. She is not stripped of biographical specificity or legal personhood. She is a "righted subject"—she is perceived as a subject with rights. The contrast between representations of Malala and the anonymous children killed by drones demonstrates the high-stakes and political investment in controlling accounts of violence against children. What ethical principles can possibly justify such discrepancies? What ethical principles can possibly decree some children's suffering as unrepresentable? Judith Butler argues that the apprehension of another's precarity "takes place at the limits of established norms of recognition" (2010, xxx). In this case, the normative disposition that regards the death of civilians in war, especially children, as unacceptable is disavowed.

In contrast to depictions of First World girls as saviors of Third World girls, some commenters have construed Malala Yousafzai as an exceptional role model for girls in the West. *International Business Times* writer Palash R. Ghosh claims that the "most compelling and important person [of the year] was a beautiful, little, dark-haired, dark-eyed Pashtun girl from remote, rural Pakistan who simply wanted to go to school" (Ghosh). Ghosh ties Malala's exceptionality to perceptions of her as an exotic beautiful "other" and balances her exoticism with the familiar and seemingly simple desire to attend school. This balance between the exotic and the familiar is likely meant to alleviate any potential discomfort on the part of Western readers. Ghosh quotes extensively from the Irish novelist Sinead Moriarty, who compares Malala's "unselfish lifestyle with the behavior of spoiled, lazy, uncaring youths in the West." (qtd. in Ghosh). Moriarty writes, "Perhaps we need to take down the posters of Cheryl Cole and Rihanna from our teenagers' bedrooms and replace them with posters of Malala Yousafzai. Where are the girls who want to change the world, not the size of their breasts? Where are the teenagers who want to grow up and rule the world, not the tabloids?" (qtd. in Ghosh). Ghosh concurs: Malala is "no shallow, empty-headed, media-created idol—she is a flesh and

blood young woman who has already challenged the fearsome Taliban militants who still threaten her life" (Ghosh). Not only does this reporter reinforce the oppositional configuration of "First" and "Third" world girlhoods; he also codes public responsibility and advocacy as the power to purchase memorabilia. Though the marketing of tragedy and advocacy are not new strategies, Café Press's Malala posters, T-shirts, mugs, and shower curtains point to the "packaging [of] market-driven interests as social values" (Hegde 5), all exemplifying the domestication of iconic figures through corporate branding.

Malala's political identity is likewise domesticated through the stylized discourse of celebrity humanitarianism. At a concert in LA, Madonna performed a striptease down to a bra and G-string, revealing a temporary tattoo of Malala's name on her back. Embracing the liberal feminist notion of freedom as a form of sexual expression, Madonna beckons the audience to "express yourself." Madonna's performance implies a sharp contrast between the liberated Christian West and the repressive Muslim East. Madonna's striptease consigns Malala to a hypersexualized heteronormative subjectivity and strips Malala of her moral system and its complexity. Such re-mediations exemplify neoliberalism's ideological investment in the "biographical project of self-realization" (Bent 6). Madonna's striptease might be read, as media studies scholar Lilie Chouliaraki suggests in another context, as an expression of a posthumanitarian ethics of solidarity based on irony. Chouliaraki uses the term *ironic spectator* to refer to the "rise of individualist morality" (4) and neoliberal forms of posthumanitarianism that privilege the "pleasures of the self" (75) and align with entrepreneurial capitalism (79). As Madonna's striptease also illustrates, celebrity humanitarianism can serve as a mechanism for orientalist extensions (84). (See also Bystrom.)

Orientalist portraits of Malala as the exotic "other" are drawn in relation to another Pashtun girl—the Afghan Girl, whose nameless face appeared on the 1985 cover of *National Geographic Magazine*—a face that came to stand in for the plight of Afghan refugees (Hesford and Kozol 2005). In *Just Advocacy,* American studies scholar Wendy Kozol and I argue that the mass circulation of Steve McCurry's iconic and highly celebrated photograph of the anonymous Afghan Girl gendered the representational politics of pity in the American international imaginary. It is precisely this feminization of suffering and hopefulness that the US Pakistani writer Saleem Ali invoked in his *National Geographic* blog in which he allied Sharbat Gula and Malala Yousafzai as "Pashtun icons of hope" (Ali). Women and girls like Gula and Yousafzai are, he writes, a "testament to the feminine spirit that we often find as the most promising beacon at any frontier of human despair" (Ali). Not only are Gula and Yousafzai geographically proximate (Sharbat Gula lived in an Afghan refu-

gee camp in northwestern Pakistan, 100 miles from Malala Yousafzai's home-town); their circumstances, he argues, are politically proximate in that the violence that permeates both areas can be traced to the Cold War "rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, [which] ignite[d] the 'Afpak' Frontier with militarized religious fanaticism for decades to come" (Ali). Ali also draws attention to class distinctions between the girls' lives and circum-stances. "We will need to remember not only the Malala's of the urban edu-cated class of Pashtuns but also the Sharbat Gula's of remote and uneducated parts of the hinterland" (Ali). Like Sharbat Gula, Malala Yousafzai was dis-placed from her home because of violent conflict. Her family separated in 2009, when the Pakistani army moved into the Swat Valley to fight the Tali-ban. After three months, she returned home. Although Ali's goal may have been to widen the circle of recognition beyond exceptional figures, linking Malala to the intensely commercialized *National Geographic* image of the Afghan Girl sets up both girls as products of the American humanitarian imaginary, which opens up only certain public spaces and roles for Muslim girls. Malala's direct media interventions, however, distinguish her from the Afghan Girl, who from the first photograph until the *National Geographic* team and forensic investigators "found" her eighteen years later had no direct access to international media or social media platforms.

Standing before nearly a thousand youth activists and dignitaries at the United Nations on July 12, 2013, draped in the shawl of the late Benazir Bhutto, Pakistan's first woman prime minister, Malala Yousafzai diffuses the hero nar-rative that had been projected onto her.[14] In response to the UN declaration of July 12 (her birthday) as Malala Day, she declares: "Malala Day is not my day. Today is the day of every woman, everybody and every girl who have raised their voice for their rights. There are hundreds of human rights activists and social workers who are not only speaking for their rights, but who are strug-gling to achieve their goal of peace, education, and equality. Thousands of people have been killed by the terrorists and millions have been injured. I am just one of them. So here I stand, one girl among many. I speak not for myself, but so those without a voice can be heard" ("Malala Yousafzai Delivers"). Rhetorical moves of collectivization such as these enable iconic status but, as political scientist Thomas Olesen rightly notes, also paradoxically "require some degree of resistance to it" (320). He continues, "Self-interestedness and self-centeredness obstruct iconization because they disturb the collectiviza-tion of the individual" (320).

Throughout her speech, Malala invokes the lessons of "Mohamed, the prophet of mercy, Jesus Christ and Lord Buddha." Additionally, she makes the self-sacrificing move—"suffering without retaliation" (Gandhi 46)—that

we have come to associate with historical figures who espoused the philoso-phy of nonviolence, and that she mentions in her speech, including Mohandas K. Gandhi, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa, and Bacha Khan, an ethnic Pashtun who organized a nonviolent opposition to the British Raj in India. She also mentions Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the found-ing father of Pakistan and a Shiite, which furthers her call for the applica-tion of universal human rights principles in overcoming Sunni/Shia schisms. Although Malala draws on liberal internationalism's focus on individual rights and legal personhood, she does not prioritize liberalism's focus on bodily vio-lation and its conjoining of the heroic with the abject—in this way she works against the human rights and humanitarian spectacle of suffering. Instead, she turns to the philosophy of nonviolence to articulate social bonds and shared responsibility. Malala links nonviolence to the discourse of universal human rights, and yet her engagement with these utopian discourses moves toward a more critical humanism attuned to the exception *and* interdependence as foundations for global engagement.

Specifically, Malala rewrites the norms of social and political recognition by extending a nonviolent response to her adversaries—the Taliban terrorists who shot her—and to the children of the Taliban. "I am not against anyone," she says. "Neither am I here to speak in terms of personal revenge against the Taliban or any other terrorist group. I am here to speak for the right of education for every child. I want education for the sons and daughters of the Taliban and all the terrorists and extremists. I do not even hate the Talib who shot me. Even if there was a gun in my hand and he was standing in front of me, I would not shoot him" ("Malala Yousafzai Delivers"). Here Malala denies the Pakistani Taliban the display of animosity necessary for its ongo-ing violent campaign, and, more broadly, she condemns the violence of war. She says: "Peace is necessary for education. In many parts of the world, espe-cially Pakistan and Afghanistan, terrorism, war, and conflicts stop children from going to schools. We are really tired of these wars. [. . .] today, we call upon the world leaders to change their strategic policies in favor of peace and prosperity. [. . .] let us wage a glorious struggle against illiteracy, poverty and terrorism, let us pick up our books and our pens, they are the most power-ful weapons." Malala's focus on peace as a precondition for the realization of educational rights points toward a more expansive philosophy of rights than that espoused by Western powers in the post-9/11 context, wherein military-humanitarian interventions in the "Muslim World" have been premised on strict "us" and "them" identifications. Malala rejects the media impulse to reduce her to a spectacle of gendered victimization. Just as she rejects the exceptional narrative for herself, she incorporates the children of the Taliban

as part of universal humanity and thereby denies their exceptionality as well. Malala's denial of exceptionality counters liberal internationalism's normative scenes of political recognition and value hierarchies, reorienting "literacy for all" campaigns to peace and nonviolence resolutions to conflict.

In aligning herself with the children of the Taliban, Malala places the rights of all children before the political concerns of those involved in the conflict and throws political actors into an irreconcilable conflict. How can the parties to the conflict maintain their political-military positions and keep all children safe? Moreover, in rejecting the subjectivity of victim that has been projected onto her, as she has said, "I do not think of myself as a girl who was shot," Malala carries her criticism to the creation of gendered spectacles at the local level. For example, in her memoir, she comments on the Taliban's public flogging of a teenage girl who apparently "came out of her house with a man who was not her husband" (170). Malala continues,

> You could hear the Taliban shouting, "Hold her down. Hold her hands down." At one point during the flogging her burqa slips and they stop [. . .] to adjust it then carry on beating her. They hit her thirty-four times. A crowd had gathered but did nothing. [. . .] A woman filmmaker in Islamabad got hold of it and it was shown on Pakistan TV over and over, and then around the world. People were rightly outraged, but this reaction seemed odd [. . .] it showed they had no idea of the awful things going on in our valley. I wished this outrage extended to the Taliban's banning of girls' education. (*I Am Malala* 170)

Here Malala points toward the mass circulation of spectacular images of gendered violence that reduce crimes against women to cultural practices alone and that stigmatize Muslim communities as exceptionally violent. In upholding Islamic norms of female modesty while refusing social norms of public silence, Malala places her advocacy for girls' rights within the Islamic tradition. In her memoir, she writes, "If I am speaking for my rights, for the rights of girls, I am not doing anything wrong. It's my duty to do so. God wants to see how we behave in such situations. There is a saying in the Quran, 'The falsehood has to go and the truth will prevail'" (141). In the epilogue to her memoir, she writes, "Today we all know education is our basic right. Not just in the West; Islam too has given us this right. Islam says every girl and every boy should go to school. In the Quran it is written, God wants us to have knowledge" (311). For Malala, rights are not beholden to Western, secular notions of autonomy and freedom. If we accept sociocultural anthropologist Saba Mahmood's conception of agency as "embedded in an agent's relation-

ship to norms" (qtd. in Lyon 94–95), as I believe we should, then we need to recognize Malala Yousafzai's agency in inhabiting and negotiating cultural norms, including those attached to the legal and moral discourses of Islam.

Rhetorical Identifications and Normative Recognitions

The "I am Malala" petition, launched by Gordon Brown, the former prime minister of England and UN Envoy for Global Education, exemplifies the risks and compensations of normative identifications. Signatories to the "I am Malala" petition pledged to take up the UN Millennium Development goal to get 61 million primary-school-age children presently shut out of school into school by the end of 2015. Each signature to the "I am Malala" petition may rhetorically take on the identity of Malala. However, similar to Angelina Jolie's universal claim "We all are Malala," which Jolie expressed in a piece published in the *Daily Beast* when reflecting on how she explained the assassination attempt to her young children, identifications that purportedly give voice to the "other," especially when uttered by those who occupy spaces of structural privilege and relative safety, often function as rhetorical acts of self-creation to the extent that the enunciator incorporates the identity of the "other" into her own identity. We are certainly not all Malala. In *Deliberative Acts,* rhetorical studies scholar Arabella Lyon observes that "in its seemingly abstract impartiality, identification hides the powerful differences of material conditions, suasory practices, semiotic technologies, and discursive structures, all of which lend force to identification as a vehicle for creating outcomes and consensus" (60).[15] Given the ease with which the "I am Malala" petition enables identification, it is not surprising that the petition met its goal of delivering one million signatures to Pakistani President Asif Ali Zadari and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon by November 10, 2012. Soon thereafter, on December 10, 2012, the Pakistani president announced the establishment of a $10 million education fund in Malala's name.

The title of Malala Yousafzai's memoir, *I Am Malala,* might be read as a belated, defiant response to the Talib who posed the intended fatal question, to which no one on the school bus that day replied. Malala's declaration "I am Malala" invokes the trauma of the violent encounter and in so doing compels readers to occupy the historical position of the witness to such violence. Yet Malala's declaration also provides a deliberative opportunity for nonviolent recognition and deliberation from her readers. But what constitutes a deliberative response in this context? Have deliberative opportunities contracted into undemanding forms of cultural consumption? And, if so, who is con-

suming whom? As readers are we simply consuming another mass-marketed, composite "invest in the girl of the global South" narrative? Are we consuming ourselves? Are we too caught up in the narcissism of exceptionality and celebrity to create deliberative publics?

Photographs of Pakistani girls holding closely cropped photographs of Malala on placards and T-shirts at vigils, tributes, and protests divert attention from identification as substitution toward the process of recognition itself. Among the most instructive of the photographs that circulated in international news media, for my purposes here, is one of young girls at a protest in Lahore, just days after the Taliban's brutal assault against Malala. The girls are affiliated with a school developed by the Pak-Swedish Teachers Association [PSTA] in Pakistan. According to its website, the association's purpose is "fighting poverty and enforcing basic rights in accordance with the UN Charter. PSTA does so through supporting education programs, female cooperatives and health care programs." PSTA declares that its "aim is to eradicate illiteracy from the society and make every child a useful educated citizen." In addition to images of Malala pasted onto get-well placards, there are also several posters that host the phrase "I am also Malala." The addition of the adverb "also" is a recognition of difference. It is not a substitution of me for you. In this way, one might argue that the posters diffract rather than reflect identification. The declaration "I am also Malala" moves away from depictions of Malala as an exceptional, singular figure, toward an acknowledgment of the ordinary and widespread violence against women and girls. "I am also Malala" implies a shared rhetorical vision but not a collapsed identification. However, as distant audiences, we are NOT also Malala. Nor do these images present an occasion for self-recognition. Pakistani youth holding "I am also Malala" signs do not present audiences with the authority of conferring or withholding recognition; that role has been taken from us—and importantly so.

Yet, the "Malala Effect" also encompasses the risks of political affiliation. Although the girls' school that Malala attended and that was run by her father was "open and running at full strength" in July 2013, during that same period the Taliban's violent campaign against girls' education continued relatively unabated. Many families feared that if they defied the Taliban's edicts on girls' schooling their daughters might "become the next Malala" (Siddiqui and Walsh A6). Correspondingly, Malala requested that Swat's provincial government reverse its decision to rename a school after her, because such an affiliation could put students at greater risk (Masood).

Some might assume that the images of Pakistani girls holding up signs written in English were orchestrated only for Western eyes. Such a view, however, overlooks the fact that although the national language of Pakistan is

Urdu, like Malala, many Pakistani children learn to speak and write in English at school. Thus, to describe these children's rhetorical acts as a capitulation to Western audiences alone is to fail to register the risks these particular children face in politically aligning themselves with Malala and, more broadly, in their efforts to claim a deliberative space among local and global publics. US audiences may not be accustomed to bearing witness to acts of solidarity among "foreign" children. Typically, Americans are either targeted for charitable donations that aid girls of the global South or asked to serve as witnesses to the alleged liberation of "foreign" women and girls in areas where the US has militarily intervened. Stories of oppressed Muslim women and girls are central to the normalization of US hostilities toward countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq. Consider the staging of the mass media spectacle of Afghan women in Kabul unveiling themselves immediately after the US bombing of Afghanistan post 9/11, and the use of such images to bolster support for the US on the grounds that the invasion liberated Afghan women. Readers may also recall reports of foreign newspaper photographers having coerced women into removing their burqas for the camera as evidence of the liberation of the city (Hesford and Kozol 6).

The PSTA performance contrasts with the campaign of the All Pakistan Private Schools Federation [APPSF], comprising 173,000 private schools, which invoked the slogan "I am not Malala, I am Muslim, I am Pakistani" as a book title and rebuttal to Malala's memoir, which the Federation banned (Ghani). Mirza Kashif Ali, president of APPSF indicates, "The book is written with the aim to reveal the truth and counter anti-Islamic propaganda and expose the nefarious designs of anti-Islam forces" ("I am Not Malala"). Ali continues, "Malala is a darling of the west and Shiv Sena, the same people who created al Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS), have created Malala."

Correspondingly, freelance journalist Assed Baig contemplates the motives behind Western media's spotlight on Malala in his *Huffington Post Politics UK Blog.* He argues Malala that has been cast as the "'good native'" and that her story, as told by Western media, partakes in the "'White Savior Complex,'" which demonizes the non-white Muslim man and justifies Western military operations in the region. Khawaja Hamzah Sait makes a similar point in *CounterPunch,* when he argues that the US has "hijacked" the Taliban's attack against Malala Yousafzai "to provide moral patina to America's equally devastating wars in South Asia. Instead of a focus on the political contours of the tragedy, mainstream media have tragically peddled, unchallenged, the tired Orientalist tropes that legitimize American militarism in the region. It is a page right out of Nicholas Kristof's playbook: the depoliticization of a fundamentally political event."

A group of young Muslim women interviewed by Diane Sawyer for the ABC News feature *20/20* "Unbreakable: One Girl Changing the World" express similar observations about the media appropriation of Malala's story. One young woman says about Malala, "I think she's not wise. I think she is propaganda for the media." In a voice-over, Sawyer tells viewers that she met these women, whom she characterizes as "extreme hardline fundamentalists," in England, and sat with them "to try to comprehend why they oppose a full education of the kind girls get in the West." She asks the group, "What are girls learning that is wrong?" One woman replies, "Freedom and democracy, obviously, is not from Islam. It totally is the opposite. Freedom and democracy and Islam cannot coexist. It is either there's Islam or there's non-Islam. Either you are Muslim or you are non-Muslim. [. . .] there's no in between." Sawyer's voice-over continues, "They told me they choose to wear the covering, the niqab, as a kind of guard against the corruption of women in the West." Here the women critique secular, liberal feminist notions of freedom and desire. Another woman speaks, "A woman is seen as no more than a sex object in [Western] society. Her contribution to society depends on how much cleavage she shows or how much leg she shows. The Islamic teaching—teaches us to guard our honor, guard our chastity to, you know, protect ourselves." Sawyer follows up, "And when you see someone completely uncovered like me, what do you think?" To which several women respond, "Oppressed." "Oppressed?" Sawyer asks? "Oppressed because you are not subservient to the one who created you," one woman says, "rather, you are subservient; you are slave to your own desires."

These women speak with authority and passion. They do not fit and clearly reject the mainstream composite image of the silent, repressed Muslim women in need of rescue by the West. But do they offer an alternative feminism or notion of freedom rooted in Islam? Or do they reify mainstream portrayals of feminism and Islam as putative opposites? Similar to Western composites of Muslim women, the group's unilateral depiction of Western feminism turns on simple oppositions, such as secular freedom and religious constraint, that masquerade the diversity of feminisms. Sawyer and the women interviewed inadvertently collude in consigning Western feminism to its obsession with freedom as a form of sexual expression. In failing to acknowledge how "all choice is conditioned by as well as imbricated with power," to draw on the insights of political theorist Wendy Brown, "Unbreakable: One Girl Changing the World," one might argue, presents "an impoverished account of freedom" (qtd. in Abu-Lughod 19). Also missing from the *20/20* report is coverage of the history of women's activism and struggles over justice in the region, especially around discriminatory family law (Abu-Lughod 177). The absence of

this information reinforces Malala's exceptionality—an exceptionality rooted in broader discourses over tradition and development.

Immediately after the group interview, Nihah Awad, the executive director of the Council on American–Islamic Relations, presents a solidly Islamic-centrist view aligned with Malala Yousafzai. He says, "If there is a battle for the soul of Islam, good Muslims, like a girl named Malala, will win." Awad continues, "To me, she represents what Islamic values are. She's bigger than all of them [Taliban] because she embodies Islamic values of seeking knowledge, standing up for justice. If the Taliban believe in God, they should know that God said the killing of an innocent person is the equivalent of the killing of the entire humanity." American journalist Nicholas Kristof appears next and says, "You have this teenage girl who's been willing to speak up dramatically for a change, even when she got letters from the Taliban warning her not to, even after she was shot. It's a reminder that at times we can find leadership in the most unexpected quarters. The greatest threat to the Taliban is not American drones; it's girls like Malala." Given the post-9/11 equation of Islam with terrorism, how might American viewers, including American Muslims, interpret the succession of positions from fundamentalist to centrist Islam to secular liberalism? Will viewers identify with Awad to challenge the women who proclaim the incommensurability of democracy and Islam? Or does the centrist Islamic position function in this context as yet another mechanism to marginalize Muslim women as deprived "others"? Like those who uncritically depict Malala as the "good native," Kristof deflects attention from Malala's critique of NATO-led drone strikes and her call to world leaders to the end violent occupations.

To typecast Malala in the "good native" role effaces the sheer complexity of her inhabitation and negotiation of norms as a historical, living being. During her meeting with President Obama, before her presentation at the World Bank headquarters in Washington, DC, "she expressed [her] concerns that drone attacks are fueling terrorism. Innocent victims are killed in these acts, and they lead to resentment among the Pakistani people. If we refocus efforts on education it will make a big impact" (Shen). This statement was not part of the official White House statement. Malala joined President Obama as he signed a proclamation celebrating International Day of the Girl. The proclamation stated that "on every continent, there are girls who will go on to change the world in ways we can only imagine, if only we allow them the freedom to dream."

Although her meeting with President Obama and the publication of her memoir, in which Malala also critiques NATO-led drone strikes, postdate these early accusations of her complicity with Western imperialism, sweeping

accusations such as these preserve, and problematically so, the binary logic that "judges Muslim women's rights to be either collusion with imperialism (to be denounced) or a hopeful sign of universal emancipation and progress (to be celebrated)" (Abu-Lughod 170). To claim that Malala simply reproduces secular liberal norms therefore ignores how she deploys rights arguments as tools to address the needs of women within religious communities. Malala's rhetoric echoes that of women reformers in Muslim communities around the world who refuse to choose between religion and rights and who turn our attention to the stymied debates over rights within religion and default Enlightenment notions of religious sovereignty within human rights law (Sunder 269).[16] As gender studies scholar Shenila Khoja-Moolji notes, "Her autography details the Pashtun ethics of care and support" and "reveals complex Pakistani political subjectivities and the extensive local alliances that are needed for women to experience empowerment" (397).

International human rights law and activism are deeply entrenched in hierarchical scenes of recognition and the production of both violated and righted subjects. Transnational feminists have drawn attention to the paradoxes of rights-based arguments, which "allow people to make claims, but lock them into fixed identities defined by their injuries" (Abu-Lughod 175). This is especially true with regard to Muslim women and girls in South Asia who are victims of Islamic terrorism. Subaltern studies scholars (see Chakrabarty and Spivak, among others) have challenged Western historicist views that envision a singular secular future for the entire world. Although Malala invokes some of the regulatory structures and rhetoric of liberal internationalism and liberal feminism, she also unsettles the binary construal of Third World Muslim girls as violated subjects upon whom rights must be conferred. Furthermore, Malala used the UN platform to contest the international community's concessions to violence in the name of rights. In upholding her faith and linking the philosophy of nonviolence and rights to the Islamic tradition, Malala challenges binary configurations of religion and rights, including the right to education, and steers us toward an understanding of political rhetoric and literacy as a transnational process of mediating how norms are lived.

In sum, the "Malala Effect" is rooted in the logic of exceptionality and celebrity culture that underwrites neoliberal internationalism, humanitarianism, and global feminism and its differential distribution of vulnerability and valued lives. A materialist-rhetorical reading helps reveal these exceptional logics and differentials affixed to Malala as a global icon. Media, government, and corporate stakeholders have tamed Malala's rhetoric by translating her resistance into stock neoliberal narratives of girl empowerment. Yet, Malala's navigation of diverse geopolitical agendas and media point to the distributive

qualities of political agency and its material-discursive contingencies. Thus, we need to understand Malala's agency in the emergence and mediation of the "Malala Effect" as a complex relationship to norms and as a struggle with those in position of power to authorize the form that norms take.

Trafficking Sexual Humanitarianism

In "Gendering Victimhood: Western Media and the Sinjar Genocide," Arab and Islamic studies scholar Veronica Buffon and Kurdish studies scholar Christine Allison observe Western media reproduction of the "hyper-visibility" of female violation and trauma endured by Yazidi women and girls who have been victims of Islamic terrorism. These patterns of representation, they argue, have silenced "Sinjari Yezidi's narratives and subjectivities" (176). As Shuman and I (2018) have also observed, Western media coverage of the Yazidi genocide has focused almost exclusively on ISIS enslavement and rape of Yazidi women and girls. But what Buffon and Allison do not consider is how Yazidi women and girls strategically navigate the exceptional narratives and subjectivities projected onto them. Yazidi survivors' stories may stand on their own as testimonies to Islamic terrorists' atrocities, specifically gender-based terrorism and sexual violence, but the stories are also part of inter-secting, sometimes contradictory, narratives that advance particular political plots and platforms. Attention to these plots and platforms yields important insights into how representations of Islamic terrorism and female victimization enjoin the concepts of female sexuality, national security, and patriarchy, and how these links drive US policy and UN security agendas.

Sexual violence has been at the foreground of international policy for several decades; the UN Security Council has passed numerous resolutions condemning sexual violence in conflict and war. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, US ratification of the UNCRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, but not of the UNCRC itself, exemplifies the priority focus on human trafficking as a transnational crime rather than a human rights issue. Chief among my concerns is to examine the fusion of human trafficking and terrorism discourses—a fusion, as transnational feminist studies scholar Pardis Mahdavi puts it, that "presents a convergence of moral panics, or public anxieties pertaining to immoral behavior about sexuality, Islam, and immigration" (1). Although Mahdavi does not address the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria's trafficking of Yazidi women and girls, the material-discursive fusion of the US wars on terror and fight against human trafficking resurface in the political coverage of the Yazidi crisis, specifically through *sexual humani-*

tarian appeals attached to American exceptionality and Christian moral typologies.

Sexual humanitarianism, a phrase coined by queer migration studies scholar Nicola Mai, thrives on a lexicon of moral sentiments, graphically sexualized dichotomies between victimization and agency and between freedom and slavery, and melodramatic heteronormative narratives of sexual danger and rescue (Vance 138). I invoke the concept of sexual humanitarianism to point to the eroticization of violence and mobilization—trafficking—of sexualized dichotomies in representations of the Yazidi crisis. Moreover, the human trafficking of female victims of Islamic terrorism has been invoked as a call for US military and humanitarian interventions. In short, the gendered ethnoreligious vulnerability of Yazidi women and girls under radical Islamic theology and the mobilization of the spectacle of sex slavery in both terrorist propaganda and human rights reporting exemplify the trafficking of sexual humanitarianism and, thus, call for further study of the material rhetoric of gendered vulnerability and gendered terror.

The Yazidi are a distinct ethnoreligious minority in northern Iraq. As a community of approximately 600,000 people, they are the second largest non-Muslim community in Iraq. Though their faith has elements of both Christianity and Islam, they are neither Muslim nor Christian.[17] The Yazidi maintain Indigenous pre-Islamic and pre-Zoroastrian practices. Many Yazidi lived in the town of Sinjar, which borders Iraq's Kurdish region, home to mostly Arabs and Kurds, who have jostled for control over the territory for centuries.[18] The Yazidi have been impoverished and vulnerable for decades and in the past targeted by al-Qaeda (Kweskin).[19] "The Yazidis' situation deteriorated under Saddam Hussein, whose targeting of the Iraqi Kurds resulted in the internal displacement and unemployment of many Yezidis" (Henne and Hackett).[20] According to a 2016 UN Human Rights Council Report, ISIS has committed atrocities against the Yazidi and other ethnic and religious communities in the region, including Iraqi Christians, Shiite Muslims, and fellow Sunni Muslims ("New UN Report"). ISIS targets the Yazidi minority because they see them as infidels, as polytheists, and as devil worshippers.[21] During its August 2014 attack on Sinjar,[22] ISIS killed Yazidi men and boys and older women and abducted Yazidi women and girls, many of whom were taken into Syria to be sold in markets as sex slaves. In an attempt to flee from ISIS, many Yazidis headed up Mount Sinjar, where hundreds perished because of high temperatures and a lack of food, water, and medical care.[23] ISIS leadership emphasizes a narrow reading of the Quran and other religious rulings to justify the enslavement of Yazidi women and girls—a reading that moderate Muslim scholars and leaders have condemned. ISIS had developed an

elaborate infrastructure for human trafficking and sexual slavery, consisting of a network of warehouses where victims are viewed and sold, transportation systems, how-to slavery manuals, and slave contracts notarized by the Islamic State–run courts.[24] An estimated 360,000 Yazidi have been displaced, many are now in refugee camps, and, at the time of this writing, approximately 3,500 women, girls, and some men remain in ISIS captivity.[25]

Although US and UK press coverage of ISIS's enslavement of Yazidi women and girls variously emphasizes sexual horror and slavery, whereas American coverage focuses on terrorist brutality, both UK and US media sensationalize the rape of young girls and children as witnesses to sexual assaults. The young age of the girls is repeatedly emphasized—a *Telegraph* headline proclaims: "Yazidi girls as young as eight raped as ISIL sex slaves" (Sherlock). An *AFP* report indicates that girls are sold for "a pack of cigarettes" or as little as ten dollars (Chulov), girls are given as "gifts" (Sherlock; Salih 2014) or assigned negotiable "price tags" (Sherlock) for buyers, ranging from "a few tens of dollars for older women to $170 for children" (Spencer 2015). Numerous articles describe girls stripped naked and evaluated as merchandise (Chulov; Sherlock). A *Time* article reports that within the ISIS caliphate, not only is the systematic rape and sexual enslavement of non-Muslim women condoned, survivors of ISIS abduction and rape have reported that "ISIS fighters believe that if a woman is raped by 10 Muslims, she will become converted" (Alter).

Many in the US first learned about the ISIS enslavement of Yazidi women and girls from mainstream media reports and through the lexicon of sexual slavery and human trafficking, a lexicon that the UNCRC Optional Protocol reiterates. Chief among these stories was a front-page story in the *New York Times* on August 14, 2015, entitled "Enslaving Young Girls: The Islamic State Builds a Vast System of Rape." Foreign correspondent Rukmini Callimachi opens the article with a graphic description of an Islamic fighter's rape of a twelve-year-old Yazidi girl bound and gagged as the fighter "knelt beside the bed and prostrated himself in prayer before getting on top of her." The article concludes with the testimony of a thirty-four-year-old Yazidi woman, who was repeatedly raped by a Saudi fighter in the Syrian city of Shadadi. The woman pleads with the Saudi fighter to stop raping another twelve-year-old girl, to which he responds, "She's not a little girl. She's a slave. . . . And having sex with her pleases God." As in many journalistic accounts of the Yazidi crisis, this girl's narrative includes the voice of the perpetrator,[26] which serves as evidence both of the atrocities committed against her and of the terrorist's justification for such violent acts. Embedded within the Yazidi woman's story is the Islamic terrorists' mythical worldview. Callimachi reports that Islamic

terrorists use sexual slavery as a "recruiting tool to lure men from deeply conservative Muslim societies, where casual sex is taboo and dating is forbidden." Characterizations of ISIS's enslavement and rape of Yazidi women as symptomatic of repressed Muslim masculinities and framing acts of sexual violence as a epiphenomena of culture or psychology risk prioritizing sexual motives for terrorist acts over social-political causes and analyses (Puar and Rai 124).

An alternative to the cultural pathology argument emerged from Yazidi activists and spiritual leaders, and from within the UN. The UN Secretary-General's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Zainab Hawa Bangura, in her briefing to the UN Security Council on June 2, 2016, appealed to both the Yazidi and the international community to turn away from the cultural framing of sexual slavery. "Sexual violence is not cultural but criminal," she said.[27] In a similar move, Yazidi spiritual leader Baba Sheikh Khurto Hajji Ismail appealed on two occasions (September 6, 2014, and February 6, 2015) to Yazidi families to welcome back into the community women and girls who had been held as sex slaves. He said, "These survivors remain pure Yezidis and no one may injure their Yezidi faith because they were subjected to a matter outside their control. We therefore call on everyone to cooperate with and support these victims so that they may again live their normal lives and integrate into society" (HRW). The spiritual leader's appeal represents a break in traditional Yazidi marriage norms, which forbid Yazidi women to marry or to have sexual relations outside their community or caste. The iteration of this doctrinal change importantly diminished the shaming of victims, and, as Bangura reports, once the women heard that they would be welcomed back, the number of escapees increased and suicide rates declined.[28]

Bangura's call to the international community to shift from framing sexual violence and terrorism as cultural pathologies and the spiritual leader's appeal may counter stereotypes about gender violence in the Middle East and represent a rupture of traditional Yazidi attitudes about sexual purity and marriage. Nevertheless, we also have to consider that by allowing for a process of reclamation, these appeals may in the end reify rather than fundamentally challenge normative cultural codes. Consider the explanation of another Yazidi spiritual leader, Baba Chawish, for the doctrinal change: "Iraqi's Yazidis are already an extreme minority in the country. Losing thousands of Yazidi women and their children would be unsustainable. Now we've said that the door is open for everyone who has been raped, they can still be purified and baptized . . . as if nothing happened to them" (S. George May 2015). To point to how male Yazidi spiritual leaders serve as cultural brokers responding to the vulnerability of the entire Yazidi community is not to suggest that Yazidi cultural traditions are the cause of women's vulnerability to Islamic terrorism

(see Hesford and Shuman 2018). Islamic fundamentalism, not Yazidi cultural traditions, is ISIS's primary inspiration for these atrocities. Moreover, many of the women were married but ISIS slaughtered their husbands. Therefore, the women's concerns transcend the concept of purity. For example, there remain unresolved issues such as the status of children born to those who were raped. Although ISIS propaganda may solidify images of Islam as monstrous and barbaric, and thereby serve as a moral alibi for Western military-humanitarian interventions and occupations in the region, narratives such as Nadia Murad's (to which I turn in the next section) compel us to move beyond the discourse of cultural pathology to think about global bio-icons as assemblages of power that rework cultural, national, and political boundaries and vulnerabilities.

In "Yazidi Girls Sold as Sex Slaves while Women March against Trump" (24 Jan. 2017), Turkish reporter Uzay Bulut expresses "sad[ness] [that] many of the organizers and participants of the recent 'Women's March' chose to ignore women being tortured and exterminated by Islamic terrorists." She writes, "If only these women felt as motivated to protest against the enslavement, rape, and torture of Yazidi women and children, as about the cost of tampons." The reference to tampons is to a line in a poem read by Ashley Judd at the Women's March, which asked why "tampons are taxed when Viagra and Rogaine are not." The reporter argues, "Women who suffer under Islamist governments" would find Women's March protesters' accusation that "Trump will take away their rights" "laughable." "It is not ayatollahs that have come to power in the U.S." "The women's march, for all the good intentions . . . violated the core principle of human rights: 'The worst first.'" "To so many persecuted peoples in the Middle East, Trump's presidency represents hope for a positive change." Not only does this reporter fail to recognize structural sexism and racism in the US health care system, not to mention attempts by the religious right to control women's sexuality and reproduction; she recreates the hierarchy of victimization that pits US women's rights (which this reporter casts as hyperfeminized and minimal) against Middle Eastern women's rights (which are cast as under threat by hypermasculinized Muslim men.)

Additionally, as we would learn soon after the article's publication, the Trump administration betrayed the Yazidi community with its Executive Order Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the US. Among those affected by the order were a young Iraqi Yazidi couple,[29] and one hundred Yazidis waiting for IOM asylum applications to be processed (Coles). Indeed, human rights lawyers have expressed concern that Yazidis might not be given priority because Trump only mentioned the persecution of Syrian Christians in an interview with the Christian Broadcasting Network, in which he incorrectly reported that Christians were persecuted more than Muslims

were and that it was harder for Christians to enter the US as refugees than it was for Muslim refugees.[30] Similarly, many conservative reports on the Yazidi crisis privilege a Christian victim typology that erases Yazidi ethnoreligious particularisms in order to position them on the "good" side of the Christian conservative moral universe.[31] In some conservative news reports, Yazidi metonymically *stand in for* Christians.

Consider, for example, the Fox News story (16 July 2016) "ISIS Tightens Grip on Yazidi Captives Held as Sex Slaves," an article about ISIS's tactics of enslavement that nevertheless prominently features a map of Christian persecution across the globe.[32] The only other allusion to Christianity appears in a comparison of religious rationalizations for slavery from the Bible and the Quran. The author concludes the comparison with the statement "most Muslim scholars backed the banning of slavery," citing Quranic verses that say that freeing them is a blessing. Some "hard-liners, however, continue to insist that under Shariah sex slavery must be permitted, though the Islamic State group is the first in the modern era to bring it into organized practice." Both the map and the comparison mobilize the Yazidi crisis to advance a form of *moral exceptionalism* that directs attention to the persecution of Christians in Muslim-majority countries.[33] Here, the Christian nation is masculinized and cast as a protector and savior, and Yazidi men are demasculinized for not protecting their women. My aim is not to diminish atrocities committed against Christians or Jews in Iraq or Syria[34] but to point out how US moral exceptionalism attributes a value to Christian and non-Muslim life over Muslim death. According to a 2011 US government report from the National Counterterrorism Center, most victims of Islamic terrorism across the globe are Muslim.[35] Alt-right conservative media's embrace of a Christian-centered counterterrorism policy abroad conveniently erases white nationalist terrorism and anti-Muslim violence pursued in the name of Christianity in the US. Through its focus on sexual violation, the CNS Media Research Center, a conservative watchdog organization, for example, reinforces a gendered orientalist rescue narrative that locates gendered, racial, and ethnonationalist acts of terror outside the moral boundaries of the US, expunging the US of implication as a violent actor and truncating the necessary assessment of interlocking regional and global culpabilities.[36]

Widespread unemployment, poverty, and insecurity in post-occupation Iraq have contributed to gender-based violence, sexual violence, and the trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation and prostitution. Thus, while sexual violence existed before 2003 under the regime of Saddam Hussein, the increase in sexual violence since the US invasion points to the role of the war on terror in such atrocities and more broadly to the failures of the

UN international community to halt such violence, as well as to the failures of the Iraqi political parties and Iraqi army. While the Kurdish regional government (KRG) "has used women's and gender-based issues to demarcate itself from the central government in Baghdad," it has also tended "to pursue more traditional ways of addressing gender-based and sexual violence, using tribal and family dispute mechanisms, often to the detriment of women receiving justice" (Al-Ali 20). Host to thousands of Syrian refugees and Iraqi displaced persons, the KRG has been hard-pressed to take in Yazidi victims of Islamic terrorism. Meanwhile, although atrocities against the Yazidi women and girls have been widely reported in international media, as Ali-Ali notes, "very little seems to be done to actually support those who escaped and survived" (21). Thus, part of the genealogy of gender-based terrorism involves recognition of the diverse modalities and histories of gender-based sexual violence (22), and "the complex interplay of inter- and transnational, regional, national and local factors in shaping the specific political economies and socio-historical contexts in which sexual violence might become more widespread" (23). The representational genealogy of gender-based Islamic terrorism exemplifies the trafficking of moral, cultural, and sociopolitical exceptionalities that thrive on the spectacle of female violation and subjection, with little attention to the assemblages of power and political formations (militarism, colonialism, imperialism, globalization, neoliberalism) and regional, national, and international materialities that exacerbate the vulnerabilities of certain bodies, communities, populations, and territories. These genealogies likewise framed the emergence of Nadia Murad as a global humanitarian icon and media attribution as the Yazidi Malala.

Nadia Murad: The Yazidi Malala

One of the most widely circulated stories in international, UK, and US mainstream news (*BBC, Independent, Business Times, Newsweek, New York Times, Time*) and social media (twitter, Facebook) about Islamic terrorism against the Yazidis is the UN video testimony of Yazidi survivor Nadia Murad [Basee Taha], who testified at the UN Security Council on Maintenance of International Peace and Security on December 16, 2015.[37] Delivered in her native Kurdish language, Nadia's testimony provides detailed descriptions of what happened to her and to others. Nadia was captured when ISIS came to her village in Kocho on August 15, 2014. Nadia reports that ISIS ordered everyone to the school and separated the men from the women (312 men were murdered, as were 80 elderly women). Nadia, and other young women, were taken to the

occupied city of Mosul, where they were given to fighters who enslaved them. Nadia testifies about the night that her captor "beat [her] up, forced [her] to undress, and put [her] in a room with six militants," [who] "continued to commit crimes to [her] body until [she] became unconscious" (2015, 1). In November 2014, after one of her captors left the house unlocked, she escaped and was transported by a poor Sunni Muslim family to a refugee camp, where she was selected to become part of a program that helped Yazidi refugees seek asylum in Stuttgart, Germany.

In her memoir, *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity, and My Fight Against the Islamic State,* Nadia Murad addresses regional conflicts and betrayals by "Sunni Arab neighbors [who] welcomed the militants and even joined them" and the Peshmerga Kurds who had sworn to protect the Yazidi but who "fled Sinjar, piling into trucks and driving back to safety before the Islamic State militants could reach them" (87). These regional betrayals forecast even larger international betrayals at the core of the memoir and Nadia's call for international militarized humanitarian intervention on behalf of the Yazidi and for international recognition of ISIS atrocities against the Yazidi as crimes against humanity—as genocide.

Nadia's story, like Malala's life story, has been framed as an exceptional transformation narrative—from victim to survivor of Islamic terrorism to international human rights witness and celebrity activist.[38] Indeed, Nadia Murad has been labeled by some "the Yazidi Malala" and has achieved celebrity status, especially after her Nobel Peace Prize nomination and award. US Representative Samantha Power's introduction to Nadia testimony before the UN Security Council reinforced the exceptional individual narrative. Power emphasized Nadia's bravery in speaking out: "I cannot imagine how painful it must be every time you are asked to recount your experience. And your being here and speaking so bravely to all of us is a testament to you and your dignity—and it's of course the most powerful rejection of what ISIL stands for" (Murad 2015, 1). Speaking out to strangers, even sympathetic ones, surely requires bravery.[39] But Power's characterization contrasts, to some degree, with the position Nadia claims for herself. Similar to Malala's expressed declaration of collectivity before the UN, in her UN testimony Nadia says, "But this is not just about my suffering; it is about collective suffering." Despite Nadia's reference to "collective suffering," her story, like Malala's, has been mobilized in ways that highlight her individual exceptionality, an exceptionality that is sometimes directed toward the transformation of liberal feminist audiences. My intent in drawing attention to these frames is not to deny the force of Nadia's UN testimony but to question the politics of exceptionality claimed *for* her and the cultural and political work such claims advance.

We can see this transference in the placement of Nadia's story as part of the V-Day feminist campaign to end violence against women. Feminist playwright and V-Day founder Eve Ensler's profile of Nadia for *Time* magazine's "100 Most Influential People" exemplifies liberal feminist consumers' insatiable appetite for the exceptional (resilient) individual. Resilience, beyond a valued character feature, is also a fundamental principle of neoliberal philosophy. In order for resilience to be sustainable, the threat of terrorism needs to be paramount and permanent (Bracke 59). We have to ask whether the construal of Murad's resilience lies in her capacity to align with international protocols and subjectivities that accord with particular human security agendas.

Ensler locates Nadia in "a long, invisible history of fierce indomitable women who rise from the scorched earth of rape during war to break the odious silence and demand justice and freedom for their sisters." Ensler writes, "Nadia is a beacon of light and truth—a reminder that it was the American-led war in Iraq that laid the path for ISIS, that U.S. arms left behind on the battlefield fell into the hands of ISIS, and that the U.S. waited too long to intervene in the mass killing and enslavement of the Yazidi people. Nadia Murad is risking everything to awaken us. I hope we are listening, because we too are responsible." Ensler's acknowledgment of US culpability is certainly important. But in linking Nadia's political agency to our "awakening"—presumably V-Day affiliates—Ensler positions Nadia as a "tool to be wielded in the name of [liberal] feminism" (Auchter). Organizations such as V-Day have increased global awareness about gender violence; however, to construe Nadia's agency as a by-product of another's recognition prioritizes the self-actualization of those aligned with V-Day's mission and rhetorical identification as the basis for feminist solidarity across difference.[40]

To claim that Nadia Murad simply reproduces secular feminist liberal norms would be to ignore how Nadia, again like Malala, deploys rights arguments as tools to address the needs of Yazidi women within their religious community. For example, Nadia's Initiative focuses on helping "women and children victimized by genocide, mass atrocities and human trafficking heal and re-build their lives and communities." "Rebuilding a devastated community requires a holistic approach," the Initiative explains, "one that addresses the pursuit of justice, humanitarian support, cultural preservation and global awareness." Nadia's Initiative highlights structural needs.[41] Nadia and celebrity lawyer Amal Clooney also appeal to the international community to act on its declaration of ISIS atrocities against the Yazidi as genocide and to bring high-level ISIS operatives before the International Criminal Court (Guest).[42] Western media focus on Amal Clooney may reproduce the refrain of the exceptional individual as the point of access to gendered terrorism, but these

appeals and the configuration of Nadia as an exceptional woman would not be possible without the coalitional efforts and women's human rights activism that prompted the international recognition of wartime rape as a crime against humanity, which frames ISIS's rape of Yazidi women and girls as a mechanism of genocide.[43]

Transnational women's rights networks and media brought the issue of gender-based violence to a global audience and in 1993 helped establish the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, the first international body to recognize rape as a crime against humanity.[44] However, the explicit focus on female rape victims and signification of children born of rape warfare as tools of biological warfare also inhibited the promotion of a human-rights-based response to the children. Transnational advocacy networks were conditioned at the time to view children as a "side effect of war rape rather than [as] a population of concern for children's advocates in their own right" (Carpenter 2010, 2). These representations at once conflated women's and children's rights and put them against each other. The political trade-off in prioritizing the rights of rape victims exposes a paradox at the heart of the protracted feminist battle for recognition of rape as a war crime and for children's rights.

Atrocity narratives that focus almost exclusively on sexual violence against young Yazidi women and girls continue to permeate global media, the humanitarian sector, and international political discourse. Yazidi activists' push for recognition of Islamic terrorism against the Yazidi as genocide runs the risk of similar conflations. However, importantly, Yazidi activists have drawn attention to the contradictory cultural and legal challenges that rape victims face upon their return. These challenges include the pressure to undergo abortions even though abortion is banned in cases of rape in Iraq, including in the Kurdistan region. Nevertheless, as Vian Dakhil, a Yazidi lawyer who serves on the Iraqi Council of Representatives, points out, there is an "'unwritten' agreement among Iraqi authorities" to allow abortions for Yazidi rape victims (qtd. in Hussein). Yet, cultural stigmatization continues to complicate matters. As Yazidi spiritual leader Baba Sheikh (Khurto Hajji Ismail) has expressed, "The victims are our daughters and sisters, but it is unacceptable in our religion to allow the birth of any children if both parents are not Yazidis" (qtd. in Hussein). The legal and cultural issues that rape victims face reach beyond women's rights to abortion. Under Iraqi law, which is guided by Islamic Sharia code, children hold the religion of their fathers. Moreover, children born of rape are treated as if born of adultery; in such cases, mothers have no rights to raise them. Yazidi rape victims are exposed to multiple vulnerabilities.

Holding ISIS accountable for genocide will be an uphill battle not only because of the complexity of fighting in northern Iraq and Syria and the chal-

lenges of international law but because of the veto power of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, namely China and Russia, who vetoed a UN draft resolution (May 2014) calling for the crisis in Syria to be brought to the International Criminal Court.[45] The reason this matters is that because Syria is not a party to the Rome Statute; the ICC can exercise jurisdiction only over crimes committed in its territory where there is a referral from the Security Council. In addition to these challenges, transnational and postcolonial feminist security scholars point to the limitations of the UN Resolutions on Women, Peace, and Security, such as UNSCR 1325 (2000) and Resolution 2122 (2013). These, they argue, do not sufficiently address the causes of conflict or "confront the structural roots of gender inequalities, including entrenched understandings of patriarchy, masculinity, and militarized power" (Jansson and Eduards 592). In prioritizing gender over other relations of power, the UN Resolutions on Women, Peace, and Security risk recreating essentialist gendered and racialized boundaries that legitimize "white masculinist protection" and fail to account for how gender is constitutive of race, sexuality, class, and other relations of power (Pratt 776).

Although time will reveal the effect of the international declaration of ISIS atrocities against the Yazidi as genocide, what we can be sure of is the traction and trajectory of Nadia Murad as a global bio-icon. Her story echoes that of Malala Yousafzai. Indeed, an article in a Kurdish media publication framed Murad as "the Yezidi Malala" (Mandalawi). Like Malala Yousafzai, Nadia Murad has received international recognition for her work on behalf of survivors of Islamic terrorism. She is the recipient of the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize, and she has won numerous human rights awards, including the Sakharov Prize, which she shared with Lamiya Aji Basher, and the Vaclav Havel Human Rights Prize, and she has been named UN Goodwill Ambassador for the Dignity of Survivors of Human Trafficking. These accolades highlight exceptionality as a collective aspiration. Yet, if our collective aspirations are to counter the violence of American exceptionalism and international terror, they must move beyond the material rhetoric of sexual humanitarianism and its emphasis on saving women and girls and claiming women and girls as embodiments of oppressive cultural traditions. Instead, our collective aspirations must move toward interrogations of the political formations that enable and exacerbate the vulnerabilities, victimization, and debilitation of entire populations.

In chapter 3 I focus on how war produces disability and how the humanitarian paradigm of international children's human rights consumes disability through cultural and legal figurations of African child amputees and African child soldiers. I argue that humanitarian transformation narratives (the child

soldier turned humanitarian celebrity) fortify ableist futures and obscure the debilitating logics and materiality of war. This case study challenges scholars and activists to scrutinize humanitarian approximations of normative notions of capacity and futurity to reveal humanitarianism and human rights complicities in the transnational debilitation of entire populations.

Humanitarian Futures

*Disability Exceptionalism and African
Child Soldier Narratives*

In the *New Yorker* article "The Children of Freetown" (2003), George Packer tracks the intersecting stories of Matthew Mirones, a New York prosthetist, and several child amputees of the Sierra Leone civil war. The article includes the story of Memunatu Mansaray (born in September 1996), now Memunatu Mansaray McShane. When Memuna was two years old, rebel militia shot her and her grandmother, who was cradling her, as the family sought refuge in a local mosque. The bullet killed her grandmother and shattered Memuna's arm. Memuna's eldest brother, Alhaji, survived the attack and carried her to the hospital, where she languished for days untreated. Memuna's medical condition deteriorated to the point that her arm had to be amputated. Memuna's mother, who was also shot, died a month later. Soon thereafter Memuna was sent to a refugee camp in Freetown that the government had set up for victims of mutilation, which was run by humanitarian organizations, including Médecins sans frontières. During the raid, her father fled to a different part of the country and later died of unclear circumstances.

The Sierra Leone civil war (1991–2002) began when conflicts in Liberia spilled over the border into Sierra Leone. With support from the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) attempted to overthrow Sierra Leone's president, Joseph Saidu Momoh. Momoh deployed troops to repel the NPFL, which Charles G. Taylor led, and the RUF, which Foday Sankoh commanded. Captain Valentine Strasser led the

coup that deposed Momoh, and the civil war escalated under his rule (1992–96). In 1996 Julius Maada Bio deposed Strasser and promised open and free elections. Several months later, Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, of the Sierra Leone's People's Party, was elected president.

The RUF's amputation campaign began soon after the 1996 election of Ahmad Tejan Kabbah. RUF forces brutally misappropriated Kabbah's campaign slogan, "The future is in your hand."[1] As the rebels mutilated Sierra Leoneans, they reportedly told their victims to "ask the President for new hands." The RUF's cruel campaign of terror peaked in January 1999, when the RUF and the allied Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) abducted over 4,000 children, recruited more than 10,000 as child soldiers (UN HR/4432), and took control of the country's diamond mines, which they used to fuel their military campaign. The RUF and AFRC were not the only armed groups in the Sierra Leone civil war to use amputation as a war tactic. The Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission later confirmed that the Sierra Leone Army and Civil Defense Forces had also used amputation as a weapon of war.[2]

Visual and narratives representations of Sierra Leonean amputees have documented war atrocities and served as evidence for international humanitarian appeals and interventions. The Sierra Leone government placed amputees in camps and used images of their mutilated bodies to secure aid from foreign donors, such as Handicap International (Berghs 2007, 78). During one visit to the Freetown amputee camp, President Kabbah ordered one of his aides to select a representative child amputee. His aide selected then two-year-old Memuna Mansaray. The president was photographed with Memuna and thereafter took her with him to political rallies. Kabbah also brought Memuna to Togo for the July 7, 1999, signing of the Lomé Peace Accord. The Peace Accord gave the RUF control of diamond mines in return for cessation of fighting and for allowing UN peacekeeping forces to monitor the disarmament process. The foreign press from there on referred to Memuna as the "peace girl." Even though Memuna's amputation was a medical necessity and not the result of a direct act of mutilation by the rebels as a misappropriation of Kabbah's campaign slogan, she nevertheless became a global symbol for amputation as a weapon of war and for the need for international humanitarian intervention.

The traction of Memuna as a global icon points to how the medical humanitarian gaze affixes American exceptionalism to the African child disabled by war. The medical humanitarian gaze that Mirones and others directed toward African child amputees substituted prosthetics for a critical accountability of the violent legacies of colonialism and imperialism in

structuring contemporary war machines, including the Sierra Leone civil war. Here prosthetics functions both as a technology of humanitarianism and as a trope for medical humanitarian intervention that configures the US as an exceptional nation. Moreover, while material prostheses may present the interface of the human and the technological, and thereby serve as a post-human figuration, the humanitarian imperative recasts the prosthesis as a humanist remedy—one that approximates normative notions of capacity and productivity.

A material-rhetorical approach (see introduction) seeks to identify these humanist commitments and their limits, including the limits of understanding representation itself as a prosthetic transfer (Wills). Disability studies scholars David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder coined the term *narrative prosthesis* to characterize how disability tropes function as "a crutch upon which literary narratives lean for representative power" (Dolmage 108). Although this chapter highlights how humanitarian narratives are envisioned as a "fix" to the debilitating logics and materiality of war, in drawing attention to the material and symbolic dimensions of humanitarian prosthetics I am not using the metaphor of the prosthesis to signify "imperfect meaning" or to advance the notion that "embodied rhetoric is always prosthetic" (Dolmage 106).[3] My focus is not on the failures of language or of representation to capture experience but on how attachments to these failures contour global humanitarian and human rights advocacy. In this chapter, I therefore track the strategic deployment of the prosthesis as both material artifact and humanitarian trope by accounting for its contribution to the precarious project of disability exceptionalism.

Disability exceptionalism encompasses practices that privilege certain disabilities over others as well as exceptionalist configurations of disability as an individual misfortune or tragedy (Puar 2017, 70). Similar to universalist notions of disability as an inevitability that affects everyone, disability exceptionalism "camouflage[s] the biopolitics of debilitation" (72) by erasing disabilities "that are endemic rather than epidemic or exceptional" (xvii). In *The Right to Maim,* queer studies theorist Jasbir Puar observes, "The transnational deployment of [disability] exceptionalism renders the United States an advanced and progressive nation of disability awareness, accommodation, and incorporation, while projecting backwardness and incapacity of modernity onto those Others elsewhere" (71–72). For example, the humanitarian spotlight on prostheses individualizes disability and deflects attention away from the debilitating legacies of colonialism and imperialism. I draw on Puar's concept of *debility,* which turns attention away from disability as an identity to focus on the precarity of populations, to demonstrate the US humanitar-

ian commodification of African children disabled by war, and, more specifically, how the prosthetic operates as an arm of humanitarian governance. As feminist disability studies scholar Alison Kafer puts it, "neither assistive technologies nor our uses of them are ahistorical or apolitical" (120). Hence the importance of a rhetorical genealogical approach that places the prosthetic and the cyborg as "embedded in larger histories, rhetorics, and economies" (121).

In October 1999, then US secretary of state Madeleine K. Albright visited this same amputee camp and was photographed holding three-year-old Memuna, along with Sierra Leone's foreign minister, Sama Banya. The child is being held by Albright, who might be read as a stand-in for the white national mother, and Sierra Leone Foreign Minister Sama Banya, the black national father. The amputated arm in the foreground solicits the ableist stare (Garland Thompson 2009) and makes the physicality of disability the currency. The photograph of this visit captured the US's humanitarian promise to the Sierra Leone government and served as a touchstone for the Clinton administration's claim that it was prepared to intervene in Africa on humanitarian grounds, as it had done in Kosovo several years before (Onishi and Perlez, 2000). Albright told reporters that the photograph allowed her "to make very personal for an American audience what kind of suffering was going on in a country some people had never heard of" (Marantz).

While all three were wearing orange clothing or accessories, the symbol of human rights awareness, US news coverage focused not on Sierra Leone children's human rights but on the promise of US humanitarian intervention. The Clinton administration agreed to contribute $55 million for food and disaster relief, $4 million to educate child soldiers after they had given up their arms, and $1 million to establish a certification process to undermine illegal trade in Sierra Leone diamonds. Secretary Albright also promised $65 million in debt forgiveness on the condition that the Sierra Leone government agreed to carry out the International Monetary Fund's economic program, which fused the US's humanitarian promise to neoliberal economics and the legacy of British colonial rule and control of Sierra Leone diamond mines.

In 1890 British imperialist Cecil Rhodes's company De Beers sealed its monopoly and control of the supply and cost of diamonds on the world market through a partnership with the London Diamond Syndicate. Rhodes, an advocate of settler colonialism, facilitated the displacement and exploitation of indigenous Africans, whom he described as a population "in a state of barbarism" (Rhodes, *The Last Will and Testament*). Although Sierra Leone claimed its independence in 1961, after 150 years of British colonial rule, like other African countries it continued to honor its earlier contracts with De Beers.

Indeed, dispossession, impoverishment, and ongoing struggles over control of the diamond mines fueled the Sierra Leone civil war. Sierra Leone children disabled by war and transnational capital are extensions of these legacies, including the history of visual technology, namely early colonial photography, through which colonial histories of disability became known.[4]

After Secretary Albright's visit, the United Nations dispatched soldiers from India, Pakistan, and other African nations to Sierra Leone to serve as peacekeepers. In April 2000, when the force tried to seize the diamond mines, the RUF took 500 peacekeepers hostage. That same year, the UN Security Council placed a diamond ban on the rebels in an effort to cut off their financing, and a year later the UN imposed an embargo on Liberia's trade in weapons and diamonds. In May 2000 the British intervened militarily to assist the UN Mission in Sierra Leone, which was created by the UN Security Council to implement the Lomé Peace Accord. By May 2001 rebels and progovernment militias begin the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration process. Thousands of fighters turned in their weapons, and the RUF surrendered hundreds of child soldiers to the UN. In 2002 the civil war was finally declared over, when Ahmad Tejan Kabbah and the Sierra Leone People's Party secured a majority in parliament.[5]

The *New Yorker* article "The Children of Freetown" focuses on two sets of photographs of Sierra Leone child amputees. The first set was published in October 1999 in an article in the *New York Times,* from which Mirones first learned about the Sierra Leone mutilations, and the second set consisted of twenty-five snapshots of amputees taken at Mirones's request so that he could identify those for whom a prosthetic limb would yield the best results. Mirones told Packer that he had waited until he was alone to look at the photographs: "I wanted maybe just to dwell on it and enjoy the moment of having them actually in my hand—the actual people in my hand that I could help." At first Mirones did not select Memuna, because he did not deem her a good candidate for prosthesis, as her amputation was above the elbow. However, upon the recommendation of Etta Toure, a Sierra Leonean émigré working with Mirones, who urged him to select her because of her notoriety, he included Memuna among the group of amputees he intended to help. Mirones imagined bringing the maimed children to the US, fitting them with prostheses, and then sending them home so that they could become, as he put it, "beacons of hope to a desperate population" (qtd. in Packer). For Mirones, the humanitarian prostheses constitute a temporary displacement of agency, in that he locates the agency (and hope) of the child in the technological artifact, at least temporarily, until the child amputee's missing limb is replaced and the child is perceived again as whole.[6]

Mirones's aspirational narrative about the rehabilitated child amputee might be interpreted as a signature feature of ableist *humanitarian futures,* a term I use to foreground the global North's humanitarian commodification and narrative assimilation of children with disabilities from the global South. The concept of humanitarian futures also highlights transnational deployments of disability as an exception and the championing of resilience in international human rights and humanitarian campaigns. As I argue in the book's introduction, resilience is a key property of humanitarian futures and neoliberal forms of managing global injustices, including poverty-related impairments and health disparities. Within the fields of psychology, social psychology, and psychopathology, the concept of resilience is deployed to highlight the ability of individuals to bounce back from difficult experiences. The American Psychological Association defines resilience as "the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress" (2012). Neoliberalism's commodification of the social-psychological approach to resilience perpetuates the very vulnerabilities and precarious conditions to which resilience is a response.

The imposition of neoliberal norms on the global South and on human rights conventions, including the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, and the commitments of neoliberal organizations, such as the World Health Organization, have resulted in the creation of "new geographies of disability and poverty" (Berghs 2014, 29). As critical disability studies scholar Maria Berghs notes, "In this worldview impairments are perceived as problems that need to be overcome by practical solutions such as medical intervention or rehabilitation" (32). Critical disability studies scholars highlight the material consequences of ability-centric notions of resilience that emphasize autonomy and self-efficacy and that thereby marginalize disabled people by placing the burden on individual utility and turning away from social circumstances that perpetuate precarious conditions (Hutcheon and Lashewicz). The moral subjectivities of humanitarian benefactors are "imbricated in a narrative of neoliberal individualism that perceives ethical action through bodily-influenced gift control and gift making" (Berghs 2014, 36). Individual resilience becomes a gift linked to the benefactor from afar.

Eventually, the Staten Island Rotary Club sponsored Memuna's travel to the US for medical care, along with that of seven other amputees. In the US, Memuna lived in foster care for two and a half years. While on a July 4, 2004 charity boat tour in New York Harbor, Memuna was photographed mirroring the Statue of Liberty in the background (see figure 5). In the photograph, the reverse mirroring (right arm, left arm; Lady Liberty standing and Memuna sitting) and Memuna's mimetic performance of liberty, her finger held high in
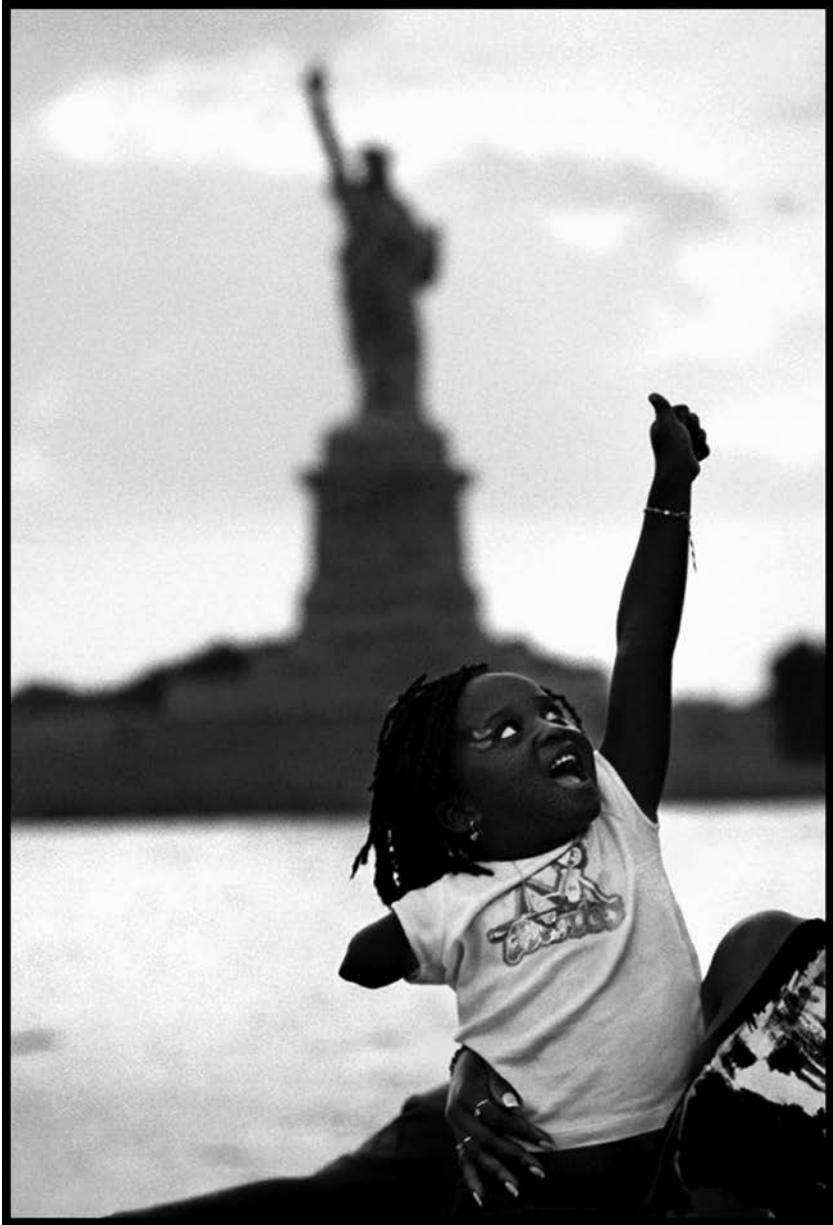
FIGURE 5. Memunatu Mansaray imitates the Statue of Liberty during a charity boat tour, July 4, 2004. Staten Island, New York, USA. Credit: Carol Guzy/ZUMA Wire.

place of Lady Liberty's lamp, forecasts her assimilation as an American citizen, first through the political asylum process and later through transracial adoption.

A white American couple, Kevin and Kelly McShane, adopted Memuna when she was six years old. This image of Memuna along with the story of her adoption by white American parents reaffirms the rehabilitative value of African children maimed by war. Yet, the Statue of Liberty and the Americanization of the African child also draw out the contradiction and irony between adoption rescue stories and the risk of premature death by state violence for Black children in the US (see chapter 4). The transracial adoption narratives that surfaced in mainstream media focus on Memuna Mansaray McShane as an American citizen through the visual rhetoric of disability exceptionalism and myths about the US as a racially tolerant nation. Photographs of Memuna Mansaray McShane surfaced in US mainstream media accompanying stories about her athletic abilities as a teenage soccer player (Janes; Kristof; Marantz), which cast the US as an exceptionally tolerant and diverse nation. From the protective caress of her grandmother as they hid in the mosque to escape the RUF, to the diplomatic clasp of President Kabbah and Secretary Albright, to the medical grip of prosthetist Mirones, to the legal and familial embrace of her adoptive parents, the global hold on Memuna has been oriented toward humanitarian objectives and futures.

Over a decade later, on November 26, 2013, the photograph of Memuna imitating the Statue of Liberty appeared in a local Columbia newspaper, the *Missourian.* In honor of war photographer Carol Guzy, author Katie Yaeger describes the circumstances behind Guzy's most widely circulated images. Yaeger describes the Sierra Leone amputees' September 2000 arrival in Washington, DC, including Memuna Mansaray, as follows:

> They came in frilly pink dresses and dire expressions. The story of Sierra Leone's war victims chronicles their physical and psychological rehabilitation, their assimilation into American society and the tenderness that has surrounded and nourished them. The group of eight amputees traveled to the United States by the humanitarian act of a New York doctor with a desire to fit them with limbs and opportunity. . . . Limbs had been amputated, but not vitality. The love that surrounds them transcends both racial and cultural barriers to mend wounds inflicted by man's inhumanity. These individuals put a face on a tragedy shared by so many in their homeland and highlight challenges they still face. It is a radiant example of the greater good that can be accomplished by the small acts of a few compassionate hearts that are determined to make a difference—one person at a time.

This excerpt captures the humanitarian gaze at African children disabled by war and vulnerabilities contingent on humanitarian recognition. Similar to Mirones's "beacon of hope," individual acts of humanitarianism are coded as "radiant examples of the greater good that can be accomplished by the small acts of a few compassionate hearts," and, more broadly, as exemplars of ableist-humanitarian futures. US medical humanitarianism is situated in this excerpt as a counter to African "inhumanity," and the prosthesis is presented as providing unimaginable opportunities and a route to a nondisabled future.

I open this chapter with the *New Yorker* story "The Children of Freetown" to underscore how war produces disability (Erevelles) and how humanitarianism consumes disability and contours American exceptionality through representations of resilient African children disabled by war. "The Children of Freetown" sets up a restorative narrative—a humanitarian narrative prosthesis—that seeks to eliminate impairment as a means of elevating hope and reconsolidating the able body. Prosthetist Mirones's "beacon of hope" metaphor renders the US as exceptional in technological and medical expertise and Sierra Leone amputees as curative objects. The literal and figurative prosthesis together become a symbol of able-futurity. The "beacon of hope" metaphor is tethered to the prognostic power and fetish of Western medical technology. In addition to the restorative humanitarian narrative, which turns disability into a commodity via technological rationalism, Packer ties amputees' agency or lack thereof to their residual limb: "A stump moves as if of its own free will, like something blind and mute that has attached itself to the body. The arm has lost its face and voice; especially in the case of a double amputee, it's as if he had been gagged as well as bound. When I first met the Sierra Leoneans, I kept imagining that the tongue had been cut off along with the hands" (11). While war is clearly disabling, and humanitarian efforts amplify the effects of war, Packer's comparison of the amputee's residual limb with other forms of mutilation—cutting of the tongue—suggests not only that war produces disability but that disability severs personal identity, agency, and rhetorical capacity. That an amputated limb is equated with loss of voice and loss of identity reinforces the binary construal of dis/abled subjectivity and the notion that disabilities render one incomplete and unknowing, as Packer's depiction of the amputee's residual limb as "blind and mute."

To highlight the continuum of disability exceptionalism in both children's human rights law and humanitarian campaigns, in the next section I focus on intersecting cultural and legal representations of former child soldiers and how the psychological trauma that African children of war experience is directed toward an able-minded, nondisabled future. As Kafer notes, temporal categories have long shaped cultural formations of disability, particularly

medical formations (25). International legal and cultural discourse on African child soldiers, like African child war amputees, rarely directs attention to the genealogies of present global injustices; nevertheless, these exceptional representations present a critical opportunity to understand how war produces and turns disability through the "curative imaginary" (25) into a commodity that is morally and politically productive, particularly for the global North. Finally, I align my analysis in this chapter with critical disability studies' turn toward the transnational (Dingo; Erevelles; Erevelles and Nguyen; Gill and Schlund-Vials; Gorman; Kazemi; Kim 2017; Meekosha; Meekosha and Soldatic; Shuman and Bohmer; among others). Violent genealogies and visual histories (trans-Atlantic slavery, colonialism, imperialism, eugenics, able-nationalism, American exceptionality) frame the humanitarian production and consumption of the African child disabled by war. The recognition of both Sierra Leone child amputees and former child soldiers as disabled subjects in the eyes of the global North are contingent on these historical constellations. A material-rhetorical approach and its focus on the assemblages of power and disciplining discourses of vulnerability, capacity, and exceptionality that undergird them bring these constellations to the foreground.

Vulnerability, Debility, and Exceptionality

International cultural and legal representations of African child soldiers offer a corollary to the hypervisibility of African child amputees in humanitarian appeals in that they make visible the relative invisibility of child soldiers' psychological trauma. The UN Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and former child soldier narratives targeted at audiences in the global North likewise emphasize individual resilience, rehabilitation, and recovery. Neoliberal forms of governance, including humanitarian aid and development discourses, which are defined by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund and that emphasize individual responsibility, resilience, and self-sufficiency, compound representations of child soldiers and group-differentiated vulnerabilities (Berghs 2014, 23). While the humanitarian narrative may focus on individual vulnerability and draw attention away from the social and political conditions that transform a physical or mental condition into a disability, analysis of the intersections between legal and cultural representations of the African child soldier further exposes how neoliberal humanitarianism or, more concretely, resilience humanitarianism (see introduction) and human rights collide in the transnational

production and consumption of group vulnerabilities and debilitation of entire populations.

The figure of the former child soldier, like that of the African child-of-war amputee, exemplifies the thoroughly contingent status of the child as a subject with rights and the political constitution of innocence and vulnerability in legal subjectivity. The figure of the child soldier marks the *threshold* of vulnerability in international human rights law and human rights reporting and mediates the imperatives of state power and humanitarian governance. Vulnerability, debility, and exceptionality are intrinsically linked in the implementation of children's human rights. The rights-bearing subject is a vulnerable subject; legal subjectivity is belated, predicated on the recognition of a prior victimization (see Kapur 2006; Merry). The African child soldier pushes Western conceptions of childhood innocence and futurity to their limit and personifies human rights' mastery of mechanisms of exceptionality through its facility with neoliberal humanitarian discourses of resilience. The translation of political struggles into the moral vernacular of resilience humanitarianism demonstrates how visibility, vulnerability, and capacity structure acts of recognition, and how able-(inter)nationalism designates certain subjects, indeed entire populations, to zones of political and legal liminality.

Like African child amputees, former child soldiers share the representational burden and genealogy of becoming poster children for the global North's repudiation of failed nation-states in the global South and for the rehabilitation of modernity from premodern tribalism. Visual representations of disabled African children of war, as the earlier section illustrates, take on particular traits in the eyes of the West. These representations emerge against a historical backdrop of colonial figurations of Africa as the "dark continent" composed of "shadow economies," "shadow states," and "shadow armies," and methodological depictions of Africa as "poorly visible" and "unknowable" (Ferguson 15). Anthropologist and African studies scholar James Ferguson notes, "A shadow [. . .] is not simply a negative space, a space of absence; it is a likeness, an inseparable other-who-is-also-oneself to whom one is bound" (17). These "shadow" configurations and the construal of the African continent as "childlike" and "incapacitated" have been historically deployed to legitimize the establishment of colonial states as protectorates. For example, the British colonial state deployed images of African children-in-peril to reify colonial governance, as did elite, Western-educated African nationals who worked with the colonial state. Specifically, in the period between the first and second world wars, "the African child became articulated as a sign of vulnerability, African pathology, and the paradoxical (im)possibility of African development" (A. George 63). Within the neoliberal humanitarian imaginary,

the Sierra Leone child amputee's lost limb is configured as a "negative space, a space of absence" that calls for the presence and "gifting" of Western humanity and futurity.

Kamari Clarke points to the International Criminal Court's preoccupation with child soldiers and the indictment of African war criminals as exacerbating stereotypes of Africa as "political fragile, legally inept, and economically volatile" (qtd. in Harlow 137). The African child soldier calls forth a perpetual paternalism, Clarke suggests, that "heralds the incorporation of the rule of law into the continuing history of institutional protectionism, legal and constitutional intervention, and the management of African resources by new humanitarian regimes" (qtd. in Harlow 137). Political theorist Barbara Harlow extends Clarke's critique in her analysis of the Obama administration's exploitation of the international profile of the child soldier and mobilization of vulnerability as a catalyst for the expansion of US military activity in Africa. Harlow points to the inconsistency between the Obama administration's renewal of economic and military support to countries enlisting child soldiers, including Uganda, and subsequent delivery of US Special Forces to assist the Ugandan government in its pursuit of the Lord's Resistance Army leader and ICC indictee Joseph Kony (135). Political mobilizations of the figure of the child soldier as a moral alibi for military-humanitarian intervention demonstrate how the humanitarian paradigm of human rights (see introduction) shapes US foreign policy.

Iconic figurations, such as the former child soldier, dominate the international field of children's human rights and US engagement with the field. This concentration can be seen in the US ratification of the Optional Protocol on the Recruitment of Children into Armed Forces to the UN CRC, and its failure to ratify the CRC and to acknowledge state violence against children of color within its borders as human rights violations. I argue that this focus on violations of human rights of former African child soldiers constitutes a form of ableist humanitarianism that privileges certain violations as politically productive for the nation, which includes the deflection of attention from rights violations within the US. The African child soldier and African child amputee are privileged because both identities reify American exceptionalism and neocolonial depictions of Africa as barbaric, uncivilized, and childlike and as potential beneficiaries of humanitarian intervention. In contrast, children of color in the US, especially African American children, are consistently denied humanitarian recognition (see chapter 4).

Within the international field of children's rights, the turn to vulnerability surfaces in the configuration of the discourse of childhood dependence. For example, dependency, political theorist Jessica Kulynych argues, is a "normal

human condition [that] can no longer be a justification for the exclusion of some humans from the common political culture" (249). Scholars working in the field of critical disability studies likewise have turned to vulnerability to theorize "claims about differential power" (Kim 2014, 146) and to trouble the neoliberal impetus to privilege resilience and reject vulnerability (Erevelles and Nguyen 4). Critical disability studies scholar Eunjung Kim has drawn attention to the risks of vulnerability as a descriptor if the focus is on the "incapacity of individual[s] and not on the social relations that transform a psychical or mental condition into a condition of great vulnerability" (2014, 138). "Vulnerability operates via hierarchical constructions of difference" (139). Similarly, political philosopher Judith Butler highlights the "radically different ways in which human physical vulnerability is distributed across the globe" (*Precarious* 57) and how "we are constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies" (2014, 49). Feminist and queer studies scholar Katie Oliviero puts it well: "Vulnerability is produced by historical, cultural, and political circumstances; it is an unevenly shared context and political subjectivity rather than a universal condition" (2018, 250). Vulnerability not only operationalizes subjectivity within specific contexts but also is itself a "shifting sociopolitical context" (251). Chicana feminist scholar-activists Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa's "theory of the flesh" powerfully illustrates "structural vulnerability as a political condition rather than as individualized experiences of identities" (251). Intersectional inquiry is similarly directed to the uneven allocation of resources and recognitions and to how these allocations align with or diverge from sociopolitical and legal norms in ways that intensify the precarity of minority communities.

Most relevant to my discussion of children's human rights is legal theorist and philosopher Anna Grear's theorization of "embodied vulnerability" (derived from Turner) "as a foundation of international human rights subjectivity" (Fineman and Grear 9). Fineman and Grear argue "'Embodied vulnerability' brings universality and particularity into a new and intimate theoretical reconciliation" (9). Yet, intersecting cultural and legal representations of African child soldiers targeted for audiences in the global North, as I discuss further, far too often erase the particularities of "embodied vulnerability," stripping the child soldier of political identity and reclaiming the simultaneously generic and exceptional identity of the innocent child. This stripping of political identity is necessary for the humanitarian narrative to function as prosthesis—that is, for the emplotment of individual resilience and the narrative arc of overcoming[7] disability through a transformation of identity from that of victim or perpetrator of war to human rights witness and/or humanitarian. The importance of the connections between legal and

cultural discourses on the African child soldier should not be underestimated, as these connections underwrite global humanitarian governance and the paradoxes of children's human rights.

The paradox that children face under human rights law is that they are deemed especially vulnerable and that this vulnerability yet leads to a protectionism that usurps their autonomy and political identities (Kulynych 249). Correspondingly, the child soldier must give up his or her autonomy in order to participate in the social contract and to benefit from the protections afforded "righted" subjects. International human rights law on the child soldier defers to the principle of the best interests of the child enshrined in Article 3 (1) of the UNCRC, which translates vulnerability as incompetency, a configuration that paradoxically subordinates children's rights in its very definition (also see introduction). In this regard, vulnerability operates as a stigmatizing discourse and therefore is best understood not solely as a property of the human condition but as a reiterative sociopolitical practice that regulates legal subjectivity. International human rights law and human rights reporting on the child soldier demonstrate how normative identitarian and international development logics form the discursive field in which children emerge (or not) as subjects with rights. In the next section, I highlight intersecting legal and cultural narratives about child soldiers and the central defining role of binary constructs of vulnerability/resilience and dependence/agency in human rights law and human rights reporting on the recruitment of children into armed forces.

Former Child Soldiers as Human Rights Subjects

The cover of the Human Rights Watch (HRW) 2012 report "No Place for Children: Child Recruitment, Forced Marriage, and Attacks on Schools in Somalia" (Bader et al.) features a photograph of two Black African boys dressed in adult army fatigues, with black caps and scarves that mask all but their eyes. Although the image and accompanying text signify less the notion of the child-in-peril and more the child soldier as threat, this photographic signification serves as the pretext for the transformation that follows, namely the sociopolitical and legal transformation of the capable child soldier (child soldier as agent) to a vulnerable child (former child soldier in need of protection). The boys are at a training camp in southern Somalia, a region besieged by two decades of civil war and interminable humanitarian crises due to ongoing fighting, droughts, and the blockage of humanitarian aid by al-Shabaab, a militant Islamist group (Bader et al. 11). HRW reports that over 1 million peo-

ple had been displaced inside Somalia, 4 million Somalis needed humanitarian assistance, and over 400,000 were in refugee camps at the Kenyan border. The conflict between al-Shabaab and the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), the unequal distribution and use of food as a political weapon,[8] an economy entrenched with lower power brokers and warlords, coupled with the crippling effects of global markets on local economies, all contributed to the severity of this humanitarian emergency.

The recruitment of children into armed forces is not new, but HRW reported an unprecedented upsurge in the forced recruitment of children in Somalia since mid-2010 (Bader et al. 2). HRW reported that al-Shabaab had targeted and abducted children from schools and used schools as firing positions and students as "human shields," which placed children at risk from return fire (22). "No Place for Children" features interviews with Somali refugees in the Dadaab camps in northeast Kenya and the capital city of Nairobi documenting the dire situation for children. Among those interviewed were eighty-one boys and girls under age eighteen at the time. "No Place for Children" acknowledges the recruitment of child soldiers by all parties to the conflict; however, with few exceptions, the testimonies featured are of children recruited by al-Shabaab. These testimonies provide evidence of al-Shabaab's targeting of both boys and girls for recruitment into its armed forces, ideological indoctrination, and forced marriage and sexual abuse. According to HRW, "Children have nowhere to hide." The report documents human rights violations committed by all parties to the conflict in south-central Somalia and specifies that neither the TFG nor the African Union Mission in Somalia has acted against those responsible for laws-of-war violations. The report calls on all parties to the conflict to end the recruitment of children into armed forces and groups and to extend the special protections that international human rights law affords children, which includes psychosocial support for former child soldiers. The report also calls for the establishment of a UN Commission of Inquiry to hold to account those responsible for violations of the laws-of-war (5).

Over the last fifteen years, greater attention has been paid to the problem of the recruitment of children into state and nonstate armed forces, with the passage of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (adopted in 1989, entered into force in 1990), the UN Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (adopted in 2000, entered into force in 2002), and the Rome Statute (circulated in 1998, entered into force in 2002). These legal instruments represent an expansion of precedent-setting international humanitarian law, namely the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols (1977), which specified children's rights in times

of war (Coomaraswamy 537). The CRC was the first significant human rights instrument that specifically applied to minors and that prohibits states from recruiting children into armed forces. The Optional Protocol increased the legal age that the CRC set for the recruitment of persons into the armed forces from fifteen to eighteen years and included nonstate armed groups among its provisions.

The Optional Protocol, however, upheld the CRC's classification of child soldiers as those who "directly" participate in armed conflicts, which minimized recognition of children who "indirectly" participate in supporting roles (Coomaraswamy 543). This provision, which highlighted the use of children participating actively in hostilities, excludes many child soldiers, especially girls, who are often recruited into militia as sexual slaves and are subjected to rape and forced marriage. Although girl combatants sometimes go to the battlefront, they are more likely playing multiple roles, which include work as domestic aids and cooks (Coomaraswamy 543). As Radhika Coomaraswamy, former Special Representative for the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, points out, "During reintegration processes, these [female] victims are often overlooked, missing out on the necessary assistance to meet their special needs. This is also true for justice mechanisms" (543). Notably, "No Place for Children" accounts for both direct and indirect forms of children's participation with fighting forces (Bader et al. 3). The Rome Statute, which established the International Criminal Court in 2002, framed the recruitment of children under age fifteen into armed forces or groups as a war crime and reinforced the Optional Protocol's identification of child soldiers as innocent victims, not perpetrators. The CRC Optional Protocol treats the child soldier as an exceptional victim, as a legal aberration.

Correspondingly, the HRW report characterizes the child soldier as a vulnerable subject, with little capacity to resist. Indeed, one might argue that the report insists on the child soldier's vulnerability. HRW describes children as "uniquely vulnerable to military recruitment because of their emotional and physical immaturity. They are easily manipulated and can be drawn into violence that they are too young to resist or understand" (Bader et al. 1). Yet the ambiguity of that vulnerability conveyed by the cover image leaves room to see these Black African children as rehabilitative failures. In other words, the phrase "No Place for Children" might be read as a prediction of an eventual failure. HRW reports that some children join armed groups "voluntarily" but qualifies children's agency in noting that voluntariness is "questionable" in the context of extreme poverty and violence. To configure child soldiers solely as victims or as agents is to oversimplify the multifaceted struggles of the majority of child soldiers in wartime and postwar contexts (see Coundouriotis;

Denov; Honwana; Rosen) and to disregard cross-cultural variations in defining childhood and adulthood (Quénivet) and the problems that the recovery and reintegration provision has posed for states and child protection partners (Coomaraswamy 546).

The child soldier represents a crisis temporality (Itagaki 199). For the child soldier, childhood (understood as a time of innocence and immaturity) is suspended in time—a temporal state of being that the humanitarian paradigm of international human rights law intends to correct. The child soldier achieves the status of "righted" subject belatedly, after he or she has been stripped of political identity and resignified as a vulnerable, unknowing child outside of history. This belated achievement removes the child from the broader political context. "No Place for Children" and international law transform the image of the child as an instrument of war, whose youth is obscured by oversized army fatigues and black masks, to a politically neutral victim. The former child soldier does not linger in this apolitical, unmarked state for long, however. "No Place for Children" transforms the figure of the child soldier from violent perpetrator (an antagonist whose moral choices are chastised) to unknowing, apolitical child (an ideal victim in need of protection) to humanitarian and/or human rights witness (a historical actor whose moral choices are revered). Within the HRW report "No Place for Children," the transformation of the child soldier from perpetrator to victim transports the child out of the confines of lawlessness to meet the conditions of legal neoliberalism; the victim identity attributes to the former child soldier moral bearings and rights inside the law (Coundouriotis 191–92). The transformation that characterizes international human rights law on the child soldier typifies literary representations of former child soldiers in Africa targeted for and consumed by Western audiences.

In cultural representations, the rehabilitation of the child soldier becomes a precondition for the cultivation of compassion among distant audiences. In other words, the former child soldier emerges as "human" through international law and notions of neoliberal personhood as well as market capitalism, in that the child soldier's transformation is commodified. Intersecting cultural and legal representations' nostalgic investment in the child soldier's recovery of a missing, lost, or stolen childhood also illustrates the global attachment to a symbolic reproductive futurism: "children are our future." Here humanitarianism serves as a mechanism for recovering the lost or stolen childhood and the figure of the child itself. The former child soldier as a human rights witness may exceed legal configurations of childhood innocence and political neutrality, and in this regard counter sensational representations of child soldiers as killing machines, but the child soldier's redemption is nevertheless

contingent on the ascription of a legal subjectivity predicated on a humanitarian narrative that invests in an ableist future. Within international human rights law and human rights reporting, the child soldier not only is construed as vulnerable subject but is vulnerable to a misrecognition, which has as its consequence the prohibition of alternative subjectivities and the elimination of opportunities for social integration that are not dictated by the right of return.

In accordance with international law, HRW called on al-Shabaab to "hand over children within its forces to a civilian protection body" and on the TFG to "ensure that captured children alleged to have been formerly associated with al-Shabaab are promptly transferred to civilian rehabilitation and reintegration programs" (Bader et al. 5). "No Place for Children" mimics the narrative logic of the Optional Protocol and popular child soldier memoirs (such as Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone,* discussed below) aimed primarily at Western audiences in their focus on psychological support for the child soldier. This focus on psychological rehabilitation "allows for the problem of responsibility in the war to be shifted onto the task of recovery itself" and "creates the impression of a linear, progressive narrative that can elide the underlying social history of what happened" (Coundouriotis 192, 194). The progressive narrative implies the foreclosure of vulnerability and functions as a form of resilience for the community, nation, and international community. The African child soldier's agency is therefore circumscribed by an ethos of resilience, which is viewed as a product of Western humanitarian intervention. The threshold of vulnerability does not lie in the consignment of African children to armed forces or militia. Rather, recognition of the African child soldier's vulnerability is dependent upon the reconciliatory logics of humanitarian governance. A key component of these reconciliatory logics is the rehabilitation of former child soldiers who are plagued by posttraumatic stress, drug addiction, and other psychological and physical ailments. Here humanitarian logics take on the form of a "rehabilitated futurism" (McRuer and Morrow).

Gendering Narrative Repair and Resilience

Like legal representations of child soldiers, literary representations emulate the novel genre of the bildungsroman; however, the trajectory of the child soldier's entry into the public sphere is typically recursive, in that trauma underwrites the child soldier's transformation from private to public subject. The bildungsroman is a formation story of an individual entering the public sphere and claiming a public persona. In the case of former child soldier nar-

ratives, the protagonist's "cultivation of a humanitarian sensibility" completes the fantasy of transnational intimacy for readers in the global North (Slaughter 2007, 274), intimacy defined by the parameters of humanitarian reception, as in the gifting of a prosthetic limb, to which readers in the global North become attached. In *Narrative Prosthesis,* Mitchell and Snyder argue, "While an actual prosthesis is always somewhat discomforting, a textual prosthesis alleviates discomfort by removing the unsightly from view" (8). While child soldier narratives do not "remove the unsightly from view," they strive to rehabilitate the "deviant" or "disabled" and to frame child soldiers as "social and military aberrations that humanitarian assistance might correct, rather than as possible products and indicators of global inequalities that would require structural changes to rectify" (Schultheis 32). The tension between the construal of the child soldier as a perpetrator of violence and as a symbol of adult wrongs points to the contingency of children's vulnerability and rights in the context of war.

In the next section, I focus on Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier,* a memoir about a former child soldier in the Sierra Leone civil war, and *Girl Soldier: A Story of Hope for Northern Uganda's Children,* a co-written memoir about a former child soldier in Northern Uganda and an American faith-based activist. Together these memoirs demonstrate how the legacy of Western imperialism parades under the cloak of humanitarianism and how former child soldiers rhetorically navigate these legacies and futures.

A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier

Ishmael Beah's memoir *A Long Way Gone* is structured as an intersecting overcoming and transformation narrative, in that the overcoming narrative is linked to the transformation of identity from that of victim or perpetrator of war to that of human rights witness and humanitarian. Beah overcomes the trauma of war not only via rehabilitation facilities and treatment but through his transformation from child soldier to transracial adoptee to human rights witness and humanitarian. While the adoption narrative is given little attention in literary scholarship on the former child soldier, adoption is a key part of Beah's rehabilitation. The memoir focuses on how Beah was primed into child soldiering, coerced into brutal acts of violence, grew dependent on amphetamines, and became desensitized to war and his actions in it. *A Long Way Gone* might be considered a humanitarian bildungsroman in that the narrative trajectory echoes that of the international law on child soldiers and humanitarian imperatives. Comparative literary studies scholar Joseph

Slaughter claims that international human rights law and the novel genre of the bildungsroman are "mutually enabling fictions; each . . . ratifies the other's vision of the ideal relations between individual and society" (2006, 1407).

A Long Way Gone is structured as a bildungsroman—a coming-of-age narrative with particular rites of passage, including a series of trials and tribulations, the painful transition to child soldiering, and the influential role of the lieutenant (107–8). Beah "turn[ed] into what he feared" (123). "The combination of these drugs [cocaine and speed] gave us a lot of energy and made us fierce. The idea of death didn't cross my mind at all and killing had become as easy as drinking water. My mind not only snapped during the first killing, it had also stopped marking remorseful records" (122). He continues, "My rule was to kill or be killed. The extent of my thoughts didn't go much beyond that. We had been fighting for over two years, and killing had become a daily activity. I felt no pity for anyone. My childhood had gone by without my knowing, and it seemed as if my heart had frozen" (126). Here Beah describes in hindsight how his thoughts were shaped by the violent genealogies around him. The temporality of the "I" narrator emerges in relation to the character (past self), and this temporal and spatial distance allows the older narrator to present as a rehabilitated self.

While the memoir does not depict child development as marked by fixed stages, namely that the child grows from an "immature, incompetent, and irrational" being into a "competent, mature, and rational adult" (Schultheis 32), child development and transition to adulthood is organized in relation to three phases: separation from community, transition, and reintegration into society with a newly acquired status. Identified by anthropologist Victor Turner, these rites of passage—namely the transition phase—culminate in a transformation, where previous social classifications do not apply, and new classifications and/or identities may not yet be adopted. *A Long Way Gone* focuses on Beah's reconstructed self and recovery from the trauma of war and drug addiction. The focus on his resilience and rehabilitation reinforces a humanitarian future that ultimately places responsibility for addressing the debilitation of entire populations on individuals and the medical realm. As mentioned earlier, resilience as a property of *humanitarian futures* frames systemic problems and injustices as isolated emergencies. In what ways, we might ask, does the figure of the former child soldier accommodate the global commodification of resilience? Is the child soldier's resilience a good to be extracted? To what degree are children's human rights entangled in these investments, and how do these investments become undistinguishable from the threat of war? If that which is considered a threat turns out to be resilient, does resilience then sustain the threat?

Victimization may provide the condition for Beah's telling of his story, but his resilience validates international humanitarian intervention, including transnational and transracial adoption, on behalf of the child soldier. Beah's caseworker Esther, at the Benin House, a rehabilitation center in Sierra Leone's capital Freetown, services the humanitarian appeal through her maternal behavior. She says to him, "None of what happened to you is your fault. You were just a little boy" (161). Esther supplanted the militia who had become his "family" and gun his provider and protector" (126). "Think of me as your family, your sister," Esther said during his stay at Benin Home. In addition to Esther's formative role in his rehabilitation, the process of speaking and writing about his experience also plays a role in his redemption. "We can be rehabilitated," he declared at a gathering in Freetown." "I would always tell people that I believe children have the resilience to outlive their sufferings, if given a chance" (169). UNICEF rescued Beah from the government army. After rehabilitation, Laura Simms, a member of the UN, adopted him. Beah attended high school in New York and graduated from the UN International School and Oberlin College. He was later selected to represent Sierra Leone at the UN First International Children's Parliament, and he is presently a member of Human Rights Watch's Children's Rights Division Advisory Committee.

At the end of the memoir, Beah reflects on a subsequent presentation at a conference at the UN Economic and Social Council chamber. He recalls how the loss of his family and the "need to feel safe and be part of something when all else has broken down" compelled him to initially join the army. "I wanted to avenge the deaths of my family. I also had to get some food to survive, and the only way to do that was to be part of the army. . . . I have been rehabilitated now, so don't be afraid of me. I am not a soldier anymore: I am a child" (199). In this regard, and through the memoir, Beah reclaims a lost or stolen childhood; however, this reclamation narrative and resilient subjectivity risk separating the child soldier from the conditions that perpetuate violence. Indeed, it is the dramatic tension between victimization and resilience that drives the popularity of child soldier narratives and the celebrity status of former child soldiers in Western media and educational contexts.

Beah's rehabilitation certainly enfranchises the former child soldier as a global citizen—a human rights witness—and marks the memoir's resonance with the UNCRC Optional Protocol on child soldiers. But the phase that I am particularly interested in is the liminal phase that precedes transformation, because here is where we see how the threshold of vulnerability operates. This transition phase notably highlights the limitations of representations of child soldiers through a "framework of extremes (as either extreme victims, extreme

perpetrators or extreme heroes)" (Denov 280). These liminal states appear in *A Long Way Gone* most readily through flashbacks, dreams, and memories. At one point, after he first escaped the militia and had been walking in the forest alone for days without sleeping, Beah is confronted by memories of violence. "I had seen heads cut off by machetes, smashed by cement bricks, and rivers filled with so much blood that the water had ceased flowing. . . . Sometimes I closed my eyes hard to avoid thinking, but the eye of my mind refused to be closed and continued to plague me with images" (49). He also recalls when the corporeal would prompt visualizations during training exercises: "Visualize the enemy, the rebels who killed your parents, your family, and those who are responsible for everything that has happened to you" (112). These examples remind readers of the role of visualization in the production and consumption of violence as well as in the rehabilitation process.

Temporal liminalities also play a central role in the development of the protagonist's sense of moral purpose and illuminate the simultaneity of the experience of committing violent acts and being a victim of violence (Denov 288). Beah recalls struggles at the Benin Home: "I would try desperately to think about my childhood, but I couldn't. The war memories had formed a barrier that I had to break in order to think about any moment in my life before the war." This simultaneity complicates our understanding of the boundaries of childhood and the incorporative process of socialization that drives international law and policy responses to children and war, such as the emphasis in the Optional Protocol on rehabilitation programs that often do not meet the needs of former child soldiers because the policies uphold rigid boundaries between perpetrator and victim (Denov 291).

Although the humanitarian imaginary situates women and girls at the top of the hierarchy of innocence and vulnerability, the Optional Protocol importantly counteracts this oversight in its recognition of social attitudes about wartime gender roles and explicit inclusion of adolescent boys as a vulnerable group. The figure of the male African child soldier may push the limits of legal and sociopolitical recognition to include special measures to protect the gendered vulnerabilities of adolescent boys in times of war, but gendered essentialisms nevertheless surface in these representations.

Girl Soldier: A Story of Hope for Northern Uganda's Children

In contrast to the narrative of the resilient African male child soldier, former African girl soldiers are often depicted as either silent victims or solely as victims of sexual slavery. Despite the fact that girls have been active partici-

pants in conflicts around the globe, they have been relatively invisible in Western media and human rights reporting (Denov 284). Some empirical studies indicate not only that girls and women actively resist sexual assaults but that some women have found participation in war empowering. The memoirs of African girl soldiers that have become popular in Western contexts, such as *Girl Soldier: A Story of Hope for Northern Uganda's Children* (McDonnell and Akallo), for example, reproduce gendered essentialisms and thereby reinforce female subjection as formative to the development of girl child soldiers' legal subjectivity. This is not to imply that girls do not have vulnerabilities unique to their gender and place in society, as they experience specific consequences from sexual violence, such as pregnancy, stigma, and rejection by families and communities upon their return.

Christian faith-based transformation narratives and neo-abolitionist discourses are prominent frameworks for contemporary child soldier narratives about former girl soldiers that are targeted for Western audiences. The International Justice Mission, the largest and most established Christian antitrafficking organization in the US, for example, emphasizes child soldiering and sex trafficking as exemplary of modern-day slavery. Evangelical antitrafficking organizations' focus on sex trafficking is not without historical precedent; as Elizabeth Bernstein notes, there are similarities between the "modern-day slavery" moral panic and White Slavery scare in the early twentieth century (2019, 132). White slavery serves as a "surrogate for a host of additional causes, from social purity and moral reform to temperance and suffrage" (132). This evangelical genealogy informs *Girl Soldier,* published by the Christian press Chosen Books. In the foreword, for example, Dan Haseltine invokes the words of Gary Haugen, CEO and founder of the International Justice Mission, which describes its mission as "dedicated to saving girls from illegal prostitution and sexual slavery." Haseltine echoes Haugen's directive to "communicate the awful realities of girls in brothels is to give people 30 percent despair and 70 percent hope" (McDonnell and Akallo 13).

Girl Soldier is a story about the acquisition of freedom and rehabilitation through religious belief. *Girl Soldier* is a memoir co-authored by Grace Akallo, a former child soldier in Northern Uganda, and Faith McDonnell, an American faith-based activist. The Lord's Resistance Army—the rebel forces of Joseph Kony—abducted Grace Akallo from St. Mary's College, a Roman Catholic secondary school for girls between thirteen and sixteen years old. The story is told from their alternating points of view. In the preface, Henry Orombi, Archbishop of the Anglican Church of Uganda, conveys to readers his "hope and prayer" that they too "will see God walking with a young Acholi girl in her captivity, hear Him weeping for the deaths of His children and whis-

pering in the hearts of thousands to raise up a movement for these children"
(16). Indeed, in the introduction, Faith J. H. McDonnell claims that it was
the abduction of Grace and other girls from the town of Aboke in 1996 that
drew world media attention to the humanitarian disaster and to the twenty-
year civil war that had forced the relocation of more than 1.5 million Acholi,
who are predominately Christian, to refugee camps (21). Among the protago-
nists in this faith-based humanitarian narrative is Sister Rachele Fassera, the
headmistress at St. Mary's College, from where the rebels abducted the girls.
Fassera, who got caught in the middle of a violent fight between the LRA
and the government Uganda People's Defense force, was able to negotiate the
release of many of the girls.

Like *A Long Way Gone,* early chapters describe Grace Akallo's family life
and her village as a pastoral place of love and protection. Her rite of passage
from innocent child to child soldier involves her witnessing violence. Grace
Akallo is immediately initiated into the life of child soldier by witnessing the
death of a fellow Aboke girl (106). "My mother cannot help me anymore . . .
hunger taught me how to fight" (105–14). She followed the commands of the
LRA in fear for her life and experienced extreme hunger and starvation, which
motivated her to participate in village raids in the hopes that she would find
food (110). She finally escapes and returns to Uganda with a group of girls
(158), but integration back into her community is challenging because of psy-
chological trauma (214–15). *Girl Soldier* traces Akallo's "spiritual rebirth on
the battlefield but also her bodily salvation by the faith-founded NGO World
Vision and the efforts of other Christian groups that operate in the region"
(Mastey 89).

World Vision, a Christian humanitarian organization, describes the chil-
dren in northern Uganda as "pawns of politics" (McDonnell and Akallo 33).
Similarly, McDonnell writes, "Everyone seems to have failed these children—
the Ugandan government and its military force, the world community and
even the worldwide Body of Christ" (33). In this regard, the story is one about
the persecution of Christians and, as McDonnell puts it, "the violent rulers
. . . such as Joseph Kony," who "'channeled' evil to steal, kill and destroy God's
children in Uganda" (39). McDonnell also provides a brief overview of the his-
tory of the Society of Missionaries of Africa, popularly known as the White
Fathers, which established missions in the late eighteenth century; how Chris-
tianity grew when Uganda was a British protectorate and after its indepen-
dence in 1962 (45); and the darkness of the Idi Amin reign, which targeted
Christians and threatened to forcibly change Uganda into an Islamic state (55).
Like all the violent conflicts discussed herein, Uganda's struggles are complex,
and this chapter cannot do justice to these complexities. But what *Girl Soldier*

does reveal, which is at the heart of this chapter, is how American engagement with stories about former African child soldiers is shaped by exceptionalist discourses, in this case Christian moral exceptionalism. This moral exceptionalism, which functions at the international level as a rehabilitative image of America, is discernable in the book's embrace of the modern-day slavery framework as a means to understand the contemporary problem of the recruitment of girl children into armed forces and militia and sexual slavery (also see chapter 2). Here, moral exceptionalism colludes with neoliberal humanitarian discourses of resilience.

Girl Soldier echoes the moralizing rhetoric associated with the missionary use of children's narratives in the nineteenth century as evidence of child enslavement in European–African colonial encounters and illustrates the ongoing "centrality of child testimony to the evangelical project" (Lawrance 164, 166). In "Documenting Child Slavery with Personal Testimony," Africa studies scholar Benjamin N. Lawrance locates the genealogy of contemporary uses of former child slaves' testimonies as part of nineteenth-century British and American antislavery propaganda that called for the saving of African children. He also notes a shift in child rescue by independent missions to the "massive expansion of rescue at the inception of formal colonial rule throughout Africa, from about 1885–1910." He continues, "The mission school-colonial state partnership attempted to maximize the potential of the natally alienated former child slaves, transforming them from budding delinquents . . . into 'honest' and 'self-reliant' laborers and servants of the colonial state" (167).

The commodification of contemporary child soldier narratives in the global North, particularly in British and American contexts, is resonant with the turn-of-the-twentieth-century narratives about child enslavement, child rescue, and child redemption in Africa. Correspondingly, contemporary narratives about the rescue and redemption of child soldiers that are targeted at Western readers are highly inflected with the discourses of anti-sex-trafficking campaigns, which encourage supporters to embrace legislative and humanitarian remedies. *Girl Soldier*'s neo-abolitionist appeal to the contemporary reader is direct. The book's final chapter, "Making a Difference," authored by Faith McDonnell, calls for high-level engagement of US leaders to protect children, to provide resources, and to end the conflict, and appeals directly to readers to make a difference through prayer. The religious appeals cohere with the book's neo-abolitionist focus and the International Justice Mission's platform on sex trafficking and modern-day slavery through which it champions the policing of female sexuality—yet another manifestation of the humanitarianism's Christian colonial genealogy.

Conclusion: Radical Vulnerability and Visuality

The spectacle of the African child soldier as a humanitarian subject leans on a notion of justice as seeing (Sliwinski 5) and a cosmopolitan *ethos* that is dependent on the configuration of a distant child-in-peril. These violent genealogies and visual histories include the use of images of mutilated African children to draw attention to the atrocities of colonialism. The Congo Reform Association, for example, was among the first humanitarian movements to use photographs of maimed Congolese children to critique the atrocities occurring in King Leopold's Belgium colony (Sliwinski 58). The photographs circulated widely and functioned both as "forensic evidence of colonial brutality" and as means for missionary reformers "to promote their missionary ambitions for central Africa" (Sliwinski 59). Although the disproportionate impact of war on people with disabilities and of how war produces disability, especially as disability interacts with gender and age, have only recently been studied, disabled children have long symbolized the embodiment of vulnerability. Through its analysis of intersecting cultural and legal representations of African children of war—child amputees and child soldiers—this chapter demonstrates how vulnerability, resiliency, debility, and agency map onto different bodies and geographies.

Representations of Memuna Mansaray McShane exemplify how humanitarian discourses intersect with transnational and nationalist discourses on race, gender, age, and disability. American exceptionality emerges in representations of Memuna in the form of ableist fantasies of American benevolence. Mansaray's rejection of the prosthetic is framed not, however, in mainstream US media as a form of resistance, but rather as the individual triumph of a transracial adoptee, which severs the African child from violent colonial histories in propagating the American myth of racial progress and tolerance.

In *Curative Violence,* Kim argues for understanding "disability in terms of radical vulnerability," which entails "exposing the divides mapped onto an uneven geography and the privilege hidden beneath the claim of universal vulnerability" (145). To view Memuna's image and to read her story and those of former child soldiers through the lens of "radical vulnerability" would entail addressing disability's violent genealogies and debilitating legacies, including how colonialism construed impairment. Indeed, the cases considered in this chapter expose the limits of disability imaginaries that focus on disability as identity and the need to look at the debilitating logics and materialities of war, colonialism, imperialism, and neoliberal internationalisms (see Puar).

Although US media framed the Sierra Leone amputees as disabled and deserving victims, Sierra Leonean amputee activists emphasize the links

among disfigurement, perceptions of disability, and the history of colonial and postcolonial exploitation, including that of Sierra Leone's diamond industry (Berghs 2007, 83). In the postwar Sierra Leone context, initial approaches to the victims of mutilation were medical. Mirones's rendering of the amputee problem and solution fell within this framework. But what the medical approach did not address was the gendering of mutilation, which activists brought to the foreground, and how, for example, the amputation of male limbs culturally emasculated men, as they were no longer perceived as laboring bodies capable of supporting their families. Many male amputees in Sierra Leone rejected the discourses of gender equality that NGOs promoted because they countered their desire to regain their privileged gender status (78–79). Additionally, some amputees rejected seeing themselves as disabled "due to the fact that disability is understood as caused by witchcraft and voodoo" (86). While global media focused on children who were victims of the war, underreported was that it was largely younger fighters who carried out the amputations on older victims, who were disproportionately male. Not only were children and youth recruited by armed forces, but, as some scholars argue, "the war was motivated (at least in part) by youth social, economic, and political alienation and broad social disenchantment with a government that was seen as a corrupt gerontocracy" (Park 586).

Memuna's story does not fall neatly into the medical humanitarian rescue narrative. Indeed, Memuna diffracts the curative narrative and Mirones's projected "beacon of hope" wherein amputees use prosthetic devices to become "self-sufficient." Memuna decided not to wear the prosthetic limb. Whereas Mirones's construal of amputees wearing prostheses signals hope, Memuna emerges as a cultural figure that rejects accommodation. Whether Memuna's decision was based on the discomfort of the prosthetic or was a rejection of the social expectations to substitute it for a missing limb, or whether she was more able, in a literal sense, without it, US media continued to characterize her decision through the rhetoric of disability exceptionalism. Indeed, it is highly likely that given the height at which her arm was amputated, the prosthetic would have been only partially functional—a perception Mirones shared upon his initial review of the photographs of the Sierra Leone child amputees. In addition, adaptive technologies require maintenance and therefore resources and access to medical services. Mainstream media representations of Memuna's rejection of the prosthesis nevertheless advanced accompanying narratives of individual resilience and American exceptionality.[9]

Violent Exceptions is in pursuit not of more perfect or better representations but of engaging the ethics of representation, recognition politics, and radical vulnerability. Narrative prosthesis does not solve the problem of rep-

resentation but rather points to how the production of disability becomes known, and how consumptive knowing perpetuates humanitarian capacity and futurity. As this chapter suggests, disability proctors humanitarian recognitions that in turn work to advance the moral superiority and exceptionalism of the US. In sum, not all children growing up in the context of war are perceived as vulnerable subjects deserving of human rights or humanitarian recognition or rescue. The withholding or affording of the cultural and legal status of child as human rights subject points to the persistence of humanitarian logics in determining political recognitions and exceptions. The iconic figures of the African child soldier and African child amputee in international law and politics and US foreign policy point to the necessity of a better understanding of how the gendering and racialization of childhood vulnerability and disability work transnationally. Violent genealogies, violent visual histories, and violent proxy wars have debilitated and continue to debilitate entire populations, and disability exceptionalism continues to serve as the global North's prosthesis through the medical isolation and presumed restoration of disabled body parts and through this humanitarian process to rehabilitate the inhumanity of the "other."

In chapter 4 I consider the differential application and suspension of the humanitarian paradigm of children's human rights when Black suffering is anchored in the US in contrast to global humanitarian contexts. Focusing on humanitarian negations of the human rights of Black children and the consequences of these negations for Black communities in the US, this chapter exposes the political limitations of the humanitarian paradigm of human rights recognition for addressing systemic inequities arising from racial capitalism. This case study calls for greater critical scrutiny of the confounding tensions and complicities between human rights and humanitarianism in anti-Black racism, including the dehumanization of Black bodies from childhood to adulthood, and risks to appeals for recognition from the very state that has enacted the violence. This chapter urges a return to the ontology of the "human" of juridical humanity to counter the violence of universalism and newly envision mechanisms of resistance.

Humanitarian Negations

Black Childhoods and US Carceral Systems

Who does the state recognize as a human rights subject? To what degree and with what consequences are such recognitions tethered to humanitarian perceptions? If human rights, especially children's human rights, are tied to humanitarian recognition (see chapter 1), the challenges posed by the humanitarian paradigm of human rights are especially acute for Black children and youth, who are "never allowed to be children" (Lorde 171). As I argued, the global insubstantiality of international children's human rights is bound to the paradoxes of humanitarianism and state-of-exception mechanisms to which the political rationalities of liberal internationalism are attached. This chapter links these political rationalities and the confounding tensions between human rights and humanitarianism to the histories and legacies of anti-Black racism, violence, and US carceral systems. The human rights of Black children have long been held hostage to the politics of humanitarian recognition and its exceptions and negations, which compound anti-Black racism's "killing abstraction[s] . . . creating spaces of living death" (Cacho 7).

The universal body of liberal legalism has historically been imagined as a specific kind of body: white, male, heterosexual, and propertied. Sociopolitical recognition is tethered to a history of selective and differential visibility, which has positioned certain bodies as objects of recognition and granted others the power to confer recognition. As I argued in *Spectacular Rhetorics,* struggles for recognition are also struggles for visibility (30). This photograph

FIGURE 6. A Black man kneels in the street in Ferguson, Missouri, during
a protest over the killing of Michael Brown, an unarmed Black teenager.
August 24, 2014. European PressPhoto Agency / Larry W. Smith.

of a young Black male kneeling with his hands in the air in the middle of
the street in Ferguson, Missouri, during a protest over the death of Michael
Brown suggests that "recognition is a matter of seeing" (Oliver 2001, 158).[1] By
what means are we as readers and viewers who occupy different social loca-
tions to understand our implication in a racial optic that regards Black bodies
as criminally other and that deny human rights violations against Black bod-
ies and humanitarian recognition of Black suffering? This photograph (figure
6) animates the racial history of sociopolitical exclusion and misrecognition
that assigns excess criminality to the Black body and the history of nonrec-
ognition that denies the humanity of Black subjects. While misrecognition
operates at the level of sociopolitical exclusion, nonrecognition withdraws
recognition and thereby operates at the ontological level as a violation of per-
sonhood (Cacho 6). A contextual reading of the photograph reveals a highly
racialized and gendered iconography. The position of kneeling, hands up, and
holding a devotional offering invokes the iconography of religious supplica-
tion. Yet, within the context of the Ferguson protest, the gesture of kneel-
ing, hands up, serves as an act of willful defiance and critique of the state's
refusal to recognize Black youth and specifically young Black men as having
the "option to be law abiding" (Cacho 8), including Michael Brown's right to
surrender. Several witnesses at the scene testified that Brown had his hands
up as Officer Wilson fired the fatal shots. Moreover, the independent autopsy

that the Brown family had requested also revealed that Michael Brown had been shot numerous times, including several times in his palm. These willful refusals and habitual prototypes of Blacks as lawless reinforce the humanitarian paradigm of human rights and its proximity to whiteness.

Correspondingly, state violence against Black communities is overshadowed by shifts in public attention to Black-on-Black crime and the culpability of visible accessories, such as the hoodie, as markers of criminality. These rhetorical recuperations exacerbate suspicions and misrecognitions in their refusal to acknowledge that a denial of rights has taken place. Not only are Black people's rights denied, but also the Black body is dehumanized and pathologized in culture, political, and juridical contexts as social menaces and as threats. These depictions expose Black bodies to punitive systems of control and surveillance from a very young age—the school-to-prison pipeline. Moreover, the hierarchy of vulnerability and therefore grievability does not extend to the Black body victimized by the state, vigilante violence, and anti-Black cultural politics. Human rights and humanitarian recognition are linked to this hierarchy of vulnerability, which, as this chapter illustrates, is reserved for bodies of color that are deemed political and morally productive for the global North, specifically the US. The Black male in the photograph does not surrender to the politics of recognition, however; rather, he mobilizes Black vulnerability to protest the state's disregard for Black life. The symbolic act of surrender neither constitutes a resignation to disempowerment nor necessarily is a capitulation to humanitarian recognition but instead might be viewed as an enactment of Black humanity based on a critique of power.

Misrecognition haunts Blackness. But can we fully understand racial injustice in terms of the politics of misrecognition? Can we chart an ethical path away from anti-Black universals in terms of recognition? Can recognition function as a form of critical deliberative intervention, or have the principles that liberalism imagines as possibilities for action incapacitated its progressive potential? Misrecognition may pervade our current political moment and racial politics in the US, but misrecognition is not simply a mistake that can be corrected by more accurate "seeing." Misrecognition is rooted in liberal legalism and its sociopolitical mechanisms of exclusion. If one of the goals of liberalism is to extend abstract recognition to all, then legal recognition remains tied to the generality of certain identity positions. Indeed, it is precisely the differentiated characteristics that make legal remedies necessary and yet also inadequate. The universal appeal of liberalism involves another paradoxical particularity. Although recognition made its appeal within the liberal humanist tradition of natural rights, rights must be claimed and then recognized.

Protesters kneeling in the streets of Ferguson before a heavily armed police force embody this distance between the claim to and recognition of rights. This photograph of a Black male protester kneeling in the streets of Ferguson therefore epitomizes the state-of-exception mechanisms that underlie and belie liberal universalism by exposing its violent exceptions and theories of recognition in which they are rooted. Thus, we must not only ask who survives recognition, but what are the erasures that recognition entails? To ask who survives recognition and at what cost is also to acknowledge that recognition cannot guarantee the fullness or virtue of a life lived that many want to find in recognition.

Scholars across the disciplines turn to theories of recognition to interpret recent cases of racial profiling, police brutality, and the militarization of the police in Black communities. I read these scholarly engagements with recognition theory and practices in this chapter not only for the critical insights they offer and ethical questions they raise but also as performances of paradigmatic reading protocols. For some scholars, recognition emerges as an aspiration and vehicle for communication and racial justice. For others, recognition propels a narcissistic circuit (wherein engagement with the Other culminates in an act of self-recognition) and the uncritical moral universalism and idealism of liberalism and its violent erasures. Even as scholars have attachments to recognition, so too do social activists who stage recognition scenes to claim political legitimacy. Activists often articulate their demands in terms of recognition. Recognition is a powerful conceit, whose power lies, partly, in the hands of those who mobilize it. Recognition grants or denies subjects access to normative systems of value. Recognition scenes afford legibility to certain bodies and social relationships and not others. Recognition sanctions and authorizes.

In *The Rhetoric of Empire,* comparative studies scholar David Spurr illustrates how rhetorical negation in colonial discourse "constituted the past as absence," which "cleared a space for the expansion of the colonial imagination" (98). Relatedly, *humanitarian negation* in anti-Black discourse dehumanizes Black bodies and clears a space for the expansion of the anti-Black social imagination. Scholars working within the Afropessimist intellectual tradition claim that "Black people exist in a structurally antagonistic relationship with humanity. That is, the very technologies and imaginations that allow a social recognition of the humanness of others systematically exclude this possibility for [Black bodies]" (Dumas 13). The anti-Black social imagination denies the humanity of Black bodies and in so doing renders Black subjects ineligible for full citizenship and personhood (Patterson). A materialist-rhetorical analysis reads these negations as staged impossibilities.

Humanitarian thresholds are produced in global rhetorics around violations of children's human rights. As argued in chapter 3, violent genealogies and proxy wars (trans-Atlantic slavery, colonialism, imperialism, eugenics, able-nationalism) frame these thresholds and the consumption of disabled African children of war (child amputees and former child soldiers) as humanitarian subjects. In this chapter, I consider what is different when the blackness being consumed is anchored not in a global/African context but in the context of the US. The humanitarian paradigm of human rights performs very different work in the context of Black children injured or killed in the US versus Black children maimed in Africa. The former African child soldier and child maimed in the context of war are valued in the global humanitarian economy. Humanitarian futures often take the form of aspirational narratives about the global North's rehabilitation of children in the global South and championing of individual resilience. Resilience may validate the global North's humanitarian interventions in the global South, but neoliberal notions of resilience are often used to obfuscate the structural inequalities that families and children of color face in the US.

Chapter 3 highlighted how disability proctors humanitarian recognitions that in turn advance US exceptionalism. Disability exceptionalism is a signature feature of humanitarian futures, especially when those disabled (or debilitated) are perceived as distant. In the case of Black children poisoned in Flint (see introduction), or in the incarceration of and violence against Black youth, disability always seems to disappear (Mollow). Moreover, humanitarian recognition is not held up as an option for Black children in the US. Hence, it is important not only to engage the limits of liberal recognition and the humanitarian paradigm of human rights but also to specifically address the harms of humanitarian negations. To challenge the violence of humanitarian negations and erasures is to engage in a materialist-rhetorical genealogical project that attends to the links between present acts of state violence and the logics and legacies of anti-Black racism. To attend to these violent genealogies and their afterlives is not to endorse an apocalyptic imaginary but to foreground the entanglement of humanitarian negation with the architectures of US carceral systems, and to consider both the limitations and the political utility of human rights for addressing anti-Black violence.

Recognition, Negation, and US Carceral Systems

Not only does the US have high rates of police violence and police force militarization; it also has the highest incarceration rate in the world, which

disproportionally affects Black and Brown bodies. Contemporary scholars frame mass incarceration in the US as a manifestation of neoslavery and the New Jim Crow (M. Alexander), the Prison Industrial Complex (Davis), and the Golden Gulag (Gilmore). Over two million men, women, and children are incarcerated in prisons, jails, and detention centers across the US. The rise of carceral systems and the explosion of the prison population are linked to neo-liberal economics and governance, which includes the privatization of prisons and detention centers, and to the dehumanizing technologies of enslavement. The biopolitics of carceral systems are wedded to legal conceptions of person-hood and the racial history of property rights and scientific racism that under-lies legal recognition, and to the sovereign's rule and right of power over life and death. Black studies and Afrofuturist scholar Alexander Weheliye rightly points out, "If demanding recognition and inclusion remains at the center of minority politics, it will lead only to a delimited notion of personhood as property that zeroes in comparatively on only one form of subjugation at the expense of others, thus allowing for the continued existence of hierarchical differences between full humans, not-quite-human, and nonhumans" (81). To raise such caveats is also not to forgo, however, the possibility of resistance in nonrecognition and opportunities for nonnormative subjectivities.

Symbolic and material violence are tied to subjects of carceral systems—the violence of nonrecognition and misrecognition among them. Violent exceptions structure racial innocence, which is probationary for Black chil-dren, if it exists at all. As African and African Diaspora studies scholar João Costa Vargas and Black feminist studies scholar Joy James note, Black children live on "borrowed, impossible time. The time is borrowed because as soon as the presumed innocence is over, their time as a sin-free, threat-free person ends" (50). Within this worldview, "blackness [is] a condition that negates the expected genealogical time" (5). "Even the toddler, infant, preborn are crimi-nalized. . . . Time is not linear, it is not chronological; it is ontological" (5)

To emphasize the ontological legacy of Black nonbeing and violent exclu-sion from the category of the "human" and "humanity" is to remedy the insufficient attention to the links between the architectures of slavery and con-temporary racist structures and acts of state violence in the work of European scholars such as Foucault (biopolitics) and Agamben (bare life) (Weheliye, 1). Hence, in addition to examining how recognition politics differentiates and adjudicates the liberal humanist figure, I attend to recognition's disciplinary formations and anti-Black legacies.

In the remainder of this chapter, I examine the rhetorical and method-ological contours of recognition that emerge as central to scholarly and activ-ist understandings of and responses to racialized state violence, specifically US

carceral systems, and point toward the sociopolitical objectives that recognition is expected to perform. These recognition scenes include (i) *dialectical recognitions,* which showcase how recognition works hierarchically through dyadic configurations of structural inequalities; (ii) *intersectional recognitions,* which break down the oppressor/oppressed binary through multi-axel identifications and intersectional analyses of power; (iii) *human rights recognitions,* which attempt to hold liberalism and the state accountable to its ideals; (iv) *recognition in-between,* which draw attention to the limits of classical liberal and neoliberal logics of recognition, and create alliances that may be impossible based on the logics of recognition; and (v) *diffractive recognitions* that draw attention to the genealogies of anti-Black violence and Black suffering via social constructs of the human. The succession of recognition and negation scenes outlined above should not be understood as a temporal or critical progression; indeed, diffracting recognition entails the construal of time not as chronologically reflective but as ontological and in this way aligns most clearly with the genealogical methodological orientation of this study. The rhetorical contours of recognition and negation are porous, and this porosity attests to the viability of recognition as a heuristic and its malleability, which includes links as well as ruptures within and across scenes. Postracial recognitions, which invest in the temporal fantasy that race is no longer a structuring principle in inequality, can permeate other scenes as counterpoints and are therefore embedded throughout. Postracial recognitions also fail to account for the power in which recognition operates.[2]

My goal in the remainder of this chapter is to elucidate how carceral systems are tied to certain scenes of recognition, misrecognition, and nonrecognition and how these scenes delimit critiques of and activism against racialized state violence. If dialectical recognitions render the "other" always in service of the "master"; if intersectional recognitions offer a more expansive vision of liberal conceits, yet also risk replication of liberalism's limits; if neoliberal dispossessions regulate access to deliberative publics and create zones of nonrecognition; if black "social" death is symptomatic of the carceral state's discourse of nonrecognition; and if postracial recognitions render identity-based rights immaterial, what are we to make of our scholarly and activist attachments to recognition? For example, what risks do human rights recognitions run in appealing to the very state that has enacted the violence? What is the importance of recognition in framing political engagements with the state despite these limitations? To focus on the material-discursive contours of recognition is not to endorse atomistic understandings of agency or intentionality but to foreground the constitutive dimensions of recognition in political subjectivity. The recognition scenes discussed herein reveal the interplay

between survivorship, the replication of power hierarchies within and across groups who are recognized, and classically liberal and neoliberal mechanisms of sociopolitical exclusion and dispossession. Finally, the recognition scenes discussed herein are in various ways tethered to the growth of carceral systems and the legacy of anti-Black violence.

Standing One's Ground: Dialectical Recognitions

On February 26, 2012, George Zimmerman, a twenty-eight-year-old neighborhood watchman or, more accurately, self-appointed law enforcer, variously described as multiracial, Latino (given the Peruvian background of his mother), and white, shot and killed Trayvon Martin, an unarmed seventeen-year-old Black male who was walking through the gated community of Twin Lakes Retreat in Sanford, Florida. Zimmerman perceived Trayvon Martin as a violent criminal; his description of Martin during a 911 call illustrates his ready prototype of the teenager based solely on his presence in the gated community, a neighborhood in which Zimmerman presumed Martin did not belong.[3] According to published transcripts of Zimmerman's 911 call, he told the dispatcher that there was a "real suspicious guy" in a "dark hoodie," who "looks like he's up to no good, or he's on drugs or something." The dispatcher indicated to Zimmerman that police were on their way. "Okay," Zimmerman responds. "These assholes they always get away" ("Transcript"). When police arrived, Martin was pronounced dead at the scene. On April 11, 2012, Zimmerman was charged with second-degree murder. At his bail hearing, Zimmerman admitted that he misrecognized Trayvon Martin's age: "I thought he was a little bit younger than I am." As Robin Bernstein notes, "Zimmerman's miscalculation is . . . widespread. To many people, black boys seem older than they are: In one study, people overestimated their ages by 4.5 years. This contributes to a false perception that black boys are less childlike than white boys" (1). Bernstein observes, "The idea of childhood innocence itself is not innocent: It's part of a 200-year-old history of white supremacy" (3). Bernstein continues, and I concur, that "the political power of childhood innocence, a cultural formation . . . has proved, over and over, to be one of white supremacy's most potent weapons" (3). On July 13, 2013, the second day of deliberations in *State of Florida v. George Zimmerman,* the jury returned a verdict of not guilty for both second-degree murder and the lesser-included charge of manslaughter. Zimmerman's defense team, Mark O'Mara and Don West, initially indicated that it would ask the case to be dismissed on the basis of immunity from prosecution provided for by Stand Your Ground (SYG) law.

But Zimmerman waived his right to a SYG pretrial, and his attorneys decided to try it as a self-defense case.[4]

SYG law represents a modification of traditional self-defense law so that a person who reasonably believes he or she must use deadly force to prevent serious injury may lawfully do so without first attempting to retreat from an attacker. It provides immunity from prosecution and subsequent civil liabilities for wrongful death. Similarly, self-defense law constitutes a justification defense, which negates criminal liability and classifies the killing as a lawful exercise of deadly force (Lawson 2012, 299). Although *State of Florida v. Zimmerman* did not hinge on Florida's 2005 SYG law,[5] the legal principle and neoliberal racial logic that underwrite SYG law (privatization of security, vigilante violence) and its privileging of the rights of propertied subjects set the stage for Zimmerman's acquittal.[6] As indicated earlier, I distinguish between the politics of misrecognition, processes through which human value is rendered unintelligible (i.e., differential inclusion of populations of color into US legal and sociopolitical systems), and the politics of nonrecognition, the alternative to social value (i.e., the constitution of populations of color as nonbeings, ineligible for personhood) (Cacho 6, 31). Carceral systems are part of the architecture of Black suffering and the ontological legacy of Black nonbeing, in that innocence and redemption are not considered options.

In *State of Florida v. Zimmerman,* legal recognition adhered to the propertied white residents of the Twin Lakes Retreat. As a self-appointed law enforcer of the 80 percent white community, Zimmerman exemplified the "rightful" and "reasonable" subject of SYG law, and, as some scholars have noted, the case has contributed to the ongoing distortion of the reasonableness standard in self-defense law (Lawson 301).[7] Moreover, the jury's acquittal of Zimmerman epitomized the state's dualist frame and exclusionary social contract wherein an "individual can only become a party to the contract by gaining recognition as white" (A. M. Smith 5). Under such scenarios, as Anna Marie Smith observes, "Whites do not owe to blacks any recognition of their shared humanity" (5).[8] The adjudication of SYG and self-defense cases, which have disproportionately protected white perpetrators,[9] and the non-indictments of officers Darren Wilson and Daniel Pantaleo in the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, respectively, are contemporary manifestations of the "ineligibility problem" (Orlando Patterson's concept), which freed slaves confronted when "transformed from nonbeing to legal personhood" (A. M. Smith 8). Adjudications of SYG law render Black men rightless—without the right to have rights. This dialectical politics of misrecognition situates the oppressed as awaiting recognition from the privileged. In this recognition scene, the privileged can only recognize Black criminality or, through a poli-

tics of exceptionality, afford Blacks respectability. Black death is also denied recognition in that grievability is culturally reserved for white death, as Trayvon Martin's parents note in their memoir *Rest in Power,* which describes, in part, their struggle to gain recognition for the loss of their son.

If Black children are perceived as older than they are, and if Black youth are perceived as not having access to the category of the child, or, for that matter, the presumption of innocence, what recognition work does that leave for Black mothers and Black fathers whose children are victims of state violence and/or vigilante violence? Must Black mothers and Black fathers bear the burden of recognition that their child did not survive? What public role does their personal pain play?

After Zimmerman took the stand in court and was sworn in, he returned to his seat and directly addressed Sybrina Fulton and Tracy Martin. Zimmerman said: "I wanted to say I am sorry for the loss of your son. I did not know how old he was. I thought he was a little bit younger than I am, and I did not know if he was armed or not" (195). Here Zimmerman deploys misrecognition as the warrant (the unspoken assumption that Black males are threats) for his nonrecognition of Trayvon Martin's humanity. In *Rest in Power: The Enduring Life of Trayvon Martin,* Sybrina Fulton and Tracy Martin respond to such scenes as they have played out in both the media and the courts. They offer a series of counter-recognition scenes to readdress the dehumanization of their son. At one point in the memoir, Tracy Martin reports on what Sybrina Fulton said at a rally: "Our son is your son. . . . This is not a black and white thing. This is a right and wrong thing" (120). Sybrina Fulton aims to counter media representations of her son that tarnished his reputation, and to reclaim what had been lost—her son's humanity.

In *Rest in Power,* Sybrina's appeal for justice is very much framed in relation to her role as a mother. "Until the day I die," she said, "I'm a mother. And I want justice for my son, and I won't stop until I receive that" (137). In this way, Sybrina Fulton attempts to bring readers into "a relationship to the victim to evidence the humanity that was violated" (Franklin and Lyons 438). These relational appeals may "engender chains of identification" (440), but they do not exist outside of the carceral state and its surveillant, spectacular, and securitized apparatus. Whereas Sybrina reflects on her son's humanity and her role as a mother, Tracy Martin redirects the reader's attention to recognition's codependency on the law and to the struggle for recognition: "Once you throw race into the equation, mothers in the white community that could identify with Sybrina's pain of losing a child are left to choose: am I loyal to my motherhood or am I loyal to my race" (76). Tracy continues, "And personally, I knew racism was part of the story from the day I heard what happened

to my son and how lax the police and prosecutors were about the killing. . . . The truth is, we were battling a system that allowed young African American boys to be killed without any consequences" (76).

Additionally, stereotypes abounded in both the cultural and the legal representations of the case. The trope of the absent Black father and the politics of respectability, for example, were clearly at work in the trial, as one potential juror said, "Trayvon would be alive today if his father was involved in his life" (220). This juror's characterization draws on cultural stereotypes that obscure the role of carceral systems in breaking apart Black families through disproportionate sentencing and racial profiling. Finally, Sybrina Fulton and Tracy Martin also knew that "as black parents of a black teenager, whatever sympathy the general public had for us would vanish if we ever truly showed all the anger and frustration we felt" (187). Indeed, Zimmerman's verdict and actions might be understood as exemplary of white rage, which, as Carol Anderson puts it, "carries an aura of respectability and has access to courts, police, legislatures."

SYG law operates dialectically in a racial juridical economy that affords freedom of movement, and, one might argue, rage to White propertied subjects but not to young Black males. In "The Dialectics of Standing One's Ground," George Ciccariello-Maher draws attention to the limits of Hegelian theories of recognition (which implies a co-constitutive relation that produces an "I" and an "Other") in his reading of Trayvon Martin's murder and debates over SYG law. Under the Hegelian model, the Other appears both as a "threat to be overcome and as embodying the path to full self-standing" (Ciccariello-Maher). Seen through a Hegelian perspective, "standing one's ground is a characteristically circular affair," which is predicated on the belief that "all enjoy the ground on which to stand" (Ciccariello-Maher). But, as Ciccariello-Maher rightly notes, Martin and Zimmerman did not stand on equal ground. Zimmerman had a gun and SYG and self-defense law backing up his actions, whereas Martin, unarmed and "saddled with the full weight of the historical-racial schema," lacked the ground (status) on which to stand. Drawing on Franz Fanon's critique of the Hegelian dialectic as a symptom of the pathology of oppression itself and argument that the Black man does not appear as a subject for recognition under white supremacy, Ciccariello-Maher reads the deadly confrontation as one between two men of color, with the twenty-eight-year-old biracial male in his role as self-appointed law enforcer gazing toward the "distant other of onlooking whiteness." He contends that Zimmerman "sought whiteness through his spectacular negation" of Trayvon Martin. In "Deadly Force and Public Reason," Anna Marie Smith similarly interprets the immunity that the police granted Zimmerman early in the investigation as an

explication of their interpellation of "Zimmerman at the scene of the crime as unequivocally white" (5). Likewise, in *Lynching: Violence, Rhetoric, and American Identity,* rhetorical studies scholar Ersula J. Ore notes how Zimmerman's "language and symbolic labor as judge, jury, and executioner invokes a tradition of antiblack violence . . . that coded him as white" (10).

Like the Sanford police, Zimmerman's defense team interpellated Zimmerman as the protectorate of white property owners, specifically Olivia Bertalan, whose home was burglarized two years earlier by a Black teenager.[10] To establish Zimmerman's fear of Martin as a "reasonable" one, the defense team "built their case around profiling Martin, grilling witnesses about other burglaries in the neighborhood" (P. Williams 2012, 20). The defense introduced photographs of Zimmerman's white neighbors and of Martin shirtless, drawing on a history of racial optics and stereotypes of unruly (and overly sexualized) Black man and vulnerable white woman (Guckenheimer). The predominantly white female jury, as Ore perceptively observes, invoked white exceptionalist notions of American identity and citizenship based on the racist myth of white female virtue and vulnerability as a defense of Zimmerman's actions (10).

In "The Monsterization of Trayvon Martin," Black Feminist scholar Patricia Williams similarly argues, Olivia Bertalan "became 'the face' of the case, a brand logo for America terrorized, for innocence violated, for all that is endangered in America." The defense team also explicitly mobilized class- and race-based literacy norms in their derogatory treatment of the prosecution's Black female witness, Rachel Jeantel, and contrasting deference to Bertalan.[11] Although the prosecution, like the defense team, argued that the case was not about race, both parties willfully mobilized race- and class-based constructs, which essentially reinforced dialectical habits of recognition. The systemic denial of the relationship between epistemic difference and structural inequalities, and differentially distributed recognition, were cloaked in the language and fantasy of postraciality, which was typified by Judge Debra Nelson's decision to only allow the word *profile* and not the phrase *racial profiling* to be used throughout the trial (*State of Florida* 2013). Zimmerman's actions and later his defense, like Judge Nelson's decision to not allow the term *racial profiling* to be used in the trial, exemplify the anti-Black logics of US juridical and carceral systems.

One might argue that Trayvon Martin was a priori a subject of the carceral state. Frank Wilderson III, influenced by Franz Fanon, a foundational figure in the tradition of Afropessimism, makes a similar claim to Ciccariello in his critique of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic and sought-after mutual recognition. Wilderson argues, "Blacks cannot reach this plane" through recogni-

tion because the plane of recognition is anti-Black (31). The violence against Trayvon Martin "is not violence that occurs between subjects at the level of conflict; it is gratuitous violence that occurs at the level of a structure that constitutes the Black as the constitutive outside for those who would construct themselves as the Human" (Sharpe 141). This points to the ontological positioning of Blackness outside Humanity (Wilderson)—a positioning that the dialectic performs repeatedly through its exceptional logic. As Vargas and James put in it "Refusing Blackness as Victimization," "Trayvon's death is foretold; it is constitutive of the black child's impossible experience of growing up as a fully legitimate, entitled, protected, member of the polis" (197). Christina Sharpe similarly notes the limits of the dialectic and the need to recognize its paradoxes and not therefore to embrace legal recognition as the ideal, since "the idea and reality of being is foreclosed to [Black people]: we're non-being" (Sharpe qtd. in Terrefe). Sharpe points to the need to account for the ontological foundations of juridical humanity and to take into account the ontology of Black suffering and white exceptionalism that set the stage for Martin's murder and Zimmerman's freedom.

SYG law intersects with the exceptionalist logic of legal personhood and its link to property in American law. Racial exclusions are not aberrational but foundational to American law, identity, and citizenship. In "Distorted Vision and Deadly Speech," religious studies scholar Jennifer Harvey claims, "Exceptionalism thus distorts our vision and understanding in profound ways" (107) by failing to address the "legacies of white supremacist violence" (109) and the deadly paradoxes that underlie the formation of the nation and American law, which manifest in this particular case in the denial of Trayvon's actions as self-defense. Vargas and James suggest, "The gravity of Trayvon Martin's last wrestle with his opponent, the 'mortal combat' against an enemy backed by white supremacy's judicial, police, and media machineries, is a compelling story about a youth who refused blackness-as-victimization, without any guarantee of redemption" (201). Within this racial logic and exceptional ontology, young Black men like Trayvon Martin can't stand their ground—they are not recognized as having legal ground (property) to stand on—no right to self-defense, or, in the case of Michael Brown, no right to surrender.

Intersectional Recognitions

State of Florida v. Zimmerman epitomizes how the dialectical politics of recognition reinforces the legal subjection of Black people and communities. The state's refusal to recognize Martin's legal status as a child (person under eigh-

teen years of age) and yet mass media circulation of the records regarding Martin's school suspensions, with little to no coverage of the racial distribution of punishments under Florida's public schools' zero-tolerance disciplinary policy, point to the entrenchment of dialectical recognitions—anti-Black universals—in the juridical and public imaginary (Hancock 4).[12] Toward the end of the trial, the prosecution had requested that a lesser charge of third-degree felony murder be brought against Zimmerman and incorporated in the jury instructions an offense that includes the commission of child abuse. But Judge Nelson ruled that the jury could not consider the offense of third-degree murder, because it was introduced too late in the process. The denial of the legal status of the child to Trayvon Martin and the erasure of his intersecting identities (race, gender, and age) is not exceptional; children of color, particularly Black boys, are readily denied the affordances—innocence and protection—typically attached to White children (Wanzo). At a gun control campaign, Sybrina Fulton countered the state's refusal to recognize her son: "This will be my first Mother's Day without my son Trayvon. 30,000 mothers lost their children this year to senseless gun violence" (2012). Similar to the unrecognizability of Black women under the law, to which the analytical framework of intersectionality was a response, *State of Florida v. Zimmerman* illustrates the unrecognizability of Black children under the law, and the salience of an intersectional analytic to understand the differential politics of legal recognition. Not only did Martin not survive his childhood; his legal status as a child did not survive him.

Intersectional recognitions both expose the limits of the master-slave dialectic and provide a fuller account of recognition that moves beyond the Hegelian tradition of the self in struggle with the other. As a form of action and mode of analysis, intersectional recognitions do not rely on a cumulative identity formula (race + gender + class + sexuality, and so on) (May 22). Contrary to reductive portrayals of intersectionality that deracialize its history and dismiss the complexities of its founding literatures, as Black feminist studies scholar Vivian May importantly notes, "intersectionality has underscored the inadequacy of seeking recognition . . . via categorical terms, knowledge norms, or political practices that deny multiplicity, disarticulate enmeshed identities and systems" (201–2). Intersectionality itself risks misrecognition. Intersectional recognitions draw attention to how forms of power and resistance "intersect" and how structural privileges and differences play out between as well as among communities (21).

#BlackLivesMatter, developed by three Black female activists, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, after Trayvon Martin's murder, exemplifies intersectionality as a critical disposition and mode of action through its cri-

tique of anti-Black universals, postracial fantasies, and hierarchical recognitions within the Black community. #BlackLivesMatter articulates its platform in part, as follows: "Black Lives Matter is an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks' contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression." #BlackLivesMatter calls for the "full recognition of [Blacks'] human rights," which includes living wages, decent housing, affordable healthy food, freedom from mass incarceration, and an end to militarization of Black and Brown communities, but refutes the freighted language of the universal. For example, in her response to the #AllLivesMatter campaign, which rejects the particularity of the ontological claim "Black Lives Matter," founder Alicia Garza speaks to the universalizing limits of liberal recognitions and postracial co-optations. Garza reclaims the specificity of the ontological warrant (Black Lives Matter) and reinforces the link between the evidence (Black poverty, incarceration, deportation, and marginalization) and her larger claim: Black dispossession is a form of state violence. Rooted in a gender-inclusive racial-justice framework and Black feminist intersectional analyses, #BlackLivesMatter and Garza specifically address the erasure of women of color and trans people of color in representations of the history of the movement. Within the context of the Black Lives Matter movement, therefore, intersectional methods work to expose carceral intersections and the policing of difference.

> When we say Black Lives Matter, we are talking about the ways in which Black people are deprived of our basic human rights and dignity. It is an acknowledgement [that] Black poverty and genocide is state violence. It is an acknowledgment that 1 million Black people are locked in cages in this country—one half of all people in prisons or jails—is an act of state violence. It is an acknowledgment that Black women continue to bear the burden of a relentless assault on our children and our families and that assault is an act of state violence. Black queer and trans folks bearing a unique burden in a hetero-patriarchal society that disposes of us like garbage and simultaneously fetishizes us and profits off of us is state violence . . . And the fact is that the lives of Black people—not ALL people—exist within these conditions is a consequence of state violence. (Garza)

Garza mobilizes intersectionality as an "ontological project that accounts for multiplicity and complex subjectivity" and elucidates "systematic patterns of 'precarity'" (May 34, 57). Who survives recognition remains a vital political question, as do the costs of this survival. For example, there has been little

public outcry for the Black women and girls who have died at the hands of law enforcement or for the over-incarceration of Black women and disproportionate processing of Black girls, compared with white girls, through juvenile justice systems. Hence, at the Millions March NYC (December 13, 2014), a coalition of feminist organizations "called [out] the names of black cisgendered women, black trans women, and black girls who have been killed by the police," referencing Black women's ongoing struggle for legal recognition (Agard). In sum, #BlackLivesMatter and the feminist coalition at the Millions March NYC point to the similitude of marginalization and power in juridical and activist contexts.

Aiyana Stanley-Jones, seven. Pearlie Golden, ninety-two. Rekia Boyd, twenty-two. Nizah Morris, forty-seven. Kayla Moore, forty-two. Trayvon Martin, seventeen. Michael Brown, eighteen, Eric Garner, forty-three, and many others "pass[ed] under the radar of recognition regimes" (Butler and Athanasiou 89). In *Dispossession: The Performance of the Political,* Athanasiou asks: "How do we survive liberal recognition and its simultaneously life-affirming and life-threatening claims for ensuring and protecting life?" To which Butler responds: "It is a fine question, how to survive liberal recognition. But perhaps it is linked with another question: how do we survive without it?" (76).

#IfTheyGunnedMeDown offers a particularly compelling response to such questions through its critical engagement with the normative structures and politics of recognition and misrecognition. #IfTheyGunnedMeDown emerged after the leak of a surveillance video of Michael Brown shoplifting cigarillos from a convenience store on April 9, 2014, which was widely circulated by national and cable news outlets. The hashtag tweet asked, "If I were gunned down, which images would the media use to portray me?" The campaign features photographs of young Black men in normative social roles: wearing military uniforms and graduation caps and gowns. #IfTheyGunnedMeDown operates iconoclastically; images link transparent recognitions (all Black men are criminals) and causalities, normative violence chief among them. In foregrounding normative achievements, the campaign draws attention to how race is classed in the American imagination. But does the campaign's critical appropriation of normative social roles effectively diffract the concept of recognition from one of "seeing" (making visible) to one of imaging equitable sociopolitical relationships? Is #IfTheyGunnedMeDown essentially a transformative or recuperative recognition project? #IfTheyGunnedMeDown may invoke the cultural politics and entitlements of liberal recognition, but it is not simply a dialectical reversal limited to the normative incorporation of the heretofore excluded or to an uncritical conformity. #IfTheyGunnedMeDown is not about norm emulation or alignment for the sake of conformity, though

normative identifications structure many posts; rather, the campaign diffracts and contests liberal recognition by exposing its "exclusionary politics" (Prasad 2016, 64). #IfTheyGunnedMeDown also exposes the alienating function of dialectical recognition and, in this regard, serves as an implicit, if not explicit, critique of dialectical notions of political subjectivity predicated on trauma and subjection.

Intersectional recognitions contrast with models of recognition based in identification and symmetrical reciprocity ("standing in another's shoes"), which essentially form a structural dialectic between same and other (Lyon 60). In *Deliberative Acts,* rhetorical theorist Arabella Lyon argues for an understanding of "identification as magical thinking": "Our identification is all my pretense, cloaking co-optation and narcissism as it ignores differences" (59). Moreover, Lyon claims, "identification is imbued with power's innate normativity, and too often, as an abstraction, it depoliticizes the most political and contingent acts of deliberation—the many becoming action—through its failure to designate inequality, history, parochialism, struggle, and marginalization" (60). In *Inconvenient Strangers: Transnational Subjects and the Politics of Citizenship,* rhetorical theorist Shui-yin Sharon Yam likewise draws attention to the risks of rhetorical identification as a strategy of persuasion and to the limits of center-periphery models for understanding power. Perhaps most importantly in the context of this chapter, Lyon's and Yam's transnational approach to deliberation and deliberative empathy respectively provide critical models for rhetoricians to rethink identification as relational and in relation to intersecting networks of power. How, then, are we to interpret expressions of identification in the context of social protests? Do protesters holding placards with expressions such as "We are Trayvon Martin," or white protesters donning hoodies at Hoodie Marches, signify an uncritical identification, or do they provide an opportunity for coalition and communication across difference?

Speaking about the risks of inadvertently replicating an uncritical moral universalism and postracial fantasies in activist contexts, cultural critic and theorist of critical pedagogy Henry Giroux addresses the challenges of the Million Hoodie Marches held in New York, Philadelphia, and across the nation. Giroux claims: "We can and must do more than don a hoodie to prop up the superficial solidarity of an alleged post-racial world order" (2013, 100). Giroux is concerned that the emphasis on accessories may draw attention to the criminalization of poor minority youth but divert attention from economic deprivations that make it nearly impossible for such youth to "challenge or escape from the zones of abandonment in which they find themselves" (93). In "Trayvon Martin and the Tragedy of the New Jim Crow," philosopher

Cynthia Willett and historian Julie Willett likewise call for a shift in attention away from the "politics of style" to the "vulnerability of neoliberal citizenship . . . and the price that demands homage to white respectability, as it denies the possibility of multiracial solidarity" (217). Hoodies Up protests, like the hashtag campaign "We Are Trayvon Martin," may yield facile identifications. Yet, Trayvon Martin's race is *not* erased by #WeAreTrayvonMartin. Wearing a hoodie does not necessarily signify a singular identification vis-à-vis substitution. Embodiment makes a difference; the body signifies. We need therefore to distinguish between identification and critique through embodiment.

Speaking to an audience at the University of Utah, Sybrina Fulton responded to Geraldo Rivera's (March 23, 2012) claim that "Trayvon Martin would be alive but for his hoodie." She said, "But is it the hoodie that really made the difference? Or the color of his skin?" (Mauney). "For those who patrol the boundaries of who does and does not belong," as Willett and Willett remind us, the hoodie still functions primarily as a "sign of race and criminality" (218). Similarly, that Zimmerman "justified his actions based on his rabid ideal that Trayvon was 'out of place' in a suburban neighborhood," as Carol Henderson points out, "lends credence to the notion that policing the racial divide is a white man's privilege and that any violation of these racial codes can be met with deadly force" (255). When men of color wear T-shirts screened with Martin's photograph, or bear signs at protests that ask "Am I Next?," or when NBA player LeBron James tweets a photo of himself wearing a hoodie with the caption "#WeAreTrayvonMartin . . . #Stereotyped #WeWantJustice," men of color mobilize a *but-for* argument that emphasizes how marginalization and privilege play out simultaneously and recognize those who have access to normative power and privileged "but for" one quality (Crenshaw, qtd. in May 49). Whether identification enables communication across difference and facilitates the difficult work of coalition building depends on any number of material and rhetorical contingencies. But what is clear is how easily identifications are co-opted and redeployed as postracial recognitions that discount ongoing racial inequities, structural differences, and white privilege.

Human Rights Recognitions and Transnational Coalitions

Rights recognitions reify the liberal state apparatus; however, human rights recognitions are not only about legal incorporation of the heretofore excluded. Human rights recognitions also aim to hold nation-states accountable as perpetrators of violence. Several scholars, for example, have called for the state of Florida to be held accountable for Martin's death because of its "failure to

establish a competent criminal justice system that is free from racial bias" (A. M. Smith 12). Anna Marie Smith points to the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), under which the state is obliged to adopt criminal statutes to protect right to life and remedy violations of individual rights or freedoms (13). Smith argues, "It follows that the State party is also obliged to forego [*sic*] a whole range of actions that would bring it into violation of the ICCPR, including the adoption of excessively permissive affirmative defense statutes, such as Florida's SYG laws—that give legal immunity to homicidal vigilantes" (13). Although international human rights laws do not trump US federal or state laws, as Smith also notes, "each State party to the ICCPR bears substantial responsibility under international human rights law where vigilante violence is concerned" (14). According to Smith, the state of Florida fell "far below the adequacy threshold" (13) in its response to the murder of Trayvon Martin.

Correspondingly, on August 14, 2014, Amnesty International sent delegates to monitor aggressive police tactics against protesters in Ferguson, Missouri. A few months later (October 24, 2014), Amnesty released a report charging that police committed human rights abuses against protesters: "The events in Ferguson raised a range of human rights concerns, including the right to life, the use of lethal force by law enforcement, the right to freedom from discrimination, and the rights to freedom of expression and assembly." A month later, on November 12, 2014, before the grand jury decision not to indict Darren Wilson, the Brown family headlined a delegation to the 53rd session of the United Nations Committee Against Torture in Geneva, Switzerland. The Ferguson to Geneva coalition included Michael Brown's parents, attorney Daryl Parks, UN report authors, and organizers from Ferguson. The group submitted a report to the UN Committee, which argued that both the "killing of 18-year-old unarmed black male Michael Brown by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, and the excessive force by police officers on peaceful protests after Brown's killing . . . [were] violations of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment" (Ferguson to Geneva). The UN Committee Against Torture soon thereafter released a report that likewise criticized the "excessive use of force by law enforcement officials" (Izadi).

Not surprisingly, the *UN Committee Against Torture Report* and its depiction of the US as a violator of human rights was not widely reported in domestic US news media. The refusal of the US to recognize its own violations of human rights—government and news media focus on violations that take place elsewhere—is a classic example of the messianic ethos and strategic deployment of human rights to bolster US military and humanitarian inter-

ventions abroad. Serge Schmemann's *New York Times* article "A Grim Week of Executions and Racial Strife," which figure 6 accompanied, exemplifies such refusals to recognize human rights violations within our own borders. These denials are especially striking when comparisons are drawn between violence in the US and the Islamic Middle East. Schmemann juxtaposes racial violence in Ferguson, Missouri, with the Syrian civil war, recent executions associated with the Israel-Palestine conflict, and ISIS's public execution of American journalist James Foley. With the exception of the Ferguson conflicts, which is discussed in terms of perceptual differences between Black and white Americans, the conflicts abroad are depicted as deeply rooted in a long history of state- and pseudo-state-sanctioned violence, mass atrocities, and human rights violations. Schmemann invokes former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay's reproach to powerful nations' failure to stop endless conflicts abroad, but when it comes to state violence in Ferguson he frames the issues largely in attitudinal terms, emphasizing differing perceptions of whether the shooting of Brown was justified or not. Had Schmemann extended his analysis of state and pseudo-state executions abroad to the police shooting (execution) of the unarmed Michael Brown, the image that accompanied the article would take on the burden of its heavy shadow—shadow carceral systems that haunt Blackness and US racial politics. This coverage demonstrates how "systemic disparities align with identity-based modes of representation to channel structural vulnerabilities towards some communities and away from others" (Oliviero 2011, 2). Hence this photograph (figure 6) might be read not as an appeal to a benevolent observer to affirm the Black man's agency but rather as the presence of Black vulnerability and strength in adversity. The juxtaposition of figure 6 and the Schmemann article illustrates the overshadowing of anti-Black violence in the US by coverage of terrorism against Americans abroad. Not only does the politics of misrecognition haunt Black life; American exceptionalism and carceral systems shadow Black death.

In contrast to the erasure of the US as a violent actor in "A Grim Week of Execution and Racial Strife," the Ferguson to Geneva coalition mobilized human rights in shaming the US for its violence against and failure to protect Black communities. Links between domestic civil rights and international human rights appeals have deep historical roots in Black activism in the US and echo the coalitional strategies and transnational rhetoric of activists in the mid-1970s, the Black Panther Party among them. For example, counter to reductive portrayals of the Black Panther Party as Black nationalists, figures such as Huey Newton and Malcolm X adopted the language of internal colonization and linked the oppression of Black communities throughout the

US with colonies throughout the Third World (B. Rodriguez 159).[13] Although human rights may be beholden to Western liberal philosophies, we need not understand these transnational recognitions as forms of false consciousness. Human rights may be beholden to a history of myopic, exclusive, and "discriminatory universality" (Kapur 2006, 673), but a campaign such as Ferguson to Geneva mobilized human rights' "rebellious spirit" to hold the US accountable for systematic states of exception (660). The critical import of a coalition like Ferguson to Geneva therefore rests not in its ability to decontaminate human rights but in its ability to leverage human rights frameworks to link anticolonial and antiracist politics, and hold to account carceral systems for their policing of certain bodies and not others.

Similar to Ferguson to Geneva, the aim of the social media campaign #Ferguson2Palestine is not primarily about the recognition of identities nor a call for inclusivity in the liberal rights regime, but rather about the dismantling of imperial and military occupations, including the militarization of the police in Black communities within the US. #Ferguson2Palestine emerged in the wake of the murder of Michael Brown and hypermilitarization of the police response to the protests in Ferguson. Palestinians reached out to Ferguson protesters via Twitter to share tactics for protecting themselves from chemical agents (tear gas) used by police. Carceral systems weaponize the air that activists and marginalized communities across the world breathe.

As a coalition-building movement, #Ferguson2Palestine has organized public events with other organizations, such as NYC Solidarity, Direct Action Front for Palestine, and #BlackLivesMatter. Some Ferguson protesters joined with members of Hands Up United and the Dream Defenders to travel as a delegation to Palestine to join forces against state-sanctioned violence and military occupations. Although activists and scholars alike draw comparisons between Israeli and US police training, military tactics, and military occupations, which includes the overpolicing of Black communities, #Ferguson-2Palestine does not so much conflate geopolitical particularities as emphasize how the politics of misrecognition and nonrecognition operate transnationally.[14] #Ferguson2Palestine foregrounds the contradictory role of nation-states as apparatuses of terror and security and as entities charged with the reconciliation of racial conflict and injustice. #Ferguson2Palestine contests the universal subject of human rights by exposing the hierarchical humanizations that drive international politics, and in this regard the movement illustrates how both dialectical and intersectional (multi-axel) identifications map onto nation-states' strategic deployments of human rights discourse to legitimize military occupations.

Dispossession and Recognition In-Between

The concept of dispossession turns our attention to the "human" of human rights and the ontological foundations of juridical humanity. In their dialogue, Butler and Athanasiou claim, "The power of dispossession works by rendering certain subjects, communities, or populations unintelligible, by eviscerating for them the conditions of possibility for life and the 'human' itself" (20). In stripping the subject of subjectivity, dispossession operates as a form of nonrecognition. Athanasiou and Butler argue that dispossession "render[s] [certain bodies] subhuman or hauntingly all-too-human, bind[s] them within calculable self-same identities, and put[s] them in their proper place . . . namely one of perennial occupation as non-being and non-having" (18–19). Dispossession shifts the analytical framework from a focus on the entanglement of rights and social identities to the broader ontological dispositions of the "human" (20), possessive individualism, and the "impasses of the liberal ethics and logics of recognition" (75). Although #BlackLivesMatter calls for the "full recognition of [Blacks'] human rights," the campaign also turns to the ontological realm and critiques universalized notions of the "human" that underlie human rights. To say that #BlackLivesMatter turns to the ontological is not to suggest that this shift displaces materiality, or that legal and social inclusion are not among its goals, but to acknowledge the intersections between the ontological and material realms in reinforcing normative rationalities and inequities.

Lyon's conceptualization of recognition helps us navigate performative scenes of dispossession and collective grief. Lyon turns to Hannah Arendt's concept of *in-between* to define the scene of recognition as a shared communicative act (54). Arendt writes, "To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time" (qtd. in Lyon 54). These in-between spaces "focus not on agent or act, but [on] the shared potential of those at the table," or, in this case, those lying on the ground. Lyon observes, rightly I believe, that "any act within an in-between is not easily owned or attributed" (58). The in-between may occupy the temporal present, but as with the die-ins, the in-between also points to the moment of relationship among social actors where future political potentials are formed (55). As Lyon puts it, "In-betweens imply responding, if not responsible, relationships and commitments" (55).

We might look at the die-ins as scenes of collective recognition, or perhaps more precisely as scenes or enactments of "differential belonging," wherein

recognition exists in-between bodies and identities (K. Chávez 2010, 144). Drawing on the formative scholarship of feminists of color, namely María Lugones, Gloria Anzaldúa, Chela Sandoval, and Aimee Carrillo Rowe, rhetorical studies scholar Karma Chávez highlights how "differential belonging . . . asks people to acknowledge how 'we are oppressed and privileged so that we may place ourselves where we can have an impact and where we can share experience'" (2010, 144). "Differential belonging," she continues, "compels us to *be* longing, as in, to desire relations across lines of difference" (144; emphasis in original). The concept of recognition in-between, like differential belonging, may thus provide a way for us to chart an ethical path away from both anti-Black universals and appropriations.

Like #BlackLivesMatter, die-ins enacted on college campus and public spaces across this country and abroad strive to dismantle the "hierarchy of humanizations" (Hua and Ray 17). Die-ins are social protest tactics wherein protesters lie on the ground to dramatize death. As acts of solidarity and commemoration, the die-ins connect those who come before with those who come after, and in this regard point to a shared history of struggle and hope. After the two grand juries failed to indict the police officers that killed Michael Brown and Eric Garner, protesters staged die-ins to draw attention to the devaluation of Black life and racialized legal exceptions. Lying on the ground, holding Black Lives Matter signs, protesters remind us of past racial injustices and present conditions that keep Blacks in an indeterminate state as racialized others. At some enactments, white protesters sit rather than lie down to signify different social positions and vulnerabilities. The different racial and class identities of participants—some at elite university campuses or even in other countries—question how we might or might not read these scenes of dispossession as persuasive acts of solidarity or alliance with activists in Ferguson, New York, or Baltimore. While the contextual contours and bodies of each die-in particularize the appeal, recognition in-between can serve as an empowering bridge for non-Black allies to show solidarity that respects the Black lives and experiences at the center of any activism and provide a way for these allies to recognize their non-Black identities as constituting their own privileges in relation to Blackness. The in-between both connects us to and separates us from others and "mark[s] an openness of communicative and interpretive horizons" (Lyon 55). The Black Lives Matter die-ins specifically break with classical liberal and neoliberal attachments to agency as autonomy and choice, and like intersectional recognitions, put forth an understanding of agency based not on an autonomous, atomistic self but on an understanding of political subjectivity and agency grounded in social interdependences, shared interests, and differential belongings.

In-betweens point to alliances that may be impossible based on the logics of recognition. Undeniably, coalitional interspaces are difficult to articulate and sustain in a liberal political milieu that inflexibly equates racial integration as civil and separatist as uncivil rather than empowering under some circumstances. Thus, I do not present recognition in-between as a universal remedy that comes with a political guarantee, nor do I want to suggest that we turn these interspaces into readily usable forms, for acquiring legitimacy may have its own perils. Instead, I want to stress that the in-between exerts power in unexpected ways; the in-between relinquishes recognition from unyielding normative identity constructs, appropriations, and the state's surveillance of the Black body. The context and modality of the in-between also matters. For instance, like the photographic silhouette of the Black male kneeling in the streets of Ferguson (figure 6), Black Lives Matter and Ferguson die-ins arrest the shadows that animate recognition. These die-ins do not nostalgically restore these hauntings but rather redirect attention to the historical imaginary and its configuration of lives deemed worthy (or not) of remembrance. To turn to these spaces between bodies is also to break with trauma as an explanatory framework for understanding racial injustice and its concession to certain habits of recognition, namely the dialectical construal of political subjectivity based on subjection. These in-between spaces have the potential to operate as diffractive spaces. Moreover, and contrary to superficial interpretations of the die-ins as liberal concessions to models of recognitions tied to victimization, Black Lives Matter die-ins extend the concept of recognition from representation to one of enacting a process of political becoming (Lyon 49). Recognition in-between resets the ethical parameters of our political engagements with each other by enacting a shared communicative act that does not arise out of dominance, identification, or appropriation but compels us to contemplate what it means to thrive, not merely to survive recognition.

Taken together, the recognition scenes presented thus far provide an opportunity to understand the different ways we live with recognition despite the fact that recognition in each scene may fail us in some way. That is, there appears within any scene of recognition that which, by virtue of the scene, remains unintelligible but present. How are we to understand the shadows and hauntings that animate that which we do see in any given recognition scene? Or, more broadly, how do we read for that which is made impossible by logics of recognition? The logic of extending recognition to subjects disavowed through the politics of misrecognition and nonrecognition suggests legal and sociopolitical recognition as a solution to racial violence. But what legal recognition fails to resolve are the paradoxes of liberalism and conferment, which includes the state as both a violator and a protector of rights. These paradoxes

point to an ethical void—a black hole, a singularity—at the core of the politics of recognition and its reliance on the willingness of dominant populations to relinquish power and privilege. The ethical void at the core of recognition politics, particularly its deployment as a means to address racialized state violence and racial injustice, is the singularity of Black suffering, which recognition in-between may, in some regards, simulate spatially. Coalitional ideals are anti-apocalyptic embodiments that offer a politics of relationality rather than a universalizing or depoliticizing relationality. These spaces in-between thus marked a threshold poised for new anti-apocalyptic articulations and coalitional imaginaries.

Black Suffering Diffracts Recognition

> Black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, impoverishment. (Saidiya Hartman 6)

In her introduction to *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being,* Christina Sharpe discusses six familial deaths: those of her eldest sister, IdaMarie (whose cause of death was unknown); IdaMarie's son, Jason Phillip Sharpe; and her sister Annette's and brother-in-law's adopted and estranged son Caleb, who was murdered. She also mentions the murder some twenty years earlier of her cousin Robert, who was schizophrenic, by Philadelphia police; and the death of her mother, Ida Wright Sharpe; and eldest brother, Van Buren Sharpe III. "This deathly repetition," she writes, "is one instantiation of the wake of the conceptual frame of and for living blackness in the diaspora in the still unfolding aftermaths of Atlantic chattel slavery" (2). And through their lives and these deaths, she notes, her family "lived an awareness of itself, as and in, the wake of the unfinished project of emancipation" (5).

Like her autobiographical introduction, Sharpe's critical engagement with her critical archive (literary texts, legal instruments, and photography) is genealogical—but unlike Foucauldian genealogy's emphasis on discursive regimes, Sharpe's genealogy is embodied—a genealogy of the flesh. While Sharpe does not use the term *genealogy* to characterize her methodology, like the Afropessimism critical tradition on which she draws (Sexton, Spillers, and Wilderson), her methodological notion of "wake work" foregrounds embodied histories. For Sharpe, the wake and wake work signify a "new analytic"

and "method of encountering a past that is not past" as a process of "tracking of phenomena that disproportionately and devastatingly affect Black peoples" (13). She is interested in "plotting, mapping, and collecting the archives of the everyday of Black immanent and imminent death, and in tracking the ways we resist, rupture, and disrupt that immanence and imminence aesthetically and materially" (13). Wake work is not a recognition politics, but a politics that elucidates the ontology of Black nonrecognition and history of the denial of Black humanity. Sharpe is also interested, however, in what "survives this insistent Black exclusion, this ontological negation" (14). Wake work attends to the "precarities of the afterlives of slavery" (5)—to the "violence of the ordinary" (to draw on Veena Das), to the "slow violence" (to draw on Rob Nixon), to the temporarily elusive violence that "structure[s] our most consequential forgettings" (8). In drawing attention to the genealogies of anti-Black violence and Black suffering via social constructs of the human and the ontological limits of recognition, wake work might be viewed as a diffractive methodology—as a breaking or spreading apart of waves. As I note in the introduction to *Violent Exceptions,* diffractive methodologies are "committed to understanding which differences matter, how they matter, and for whom" (Barad 90).

Wake work, as a diffractive methodology, situates Black suffering as perpetual and inequitable. Black suffering is therefore not beholden to the humanitarian threshold—or to threshold politics. "To be in the wake," Sharpe argues, is "to recognize the ways that we are constituted through and by continued vulnerability" (16). "We are positioned in the knowledge that we are living in the afterlives of slavery . . . in a lived and undeclared state of emergency" (100). For Sharpe, carceral systems might be understood as "slavery's as yet unresolved unfolding" (14).

> In the wake, the semiotics of the slave ship continue: from the forced movements of the enslaved to the forced movements of the migrant and the refugee, to the regulation of Black people in North American streets and neighborhoods, to those ongoing crossings of and drownings in the Mediterranean Sea, to the brutal colonial reimaginings of the slave ship and the ark; to the reappearances of the slave ship in everyday life in the form of the prison, the camp, and the school. (Sharpe 21)

Stop-and-frisk policies, for example, Sharpe argues, "follow a direct line from the overseer and the slave/master/slave owner's and any white persons' charge of impudence . . . [and] 'catalogue of offenses usually laid to the charge of slaves' (Douglass [1855] 2003a, 92)" (86). As this passage suggests, "wake work" presents a challenge to paradigmatic imaginings of slavery in the US as a "sin-

gular event." Instead, Sharpe argues for an understanding of slavery as a "singularity—a weather event or phenomenon likely to occur around a particular time, or date, or set of circumstances." She continues, "Emancipation did not make free Black life free; it continues to hold us in that singularity. The brutality was not singular; it was the singularity of antiblackness" (106). *Singularity* refers to the infinite gravitational distortion of space and time. Sharpe codes the pervasiveness of antiblackness as an ecology, as weather that "trans*forms Black being" (106). She asks, "What must we know in order to move through these environments in which the push is always toward Black death?" (106).

Drawing on Vargas and James's formulation in "Refusing Blackness-as-Victimization," Sharpe points to the predictably of Black death as a "constitutive aspect of democracy" (193). Yet, in highlighting the paradoxes of "wake work" as a "mode of inhabiting and rupturing this episteme with our known lived and un/imaginable lives" (18), Sharpe does not concede to apocalyptic posthumanist imaginaries. In mapping the intersection of ocean, weather, the ship's hold, and human cargo, Sharpe highlights the intra-activity of human and nonhuman life. But, unlike posthumanist iterations that fail to attend to ontological configurations of Black bodies as nonhuman and Black suffering, Sharpe, drawing on Black feminist studies scholar Hortense Spillers, offers a methodological corrective. Sharpe writes, "Again and again scholars of slavery face absences in the archives as we attempt to find 'the agents buried beneath'" (Spillers, qtd. in Sharpe 12).

Black suffering is not apocalyptic, in that Black suffering is neither total nor complete. If apocalypse refers to the complete final destruction, then "wake work" acknowledges slavery's afterlives as well as aesthetic and political disruptions and interventions. Unlike Spillers, who "organize[s] her account of political change around the drama of recognition and the struggle between competing constructions of the human" (Ellis 163), Sharpe moves farther afield from recognition politics in insisting that her project is not about the reclamation of Black humanity. Sharpe and Spillers both observe that the category of the "human" is a "status conferred on some bodies and not others for ideological reasons" (Ellis 167). But Sharpe is "not interested in rescuing Black being(s) for the category of the 'Human'" (116). Sharpe's critique of hegemonic formations of the "Human" resonates with posthumanists' critiques; however, her focus on the racial genealogies of the "Human" and ontology of Black nonbeing offers an important corrective to posthumanism's "white optics" (Sullivan 2012, 303).

More broadly, Black feminist studies scholar and philosopher Axelle Karera argues that Anthropocene ethics, with its "naturalization of relationality" (34) and "depoliticized imaginaries" (37), is "unequipped to face the racial

histories of our current ecological predicament" (32). The Anthropocene's "apocalyptic imaginaries," Karera claims, are "'powerful in disavowing or displacing social [. . .] antagonisms'" (33). If the Anthropocene is to have political impact, therefore, Karera asserts, and I concur, it will need to "grapple with the problem of black suffering" (34). She continues, "black suffering—especially in the figure of the slain black bodies—indefinitely haunts the possibility of a post-apocalyptic afterlife" (34). Even when new materialists and posthumanist theorists "acknowledge that intra-species inequalities are central to our current ecological crisis," as Karera points out, "anthropocene thinking has generally been unable to yield a sustained critique of the racist origins of global warming capable, in turn, of exposing the limits of its desire to rethink . . . the concept of the 'human'" (38). Karera therefore questions Anthropocenean discourse's "premature fantasies about post-apocalyptic futures," which, she argues, "obscure a deeply fragmented ethos unequipped to account for the suffering of racialized bodies" (39).

Thinking with both Sharpe and Karera, I envision an anti-apocalyptic imaginary capable of articulating the racial implications of crisis and the violence of universalizing notions of human life and threats on life. More specifically, thinking with Sharpe and Joy James, I envision a genealogy that counters the negation and erasure of "racialized terror, punishments, and control in the United States," including "the history of policing" and "visceral spectacles of state abuse" (24). These are the omissions that characterize, as James points out, the metanarratives of European theorists such as Foucault's *Discipline and Punish.* The rise of the global right and its apocalyptic imaginary might very well frame the photograph of a Black man kneeling in the street in Ferguson during a protest over the killing of Michael Brown, a rose in his hand, as an act of contrition or repentance—as a sentimental apocalyptic recognition scene. But must the photograph be read as a reversal of the hail of the police officer in the Althusserian recognition scene? And if we read it this way, are we therefore insisting that the photograph functions as a hail to the non-Black person? And what are the risks of such recognition scenes? After all, the rose that rises out of this violence—the offering—is also precarious, cut from its source of life. Like Michael Brown's attempt to surrender—hands up—the Black man's offering is precarious.

What if we were to look beyond this precarious offering to the carceral state? What if we were to look beyond the reconfiguration of the ideological rituals of recognition? What if we were to see differently and look over the Black man's shoulder across time to another archive, to another genealogy? What if we were to practice "wake work" and annotate the historical redactions of Black life and Black death to which the photograph refers? What if

we were to see Brown's death not through the gaze of the carceral state but via a diffractive rhetorical genealogy—that both inhabits and ruptures slavery's afterlives and lives in these paradoxes? (Sharpe 18). What if we were to see and to know the birth of these hands and the fear of losing one's child to violence? What if we were to trace this fear and "history back to chattel slavery and the law of partus sequitur ventrem [. . .] which dictated that the children of a slave woman inherited the mother's non/status"? (79). Wake work demands attention to Black motherhood and mourning. Yet, as Sharpe also notes, "Just as wake work troubles mourning, so too do the wake and wake work trouble the ways most museums and memorials take up trauma and memory" (19).[15] Rather than engage in a "kind of reparation [. . .] about an event that is seen to be past," wake work focuses on the afterlives of slavery that are "unfolding still" (20). In this regard, "wake work" might be understood as an embodied genealogy with porous boundaries—a diffractive rhetorical genealogy of the flesh. Wake work opens violence to time. Diffractive genealogy does not frame time as recovery but in the terms of everyday survival. Diffractive rhetorical genealogy likewise does not seek unity in meaning or simple truths but through its analysis of the struggle of world-making forces is engaged in the project of imagining new worlds.

Building on these imaginings, in the concluding case study chapter, I highlight the exceptional ocular logics that underwrite heteronormative policies and violence toward LGBTQI children, and, more specifically, how transgender children likewise must navigate the liminal spaces between public invisibility and hypervisibility in claiming their rights. The cases under consideration in chapter 5 reveal the troubling affixation of the humanitarianism paradigm of children's human rights to the tolerance threshold and to state mechanisms predicated on transnormative and ableist conceptions of gender identity. To combat these affixations and their negative consequences, this case study calls for diffractive readings of the human and humanism and urges greater critical understanding of how tolerance functions as discourse for containing difference and recognition of how transgender children and advocates challenge these discourses and violent genealogies.

CHAPTER 5

Queer Optics

Humanitarian Thresholds and
Transgender Children's Rights

Humanitarianism operates according to the logic of the threshold, which, as I have argued throughout, the liminal figure of the child-in-peril operationalizes. Exceptionalist translations of human rights violations congregate around the humanitarian figure of the child-in-peril and the imagined intimacy of distant observers. Iconic figurations of the child-in-peril suture moral sentiment to humanitarian governance and traffic in the violence of the exception. Humanitarian recognitions are affixed to the optics of liminality. Thresholds establish and monitor values, and these value determinations underwrite humanitarian recognitions. In this chapter I consider the degree to which public recognitions of transgender and intersex children's rights are tied to the tolerance threshold and to the heteronormative mechanisms of the state. I juxtapose three LGBTQI documentary films—*Growing Up Coy* (2016), *Getting Out* (2011), and *She's Not a Boy* (2019)—to elucidate the obstacles to the recognition of transgender and intersex children's rights and the links between these obstacles and the optics of *queer liminality*—a term I use in this context to refer to the *in-between* spaces and identities that challenge the stability of the heteronormative gender binaries that undergird the tolerance threshold and its figuration of the child-in-peril.

Liminality demarcates a transitional phase, a period during which an individual awaits incorporation into a particular social structure, or a space where transformation takes place, or a process of transitioning across bound-

aries and borders, and, more broadly, refers to the quality of ambiguity or in-between-ness. In earlier chapters I argued that the figure of the child-in-peril as a liminal subject operationalizes the humanitarian threshold as a site of political and moral struggle. Here I want to highlight how humanitarianism and its optics leverage queer liminality to frame LGBTQI children's rights as exceptional, even when the circumstances that condition these rights violations are systemic and of the everyday. Victor Turner (1969) argues that "liminal personae elude or slip through the network of classifications" (95). He continues, "Liminality is frequently likened to death . . . to invisibility, to darkness" (95). Queer liminality may disrupt heteronormative binaries and fixed identification and thus be celebrated by LGBTQI activists in its "opposition to disciplining, normalizing social forces," as Seidman notes (133), but those who embody liminality are also often targets of discrimination and violence. When people in liminal spaces are viewed by those in power as moving toward normative nonliminal spaces, they often are accepted. In other words, return from the liminal is perceived as a return to the normative. Transgender and intersex children are in a particularly precarious position when it comes to negotiating liminal identities and embodiments, especially if these liminalities are visibly marked.

I turn to queer liminality not only as a subversive space but rather as a space that is also rhetorically appropriated in service of heteronormative cultural and political agendas. In children's human rights discourse, and LGBTQI rights discourses in particular, liminality conjures a paradoxical space. Focusing on these liminal spaces and identities brings the precarity of transgender children's rights to the foreground and sets the stage for a more critical engagement with the violence of trans exceptionality. Building on Jasbir Puar's conception of trans exceptionalism (2017), I use the term *trans exceptionality* to point to contrasting perceptions of transgender children both as nonnormative, and therefore exceptional, and as bodies in transition that eventually assimilate gender difference through transnormative gender identities, which align with neoliberal biomedical notions of flexibility (54). This chapter therefore aims to reframe children's human rights to account for these paradoxical liminalities. Moreover, some transgender and intersex children, such as those featured in the films under consideration, may be less inclined to proclaim liminal identities for fear of social stigmatization and violent reprisal. Transgender and intersex children are also frequently expected to conform to transnormative and neoliberal narratives of sexual citizenship that must navigate the liminal space between public invisibility and hypervisibility, and these navigations are particularly perilous for those seeking political asylum, as discussed later in this chapter.

Through an analysis of the cultural mediation of transgender and intersex children's rights and their safe or imperiled access to public spaces, this chapter reveals the material-rhetorical contingencies that uphold or push local-global publics beyond the tolerance threshold and its disciplining of differences. This chapter builds on earlier chapters in highlighting the limits of the humanitarian paradigm of human rights and its affixation to the threshold. I argue that the tolerance threshold, which in this context is aligned with transnormative assimilation, emerges in contemporary cultural and legal representations of LGBTQI children's and their advocates' capacities to manage queer liminality as an iteration of neoliberal volatility. Each film under consideration uniquely navigates the tension between visibility as a form of empowerment and conversely as precipitating liminal volatilities. In hegemonic discourses, the transgender and intersex child represents a liminal state that heteronormative impulses aim to fix. Discourses of protection undergird these fixations. Essentialist gender identities may protect those perceived as occupying heteronormative identities, but they also occasion heteronormative violence. In the next section, I demonstrate how the tolerance threshold for transgender children's rights is predicated on transnormative conceptions of gender identity, trans exceptionalism, and ableist configurations of childhood gender identity.

Trans Tolerance and Trans Exceptionality

In *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire,* Wendy Brown offers a trenchant critique of liberalism and the regulatory functions of its seemingly benign ideal of tolerance. The liberal logic and governmentality of tolerance, Brown persuasively argues, depoliticizes discrimination by "reduc[ing] conflict to an inherent friction among identities" (15). Tolerance also functions as a civilizational discourse that "confers superiority on the West" via the attribution of the "intolerable" to certain groups and regimes, which then serves as a form of justification for aggression toward them (15). Tolerance as a "political practice is always conferred by the dominant" (15). Tolerance is ultimately a discourse for containing difference. Tolerance may be inclusive in that it expands the parameters of recognition within existing structures, but it does not transform those structures.

Tolerance for the transgender child is tied to transnormative conceptions that reinforce essentialist models of the male/female gender binary. I use the term *transgender* to refer to "persons whose gender identity or expression does not conform to the social expectations for their assigned sex at birth"

(Gressgard 540). I use the term *transgender child* to refer to transgender minors and to signify a "politically disenfranchised person subject to a regime of racially and gender normative governance by medicine and other social institutions, including the family" (Gill-Peterson, *Histories* 10).[1] The figure of the transgender child is often perceived as doubly liminal in that they are in a state of transition to adulthood and gender transition. In contemporary liberal democracies, the tolerance threshold emerges to discipline transgender identity through heteronormative attempts to desexualize children and through neoliberal discourses' pathologization of childhood dependence. The tolerance threshold is also aligned with neoliberal discourses of plasticity, which are administered by racial and class disparities in medical access (27). Randi Gressgard argues, "Tolerance is bound to its plasticity . . . to when, where, and how far it will stretch" (542). The tolerance threshold has two common definitions in business that are relevant here: "Maximum allowable departure from a standard or specification that a part, process, or product can have and beyond which it may suffer irreparable harm," and "maximum period which an enterprise can afford to be without a critical function or process" (*Business Dictionary*).

In 2014 *Time* magazine characterized the upsurge in positive media coverage of transgender individuals as a "transgender tipping point." *Time* signified this representational threshold on its cover with a photograph of Laverene Cox and the headline "The Transgender Tipping Point: America's Next Civil Rights Frontier." The "transgender tipping point" may signal an increase in positive representations of transgender subjects, but this rise may be tied less to a teleological rendering of civil rights and trans rights, as Puar suggests in her analysis of this feature story, and more to the fetishization of transnormative aspirations disciplined by the neoliberal tolerance threshold. Julian Gill-Peterson points out that trans children are "domesticated figures, either reassuring that the so-called trans tipping point heralds a new generation of liberal progress and acceptance, or, to the transphobic agitators involved in political campaigns focusing on bathrooms and schools, acting as proof that trans life deserves to be repressed in its incipient forms for the threat to the social order that its future would represent" (*Histories* 2). Trans futurity is "tolerated" when white trans children meet transnormative expectations and are therefore capable of incorporation into the normative models of the sex and gender binary and thus capitalism, norms that ignore those in the transgender community who identify outside the gender binary as well as those who are poor, of color, and/or disabled. Trans futurity is not only heteronormative futurity but neoliberal futurity (Lewis, personal correspondence). Puar puts it well: "This suturing of trans to exception futurity and the potential that

the future offers is the new transnormative body" (2017, 46). Trans tolerance is attached to exceptionalist neoliberal notions of adaptation and resilience.

In contrast to the visibility of middle- and upper-middle-class transgender children, for whom these transnormative futures are more readily available, the publicness of transgender children of color is registered not in terms of a better future but in forms of the social death (Cacho). The increased visibility of the experiences of white transgender children speaks to the vulnerabilities they face, but within this coverage transgender children of color become an impossibility. The "spectacular whiteness" (Stryker) of transnormativy stages an "antimony between [Black] negativity and [white] futurity" (Gill-Peterson, *Histories* 3). The dominant coverage of the rights of white transgender children is linked to neoliberalism's encouragement of single-issue struggles, which pit differently oppressed groups against one another.

Tolerance is often deployed in the service of white heteronormative and ableist ideologies. Lee Edelman's work illustrates how the figure of the child is used to buttress discourses of heteronormative reproductive futurism because of the child's position within chronological, developmental narratives of progress beginning in childhood dependency and culminating in independent adulthood. Edelman argues that within dominant liberal figurations, the future is unimaginable without the "figure of the child" because the child serves as "the telos of the social order" (qtd. in Kafer 28). Alison Kafer has shown how anxieties about aging similarly result from heteronormative and ableist assumptions about appropriate temporality, whereby aging itself becomes cast as a disability. These anxieties and futures, as Kafer and others have pointed out, are racialized and classed (see also Hesford and Lewis 2019).

Trans and disabled bodies are tied to the material-discursive biomedical infrastructure of the cure, which for transgender children is construed as a successful transition or as passing. Of course, successful passing—at least initially—can also lead to violence and death; for example, trans sex workers have been assaulted and in some cases murdered when their trans identity becomes known. Puar highlights two forms of trans exceptionalism; the first are "aspirational forms" that "seek rehabilitation, cure, concealment," and the second are "piecing" forms of "inhabiting an exceptional trans body," which in contrast to passing place emphasis on body flexibility, mobility, transformation" (2017 45). Aspirational trans narratives echo narratives about overcoming disability. Even though *trans* identities queer static gender binaries, biomedical diagnoses often push transgender children toward heteronormative subjectivities as a "cure" for what is defined as transgressive behavior. The temporal framing commonly attributed to the disabled person, namely "curative time" (Kim 2017, 25), which presumes the need for expert medical inter-

vention, is increasingly imposed on transgender children. Able-normativity casts those with disabilities as without a future and trans subjects as obstacles to heteronormative futures. Yet, the space for agency that neoliberalism allows for transgender children often exceeds that of children with disabilities, especially children with disabilities for whom a curative future is not imagined or possible (Hesford and Lewis 2019).

The legal underwriting of trans as a disability has its genealogy in the 1990 American Disabilities Act, which specifically excluded "gender identity disorders not resulting from physical impairments" from the category of disability and presented transsexuality and transvestism among a litany of criminalized behaviors, such as pedophilia, exhibitionism, and voyeurism. Professional medical and psychological discourses on gender identity disorder, a diagnosis that refers to people whose gender at birth is contrary to the gender with which they identify, compound ableist temporalities in framing gender nonconformity as a disability or illness (Spade 439) and delimiting the transgender child's agency to their transition from one gender to the other. In 2013 the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* eliminated the diagnosis of gender identity disorder and replaced it with gender dysphoria. Within the psychiatric context, however, dysphoria refers to a mental disorder. Thus, the discourse of gender dysphoria converges with corrective, if not curative, disability discourses.

Growing Up Coy (2016), a documentary film directed by Eric Juhola and produced by Eric Juhola and Jeremy Stulberg, is part of the recent wave of cultural productions about children growing up transgender.[2] *Growing Up Coy* is a film about a transgender child with two disabled siblings. As I argue below, the film highlights an "aspirational form" (Puar 2017, 45) of trans exceptionalism in its focus on Coy's future incorporation into normative identity structures and gendered spaces—the girl's bathroom. Yet *Growing Up Coy* also shows how a transgender child challenges dominant narratives of childhood vulnerability through their articulation of trans agency as a form of sociality.

Growing Up Coy: Trans Recognition

Growing Up Coy premiered June 2016 at the Human Rights Watch Film Festival in New York. The film is about a six-year-old white transgender girl named Coy Mathis whose school in Fountain, Colorado, banned her from using the girls' bathroom. Fountain is a conservative town near the headquarters of the conservative Christian organization Focus on the Family. At the onset of the film, Coy's mother, Kathryn Mathis, reports that Coy was born a boy but

has identified as a girl since she was eighteen months old. Coy publicly transitioned from male to female in kindergarten, and teachers and classmates generally supported her. Coy used the girls' bathroom without incident until the school changed its policy as Coy entered the first grade. Her parents hired a lawyer, Michael Silverman, executive director of the Transgender Legal Defense and Education Fund, who initially wrote to the school board to seek a resolution. But the school board refused to allow Coy to continue to use the girls' restroom, expressing concerns for other students. The family then filed a complaint with the Colorado Civil Rights Division accusing the school of violating the state's antidiscrimination law, which protects transgender people from discrimination. In June 2013 the Colorado Civil Rights Division ruled in favor of the Mathis family, indicating that transgender children could use the bathroom of the gender with which they identify, and chastised the school for a "hostile, intimidating or offensive" environment. Silverman characterized the decision as a "watershed moment for transgender civil rights." Transgender civil rights frames trans visibility in terms of public access to gendered spaces.

In the film, Silverman provides the voice-over commentary and presents the case to Coy's parents, Kathryn and Jeremy Mathis, as "an opportunity to educate the public." The film follows the family from early 2013, six weeks before they went public with their case, through the case's resolution. The intense media coverage shined a light on the case but also brought out public scrutiny and negative criticism of the family. Jeremy and Kathryn Mathis, for example, were "accused of child abuse for allowing their six-year-old to identify as female." In contrast, the film's website characterizes the Mathises as "outspoken public defenders of their daughter's rights" and depicts Coy's transition from an "innocent 6-year-old girl to [a] proverbial 'poster child' for the trans youth movement"—a movement, like the disability movement in the US, that has focused largely on access to public space, in this instance, the public toilet. Moreover, Coy's characterization as a "proverbial 'poster child' for the trans youth movement" likewise reaffirms whiteness and, specifically, the white transgender child as exemplary.

The Mathises have five children: eight-year-old Dakota, whom the father describes as autistic; six-year-old triplets, Coy, Max, and Lilly; and three-year-old Auri. Lilly is a quadriplegic and has cerebral palsy. The film opens with the Mathises' statements about Coy's recent past. Kathryn laments, "At first, we thought it was a phase that he [*sic*] liked the color pink and wearing girly clothes. But one day, shortly before Coy began kindergarten, Coy asked, 'When are the doctors going to take my penis off?'—and then I knew this was something serious." Coy's father, Jeremy, says, "I didn't like the idea of sending

out my son [*sic*] in little bows and stuff. It really wasn't a matter of whether we agreed or not, it was just what it was." As he explains, "This wasn't a phase." The film highlights the pressures that transgender children and their parents face to conform to essentialist categories and institutional gender norms. After the principal notified the family that Coy would no longer be allowed to use the girls' restroom, they contacted the Transgender Legal Fund, who soon thereafter wrote a letter asking the school to uphold Colorado law and allow Coy to continue to use the girls' restroom. Two days later, the Legal Fund received a response from the school's legal representative, which exemplified the convergence of heteronormative and transphobic narratives about gender identity, childhood innocence, and child protection:

> Coy Mathis has not been denied access to the full and equal enjoyment of the educational services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations of Eagleside elementary school. Coy attends classes as all other students, is permitted to wear girls' clothes, and is referred to as the parents requested. Coy has easy access to single user restrooms marked "men" or "women" used by employees or gender-neutral bathrooms located in the school's health room. I'm sure you can appreciate as Coy gets older and his [*sic*] male genitals develop along with the rest of his [*sic*] body at least some parents and students are likely to become uncomfortable with his [*sic*] continued use of the girls' rest room and that it would be far more psychologically damaging and disruptive for the issue to arise at an age when students deal with a lot of social issues.

The argument that with increasing age Coy's body will make "some parents and students . . . *become uncomfortable*" is essentially an argument tied to the tolerance threshold (emphasis added), and the idea that children are asexual beings until adolescence, when they are perceived as sexual subjects. Once children reach adolescence, tolerance for transgender difference surpasses the innocence threshold. Additionally, moral panics about transgender children's access to public spaces, especially sex-segregated spaces, perpetuate stereotypes that conflate sex offenders with transgender adults and, more recently, with transgender children, particularly "boys who claim they're really girls" (Stone 2). Trans girls are likewise depicted as "opportunistic predators" and as threats to cisgender women and children (11), similar to how minority children (see chapter 4), "transgender children, particularly trans girls, are adultified, and sexualized [and, I would add, criminalized] in anti-trans discourse," especially in the moral discourse emerging from the religious right (Stone 3).

A scene midway in the film further illustrates the primacy of heteronormative narratives in trans recognition. The camera zooms in on the extended Mathis family watching Coy and Kathryn's appearance on a show hosted by Katie Couric. The announcer exclaims, "Today on *Katie,* inside the world of transgender children . . . Trapped in their own bodies and lost in an identity they say is not theirs and the parents who have intervened to change their child's future. What do you do when your child wants to be the opposite sex?" The "wrong body" narrative at work here upholds the heteronormative notion of gender as a fixed male/female binary and implies that transgender is an illness that demands a corrective—a gender-normative cure—that begins with parental intervention. *Katie*'s appeal and promise to parents with gender-variant children to provide strategies if not solutions links transgender issues to neoliberal logics that individualize and privatize social challenges.

The documentary's complicity with trans ableist discourses is evident in the film's treatment of disability issues. In *Growing Up Coy,* the disabled child Lilly frequently appears in background shots sitting in her wheelchair; she does not receive any direct filmic attention, nor is she attributed subjectivity or recognized as a complex subject. There are only two very short scenes in which Lilly is directly addressed. "Hi Baby Girl," her grandmother says to her, "I missed you." The second scene is when father Jeremy Mathis playfully pushes Lilly's wheelchair. In contrast to the child with autism, who is virtually invisible, the visibility of Lilly in her wheelchair affixes her identity to disability. Both representations contrast with that of Coy, whose otherness is imagined as temporary. The erasure of the subjectivities and agency of the two children identified as disabled and the praise for Coy's self-defining agency are symptomatic of the pressure for a persuasive gender transition. In other words, as a transgender child, Coy is hypervisible but illegible outside of normative gender identities. And yet Coy is also "transformative" insofar as she is able-bodied/able-minded, testifying to the film's predictably neoliberal lack of intersectional engagement with trans/disability issues.

At the onset of the film, Kathryn is depicted as sweet and caring. In an early scene, Kathryn reads Coy her favorite book, *Be Who You Are,* about a transgender child named "Nick" as he transforms into "Hope." That is, here Kathryn emerges as the "good white mother" who fulfills maternal norms and yet supports her child's nonnormative gender expression. The father is described as an ex-Marine, which signifies his masculinity and patriotism. These normative depictions of the "good mother and father" offset public criticism and cultural shaming lodged against the Mathises later in the film. Social media trolls Kathryn as "defective" because she makes "Tranny and CP kids." These acts of white patriarchal cultural shaming frame transgender chil-

dren and children with disabilities as unwanted social burdens, and link trans children to disabled children as aberrations. Jeff Johnson, from Focus on the Family, likewise criticizes the family for demasculinizing their son. "We don't think it's healthy for girls to be exposed to a boy who thinks he's a girl in a bathroom. It's got to be painful to reject your own masculinity. That's painful internal conflict for a child. You want to affirm his essence and the goodness of being a boy—that your masculinity is a good thing, and it comes from God" (Erdely). For Johnson, the threshold that must not be trespassed—the threshold that is not tolerant of a challenge—is white masculinity.

At one point, the couple decides to separate, citing numerous stresses on their relationship, including media scrutiny and Jeremy's return to school full-time, which places greater household responsibilities on Kathryn. In the end, however, the family is reunited, and Coy is characterized as happily living as a girl in a new town and at a new school. As Kathryn remarks, "She [Coy] doesn't want to have to explain who she is and talk about how she's different. She just wants to be." Here we see how transnormative representations erase the possibility and legibility of difference.

The "wrong body" narrative proliferates perceptions in US news media and entertainment about how to be properly transgender. This narrative is also most often directed toward and consumed by white cisgender individuals. Not only do these transnormative narratives reinforce an essentialist gender binary that can be a source of oppression for many transgender people; they also question the legitimacy of transgender individuals who choose not to have surgery (Ruin). Moreover, transnormative narratives predicated on the embrace of the neoliberal mandate of compulsory whole or able-bodiedness and inclusion ignore the obstacles faced by transgender people of color, transgender people with disabilities, and transgender migrants—for whom an "aspirational" model of transgender citizenship predicated upon visibility and consumption may be neither possible nor desirable (Puar 2017, 45–47). The ability of transnormative discourses to reinforce white heteronormativity may account for why the figure of the transgender white child is often more palatable within the mainstream media than that of the transgender child of color or children who identify as gay or lesbian (Stockton).

Growing Up Coy opens up a critical space to address important ethical questions about transgender children's identity and agency within rights narratives. Likewise, the film's juxtaposition of Coy, a transgender child, and her two siblings with disabilities puts pressure on our understanding of the children's human rights. Placing the figure of the transgender child at the center of debates around children's rights opens up new areas of inquiry through which to interrogate the racialized and ableist norms that structure the pluralization

of rights (that is, rights based on social identity categories) and the differential recognition of particularisms, which circumscribe which children's lives are livable and deserving of a future.

In the next section, I turn to the documentary *Getting Out,* by the Refugee Law Project in collaboration with the Uganda Civil Society Coalition on Human Rights and Constitutional Law, and more specifically to the film's depiction of Tatenda Ngwaru, an intersex girl from Zimbabwe who was persecuted in her home country because of perceptions of and her own claims to transgender identity. Tatenda now resides in the US awaiting asylum. *Getting Out,* and Tatenda's story in particular, demonstrates the risks in the "divestment of codes, of signification, of identity" (Puar 2017, 56) and thereby further elucidates the obstacles of these divestments for LGBTQI youth, specifically LGBTQI asylum seekers and the regulation of queer liminality. *Getting Out* foregrounds the mechanisms of state control of trans im/mobility, including transgender and intersex children's access to public spaces, as well as the exceptional politics and optics of liminality.

Getting Out: The Optics of Trans Liminality

Getting Out portrays the struggles of five LGBTQI Africans fleeing persecution, some of whom are applying for political asylum. The personal portraits provide a first-person perspective on the limitations of the identity-based categories of asylum as not necessarily matching the ways the individuals understand themselves as sexual and gender minorities. The film exposes how LGBTQI asylum seekers are produced as unrecognizable by the state systems in contrast to the film's production of asylum seekers as individuals with legible stories, thus compelling the film viewer to see the impossible subject positions they are forced to occupy. Filmed in Uganda, South Africa, Geneva, and London, with footage from Malawi and Zimbabwe, the film explores not only the homophobia the individuals face in their home communities and countries but also the hypocrisies and failings of asylum systems in the countries where they seek refuge. As the film's title argues, some LGBTQI Africans need to "get out" to escape further persecution before they can "come out." "Coming out" can have serious consequences, beyond the stigma or exclusions one might experience from family and others.

Getting Out also exposes the political consequences of the state's control of queer futurity in its dispersion of the concealing logic of discretion, and thus corroborates how political asylum has become a site for interrogating what constitutes persecution. The film also compels viewers to think about

gender rights as transnational iterations of state-regulated concepts of sexuality, desire, and identity (see Howe and Rigi). In presenting sexuality, and more particularly, the struggles of LGBTQI individuals, as "the new frontier of human rights work," *Getting Out* fosters critical reflection about how sexuality and gender rights take on various meanings in the transnational contexts that asylum law compels. The film's narrator reports, "Nobody lives this frontier more intensely than LGBT persons themselves, particularly when they try to cross it to seek asylum." In Judith Butler's terms, the political asylum process is a site of cultural translation of human rights discourses. Observing that universal human rights refer to "a reality that does not yet exist," Butler "arrived at a second view of universality in which it is defined as a future-oriented labor of cultural translation" (1999/2011, xiii). Here Butler points toward the universalizing logic of human rights and its erasure of cultural particularity. LGBTQI subjects may challenge these universalizing logics, but as *Getting Out* demonstrates, asylum law and rulings on the persecution of gender and sexual minorities do not escape these logics.

Getting Out shows how gender and sexual rights are shaped by imperial imaginaries and the privileging of visibility and therefore provides an opportunity to contemplate the obstacles that LGBTQI asylum seekers face as they navigate legal and cultural systems confounded by heteronormative assumptions and suspicions. Visibility becomes a central issue in these cases as a consequence of lacking other kinds of evidence. For example, asylum officials' demand that asylum seekers prove that they are gay relies on unquestioned, stereotyped assumptions about the kind of questions a gay person should be able to answer, the kinds of affect that signify being gay, and the consequences of public displays that signify identity as a sexual minority in different cultures. Indeed, visuality structures the asylum process and the legibility of LGBTQI[3] identities and the state's sociopolitical recognition or subjection of sexual minorities.

Article 14 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states, "Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution." According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a refugee is someone who, "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country." The category *social group* is the most difficult to define; individuals seeking asylum to escape persecution as sexual minorities fall into this category. Until the Flores case, domestic violence was not recognized as a form of persecution. Membership in a sexual minority group was not one of the cate-

gories originally considered under international refugee law. Originally, *social group* referred to belonging to a recognizable group—a group with members, not a category of people. Many LGBTQI people, as the film suggests, suppress their identity and/or social group affiliation precisely because greater visibility may instigate further persecution (Hazeldean 380). As Amy Shuman and Carol Bohmer observe in their research on asylum narratives, the suspicion of deception is linked to the seemingly arbitrary or dismissive practices on the part of asylum officials (2012). The asylum process is designed to differentiate between fraudulent and legitimate asylum seekers. Gay and lesbian asylum seekers are often accused of being fraudulent (not gay or lesbian) or of not having a sufficient fear of return.[4]

Within the first few minutes of the film, viewers are presented with an example of the strategic use of discourses of contagion, invasion, and negation by parties that support antigay legislation and those that oppose antigay legislation, and more broadly, the legacy of using sexuality as an exclusionary mechanism of the state. On October 14, 2009, the Ugandan antihomosexuality law, known as the "Kill the Gays Bill," was introduced by Member of Parliament David Bahati. (The bill was reintroduced in 2012.) The bill aims to broaden the criminalization of same-sex relations in Uganda domestically, includes provisions for Ugandans who engage in same-sex relations outside of Uganda, and includes penalties for individuals, companies, and organizations that support LGBTQ rights. The bill also includes a provision for the death penalty for "aggravated homosexuality." Daniel Englander notes that "the Bill sparked a nationwide flare of homophobia, where citizens, politicians, and the media have branded homosexuals as 'un-African'" (1264). Supporters argue that the "law [is] designed to protect their traditional values against the invasion of Western homosexuality" (this disposition was represented in the film). As the narrator of the film notes, "The outdated provisions on unnatural offenses echo those found in the penal codes of many of the former colonies of the British Empire." Although local supporters in Uganda, who were interviewed in the film, view the bill as a "law against the invasion of Western homosexuality," a Western man, interviewed by ABC News, tries to distance the West from its colonial past by framing Western interventions in support of the antigay bill as an effort to bolster existing cultural values in the community. In the ABC News interview, when asked if his comments might yield "unpleasant outcomes," he replies: "Do you think that these people have not already had a strong opinion against homosexuality?" In an ironic appropriation of anticolonialist criticism, he argues that the accusation that Western Christian groups have brought homophobia to Uganda is racist and an example of the "colonial mindset all over again."

Human rights entanglement with colonialism points to a core debate between cultural relativism and philosophical universalism in the history and development of human rights law and its mobilization. Although justifications for the persecution of sexual minorities sometimes refer to anticolonialist rhetoric, they represent a more complex web of Christian, local religious, historical, and cultural moral discourses. The cultural traditions to which the relativist features of the Uganda law and its supporters refer are not isolated or singular. Indeed, supporters' arguments are clearly inflected by Christian modalities and narratives that continue to have traction in the West, namely the focus on the sin, not the sinner: "We love homosexuals but hate homosexuality." Antigay rhetoric in Uganda draws its authority from religious discourse as well as from the Christian lobbyists who promise billions in aid to Uganda (Englander 1270). Thus, in addition to asylum reforms, cross-border activist collaborations, and international pressure, LGBTQI rights activists must also engage the religious debates. By focusing on the multiple layers of power and cultural discourses operating in the political asylum process as well as transnational movements for LGBTQI justice and local responses to these movements, *Getting Out* essentially prompts viewers to think about how sexuality and sexual rights operate as forms of transnational exchange.

NGOs offering assistance to sexual minorities play an increasingly important role in helping individuals to navigate the political asylum process, and NGOs have become leaders in the effort to call attention to the obstacles that sexual minorities face in applying for political asylum. *Getting Out* is one of several recent films designed to create an awareness of these obstacles. However, as noted earlier, *Getting Out* must cautiously navigate the tension between visibility and subjection in its promotion of the rights of sexual minorities. For example, the US premiere of *Getting Out* was hosted by the Open Society Foundation, which also provided support for the making of the film, and Human Rights First, on April 6, 2011, in the wake of the January 2011 murder of David Kato, the Ugandan gay activist who worked with Sexual Minorities Uganda. The murder of Kato was directly tied to his visibility as a gay rights activist; Kato's photograph was published in a local Ugandan tabloid, *Rolling Stone* (no relation to the US publication), with other LGBTQI individuals with the headline "Hang Them." Clearly, for socially stigmatized groups, such as sexual minorities, public visibility is not empowering in all contexts.

Getting Out follows the liberal humanist trajectory of bringing greater visibility to the struggles of LGBTQI asylum seekers and attests to the benefits of social media. For example, we learn about the importance of Val Kalinde's access to social media as she was growing up. Kalinde, one of five individuals

featured in the film, turned to social media to connect with other LGBTQI persons and organizations. Yet, importantly, the film also draws attention to the risks of visibility, for when Kalinde came out as a teenager she too was featured in a Ugandan newspaper, and because of that visibility she was subjected to harassment and sexual violence and was publicly stigmatized. She was kicked out of her church and moved out of her neighborhood to avoid further harassment.

Human rights advocates' privileging of visual representations intersects with the LGBT rights movement and its celebration of gay and lesbian visibility and the "coming out" narrative. The human rights seeing-is-believing paradigm (Hesford 2011) and the challenges it poses for certain social groups is particularly apparent in asylum law, which requires that asylum seekers prove membership in a social group (lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender) and fear of persecution on the basis of that membership. The social group must be socially recognizable and therefore, to one degree or another, socially visible. To put it differently, "Unlike other refugee claimants who are not compelled to perform a visible identity in the country to which they migrate, lesbian and gay asylum applicants frequently are expected to conform to neoliberal narratives of sexual citizenship grounded in visibility politics, consumption, and an identity in the public sphere in order to be considered worthy candidates for asylum" (Lewis 179).

In a discussion of political asylum and stigmatized categories of social practice, Amy Shuman and Carol Bohmer describe how the visibility, invisibility, and hypervisibility of social practices are related to the tellability or untellability of particular narratives. Stigmatized social practices can be either more or less visible and more or less legible. "Stigma works by assigning, legitimating, and disputing value . . . and then naturalizing those positions" (Shuman and Bohmer 2012, 217). Stigma works in conjunction with the public spectacle, especially with regard to the policing of sexuality. In *Getting Out,* Florence Kizza describes how police in Uganda invaded her home, found her in bed with her partner, and paraded both her and her girlfriend around town naked. Footage of police in Malawi escorting the first married gay couple in handcuffs through the town and a police raid of a gay wedding in Kenya serves as a backdrop to Kizza's narration. These scenes effectively capture the state's command of the visual regime and the deployment of the public spectacle to shame LGBTQI individuals. Crowds gather and laugh as the gay couples are escorted to the police station and courtroom. The film's inclusion of the public-shaming spectacle aligns viewers with the state's objectifying gaze and as witnesses to this objectification, and foregrounds the significance of the visual realm in upholding relations of power.

Questions of visibility also surface crucially in the immigration officials' arguments for "discretion" as a solution to the persecution of sexual minorities. In the film, the officials determine that someone who has experienced persecution based on sexual preference can return to their country, perhaps to a different region, where they can be "discreet" and thus safe. The British officials' argument that a person who is LGBTQI can return to their country and be discreet is a perpetuation of the colonial view of sexual discretion. The discretion argument, now overturned,[5] did not take into account that once the person has made an asylum application, they become a target for persecution. This discretion argument, I would suggest, is yet another manifestation of the tolerance threshold, which, as Rachel Lewis observes in her analysis of queer asylum policy in the United Kingdom, "not only produces the expectation of consumption and an identity in the public sphere but, perhaps more disturbingly, has resulted in an excessive focus on the sexuality of individual claimants" (2014, 962). Similarly, Alice M. Miller writes, "Burdening sexual dissidents with the obligation to be discreet, the adjudicators are then unable to understand how a woman who has been discreet can be 'gay'—after all, she has not even been sexually 'out' or active" (160).

Early in the film the narrator says, "In order to be able to come out, they first have to get out." Here the narrator confirms the centrality of the coming-out/gay-rights liberation narrative to the film's advocacy stance. Yet, the individual coming-out narratives that the state requires of claimants in order to meet the conditions for political asylum also point to how the state circumscribes the narrative parameters of recognition of sexual rights. In keeping with Butler's call for "future-oriented labor of cultural translation" (1999, xiii), the film describes cases, such as that of Tatenda Ngwaru, a transgender woman, not as exceptions but as examples of the problem of being uncategorizable. Butler describes the problem of uncategorizability in relation to violence, specifically: "The person who threatens violence [against someone who does not conform to gender norms] proceeds from the anxious and rigid belief that a sense of world and a sense of self will be radically undermined if such a being, uncategorizable, is permitted to live within the social world. The negation, through violence, of that body is a vain and violent effort to restore order, to renew the social world on the basis of intelligible gender, and to refuse the challenge to rethink that world as something other than natural or necessary" (2005, 71). The political asylum system itself perpetuates the vulnerability of seemingly uncategorizable individuals who do not conform to the asylum officials' expectations for the category.

Claims based on persecution of sexual minorities face the additional problem of what Jasbir Puar describes as sexual exceptionalism, producing

exceptional vulnerabilities (2007, 7) and impossible subjectivities (19). In other words, not only is disclosure not the whole problem; disclosure is always compromised. The individuals claiming political asylum based on violence they experienced as sexual minorities are, in a sense, unknowable to the asylum officials. By telling their individual stories, *Getting Out* does not make them known but instead points to the problem of unrecognizability as well as to state attempts to regulate queer liminality. Many of the individuals in the film have multiple vulnerabilities and sometimes competing narratives. Among the individuals featured in the film is Leon (who uses only his first name), a refugee, father, and sex worker. Leon, a refugee from the Congo, now in Uganda, left his home country because his sexuality was discovered. But because of discrimination in Uganda, sexual-preference-based discrimination was not part of his asylum narrative. Leon also does not think of himself as gay; instead, he foregrounds his identity as a sex worker. These confounding vulnerabilities draw attention to the problem of uncategorizability (see Shuman and Hesford 2014 for extended analysis of this case). Of particular note, given this chapter's focus on transgender children, is the case of Tatenda Ngwaru. Tatenda Ngwaru tries without success to convince the asylum officials that she is a transgender woman. Her claim is refused, but we learn through subsequent interviews and the later documentary *She's Not a Boy* that she is an intersex woman. Viewers are not made aware of what motivated the decision, whether by Tatenda or the filmmakers of *Getting Out,* to exclude the category of intersex from her narrative. However, as scholars have noted, intersex and transgender are cultural categories. In some cultures, intersex and transgender overlap; in others, they are distinct. Tatenda's shifting embrace of transgender and intersex identities likewise signifies not only the complexity of her identity but the optics of queer liminality and its regulation.

She's Not a Boy

She's Not a Boy is a short documentary by Yuhung Pang and Robert Tokanel, two Columbia University students. Like *Getting Out, She's Not a Boy* seeks to create greater visibility for otherwise unrecognizable sexual minorities and victims of persecution, namely intersex individuals. The film follows the story of Tatenda Ngwaru, who grew up in Gutu, Zimbabwe, and her experience as an intersex asylum seeker and activist in the US. Like *Getting Out, She's Not a Boy* also points to the ways in which visibility logics sanctify singular identities and the atomistic legal subject of liberalism and, in so doing, erase the social factors that may be less visibly intelligible, such as the economic per-

secution of LGBTQI communities. In other words, unrecognizability is also a part of visibility logics. *Getting Out* in particular prompts viewers to consider the degree to which the LGBTQI identity categories reflect a Western understanding of sexual minorities based on individual conceptions of selfhood that do not necessarily address the complexity of the experiences of sexual and gender minorities from diverse cultures, or in the case of intersex individuals, such as Tatenda Ngwaru, who do not identify as queer. Additionally, the discourse of protection inevitably, as Matthew Price puts it, "relegates asylum to an essentially humanitarian, rather than political, role" (357).

Whereas *Getting Out* troubles static notions of sexuality and emphasizes cultural difference in sexual identification (see Shuman and Hesford, 2014), *She's Not a Boy* focuses on the invisibility of intersex within the LGBTQ community. In the film Tatenda Ngwaru describes her experience growing up as an intersex child in a small village in Zimbabwe. She tells us that her mother intuited while pregnant with her that she was carrying a girl and so she prepared for a girl and bought girls' clothes. Yet, when she was born, Tatenda was identified as a boy and raised as a boy. She was even enrolled in an all-boys boarding school. When she entered adolescence, however, and her body began to transform, her teachers and peers began to question her feminine appearance and gestures. Teachers claimed that she wouldn't get a girlfriend if she continued to walk like a girl. Even her father at that point in her life threatened to disown her, calling her a homosexual. At six years old, Tatenda had a hernia, and the doctor who operated on her discovered that she had an ovary. But her parents encouraged her to keep that information secret because they said it would be easier to go on living as a boy. But the bullying against her did not stop, and so Tatenda had to eventually change schools. After college, she moved to South Africa, and while there she visited a doctor who confirmed that she was intersex. Once her parents read the doctor's report and medical determination, they embraced and supported her. Tatenda also lived briefly as a trans women, she says, because she too was unaware of the category intersex. It wasn't until she was in her twenties that she claimed the identity intersex. In 2013 she founded the Zimbabwe organization "True Identity" to fight for equality for intersex people. However, because such advocacy was illegal, the group she founded had to meet in secret. Still, police raided their meetings, and she and others suffered physical and psychological abuse.

In Zimbabwe she was also a victim of a violent hate crime. She was beaten by two men who asked her why she acted as a woman, and as a result of the beating she lost hearing in one ear. Given their concern for her safety, her parents encouraged her to leave Africa to seek political asylum in the US. Her father used his pension to buy her flight ticket, and said to her, "If Obama

hears of you, he is going to meet you and you will change the world together." But, as the film documents, when she reached Los Angeles, with only $60 in her pocket, and no place to sleep, she found herself homeless. Lacking resources, she decided to ask for help on her Facebook page. Soon after her post, someone from NYC offered to buy her a one-way ticket. Even with support from the LGBTQ community in NYC, she was unable to legally work, and so she continued to struggle. It took her nearly a year to get authorization to work. The film also traces her discomfort among the LGBTQ community and her inclination not to identify as queer, an identity that she understands as identified with nonheteronormative sexual desire.

She's Not a Boy brings us full circle back to the US to *Growing Up Coy* and the politics of protection and its delineation of binary gender identifications. In her published essay "I'm an Intersex Black Women. My Voice Matters. Listen," Tatenda Ngwaru, now an intersex activist in the US, describes her struggles for recognition as an intersex woman. She writes, "America didn't welcome me; it didn't even understand me. Americans don't know what intersex means. That includes many within the LGBTQ community, the community where I was supposed to find empathy and love. And it includes the black community." She continues, "Most of the intersex people I've met in America are white. Intersex people are not celebrated in communities of color. We are not represented on their platforms, in the media or anywhere else." Tatenda's goal is not only to bring greater visibility to intersex individuals within the LGBTQ community but to "break barriers to familiarize people with intersex people, show them it's biological, that it's not a choice."

If the rhetorical power of *Getting Out* lies in its documentation of LGBTQI asylum seekers' navigation of competing cultural and legal logics on sexuality, *She's Not a Boy,* unlike *Growing Up Coy,* challenges heteronormative discourses of protection and entitlement. Judith Butler observes the political predicament that rights discourse imposes on those who argue for protection against discrimination. Rights discourse calls forth a presentation of oneself as "distinct, recognizable, delineated, a subject before the law, a community defined by sameness" (2004, 52). "Although this language may well establish our legitimacy within a legal framework ensconced in liberal versions of human ontology," Butler argues, and I concur, "it fails to do justice to passion and grief and rage, all of which tear us from ourselves, bind us to others, transport us, undo us, implicate us in lives that are not our own, sometimes fatally, irreversibly" (52). *Getting Out* and *She's Not a Boy* call attention to the profound contradictions in the political asylum system for LGBTQI minorities. Of course, persecution itself targets individuals who fail to conform to various locally and politically imposed normativities. *Getting Out* offers important insights about

how the political asylum process sustains those normativities; as the film makes clear, the discourses of protection and the discourses of persecution are both complicit in rendering LGBTQI individuals invisible and illegible. Likewise, *She's Not a Boy* demonstrates how, even within the LGBTQ community, intersex individuals are often invisible and illegible. All three films illustrate how transgender and intersex individuals and communities must navigate heteronormative spaces and identities in order to be seen and heard.

Taken together, these three films shine a spotlight on the complex and often contradictory visual politics of human rights recognition and the limitations of identity-based frameworks to which human rights are bound. More specifically, they point to how transgender and intersex children must navigate confounding liminalities and transnormative expectations in public, political, and medical arenas. In the concluding section, I turn to the question that arises repeatedly when thinking about the liminal embodiments and identities: who survives recognition and its erasures? As my discussion of these three films has suggested, LGBTQI children's rights are wedged between transnormative recognition and its erasures. In the next section, I also contemplate queer studies scholars' articulations of the relation between trans and disability because these relations forecast the obstacles to the recognition of children's rights. In particular, queer posthumanist challenges to human exceptionalism have profound implications for how we think about LGBTQI children's human rights, which includes challenges to our efforts to escape human rights universalisms.

Becoming Trans, Unbecoming Human

In her chapter "Bodies without Organs, Becoming Trans, Becoming Disabled," Jasbir Puar (2017) interrogates trans in relation to disability. She notes that disability and transgender activists may align in their focus on access to public restrooms, for example, but that these coalitions can be stymied because of perceptions of the potential of such coalitions to restigmatize transgender individuals through their affiliation with disability (Puar 35; also see Kafer). In contrast to the Euro-American focus on disability as an identity-based rights discourse, and disability rights scholars who share the idea that disability should be understood in terms of social forces that create stigma, Puar is interested in the biopolitics of debilitation, which draws attention to the massification of disability through "colonial violence, developmentalism, war, occupation and the disparity of resources" (xix). While Puar recognizes the importance of the disability rights movement and the social model of dis-

ability, she, like disability studies scholars such as Nirmala Erevelles (also see chapter 4), question the Euro-American bias and the privileging of "normative (white, male, middle-class, physically impaired) subjects that have historically dominated the field" (xix). In this regard, Puar echoes Erevelles, whose scholarship focuses on the "transnational historical contexts that enable becoming disabled," and, most relevant to my project, the commodification of these processes (27). For Erevelles, "Disability [is] not a condition of being but of becoming, and this becoming is a historical event" (26). Drawing on Hortense Spillers's theory of the flesh, Erevelles calls for "a historical-materialist analysis of disability that could enable transformative possibilities for all bodies located at the intersections of difference" (27).

Not only does Puar, like Erevelles, shift attention away from disability as an identity; she views trans as an "ontological force that impels indeterminate movement rather than an identity" (2017, 51). This view is not equivalent to universalization of "transgender as an all-encompassing category" (52), which, as Puar rightly warns, can be "violently idealistic" (43). Rather, "becoming trans" emphasizes "unpacking human exceptionalism embedded in continually evoking the trans human body as transgressive of nature" (53). "Unpacking human exceptionalism" exemplifies a diffractive reading of the "genre of the human" (29). Puar's emphasis on "becoming trans" counters the focus of antidiscrimination law on identity and the politics of recognition in its "challenge [to] the stability . . . of the human form" (30).

For Puar, "becoming" entails "a divestment of codes, of signification, or identity" (2017, 56). "Becomings have no static reference or start point, end point, or climax: they have no narrative" (56). And if there is no starting point, ending, or climax, then, there is no threshold. Becoming renders the threshold irrelevant. In contrast to the philosophical use of the term *becoming* as a reference to "the process of coming to be something or of passing into a state" (*OED*), for Puar, "Becoming trans is distinct from trans being . . . [it is] the dissolution of this category of signification" (58). To emphasize trans becoming is to "unravel the trajectory of coming out/transition, visibility, recognition, protection, and self-actualization" and the convergence of this trajectory with hegemonic biomedical, racist, and neoliberal projects (34). Becoming does not offer an "epistemological corrective" but brings forth "ontological irreducibilities" (36). Puar's focus is less on disrupting categories than on "dissolution via multiplicity" (36).

In "Unbecoming Human: An Ethics of Object," Eunjung Kim calls for "embodying objecthood" by "unbecoming human" (296). "Unbecoming human" challenges "exclusionary configurations of humanity that create otherness" (295). For Kim, "unbecoming human" "reveals the workings of the

boundary of the human" (296), and in this regard her theorization dovetails with Puar's ontological probe of the human. Instead of emphasizing the human as a precondition for rights and productive citizenship, "unbecoming human" "suspends the human" and "abandon[s] the appraisal of difference and move[s] toward a nonjudgmental ontology of copresence and proximity" (305). "Unbecoming human" by extension warrants a critical interrogation of humanism's violent exceptions. *Becoming disabled, becoming trans,* and *unbecoming human* entail diffractive readings of the human and humanism, and, more specifically, entail reading for the repressed genealogies and erasures of trans archives and historical precedents and the perpetual deferral of transgender children's futures.

That is not to say that there are not political risks in the critical act of "unbecoming human" (Kim 2015, 315), especially in a context in which the pluralization of rights and their particularities is steadily denied. The Trump administration's rescission of the 2016 trans-inclusive Title IX policy initially authored by the Department of Justice for schools receiving federal funding is just one of many recent examples. The Trump administration's antitransgender actions also include the Department of Defense's plan for implementing its ban on transgender troops, and the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Civil Rights grant of exception to adoption and foster care agencies in South Carolina that allows them to discriminate against current or aspiring LGBTQ caregivers. Tolerance is an ineffectual response to the crisis of liminality that heteronormative neoliberal rationalities create and likewise seek to regulate. This chapter demonstrates the regulatory power of the tolerance threshold and how the optics of queer liminality can serve as an exceptional mechanism of subordination and incorporation.

To read LGBTQI children's human rights diffractively is to interrogate the biopolitical extraction of value from the bodies of LGBTQI children; to pull away from heteronormative and neoliberal calibrations of vulnerability, capacity, and futurity; and to lean into relational vulnerabilities, capacities, and nonnormative futures. A materialist-rhetorical approach compels an analysis of what protocols of intelligibility do not account for and render invisible and/or unknowable.[6] To read these films diffractively is not only to foreground how sexuality and gender rights operate as normative forms of transnational exchange but also to interrogate how certain constructs of the human undergird these exchanges. Diffractive readings allow us to interrogate shifting parameters of the human and human rights recognition, but posthumanist and new materialist orientations also run the risk of idealizing volatility and liminality if the violent exceptions from which this volatility and liminality emerge are ignored.

In "Decolonizing the Non/Human," Jinthana Haritaworn importantly "interrogate[s] the nonhuman alongside the dehumanization of 'Man's human Others'" (212). Thus, in contrast to uncritical celebrations of the nonhuman or inhuman, Haritaworn, like the three films under consideration in this chapter, prompts us to consider the violent genealogy of the designation of the human, inhuman, and nonhuman, and the "uneven terms on which bodies interpellated as 'queer' or as 'racialized' are sorted into various biopolitical and necropolitical molds" (212). Building on Haritaworn's critique, to advance transgender and intersex children's human rights is to decolonialize human rights and its protectionist narratives.

Moving away from human rights preoccupation with the sovereign subject likewise requires recognition of the transnational forces that bring states and therefore rights into being. *Getting Out* in particular unsettles common perceptions of human rights violations as individual incidents or acts and instead looks to human rights violations and recognitions as structural processes that create and divide communities and distribute or withhold recognition. Thus, even as we turn to networked or relational understandings of human rights, human rights recognitions must continue to grapple with sovereign frameworks and notions of sexual citizenship. LGBTQI asylum cases in particular point to the need to rebuke the humanitarian paradigm of human rights and its focus on the singular subject, the child-in-peril, and its codification of violent exceptions, and to rethink human rights in terms of structural entanglements, culpabilities, and interdependencies. Heteronormative cultural and political forces weaponize transgender children's rights as exceptions. To queer children's human rights therefore is to remain suspicious of the tolerance threshold to expose humanism's violent exceptions and precarious distribution of humanity.

"Walls as We See Them"

Early in 2017, at the US-Mexico border, French street artist JR and curator Pedro Alonzo installed a temporary artwork composed of a billboard-sized photograph of a one-year-old child named Kikito, who was living in Tecate, Mexico. The enlarged photograph, visible from the US side of the border, was attached to scaffolding that JR and Alonzo and their teams built behind the Mexican border wall about one hour southeast of San Diego, CA. This depiction of a Mexican child peering over the slotted fence as if gripping the top rails of a crib while looking down at the US side aimed to humanize the border as well as child migrants and refugees portrayed as deviant by racist and xenophobic ideologies. In her review of the installation, Jessica Stewart notes, "Kikito's presence looking over the fence put a touch of humanity to the immigration debate, asking people to engage in a way they otherwise would not have, imploring them to reach across and remember the people that live just on the other side." JR himself reported, "When Trump started to talk a lot about a wall along the Mexican border, one day I woke up and I saw a kid looking over the wall. I was wondering, what is this kid thinking? What would any kid think? We know that a one-year-old doesn't have a political vision, or any political point of view. He doesn't see walls as we see them." Indeed, by saying that the child "doesn't see walls as we see them," JR suggests that the child's gaze instead signified curiosity and interest in the other side (a sign of "basic humanity"). While a one-year-old may not have an identifiable political

vision or gaze, this art installation positioned, and powerfully so, the child-in-peril as a political subject with the capacity to transgress division and reframe walls as we see them.

In drawing attention to children living within these border zones, the installation reignited public recognition of the centrality of children to border politics. *Violent Exceptions* considers how the figurations of childhood innocence and the figure of the child-in-peril emerge in representations of the structural and symbolic borders that divide us, and in efforts to bridge them. These efforts often appear in the form of humanitarian appeals to protect children or to commemorate lives lost as the humanitarian framing of Yazmin Juárez's testimony recounting the death of her twenty-one-month-old daughter Mariee after she was released from ICE detention facility illustrates (see preface). JR's installation likewise attempts to break down barriers to identification and empathy, much like activist die-ins on beaches across the globe, where participants lay facedown dressed in blue jeans and red tops to evoke the image and memory of Alan Kurdi, who died as he and his family crossed the Mediterranean Sea (see chapter 1).

JR's installation emerged soon after President Trump ended the amnesty program for residents brought to the US illegally as children. On September 5, 2017, the Trump administration announced the end of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA), which protected hundreds of thousands of undocumented immigrants from deportation. After the announcement, the administration stopped processing new DACA applications and argued that the Obama administration's creation of the program through executive authority was unlawful. Three federal appeals courts disagreed with the Trump administration's claims that DACA was unconstitutional and found the administration's decision "arbitrary and capricious." Unsatisfied with the decisions of the lower courts, the Trump administration appealed to the US Supreme Court. The lives and legal status of 700,000 to 800,000 DREAMers hung in the balance awaiting the Supreme Court ruling. On June 18, 2020, the Supreme Court ruled 5 to 4 that the Trump administration's rescission of DACA, begun in 2012 under President Obama, violated the Administrative Procedure Act, and thereby blocked the administration's decision to retract deportation relief for the undocumented immigrants who came to the US as children.

JR's installation strategically mobilized humanitarian tropes of childhood innocence to critique the inhumanity of US immigration policies, including the Trump administration's attempt to rescind DACA. The installation also highlighted immigrant rights advocates' investment in humanitarian sensibilities as a means to counter state violence. As discussed through the rhetorical

case studies chapters, sovereign investments in the lives of certain children (and not others) reveal the differential political and moral thresholds for the recognition of children's human rights. Most prominently, the Sierra Leone and US governments' strategic mobilization of the figure of the African child amputee disabled by war (see chapter 4) demonstrates nation-states' investments in the figure of the child-in-peril as a means to uphold their political and moral standing in the international arena.

The public pilgrimage to another JR installation at the US-Mexico border likewise points to art-activists' efforts to critique these differential recognitions and to replace recognition and its self/other binary with relational understandings. On October 8, 2017, people met for a giant binational picnic that stretched across the border. A band playing festive music accompanied the gathering, its members split equally between the US and Mexico (Stewart 1). JR built a giant table for the picnic that crossed through the border fence. The table was covered with an enlarged photograph of the eyes of a young undocumented immigrant under the DACA program (Alter). Posting an aerial-view Instagram, JR hailed distant viewers as witnesses to the liminal legal and political status of DREAMers and the surveillant gaze of the carceral state. The eyes straddling the border highlight how border optics "animate social relations," and, as rhetorical border studies scholar D. Robert DeChaine notes, "function as powerful sites of rhetorical invention" through which "understandings of citizenship, national identity, belonging, and otherness are publically negotiated" (1).

President Obama framed the rationale for DACA and the legal protection of the DREAMers in primarily humanitarian terms. Obama said that not only were DREAMers "here through no fault of their own" but that they "pose[d] no threat" (qtd. in Seiger). He referred to the DREAMers as the "pitcher on our kid's softball team, [the] first responder who helps out his community after a disaster, [and the] cadet in ROTC who wants nothing more than to wear the uniform of the country that gave him a chance" (qtd. in Seiger). Humanitarian appeals also framed corporate economic imperatives for supporting DACA, including Microsoft, which pledged to protect DREAMers' legal rights. Even as Obama and others urged immigration reform, a powerful counterargument by conservatives, especially prominent religious leaders, emerged that argued that ending DACA would lead to a humanitarian crisis.

As these examples suggest, humanitarian figurations of the border and more specifically children-in-peril perform particular cultural and political work for nation-states. In *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty,* Wendy Brown argues, "Twenty-first-century walls are responses to transnational economic, social, and religious flows that do not have the force of political sovereignty

behind them [and] . . . harken back to a modality and ontology of power that is sovereign, spatially bounded, and territorial" (81). Chief among the paradoxes of walled states is that these new or reinforced barriers arise along with the diminution of state sovereignty and distributive power unleashed by the force of global capital (24). Border walls ascend as a response both to threats to state sovereignty and to cosmopolitan visions of a world without borders.

Violent Exceptions focuses on strategic mobilizations of humanitarian tropes and narratives in American political discourse and highlights the limits of the humanitarian paradigm of human rights (Moyn 2012) as well as its co-optation by neoliberal and neoconservative rationalities. The figure of the former child soldier in Africa exemplifies the collision of neoliberal, humanitarian, and human rights imperatives emerging from the global North. These collisions are most evident in the popular reception of child soldier memoirs in the US, which depict African child soldiers' transformation from perpetrator to victim to humanitarian. As such, these memoirs echo the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, which itself works to humanize the child soldier as a human rights victim (see chapter 3). Similar collisions define humanitarian representations of the US war on terror and sex slavery (see chapter 2). On the one hand, media coverage of children growing up in the midst of civil war in what are depicted as failing states in Africa contrast with depictions of children who are victims of carceral democracies, namely the US and Israel, with children of color the primary victims of the US carceral state (see chapter 4), and Palestinian children the primary victims of the Israeli occupation. Yet children and youth growing up in the midst of war and militarized occupations have the capacity to diffract these patterns of recognition. As examples throughout the case study chapters suggest, children and youth living in increasingly precarious conditions have mobilized and continue to mobilize in ways that counteract the violence of exceptions.

Another installation at the border wall, this time in Sunland Park, New Mexico, exemplifies children's participation in the resignification of liminal zones and identities. The seesaw installation points to the inefficacy of border fortifications to stop crime and to the failure of border walls and barriers to aid in peaceful solutions to conflict. With the help of his collaborators, architect Ronald Rael, a professor at the University of California, installed three bright pink seesaws through the steel slats of the border wall in Sunland Park, just west of New Mexico's border with Texas. Images and videos of the installation showed children from both sides of the border playing together on the seesaws. While the installation bridged the border only for a brief half-hour, as Rael tweeted, "The wall became a literal fulcrum for U.S.-Mexico relations

and children and adults were connected in meaningful ways . . . with the recognition that the actions that take place on one side have a direct consequence on the other side." Like JR's installation, the seesaw installation humanized the border, border cultures, and border children as nonthreatening.

But the installation does more than humanize the border; the children on the seesaw transgress national sovereignty and its fantasies of containment and impermeability (W. Brown 2010, 117–19). In *Borderlands / La Frontera,* Gloria Anzaldúa defines borderlands as "zones of liminality and ambiguity" (3). The seesaw literalizes Anzaldúa's description of the mestizo as having a foot on both banks of the river. The seesaw installation mobilizes the border zone as a potentially subversive space and, as such, counteracts the sovereign exploitation of liminal spaces and identities. The seesaw installation enacts the border zone as a transnational space of belonging and as vulnerable to larger global forces, such as global warming, smart bombs, and viruses. One might argue, then, that the seesaw suspension of the border as a legal boundary shines a necessary spotlight on the paradox of the border as a signifier of political freedom defined by the power of division. In other words, the seesaw as a simple technology exemplifies how technology not only enforces but limits state power, demonstrating how strategic mobilizations of childhood innocence can disrupt sovereign power. Finally, as DeChaine argues in another context, the seesaw illustrates how borders and "bordering practices . . . shape social collectivities" and can "function as modalities of social action" (6).

Throughout *Violent Exceptions,* I have focused on cases wherein governments have mobilized the figure of the child-in-peril as a humanitarian proxy for and performance of political sovereignty. The US government's investment in the separation and detention of undocumented children at the US-Mexico border spotlights how the state produces the precarious conditions from which the humanitarian figure of the child-in-peril emerges. These conditions also exemplify humanitarianism's production of liminal spaces and identities. As the cases in this book demonstrate, the humanitarian figure of the child-in-peril embodies a fundamental paradox of human rights, namely that nation-states are both violators and guarantors of rights, which, one might argue, exact human rights' ineffectuality and violent circularity.

While human rights will never be enough to transform global injustices (Moyn), like the border walls that compound the problems they attempt to solve, if human rights do not move in new directions, they will secure their own end. Violations of children's human rights are mounting, including in the US, as a consequence of discriminatory housing, health, and education policies; policing practices and gun violence; and the dispossession of entire communities and restrictions on their movement. Thus, as important as it is

to expose these violations, we also need to understand the degree to which children's rights are subordinated to the potency and politics of nation-states and their investment in certain children's futures and not others.

Violent Exceptions identifies and develops two main claims. First, in the American international imaginary, children's human rights are rooted in the racial iconography of childhood innocence and crystallize around the distant humanitarian figure of the child-in-peril. *Violent Exceptions* argues that the humanitarian paradigm of human rights and its privileging of the position of the liberal subject seriously curtail the progressive force and political utility of human rights in contemporary democracies. Second, the humanitarian figure of the child-in-peril cannot be understood outside of the material-discursive contexts and genealogies through which these figures attain meaning and public traction. We cannot grasp contemporary US border politics and policies without understanding the history of colonialism, imperialism, white settlement, and the pathologization of difference (chapter 1). We cannot understand the US popularity of memoirs by young female survivors of Islamic terrorism, and specifically sex trafficking, unless we understand the "girling" of international development and links between US antitrafficking laws and the US war on terror, and the genealogy of global girlhoods in international development and humanitarian discourse (chapter 2). We cannot understand US humanitarian appeals to the human rights of African child soldiers and child amputees without understanding the links between colonialism, humanitarianism, and ableism (chapter 3). We cannot understand US state violence against Black children without understanding the history of slavery, white property rights, and dispossession of Black communities (chapter 4). We cannot understand violations of transgender children's rights without understanding the historical force of heteronormativity in Western medical and scientific discourses (chapter 5).

Like the billboard-size photograph of a one-year-old child named Kikito installed at the Tecate, Mexico, border, the seesaw installation evokes the humanitarian trope of childhood innocence and, by figurative extension, challenges the idea of national purity that the border wall is depicted as preserving. Yet these installations also importantly realign the tropes through their differential affiliation. The simple technology of the seesaw transgressed the border threshold and reconfigured its function, reminding us that the border is not only a place (noun) but also an event (verb) (Donnan, Hastings, Hurd, and Leutoff-Grandits 2). Similarly, rhetorical border studies scholars (see chapter 1) have turned our attention to the material rhetoric of bordering (DeChaine; Flores; Ono and Sloop; among others). Likewise, human rights are living forces, as legal scholar Upendra Baxi long ago suggested. Human

rights are made and remade through sociopolitical and cultural practices. Yet, pragmatically, if human rights are to transgress the material and symbolic infrastructure of sovereign states and their legal and moral thresholds, they will obligate a supranational force. While a supranational force may challenge the sovereign state's role as the sole rights protector and benefactor, it does not reform the sovereign subject.

If new materialist frameworks challenge the sovereign subject to whom rights and citizenship are granted, then, by extension, such frameworks also challenge the default figure of the child-in-peril that grounds sentimental claims to children's human rights. *Violent Exceptions* argues that we need to extend our critique of this figure around which the humanitarian paradigm of human rights constructs the political capacity of adults and incapacity of children, and jettisons the responsibility of nation-states to address systemic violence and structural inequities. *Violent Exceptions* calls for a material-rhetorical methodology capable of identifying the limits of the humanitarian paradigm and its precipitation of the precarious conditions from which the child as a liminal subject emerges without abandoning political investment in human rights' potential to move beyond the figure of the child-in-peril in recognition of the "larger material arrangements of which 'we' are a 'part'" (Barad 178).

My focus on children's human rights may seem misplaced or naively optimistic at a time when the most powerful nations cast their sovereignty as vulnerable to and under threat from global economic forces, global warming, and mass migration, when white nationalism and fascism are on the rise, when differently oppressed groups are increasingly pitted against each other, and when international human rights and the organizations that uphold them have come under serious threat. But as my analyses have shown, humanitarianism's seemingly protective cover for children's human rights extracts rights violations from the systemic conditions from which they emerge and thereby minimizes human rights potential to counteract these conditions.

We are accustomed to states of emergency. We are accustomed to border walls, barriers, and checkpoints. We are accustomed to humanitarian interventions. We are accustomed to political failures. But just as power is not bounded territorially, we are not bound to capitulate to these political failures and divisions. If human rights scholars, teachers, and activists cannot dismantle the symbolic thresholds that divide us, how can we expect to inspire others, including those that represent us, to foresee a world without violent exceptions? To inspire is not to sentimentalize material ecologies or idealize ecological thinking, as material and theoretical ecologies are sustained by the deconstruction and transformation of matter, whether cells or citations.

Recognition of our fundamental interconnections and interdependences will not in and of itself dismantle hierarchies. Moreover, material entanglements and transformations are not equal in force or impact. Nevertheless, the future of human rights lies in its transformation. Similar to waves diffracting as they face obstacles in their path, human rights may not be able to transcend obstructions. But as those who advocate for children's human rights confront obstacles in their path and map the effects of difference and diffraction, they open up new passageways to practices accountable to all.

NOTES

Introduction

1. My analysis of the Flint water crisis builds on an earlier co-authored essay. See Athey, Ferebee, and Hesford.
2. A 2015 Natural Resources Defense Council Report indicated high lead levels in water systems serving 3.9 million people in the US. Among the affected are residents of Flint; Hoosick Falls, New York; and Charleston, West Virginia, where a 2014 chemical spill contaminated the Elk River; parts of the Appalachia region, which is contaminated by coal; and military bases across the country contaminated by firefighting foams and chemicals. Additionally, regions of the Central Valley, California, are contaminated from agricultural runoff, and 30 percent of the Navajo Nation has no access to piped water.
3. In April 2018 there was an unprecedented partial settlement of a federal lawsuit against the state of Michigan and two school districts that provides 4 million dollars to cover the cost of lead-screenings. In addition, there has been the establishment of the Flint Registry sponsored by a 14.4 million-dollar federal grant that MSU received from the federal Department of Health and Human Services (Camera).
4. This is an adaptation of Redfield and Bornstein's helpful definition of humanitarianism as "a structure of feeling, a cluster of moral principles, a basis for ethical claims, and political strategies and a call for action" (2011, 17).
5. The popular figure of Little Eva in *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* Bernstein observes, codified the racialization of childhood innocence as white in the American cultural imaginary. Yet early nineteenth-century sentimentality also fetishized Black suffering and rendered Black literary characters, such as Stowe's Uncle Tom, as perpetual children, in order to garner sympathy from white readers (Duane 2010, 141).
6. While international law defines children as those under eighteen, the UN also employs the term *young people* for those between the ages of ten and twenty-four and the term *youth* for those between fifteen and twenty-four years old.

7. *Neoliberalism* is a term typically used to refer to a period of economic liberalism that began in the 1970s, gained momentum in the 1980s, and led to the deregulation of capital, the privatization of government services, a decrease in public employment and social services, and the denigration of scientific expertise to the priorities of corporate profit. I am interested in neoliberalism's privatization of risk and normalization of insecurity and therefore find critical theorist Isabell Lorey's *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious,* particularly her conceptualization of the precarization of labor and life under neoliberalism, particularly helpful.

8. Mauthner puts it well. Building on Barad (2007, 2003), Mauthner argues, "Materiality is always already discursive—material phenomena come into being through, and are inseparable from, discursive practices—and discourse is always already material—discursive practices are ongoing materializations of the world and not merely human-based activities. On this approach, matter and meaning only become intelligible—determinate and meaningful—through specific "agential intra-actions" (261).

9. In *Visualizing Posthuman Conservation in the Age of the Anthropocene,* new materialist rhetorical studies scholar Amy Propen likewise aligns her project, to a certain degree, with new materialist articulations of "diffractive methodology" (especially Haraway and Barad). Propen's focus is on how nature photography participates "in material-discursive, embodied practice that is also a manifestation of the agential intra-actments of matter" and how "visual-material artifacts constitute and take up differences" (57).

10. New materialist scholar Astrida Neimanis likewise challenges the liberal humanist paradigm of embodiment that prioritizes discrete individualism and anthropocentrism. She reconfigures subjectivity through figurative and literal bodies of water. Her goal is not only to reconfigure subjectivity as relational but also to challenge instrumental perceptions of water as a resource (2017, 4).

11. Similar to my use of the terms *global South* and *global North* throughout this project, I use the terms *First* and *Third* Worlds to denote historical and ideological constructs that operate as loci of power from which some areas, namely the US and Europe, have imposed values on other parts of the world. As colonial and neocolonial tropes, these terms differentiate between modernity and tradition, wherein the global South or "Third" World is cast as a beneficiary of the global North or "First" World.

Chapter 1

1. Three days after the front-page photograph of Omran appeared in the *New York Times,* the paper published several casualty photos featuring Syrian children overlooked in earlier reporting. On August 21, 2016, the *Times* published "One Photo of a Syrian Child Caught the World's Attention. These 7 Went Unnoticed." Each of the seven is prominently named, including a closely cropped image of the injured bodies of Ahmad Tadifi, two (who later died from his injuries); sisters Rouwaida, five, and Rana Hanoun, seven months, suffered shrapnel wounds; Aisel Hajar, two; siblings Amal, four, and Hikmat Hayouk, six; an unidentified boy. The report also mentions the death of four children from one family; Aisha, twelve; Mohammad, eleven, Obaida, seven; and Afraa, six (Barnard and Saad).

2. Throughout the conflict, warring parties have restricted humanitarian access to many of those in need, which exacerbated the humanitarian crisis. For example, President Bashar al-Assad granted the UN permission to supply aid only to government-held, not rebel-held, areas.

3. Major General Ignot Konashenkov, the chief spokesman for the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, similarly claimed that the strike indicated a blast less powerful than an air-fired missile and that therefore rebel mortars or IEDs may have perpetrated the strike.

4. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/omran-daqneesh-photo-video-aleppo-boy-syria-injured-china-state-media-western-propaganda-war-a7205296.html.

5. In the mid-nineteenth century, the first state child labor laws were passed (1836). The Children's Aid Society was founded in 1853. During the early twentieth century, the Juvenile Protection Association (1901), National Child Labor Committee (1904), and Child Welfare League of America (1915) were formed, and campaigns that worked to prohibit child labor and emphasized education for all flourished. Founded in 1919, the Save the Children Fund, a nongovernmental organization that promotes children's rights and provides relief and support to children in developing countries, began to address the issues of child labor (Iran and China), child marriage (India), and primary education (Africa). In 1959 the UN Assembly adopted the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child and in 1973 formed the Children's Defense Fund. In 1989 the US signed but has yet to ratify the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). In 2002, however, the US did ratify two optional protocols to the CRC on Armed Conflict, and Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography. See chapter 4 for further discussion of the CRC Optional Protocols.

6. Also see Briggs; Manzo; Malkki; Suski; Wells.

7. Also see Atanasoski; Barnett; Terry; and Weiss and Collins for more on the history of humanitarianism, humanitarian violence, and the paradoxes that define the humanitarian project and notions of moral progress.

8. "Liminal places can be specific thresholds, or they can also be more extended areas, like borderlands or . . . whole countries, placed in important in-between positions" (Thomassen 16).

9. In chapter 6, Fassin focuses on representations of childhood within the context of the AIDS epidemic in South Africa. He writes about a young boy named Nkosi Johnson who was born HIV-positive and who "became an icon of the disease" and posthumously a poster child for antiretroviral drugs (162). Nkosi's mother, who had AIDS, abandoned Nkosi, whose father was unknown, and Nkosi was adopted by a white woman who worked at the health clinic. Nkosi became a symbol at age eight when a school in a white district refused to admit him. Protests ensued and the school ended up reversing its decision. Nkosi died of AIDS at eleven years old, and his death served as an appeal for public support for antiretroviral drugs. Nkosi's iconic status as both victim and hero was reflected and aided by a public poster in which his photograph appeared beside that of Hector Petersen, a young activist, who died in the 1976 Soweto uprising. Both tragic deaths, Fassin observes, "prompted a nationwide surge of compassion" (164). Nkosi Johnson's entrance into the moral realm of anti-AIDS discourse points toward the emergence of endangered children as central to political discourse in South Africa and the risks that focusing on the child may perpetuate hierarchies of innocence that lead to public indifference toward mothers or outright stereotypes about African women as sexually promiscuous and African men as irresponsible and violent.

10. More recently, in March 2018, *New York Times* reporter Michael Kimmelman commented on the death of Jad Allah Jumaa, a one-and-a half-year-old boy from eastern Syria, killed in a rebel stronghold near Damascus. The image accompanying the article is of Jad in a pink sweater, who Kimmelman describes as "cherubic"—an image akin to the "snapshot[s] that loving parents all over the world take every day." Kimmelman notes that photojournalists often use images of the lone child to "distill . . . panoramas of destruction down to human scale." "Maybe we need to stare at a simple, everyday family snapshot to remember what binds us," he ponders. "Like that one of Jad Allah Jumaa." Jumaa died on February 21, 2018, in an airstrike on Ghouta. As Kimmelman notes, "He was wearing his pink sweater."

11. In October 2014 the Turkish government passed a law that granted "temporary protection" status to Syrians and the right to stay.

12. The WatchTheMed Alarm Phone launched in 2014 on the anniversary of the 2013 ship-wreck of a vessel in Libyan waters that had carried hundreds on board who were seeking to cross the Mediterranean. Although the ship escaped, it began taking on water through the bullet holes. A doctor on board used a satellite phone to call out to Italian authorities. But because of a contest over whose responsibility it was to intervene, the rescue operation was not immediately launched, and more than 260 people drowned.

13. In collaboration with UNHCR and the *Guardian, Sea Prayer* has been translated into a five-minute virtual reality project. The poem is transformed into a painting by Liz Edwards, using TiltBrush technology, and read by actor Adeel Akhtar, accompanied by a score that David Coulter composed working with the Kronos Quartet. The meditative poetic letter from a father to his son is narrated against a backdrop of crashing waves, which reinforces the idea that the sea also has a story to tell.

14. Hosseini frames *Sea Prayer* as a "tribute not only to [the Kurdi] family"; but he "hope[s] [the book] highlights the unthinkable despair that thousands of other ordinary people face every day to abandon home and community and take a chance on this brutal and often lethal journey across the sea" (NPR interview). "As a father myself," Hosseini continues, "I kept trying to imagine the emotional, psychological nightmare that his dad had to endure every time he saw the photographs of his son, and a stranger lifting his child's body—a stranger who didn't know Alan's voice or his laughter or his favorite toy." In an interview with NPR, Hosseini notes his identification with the plight of refugees. When his family returned to Kabul, Afghanistan, after having relocated to Paris for his father's job as a diplomat in the Foreign Ministry, the family found themselves in the middle of a bloody communist coup and Soviet Army invasion. To flee the violence, the Hosseinis sought and were granted political asylum in the US.

15. However, as some critics have argued, the film's characterization of the origins of ISIS is inaccurate. In his review for the *Foreign Policy Journal,* Jeremy R. Hammond notes that ISIS was not born from the Assad regime's release of Islamic militants from prison, as the film suggests, but instead emerged during the US 2003 War in Iraq. When Abu Musab al-Zarqai, leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, was killed in June 2006, al-Qaeda renamed itself the Islamic State of Iraq and, later, ISIS, when it broadened its territory to Syria (Hammond).

16. For example, on November 16, 2015, Fox News ran a headline quoting Lieutenant Colonel Allen West: "West on Syrian Refugees: 'No military age males should be allowed in." West said, "Anyone from about 16–40 years of age, single males, should not be allowed to come in. That's a Trojan horse" (see Pruitt, Berents, and Munro 699).

17. In 1995 Republican Elton Gallegly (CA) recommended an amendment to the US Constitution, and, more recently, two similar bills were introduced in Congress: the US Citizen Reform Act of 2005 and the Birthright Citizenship Act of 2007 (L. Chávez 88–89).

18. There are three ways to acquire US citizenship: through birth (the principle of *jus soli*); through blood (*jus sanguinis*); and through the legal process of naturalization. The US is one of few countries that have a birthright citizenship law—it's part of our national history—others have citizenship laws linked to the citizenship of the mother and/or father ("The Debate over 'Anchor Babies' and Citizenship"). The Fourteenth Amendment was crafted after the Dred Scott vs. Sandford decision, in which the Supreme Court held that no person of African descent, slave or free, could ever be a citizen of the US, nor could any of their descendants ever be a citizen. There was unrestricted immigration to the US at the time of the writing of the amendment, so it did not address the issue of illegal immigration.

    The anti-immigration movement's construal of the Fourteenth Amendment as a threat to national security might strike some as ironic given the movement's reverence for the nation's founding constitutional structure. But their position actually continues the legacy of antifederalist opposition to the Bill of Rights. Southern loyalists, for example, have argued that the Fourteenth Amendment does not, in fact, exist because it was never constitutionally ratified but was forced on the South through the military dictatorship of the North. This is just one of the many historical congruities between nineteenth-century fears of judicial

tyranny and anxiety over national boundaries that typify the contemporary anti-immigration platform.

19. For Agamben, biopolitics refers to the blurring of the distinction between biological life and politics.

20. The children of undocumented immigrants do not automatically grant citizenship status to their parents. These children have to wait until they are adults (age twenty-one) to petition on behalf of a parent's or a sibling's citizenship. While US-born children, given our birthright citizenship laws, are entitled to Medicare and Medicaid, "undocumented immigrants have never been eligible for cash-benefit programs, though they may receive care under Emergency Medicaid" (Huang). Priscilla Huang, a policy director at the National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum, reports, "qualified immigrants, legal permanent residents, and undocumented immigrants routinely under utilize social service programs compared to U.S. born counterparts" (396). Yet, "anti-immigration provisions continue to be introduced into health related polices" (400). Additionally, there is increased hostility toward pregnant immigrant Latinas and toward Latino communities at large.

21. In that regard, the project and its use of childhood photographs resonates with French artist J. R.'s installation at the US-Mexico border. J. R.'s installation featured an enlarged photograph of a one-year-old boy who lives with his mother and grandparents in Tecate, Mexico. See coda.

22. Licona also informed me that the POPUp exhibition aims to extend the politics and possibility of coalition, which Licona achieves through the inclusion of local migrant-rights activists to join her artist talk and web resources geared toward local organizations and need; and the event/exhibition itself serves as a fundraiser for a locally selected migrant rights organization (personal correspondence).

Chapter 2

1. The gunman then shot Shazia twice, just below her left collarbone, and in her left hand when she tried to protect herself. Then he shot Kainat Riaz, the sixteen-year-old tenth-grader to Shazia's left, in the shoulder, before backing out of the school bus.

2. In her memoir Malala also quotes from the statement issued by the Taliban spokesman Ehsanullah Ehsan: "Malala has been targeted because of her pioneer role in preaching secularism . . . She was young but she was promoting Western culture in Pashtun area. She was pro-West; she was speaking against the Taliban; she was calling President Obama her idol" (256). Correspondingly, after her UN speech (July 12, 2013), Malala received a letter from a Taliban commander, Adnan Rashid, who said that "the Taliban had attacked [her] not for [her] campaign for education but because [she] tried to 'malign [their efforts to establish the Islamic system. [. . .] He wrote that they would forgive [her] if [she] came back to Pakistan, wore a burqa and went to a madrasa'" (311).

3. Cynthia Enloe coined the one-word phrase *womenandchildren* to foreground misogynist nation building just prior to the first Gulf War (Eisenstein).

4. See Puar and Rai; Puar 2007.

5. In the case of Iraq, for example, gender-based violence has a history linked to the Ba'ath regime (1968–2003) and since 2003 to high levels of insecurity (Al-Ali 14). Thus, recognition of these histories and contingencies challenges otherwise dichotomous feminist approaches to gender-based violence in the Middle East that frame the problem either solely in macro terms, as the product of neocolonial and imperialist policies, or in micro terms, as a symptom of local patriarchal and cultural traditions (see Al-Ali; Abu-Odeh).

6. The money will be channeled through the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

7. The coalition is "a membership network of over 30 international aid agencies aiming to reframe the economic development agenda by targeted young females between the ages of 10 and 20" (Switzer).

8. For example, the Malala Yousafzai Scholarship Act, which the US Congress passed in 2014 [H.R. 3583], calls for half the scholarships available under USAID to be made available to Pakistani women and for the leveraging of investment by the Pakistani private sector and Pakistani diaspora communities. The act cites the *UN 2012 Education for All Global Monitoring Report* and reinforces the idea that education is the solution to global illiteracy, poverty, and terrorism.

9. Former World Bank president Robert Zoellick proclaimed, in 2008, "Investing in adolescent girls is precisely the catalyst poor countries need to break intergenerational poverty and to create a better distribution of income. Investing in them is not only fair, it is a smart economic move" (Nike News).

10. In contrast to "the Girl Effect" claim that girls' education delays early marriage, a "Cross-Sectional Analysis of Associations between Education and Girl Child Marriage in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan, 1991–2011," reveals that in "South Asia, where the majority of girl child marriages occur, substantial improvements in girl's education have not corresponded to equivalent reductions in child marriage" (Raj et al.).

11. In Pakistan there were 120 bombings of schools in 2012 alone (Start: National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism).

12. The American commodification and consumption of Muslim women's narratives in the post-9/11 context is a subject too broad to address here. For more on this topic, see Whitlock; Abu-Lughod.

13. Initially, Pakistani and American officials talked about relocating Malala to an American military hospital in Germany. Senator John Kerry and former US congresswoman Gabby Giffords and her husband, Mark Kelly, offered to bring Malala to the US for treatment, and an unnamed celebrity offered to cover the fuel bill. Offers also emerged from Germany, Singapore, the UAE, and Britain. In the end, Pakistani and British officials came to an agreement, and she was moved to Queen Elizabeth Hospital. Three months later, Malala was discharged and rejoined her family, who now reside in the West Midlands, her father having accepted a three-year position at the Pakistani Consulate.

14. Malala tells us in her memoir that while she was in the hospital in Birmingham she received a parcel from Benazir Bhutto's children, containing two shawls that had belonged to their mother (*I Am Malala,* 288).

15. For an astute analysis of "We are" campaigns as a phenomenon with vast implications and interpretations depending on who claims identification and the material and political circumstances of the project or protest, see Lyon.

16. Among the reform movements that Sunder analyzes is the transnational network Women Living Under Muslim Laws, whose core principles include developing strategies for women to articulate and demand "freedom and equality within the context of a normative (religious and/or cultural) community" (271).

17. Phelps notes misclassifications of Yazidi as Arab under Saddam Hussein's regime and as Kurdish under the Kurdistan Regional Government (461). "The Yezidi Human Rights Organization argues that Yezidi were 'forcefully misclassified as Arab' in ethnicity under the regime of Saddam Hussein and, more recently, under the control of the Kurdistan Regional Government they were 'wrongfully classified as Kurdish'" (Phelps 461). There is some dispute over the ethnic origin of the Yazidi, but most scholars seem to agree that they are a distinct ethnic and religious community (Phelps).

18. Prior to the war with the Islamic State, 90 percent of Yazidi areas fell outside the jurisdiction of the Kurdistan Regional Government and under the central government in Baghdad (Kweskin).

19. Kweskin reports that the Yazidi are presently divided about the solution to the current war with ISIS and their geopolitical desires. Some Yazidi want a unified Iraq. Others want protection and support from an independent Kurdistan, and still others want their own autonomous region.

20. "One seat in the national parliament is reserved for a Yazidi, as is one seat in the regional Kurdistan parliament. And Yazidis receive some funding from the national government as part of an endowment that provides money to minority religions' religious sites" (Henne and Hackett).

21. The former directors for Iraq at the US National Security Council and Research for Combating Terrorism at West Point argued, "The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is no longer a state in name only. It is a physical, if extralegal, reality on the ground. Unacknowledged by the world community, ISIS has carved a de facto state in the borderlands of Syria and Iraq . . . this former Al Qaeda affiliate holds territory, provides limited services, dispenses a form of justice (loosely defined), most definitely has an army, and flies its own flag" (Ollivant and Fishman qtd. in Smith et al. 171).

22. In addition to the US role in the offensive, and US-backed Kurdish forces, some of the coverage of the attack minimized the instrumental role of other forces in the liberation of Sinjar, including the Kurdish Peshmerga, as well as the fact that US support for the Peshmerga came late because the US administration feared that in arming the Kurds they might inadvertently promote the ethnic group's legitimate quest for independence.

23. See the UN Human Rights Commission Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Iraq.

24. Issued by the Islamic State Research and Fatwa Dept.

25. "The U.S. Department of State (2015) has estimated that supporters of ISIS post around 90,000 messages a day online through a variety of platforms, including YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, while The Brookings Institute study of 20,000 ISIS supporter accounts provided a 'conservative estimate' of at least 46,000 Twitter accounts" (Berger and Morgan 2015, 2, qtd. in Smith et al. 172).

26. Much of the work on terrorist rhetoric purports a view of terrorism as fundamentally rhetorical and therefore posits counter-rhetoric as the essential combatant (see Rowland and Theye).

27. Elbio Rosselli of Uruguay made a similar argument to Bangura, indicating that "sexual violence should not be understood as a cultural condition or characteristic of any particular country, but rather as unacceptable insubordination" (as summarized on the UN Security Council website).

28. A crisis response advisor from Amnesty International, Donatella Rovera, postulates, "Perhaps the most powerful motivator [for the change] was the scale of the crisis—the fact that the abductions could not be explained away as 'shameful' individual cases" (S. George, UNHRC). Yazidi activists (Khidher Domle among them) are also credited with helping to facilitate the doctrinal change.

29. Khalas, a former interpreter for the US Army who was granted a Special Immigration Visa for his service and has lived in Washington, DC, since July 2016, has been waiting for his wife, who was still in Sinjar. Two months before the 2016 US presidential election, Nada's visa was tentatively approved, though she had to wait at least three months for final approval. On the day of the presidential inauguration, Nada's visa was finally approved, and her Iraqi passport with an American visa was en route. But by the time she was ready to travel, Trump had issued the Executive Order Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States, on January 27, 2017, and she was stopped at the Dubai airport from boarding; the staff ripped up her ticket and said that they had orders that "no Iraqis with American visas should be boarded" (K. Johnson). With the court's stay of the executive order, Nada was able to enter the US and join her husband. But many refugees remain in legal limbo.

30. A Pew Research Center report indicates that in 2016, the numbers of Muslim and Christian refugees entering the US were about the same: 37,521 Christians and 38,901 Muslims entered the US during the same year. From 2009 to 2016, 816 Yazidi refugees from Iraq entered the US. In 2016 the highest numbers of refugees to enter the US came from Demo-

cratic Republic of Congo (16,370), Syria (12,587), Burma (12,347), Iraq (9,880), and Somalia (9,020). Christians were 61 percent of the religious minority refugees entering the US in 2016.

31. The Yazidis in Northern Iraq have long lived as a persecuted minority; they have withstood over seventy attempts at genocide, have had no access to land ownership or basic resources, and have faced quotas in education (Dakhil).

32. The map is sourced from Open Doors, a nonprofit organization that focuses on Christian persecution worldwide.

33. These appeals continued even after March 2016, when the US government made a legal determination of ISIS's attack against the Yazidi and other religious minorities (Christians and Shiite Turkmen) in the region as genocide. To provide evidence of the Islamic State's intention to destroy Christians, Christian conservative media draw on the *Genocide against Christians in the Middle East Report,* authored by the Knights of Columbus, and *In Defense of Christians,* as well as on ISIS's publications. The *Genocide* report refers to the Syrian Catholic Patriarch of Antioch, who estimates that ISIS has killed more than 1,000 Christians, and attempts to counters arguments that "Christians should be excluded from a genocide declaration because ISIS supposedly allows Christians to pay a tax historically made available in Islam to Christians in Muslim lands—while denying this option to groups like the Yazidis, who are considered 'pagans' by Islam." The *Genocide* report argues, "In Nineveh, demands for so-called jizya [tax] payments were a prelude to killings, kidnappings, rapes, and the dispossession of the Christian population" (Knights of Columbus).

34. "Since Syria began allowing emigration of Jews in 1992, most have left for Israel or the United States, drastically shrinking the country's Jewish population. 50 years ago there were 15,000, a very large community they used to live very well with us and the Muslims. But persecution by ISIS militants has further decimated the population" (Batchelor).

35. A CNN World report (8 Aug. 2014) noted that the risk to Iraq's majority Shia Muslims is far more widespread than the risk ISIS poses to Yazidis and Christians. ISIS has targeted Shiites (Shia Muslims) in both Iraq and Syria (Berlinger).

   Although there is debate over statistics with regard to the religious affiliation of those targeted by and killed by terrorists, a 2011 report by the US government's National Counterterrorism Center indicates, "In cases where the religious affiliation of terrorism casualties could be determined, Muslims suffered between 82–97% of terrorism-related fatalities over the past five years." With regard to Islamic terrorism in the US, a study from the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill reports that in 2016, out of a US Muslim population of 3.3 million, forty-six Muslim Americans were linked to violent extremists at home or abroad. These terrorist acts claimed fifty-four lives, forty-nine of which were lost in the Pulse nightclub in Orlando. Between 2001 and 2015 homegrown right-wing extremists killed more Americans than Islamic terrorists did. Terrorism committed by Muslim Americans represents one-third of 1 percent of murders in the US.

36. In her September 23, 2014, letter to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, Samantha J. Power drew on the language of the Responsibility to Protect doctrine (R2P), which derives its authority in part from the Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, to rationalize armed intervention in Syria under the "unwilling or unable" rationale—that is, under the claim that the Syrian government is unable or unwilling to halt gross human rights violations in its own territory. Although President Obama was reluctant to invoke R2P, between "August 2014–March 2015, the United States-led coalition launched 1,700 airstrikes against ISIS in Iraq, and the U.S. alone has launched 946 airstrikes in Syria" (Lekas 324–26). At one point, the US backed the Kurdish militias fighting against ISIS. Many argue that the US support for the Kurdish Peshmerga came late because the US administration feared that, in arming the Kurds, they might inadvertently promote the ethnic group's legitimate quest for independence (Ryan).

37. Nadia Murad also presented her case to the Senate Homeland Security Committee, calling for Congress to more aggressively fight ISIS, and she admonished the international community to take the terror group to the International Criminal Court.
38. Khoja-Moolji refers to this process as the "chain of vulnerability-suffering-empowerment," which is linked to the teleology of human rights discourse (384). I refer to a similar transformation in earlier publications (Hesford 2013, 2014).
39. Amnesty International's December 2014 report on the abductions likewise brought attention to the pressures placed on women who escaped to speak to the media (7). So this, too, is an area important to consider.
40. V-Day's rhetoric and campaign strategies that focus on feminist consumer activism (proceeds of V-merchandise purchases are donated to campaigns to stop violence against women and girls) line up with mainstream US liberal policies and the nearly exclusive focus of both the wars on terror and trafficking on sexual victimization against women and girls.
41. The campaign also focuses on "peace through de-radicalization." In her Initiative's profile, Nadia writes, "I will focus my power to deliver a message to the Muslim world to condemn extremism, particularly against children and women, carried out in the name of Islam. We must work together to counter terrorism and . . . to teach all youth the importance of tolerance towards the beliefs of others."
42. The Rome Statute, the ICC's founding document, allows the court to intervene when a state has failed to address breaches of international law within its borders. As a side note: "In December 2016, the Supreme Court of Germany authorised the issuance of an arrest warrant against an ISIS commander who is allegedly responsible for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated against the Yazidi minority in Syria and Iraq" (Clooney).
43. In 2015 the antigenocide organization Yahad-In Unum ("Together in One") launched an initiative to document these crimes.
44. In 1998 the International Criminal Court approved a binding legal agreement—the Rome Statute—that declared rape a crime against humanity (Article 7 (g)) and a war crime (Article XXII), along with sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced sterilization, and other forms of sexual violence. The first UN resolution to urge states to protect women from sexual violence in times of conflict was UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000. Other key resolutions that speak to sexual violence in times of war are resolutions 1674, 1820, 1882, 1888, 1960, and 2106.
45. "International humanitarian law does not apply in the case of Syria, as it did in Iraq, because the Syrian government never invited the U.S. or any other State, which is required under *Nicaragua,* to invoke collective self-defense to assist Syria in fighting ISIS" (Lekas 334–35). Humanitarian intervention also requires states participating in the fight to overthrow the existing repressive regime and institute democracy. The overthrow of President Assad's regime is not the UN's or states' immediate effort (341–42). Finally, "although ISIS threatens the U.S. and States worldwide, anticipatory self-defense cannot legally justify intervention in Syria" (335). In sum, human rights lawyers are appealing to the UN Security Council to set clearer standards to allow states to combat ISIS, as a nonstate actor, with the force of international law.

Chapter 3

1. President Kabbah's election slogan has also been translated as "Give a Hand" (Berghs 2007).
2. Amputation as a technology of terror, however, is not unique to Sierra Leone. It has been practiced across the globe: "by Spanish against indigenous populations in New Mexico; by

the United States against its slave population; in the Belgian Congo; in colonial Rwanda by decree of Belgian administration; by American soldiers in the Vietnam War; in Columbia; in Angola; in Mozambique; Uganda; South Africa; the DRC; [and] Liberia" (Park 582–83).

3. Dolmage aligns his usage of the term *prosthetic* to the Derridian notion of *difference*. For Dolmage, "Writing of the body is to embrace difference . . . to continually fail to signify, when failing to signify is our only means of making meaning" (106). I share Dolmage's view of the history of prosthetics as a bodily expression that "fuses linguistic and corporeal supplementarity in our embodiment" (107). Moreover, I understand the lure of the formulation of rhetorical forms as "prosthetic transfers" (Wills). But I do not embrace the notion that modes of knowing and meaning making and being are "essentially prosthetic" (Dolmage 115).

4. Scholarship on disability and visuality is vast and includes works on the colonial visual histories of disability and eugenics and photography: Bogdan, Elks, and Knoll; Dolmage; Garland Thompson; Hevey; Lutz and Collins; McRuer; and Moeschen, among others.

5. In July 2003 Foday Sankoh died awaiting trial for war crimes. In 2006 Liberian ex-president Charles G. Taylor was indicted at the war crimes court in Sierra Leone. In 2012 Taylor was found guilty of terror, murder, rape, sexual slavery, mutilation, and recruiting child soldiers and sentenced to fifty years in prison.

6. For discussions of Western culture's fixation on prosthetics and warfare, and specifically America's long embrace of prosthetics-as-cures to World War II, see Aimi Hamraie's *Building Access* and Bess Williamson's *Accessible America.*

7. For an overview on overcoming disability narratives and, specifically, the narrative of the Supercrip, see Sami Schalk.

8. Humanitarian aid agencies have been blocked by al-Shabaab, under the accusation that these agencies, including UN agencies, are pursuing religious and ideological motives. The US cut its aid to Southern Somalia and the World Food Program in operation there because of these diversions by al-Shabaab, which the US defines as a terrorist organization. HRW reported that the transition government has also been involved in blocking food aid. Humanitarian zones are also habitually compromised by combatants who illegally mix among refugees and by leaders who manipulate the humanitarian system to divert resources to their own causes (Terry), and by persistent problems with UN peacekeeping forces, including sexual assaults against women.

9. For critique of the assumption that adaptive technologies increase abilities, see Kafer and Siebers, and for critical engagement with the construct of Universal Design and access, see Hamraie and Williamson.

Chapter 4

1. Photographer Larry W. Smith confirmed the racial identity of the protester via contact through a representative at the European PhotoPress Agency. Although the protester is unidentified, other than the photographer's identification of him as a Black man, he might very well be under the age of eighteen.

2. Sumi Cho defines postraciality as an "ideology that reflects a belief that due to the significant racial progress that has been made, the state need not engage in race-based remedies, and that civil society should eschew race as a central organizing principle of social action" (1594).

3. In the prosecutor's closing argument, John Guy asked the jury: "Would Martin be convicted if he had followed and then shot George Zimmerman?" Yet he followed this question with the claim that the case had never been about race (Bloom 2013).

4. The defense lawyers indicated that they would "much rather have the jury address the issue of criminal liability or lack thereof." There is ongoing debate about whether Florida's

SYG law applied in this case as a defense through Judge Nelson's jury instructions, in which Nelson told the jury that if Zimmerman "was not engaged in an unlawful activity and was attacked in any place where he had a right to be, he had no duty to retreat and had the right to stand his ground and meet force with force, including deadly force if he reasonably believed that it was necessary to do so to prevent death or great bodily harm to himself or another or to prevent the commission of a forcible felony" (Nelson). In contrast, Mark Follman and Lauren Williams argue that Zimmerman had known about SYG law, that at the very least he was taught about it in a criminal justice class, and that laws of self-defense and SYG themselves hamstring police and authorities. The authors also point to Juror B-37's statements, in an interview with CNN's Anderson Cooper, in which she said that "neither second-degree murder nor manslaughter applied in Zimmerman's case 'because of the heat of the moment and the "stand your ground." He had a right to defend himself. If he felt threatened that his life was going to be taken away from him and he was going to have bodily harm, he had a right'" (Follman and Williams 2013). Timothy Johnson argues that SYG law is a centerpiece to Florida's Self-Defense Law, that the "sole justifiable homicide law incorporates SYG." An opponent of SYG, former Florida state senator Dan Gelber, highlights how SYG law "changed the analysis used by juries to assign blame in these cases." He notes that when the legislature passed the SYG law in 2005 it changed the rules of engagement by eliminating the duty to avoid the danger and duty to retreat. (For an overview of the controversy over SYG law and its applicability to this case, see T. Johnson.)

5. The SYG statue also indicates that a police department cannot make an arrest "unless it determines that there is probable cause that the force that was used was unlawful."

6. A 2012 report indicates that the number of justifiable homicides in Florida tripled after the passing of the SYG law ("Deaths Nearly Triple"). According to researchers Mark Hoesktra and Cheng Cheng at Texas A&M University, murder and nonnegligent manslaughter rates have increased by 8 percent in states with SYG laws (see Hicks). Scholars have also found racial disparities in application of these laws. For example, whites are 250 percent more likely to be found justified in the killing of a Black person than whites killing whites (the baseline for comparison). In SYG cases the likelihood rises to 354 percent (see Childress). White-on-Black gun deaths are found to be justifiable 40 percent of the time, whereas Black-on-white gun deaths are found to be justifiable 5 percent of the time. For contrary views of and statistics for Florida's SYG law, see "The Racial Statistic behind 'Stand Your Ground.'"

7. It is precisely the issue of reasonability to which Patricia Williams draws our attention, citing Florida Statutes Chapter 776: "A person is justified in using force, except deadly force, against another when and to the extent that the person reasonably believes that such conduct is necessary to defend himself or herself or another against the other's imminent use of unlawful force. However, a person is justified in the use of deadly force and does not have a duty to retreat if: . . . He or she reasonably believes that such force is necessary to prevent imminent death or great bodily harm to himself or herself or another." Any person who does have such reasonable apprehension is "immune from criminal prosecution and civil action." However, this immunity is not available to one who "initially provokes the use of force against himself or herself" (2012).

8. The *New York Times* op-ed writer Robert Gooding-Williams argues that the Sanford police chief's statement that he did not arrest Zimmerman because he had no reason to doubt his self-defense claim "bears an eerie resemblance to cases brought under the Fugitive Slave Law," which required that "the self-proclaimed slave catcher be taken at his word" and left "unconstrained the ability of any white person to arrest and seize any black person."

9. Hancock notes that Florida's SYG law "has produced a spike in justifiable homicides defense, from an average of 34 in the 6 years prior to the law's enactments to an average of 85 in the years 2005–2009."

10. The prosecution attorneys included Angela Corey, Bernice de la Rionda, with assistance by John Guy and Richard Manter. Defense lawyers were Mark O'Mara and Don West. Judge Debra Nelson of the 18th Circuit Court of Florida ruled.

11. Florida Assistant State Attorney Bernie de la Rionda defended Rachel Jeantel, when he asked jurors not to discriminate against her, but the prosecutors did not raise any questions about the defense's strategic deployment of racial constructs; no questions were asked about "other, non-racial, identifying factors" of the Bertalan burglars, for example (Bloom).

12. With few exceptions, absent from the prosecution's arguments was attention to Trayvon Martin's youth. In the prosecution's closing arguments, State Attorney Bernie de la Rionda reminded the jurors that "a teenager is dead through no fault of his own" (Pearson and Botelho). Similarly, prosecutor John Guy told the jury that in order to know what happened that night, they should look "into the heart of the grown man and the heart of the child" (Stutzman and Weiner). Additionally, "the number of out-of-school suspensions for Black males was more than double that of white males" (Hancock).

13. By the mid-1970s, the Black Panther Party had "over forty U.S. chapters: coalitions with Asian Americans, Latinos, white antiwar activists, feminists, and lesbian and gay men; chapters in England, Israel, Australia, and India; and solidarity committees in Germany, China, Japan and Peru" (B. Rodriguez 2008, 166). For an overview of the Black Power movement and its changing meaning within civil rights scholarship and Black studies, see Joseph.

14. Additionally, some scholars, reporters, and social media contributors point to similarities in media depictions of Black protesters in Ferguson and Black victims of state violence, such as Michael Brown, as demonic, violent criminals, and Palestinians as uncivil, lawless terrorists, and also note commonalities in the willful refusals to recognize the oppression of Palestinian people and Blacks as oppression (Schotten). There are, of course, also critiques of such comparisons espoused from a range of political platforms. At the time of this writing, the top hit of a Google search of "Critiques of Comparison between Ferguson and Palestine" yields an op-ed piece by Kenneth Jacobson, Deputy National Director of the Anti-Defamation League.

15. Ore's award-winning book *Lynching: Violence, Rhetoric, and American Identity* likewise might be read as a methodological enactment of wake work, especially in her comparative analysis of the murders of Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, and Michael Brown as part of the long history of lynching and white racial terror in the US (see Hesford 2021, forthcoming *QJS*).

Chapter 5

1. Also see Gill-Peterson (2018) for a discussion of trans people of color and medical rationalities.

2. Among recent documentary and literary representations of the present generation of children growing up transgender are *I Am Jazz: A Family in Transition* (2011); PBS's "Growing Up Trans" (2015); Amy Ellis Nutt, "Becoming Nicole: The Transformation of an American Family" (2016); and the special issue of *National Geographic* magazine "The Gender Revolution" (2017).

3. As Amy Shuman and I discuss, the categories LGBTQI are themselves fraught and, in many cases, limiting. Transgender and intersex applicants face particular problems. Fatima Mohyuddin discusses the term *third gender* to describe "people around the world who live outside of culturally imposed sexual and gender boundaries" (2001, 388). In some cultures, third categories, such as the hijiras in India, are recognized. Mohyuddin provides descriptions of several transgender and intersexed applicants, some of which were successful

(2001, 404–10). Also see Tom Boellstorff's *The Gay Archipelago,* which focuses on queer activism in Indonesia, or Martin Manalsan's ethnography of queer Filipinos, *Global Divas.* Both demonstrate that LGBTQI terms often co-exist with local terms and/or are adapted with differential meanings in non-Western societies.

4. Within rhetoric and communication studies, Sara McKinnon has done important work on gender, sexuality, and asylum claims. In *Gendered Asylum,* McKinnon looks not only at how asylum seekers position themselves narratively but also at how the legal reception of these narratives either reinstantiates or reconfigures dominant paradigms and ideological formations. Chapter 4 aptly demonstrates, through its analysis of the case of transgender asylum seeker Arabillas Moreles, gender's categorical parameters and narrative conventions for reading sexuality in evaluating asylum claims. McKinnon foregrounds instances wherein asylum seekers' narratives do not correspond with dominant stereotypes of non-normative gender expression. In contrast to gender-confirming gay male asylum seekers, for instance, she likewise claims that lesbian asylum seekers have been denied asylum based on assumptions about the social invisibility of their identity; this is especially true in cases where lesbian asylum seekers display affective markers of femininity and therefore presumably can "pass" as heterosexual (106). We see similar patterns in the two documentary films *Getting Out* and *She's Not a Body,* discussed in this chapter.

5. See Keenan's discussion of the overturning of the discretion requirement (2011, 35).

6. For overview of the queer and trans* turn in scholarship in composition studies, and communication studies, see J. Alexander; Alexander and Wallace; Hsu; Rawson and Williams; and Spencer and Capuzza.

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NEW DIRECTIONS IN RHETORIC AND MATERIALITY

BARBARA A. BIESECKER, WENDY S. HESFORD, AND CHRISTA TESTON,
SERIES EDITORS

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