

The Killing of Syrian Children: On the Dangers of Theorizing from Emergency

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR

THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

The Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

(Political Science)

The University of British Columbia

(Vancouver)

August, 2018

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The following individuals certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies for acceptance, a thesis/dissertation entitled:

The Killing of Syrian Children: On the Dangers of Theorizing from Emergency

submitted by Salma Essam El Refaei in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for

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In Political Science

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## Abstract

How does theorizing from a state of emergency inform representations of Syrian refugee children? This thesis introduces a theoretical framework that brings into consideration Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* and *Black Skin, White Masks* and Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Through a reading of these texts, the thesis explores why it is essential for representation to "exceed the language and practices of security" and the emergency framework.<sup>1</sup> This thesis has a two-fold argument. First, I argue that the humanitarian discourse and the anti-refugee/immigrant discourse on Syrian refugees and children reincarnate a colonial approach and language to studying the Other. Resultantly, some of the circulated representations of the Syrian 'refugee crisis' either vilifies refugees collectively or overlooks their agency by romanticizing them. On one hand, these representations are then problematically employed to justify rigid border control measures; on the other, to legitimate humanitarianism as a response to the refugee crisis.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, I argue that theorizing from emergency results in "killing of [the] lives" that it sought to preserve, through a recourse to a colonial discourse that alienates Syrian children from their "way of life – life as it is lived" and relegates them to a zone of extinction.<sup>3</sup> To further demonstrate the presence of discontinuities between some of these representations and acts of resistance and reclamation that Syrian refugees and children engage in, I draw on stories and actions of war affected Syrian refugees, in documentary radio and social media campaigns.

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<sup>1</sup> John Lechte and Saul Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2013), page 12.

<sup>2</sup> Bronwyn Leebaw, *Judging state-sponsored violence, imagining political change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) pages 6-7. Akm Ahsan Ullah, *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), page 63.

<sup>3</sup> Christine Sylvester, "Avoiding the 'killing' of lives: representations in academia and fiction" in *Studying the agency of being governed* ed Stina Hansson, Sofie Hellberg and Maria Stern (New York: Routledge, 2014), page 64. Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 143.

## Lay Summary

When Alan Kurdi's story surfaced in 2015, the call to *do something* "about" Syrian children grew more urgent, drawing attention to the Syrian refugee "crisis." This call was motivated by either a fear of the perceived "chaos" Syrian refugees were causing or a genuine concern for their survival. As such, stories about Syrian refugees and children represented them only as victims or (potential) terrorists. These stories, told in a language of emergency, propelled its audience to either *do something* or bear the consequences of *doing nothing*. Yet these stories problematically represented Syrians as an undifferentiated group that the world had to either save or avoid. In this thesis, I argue that theorizing from emergency results in "killing of [the] lives" that it sought to preserve, through a recourse to a colonial discourse that alienates Syrian children from their "way of life" and relegates them to a zone of extinction.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Christine Sylvester, "Avoiding the 'killing' of lives: representations in academia and fiction" in *Studying the agency of being governed* (New York: Routledge, 2014), page 64. Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 143.

## **Preface**

This thesis is the unpublished original work of the author, Salma Essam El Refaei.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iii
Lay Summary.....	iv
Preface.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vi
Acknowledgements .....	vii
Dedication.....	viii
Epigraph.....	ix
Section 1: Introduction .....	1
1.1 Representation and Theorizing from Emergency .....	1
Section 2: Theoretical Framework: Orientalism, Fanonism and Bare Life .....	4
2.1 Orientalism: Theoretical Grounding .....	5
2.2 Fanonism: Theoretical Grounding .....	8
2.3 Othering and Zones of Extinction .....	10
2.4 Agamben: Theoretical Grounding .....	12
Section 3: Critical Analysis of the Humanitarian Response to Refugee Children .....	14
3.1 State of Emergency: Non-transcendence, Necessity and Humanitarianism .....	14
3.2 Refugee Children.....	18
Section 4: Representation and the Emergency Framework: Syrian Refugees.....	23
4.1 Representing Syrian Refugees .....	25
4.2 The Syrian Refugee, The Syrian Child and the Orient .....	27
4.3 The Syrian Refugee, the Syrian Child as the Evil Other .....	32
4.4 On the Critical Event, Representation of Syrian Children and the Bare Life.....	38
Section 5: Concluding Chapter.....	44
Bibliography .....	48

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Erin Baines for her mentorship, unwavering support during the entire year that I was at UBC and for investing time in this project and my education. I would also like to sincerely thank Pilar Riaño-Alcalá for agreeing to be the examiner and for helping me approach memory work and lived experiences of the displaced differently. A very special thanks to Alexia Bloch and Glen Coulthard for offering valuable insights and suggestions and for contributing crucial feedback on different sections of this thesis. I also offer my gratitude to the faculty and staff in the Political Science Department at UBC. Particularly, I would like to thank Arjun Chowdhury, Katia Coleman and Anna Jurkevics. A special shout out to Josephine Calazan for being an amazing coordinator and for always making things easier and to Richard Wright for helping in booking classrooms for TA review sessions which made my TAsip an experience that I will forever cherish.

I cannot end this section without thanking Sean McMahon for introducing me to postcolonial theory and for being an outstanding teacher. I am forever indebted to Nadine Sika for generously helping me finish my undergraduate studies. Many thanks to Dina Hosny, Nevien Samir and Shereen Emad for providing logistical support and making my undergraduate journey memorable. Finally, cheers to my family and friends for being my reason.

## **Dedication**

*To the Syrian kids I worked with and the ones who I never met.*



## Epigraph

“War arrives suddenly, uninvited and brings with it a new normal ... It has its own cadence, its own logic. It is the mundane experiences through heightened, sometimes supercharged emotions. The daily rhythm of life goes on, as it must, but with a constant undercurrent of tension, a baseline permanently shifted with the knowledge that a single abrupt event at any time.”

-Rania Abouzeid

“There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.”

-Walter Benjamin

“... to lose one’s humanity is, Agamben shows, also to confirm one’s humanity. For only human can be excluded from the human.”

- John Lechte and Saul Newman

“If a human being loses his political status, he should, according to the implications of the inborn and the inalienable rights of man, come under exactly the situation for which declarations of such general rights provided. Actually, the opposite is the case. It seems that the man who is nothing but a man has lost the very qualities which makes it possible for other people to treat him as a fellow man.”

-Hannah Arendt

“Refugees are neither victims nor Homo Sacer; they are struggling for their rights.”

-Elsbeth Guild

## 1. Representation and Theorizing from Emergency

Inspired by the outbreak of the Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt, Mouawiya, Omar and Yacoub, along with a group of their friends, whose ages ranged between 9-14, “spray-painted graffiti reading “Freedom” and “Down with the regime,” and “It’s your turn Doctor” [in reference to Bashar Al Assad]” on their school walls in Dara’a.<sup>5</sup> A few hours later, they were arrested and reportedly brutally tortured.<sup>6</sup> In protest against the unjust and ruthless treatment of the children, demonstrations broke out in their province marking the “official start” of the Syrian revolution or as Save the Children presents it, the “worst humanitarian crisis of our time.”<sup>7</sup> According to the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR), the revolution, which spiraled into what is popularly and particularly addressed as a civil war and largely described as a protracted episode of armed conflict, leaves in its wake, “the greatest refugee crisis in a quarter century.”<sup>8</sup> As of Winter 2017, “there were 13.5 million people [out of a total of 22 million] internally displaced [in Syria] and ... 4,898,353 registered Syrian refugees- including 2.3 million children under the age of 18” who sought refuge in neighboring countries, Europe and North America.<sup>9</sup>

The question of refugees’ mobilities “hold significant implications for asylum debates, international peace and security, peacebuilding and security studies.”<sup>10</sup> The multitude of borders that Syrian children, in particular, and refugees at large have crossed, metaphorically and

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<sup>5</sup> Jamie Tarabay, “For many Syrians, the story of the war began with graffiti in Dara’a,” *CNN*, March 15, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/15/middleeast/daraa-syria-seven-years-on-intl/index.html>. Avi Sher-Schapiro, “The Young Men Who Started Syria’s Revolution Speak About Daraa, Where It All Began,” *Vice News*, March 15, 2016. <https://news.vice.com/article/the-young-men-who-started-syrias-revolution-speak-about-daraa-where-it-all-began> 15 March, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Tarabay, “For many Syrians, the story of the war began with graffiti in Dara’a.”

<sup>7</sup> Save the Children, “Emergency Syria Appeal,” February 2016, [https://www.savethechildren.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/giving\\_children\\_a\\_future.pdf](https://www.savethechildren.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/giving_children_a_future.pdf) page 1.

<sup>8</sup> Maria Von Welser, *No Refuge for Women: The Tragic Fate of Syrian Refugees*, trans. Jamie McIntosh (British Columbia, Greystone Books, 2017), page vi.

<sup>9</sup> Von Welser, *No Refuge for Women: The Tragic Fate of Syrian Refugees*, pages vi-22.

<sup>10</sup> Gil Loescher, James Milner, Edward Newman and Gary Troeller, *Protracted Refugee Situations* (Hong Kong: United Nations University Press, 2014), page 4.

literally, over the past seven years has heightened international attention and urgency to respond, especially after Alan Kurdi's photo was widely circulated in September 2015.<sup>11</sup> The call for immediate solutions was made even more urgent when "every day from September 2015 through spring 2016, on average two refugee children drowned in the eastern Mediterranean, right in front of their parents' eyes."<sup>12</sup> The children who survived fleeing, were either held at camps or detentions centers, where "their destinies ... are linked to political decisions."<sup>13</sup> Since then, children became an icon of the Syrian conflict, and their stories have been widely mobilized to show that the war was indeed "real," gravely dangerous and to draw attention to at least 6.1 million children who "desperately need humanitarian aid" but are also stateless, ungoverned, unrestrained and potentially violent if not attended to.<sup>14</sup>

Such facts are often mobilized by humanitarian organizations such as Save the Children and UNHCR, and by right wing media in host countries, such as Germany and Hungary. In this thesis, I am concerned with how some representations of Syrian refugees and children, when theorized from emergency reproduce two contradicting, but equally violent, discourses, resulting in what Christine Sylvester refers to as the "killing of lives." For Sylvester the "killing of lives" ... refers to the ... practice of separating people's words and identities from their daily experiences.<sup>15</sup> The first is a humanitarian discourse, which is particularly powerful as it draws on universal doctrines, which has a romantic appeal to it. Victimhood becomes the single story through which the refugee is romantically represented and although victimhood, which does not by default have a negative connotation, constitutes an integral layer of their identity, it is not

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<sup>11</sup> Dina Vaiou. "Gendered Mobilities and Border-crossings: From Elbasan to Athens." *Gender, Place, Culture* 19, no. 2 (2012): pages 254-255. Von Welser, *No Refuge for Women: The Tragic Fate of Syrian Refugees*, page v.

<sup>12</sup> Von Welser, *No Refuge for Women: The Tragic Fate of Syrian Refugees*, page 9.

<sup>13</sup> Von Welser, *No Refuge for Women: The Tragic Fate of Syrian Refugees*, page 10.

<sup>14</sup> Von Welser, *No Refuge for Women: The Tragic Fate of Syrian Refugees*, page 19.

<sup>15</sup> Sylvester, "Avoiding the 'killing' of lives: representations in academia and fiction," page 64.

their only identity.<sup>16</sup> The second discourse, in contrast, is an anti-refugee/anti-immigrant discourse. Geographically, this is popular in countries that welcomed a high influx of refugees or countries where refugees reside in refugee camps outside its borders.<sup>17</sup> Proponents of this discourse present the refugee, and by extension the Syrian child, as a (potential) terrorist.<sup>18</sup>

Through consideration of the question, *How does theorizing from a state of emergency inform representations of Syrian refugee children?* I advance two arguments, each drawing on theoretical insights of Edward Said, Frantz Fanon and Giorgio Agamben.<sup>19</sup> First, I argue that the humanitarian discourse and the anti-refugee/immigrant discourse on Syrian refugees and children, reincarnate a colonial approach and language to studying the Other. Resultantly, some of the circulated representations of the Syrian “refugee crisis” either vilify the refugees featured collectively or overlook their agency by romanticizing them.<sup>20</sup> On one hand, these representations are problematically employed to justify rigid border control measures; on the other, to legitimate humanitarianism as a response to the “refugee crisis.”<sup>21</sup> Secondly, I argue that theorizing from emergency results in “killing of [the] lives” that it sought to preserve, through a recourse to a colonial discourse that alienates Syrian children from their “way of life –

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<sup>16</sup> “Die erste Kandidatin stellt sich vor,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JfLLnirY5ak>. “Catching Birds, Eating Sharks - How Syrians Survive the War,” *Sputnik International*, September 22, 2017.

<https://sputniknews.com/middleeast/201709211057594220-how-syrians-survive-war/>

<sup>17</sup> Carolyn Smith Keller, “Elections and Anti-Immigrant Sentiment in the European Union,” ESS Conference. 13-15th July 2016, Switzerland, page 11.

<sup>18</sup> Ramona Kreis, “#refugeesnotwelcome: Anti-refugee discourse on Twitter,” *Discourse and Communication* 11, no. 5 (2017), pages 499-507

<sup>19</sup> This thesis uses Agamben to critique the role emergency plays in shaping humanitarian responses to the refugee crisis and how it requires the reduction of the refugee to a bare life. It uses Said’s work to critique the humanitarian discourse and it uses Fanon’s texts to critique the anti-refugee discourse. With regards to the latter, the thesis does not present a state centric analysis, despite acknowledging that containment is essential for preserving the nation-state and what it stands for. However, the thesis only focuses on the discourse disseminated by some right wing media and on social media that is used by right wing parties to push for tighter border control measures.

<sup>20</sup> Kreis, “#refugeesnotwelcome: Anti-refugee discourse on Twitter,” pages 498-499. “Catching Birds, Eating Sharks - How Syrians Survive the War.”

<sup>21</sup> Leebaw, *Judging state-sponsored violence, imagining political change*, pages 6-7. Akm Ahsan Ullah, *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa* (Hamphsire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), page 63.

life as it is lived” and relegates them to a zone of extinction.<sup>22</sup> To further demonstrate the presence of a gap between some of these representations and acts of resistance and reclamation that Syrian refugees and children engage in, I draw on stories and actions of war affected Syrian refugees, in documentary radio and social media campaigns.

The thesis contributes to bodies of literature exploring why it is essential for representation to “exceed the language and practices of security” and the emergency framework.<sup>23</sup> While this thesis mainly presents a critique of humanitarian reliance on non-transcendence and emergency, when representing Syrian refugees and children, it still does not call for the immediate upheaval of humanitarianism, as a doctrine and an industry. This is mainly because it recognizes the importance of donations for refugees. What this thesis does instead is highlight a possibility for different discourses, especially that the contemporary humanitarian discourse is not effectively contributing to a betterment of or an end to the perpetually decreasing food cuts, that refugees have been subjected to.<sup>24</sup>

### **Theoretical Framework: Orientalism, Fanonism and Bare Life**

This thesis does not deny that bringing three thinkers from two different schools of critical theory into the same theoretical framework can be problematic. That being acknowledged, the conversation that they struck together is valuable for formulating a decolonial approach to representation. Even though the insights of other postcolonial scholars such as Albert Memmi, Ella Shohat, Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak are pertinent to the discussion this thesis presents, focusing mainly on the writings of Said and Fanon helps in critiquing the contemporary romanticizing-vilifying binary that scholars working on the Syrian

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<sup>22</sup> Sylvester, “Avoiding the ‘killing’ of lives: representations in academia and fiction,” page 64. Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 143.

<sup>23</sup> Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 12.

<sup>24</sup> Loescher, Milner, Newman and Troeller, *Protracted Refugee Situations*, page 29.

conflict recently identified as a representation trend.<sup>25</sup> While Said is often a popular choice for scholars working on representation of Syrian refugees, Fanon, is not. This is partly because he is often exclusively associated with literature on African diaspora and because his theory of violence is popularly “misunderstood,” by “many” scholars as Lewis Gordon argues.<sup>26</sup> This thesis shows why bringing back Fanon into the discussion of representation, in conversation with Said, is important. Not only is Fanon’s analysis of the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer relevant to the question of dichotomous representation, but his understanding of Othering and zones of extinction helps flesh out the dangers of problematic representations. Agamben contributes an ontological analysis, identifying a root cause of these representations by exploring how Othering and how the zone of complete indistinction is a product of theorizing from a state of exception or in the thesis’ case, chronic emergency. This section lays out the theoretical concepts pertinent to sections three and four.

## **2.1 Orientalism: Theoretical Grounding**

In *Orientalism*, Said studied the different processes, linguistic and otherwise, through which the colonizer, socially and politically created the Orient, manufactured it into an Other. According to Said, Orientalism was “the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient ... by making statements about it, ... describing it, by teaching it, ... ruling over it: in short, Orientalism is a western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient”.<sup>27</sup> He refers to the “Orient” as a “European invention.”<sup>28</sup> It is a “place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, [and] remarkable experiences.”<sup>29</sup> Through discourse

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<sup>25</sup> Von Welser, *No Refuge for Women: The Tragic Fate of Syrian Refugees*, page v.

<sup>26</sup> Brooks Kirchgassner, “On Frantz Fanon: An Interview with Lewis R. Gordon,” *Public Books*, July 20, 2016, <http://www.publicbooks.org/on-frantz-fanon-an-interview-with-lewis-r-gordon/>

<sup>27</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, (London: Routledge, 2000), page 167-68.

<sup>28</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978), page 1.

<sup>29</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, page 1.

analysis, Said aimed to “examine Orientalism and to show ... “how the will to exercise dominant control ... has ... discovered a way to clothe, disguise, rarefy, and wrap itself systematically in the language of truth, discipline, rationality, utilitarian value and knowledge.”<sup>30</sup> In the epigraph, Said cites Karl Marx and departs from his quote: “they cannot represent themselves; they must be represented,” which is relevant to the discussion on children as dependent, vulnerable beings.<sup>31</sup> The colonizer did not just create the Orient and set the rules of formation, which gave it control over how the Orient was seen, but it also mitigated the silences around it. It constructed the idea of the Orient and dictated how it behaved through a comprehensive system of “knowledge manipulation” or what Said concretely referred to as the “corporate,” suggesting the pervasiveness of the idea of the Orient and its ability to transcend time and space.<sup>32</sup> This “corporate” as Said would show was put in place to service the imperial project and sustain the totality of the colonial tutelage that the colonizer assumed over the colonized.<sup>33</sup>

The Orient had characteristics that distinguished it from the West. Said writes that the Orient “has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience.”<sup>34</sup> In *Orientalism*, he shows how the colonizer erected a binary through which it distinguished itself from the Orient. This binary had crippling implications because it was “very common in the cultural construction of reality” and consequently it facilitated the multilayered exploitation and dispossession of the colonized.<sup>35</sup> Said showcases how colonial writings

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<sup>30</sup> Ensieh Shabanirad and Seyyed Mohammad Marandi, “Edward Said’s *Orientalism* and the Representation of Oriental Women in George Orwell’s *Burmese Days*,” *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences* 60 (2015): pages 22-23 <https://www.scipress.com/ILSHS.60.22.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, page xi. UNHCR, “Refugee Children: Guidelines on Protection and Care,” 1994, <http://www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/3b84c6c67.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, pages 41-49.

<sup>33</sup> Shabanirad and Marandi, “Edward Said’s *Orientalism* and the Representation of Oriental Women in George Orwell’s *Burmese Days*,” pages 23-24.

<sup>34</sup> Farah Ismail, “Representations of home, the orient and the other “other” in selected children’s fantasy literature,” *Scrutiny* 21, no. 1 (2016): 3-17, DOI: 10.1080/18125441.2015.1072838 pages 3-4.

<sup>35</sup> Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies*, page 23.

presented, “the Oriental ... [as] irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike [and] ‘different’; thus [they presented] the European ... [as] rational, virtuous, mature [and] ‘normal.’”<sup>36</sup> The Orient was “intrinsicly” weak as opposed to the bodily abled colonizer.<sup>37</sup> It was the “alluring, exotic-body oriented” object as opposed to the mind-oriented colonizer.<sup>38</sup> The Orient was also the “erratic” while the colonizer was the “ordered.”<sup>39</sup> It was uneducated while the colonizer was knowledgeable, well rounded and educated.<sup>40</sup> The colonizer represented the “functional” and the Orient was the “dysfunctional.”<sup>41</sup> The colonizer presented its town as “well-fed” in contrast to the colonized town which was “a hungry town, starved of bread, of shoes, of coal, of light.”<sup>42</sup> Finally, the Orient, according to the colonizer, only existed freely through its fantasies, most of which were sexual and featured lavish lives that were the opposite of the “miserable” lives that the Orient had in the East.<sup>43</sup> The binary that the colonizer created and entrenched through works of literature instigated a violent hierarchy where the Orient was “inferior” in every way when compared with the colonizer’s superiority and strength.<sup>44</sup> This had several implications but the one most pertinent to this thesis is the dependency that this hierarchy also created.

Establishing that the Orient was incapable of “representing itself” because of its “intrinsic weakness” laid the ground for the colonizer to take over and assume the responsibility of representing the Orient as well as educating and liberating it.<sup>45</sup> According to this particular imagination of the colonized, the Orient suffered from “mass rage” and an inability to express

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<sup>36</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, page 40.

<sup>37</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, page 54.

<sup>38</sup> Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies*, page 24.

<sup>38</sup> John M. Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), page 8

<sup>39</sup> Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies*, page 24.

<sup>39</sup> John M. Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), page 8

<sup>40</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, page 46.

<sup>41</sup> Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies*, page 24.

<sup>41</sup> Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization*, page 8.

<sup>42</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1967), page 30.

<sup>43</sup> Ismail, “Representations of home, the orient and the other “other” in selected children’s fantasy literature,” pages 11-12.

<sup>44</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, page 41.

<sup>45</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, page 298.



their emotions or needs civilly and the colonizer was morally obligated to rid the Orient of its emotional irrationality.<sup>46</sup> The colonizer needed to guide the Orient into civilization, scientific inquiry, virtue and maturity. The colonial imagination addressed the idea that the Orient was not going to necessarily embrace these traits because it was violent but the colonizer had more “strength” and had the capabilities to civilize the Orient and save it from its own depravity and backwardness.<sup>47</sup> In other words, the Orient was in constant need of guidance, help and assistance, which reflected elements of paternalism that the colonial imagination embraced pervasively.

## **2.2 Fanonism: Theoretical Grounding**

Fanon, like Said, shows that it was necessary for the colonizer to erect binaries between itself and the colonized that helps alienating the latter and turning it into an Other. However, Fanon explores how these binaries drew on elements that demonized and vilified the colonized as opposed to romanticize it. Through the instigation of a violent hierarchy and an inescapable relationship that are dichotomous and exclusive, Fanon explains the process of Othering and vilification that the colonizer subjects the colonized. There were vilifying binaries between “white [and] black, civilized [and] primitive, advanced [and] retarded, good [and] evil, beautiful [and] ugly, human [and] beastial.”<sup>48</sup> These binaries arguably had crippling implications, one of which was that it constructed a powerful discourse, controlling how the ‘rest’ saw the colonized and how the colonized internalized their own inferiority and preformed their identities. Fanon analyzes how the colonized internalizes its inferiority in “Concerning Violence.” He writes, “the gaze that the colonized subject casts at the colonist’s sector is a look of lust, a look of envy.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, page 296.

<sup>47</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, page 296.

<sup>48</sup> Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies*, page 19.

<sup>49</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, page 39.

The colonized internalizes its inferiority and subordination to the extent that it does not want to suspend the colonial establishment, it just wants to replace the colonizer and in some cases, all it aspires to is to replace the colonizer's local ally in the colony. According to the vilifying rhetoric, the colonized town is "peopled by men of evil repute." They are "dirty ... envious [and] ... enemies [of the colonizer]." <sup>50</sup> Fleshing out the vilifying imagination, Fanon writes:

... the native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values. He is, let us dare to admit, the enemy of values, and in this sense he is the absolute evil. He is the corrosive element, destroying all that comes near him; he is the deforming element, disfiguring all that has to do with beauty or morality; he is the depository of maleficent powers, the unconscious and irretrievable instrument of blind forces. <sup>51</sup>

Through this paragraph, he powerfully demonstrates the extent to which the colonial imagination demoralized and ultimately dehumanized the colonized by associating it with "absolute evil". Using words such as "corrosive" and associating it with totalizing destruction, nothingness, ugliness, filth and immorality, turned the colonized into an Other who was to be feared, avoided and who had to be punished, cleansed from its brownness and purified into civilization. <sup>52</sup> The colonial imagination alienated the colonized from others by associating them with toxicity and destruction and it alienated them as a people from their humanity by associating them with absolute evil and by establishing that they "represent ... the absence [and "negation"] of values." <sup>53</sup> This multilayered alienation and Othering is not born in a vacuum as demonstrated below.

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<sup>50</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, pages 38-39.

<sup>51</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, page 40.

<sup>52</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, page 40.

<sup>53</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, page 40.

## 2.3 Othering and Zones of Extinction

In, *What Fanon Said: A Philosophical Introduction to His Life and Thought*, Lewis

Gordon writes

as Virgil eventually shows Dante's protagonist two foes, one of whom is so consumed by hatred that he gnaws on the head of his enemy while frozen from the neck down at the icy cold epicenter of Hell, Fanon presents the horrific implications of being consumed by hatred.<sup>54</sup>

In this scene, Gordon borrows Dante's descriptions of Hell in *Inferno* and uses them to explain the power of the constructed Othering that transcend the fixity of times and spaces. He shows how the person who was made into an Other becomes so entrenched in its otherness and inferiority that even in Hell, it keeps looking for its enemy, while knowing that it is hate that resulted in its exile. In his reading of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Gordon shows how Othering can be detrimental to imagination and ultimately to the existence of the Other as a human being. Said agrees with this as he analyzes the binary between Us and the outsiders.<sup>55</sup> He identifies what he refers to as the "perilous territory of not-belonging" which is "where in a primitive time people were banished, and where in the modern era immense aggregates of humanity loiter as refugees and displaced persons."<sup>56</sup>

Fanon analyzes and nuances Othering in, *Black Skin, White Masks* where he writes "the resentment [that the colonizer and sometimes the colonized itself has for the colonized] takes us to a particular place: *a zone of non-being, an extraordinary sterile and arid region, where black is not a man, and mankind is digging into its own flesh to find meaning.*"<sup>57</sup> This last part is particularly powerful and it could explain how Syrian children, are merely a vehicle that is

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<sup>54</sup> Lewis R. Gordon and Project Muse, *What Fanon Said: A Philosophical Introduction to His Life and Thought* first ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), page 128.

<sup>55</sup> Edward Said, *Reflection on Exile and Other Essays* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000), page 177.

<sup>56</sup> Said, *Reflection on Exile and Other Essays*, page 177.

<sup>57</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), pages vi-2.

mobilized to either legitimate humanitarianism or introduce stricter border control measures. Humanitarians “dig into its ... flesh” to generate sympathy and secure donations.<sup>58</sup> Proponents of stricter border controls “dig into its ... flesh” to prove that they will contaminate society.<sup>59</sup> The academic canon “digs into its ... flesh” to theorize about them and “find meaning.”<sup>60</sup> In this case, not only does colonial imagination reproduce the colonized as the Other but by demoralizing them and pushing them into the “zone of non-being,” the colonizer effectively places the colonized “beneath even the self–other relation.”<sup>61</sup> In the zone of non-being, the colonized is not even a sub-human. Colonial imagination removes their existence from the realm of the being.

One of the interpretations that Lewis Gordon presents for the “zone of non-being” is that it equates to “a point of total absence, [where it is] the place farthest from the light.”<sup>62</sup> It is an inherently negative category of existence, and it was one of the most prevalent identities that the colonized lived with for decades, even after decolonization because as Fanon demonstrates, it was sometimes inescapable because of the internalization of inferiority and because of how powerful it was as an identity which is central to understanding the dangers of colonial imaginations in relation to children and their futures.<sup>63</sup>

As established in the introduction to this section, Agamben approaches the zone of extinction from a different angle by tracing its genealogy to emergency. He establishes that

the decisive fact is that, together with the process by which the exception everywhere becomes the rule, the realm of bare life- which was originally situated at the margins of the political order- gradually begins to coincide with the political realm, and exclusion and inclusion, outside and inside, *bios* and *zoē*, right and fact, enter into a zone of irreducible indistinction.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, pages vi-2.

<sup>59</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, pages vi.

<sup>60</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, pages vi.

<sup>61</sup> Gordon, *What Fanon Said: A Philosophical Introduction to His Life and Thought* first ed. pages 127-128.

<sup>62</sup> Gordon, *What Fanon Said: A Philosophical Introduction to His Life and Thought* first ed. page 23.

<sup>63</sup> Gordon, *What Fanon Said: A Philosophical Introduction to His Life and Thought* first ed., page 72.

<sup>64</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), page 9.

Similar to Fanon's, Agamben's zone of complete indistinction is also a zone of Othering where the Other is "neither human nor non-human" and where the stateless person violently remains "on the threshold between the human and inhuman" which implicates their presents and their futures.<sup>65</sup> However, Agamben's critique particularly explores how it is a zone erected on ideas of securitization and immunization where "the project of securing life, of protecting the lives of some- citizens of a nation-state, for instance- is always at the expense of others, whether through their exclusion of even their elimination."<sup>66</sup> It is a product of "concepts such as "public security and order," "state of danger," and "case of necessity"" and theorizing from non-transcendence.<sup>67</sup> This is relevant to the question of refugees' mobilities because statelessness in its essence "becomes a site of (in)security for national governments, thus authorizing more intense border controls" or urgent calls for humanitarian intervention requiring the 'temporal' upholding of non-transcendence.<sup>68</sup>

## 2.4 Agamben: Theoretical Grounding

Non-transcendence is the "material situation in the here and now, one that must be managed and not changed."<sup>69</sup> In their reading of Agamben, John Lechte and Saul Newman argue that as an abstract concept, non-transcendence significantly informs the work of the agencies providing aid in response to mass violence as their main aim is always the "mere aliveness [of the] individuals in need" through meeting the biological/physical needs that guarantee their "bare survival."<sup>70</sup> In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Agamben

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<sup>65</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, pages 54-50.

<sup>66</sup> Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 3.

<sup>67</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, page 172. Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 4.

<sup>68</sup> Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 14.

<sup>69</sup> Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 21.

<sup>70</sup> Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 21.

critically analyzes the reliance on non-transcendence as a discourse that “participate[s] in the reduction of people to bare life [which is] ... the closest that we can get to the notion of pure organism as an exclusively physical entity, whose only defining quality is it is alive.”<sup>71</sup> This implicates the lives of refugees as aid recipients because as Andrew Benjamin would argue, they are “dispossessed of rights ... and civil identity” and they are “marked” as inhabitants of a “zone of complete indistinction.”<sup>72</sup> Their identities, experiences and humanity are limited to their biological existence.

Agamben critiques the “inability or refusal to recognize the dimension of the human that remains irreducible to utility and quantification- that cannot be objectified as ‘bare,’ biological life” and argues for the need to acknowledge that a stateless person “can reveal part of itself that transcends mere existence.”<sup>73</sup> In other words, there is no absolute sovereignty or “an absolutely vulnerable bare life” which is demonstrated in this thesis through the examples drawn out from documentary radio and a social media campaign .<sup>74</sup> There is a multitude of ways through which the non-transcendent Other resists and reclaims existence beyond the zone of extinction. However, that still does not negate the misrepresentation of the stateless person, their Othering and their reduction into a non-transcendent bare life. Agamben looks at how the ““imploring eyes” of the Rwandan child, whose photograph is shown to obtain money” became necessary for humanitarianism to function.<sup>75</sup> In his analysis, he demonstrates how representation is complicit

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<sup>71</sup> Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, pages 97-53.

<sup>72</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, page 54. Andrew Benjamin, “Particularity and Exceptions: on Jews and Animals,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 107, no. 1 (2008), page 12. Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 63.

<sup>73</sup> Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, pages 74-84.

<sup>74</sup> Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 105.

<sup>75</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, page 133. Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 5.

with power and how reducing and representing the stateless person as a bare life is essential for its temporal (in)existence.<sup>76</sup>

### **3. Critical Analysis of the Humanitarian Response to Refugee Children**

The core value of humanitarianism, as a doctrine, lies in “human beings ... help[ing] human beings in need.”<sup>77</sup> Humanitarianism, as an industry, helps achieving that partly through securing donations.<sup>78</sup> In order to accumulate donations quickly, humanitarians have to represent the “human beings in need” through portraits and stories that help the donors sympathize with them and that eventually convince the latter to donate.<sup>79</sup> The section below explains how emergency and non-transcendence, which inform these representations or stories, are essential for humanitarianism to function. Then it looks closely at the humanitarian response to refugee children. This section, however, does not address the question of the representations of Syrian refugees or Syrian children yet. Instead, it sets the context within which the Syrian refugee crisis, as a global humanitarian crisis, is situated in this thesis. It also lays down the ideas that will be critiqued through Agamben’s work in section four.

#### **3.1 State of Emergency: Non-transcendence, Necessity and Humanitarianism**

By adopting a critical approach to the literature on humanitarian responses to statelessness and refugee children, I identify two pillars that evolve from non-transcendence and govern humanitarian work. The first is that emergencies are “omnipresent [where] we are never in a ‘normal’ situation,” because of the prevalence of mass violence particularly in the Global South.<sup>80</sup> The second is that short-term solutions or what David Rieff, refers to as “Band-Aids on

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<sup>76</sup> Bogusia Temple and Rhett Moran, eds. *Doing Research with Refugees: Issues and Guidelines* (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2006), page 8.

<sup>77</sup> Ullah, *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa*, page 81.

<sup>78</sup> David Rieff, *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), pages 276-321.

<sup>79</sup> Ullah, *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa*, page 81.

<sup>80</sup> Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 8.

malignant tumors” in *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis*, are the only affordable responses to these emergencies because durable solutions are time and resources consuming and would involve redistribution.<sup>81</sup> Akm Ahsan Ullah analyzes the structural limitations that weigh the humanitarian industry down and argues that, “there are inherent lacunae within the protection agenda of the humanitarian organizations; hence, the expected yields have not appeared.”<sup>82</sup> The lacuna that this thesis is particularly concerned with is how humanitarianism is structurally constrained by the decreasing funding.<sup>83</sup> This is not a limitation existing in a vacuum. It is arguably interlinked to the deliberate framing of episodes of mass violence as omnipresent states of emergencies, which is depoliticizing and dehistoricizing but deemed necessary to raise donations.

By evoking a state and a language of emergency in an attempt to draw donors’ attention to the crises that need immediate solutions, proponents of humanitarianism become part of a vicious cycle, where they are constantly racing against time and trying to secure funding to maintain sustainable aid provision while attempting to reverse short term material conditions that the limited resources and the funding can barely fix.<sup>84</sup> Looking at UNHCR in particular, “in a number of cases, ... [it] has fallen into an uncomfortable role, stuck between host governments attempting to meet their responsibilities to refugees and donors with obligations to appropriate burden-sharing.”<sup>85</sup> This has not completely stopped UNHCR from providing aid yet but it places it and the refugees it is trying to help under the constant pressure of trying to secure funding. Moreover, despite humanitarians’ efforts, which most of the time reflect individuals’ genuine desire to end the pain of another human being, and despite the criticalness of the crises that

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<sup>81</sup> Rieff, *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis*, page 307.

<sup>82</sup> Ullah, *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa*, pages 3-4.

<sup>83</sup> Ullah, *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa*, page 79.

<sup>84</sup> Temple and Moran, eds. *Doing Research with Refugees: Issues and Guidelines*, pages 5-16.

<sup>85</sup> Loescher, Milner, Newman and Troeller, *Protracted Refugee Situations*, page 379



humanitarian agencies try to mitigate, there have been exponentially increasing budget cuts every year since mid-1990s.<sup>86</sup> These cuts are not a result of additional costs that UNHCR incurs but rather a result of its inability “to maintain a minimum level of health care, shelter and food assistance to the refugees.”<sup>87</sup> This, according to Gil Loescher and James Milner, is alarming because it means that the humanitarian industry, represented in this case by UNHCR, which centered all its efforts around preserving the bare life of the refugee by maintaining “a minimum level of health care, shelter and food” and sacrificed other “add ons” which varies from one refugee camp to the other, is dysfunctional and possibly chronically failing.<sup>88</sup> In some camps, these “add ons” are providing an education to the children.<sup>89</sup> In other camps, it is providing colouring books, crayons, and cookies.<sup>90</sup>

Furthermore, this cycle that UNHCR is trapped in, is inherently flawed. The short term solutions that the agencies provide, and decreased but still existing aid only help in “administering human misery,” which entails “providing the minimum human needs necessary for survival while keeping the challenge off the political agenda.”<sup>91</sup> That results in perpetuating precarity and the root causes of the crisis that it is trying to solve.<sup>92</sup> Essentially, humanitarian work becomes limitedly oriented around human security and ensuring that the aid recipient stays alive, reducing it into a bare life by sacrificing the services that it cannot fulfill because of the decreasing funding. In essence, ensuring refugees’ survival is important, but most of the time, the

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<sup>86</sup> Loescher, Milner, Newman and Troeller, *Protracted Refugee Situations*, page 29

<sup>87</sup> Loescher, Milner, Newman and Troeller, *Protracted Refugee Situations*, page 29

<sup>88</sup> Erin Baines, *Vulnerable Bodies: Gender, the UN and the Global Refugee Crisis* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004), page 156. Loescher, Milner, Newman and Troeller, *Protracted Refugee Situations*, page 29

<sup>89</sup> Von Welser, *No Refuge for Women: The Tragic Fate of Syrian Refugees*, page 124. Baines, *Vulnerable Bodies: Gender, the UN and the Global Refugee Crisis*, page 156.

<sup>90</sup> Von Welser, *No Refuge for Women: The Tragic Fate of Syrian Refugees*, pages 118-185.

<sup>91</sup> Loescher, Milner, Newman and Troeller, *Protracted Refugee Situations*, page 11

<sup>92</sup> Loescher, Milner, Newman and Troeller, *Protracted Refugee Situations*, page 11

upholding of human security above everything else fails to, “do no harm,” while it is caring for and helping the refugee stay alive.<sup>93</sup>

Michel Foucault problematizes care arguing that, “in caring for the victim, ... it establishes a power relationship over the victim, reducing him or her to a politically irrelevant form of ‘bare life’, incapable of political agency and autonomous action.”<sup>94</sup> This sheds light on how the focus on preserving the physical entities or the bare life of the refugee can harm it by “constrain[ing] the autonomy [and the dignity] of the human.”<sup>95</sup> This is neither coincidental nor inevitable. In his critique of the Hobbesian project, Robert Esposito argues that humanitarian work is “caught up in a paradox whereby, in order to preserve life, it is necessary to destroy life.”<sup>96</sup> This clearly manifests self in how theorizing from emergency and the importance of preserving a headcount, impact representation and the reduction of the aid recipient, who in the context of this thesis is the child refugee, to a bare life and a mere number.<sup>97</sup>

Gil Loescher, James Milner, Edward Newman and Gary Troeller establish that “protracted refugee situations also reflect pathologies inherent in attitudes towards asylum in policy circles, in both the developed and developing worlds.”<sup>98</sup> They argue that there is a need to shift away from the existing discourses and instead develop a framework that utilizes “new analytical thinking- as well as new policy” that moves “beyond charity.”<sup>99</sup> They call for a “shift ... from the current ‘care and maintenance’ mindset, focused on managing protracted refugee situations, to a more ‘solutions-oriented’ approach, involving more than just humanitarian

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<sup>93</sup> Rieff, *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis*, page 22.

<sup>94</sup> Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 11.

<sup>95</sup> Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 11.

<sup>96</sup> Roberto Esposito, *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*, trans. Timothy Campbell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), page 141. Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 3.

<sup>97</sup> Ullah, *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa*, page 18.

<sup>98</sup> Loescher, Milner, Newman and Troeller, *Protracted Refugee Situations*, page 4.

<sup>99</sup> Emma Haddad, *The Refugee in International Society: Between Sovereigns* (New York: Cambridge University Press: 2008), page 10. Loescher, Milner, Newman and Troeller, *Protracted Refugee Situations*, page 5.

actors.”<sup>100</sup> This thesis agrees with their diagnosis, but adds a revision to the suggestion made by Loescher et al. and instead calls for a shift in the representation highlighting the need for a theorization effort beyond emergency, demonstrating that it is not necessary to sacrifice the personal and the complex in return for exponentially decreasing funding.<sup>101</sup>

### 3.2 Refugee Children

The violence within this cycle and paradox is even more pronounced in the context of children refugees. There are “65.3 million people who are displaced in the world.”<sup>102</sup> 28 million of which are child refugees who, according to Tara Kinch, are “more vulnerable as many no longer have the protection of their households, communities and state than children under the first line of protection.”<sup>103</sup> According to the 1994 UNHCR Geneva Convention on Refugee Children, Children are “vulnerable, ... dependent ... [and] developing.”<sup>104</sup> They are dependent because their wellbeing is maintained by their guardians, especially in the earlier years of their childhood.<sup>105</sup> They are “developing [as] they grow in developmental sequences, like a tower of bricks, each layer depending on the one below it. Serious delays interrupting these sequences can severely disrupt development.”<sup>106</sup> The three premises, despite being valid to an extent, mobilize a very particular imagination and understanding of children that frames them predominantly as “innocent,” vulnerable and helpless.<sup>107</sup> This informs how the children are represented in some UNHCR donations platform where the photos used are photos of their faces smudged with tears

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<sup>100</sup> Loescher, Milner, Newman and Troeller, *Protracted Refugee Situations*, page 353.

<sup>101</sup> Loescher, Milner, Newman and Troeller, *Protracted Refugee Situations*, page 29

<sup>102</sup> Von Welser, *No Refuge for Women: The Tragic Fate of Syrian Refugees*, page vi.

<sup>103</sup> “Figures at a Glance,” *UNHCR*, <http://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>. Tara Kinch, “linking Invisibility and Vulnerability: Strengthening Refugee Child Protection Capacity: The Case of the Unaccompanied and Separated Refugee Children from Bhutan living in Nepal,” in *Listening to Asia from the Atlantic* (Berlin: VDM, 2017), page 68. Ullah, *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa*, page 63.

<sup>104</sup> UNHCR, “Refugee Children: Guidelines on Protection and Care,” page 1.

<sup>105</sup> UNHCR, “Refugee Children: Guidelines on Protection and Care,” page 1.

<sup>106</sup> UNHCR, “Refugee Children: Guidelines on Protection and Care,” page 1.

<sup>107</sup> Rieff, *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis*, page 25.

or others conveying pain and suffering.<sup>108</sup> The convention assumes that refugee children should grow and develop in a linear pattern, as it understands their development as a “tower of bricks” and that the conflict hurdles their development, which to a high degree it does.<sup>109</sup> However, despite the devastating impact that violence has on their development, as understood by the convention, in some cases, refugee children reconcile their different realities and develop, through externalizing multiple identities that help them navigate their “severely disrupt[ed] development.”<sup>110</sup> This is demonstrated further in section four of this paper, where it shows that despite the absence of the conditions of security stipulated by the convention, refugee children grow by reconciling the violent world they live in with other worlds.

Security, as established earlier, is essential to the functioning of humanitarianism as an industry and a doctrine. According to the 1994 convention, aid workers must ensure that refugee children feel safe through introducing a level of predictability to their daily life.<sup>111</sup> This departs from the understanding that child “ideally experience living in a predictable, secure world in which their basic needs are consistently satisfied.”<sup>112</sup> As a result of children refugees not having access to this ideal, aid workers strive to meet the children’s needs and create the conditions that would at least maintain their survival first, then ultimately establish trust, through mitigating their suffering of starvation, malnutrition, diseases and physical violence. Through creating solid bases for developing trust and predictability in the child’s life, it is believed that “a feeling of security, [will be achieved] in the long run.”<sup>113</sup> According to the 1994 convention, this is

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<sup>108</sup> “Donate and Rush Emergency Aid to Syrian Families,” UNHCR, [https://give.unhcr.ca/ea-action/action?ea.client.id=1920&ea.campaign.id=42953&en\\_txn10=18-OL\\_Syria\\_HQ](https://give.unhcr.ca/ea-action/action?ea.client.id=1920&ea.campaign.id=42953&en_txn10=18-OL_Syria_HQ) “Syria Emergency,” UNHCR, <https://donate.unhcr.org/gb-en/syria>

<sup>109</sup> UNHCR, “Refugee Children: Guidelines on Protection and Care,” page 1.

<sup>110</sup> UNHCR, “Refugee Children: Guidelines on Protection and Care,” page 1.

<sup>111</sup> UNHCR, “Refugee Children: Guidelines on Protection and Care,” page 14.

<sup>112</sup> Rolf E. Muuss, *Theories of Adolescence* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1996), page 47. Ullah, *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa*, page 9.

<sup>113</sup> Muuss, *Theories of Adolescence*, page 48. Ullah, *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa*, page 9.

critically essential. However, although this may reflect genuine care for the wellbeing of the child, it is also arguably strategic and problematic.<sup>114</sup>

This emphasis on recreating the ideal and developing predictability in the life of the refugee children is mostly informed by fear of who this child would grow up to be. It is informed by views such as E. Erikson's who argues that "a disorder experienced due to a lack of security, predictability and safety in childhood may cause serious psychosocial malfunctions in adulthood."<sup>115</sup> What Erikson refers to as a temporal, linear "disorder" becomes the defining event in the children's lives and it is all what their experiences and responses are reduced to.<sup>116</sup> J. P. Leyens and Z. Mahjoub argue that more than 50% of the refugee children were exposed to different forms of violence, before they 'found' refuge in the camps.<sup>117</sup> Binnie Kristal-Andersson, builds on Erikson's school of thought and problematically argues that since children are heavily influenced by their childhood experiences, it is likely that they "regress to these early experiences, especially during periods of difficulty, crisis and change" when they grow up.<sup>118</sup> UNHCR finds this alarming, because the trauma that the children were exposed to, "inflict[s] multidimensional physiological stress which affects the child's development," informs the decisions they make and ultimately affects how they perform adulthood and their identities as refugees.<sup>119</sup> This is also very relevant to the anti-immigration discourse that frames refugees as a

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<sup>114</sup> UNHCR, "Refugee Children: Guidelines on Protection and Care," page 14.

<sup>115</sup> E. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1968). Ullah, *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa*, page 9.

<sup>116</sup> Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. Ullah, *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa*, page 9.

<sup>117</sup> J. P. Leyens and Z. Mahjoub, *The Mental Health of Refugee Children Exposed to Violent Environments*, unpublished project proposal by the Refugee Studies Programme (Oxford: Oxford University, 1989). Ullah, *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa*, page 16.

<sup>118</sup> B. Kristal-Andersson, "Psychology of the Refugee, the Immigrant, and their Children: Development of a Conceptual Framework and Application to Psychotherapeutic and Related Support Work," PhD. Dissertation, Department of Psychology, University of Lund, Sweden, 2000, page 167. Ullah, *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa*, page 64.

<sup>119</sup> Ullah, *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa*, page 64.

“problem,” or a burden.<sup>120</sup> When they settle into the refugee camps, they are still “carrying ... the physiological burdens from having experienced and witnessed atrocities.”<sup>121</sup> While this could be valid individually, it shows three things. First, it shows how the discourse is pathological, framing trauma as a disease that someone carries and contaminates others with. Second, it represents a departure from a state of emergency showing how invoking a sense of emergency requires the presentation of the child, who, until 2013, represented 48% of the world refugees, as a potential threat to both nation and peace building.<sup>122</sup> Finally, it shows that this fear or broadly speaking, emergency is what is expected to propel the process of providing aid forward.

To further validate this, there is a “lack of policy addressing the concerns of UASC [Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children] in protracted refugee situations.”<sup>123</sup> Most of the donor-oriented policies group all refugee children together and focus only on the “emergency relief phase.”<sup>124</sup> As a result, according to Kinch, children who witness and are born into camp violence do not get the same attention or coverage that other refugee children get because they do not fit into the emergency phase. In fact, producing aid-oriented policy only about protracted refugee situations is counterproductive because it uncovers the weaknesses inherent in humanitarianism as an industry: it is unable to end the emergency.

Furthermore, as I alluded to earlier, the identity that children refugees internalize after witnessing episodes of mass violence is of high concern for humanitarian organizations. N. Boothby looks at how “relocation and disruption of the social and cultural milieu” affect children

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<sup>120</sup> Haddad, *The Refugee in International Society: Between Sovereigns*, page 1. Loescher, Milner, Newman and Troeller, *Protracted Refugee Situations*, page 4. B. S. Chimni in Erin. K. Baines, *Vulnerable Bodies: Gender, the UN and the Global Refugee Crisis* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004), page 5.

<sup>121</sup> Ullah, *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa*, page 16.

<sup>122</sup> Ullah, *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa*, page 15.

<sup>123</sup> Ullah, *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa*, page 62.

<sup>124</sup> Ullah, *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa*, pages 62-63.

refugees.<sup>125</sup> B. Ferenci and R. Kohli demonstrate how “children are confronted by different social structures, including school systems, unfamiliar role patterns, cultural habits, rules and customs.”<sup>126</sup> M. R Bashir adds the language barrier to the list of challenges that the children face.<sup>127</sup> Kohli further argues that they also find it difficult to balance “between integration into the host society and “disintegration” from the society left behind.”<sup>128</sup> Although these sources make historically significant contribution to the literature on refugee children, none of them particularly study protracted refugee situations. They assume that there is society to go back to and that the children all have the chance to be integrated into society and that they are not held in a camp in the suburbs. In addition, they are concerned with determining the challenges that are likely to break the children as opposed to study how the children react to them.

Moved predominantly by fear of what these children could become, aid and security-oriented policies mobilize a particular imagination where “child refugees in camp are ... socialized into a distinct camp culture.”<sup>129</sup> This culture produces children who are, as the following section elaborates, either solely victims of violence or potential perpetrators of acts of terrorism given their descent. This imagination, as the documentary and the podcast introduced below would demonstrate, obscures the fact that “there can ... be multiple types of identity despite homogenous identity of a particular legal status attached to all camp inhabitants.”<sup>130</sup> It simplifies and categorizes children’s experiences as either reason to pity them or fear them. It

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<sup>125</sup> N. Boothby, “Displaced Children: Psychological Theory and Practice from the Field,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 5(2): 1991, page 111. Ullah, *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa*, page 64.

<sup>126</sup> B. Ferenci, “Separated Refugee Children in Austria,” *International Journal of Refugee Law* 12 (2001): 525-547, page 538. R. Kohli, “Social Work with Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Young People,” *Forced Migration Review* 12 (2002): 31-33, page 31. Ullah, *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa*, page 64.

<sup>127</sup> M. R. Bashir, “Issues OF Immigration for the Health and Adjustment of Young People,” *Journal of Pediatrics and Child Health* 29 (1993): S42-S45, page S42 Ullah, *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa*, page 64.

<sup>128</sup> Kohli, “Social Work with Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Young People,” page 32. Ullah, *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa*, page 64.

<sup>129</sup> Ullah, *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa*, page 64.

<sup>130</sup> Ullah, *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa*, page 64.

glosses over the fact that refugee children experience, react and respond differently to the different violences that they encounter.

Again, as established earlier, this imagination is also strategic. The simplification and the essentialization of children's innocence "makes life much less complicated for relief workers in their dealings with the people they have come to help."<sup>131</sup> This imagination frames children as collectives who "have no views; they are assumed, quite rightly, to have no responsibility for what is going on, either."<sup>132</sup> This is not benign because through this imagination, children become "the perfect vessels for the sympathy of strangers." Rieff problematizes this and argues "while it may be the suffering of children that gets people to contribute back home, a humanitarianism that infantilizes its beneficiaries or holds itself aloof from the political consequences of its actions in increasingly becoming indefensible."<sup>133</sup> He asserts "we do those who are in pain and in need no favor by infantilizing them." However, he problematically argues "such a perspective is perfectly appropriate when the victims in question are children."<sup>134</sup> I disagree with this, and through the following sections, flesh out how representations of refugee children as victims is also problematic partly because it obscures their reclamation of their "way of life."<sup>135</sup>

#### **4. Representation and the Emergency Framework: Syrian Refugees**

For the emergency framework to function, the objects of representation must be "categoriz[ed] .... into "liberal democratic identity categories" [which] is part of that process of

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<sup>131</sup> Temple and Moran, eds. *Doing Research with Refugees: Issues and Guidelines*, page 15. Rieff, *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis*, page 26.

<sup>132</sup> Rieff, *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis*, page 26.

<sup>133</sup> Rieff, *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis*, page 26.

<sup>134</sup> Rieff, *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis*, page 25.

<sup>135</sup> Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 143



oversimplifying reality” and the manufacturing of people into “manageable categories.”<sup>136</sup> Once this happens, it becomes easier to represent them especially during critical events when humanitarians are racing against time and need fit the story in a few lines, minutes or in an image to bring “home the urgency of human beings who ... [are] days, perhaps hours away from death” and ultimately secure donations.<sup>137</sup> This illustrates how departing from a point of emergency, which is the critical need to secure donations, entails circulating a dehumanizing and a demoralizing discourse.

The three sections below use concepts drawn by Said, Fanon and Agamben in the theoretical framework to show how “images [or more broadly, stories] of refugees, such as those propagated by humanitarian organizations, silence and take away the speech of refugees.”<sup>138</sup> The sections demonstrate that within these dichotomous stories, “there are no real individuals ... – only victims, victimizers and relief workers who want to help and urgently need the means.”<sup>139</sup> Denis Kennedy follows that through and argues that in the various mediums where the refugee is represented, it remains “nameless, as if one refugee is the same as any refugee.”<sup>140</sup> The refugee then becomes an object, which can only be represented and talked about.<sup>141</sup> The problems that Sylvester, in her work on the “killing of lives,” and Kennedy in particular, diagnose are central to analyze representations of Syrian refugees.<sup>142</sup>

However, before analyzing the similarities between the colonial and the contemporary discourses, it is important to establish that in this thesis, the colonial discourse is more pervasive

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<sup>136</sup> M Hourmat, “Victim-Perpetrator Dichotomy in Transitional Justice: The Case of Post-Genocide Rwanda” *Narrative and Conflict: Explorations in Theory and Practice* 4, no. 1 (2016): pages 49-50 <http://journals.gmu.edu/NandC/issue/view/197>

<sup>137</sup> Philip Johnston in Rieff, *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis*, page 34.

<sup>138</sup> Denis Kennedy, “Selling the Distant Other: Humanitarianism and Imagery—Ethical Dilemmas of Humanitarian Action” *The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance*, February 28, 2009, <https://sites.tufts.edu/jha/archives/411>

<sup>139</sup> Rieff, *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis*, page 35.

<sup>140</sup> Kennedy, “Selling the Distant Other: Humanitarianism and Imagery—Ethical Dilemmas of Humanitarian Action”

<sup>141</sup> Temple and Moran, eds. *Doing Research with Refugees: Issues and Guidelines*, page 7.

<sup>142</sup> Sylvester, “Avoiding the ‘killing’ of lives: representations in academia and fiction,” page 64.

and violent than the colonizer as described earlier in the theoretical framework. This is grounded in Albert Memmi's analysis of the colonial structure which reproduces colonial ideas even in the absence of the colonized and the colonizer as Said and Fanon understood them. In *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Memmi examines the nature of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. Through a detailed study of the role each play in relation to the other, and a critical analysis of their "portraits," which Said and Fanon engage with, Memmi concludes that the "the colonial relationship chained the colonizer and the colonized into an implacable dependence, molded their respective characters and dictated their conduct."<sup>143</sup> Arguing that the colonial relationship "chains" both the colonizer and the colonized in an "implacable dependence" potentially suggests that this relationship is not bound by time and space because by "molding their ... characters" and most importantly, by creating path dependencies, this relationship can be inescapable because of the ideas and the discourse that it entrenches politically, socially, economically and culturally.<sup>144</sup> This understanding of a colonial discourse that is unbound by the presence of a colonizer and a colonized helps in explaining how humanitarianism produce a humanitarian discourse that mirrors the colonial discourse, despite its attempts to steer away from any colonial associations. It also explains how right wing policy makers and media outlets in Germany and Hungary reincarnate a colonial discourse without identifying as a contemporary colonizer.

#### **4.1 Representing Syrian Refugees**

In a recent ethnography on Syrian women and children, Maria Von Welser establishes that, in response to the iconic photo of Alan Kurdi, "citizens split into camps: "do-gooders"

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<sup>143</sup> Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), page ix. Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (UK: Earthscan Publications Ltd, 2003), pages 4-5.

<sup>144</sup> Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, page 5.

wanting to offer help and protection, and skeptics and scaremongers warning of terrorists among the asylum-seekers.”<sup>145</sup> Syrian refugees’ disenfranchisement and suffering became a contested site for domestic agenda setting, policy making and approaches that reinforce, justify and institutionalize the pillars of the liberal frameworks of legalism and humanitarianism or protectionist national security policies.<sup>146</sup> Part of the problem of both discourses is that when evoked, the ‘refugee’ in the Syrian child refugee becomes their single story. In other words, their existence, in these representations, becomes a temporality; one that is only relevant for drafting policies that either strengthens humanitarianism as a regime and a facet of globalization and international peacebuilding efforts or adhere to border protectionism and an a euphemized anti-refugee discourse. This push and pull between romanticizing humanitarianism and vilifying anti-immigration discourses suspended the Syrian child within a violent imagination where their existence becomes a problem that needs to be solved and where they are alienated from their futures, identities and “way of life.”<sup>147</sup>

Furthermore, Syrian children in particular are not only misrepresented but also underrepresented. There is little literature on children on their own. A recent sample of (academic) sources found, aggregately, groups Syrian children within their focus on Syrian women.”<sup>148</sup> Accordingly, the children are represented through their mothers’ eyes and not as

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<sup>145</sup> Von Welser, *No Refuge for Women: The Tragic Fate of Syrian Refugees*, page v. Hester Gartrell, “Muslim or Migrant? An Exploration of the Portrayal of Syrian Refugees in the British Press,” *Oxford Monitor of Forced Migration* 6, no. 1 (2016): page 2.

<sup>146</sup> Catherine Besteman, *Making Refuge: Somali Bantu Refugees and Lewiston, Maine* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016.) Keller, “Elections and Anti-Immigrant Sentiment in the European Union,” page 6. Leebaw, *Judging state-sponsored violence, imagining political change*, page 6.

<sup>147</sup> Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, page 135. Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 143. Loescher, Milner, Newman and Troeller, *Protracted Refugee Situations*, page 4.

<sup>148</sup> Paddy Dowling, “In Photos: The Syrian Women and Children waiting in the shadows of Lebanon Refugee Camps,” *Independent*, June 22, 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/syria-refugees-photos-latest-lebanon-camps-women-children-immigrants-civil-war-a8406256.html> L. M. Walton, “Health and Human Rights of Syrian Women and Children Refugees: Trafficking, Resettlement, and the United Nations Convention on Refugees Revisited.” *Online Journal of Health Ethics*, 14 no. 1 (2018), page 1, <http://dx.doi.org/10.18785/ojhe.1401.04> “Syrian Women and Children: Identifying Gaps and Goals for Reconstruction,” The Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies, last modified 2017 <https://jsis.washington.edu/news/syrian-women-children/> Maggie Sullivan and Timothy S. Rich “Many refugees are women and

independent actors. While this is not inherently problematic, it still does not feature the child as the writer of their own story, but rather as a side-character.<sup>149</sup> Moreover, not distinguishing children and grouping them within representations of Syrian refugees as an undifferentiated group is significant because then the children's access to a future becomes informed and determined by how the Syrian refugee is represented contemporarily.<sup>150</sup> One of the problems following from that is that the Syrian child is not only alienated from its "way of life" as an othered refugee but also as a child which signifies a multilayered alienation, that is similar to the alienation that the colonized felt by being relegated to the zone of non-being.<sup>151</sup>

Critiquing how Syrian refugees and Syrian suffering are represented is a question that researchers have grappled with for the past four years. Edward Said's *Orientalism* is *the* text for problematizing the contemporary discourse, which is a geographically-informed choice. Through a reading of his work, it can be concluded that the Syrian refugee is portrayed as "helpless," needy and unable to survive without the help of the host-society.<sup>152</sup> A recent study added that Syrian "refugees are primarily portrayed negatively, whether as tragic victims without agency or as the dangerous 'other' who threatens" host societies.<sup>153</sup> These portrayals are engineered to attract donors to help a human being in need which, if achieved, strengthens the humanitarian industry. The similarity here between the colonial corporate and the humanitarian industry is not that the latter dispossess and directly exploits the refugee economically like the colonizer did. The exploitation however, lies in the commodification of the suffering of the refugees and the

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children. That changes whether Americans want to admit them," *The Washington Post*, November 29, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/11/29/americans-like-refugees-better-when-theyre-women-and-children-especially-republicans/?noredirect=on>

<sup>149</sup> Von Welser, *No Refuge for Women: The Tragic Fate of Syrian Refugees*, page 9.

<sup>150</sup> Temple and Moran, eds. *Doing Research with Refugees: Issues and Guidelines*, page 7.

<sup>151</sup> Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 143

<sup>152</sup> Femke Eerdmans, "Portraying the Other: The Use of Orientalist Discourse in the Representation of the Refugee Crisis in Dutch Newspapers," MA Thesis, Comparative Literary Studies Utrecht University, 2016, page 56.

<sup>153</sup> Gartrell, "Muslim or Migrant? An Exploration of the Portrayal of Syrian Refugees in the British Press," page 3.

romantici-zation of their survival to raise donations. Most of these studies analyze the two representative discourses, which are the humanitarian and the security-oriented ones, within Said's work arguing that "press present[s] Muslims in orientalist fashion as the violent, irrational and despotic 'other' against the free, rational and liberal West."<sup>154</sup> By grouping both the romanticizing and vilifying discourses under Said's critique on romanticism, they side-step other texts on vilification and Othering, such as Fanon's and Agamben's that help nuance the question of representation further, which is what this thesis attempts to do by bringing them into the conversation with Said.

#### **4.2 The Syrian Refugee, The Syrian Child and the Orient**

The process of romanticizing the person represented as 'the Orient' and contemporarily represented as the 'helpless refugee,' framing it as helpless and describing it only in light of intrinsic primordial traits created a fetishized object that the west and more contemporarily, the humanitarian had to observe, protect and save. Saving comes in a multitude of ways. In the context of this thesis, it is mostly saving the Syrian refugee and child from destruction and death. There are several concepts from Said's work that transcended time and space and could arguably be used to analyze the contemporary humanitarian discourse on the Syrian refugee and how it is affecting the future of the Syrian child.

The first concept that is still pertinent from *Orientalism* is fetishism where the Syrian refugee is fetishized. However unlike the Orient, Syrian refugees are not fetishized sexually, even though Kennedy argues that "morbid images can also allure," but this thesis draws more on how the romanticized discourse fetishizes the Syrian refugee for its ability to survive.<sup>155</sup>

Departing from the understanding that the Syrian refugee, like the Orient, is weak and unable to

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<sup>154</sup> Gartrell, "Muslim or Migrant? An Exploration of the Portrayal of Syrian Refugees in the British Press," page 4.

<sup>155</sup> Kennedy, "Selling the Distant Other: Humanitarianism and Imagery—Ethical Dilemmas of Humanitarian Action"

help itself or others, the humanitarian views survival of Syrian refugees as an exception. This is predominantly a product of the stereotypical framing of the refugee as a victim.<sup>156</sup> When the refugee claims their right to survive without the help of the humanitarian, which they sometimes do as part of the way of navigating their everyday life, they are fetishized and their attempt is romanticized. The humanitarian discourse does not present their survival as an everyday mechanism that human beings adopt to exist, but rather it presents it as an achievement which is evident through the diverse collection of photos and the captions that “Catching Birds, Eating Sharks - How Syrians Survive the War.” presents its audience with.<sup>157</sup> These photos were not radically different in content from the photos and the stories that UNHCR uses to raise donations.<sup>158</sup> Recognizing refugees’ survival is not necessarily a problem in and of itself, because of what the Syrian refugee is subjected to when it is engaging in border crossing, but fetishizing their survival arguably others and distances them from their “way of life.”<sup>159</sup>

The second concept from Said’s work that is pertinent to the argument is that of representation and agency. Said shows how the Orient was always an outsider in colonial writings. It was a “silent shadow,” that only existed when the colonizer spoke about it and represented it.<sup>160</sup> The Orient was there to be guided into civilization and maturity. It was to be pitied for its irrationality and weakness but it was never intended to speak up or question the totalizing reality that dominated its existence. Through romanticizing the Orient and contemporarily the Syrian refugee, humanitarian discourse manufacture the subject of analysis into a work of art, constructed for the others to study and draft policies about but not to engage

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<sup>156</sup> “Catching Birds, Eating Sharks - How Syrians Survive the War.”

<sup>157</sup> “Catching Birds, Eating Sharks - How Syrians Survive the War.”

<sup>158</sup> « Stories », *UNHCR Syria*, <http://www.unhcr.org/sy/stories>

<sup>159</sup> Vaiou. “Gendered Mobilities and Border-crossings: From Elbasan to Athens.” pages 254-255. Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 143

<sup>160</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, page 209.

with in conversation which is further demonstrated by the first act of the podcast referenced below.

The romanticizing discourse obscures how Syrian refugees and children disrupt and navigate their daily lives and suffering. It obfuscates how Syrian refugees engage in conversation beyond emergency. While Said is often critiqued for denying the agency of the Orient through his own critique, Agamben establishes the absence of totalizing victimhood, turning the focus of this section to the lived experience of Syrian refugees presented in radio. The prominence of problematic infantilizing representation is partly why in the American Life Podcast “Don’t have to live like a refugee,” the refugees in the camp felt the need to establish their own satirical news platform claiming a space for themselves to speak up about their problems which were unheard or glossed over by their humanitarian counterparts.<sup>161</sup> In act five of the episode, which is titled “Smile, You’re on Handmade Camera,” Sean Cole interviews a group of young men who created talent shows and a news network, for the camp they lived in, calling it “Refugees TV.”<sup>162</sup> Their channel later evolved into a more formal media platform on Facebook even though they started it using a “pretend” camera and microphone.<sup>163</sup> The idea emerged when three Syrians, Basel and Mahmoud who lead the channel wandered around the camp and engaged in small talk with people pretending that they were recording the interview on TV.<sup>164</sup> However the small talk that is often neglected by the humanitarians, gave the people in the camp the chance to voice their thoughts, feelings and represent themselves rather than remain represented.<sup>165</sup> Their show gained popularity and the refugees in the camp started to reflect on how different the experience felt.

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<sup>161</sup> Cole, Sean, Miki Mekk, Joanna Kakissis and Robyn Semien. *Don’t Have to Live Like a Refugee*. Podcast audio, September, 2017, <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/593/dont-have-to-live-like-a-refugee>

<sup>162</sup> Cole, Mekk, Kakissis and Semien. *Don’t Have to Live Like a Refugee*.

<sup>163</sup> Cole, Mekk, Kakissis and Semien. *Don’t Have to Live Like a Refugee*.

<sup>164</sup> Cole, Mekk, Kakissis and Semien. *Don’t Have to Live Like a Refugee*.

<sup>165</sup> Cole, Mekk, Kakissis and Semien. *Don’t Have to Live Like a Refugee*.

They reflected on the power that they felt they had when they were telling their own stories as opposed to hearing about them from UNHCR donation ads or German and Hungarian media.<sup>166</sup>

This account showcases the difference and the tension between listening to and hearing a story. It also shows the power of storytelling against erasure, disenfranchisement and loss of voice.

The other acts in the episode reinforce this point further and locate the silences within the humanitarian discourse showing precisely where it falls short.<sup>167</sup> Most of the aid-oriented policies that adopt the humanitarian discourse focus more on fixing the humanitarian approach and practicing a ‘better’ humanitarianism and it uses the Syrian refugee crisis as a case study to achieve that and assess its progress. Proponents of humanitarianism look at how humanitarian organizations need more funding, access to information, cooperation and collaborative mechanisms to be able to help the Syrian refugee but it does not engage with the refugee.<sup>168</sup> The discourse adopts only a top-down approach that is normative and that does not incorporate or frame the refugee as an actor. It only looks at the refugee as a recipient of aid and it erects an entire aid-oriented discourse and policy framework based on this understanding which is alienating the refugee from its own suffering. In doing so, it dismisses the Syrian refugees’ agency and local survival strategies and it may also fall in the trap of glancing over its concerns such as unfulfilled dietary needs as demonstrated below for example. Mobilizing a one-size-fits-all approach with a standardized toolkit does not always reflect the refugees’ needs and might be counterproductive to what the refugees are locally engaging in.<sup>169</sup>

Act two of “Don’t have to live like a refugee” captures fleshes out this problem perfectly. Titled “Thank you for Smoking,” it tells the story of Ahmed who opens a small grocery shop in

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<sup>166</sup> Cole, Mekk, Kakissis and Semien. *Don’t Have to Live Like a Refugee*.

<sup>167</sup> Cole, Mekk, Kakissis and Semien. *Don’t Have to Live Like a Refugee*.

<sup>168</sup> Elizabeth Ferris and Kemal Kirişci, “The Context, Causes, and Consequences of Syrian Displacement,” In *The Consequences of Chaos*. Brookings Institutions, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Chapter-1-4.pdf> pages 2-4.

<sup>169</sup> Baines, *Vulnerable Bodies: Gender, the UN and the Global Refugee Crisis*, page 156.



the camp where he is staying to service the other refugees who are based there.<sup>170</sup> The ethnographic account brilliantly shows how strong local ties can be and how there might be potential that the camp services itself. This account showcases local survival strategies and how the humanitarian approach does not always satisfy or reflect the needs of the refugees. Even though the camp receives meals contributed by international humanitarian agencies, they are usually deficient in vegetables and fruits amongst other dietary substances.<sup>171</sup> Comprised mainly of seeds, the food sent to the camps, which is supposed to preserve the bare life, does not cover the basic needs to survive healthily.<sup>172</sup> While the return is not great because camps have cash flow problems, Ahmed explains that most of his customers barter or offer services to each other, as opposed to money, to make up for the shortcomings that the humanitarian agencies cannot account for.<sup>173</sup>

It can be argued that the explicit similarities between the colonial imagination of the Orient and the contemporary humanitarian discourse stop there, because the latter, unlike the vilifying discourse, does not engage with the same language that was once used to describe the Orient. However, according to the humanitarian story, the Syrian refugee, and by association child, is still in constant need for the help of the humanitarian. They are represented as weak and intrinsically incapable of helping themselves. They cannot survive without the survival networks that the humanitarian puts in place. In both the colonial imagination and the humanitarian discourse, the object of study did not represent itself. Instead it is represented and this, in and of itself, is significantly problematic.

#### **4.3 The Syrian Refugee, the Syrian Child as the Evil Other**

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<sup>170</sup> Cole, Mekk, Kakissis and Semien. *Don't Have to Live Like a Refugee*.

<sup>171</sup> Cole, Mekk, Kakissis and Semien. *Don't Have to Live Like a Refugee*.

<sup>172</sup> Cole, Mekk, Kakissis and Semien. *Don't Have to Live Like a Refugee*.

<sup>173</sup> Cole, Mekk, Kakissis and Semien. *Don't Have to Live Like a Refugee*.

As shown earlier in “Fanonism: Theoretical Grounding,” the colonial imagination presented the colonized as savage, evil and destructive and through its manufacturing of the colonized as the Other, it justified the colonizer’s fear of that Other and their intervention in the colonized town to protect itself and the world from the ills of the colonized.<sup>174</sup> This is arguably similar to the contemporary discourse that is predominantly mobilized by right wing parties in Germany and Hungary. Within the anti-refugee discourse, the Syrian Refugee is predominantly seen and presented in relation to questions of international security. Syrian refugees, because of their status as refugees and partly because of their place of origin as people from the Middle East, are then systematically associated with crimes, terrorism and gender-based violence as exemplified by the tweets presented in the following paragraph.<sup>175</sup> Following this framework, security oriented policy makers use individual crimes that Syrian refugees commit and present them as the collective behavior of Syrian refugees corroborating the vilifying discourse and reincarnating a fear of the Other who is intolerant and barbaric.<sup>176</sup>

In her study, Ramona Kreis analyzes the content of 100 anti-refugee tweets that twitter users, based mainly in Germany and Hungary, who supported the right wing appeal to fear, security and border control. She writes “The first tweet that included #refugeesnotwelcome appeared on 10 August 2015 (*Wer beschützt die deutschen Mädchen und Frauen gegen Anmache und Angriffe der sexuell ausgehungerten sog. #Flüchtlinge. #refugeesnotwelcome*. Translated: *Who protects the German girls and women against attacks of so-called #Refugees. #refugeesnotwelcome*).<sup>177</sup> The first similarity between the vilifying colonial discourse and

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<sup>174</sup> Cheryl McEwan, *Postcolonialism and Development* (London: Routledge, 2009), page 47.

<sup>175</sup> J.J. Messner, “Change is the Only Constant,” *Foreign Policy*, June 18, 2012. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/06/18/change-is-the-only-constant/>

<sup>176</sup> Geeta Chowdhry and Sheila Nair, *Power, Postcolonialism and International Relations ed.* (New York: Routledge, 2002) pages 127-197.

<sup>177</sup> Kreis, “#refugeesnotwelcome: Anti-refugee discourse on Twitter,” page 499.

contemporary anti-refugee discourse is the negative associations. In the contemporary discourse, refugees are presented as “*criminals, thugs, scum, invasores* (invaders), and *terroristas* (terrorists).”<sup>178</sup> When they are engaging in acts of crossing borders/barriers, whether the physical ones or the more implicit ones (gathering in groups to establish relations and connections), they are described as a groups of “criminals ...[who are] violently rioting.”<sup>179</sup> Although it is rare to see the absolute literal associations to evil, sin and filth made in the contemporary discourse, the other ones that appeal to security remained. Also as Kreis analyzes some of the expletives that proponents of the anti-refugee discourse use, she demonstrates that the refugees are still seen in primitive light, only not literally similar to the language of the colonial imagination.

The second concept that transcended the colonial imagination and reincarnated itself in the contemporary anti-refugee discourse is the understanding of the “colonized as an envious man.”<sup>180</sup> “They want to take our place” was one of the most prevalent statements in colonial writings that corroborated the imagining of the colonized as envious, vengeful and eager to replace the colonizer and take its place.<sup>181</sup> This is arguably one of the strongest similarities between the contemporary and the colonial discourses. The contemporary anti-refugee discourse, as mentioned in the introduction, refers to the Syrian refugees as “the so-called refugees” contesting their status as it calls for a “Europe [exclusively] for Europeans.” This is where the identity of the refugee as a “migrant” and “immigrants” galvanizes. Right wing political parties that usually act within the framework of participatory politics and parliamentary representation, present a stereotype of the Syrian refugee as a young, middle class male migrant who is using the

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<sup>178</sup> Kreis, “#refugeesnotwelcome: Anti-refugee discourse on Twitter,” page 506.

<sup>179</sup> Kreis, “#refugeesnotwelcome: Anti-refugee discourse on Twitter,” page 506.

<sup>180</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, page 39.

<sup>181</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, page 39.

status of a refugee to start a better life in Europe.<sup>182</sup> Building on this stereotype, which is not one that locals particularly sympathize with, unlike the romantic discourse that features refugees as women and children, right wing policy makers appeal to nationalism and patriotism. They call for a “Europe [that] belongs to ethnic Europeans (whites)” and not outsiders who would drain the opportunities and the resources that the locals know are scarce to begin with.<sup>183</sup>

The discourse supports this by highlighting the expansiveness of some of the economic benefits and the humanitarian assistance that the refugees, who are economic migrants, get and it contrasts that to the struggles of the local middle class workers who do not get the same privileges despite paying their taxes, unlike refugees who sometimes get exempted.<sup>184</sup> This creates a tension because the local who is only presented with the image of the Syrian refugee as “an envious man” who wants to replace it by taking its job, living in the same street and marrying from the host country, which are the three main elements that the colonizer also feared.<sup>185</sup>

In doing so, the contemporary security-oriented discourse also erects another violent binary between “us” and “them,” where the latter refers to the refugees and the former to the local Europeans. Kreis cites one of the tweets that said “WE DON’T WANT THEM #refugeesnotwelcome #nomorerefugees they’re criminals”<sup>186</sup> The discourse then presents the refugees as undesirable and different. They are not like the local. They are the Other. This turns the focus to the third and last concept which is the “zone of nonbeing.” The contemporary discourse, similar to the colonial imagination, also arguably others the Syrian refugee and exiles

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<sup>182</sup> Kreis, “#refugeesnotwelcome: Anti-refugee discourse on Twitter,” page 508. Ullah, *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa*, page 40.

<sup>183</sup> Kreis, “#refugeesnotwelcome: Anti-refugee discourse on Twitter,” page 509.

<sup>184</sup> Kreis, “#refugeesnotwelcome: Anti-refugee discourse on Twitter,” page 506.

<sup>185</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, page 39.

<sup>186</sup> Kreis, “#refugeesnotwelcome: Anti-refugee discourse on Twitter,” page 507.

it into zones of extinction.<sup>187</sup> The Syrian refugees within the vilifying discourse has no resemblance of ‘normality.’ Similar to the colonial discourse, the vilifying one aims to distance the nation from the unwanted invader who will contaminate society with its ills. This distancing can be achieved if the refugee does not resemble the local. Accordingly, Syrian refugees are not represented as human beings in need, as shown in the tweets that Kreis selected, and they are nameless.

Roopika Risam looks at the role social media platforms play in a reclamation of agency against totalizing forms of power. Through an analysis of refugee selfies and ‘migrant-related selfies,’ Risam argues that recently, Syrian refugees have been documenting their daily lives through sharing selfies claiming space. However, the press in host countries circulates “images of refugees taking selfies—rather than the selfies themselves—these news media articles deny both self-representation and agency to refugees.”<sup>188</sup> Furthermore, she notices that not only is refugees’ contribution denied through a refusal to share the selfies that refugees capture themselves, but also their names are omitted even though the refugees themselves circulate the photos using their names, which reinforces Kennedy’s point on the necessity of the namelessness of the refugee.<sup>189</sup>

Ella Shohat argues that the reduction of names is a “dehumanizing gesture [that] reinforces a sense of refugee unbelonging” but also as “the denial of aesthetic representation to the subaltern.”<sup>190</sup> The omission of the Syrian selfie takers’ names is significant because they

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<sup>187</sup> Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies*, page 167. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, page vi. Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 12.

<sup>188</sup> Roopika Risam, « Now You Can See Them: Self-Representation and the Refugee Selfie,” *Popular Communication* 16, no.1 (2018): page 59.

<sup>189</sup> Risam, « Now You Can See Them: Self-Representation and the Refugee Selfie,” page 62

<sup>190</sup> Risam, « Now You Can See Them: Self-Representation and the Refugee Selfie,” pages 62-65 Ella Shohat, “The Struggle over Representation: Casting, Coalitions and the Politics of Identification,” in *Late Imperial Culture* (New York: Verso, 1995), page 173.

could consequently be anyone. They could be the terrorist or the face on a donations flyer. This happened with the iconic selfie that Anas Modamani, a 19 year old, took with Chancellor Angela Merkel. The selfie itself was not widely shared but the “migrant-related selfie” version of it went viral and very quickly he was “incorrectly identified as Najim Laachraoui, one of the bombers in the Brussels Airport and metro station bombings” which significantly impacted his attempts to apply for school, find a job and basically ‘exist’ in his host society.<sup>191</sup> What happened with Modamani summarizes the key problems this thesis is concerned with which is the dispossessing of Syrian refugee from their suffering and “way of life.”<sup>192</sup> By enabling the identification of Modamani as a suicide bomber, the vilifying discourse glossed over and ‘denied’ his everyday struggles as a refugee. This showcases the dangers of limiting Syrian refugees to only faceless, nameless bodies that are mobilized not only to fit into fixed categories that do not reflect the fluidity of their identities or the episodes of violence that they witnessed.

One of the reasons why the colonizer placed the colonized in the “zone of non-being” to being with was that it did not see its own reflection in the colonized and consequently, and because it has the manifest power to do so, it presented the colonized as the Other. This Other then becomes unidentifiable with because one cannot see its reflection, as a fellow human being, in the Other’s eyes. Dehumanizing the Syrian refugee and only presenting them as a threat to national security, makes it hard for locals to identify, connect and establish meaningful relationships with them. The contemporary anti-refugee discourse strips the refugee from their “way of life” and strips the child, by extension, from the chance of acquiring a “way of life” in

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<sup>191</sup> Risam, “Now You Can See Them: Self-Representation and the Refugee Selfie,” page 65.

<sup>192</sup> Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 143

its representations and possibly in reality because of how these representations influence the way the host society treats the child.<sup>193</sup>

However, the podcast tells a different story. The first act of the podcast “Don’t Have to Live Like a Refugee,” titled “You Just Keep on Pushing My Love Over the Borderline” tells the story of a Syrian couple who fell in love while staying in the camp waiting for the processing of their asylum requests.<sup>194</sup> The account describes the multilayered problems that their love goes through and it tells the story in a language and a format that makes it easy for anyone to identify with them and see them for who they are instead of pitying them. The fourth act, titled “Take Another Little Piece of My Heart” tells the story of a Syrian woman who had heart problems and who got pregnant in one of the camps because of the inability of the humanitarian organizations to sustainably provide contraceptives.<sup>195</sup> The ethnographic account then locates the multitude of borders that she had to cross and the different emotions that she feels daily.<sup>196</sup> Unable to communicate with others that she wants an abortion, the doctors did not execute the operation when it was safe to do. When she was able to finally find a translator and booked her abortion appointment, she missed the taxi, which she had to borrow money for, because of the language barrier and missed her last chance for an appointment.<sup>197</sup> The account ends on the hope that she and the baby survive labor.<sup>198</sup>

The ethnographic accounts presented in this section show the ordinary in the life of the Syrian refugee. They highlight the importance of turning away from romanticizing and vilifying discourses. They reject colonial language, Othering and dehumanization. In the podcasts, it is

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<sup>193</sup> Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 143

<sup>194</sup> Cole, Mekk, Kakissis and Semien. *Don’t Have to Live Like a Refugee*.

<sup>195</sup> Cole, Mekk, Kakissis and Semien. *Don’t Have to Live Like a Refugee*.

<sup>196</sup> Cole, Mekk, Kakissis and Semien. *Don’t Have to Live Like a Refugee*.

<sup>197</sup> Cole, Mekk, Kakissis and Semien. *Don’t Have to Live Like a Refugee*.

<sup>198</sup> Cole, Mekk, Kakissis and Semien. *Don’t Have to Live Like a Refugee*.

usually the refugees telling the story or it features a conversation between the presenter and a group of refugees as opposed to a narrator telling their story or asking them to talk about a particular event. In the podcasts, audiences are presented with the Syrian refugees and their “way of life” without judgment of some of the choices they make or things they say.<sup>199</sup> Telling the story of the Syrian refugee differently helps in seeing the refugee as a human being unlike the discourses that makes it impossible to see the Syrian child, by extension, as anything but a dependent victim or a potential threat.

#### **4.4 On the Critical Event, Representation of Syrian Children and the Bare Life**

“The Last Men of Aleppo,” could be seen as an attempt to present stories of Syrian children, who are still in Syria, differently, even though children are not the main focus of the documentary. In the opening scene, the local rescue team is searching for children underneath the rubble of a collapsed building.<sup>200</sup> Unlike humanitarian stories though, the scene does not stop there. Instead, the following scene shows the rescue team visiting the childrens’ houses, consoling their families and spending time with two of the children. The reason why this documentary, in particular, is brought up is that it features a dialogue between the child and one of the men. This dialogue is not an interview where the child is pointedly asked to share their story, what they witnessed during the war specifically, how they lost a limb or a family member or how they overcame difficulties, which are what humanitarian stories on Syrian children usually revolve around. Instead, it is a conversation, where the child, shared his feelings about being stuck under the rubble, then switched the conversation to talk about other things.<sup>201</sup> Fast-forwarding to another day, when the children in the neighbourhood were growing bored of

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<sup>199</sup> Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 143

<sup>200</sup> Last Men of Aleppo, directed by Kareem Abeed, Mujahed Abou Al Joud, Fadi Al Halabi, Steen Johannessen, Hassan Kattan, Khaled Khateeb, Yaman Khatib, Thaer Mohamad and Firas Fayyad, Denmark: Danish Film Institute, 2017.

<sup>201</sup> Last Men of Aleppo



staying inside especially on a day that was sunny and quiet.<sup>202</sup> The rescue team decided to take them to a nearby park.<sup>203</sup> The children all excitedly jumped into the ambulance, which is how they commute, and they make it the park where they spent the afternoon.<sup>204</sup> Then, they noticed a few helicopters, understood that it is not safe to stay visible anymore and they made the trip back to their neighbourhood or what remained of it.<sup>205</sup>

This is certainly not a childhood that children aspire to and what this thesis is suggesting does not deny the unimaginable tragedies these children live through. However, despite these tragedies, the children along with their guardians still claim a sense and a state of normalcy that is obscured and deliberately dismissed in the stories propagated about them, whether the humanitarian version or the security-oriented one. Despite the air strikes, they still try to visit neighbouring parks and the children claim the space to play. They help their families/guardians build make-shift pools, pet surviving animals, and create and claim a normal or a “way of life” during critical times.<sup>206</sup> It is true that sometimes, they will isolate themselves and refuse to play. Other times, they may still play hide and seek or they may also reconcile the two worlds they live in and play “sniper,” which is a game they developed during a war, where they practice evading snipers.<sup>207</sup> They swim when and if they can and they play “knights with wooden sticks for swords.”<sup>208</sup> Despite having more concrete fears compared to children who did not witness a war, they still curiously explore their surroundings wherever they are which may subject them to harm because, often, around and within the camps, there are barbed wires, “rats and sewage” and

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<sup>202</sup> Last Men of Aleppo

<sup>203</sup> Last Men of Aleppo

<sup>204</sup> Last Men of Aleppo

<sup>205</sup> Last Men of Aleppo

<sup>206</sup> Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 143.

<sup>207</sup> Von Welser, *No Refuge for Women: The Tragic Fate of Syrian Refugees*, page 31.

<sup>208</sup> Von Welser, *No Refuge for Women: The Tragic Fate of Syrian Refugees*, page 65.

in the case of ruins, there is often “cluster bombs” or undetonated “sub-munitions.”<sup>209</sup> However, children still need and want to play, “just like . . . . [they] need food,” and they will find the place to play, be it the camps or the ruins or the transit stations where they are held until their asylum seeking applications are approved.<sup>210</sup>

This represents a radically different response to the Syrian conflict as a collective of unfolding and collapsing events as opposed to the responses emerging from a state of emergency. The latter assumes that there is one particular “remembered event” according to Walter Benjamin or a “critical event” as Veena Das puts it which is the Syrian Civil War in totality.<sup>211</sup> Aside from the fact that this categorical understanding of events and moments of discontinuities and historical rupture overlooks the significance of “experienced events” or the everyday-life which is what Das critically explores, this understanding of the conflict also homogenizes the children’s experiences and ages. This is evident in some representations of Syrian children in UNHCR and Save the Children donations platform where most of the children are of the same age.<sup>212</sup> When these stories are decontextualized and disseminated widely to attract as many donors as possible, there becomes no difference between a Yazidi child, another who lived in Damascus, the one born in the camp, the one who lived under ISIS and the child whose asylum was approved and lives in Hanburg.<sup>213</sup> These stories homogenize and simplify gendered experiences, fears, and the children’s attempts to navigate gendered violence,

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<sup>209</sup> Ullah, *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa*, pages 76 Von Welser, *No Refuge for Women: The Tragic Fate of Syrian Refugees*, page 27.

<sup>210</sup> Ullah, *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa*, pages 76 Von Welser, *No Refuge for Women: The Tragic Fate of Syrian Refugees*, page 86

<sup>211</sup> A. Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories*. (New York, State University of New York Press, 1991), pp. 1-26, page 1. Erin Baines, “‘Today, I Want to Speak Out the Truth’: Victim Agency, Responsibility, and Transitional Justice,” *International Political Sociology*, Volume 9, Issue 4, 1 December 2015, Pages 316–332, page 321.

<sup>212</sup> Donate and Rush Emergency Aid to Syrian Families,” [https://give.unhcr.ca/ea-action/action?ea.client.id=1920&ea.campaign.id=42953&en\\_txn10=18-OL\\_Syria\\_HQ](https://give.unhcr.ca/ea-action/action?ea.client.id=1920&ea.campaign.id=42953&en_txn10=18-OL_Syria_HQ) “Syria Emergency,” <https://donate.unhcr.org/gb-en/syria>

<sup>213</sup> Von Welser, *No Refuge for Women: The Tragic Fate of Syrian Refugees*, page 56.

particularly in the camps. They also unify their everyday responses. For instance, they predominantly feature them crying or in pain which becomes their single story. In reality, some nights they will cry, sometimes they “can hardly breath,” others they will “dream blissfully, sleeping soundly.”<sup>214</sup> Using the criticalness of the Syrian civil war as an emergency, presenting it aggregately as such, and dismissing the child as an individual with needs and abilities that sometimes do not fit the emergency framework, where time and resources are tight, requires and results in reincarnating a colonial discourse as well the reduction of a child to a bare life.

According to P. K. Rajaram: “... [children] refugees are confined to their body. That is, they are rendered speechless and without agency, a physical entity, or rather a physical mass within which the individuality is subsumed.”<sup>215</sup> Through securitization and urgency, children are reduced to a bare life where they are represented as “incapable of political agency and autonomous action.”<sup>216</sup> This is significant because the Syrian child who is featured in the humanitarian story, in UNHCR donations platforms, is usually under 10 years old which overlooks the teenage group, who according to the Convention on Refugee Children (CRC) are legally regarded as children. This is ironic because the age group that is aggregately presented as “incapable of political agency” is also the same group who sparked the Syrian revolution to begin with.<sup>217</sup> Another example is the “Sun Girls,” who are a group of Yazidi women including teenagers, training to fight ISIS, and who are “tired of being considered [only] victims.”<sup>218</sup> In totalizing representations however, reducing a child into a bare life, trivializes its resistance, because it falls “into this totally non-transcendent abyss” where the child becomes “something

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<sup>214</sup> Von Welser, *No Refuge for Women: The Tragic Fate of Syrian Refugees*, pages 33-42

<sup>215</sup> P. K. Rajaram in Erin Baines, *Vulnerable Bodies: Gender, the UN and the Global Refugee Crisis*, page 1

<sup>216</sup> Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 11

<sup>217</sup> Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 11.

<sup>218</sup> Von Welser, *No Refuge for Women: The Tragic Fate of Syrian Refugees*, page 77.

entirely lacking distinction.”<sup>219</sup> A child whose biological existence is all that matters, becomes “anonymous, nameless, [and] faceless” in popular discourse.<sup>220</sup> The stories circulated about Syrian children hold them as “object[s] ... separate from a way of life- life as it is lived.”<sup>221</sup> This leaves the child “vulnerable to be marked as an outsider and less than a human” which is the furthest from reality as the examples above demonstrate.<sup>222</sup>

As established earlier in section two, the reduction of the refugee child to a bare life results in the sacrifice of “add ons” in return for guaranteeing the survival of the refugee, as a physical mass, because there is only enough aid for the basic needs, A violent “tradeoff” then becomes necessary where a child can either have a “normal” life or survive which is why the Syrian children are popularly referred to as the lost generation or as a generation who lost their right to childhood.<sup>223</sup> This romanticizing discourse, aiming to trigger sympathy and compassion and raise funds, dismiss the fact that children, to an extent, can and often reclaim their childhood. The idea of sacrifice or trade-off is central to understanding how the theorizing from emergency framework functions. By framing the war, as an ongoing emergency, and by only presenting the stories of despair and pain as the single story of the children, “the point where rights [such as the right to play, or the right to normalcy] are enjoyed is never actually reached” because they are in a state of emergency where it is only possible to stay alive.<sup>224</sup> Anything beyond survival is sacrificed in “the name of life necessity.”<sup>225</sup> In the name of preserving life and maintaining a headcount, complexities, identities’ fluidity and dignity must be sacrificed. In the name of

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<sup>219</sup> Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, pages 12-16-52.

<sup>220</sup> Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 13.

<sup>221</sup> Haddad, *The Refugee in International Society: Between Sovereigns*, page 8 Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 143.

<sup>222</sup> Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 17.

<sup>223</sup> Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 8.

<sup>224</sup> Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 8

<sup>225</sup> Baines, *Vulnerable Bodies: Gender, the UN and the Global Refugee Crisis*, page 156. Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page xi.

security, the lesser evil and the bare minimum is prioritized over the child as a “transcendent human being.”<sup>226</sup>

The child is demoralized, dehumanized, sensationalized and alienated from the Self, manufactured into an Other and ultimately banalized and killed in the stories that commodify the child in return for donations that are shrinking every year and in response the United Nations World Food Programme continues to reduce “the support payments.”<sup>227</sup> Despite these grave sacrifices, the “situations [that children are subjected to, and the horrific stories circulated] ... do not seem to evoke deep reflection or concern about the human as human.”<sup>228</sup> It is true that these stories bring “the catastrophe ... closer to home, [but it makes it] ... somehow less visible and less likely to elicit compassion- indeed, quite the opposite.”<sup>229</sup> Risam explores this as she looks at how refugee-selfies sometimes triggered disgust because the audience could not understand how could someone who is in an emergency, smile and proudly take a photo like “all is well in the world.”<sup>230</sup> Von Welser’s account is another example of that where she frowns down and criticizes women in the camps for having children, questioning their responsibility and the ability to evaluate the situation they live in.<sup>231</sup> Esposito traces that back to the genealogy of securitization and immunization- where he establishes that both processes result in “destroying or scarifying part of what it seeks to protect.”<sup>232</sup> Theorizing from emergency cannot function without a binary or the “primacy of fact and situation” over the individual. In the context of the Syrian crisis, this manifests itself in a multitude of ways. There is a primacy of the war, as a collapsed event, over

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<sup>226</sup> Eyal Weizman, *The Least of All Possibly Evils: Humanitarian Violence from Arendt to Gaza* (London: Verso, 2011), page 19. Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 19. Haddad, *The Refugee in International Society: Between Sovereigns*, page 37.

<sup>227</sup> Von Welser, *No Refuge for Women: The Tragic Fate of Syrian Refugees*, page 97

<sup>228</sup> Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 13.

<sup>229</sup> Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 13.

<sup>230</sup> Von Welser, *No Refuge for Women: The Tragic Fate of Syrian Refugees*, page 65.

<sup>231</sup> Von Welser, *No Refuge for Women: The Tragic Fate of Syrian Refugees*, page 134.

<sup>232</sup> Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 20.

the children who are a widely diverse unit of analysis. There is the primacy of the emergency and security, over the “add ons,” the access into the complex and the personal.<sup>233</sup> Finally, there is a primacy of the humanitarianism, as a doctrine and an industry, and border security over the child as a human being.

## **5. Conclusion:**

The emergency framework facilitates the trivialization and obscuration of the ways Syrian refugee children claim ‘a’ childhood and a “way of life” in fear that this will not attract donor’s pity but rather disgust.<sup>234</sup> It glosses over the different responses that the war elicits from the children which we see glimpses of in The American Life podcast and the documentary “Last Men in Aleppo.” The emergency framework, through the contemporary discourses, over-represents their battles, romanticizes them, and fetishizes their victories. Through examining the question of representation, by looking at Syrian children, one realizes that theorizing from emergency, which is the predominant liberal point of departure that is informing their representation, requires the reduction of Syrian children into over-simplified “manageable categories.”<sup>235</sup> It entails a categorical discourse and it requires their reduction to a bare life, a physical entity, a biological mass to preserve.<sup>236</sup> Moreover, they are grouped with Syrian refugees as an “undifferentiated” identity when relevant and they are distinguished when needed.<sup>237</sup>

However, this is not benign because as a result of departing from an emergency, the child can then predominantly be represented as a victim or a terrorist to be. Romanticizing, alluring

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<sup>233</sup> Baines, *Vulnerable Bodies: Gender, the UN and the Global Refugee Crisis*, page 156.

<sup>234</sup> Risam, “Now You Can See Them: Self-Representation and the Refugee Selfie,” page 58. Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 143.

<sup>235</sup> Rieff, *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis*, page

<sup>236</sup> Haddad, *The Refugee in International Society: Between Sovereigns*, page 45.

<sup>237</sup> Rieff, *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis*, page

stories of “catastrophes turn the victims into ... objects of ... compassion.”<sup>238</sup> They are fetishized, infantilized and they are engineered to “raise feelings of indignation in support.”<sup>239</sup> In other words, they are commodified to raise donations.<sup>240</sup> The vilifying discourse, informed by a blinding fear of the Other, is concerned with maintaining a homogenous society. It frames the Syrian refugee, and by extension, the Syrian child, as a threat to the cohesion and the existence of the host-society. It only sees them as bodies “who may not only pose the threat of contamination in a physical sense through disease [like the colonized], but also weaken the cultural integrity of the nation, spreading the virus of Islam or terrorism.”<sup>241</sup> Both discourses are unable to think beyond emergency, as the first discourse is propelled by the critical need for donations and the second is built essentially on fear and as a result, both discourses result in reincarnating a colonial discourse which is problematic and should not be overlooked but continue to be overlooked, because we are in a state of emergency where solutions are prioritized over the individuals.

Furthermore, the discourses dispossess Syrian children from access to a future that not predetermined and that is free from preconceived notions. They alienate them from their realities and histories. Within these particular stories, they “exist only as representations” that are heavily informed by fear or a romanticized fetishized imagination of childhood and innate innocence.<sup>242</sup> In a sense, they are not regarded as equal counterparts. They are just vehicles that are only relevant for introducing tighter border control measures and for strengthening humanitarianism

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<sup>238</sup> Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 6

<sup>239</sup> Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 13. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, page vi.

<sup>240</sup> Kennedy, “Selling the Distant Other: Humanitarianism and Imagery—Ethical Dilemmas of Humanitarian Action” Lechte and Newman, *Agamben, Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, page 5.

<sup>241</sup> Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies*, page 167-68. Shabanirad and Marandi, “Edward Said’s *Orientalism* and the Representation of Oriental Women in George Orwell’s *Burmese Days*,” pages 23-24 <sup>241</sup> Lechte and Saul Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 14.

<sup>242</sup> Bella Mody, *The Geopolitics of Representation in Foreign News: Explaining Darfur* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2010), page 351.

both as a doctrine and an industry and because of that, some recent approaches to represent the children continue to reincarnate a colonial discourse misrepresenting them and alienating them from reality, dispossessing them from normalcy. They dismiss acts of reclamation that one can clearly see through the documentary and the podcast.

Theorizing from emergency could arguably be thought as paradoxical framework that is engineered to be paradoxical.<sup>243</sup> Its main aim is to maintain survival during critical events, when time collapses, but it results in the “killing of lives” both through a colonial discourse that alienates and confines the Syrian child within zones of extinction and reduces it to a bare life.<sup>244</sup> The problem is that despite the killing of the children in the stories, despite demoralizing and dehumanizing them and despite sacrificing all the other “add ons” or the needs beyond the physical, the donations for food programmes, which are necessary for the children’s wellbeing, are in exponential decline which ultimately could lead to the clinical death of the children.<sup>245</sup> It is the same framework that is centered on aliveness, that contributes to perpetuating conditions of precarity that threatens the children’s wellbeing and existence. This thesis contributes to the literature attempting to rethink representation and open it up to encompass the vulnerable as a human being and not an object to fear or sympathize with.<sup>246</sup> It shows why is it important to prioritize the individual, in this case the Syrian child, over humanitarianism and border security. Finally, the thesis shows why it is essential for representation to “exceed the language and practices of security” and the emergency framework that always entails settling for the bare minimum and fails to see the Syrian child as so much more.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Esposito, *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*, page 141

<sup>244</sup> Sylvester, “Avoiding the ‘killing’ of lives: representations in academia and fiction,” page 64.

<sup>245</sup> Baines, *Vulnerable Bodies: Gender, the UN and the Global Refugee Crisis*, page 156.

<sup>246</sup> Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 10.

<sup>247</sup> Lechte and Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights*, page 12.



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