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Images as Border

On the Visual Production of the "Migration Crisis"

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Introduction

In 2015, there was a marked increase in the number of people fleeing conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq, with more than 911,000 migrants and refugees from these three countries migrating to EU nations. Over one year, the increase in migration led to tragic accidents and deaths, such as boats capsizing or people asphyxiating in trucks. This mass migration was quickly labeled the "European refugee crisis" by journalists and policymakers. Since then, the terms "refugee" and "crisis" have become fixed in relation to each other such that the collocation "refugee crisis" is assumed whenever the question of refugees or migrants is discussed. What marked this migration as a "crisis" different from the regular movement of thousands of people around the world between nations was that these individuals were willing to put themselves through daring journeys, including traveling the Mediterranean Sea on a raft or walking thousands of miles through Turkey, Serbia, and Hungary. Sadly, more than fourteen thousand people have drowned in the Mediterranean since 2014. Of the more heart-wrenching stories were those of Italian coastguards ignoring calls of distress and letting dozens of refugees drown. The desperation of these stories and geographic proximity to Europe suggest some reasons why the mass migration event caught the attention of Western audiences–the same audience who used the phrase "refugee crisis" to describe their perception of the phenomenon.

Yet, for those migrants fleeing conflict, *their* crisis began years earlier with either US-backed military interventions as part of the "War on Terror" or in the unfolding despotism of authoritarian leaders backed by Western[1] powers seeking to stifle local opposition and protest, as in Syria's case, or in global capitalist dispossessions facilitated by imperial and neocolonial superpowers. Often coproduced by Western military projects and mainstream media reports, the catch-all label of "crisis" was used to describe these migrants fleeing life-threatening conflicts in search of safety and security for themselves and their children. However, the "crisis" has not been met with mere curiosity or empathy. Instead, the borders on land and sea have become sites of heightened militarization, greater state control, and violence, with these states seeing the migration of racialized peoples as a "national security risk." The rhetoric of "crisis" and of the need to corral movement echoed across the Atlantic Ocean as asylum seekers from Honduras and other Central American states began to migrate toward the US through Mexico. For weeks, the US news media framed these asylum seekers as a "Central American caravan" that threatened to create a "border crisis."

In both European and US media discourses, the migration event is articulated as a crisis only when the borders of the white-Western state are breached by migrants seen as a large, undifferentiated brown mass threatening the "safety" of white-Western life. The "migration-as-crisis" discourse indexes a concentrated attention to policing immigration in Western states naturalized through laws that remain hidden from view. At the same time, the "migration-as-crisis" discourse also invisibilizes the economic precarity, wars, and tragic violence that migrating peoples have endured before embarking on such treacherous journeys (De Genova 2013). This attention to the migration-as-crisis, as opposed to understanding the war-as-crisis, has mobilized white nationalist movements across Europe, Canada, Australia, and America to police their national borders and prevent the "browning" of their societies (Bhattacharyya 2018). For example, according to the not-for-profit Transnational Institute, between 2014 and 2017 Europe went from five border walls—built following the 1985 Schengen agreement—to fifteen barriers along with a heavily patrolled maritime border. In 2015, Hungary's high-tech fence included thermal detection and cameras to monitor movement and speakers that blared warnings in five languages along its border with Serbia and Croatia. And yet, scholars have found that the surveillance and often violent border enforcement does not limit migration but only makes migration more dangerous (De Leon 2015).

As the "migration crisis" was framed as an epic phenomenon, images of the suffering subject, both the refugee and the migrant, began to propagate almost exponentially as "real evidence" of the emerging "crisis." De Genova (2013) argues that such images produce the Border Spectacle:

> Spectacles of "illegal" passage and ever-increasingly militarized interdiction become emblematic precisely, in the haunting phrase of Joseph Nevins (2002: 144), as "landscapes of death," as well as zones that are inseparable from the accompanying experiences of rape, mutilation, disappearance and protracted irremediable trauma.

Yet, while those who are visibilized in such imagery are rendered inseparable from abject suffering, they are also rendered absolutely and radically separate from the audience. Strangely mimicking the physicalized borders between states, the image of the suffering migrant subject began to function as a *visualized border* separating the audience from the people and the experience captured in the static photograph. We offer the "image-as-border" metaphor to foreground the way that images themselves have, historically, reproduced processes of border and boundary creation. On the one hand, the metaphor mimics what scholars have described as the "dystopia" of physical borders (Abram et al. 2017), demarcations of nation-state territory that unnaturally prevent the movement of human beings. The physical borders that separate nation-states index virtual, imagined notions of identity and community, ossified by national and international law, that seek to separate people into those who "belong" inside versus outside (Anderson 1983). These imagined borders become materially consequential once they are reformulated into states of exception in which certain bodies, certain peoples, certain movements are caught within borders or between borders and even transform *into* borders (Agamben 1998; Balibar 2002; Abram et al. 2017). In this way, the image functions as an iconized border between the realities momentarily captured in the photograph and the context in which viewers see the image.

At the same time, conceptualizing the "image-as-border" also illuminates the layers of paradoxical meaning that are produced as a moment of movement is frozen in time, a frame that is then circulated to audiences ever further afield from the image's taking. As the Multiple Mobilities Research Cluster (2017: 24) writes:

> Images enact a mobility politics of their own, circulating with little or no citation, un-tethered in ways that often defy scholarly domestication, remaining ambiguous as to their origins and precise configuration. The lives and afterlives of such imagery expose the temporal depth of the aesthetics and politics of borders, the intersecting visual and political regimes.

Perhaps this is why Azoulay (2008: 89) argues in *Civil Contract of Photography* that the invention of the camera in the early nineteenth century was not merely a technological leap but an "invention of a new encounter." She explains how photographs gave people a chance to see places and peoples beyond their visual fields, a kind of "transit visa" for the viewer. Here, the

image as border is further extended by the metaphor of the photograph as the "transit visa," resting upon an assumption of nation-based borders that filters how we see the image as a material artifact. The image-as-border foregrounds this viewing practice that imagines viewing an image to be akin to a literal border crossing or border encounter. This framework provides one foundation for how images become borders, particularly when the image is interpreted as providing the viewer with an "unmediated" lens into a visual field far removed from the viewer's own life.

In this vein, visual anthropologists have long shown how colonial photographers sought to "fix" racial types and bodies, believing that the photograph could be used as a kind of unmediated and authentic look at cultural Others (Pinney 1997; Rony 1996). The image of the Other–through staging, costume, static comportment–was intended to serve as the definitive representation of an entire "race." And yet, the problem remained that these typological racial imaginaries were challenged by those in the frame: the distinct individuals whose stories and humanity were conveyed through these images immediately subverted the kinds of bounded racialized cultural narratives that colonial photographers sought to tell. Colonial photographers were constantly beset by anxieties regarding the authenticity of their images precisely because they could not fix people into racial types as proof of the truths they intended (Shankar 2020). By investigating these colonialist anxieties, visual anthropologists have revealed the ways that humans grapple with the problem of "visual excess" in images–that is, the realization that the image always seems to spill beyond the intention of the photographer and whatever perceived explanatory power might be attached to it (Poole 2005). This dilemma of visual excess and the spilling beyond borders offers an apt metaphor for what is currently happening at physical borders, whose fixity continues to be questioned as real people travel across them in ways that do not fit into state-sanctioned categories and processes. Indeed, nation-state borders are constantly surveilled and safely guarded precisely because they are arbitrary constructions in the first place.

Within our theorizing of the image-as-border, images of children are an especially fraught terrain. Children's suffering has become iconic of the migrant and refugee "crisis." In fact, images of children seem to be the harshest and most heartless borders of them all, functioning within a de facto "savage slot" as perhaps the starkest reminder of the brutal violence rendered against migrant bodies as they travel across borders (Kromidas 2014). They seem to ossify passions, functioning as undeniable proof for whatever position a viewer of these images already might have about the crisis. This is partially because of how audiences view children: as agencyless, as victims, as innocent, and without their own subjectivities (Al-Ghazzi 2019). This process of perpetual dehumanization of children allows for viewers to see their bodies as "empty" signifiers. And yet, these images of suffering racialized

children index the historical legacy of European colonization and savior discourses that justified efforts to dominate and maintain power, which included the ways that children of colonized subjects were racialized (Shankar 2014). Images of starving, destitute, and helpless children "somewhere" in Africa, Latin America, and South Asia were routinely mobilized in order to justify white-Western interventions and circulated across Western audiences as a means to garner empathy to the plight of the "Third World," in part as a means to pathologize previously colonized subjects who therefore needed Western powers to come save them (Chouliaraki 2012; Benton 2016; Spivak 1994). As such, images of migrant children mobilize this historical legacy and map it onto current geopolitical discourses that mix in hypernationalist sentiments with new processes of racialization to create a unique set of border discourses.

In making our claims about images-as-border and children as a central concern of these visual border constructions, we draw from four iconic images of movement that have become the source of media debates over the past five years. On 2 September 2015, three-year-old Aylan Kurdi tragically drowned in the Mediterranean Sea along with his mother and five-year-old brother. The photo of Aylan lying facedown in the sand as the waves lapped against his body produced headlines that finally seemed to "humanize" the over 16,500 migrant bodies that have drowned in the Mediterranean since January 2014. NPR reported that until the photo appeared, many Western audiences were not focused on the humanitarian crisis in Syria. Then in 2016, a photograph of a dust- and blood-covered young Syrian boy, Omran Daqneesh, spread quickly across the internet. The image of a frightened, pudgy-faced child again allowed Western audiences to recognize the plight of civilians besieged by government forces in Aleppo. Later, an image of seven-year-old Amal Hussain, a Yemeni girl suffering from severe acute malnutrition, was shared widely on social media, highlighting the suffering of Yemeni civilians amid a devastating war between Houthi rebels and a Saudi-led coalition aided by American-supplied bombs and intelligence. In late 2018, an image of a woman with her two children, running away from tear gas spread by the US border patrol at the Mexico-US border in California after she had undertaken a trek of over one thousand miles to seek refuge in the United States, reignited debates regarding white supremacy, authoritarianism, dehumanization, and militarization in the United States.

Our discussion focuses on the production and circulation of these four images of refugee and migrant children to interrogate the visual economy of racialized children's suffering. We argue that the photograph acquires value based on interlocking systems of violence–the violence endured at their homes of origin, the dangerous journey, and the violence encountered at land and maritime borders (Poole 1997; Combahee River Collective 1979). Specifically, we draw from theories in critical race studies, visual and se-

miotic anthropology, and critical media studies in order to show how the suffering child image mediates the conversations regarding the refugee crisis and functions as its own border.

For migrants for whom "home is the mouth of a shark," survival depends on the ability to migrate somewhere safer. In images of refugee/migrant children, we might instinctively think that the suffering of a child most immediately points to the forms of systemic violence found in their home of origin, whether that is war and extreme poverty created by local state or nonstate actors. However, the photograph itself becomes legible as an image of the suffering racialized child-subject to Western audiences based on responses by the white viewing subject, which is embedded in particular racialized and gendered ways of seeing. Drawing on Rosa and Flores's (2015) theorization of the "white listening subject" as one who "hears linguistic deficiency in racialized speaking subjects even when they engage in language practices that would be deemed normative were they produced by a white speaking subject," we posit that the "white viewing subject" sees the suffering of the racialized suffering child subject as a "crisis" produced elsewhere and by others. As such, the politics of image-making in the digital age necessitates an excavation of how racialized and gendered visual economies, in the form of *visual raciontologies*, function as a form of capitalist value creation.

Rosa and Diaz (2019) offer *raciontologies* as a theoretical framework that allows scholars to follow the "construction, circulation, surveillance, and, frequently, overdetermination of racialized models of personhood" (2019: 2). If the colonial gaze was structured to reproduce dominance over colonized subjects by colonial photographers, the racialized gaze is defined by the reformulation of the colonial gaze within modern, late-liberal capitalist media institutions. Echoing Rosa and Diaz (2019), we are interested in how media circulation of these images of children's suffering draws on raciontologies that reproduce white supremacist ideologies. This emphasis on how Western media reproduces white supremacy through the racialized gaze reveals the ways in which the media's ontological practices politicize the images of racialized children's suffering to shift attention away from the atrocities momentarily captured in the shot and, more importantly, the complicity of Western states in the ongoing violence. We question if the politicization of children's suffering in the migration "crisis" discourse has the potential to influence policies that recognize the humanity of the dispossessed, or if they allow Western audiences to momentarily consume racialized people's suffering before moving on with other concerns, leaving behind questions about how to alleviate the suffering of people "over there."

This chapter is divided into three parts, each of which captures one aspect of how images of suffering children "on the move" function as borders. In the first part, we investigate how these images force white-Western audiences to recognize the humanity of suffering migrants, even though they do

so in, at best, a partial sense, only recognizing aspects of migrant humanity that fit into existing narratives of racialized Black and brown people's suffering. As such, one kind of border the image rests upon and seems to propagate is that between humanizing and dehumanizing migrant children. In the second part, we build upon the discussion of race and the suffering child by showing how these images are indexical of gendered and racialized ways of seeing, reinscribing narratives of deficiency *alongside* the experience of sympathizing with the suffering subject. That is to say, the way we interpret images of suffering children rests upon historically constituted racial boundaries as they are recontextualized in the present. In the third part, we emphasize the particular role of media institutions in creating these boundaries. Media portrayals seem to individualize suffering both in the atomizing of those depicted within the image frame *and* in the emotional responses assumed as appropriate responses to the consumption of suffering by white-Western audiences. These constructions support how the image both becomes a border for humanization and dehumanization of racialized subjects and an artifact to illustrate how neocolonial visual raciontologies continue into contemporary media institutions and their practices. Together these frames make clear how the production and circulation of these images constrain the kinds of redress that are possible, often focusing on helping individual children and their families rather than redressing the system of violence that begets their suffering.

Before we begin our analysis, we want to acknowledge that we do not hear the voices of subjects depicted in these images, nor have we conducted ethnographic fieldwork with the producers of such images. These areas of research are undoubtedly necessary. However, by focusing on the images of the suffering child and media engagement with these images, we begin to see how the refugee "crisis" is constructed visually. In other words, the "crisis" may lie in how we consume such images as much as it may be about the tragic events occurring all over the world. Without a more critical set of viewing practices, these images may never have the impact necessary to enact social or policy change.

Images as Humanizing, Images as Dehumanizing

Ever since Web 2.0 came into full bloom in the late 2000s, digital consumers have been saturated with images of suffering as they peruse their social media feeds and navigate mainstream online news media sources. If in the past images of suffering were heavily curated by journalists and mainstream media sources for consumption by their audiences, now images of suffering seem to come directly from a number of sources simultaneously and therefore from seemingly "no place" at all (Rafael 2003). Perhaps paradoxically,

this lack of obvious sender can make images feel more "objective" as they circulate, compounded by the fact that an audience knows that a cameraman was there at the moment of an image's taking, providing the hint of proof or "truth" to the image itself. This feeling is only exacerbated when the images we see are so tragic: the image of a child lying face down, an emaciated girl, or a weeping mother seem to emotionally tie us to these events and make us feel as if we are experiencing these people's suffering as we voyeuristically gaze into a single moment of their lives. In this sense, the circulation of the refugee and migrant seems to do the work of humanizing these subjects, bringing their suffering to light in a way that forces us to see them and acknowledge the reality of what is happening to them.

Yet, the discourses regarding dehumanization have had a fraught history. They have been linked to human rights discourses that emerged as a "universal" claim in liberal democracies in the post–World War II period, primarily in light of the atrocities wrought during the Holocaust. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, for example, "reaffirmed faith in fundamental human rights, and dignity and worth of the human person," the stripping away of which was considered an act of dehumanization (UDHR 1948). These types of human rights discourses have been hailed as the crowning achievements of liberal notions of justice even as the very idea of the "universal subject" imagined by the UDHR has been called into question. As early as 1947, the American Anthropological Association criticized the "universal" framing, asking: "How can the proposed Declaration be applicable to all human beings, and not be a statement of rights conceived only in terms of the values prevalent in the countries of Western Europe and America?" (The Executive Board, AAA 1947). In other words, our cultural vantage points dictate what constitutes universal humanity and what might not, when, and why. Moreover, by beginning with a post–World War II period for the production of the "universal human," histories of colonialism, imperialism, and slavery have been erased from conversations regarding how humans have been differentiated, hierarchized, and dehumanized (Johnson 2018).

Indeed, this same line of questioning permeates the decisions that audiences make when interpreting images of human suffering as dehumanizing or not. The momentary encounter with the reality of another's suffering brings the viewer to an ethical crossroads, forcing a reckoning with the extent to which we can or should consume the suffering of Others. Is it a dehumanizing act to consume someone else's suffering or not, and what visual raciontologies influence the answer? Oftentimes, the more devastating the image is–the more visceral the emotional response–the more likely it is for the image to be shared, retweeted, and further circulated across digital and print publications. The resharing of images on social media does not automatically transfer into political action or humanitarian aid, and yet this

is the commonsense doctrine as to why these images are shared so widely. This begs the question: does the circulation of such images make Western audiences realize the extent of an unfolding tragedy and force them to put pressure on their political leaders to take action, or do these images become a kind of pornographic engagement, a voyeuristic pleasure in the suffering of Others?

Regarding the question of how audiences respond to images of pain and violence, Susan Sontag (2004) famously wondered about the extent to which people see images of pain and actually feel empathy for those within the image's frame. Speaking specifically of war photography, she writes:

> Photographs of the victims of war are themselves a species of rhetoric. They reiterate. They simplify. They agitate. They create the illusion of consensus. Invoking this hypothetical shared experience ("we are seeing with you the same dead bodies, the same ruined houses"), Woolf professes to believe that the shock of such pictures cannot fail to unite people of good will. Does it? (2004: 6)

Through this initial line of questioning, Sontag begins to focus the reader on the ideologies that situate how people see photographs of pain, remarking on just how much framing, mediation, and historical positioning is involved in whether or not we feel empathy, shame, or sadness at the suffering we view onscreen: are those within the frame people who we see as part of our community, or are they our enemies? In other words, are they one of "us" or are they one of "them"?

> To those who are sure that right is on one side, oppression and injustice on the other, and that the fighting must go on, what matters is precisely who is killed and by whom. To an Israeli Jew, a photograph of a child torn apart in the attack on the Sbarro pizzeria in downtown Jerusalem is first of all a photograph of a Jewish child killed by a Palestinian suicide-bomber. To a Palestinian, a photograph of a child torn apart by a tank round in Gaza is first of all a photograph of a Palestinian child killed by Israeli ordinance. To the militant, identity is everything. And all photographs wait to be explained or falsified by their captions. During the fighting between Serbs and Croats at the beginning of the recent Balkan wars, the same photographs of children killed in the shelling of a village were passed around at both Serb and Croat propaganda briefings. Alter the caption, and the children's deaths could be used and re-used. (2004: 10)

It is significant that Sontag uses an example of a photograph of a child to make her point about how images of death are more than likely political tools rather than obvious examples of tragedy. Even if we think that the pain of adults may be situated in our ideological worlds, surely the pain of children, at the very least, is above and beyond the vagaries of human differ-

ence. And yet, as Sontag points out, even when the figures in the frame are children, they do not seem to push beyond the ethnonationalist ideologies of those who are viewing. Instead, the figure of the child is *instrumentalized* as the best justification for further war, ossifying difference in how viewers make sense of the pain of the child being seen on screen.

When the photograph of the body of three-year-old Aylan Kurdi, who had drowned in the Mediterranean after his family had escaped the Syrian war, was catapulted into the global news cycles and became the iconic image of the "refugee crisis," it was accompanied by heated discussions as to whether it was morally and ethically appropriate to publish the image of a small child lying face down on a Turkish beach. A number of journalists and activists argued that such images are necessary in order for Western voters to understand the human toll of the war in Syria and the impact of European policies determined to limit migration into its borders (Mackey 2015). The question might be less about the circulation of images themselves and more about *how* they are circulated: what information is provided, what information is left out, and who is meant to consume these images. This is perhaps why visual and media studies scholars acknowledge that while journalists turn to images as a way to represent moments of crisis to public audiences, they remain reluctant to develop standards and practices that "account for the particularities of visual modes of knowing" (Zelizer 2010, cited in Ristovska and Price 2018). Without a critical analysis for how visual modes of knowing evoke raciontologies within the news media, it is unlikely that the media will change how racialized children's suffering is shown and circulated.

These circulations go far beyond the intentions of news media outlets, particularly given the proliferation of social media as a site for news-related information gathering and sharing. In her genre analysis of how the Kurdi image was appropriated across digital discourses, Mortensen (2017) found that *image recontextualization* is the most frequent mode by which audiences receive the Kurdi image. She follows the hashtag #humanitywashedashore to observe how the Kurdi image is decontextualized and recontextualized across social media through posts and likes. She excavates instances when the figure of the drowned child is isolated, and how the figure is inserted into new contexts such as nonrealistic drawings, photo collages, unaltered photos with text, and other photos. Ultimately, Mortensen concludes that the ubiquity of digitally circulating icons of crisis does not produce consensus as to what the humanitarian response should be. She remarks:

> While the visual icon swiftly became a standard reference in debates about the "refugee crisis," short hand for the humanitarian catastrophe and the missing political solutions, the appropriations point to diverging interpretive frameworks and local receptions. (2017: 1159)

In fact, Mortensen's study illuminates what one might expect: the iconic image is more likely to be recontextualized and instrumentalized to foment the anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim discourses echoed across the populist, white nationalist politics of twenty-first-century Europe.

At the very least, what Mortensen's study suggests is that when we get access to such images on our social media feeds, the individuals within the frame are "frozen" and become instrumentalized for the arguments made by those seeing and circulating these images. When we see images of suffering refugees and migrants, what is within the frame is always mediated by its path of circulation and the discourses that surround them. We might find ourselves seeing an image that was sent from a friend, directly from a photographer, from alternative news sites, or from the mainstream media, with each source providing textual context that reframes how these images and thus the stories of the people in the images are seen, consumed, and recontextualized. In other words, the information we glean and the political possibilities we assume *based* on these images are not so much about the image, per se, but the visual economies through which they circulate and are consumed. For example, when the Kurdi image inspired Ai Weiwei to reenact the pose on the beach of Lesbos in an effort to create a tribute to the child and other drowned refugees, the appropriation was met with criticism and skepticism about reenactment as an insensitive aestheticization of people's suffering (Jones 2017). Similarly, when *Charlie Hebdo* circulated a cartoon depicting a grown Kurdi as a sex attacker eager to grope European women in skirts, it was condemned for its racist rationalization of young Kurdi's death as a way to keep white European women safe from Muslim men.

Yet, photographs still seem to make self-evident truth claims. As visual studies scholars have described, the realism of documentary photography is "a core attribute that established its privileged claim on truth, facticity, and intelligibility" linked to the medium's evidentiary, typified, and mimetic dimensions (Feldman 1997: 24; Tagg 1993). Take, for example, another iconic image of the suffering child. In August 2016, the Aleppo Media Center posted an image of five-year-old Omran Daqneesh sitting expressionless, covered in ash and blood, in an ambulance after an airstrike destroyed his home where he lived with his parents and two siblings. Reading the Pictures, a web-based media organization, called attention to how major news publications such as NBC News and the *Washington Post* claimed that the image realistically portrayed how the Syrian war depicted the "horror" of children's suffering (Adelman 2017). Many commentaries focused on Daqneesh's impassivity indicating the ways that the photograph accrued value. While the child's face was emotionless, "observers read Daqneesh's blank face as an invitation to laminate their own feelings onto, and over,

the photo" (Adelman 2017). What is implied, yet remains unsaid, is that this sentimentality relies on the visual raciontologies emplaced in the production, circulation, and reception of this image. When CNN reported on this story, the anchor began to tear up: "What strikes me is that we shed tears, but there are no tears here." Shortly after, a series of articles on CNN and other media sites cropped up with the headline "Story of Little Syrian Boy Moves CNN Anchor to Tears." For white Western audiences, the image of Daqneesh's suffering was seen as an unmediated truth, proven by the listlessness of the child's face—a listlessness that seemed to prove itself because of just how radically Other it seemed to those who were viewing the image because the child was not seen crying. This interpretative move was accompanied and overwritten by the story of white women journalists crying, an emotional reaction that resonated so completely with that of the expected audiences of CNN that these white women's tears became their own legitimate news headlines that also served as the *real proof* for why this child's suffering mattered. In other words, the child's suffering was not necessarily self-evident in and of itself, but it became so when accompanied by the white newscaster's emotional response.

Then, in June 2017, another image of Daqneesh was filmed by pro-Syrian government news agencies and circulated on global online news media platforms. This time he was all cleaned up, hair neatly combed, and with a smile on his face (McKirdy and Tawfeeq 2017). For viewers who had seen the original image of a dust-and-blood-covered, expressionless Daqneesh, the second image of him offered the viewer some comfort, a visible proof that things in Syria were not "that bad." But the second image also challenged the facticity of the original image, forcing viewers to wonder about the legitimacy of images of children's suffering. The second image was accompanied by an interview with Daqneesh's father, who accused rebel groups and the international media of using his son's image for anti–Syrian government propaganda. These tensions regarding the use of Daqneesh's image by media outlets—as an obvious example of atrocity in Syria, as a manipulation by Western news media or rebel groups, as lacking facticity—direct our attention to the unresolved signification of such images. The analysis of the two images of Daqneesh were instrumentalized for conflicting media narratives whether it is media coverage by CNN on their news shows and online, media coverage by the video news agency Ruptly (owned by a Kremlin-backed news channel), or coverage in the form of a YouTube video of a pro-opposition journalist Mousa Al Omar, who said Daqneesh's father was speaking as a hostage of the Syrian regime (Al Omar 2017).

As such, because of the way that images of migrant suffering reach our screens, images are recontextualized as borders unto themselves. We know that we are seeing people within the frame, but they and the violence in the image are "safely" behind the screen, flattened, distanced, and separated from us. This process of distancing also becomes the basis for a particular

kind of dehumanizing: Yes, the people on screen are certainly "real" people, but the images make it clear that they are certainly *not* us. At the same time, because the people onscreen cannot speak, their images become a matter of debate and argument by those who consume these images. The images become blurred and contested borders, at once hardened against any counterbelief while also porous, allowing for significations and new meanings as they circulate This is how the images of Daqneesh suffering can be read as both positioning him as the "face of Aleppo" as well as propaganda against the Syrian regime. Similarly, the image of a smiling Daqneesh can be read as evidence of a child well cared for and as propaganda supporting the Syrian regime. How we interpret these images becomes its own kind of border creation or border crossing.

But this choice is not unmediated or random. Instead, this section has argued that the suffering racialized child-subject is constructed through a political economy of visual consumption that reproduces visualized raciontologies that influence how images of racialized "black and brown" suffering child-subjects are consumed. This visualized raciontology rests squarely on the historically entrenched notions of liberalism that already constitute racialized subjects along the axis of humanization/dehumanization, a situation that already presupposes their potential abjection. In this sense, Walter Johnson puts it best when he describes the way that discourses on dehumanization function in relation to discourses of black struggle and liberation, remarking:

> I continue to think that we have more to lose by employing the word "dehumanization" that we have to gain from it. First, because it is sucked too easily into the culturally dominant notion of redress through human rights. Second, because it is too sticky: it leaves a trace of abjection on those it (sincerely) seeks to celebrate, advance and protect … it frames black history as a "never-ending audition" for humanity. (Johnson 2018)

Similarly, for those migrants racialized as they travel, the image seems to only reinscribe the humanizing/dehumanizing binary, functioning as the boundary condition for the "audition" that circumscribes migrants' life possibility. What this discussion tells us is that we must move away from simplistic "dehumanization" rhetoric to think more critically about the political and economic relations that historically situate how we determine migrants' humanity. We might ask: if their humanity is a border that is constantly encountered and must be crossed, then what possibility is there for redress of the political, economic, and material grievances that images are intended to be the conduit for?

In the next section, we further interrogate the history of image making that focused its colonial gaze on producing ideas of racialized pathology, ideas that continue to undergird how contemporary images of formerly colonized subjects' suffering accrue value.

The Colonial Gaze Becomes the Racialized Gaze

Anthropologists who focus on visual economies have argued extensively that modern circulation and consumption of images are based heavily on the history of colonial and imperial social relations. Anthropologist Deborah Poole, for example, draws on Edward Said's compulsory work on *Orientalism* in order to describe the "imperial condition" of photography. For her, questions regarding "image value"–that is to say, what kinds of images we think are important and should be produced and circulated–are entirely based on a long history of image production that largely overdetermines what kinds of images "sell." In her discussion, she notes that the "how" and "why" of white-Western audiences deriving pleasure from images are organized through a history of circulations focused on the "primitive" Black and brown Other, whose bodies were meant solely for white consumption (Poole 1997; Rony 1996; Lutz and Collins 1993). In many cases, this process of primitivizing through image making produced the perception of Black and brown peoples as "savage" and "barbaric," peoples whose "violent" tendencies justified colonial and imperial extermination or, at best, their need to be civilized by the white man. Based on this scholarship, maintaining the imagined border separating civilization from primitivity was a direct and deliberate purpose of colonial imagery. At the same time, colonial photographers related gender and age to race in order to position certain subjects as destitute, helpless, impoverished, and unhappy so as to justify their interventions. As Shankar (2022) has noted elsewhere, the boundary between the savior and those who are in need of saving continues to shape the discourse around suffering. Women and children were central to these early visual representations, with women sometimes being characterized as "ignorant children" and therefore justifying colonialist policies based on the idea that "white men are saving brown women from brown men" (Spivak 1994; see also: Khoja-Moolji 2020).

Colonial and imperial projects depended on the production and circulation of racialized pathology discourse and media that clearly indicated the lack of sophistication of the racialized subject. At the same time, the use of colonial visual depictions depended on media ideologies regarding viewers' raciontologies and therefore produced them: that the people in the photograph had consented to having their picture taken, that what was being depicted was "really" happening, and that the interpretation of seeing the racialized subject in the frame as threatening, or destitute, or exotic was a universal interpretation that necessitated a *particular* response by the civilized viewer and her compatriots. In the historical period that marked the independence of previous colonized peoples, these earlier colonial visual depictions found their footing in humanitarian and development imagery, which used the figure of the brown and Black child in order to justify con-

tinued interventions and produced what Teju Cole (2012) characterized as the "white savior industrial complex." In much of this imagery, women and children have stood for abject poverty in "Third World" countries (Manzo 2008), and these images are meant to produce an empathic, if distanced, stance toward the suffering of Others, facilitating philanthropic capital flows from the "First-to-Third" worlds. Images of children, functioning as images of the "uncivilized, uncared for, savage child," have been useful for both NGOs and governments to legitimate their interventions as well as to legitimate the larger project of outsider-led "development." Yet, these images are paradoxical in that they seem to justify intervention based on the same iconography and assumptions of earlier colonial imagery. As such, Manzo (2008) explains, the question for NGOs, and journalists as well, when using images of children experiencing abject suffering and violence is whether the accompanying texts or articles "can nullify the contradictory subliminal messages that emanate from the iconography of childhood" (2008: 632).

The suffering of racialized children, including in the case of racialized migrants and refugees, is consistently and constantly depicted across digital, analog, and print platforms. However, despite the fact that, as mentioned above, digital images may sometimes seem like they come from "no place," they are actually generated and disseminated by a group of mediators who have a disproportionate power to decide whether and how we should see the suffering of Others. These people, who Gursel (2016) calls "image brokers," make "the decisions behind the photographs we encounter in the news–and the organizations in which they work, whether agencies, publications, or visual content providers, [and] act as mediators for views of the world. Image brokers collectively frame our ways of seeing" (Gursel 2016: 2). Take, for example, the *New York Times* exposé about the young Yemeni child, Amal Hussain, whose emaciated body was depicted as part of the *Times*'s attempt to get American audiences to understand and care about the political situation in Yemen that has been produced by Saudi imperial interests in the region and facilitated by America's intimate relationship with the Saudis. The *New York Times*, in the aftermath of the exposé, acknowledged the difficult decision-making process that went into publishing the photographs of the emaciated girl who had been described by her doctor as such: "No meat. Only bones."

> *Times* editors don't decide lightly to publish pictures of the dead or the dying. The folders of photo editors bulge with powerful images that did not make the cut because they were considered too horrific, too invasive, or too gratuitous. … The images we have now published out of Yemen may be as unsettling as anything we have used before. But there is a reason we made this decision. … The story of Yemen and all its suffering is one that must be told, and as powerful as Declan's writing is, it cannot be told in words only. … This is our job as journalists: to bear witness, to give voice to those who are otherwise abandoned,

victimized, and forgotten. And our correspondents and photographers will go to great lengths, often putting themselves in harm's way, to do so. (Nagourney and Slackman 2018)

Here, the *Times* editors are articulating a media ideology and their theory of the image in their justification for showing Amal Hussain's emaciated body, arguing to its audience that the story of Yemeni suffering *cannot* be told without seeing these images onscreen. It is the affective immediacy of this suffering that the *Times* editors seemed to suggest was the necessary contribution of the image without which (white) Americans cannot or will not reckon with the plight of the Yemeni people. This is why the "brutally honest" images of Yemeni suffering could not be "sanitized." At the same time, much of the justification for showing these images was the evocation of the heroic reporter who will "go into harm's way" to bear witness, a phrasing that obviated the agentic altruism of the journalist in opposition to the complete helplessness–"abandoned" and "forgotten"–of those who are depicted within the frame. We might say that this boundary is but one example of how image borders must function by maintaining racialized difference "that organizes bodies into victims and saviours" (Khoja-Moolji 2020: 5; see also: Shankar 2022).

David Furst, *New York Times International* picture editor, explained their decision further by stating: "But we felt it would be a disservice to the victims of this war to publish sanitized images that don't *fully* reflect their suffering" (quoted in Nagourney and Slackman 2018; our emphasis). In this justification, the modifier "fully" indexes that people's suffering cannot be felt unless the entirety of their suffering is revealed through the image. This ideology connects the devastation in the image to some notion of "service" being provided by the media as opposed to a critical discussion of how *New York Times* images and their circulation provide little to no "service" to the victims and their suffering. In other words, the *Times* editors are implicitly drawing from the racialized history of which it is a part, as a savioristic media source doing "good work." Indeed, there seems to be some pleasure in this voyeuristic look at racialized suffering, as the editors acknowledge that the images are "riveting." But riveting for whom? Would those experiencing this suffering find the images "riveting," or is this type of imagery "riveting" only for those audiences who sit and consume them from half a world away?

Of course, this is not the first time such justifications have been deployed. Nearly thirty years prior to the now ubiquitous circulation of digital images of racialized suffering, the photojournalist Kevin Carter set in motion an intensely debated conversation on whose suffering should be depicted and why after his photograph "Starving Sudanese Child Being Stalked by a Vulture" was published. Taken in 1993, Carter's photograph shows an extremely malnourished Sudanese girl keeled over as a vulture awaits her

imminent death. Rather than help the child, Carter took a photograph, seeking to make Americans aware of the plight of the Sudanese in the wake of the Sudanese civil war but ultimately resulting in severe ethical debates regarding when and if photographers should intervene in the contexts in which they work. But most importantly, Carter's imagery forced a reckoning with the problematic of image immediacy itself. What was most shocking about the incident was how the potential for the image's immediacy when viewed–an unquestioned feeling that one is seeing a social ill that must be rectified–seemed to replace the demand for immediate need to help; that is to say, the image's immediacy replaced the need to reduce the suffering of the child, aestheticizing it and distancing Carter from the need to do anything other than bear witness and share the image with Western audiences. In the end, the case of the Yemeni child image seemed to suggest the very same thing: in the image's aftermath it was revealed that the child had died. Even as the image did nothing to rectify her suffering, she became iconized as a representation of violence, and her image was instrumentalized for the *Times*'s demonstration of how reporters go into "harm's way" to publish unsanitized images that "fully" reflect suffering and, therefore, provide the potential for redress.

The *New York Times* publication of Yemeni children's suffering and Carter's image of the starving Sudanese child highlight the ways in which such images draw on a particular kind of visual raciontology that fetishizes certain racialized subjects and hypervisibilizes Black, brown, and Muslim "suffering subjects" as justification for their need for help. As such, an analysis of visual raciontologies connected to the suffering subject could benefit from an attention to the depiction of suffering subjects perceived as white.

Depicting "white suffering" has traditionally been seen as gratuitous and insensitive, unnecessary given that audiences already understand that tragedy has occurred and that they must show solidarity with those who have been directly affected even if images of violence and suffering do not scroll across their media feeds. Overwhelmingly, the perceived suffering of white subjects has been focused on particular kinds of classed trauma: abject rural poverty, and in the last twenty years, drug overdoses, gendered domestic violence, and school/mass shootings. For example, in the 1930s and funded by the US agriculture department, the Farm Services Administration's visual project documented the lived experience of many rural, white farmers and families made destitute by the Great Depression. Solicited by the FSA, photographers and journalists collected a body of 250,000 images intended to popularize the case for the capitalist investments and bureaucratic restructuring of the New Deal. President Lyndon Johnson's 1964 declaration of the "war on poverty" is visually documented by an image of him visiting a family in rural Kentucky. Depictions of rural America, and specifically

Appalachia, have been critiqued for Othering the rural, white poor as in need of interventions, much like the development imagery discussed earlier. More recently, the circulation of images and video of people overdosing due to opioid addiction draw on an elitist gaze that sees certain persons as somehow deficient, abject, and in need of immediate help. However, cases of rural white drug addiction have been dealt with quite differently than earlier ones, which were associated with impoverished Black and brown peoples, with rehabilitation and incorporation being the primary strategies for redress.

In other cases, images of white-appearing people fleeing terrorist violence from the 1994 Oklahoma City bombings continue into the present era of mass shootings, where it is often white children fleeing, wounded, and distraught. Yet, the characterization of such violence has rarely been racialized when perpetrated by white criminals. Instead, white murderers are often considered "lone wolves," who have individuated pathologies that do not represent "all white people." Similarly gendered domestic violence of men abusing and killing their wives and children are seen as individual pathologies rather than as tokens of an endemic and systemic gender inequality and patriarchy in white society. Even if they are pathologized, they are depicted in humanizing ways as lonely, disturbed people who did not get the support they needed in order to deal with their mental illness. This problematic ableist framing further stigmatizes those who might actually be mentally unwell by linking mental illness to criminal and violent behavior. By contrast, attacks by nonwhite actors–whether in the public or private spheres–have been treated as examples of the pathology of entire cultural and racial groups, as in the now-ubiquitous anti-Muslim racist stereotypes that imply that all Muslims could be potential terrorists (Beydoun 2018; Durrani 2018; Kazi 2019). Images of Muslims as inherently violent consistently dehumanize these individuals, rendering them villainous and beyond resuscitation, similar to how *Charlie Hebdo* used Kurdi's image to imagine his future as a grown Muslim man who rapes white women.

Even images of white-passing refugees seem to follow this trope. Take, for example, the case of Bosnian refugees who migrated all over Europe in the early 1990s in the aftermath of the brutal violence of the Bosnian War. These refugees, like their contemporary counterparts, were fleeing violence and looking for stable homes in new contexts. Yet, unlike current refugee depictions, Bosnians were relatively well integrated into their new contexts, finding some economic opportunity and stable livelihoods. As Baker (2017) argues, this integration was largely due to the depictions of Bosnians that did not seem to fit normal stereotypes of Muslims because of their ability to pass as racialized white subjects. She writes:

> Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, news images of Palestinian hijackers and Libyan and Iranian state-sponsored terrorists, mediated further by the ste-

reotyped terrorist villains of Reagan- and post-Reagan-era Hollywood, had mapped the security threat of Islam on to brown, male, vigorous bodies of "Middle Eastern" appearance, and more specifically on to "Arabs." … These Islamophobic representations catch today's refugees in their net but exempted Bosnians. Light-skinned Bosnians wearing Western clothes were not "visibly Muslim" in European symbolic politics, even when they were Muslim by religion and ethnic heritage and did not resemble the stock figure of the Islamic fundamentalist and militant.

That is to say, the figure of the Muslim was and is racialized as nonwhite, affecting the way that people can see their suffering and the possibility of redress of their suffering. When the image of the refugee crisis is a nonwhite Muslim person, the image often evokes questions about national safety and security, even when it is a three-year-old Syrian child lying facedown on a Turkish beach, as in the case of its subject's appropriation for the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoon.

These visual raciontologies have implications for how visual economies function: how images circulate, how bodies accrue value, and the differential possibilities for redress of migrant suffering, topics that we address in the next section.

Visual Economies and the Politics of Giving

In thinking about why and how certain racialized images gain social power in their circulation, we must also consider the visual economies of images, i.e., the asymmetries of capitalist power that determine which kinds of images circulate in greater numbers, over greater distances, for a longer period of time (Poole 2007). That is to say, not all images are created equally given their histories and given the regimes of production and consumption that structure how images circulate, influencing what audiences are intended to feel and how they respond. As Chouliaraki and Blaagard (2013) write, analyzing the production and circulation of migrant and refugee imagery reveals the

> social relations of power and the forms of moral–political action that the visual representations of such vulnerability call on us to perform and … to the truth claims and modes of identification with those who suffer–what, that is, these visuals tell us about ourselves as moral actors and how they invite us to engage with them. (Chouliaraki and Blaagard 2013: 254)

As we have discussed, what we see in these images, including what is in the frame, what is not, and the context of circulation, interpellates the audience to respond. Particularly in the case of suffering children, the response can be immediate and personal. From a raciontologies perspective, we have

discussed how a colonial gaze undergirds a contemporary racialized gaze that produces regimes of value and the responses that are deemed appropriate or not. This is why bodies that have been historically marginalized–based on class, caste, race, gender, sexuality, and ability (among others)–have a hard time accruing value beyond what is expected within dominant framings (Poole 1997). We might say that value begets value, and so to create surplus value almost necessarily involves the reproduction of hegemonic imagery.

This racialized hegemonic visual order facilitates a very particular form of giving aid while diverting attention away from the political and economic processes that produced such suffering in the first place. Instead, the images of suffering subjects facilitate an already ongoing circuit of capital–what some have termed "poverty capital" (Roy 2010) and others the "compassion economy" (James 2010)–which relies on images of suffering to promote the continued growth of the help economies by getting individuals to give funds (Shankar 2014). Indeed, current reports suggest that one in three people give to help organizations, and consumers assume that this is the best way of solving the problem of suffering they bear witness to in these images. This form of philanthropic giving functions paternalistically and is heavily gendered, assuming and reproducing the idea that those women and children cannot or no longer care for themselves and therefore need external forms of care in order to survive. Take, for example, the circulation and reception of the *New York Times* decision to publish the photograph of Yemeni child Amal Hussain. Although she died soon after the image was taken by the *Times*, viewers of the image "expressed heartbreak. They offered money for her family. They wrote in to ask if she was getting better." Each of these responses was individualized, concerned most directly with the fate of the child and less with the systemic causes for the malnourishment of Yemeni children caught in the violent conflict. In fact, what this form of response seemed to occlude was any awareness of how the United States was and is implicated in the Saudi-led strikes that resulted in the abject suffering and deaths of Yemenis like Hussain (Walsh and Schmitt 2018). Audiences of such images are not made aware of the arms and military training provided by the US government to the Saudis. Instead, those who read the exposé felt the need to give directly to Hussain's family, driven to solve their own feelings of helplessness and sympathy by offering money to help the suffering child, as if the relation between those on each side of the image-as-border was direct and immediate.

A similar situation unfolded in the aftermath of the circulation of an image of a Honduran woman, Maria Meza, taken on 25 November 2018 as she was seen running in fear holding the hands of her two children as tear gas was released by border patrol officers at the Mexican border. The US border patrol apparatus has become an iconic and physicalized symbol of

the Trump regime's racist rhetoric and policies regarding migrants, viewing them as violent and pathological invaders who will cripple the "American" way of life. In April 2019, Trump doubled down on this anti-immigrant speech, claiming that the United States is "full" despite the fact that declining birth rates and increasing elderly populations have actually created a labor crisis for many of the towns and smaller cities in the United States.

There were several ways that Meza's image was deployed when it first began to circulate that bear special attention and point to the political economy of images of Central American asylum seekers at the US-Mexico border. First, the image of the mother and her two children was invoked by many as evidence of the Trump regime's anti-immigrant violence and to disprove the fearmongering rumors that he continues to stoke about the violent nature of those coming across the border as "rapists" and the like. This argument relied heavily on the fact that those on screen were women and children. How could it be, the argument went, that such helpless and vulnerable women and children could be the kinds of violent perpetrators that Trump claimed? In other words, it was the gendering of this particular visual raciontology and the ideologies associated with women and children that produced one of the fundamental axes of the image-as-border and, in turn, facilitated the particular form of empathy and outcry that ensued thereafter. On the other hand, the image was also used by some commentators to obviate the shortcomings of this mother, a different discursive path also premised on the gendered border image. A quick perusal on Twitter in the aftermath of the image's taking and circulation revealed a counternarrative to the seemingly obvious view that this image was a moment of suffering. Instead, this counternarrative justified what was seen within the image by arguing (1) that this kind of direct violence was the only way to keep these migrants from coming across the border and that the circulation of this image would "show" these migrants that they better stay away and (2) that the image proved the fact that this woman was unconcerned with the well-being of her children in pushing them to make such a treacherous journey.

These claims rest upon particular visual raciontologies that allow viewers to question whether or not images have been manipulated depending on what other racial ideologies they want a photograph to reinforce. *Even if* the viewer were to admit to the authenticity of the suffering they are seeing within the frame, they might still question the image by critiquing what "is not seen"; the fact that the photographer has intentionally taken this image at the expense of so many other images that might actually "reframe" the image of suffering they are seeing. Or the viewer might question the validity of the image not based on what is in the frame but instead on its networks of circulation. Indeed, in the example above, many of those who were dismissive of Meza's plight pointed to the fact that the photograph must have been manipulated, and that, even if it had not been manipulated, it was taken in

order to manipulate the political leanings of those who view it by powerful media institutions like the *New York Times*. The photograph, therefore, became less about the suffering onscreen and more about the raciontologies of the photographer or the institutions who picked it up and circulated it.

The particularities of the aftermath of the image's circulation were also significant. Within one month of the incident, it was announced that the mother and her two children had been allowed into the United States, a circumstance that was hailed as a moment when political activism might actually beget the kinds of social change that we imagine. Indeed, the image seemed to play a key role in this activist possibility, the mother and child so obviously in need and at risk producing collective empathy that needed immediate recognition and redress. And yet, when we analyze just a bit deeper, we might question the "success" of this sort of image-focused, atomized activism. What seems apparent is that what such images do well is focus our gaze, not on a collective suffering or on the policies and practices that produce violent oppression for many but instead on the individuals who we see within the frame: whether we want to see them as victims or savages. That is to say, images like that of the mother with her children resonate because they function as a border, focusing on the specific horrors perpetrated on these individuals, therefore obscuring the historical, political, and economic processes at play and the systemic violence perpetrated by certain Western nations on racialized brown and Black migrants.

Conclusion

Images of children have become iconic of the migrant and refugee "crisis," functioning as perhaps the starkest reminder of the violence rendered against migrant children's bodies as they travel across borders. The images and stories of Aylan Kurdi, Omran Daqneesh, Amal Hussain, and Maria Meza holding her children have indexed both the intense suffering of migrants as well as the callous lack of empathy that various states have shown to those who are seeking to find better lives for themselves and their children. And yet, these images of suffering children also index the historical legacy of European colonization and savior discourses that justified efforts to dominate and maintain power. In the postcolonial moment, colonizer-colonized relationships were reproduced through the circuits of humanitarian and development aid, claiming that newly independent nation-states could not govern themselves because they could not take care of their own people, women and children in particular. Images of starving, destitute, and helpless children in Africa, Latin America, and South Asia were mobilized in order to justify white-Western interventions and circulated to white-Western audiences as a means to garner empathy to the plight

of these "Third World" peoples (Benton 2016). The production of empathy that such images garner is distanced and separated, never implicating its audiences in the suffering of these children despite the fact that poverty in the Global South has and continues to be in large part a byproduct of colonization and imperialism. As such, images of migrant children mobilize this historical legacy overlaid by hypernationalist discourses, creating a unique set of border discourses. It is in this sense that the current chapter reframes the image-as-border through which these multiple narratives and discourses are contested.

In each of the cases provided, the images of women and children function as borders and render mute the larger discussions of policies and practices that caused the suffering of these and so many others. De Leon (2019) points to the way that this individualizing of suffering, framed within journalistic images, occludes as much as it produces. In the aftermath of yet another photo of a child at the US-Mexico border, this time a young girl Valeria Ramirez with her father, De Leon lamented the fact that this kind of photograph could never truly capture the extent of the epidemic, no matter how "riveting" the image. Perhaps, he suggests, we need a different kind of image, not one focusing the gaze on the bodies of already suffering individuals, whose historical racialization makes their suffering always visible yet produces no sustained change.

To illustrate this point, he posted a map on Facebook that showed the locations of each person found dead at the border, marked by a red dot, accompanied with the caption:

> Many people are outraged (sparked via a photo) about the death of Oscar Alberto Martinez Ramirez and his 23-month-old daughter Valeria. Please know that many migrants (including Oscar and Valeria) have lost their lives because of the US border policy known as "Prevention Through Deterrence." There aren't enough images in the world to convey the pain that this policy has caused but here is one that hints at the scale of this brutality. Each of these red dots is a person who has died because of America's federal border policies.

This quantitative rendering accompanied by a caption does something very different than the images of Maria Meza or Amal Hussain or Valeria Ramirez. Unlike the media ideologies espoused by the *New York Times*, which argued that the *only* way to rectify political violence was through "riveting" photographs "fully" depicting abject suffering, De Leon rightly points us to the fact that *no number of individual images of suffering* can ever capture the extent of the devastation that migrants and refugees experience because of policies and practices enforced by Western governments. Unlike images we have discussed thus far, his image seems to take the viewer in a different direction, one in which redress does not always necessitate the voyeuristic gaze into the suffering of Others. Instead, the image he provides highlights

the scale of the crisis, rendering visible its systemic nature and the policies that have produced such brutal and violent death.

But the question is: can images like the map De Leon provides, when shared with people who have been gazing upon brown and Black suffering for nearing two hundred years, truly make an emotional impact, or are they, by the very intransigence of visual raciontologies, rendered mute before they ever reach our screens?

This question continues to challenge us. In the United States in 2021, as a new regime led by Joe Biden and the Democrats continued, and even increased, the number of deportations out of the United States, images of Haitian migrants fleeing border police began to circulate online. These images showed Haitian people running from border police who rode on horseback, evoking the figure of the white cowboy or Southern slave patroller ready to lasso the indigenous person or enslaved person in nineteenth-century America. In the aftermath, online discussions centered on the racialized brutality of American policies and the inhumanity of the techniques deployed by border patrol. Responding to the criticism of these images, Biden's regime promised that border police will no longer ride on horseback when seeking to capture and deport Haitian migrants (Hernandez 2021). In this absurd example of image-as-border ideology, the Biden regime's answer was to remove horses rather than remove the people riding the horses. This decision has ensured that US audiences would not have to be exposed to these specific kinds of violent images and would not have to acknowledge the very violence of militarized border regimes, ongoing deportations, and the urgency of these issues for migrants and their families. Yet again, the humanity of those refugees seeking a better life is rendered practically invisible, even as images of their suffering are made hypervisible for voyeuristic consumption by audiences who remain safely hidden behind a screen.

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Note

1. We use "West" in this chapter not as an actual physicalized location but as a colonial construction that conceptually separates colonizing nation-states from the "rest" (Trouillot 2003). The idea of the West finds a number of contemporary manifestations, including in the idea of the "Global North" and the "First World" and in the US imperial regimes.

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