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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, MERCED

Stateless at Sea: Media Representations of Kurdish Women's  
Movements across Water

A Thesis submitted in satisfaction of the requirements for the  
degree of Master of Arts

in

Interdisciplinary Humanities

by

Violet E. Barton

Committee in charge:

Professor Ma Vang, Committee Chair

Professor Anneeth Kaur Hundle

Professor Nigel Hatton

Professor Paul Almeida

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The Thesis of Violet E. Barton is approved, and it is acceptable  
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University of California, Merced

2018

## DEDICATION

*To Those Whose Names and Stories We Do Not Know*

No Search, No Rescue  
by Jihan Bseiso

I.

How do we overcome war and poverty only to drown in your sea?

II.

Misrata, Libya  
Habeebi just take the boat.  
In front of you: Bahr.  
Behind you: Harb.  
And the border, closed.  
Your Sea, Mare, Bahr. Our war, our Harb.

III.

Augusta, Italy  
Where is the interpreter?  
This is my family.  
Baba, mama, baby all washed up on the shore. This is 28 shoeless survivors and  
thousands of bodies.  
Bodies Syrian, Bodies Somali, Bodies Afghan, Bodies Ethiopian, Bodies Eritrean.  
Bodies Palestinian.  
Your Sea, Mare, Bahr. Our war, our Harb.

IV.

Alexandria, Egypt  
Habeebi, just take the boat.  
Behind you Aleppo and Asmara, barrel bombs and Kalashnikovs.  
In front of you a little bit of hope.  
Your Sea, Mare, Bahr. Our war, our Harb.

V.

Maps on our backs.  
Long way from home.

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My profound gratitude to my family, for their loving and courageous example of survivance. Through war and peace, you have shown me the way: seguimos en la lucha!

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## ABSTRACT

This project centers Kurdish women in modern-day Syria, as native to the land, to demonstrate how Syria's deployment of state biopower produces statelessness and refugee-ness among indigenous communities. Borrowing Michel Foucault's notion of biopower and Yen Len Espiritu's reconceptualization of the refugee, I frame the minoritization process of Kurds during the French Mandate period, their subsequent denationalization from the nation-state, and their violent displacement and dispossession that is forcing them to become refugees of war during the 2012 Syrian war, as technologies of exclusion, in the context of colonialism, empire, and war for the past 100 years, that are not over. I seek to answer what are the ways in which Kurdish women's movements across Mediterranean waters are represented in public discourse? Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) I analyzed a sample of 28 newspaper articles that I obtained from ethnic media in the first five years of the war. I examined semantic strategies of marginalization to theorize about hierarchies of power, to help us remember the violences of a colonial past that are in danger of being forgotten, and to unpack ideological underpinnings of discourse that have become naturalized and may be out of vision through the 'feminization of the Orient' and the 'Orientalization of the feminine' (Dobie). My analysis shows three emerging themes: refugees as burdens to the nation, [white] savior narratives that deploy humanitarian discourses, and the prominent (in)visibility of Kurdish women in public discourse. As Kurdish women's bodies wash ashore, they enact their agency, even in death.

## Introduction

After my arrival to the United States, I remember seeing a short story on the local paper where I lived, about a Central American family who had immigrated to Northern California during the 1980s war<sup>1</sup> in El Salvador. The headline caught my eyes because the story was about my homeland; as I flipped the pages, I could easily recognize the people portrayed in the picture, but I could not make sense of the story written about my family and me. There we were, framed by a rhetoric of ‘making it’ and ‘being grateful’ for the opportunity to achieve the ‘American dream.’ In as much as I tried to share our story in the days that followed, the local paper would not hear me out. Cleaning houses, caring for other peoples’ children’s, and doing back-breaking yard work was an imposed idea of the ‘American dream’ that was not part of our imaginaries. This intimate experience with the local paper attempted to erase our stories, invisibilized our political struggles, and took away our agency, triggering in me an inner ‘want to question,’ that, which we see and hear from the media, about those who are vulnerable and whose lives can be bared as spectacles of war. Mostly, I was left wanting to question the silences of war.

Several decades later, I write this paper seeking broader understandings about the ways in which each of us comes to know war from a distance, and the ways in which we are disciplined by the media to ‘read’ refugees and the ‘afterlives’ of war that innocuously may cross our paths and leave permanent marks in our souls. In some ways, this inquiry derives, in part from my story, which upon my forced displacement from El Salvador in the 1980s, placed me in an apartment complex on 21<sup>st</sup> street, along with a handful of families from Vietnam, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Afghanistan. Since none of us spoke enough English, we shared many meals and laughter together and almost never spoke about anything, much less about the ‘wars’ that brought us together to that place, except for remembering our dead. Yet, I always pondered about the conversations that we could have had, but that we never did, the tears that we never shed, the anguish that we never showed, the memories that we never shared... and, how we could go on, as if our ‘afterlives,’ were the only lives left within us that mattered, in the aftermath of war.

Several decades later, as Western empire and war continue to ravage the global South, my personal interest on refugee stories led me to write this paper, for which the literature review on public discourse and refugees shows that news articles are coded with racialized, gendered, classed, religious, and nativized meanings that obscure refugees’ personal and political struggles. Public discourses on refugees, also hide their histories of colonial violences, which are not understood or are mis-understood, and in danger of being forgotten. Further, this body of literature shows that public discourse about refugees functions to frame difficult political issues such as immigration and war, to center humanitarian discourses that deploy state controls to manage the lives of refugees and maintain the ‘order of things<sup>2</sup>,’ hiding the system’s vulnerabilities and the evil that war does. Thus, I offer that as we rely on public discourse to inform and keep us

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<sup>1</sup> I refuse the word ‘civil’ in front of war, to highlight its brutality, although I make meaning of it, by associating it with the colonial notion of ‘civilizing the savage.’ To this extent, I simply say ‘war.’

<sup>2</sup> Colonial order of things (Stoler 1995: 46).

connected with everyday happenings in our communities, at home and abroad, the ways in which we come to understand war and refugees are being shaped undoubtedly, by what we are allowed to know about war and refugees, but also, by what we are not allowed to know about them, and their ‘invisible’ afterlives. To understand the significance of the ‘making’ and ‘un-making’ of refugees through public discourse, knowledge production of war, and how refugees function in service of empire, I claim that it is essential to elucidate how power reproduces itself within the modern nation-state, to exercise the right over the lives of refugees, or what Michel Foucault calls *biopower* (Foucault 1990: 140).

To illustrate my claim, I center Kurdish women in modern day Syria, as a case study that demonstrates how Syria’s deployment of biopower ‘makes’ and ‘unmakes’ statelessness and refugee-ness among this community, as they struggle for liberation. I focus specifically, on the ways in which the afterlives of Kurdish women who are at once, stateless and refugees in their own land, are represented in public discourse - or not, to reckon with the histories of violences of French colonialism, empire, and war over the past 100 years that are connected and not over. As the 2012 Syrian war rages, I contemplate it as most Western readers do - from a distance. Even though I ground my work, as a Third World woman of color who survived forced displacement and dispossession at the hands of colonialism, empire, and war in Central America, I acknowledge that from the safety of my privileged positionality, I am simply unable to fully understand what it is like for Kurdish women, to live in the bloodiest conflict of our times.

To frame my inquiry, I borrow from the fields of Critical Race and Ethnic Studies and Critical Refugee Studies to situate Kurdish women as indigenous to the land, to reconceptualize statelessness and refugeeness, and to speak of Kurdish movements across Mediterranean waters as political in my efforts to trace state biopower through the violences of colonialism, empire, and war. In this light, I borrow the term *survivance* from Gerald Vizenor (2008), which he defines as “an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable event” (Ibid 25). I apply survivance to the Kurdish renunciation of a history of French colonial and Syrian state domination, tragedy, victimry, and war, which allows them to declare their indigenous right of succession in an existence that nourishes indigenous ways of knowing and of being, beyond mere survival. I borrow from Yêñ Lê Espiritu (2014) to reconceptualize the refugee as an “intentionalized being who enacts her hopes, beliefs, and politics” (Ibid 14). I apply these refugee re-conceptualizations to Kurdish women, as their stories are ‘barely there’ (Morrison 1989) and as their bodies become powerful sites of critique of the racialized and gendered violences of war against the flesh to allow a re-centering of what Lê Espiritu calls “fragmentary testimonies” that make their existence visible to the violences of the West (Ibid 19). Last, I borrow from Suvendrini Perera (2006), to speak about Kurdish women’s movements across Mediterranean waters, to make-meaning of Kurdish refusals of the Western geographical imaginary that expose the fluidity of international waters and borders and the vulnerability of empire when Kurdish women exercise the sovereignty and self-determination of their bodies. By wetting their

feet and entering in ‘international’ waters, they defy the logics of the state and the international community and confront its violences.

In this context, my analysis shows that in public discourses about the 2012 Syrian war, Kurdish women who are stateless refugees<sup>3</sup> are portrayed, as ‘ahistorical,’ ‘apolitical,’ and thus, (in)visible and their vulnerability functions to center humanitarian discourses that deploy state biopower and [White] savior/rescuer narratives that function in the service of Western empire. At the same time, their movements across international waters in 2015, are barely audible and visible to the West, attempting to deny them agency in this context and any possibility of existence, and much less of being remembered. Except, that when women’s bodies wash up on European shores, their stories surface to light, in undeniable and powerful ways, urging us to meditate about what it is like for the stateless, refugee *Other* to carry her histories and geographies on her back, only to be sunken to the depths of our political divides by the weight of her dreams, hopes, and aspirations for indigenous liberation.

To help us understand the context of Kurdish women’s journeys across Mediterranean waters in 2015, in the first section of this paper, I conduct a brief historical context analysis of the 1962 denationalization of Kurds in modern day Syria, and of their political struggles to survive technologies of exclusion in the borders of four nations until the 2012 Syrian war forces them to migrate to the border sites of empire. Here, I argue that biopower is aimed at subjecting the indigenous body and its reproductive power to state controls, by first imposing Syrian nationality on indigenous peoples and then, by taking it away.

To make sense of technologies of exclusion in modern day Syria, I trace biopower from the French colonial encounter to the Mandate period, which shaped people in this region and dispersed through time and space, well-after Syria’s independence from France took place in 1946. By reproducing the injuries of colonialism and empire and deploying state controls over life that was deemed ‘marginal’ and a ‘threat’ to the new order of Pan Arab nationalism that arose in response to decades of French occupation, Syrian elites first ‘minoritized’ and then, ‘denationalized’ Kurds. This analysis is helpful in re-situating my argument that the Syrian 1962 de-nationalization of Kurds and their current displacement and dispossession during the Syrian 2012 war, are necessarily a continuation of the Syrian colonial past, which is co-constituted as a project of Western empire, that is not over and that seeks to control indigenous existence.

To illuminate the severity of the Kurdish condition in Syria, I borrow the concept of *bare life* by Giorgio Agamben (2005), which operationalizes the indigenous stateless-refugee body, as a site for biopower, where the nation-state and the international human rights regime converge to exercise a *state of exception* on it. While Kurdish communities in Syria are politically and legally (in)visible, their existence is acknowledged by the nation-state, only as the ‘indigenous,’ ‘stateless,’ ‘refugee *Other*,’ *who is* outside of the confines of the nation-state, and whose life is maintained instead of letting die, as a condition necessary for the Syrian state to exercise power over life.

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<sup>3</sup> I use the term *women stateless refugees* instead of the commonly used ‘refugee women,’ to honor the *political* that resides in the intimacy of women’s bodies, before they become labeled through state controls.

In the second section of this paper, I use public discourse as a unit of analysis to shed light on a sample size of 28 newspaper articles published in English by ethnic news media during the first five years of the 2012 war in Syria, about Kurdish refugees. I utilized ProQuest as my database to access Ethnic News Watch™, using the key words: (Kurd) AND (refugee) AND (drowned) OR (rescue at sea), and selecting ‘all ethnic categories’ to obtain these primary data. Utilizing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a method to theorize about relations of power in the production and representation of refugees, I focus on public discourse and language. Recognizing that public discourse is historically produced and power is enacted, legitimated, and reproduced by the ideologies of dominant groups through public discourse, CDA is critical to help us remember the violences of a colonial past that are in danger of being forgotten. At the same time, I use CDA to delink the ideological construction of racism, which I show, is imbricated within the structures of the 28 newspaper articles about refugees that I obtained as my primary data. I accomplish this, by uncovering evidence of semiosis, semantic strategies of marginalization, and *othering* of refugees by dominant groups through language.

To these ends, I attempt to answer questions that were first raised by my experiences of forced displacement and dispossession, which stayed with me all these years, leading me to ask how does state biopower exert power over the life of racialized and gendered refugee bodies that defy their own living in their quest for sovereignty, self-determination, and survivance? How does public discourse on refugees, particularly ethnic media, represent [Kurdish] women in the context of the Syrian War of 2012? How does ethnic media negotiate Western tropes of refugees and stateless communities, and make visible or not, Kurdish political struggles for survivance during the war? And, lastly, how does ethnic media represent or not, Kurdish women refugee movements across water?

Last, as part of my reflexive feminist praxis to confront the ways in which empire defines and memorializes war and its ‘afterlives’ through public discourse, in this paper, I seek to delink war from refugees’ lives and ‘put it on the West’ where it belongs, to make space for refugee voices and conditions of possibility for our futures because refugees should not have to explain the reasons for our being ‘here’ any more than the West justifies their presence in our homelands. I do so, by attempting to illuminate the ways in which the West has failed to understand and remember Kurdish women’s movements across Mediterranean waters during the Syrian war of 2012, by affirming Kurdish women’s struggles for liberation, their humanity, and political agency to the world. Most importantly, I seek to amplify the ways in which we can at least, imagine, the unimaginable active presence of indigenous dreams, hopes, and aspirations for liberation of Kurdish women refugees who cross the Mediterranean waters, and whose lifeless bodies wash at the border sites of European beaches hundreds of times, over and over. For those whom we know not a single name to remember them by, but that through their deaths they enact their beliefs, hopes, and political struggles and make the violences of the West, more readily visible and audible in the most resolute and unforgettable ways.

## Section I. Framework: Historical Context of Kurdish in Syria

Kurds are represented in Western scholarship,<sup>4</sup> as the largest *non-nation-state* and one of the most historically persecuted ethnic and religious ‘minorities’ in the ‘modern’ history of the Middle East (White 2011: 5; Tejel 2008: 8; Mojab 2003: i). As indigenous-to-the-land, Western historians offer that Kurds have shared the land with a ‘mosaic of tribes’ from the Ottoman, Persian, and Russian empires and continuously lived in ‘mountainous territories’ designated as *Kurdistan* since as early as the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, Kurds are also constituted by archaeologists and anthropologists, as ‘one of the first settlements of human civilization’ in Jarmo, in the Valley of Chamchamal, located at present-day Iraq (Fuccaro 2003: 207; Black 1993: 23). Their relationship with the land, has been described by dominant Western narratives, as one encompassing over four-thousand years of cultivating wheat, barley, lentils, peas, olives, almonds, pistachios, and figs:

“It is a land of spring flowers, and waving fields of wheat, of rushing streams and sudden perilous gorges, of hidden caves and barren rock faces. Above all, it is a land where the rhythm of life is defined by the relationship between the people and the mountains” (Black 1993: 23).

Further, Western geologists describe Kurdistan as a ‘different’ geography within the Middle East, highlighting it as a ‘high mountain region’ surrounded by ‘glaciers,’ ‘snow,’ and exceptionally ‘powerful springs,’ which make the low desert lands between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers - the most fertile expanse in modern-day Syria. These Western descriptors, situate Kurdistan as one of the few and most exoticized water-sheds in the Middle East (Izady 2015: 14). In this context, seventeenth and eighteenth century European travelers to this region, interpreted Kurdish movements across the land that are centered on ancient knowledges about water and related to unique seasonal fluctuations between water abundance and scarcity, through the Western gaze, rendering Kurds as ‘nomadic,’ ‘primitive,’ ‘tribal,’ and without ‘place’ in their writings (Ibid 15,16). As such, the scarcity of water in vast regions of the Middle East developed new political meanings during the French colonial project in the Levant<sup>5</sup> (Fuccaro 2003: 206).

With Western visions of modern Middle East geographies, political tensions about water rights rapidly escalated for Kurdish peoples, as mostly non-Kurdish peoples benefitted from Kurdistan’s downstream water. Thus, a colonial biopolitics of ‘displacement’ emerged as a technology of ruling that centered on excluding the originary peoples of the land and attempted to erase Kurdish understandings of water as life (Izady 17). With the emergence of the modern Syrian nation-state in 1946, state biopower has continued to displace and dispossess Kurdish communities through similar

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<sup>4</sup> Western epistemologies, histories, and historiographies about the Kurds are incomplete of facts and muddled with Orientalist rhetoric and evidence of imperial genealogies that essentialize them and demand critical questioning (Dobie xii).

<sup>5</sup> The Levant is a geographical term that refers to modern-day Turkey, Lebanon, and Syria.

technologies of exclusion, such as through their 1962 denationalization, which forced them to become stateless, and later on through the 2012 war, which forced them to become refugees of war. Kurdish political struggles for sovereignty, self-determination, and survivance<sup>6</sup>, are not over.

To appreciate the significance of deeply, historically ingrained uneven power relations that developed between the colonizer and the colonized in this region, it is necessary to situate the European male identity as the locus of desire, subjectivities, and knowledge who, according to Lisa Lowe (2015), positioned *the Orient*<sup>7</sup> as a “critical terrain” of European thought at the time (Dobie 2004: 4). Western fascination with the ‘timeless Orient’ in the eighteenth century, resulted in an acute phase of French colonial expansion in the Orient, through the establishment of national policy in 1870, or what it is known as “*mission civilisatrice*”<sup>8</sup> (Ibid 5), when the “scramble for Africa” began, although the ‘Eastern question’ or partition of the Ottoman Levantine territories, which include modern day Syria, was first raised in France, as early as the 1760s (Ibid 38). During this French expansionist period, the colonies enjoyed a prominent place in the national consciousness of France, which allowed the centering of the Orient at the heart of prolific European artistic and literary production, which serves as evidences of the “citational repertory of Orientalism” that Edward Said speaks of (Ibid 5; Said 1979: 20).

Further, ethnography enabled European superiority to be defined, by its ability to travel and gather information that represented others as primitive and backwards, in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, which justified conquest and colonial occupation. These expansionist logics of imperial domination were consolidated by Enlightenment philosophies through the exclusion of racial, gendered, and cultural identities and a policy of replacing indigenous practices in the colonies, including European infatuation with unveiling the ‘femme Oriental’<sup>9</sup> (Dobie 2004: 11).

The Oriental woman, emerged in travel literatures in the late 1600s, as a figure of speech denoting mystery and enigma, triggering associations with harems and veils, eunuchs and despots<sup>10</sup>, criminality, perversion, neurosis, homosexuality<sup>11</sup> and contagion<sup>12</sup>, emphasizing features of ‘Oriental life’ while simultaneously erasing differences between women from various Eastern regions, ethnicities, cultures, and religions. The Oriental woman played a central role in defining France’s relationship to the Levant, through rigid European ideas about gender relations in the Orient that

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<sup>6</sup> Survivance is an active resistance, a native presence, the continuation of native stories that beholds the heritable right of succession; it subordinates survival’s implications of escaping from catastrophe and marginal preservation, reducing the power of the destroyer. It (Vizenor 2008: 1, 25).

<sup>7</sup> The Orient was defined as Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Iran in the works of Maxime du Camp and Gustave Flaubert, 1830.

<sup>8</sup> Civilizing Mission

<sup>9</sup> Oriental Woman

<sup>10</sup> Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters*, 1721

<sup>11</sup> Paul Rycout’s “Present State of the Ottoman Empire,” 1668

<sup>12</sup> Montesquieu’s *Esprit des Lois*, 1748

feminized the Orient and Orientalized the feminine, ascribing the Oriental woman with ‘foreignness’ and ‘Otherness,’ and blaming her for destabilizing and disrupting the ‘order of things’ (Ibid 1, 2; Stoler 2010: 46). Moreover, the Oriental woman was also depicted as passive and submissive to her husband, but indolent in the harem<sup>13</sup>, whose interests were mostly on “smoking, drinking coffee or tea, going to the baths, and beating their children” (Dobie 2004: 43). The veil was equated by Montesquieu (1748), as the reason why the voracious sexual appetite of the Oriental woman of warm climates needed to be ‘enclosed’ in the harem and ‘covered,’ serving as a rationale of Western desires to (in)visibilize her. This premise was also used by Montesquieu to ponder if European women should be allowed in political life, making note that “a discourse in the harem is a discourse on gender in France,” which indicated the concerns of the time, to control the discourse on sexuality in Europe, equating sexuality with power and politics, through European male anxieties about the Orient (Ibid 50, 52).

Simultaneously, Western desires to unveil the Oriental woman were first recorded by Charles Nicolas Cochin’s Encyclopedia (*Encyclopédie* of 1764), who portrayed the act of unveiling as way of finding the ‘truth.’ In an 1862 letter to C. A. Sainte-Beuve, Gustave Flaubert writes: “Neither you nor anyone, no ancient and no modern, can know the Oriental woman for the reason that it is impossible to visit her” (Ibid 1). Additionally, according to Dobie, Denis Diderot’s *The Indiscreet Jewels* (*Les Bijoux Indiscrets*, 1748), Claude Prosper Crebillón-fils’ *The Sofa* (*Le Sopha*, 1748), Princesse Cristine di Belgiojoso’s *On Women’s Condition and of Their Future* (1866), Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s *Letters from Turkey* (1716-18), and Gustave Flaubert’s *Travels in Egypt* (*Voyage en Egypte*, 1717), first captured the Orient as “a compliant female body that invites penetration and possession, but that it is an impenetrable veiled body” (Ibid 32-34). Lastly, she cites Montesquieu’s *The Spirit of Laws* (*Le Esprit des Lois*, 1748), as the most extensive account of Oriental life by the West during colonial times, represented the military superiority of the West as dominant over cultural differences of the Orient, which were elucidated through the unveiling of the Oriental woman (Ibid 36). In general, questions of sexual difference between the West and the Orient caused great anxiety in Europe, particularly in France, shaping the colonial politics of race and gender in the colonies, as the native woman’s body was ascribed as a ‘dangerous alterity’ that needed to be ‘neutralized’ not destroyed, becoming a metonymy for colonial governance (Ibid 37). Montesquieu’s writings went onto compare France’s imperial dominion of the Orient as “a tree whose over-extended branches drew all sap from the trunk and do nothing but, give shade,” which scholars have interpreted as a metaphor for a ‘penis,’ to illustrate the intermingling of colonial discourse of power with the thinking of sexuality (Ibid 56). His representations of the colonies as “dangerous over-extensions of the body of the nation that transmit disease,” and of the colonial encounter between two cultures as “dangerous a liaison as the encounter between sexes” evidences the anxieties that developed about the politics of race and gender during this time (Ibid 58).

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<sup>13</sup> Flaubert’s *Delightful Places* (1850) and di Belgiojoso’s *Scenes from Life in Turkey* (1858)



Meanwhile, in 18<sup>th</sup> century France, Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality Volume I* (1978) offers that, how the West thinks of sexuality, can be traced to Sigmund Freud's claims that sexuality was repressed by the ruling class' efforts to control the working class' activities outside of work, which coincided with the development of capitalism (Ibid 5). Unlike Freud, Foucault poses that instead of silencing the discourse on sexuality, repression functioned to intensify it, as I have shown through Dobie's analysis of Montesquieu's writings of the management of empire and of the colonial rule in 'the Orient' (Ibid 5, 10). In this light, Foucault offers that sex became an essential sphere in the exercise of institutional power that built a political, economic, and technical incitement to speak about it and hear it, through authorized discourses of the West (Ibid 18, 23). As such, techniques of institutional power that allowed for sex to be managed as a tool for "population control," included birth rates, death rates, life expectancy, fertility rates, health status, illness patterns, diet, habitation, criminalization, etc. These techniques were first located at the intersections of life and institutions, allowing sex to become a public issue between the state and the individual (Ibid 25, 27-30). Everyday occurrences in the sexual life of the village, were managed through judicial action, medical intervention, careful clinical examination, therapy, and theoretical elaboration which coincided with the fixing of European superiority through Orientalism and racisms that occurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and that were exported to the colonies around the world (Ibid 31-33). From this perspective, Foucault sees the discursive 'explosion' surrounding sex that was imposed by the *Age of Reason* to be in service of maintaining the Victorian bourgeoisie's power, the purity of race through bloodline and chastity, and legitimacy of their caste through marriage and fertility (Ibid 118, 121). Hence, the techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations, marked the beginning of an era of *biopower* during a time in which power transitioned from a society that relied on 'blood' to a society that relies on sexuality, disciplining discourses, and the management of life, instead of the menace of death (Ibid 140).

In his analyses, Foucault proclaims that the right of death over peoples' lives that was exercised in absolutism, was eventually replaced by the state's right over the life of people in capitalist societies, linking sexuality to the production of knowledge and the juridico-discourses of power (Ibid 136). Thus, biopower - according to Foucault, allows for the disciplining of the body and serves to control populations, for the greater good of all. Deriving from the notion of *patria potestas*, which in ancient times gave the Roman father the right to dispose of the life of his children and slaves, Foucault does not consider biopower a type of sovereign power over the subjects. Instead, he argues that biopower has been historically exercised as a sort of right to rejoiner, where the sovereign - if threatened by enemies, could legitimately wage war and require his subjects to take part in the defense of the state, directly "proposing their deaths," but, if someone rose up to him, he could punish them to death, wielding an indirect power over them, of life and death (Ibid 135). In a 'modern' sense, Foucault offers that the state's right over life, is dissymmetrical in that it is exercised by the right to kill or by refraining from the killing; in other words, the taking of life or the letting live, arises from a historical juridical discursive that comes from absolutist societies in which power was exercised by taking. For instance, the right to appropriate wealth, taxes, goods and

services, labor, blood, etc. levied upon the subjects by the monarch. Thus, here power has been legally exercised as a right to seizure things, time, bodies, and ultimately life itself (Ibid 136). Yet, Foucault argues that ‘taking’ is no longer the main way of exercising power today, but one of the ways. Other elements of modern state biopower, according to Foucault, include: inciting, reinforcing, controlling, monitoring, optimizing, and organizing forces to generate order (Ibid 137).

Underlining the historical shift where the body has a right to maintain life, Foucault stresses that since the turn of the nineteenth century, the irony is that war has become bloodier than ever. He highlights that wars are now waged on behalf of the existence of everyone, where entire populations are mobilized to fight war, in the name of life. Yet, people are killed and massacred in the modern process of managing of life. When at war, one must be capable of killing others, to live. Thus, Foucault situates power at the level of human life - making death, the most secret aspect of biopower and of our existence (Ibid 138). Arguing that if the body functions as a machine that can be optimized, extracted of its forces, and integrated into economic controls by disciplining and punishing it, while at the same time, the body can be imbued with the mechanics of life, birth and mortality, health, life expectancy, longevity - which are intervened by regulatory controls of the state – then, these two forms of biopower, exercise power of death to administer bodies and manage life (Ibid 139). Through these deployments of biopower, according to Foucault, the discourse on sexuality has served to ultimately demarcate the bounds of what is acceptable behavior in society and who can gain citizenship and national belonging, through disciplining and power over life. Last, Foucault’s notion of biopower also allows us to enact that our biological existence can be manifested as political existence, through sex; although, this is a heteronormative concept, sex becomes the means to access the life of the body and of the species, and it allows individuals to access their own “intelligibility, body, and identity” (Ibid 146).

To make meaning of how deployments of power have been directly connected to the body in the historical context, the work of critical anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (2010), sheds light on the French colonial project, where she argues that the colonizing of both - bodies and minds, was central to maintaining the [colonial] order of things through the politics and language of ‘the racial’ (Ibid 4). Stoler’s intervention on Foucault’s theorizing about power, offers that even though state power enveloped in the European setting, he failed to acknowledge a broader imperial context to re-situate European racial and identity formation in the colony, in more complex ways, (Ibid 18). Stoler’s theorizing on the double movement of colonial expansion, proposes that the discourse on sexuality, could not have been crafted in Europe alone, as it needed the formation of racialized bodies to contrast with, and define what a “healthy, vigorous, bourgeois body” should be (Ibid 62, 67, 74, 98). Thus, Stoler argues that Foucault’s notion of European technologies of sex in the nineteenth century developed within a racially charged context in the colony, as the French body needed an uplift from its moral decline, which was achieved through deployments of power on the native body (Foucault 1978: 118, 119). This

analysis allows for a re-framing of the biopolitical state and its discourse of empire, as mutually constitutive and historically bound on French colonialism.

As the colonial project expanded to various parts of the world, Stoler proposes that [European] racial obsessions with imperial discourses on sexuality were not restricted to the colonies alone, and consequently, nineteenth century expansionist practices unleashed anxieties about European identity and citizenship, everywhere. These anxieties, became unsustainable and unmanageable, positioning the European bourgeoisie to emerge from strictly regulating subjugated bodies through coded discourses on race and gender, delineating the morally superior character of the modern European nation-state (Stoler 2010: 41, 78, 137). Through her critique of Foucault, Stoler is careful not to isolate racism's originary moment or to essentialize all racisms in the French colonial period, but to point out how the crafting of European bourgeois identity and colonial politics, add meaning to Foucault's analyses of the discursive of sexuality presented in *The History of Sexuality* (Ibid 10). Additionally, Stoler contends that Foucault's 'grid of intelligibility,' a hierarchy of conflated and collapsed categories of racial, gendered, and classed *Others*, served to create the 'bourgeois-self' in the frontiers of new nation-states, which were articulated on discourses of sexuality and the politics of race that manifested in 'good breeding,' 'proper [child] rearing practices' and notions of 'being European' to delineate the authentic (Ibid 11).

From these theoretical underpinnings, I frame the contemporary political struggles for survivance of Kurdish communities in Syria, in the context of state's biopower through historical attempts to (1) discipline bodies and regulate Kurdish existence, (2) the disavowing of indigenous ancestral practices and their relationships with land and water, (3) the negation of Kurdish identity and existence, and (4) the erasure and (in)visibilization of Kurdistan from 'modern' cartographies that emerged from the legacies of French colonialism, empire, and war (Zeydanlioğlu 2008: 9). Even though these attempts are a product of Western imperial practices and they continue to produce and reproduce the violences that created them, I offer that it is important to critically examine and re-examine - time and time again - the forces by which 'Kurds' and 'Kurdish' in Syria have now become the 'largest non-nation-state' in the Middle East in the past five decades, while simultaneously becoming stateless and/or refugees of war in the past five years. As such, they have been displaced and disposed continually and forced to move across Mediterranean waters, despite their indigenous existence that ties them to the land, for thousands of years.

Kurds in Syria are far from being a homogenous group, as they encompass several languages, religious denominations<sup>14</sup>, and various social, political, and geographic identities (both tribal and nontribal), accounting for approximately twelve to fifteen percent of Syria's population or approximately close to three million people in the Rojava region (Knapp et al. 2016: 19). In the past 100 years, French colonial and state biopower controls have attempted to forcibly regulate them by implementing strategies of

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<sup>14</sup> Sunnism, Shi'ism, Alevism, and Yazidism

fragmentation, considering them historically as a sign of *fitna* or ‘division in society,’ by the ruling authorities (Gorgas 2007: 2). One of the first recorded attempts to regulate the Kurds, occurred during the French Mandate period of the 1920s, lasting through Syrian independence in 1946; during this time, Kurds functioned through affiliation in social, cultural, and political networks, not based on ethnicity; however, the civilizing mission in the Levant established a ‘Kurdish Policy’ in 1925, under the Terrier Plan, which consisted of progressive ethnicization tactics that empowered religious and ethnic groups against the Sunni Arab nationalist majority to create a buffer zone that would be loyal to France, while ‘civilizing’ and ‘sedentarizing’ nomadic tribes; this led to a fragmentation of national space that spanned beyond colonization and independence and that resulted in ethnic, linguistic, religious, indigenous, and classed divisions (Ibid 99).

These and other biopolitical colonial regulations of native bodies, brought many indigenous refugees from Turkey to the Jazira region, as the Mandate authorities sought to ameliorate the economic and political constraints of the times and benefit from refugee agricultural labor and their ‘non-Arabness,’ to fend off rising Arab nationalism. Colonial administrators also relied on Kurdish bodies to suppress the 1925 Druze Revolt, promising autonomy laws to the Kurds in exchange for their cooperation with colonial authorities, but these promises were subsequently denied signaling the rise of Kurdish nationalism through the Khoybun League<sup>15</sup> in 1927, and the 1928 Petition<sup>16</sup>, which was also denied on the grounds of Kurd ‘primordialism.’<sup>17</sup> (Ibid 99-100; Fuccaro 2004: 595). It is during these historical moments that through French intervention, Arab elites identify Kurds as an impediment to Arab nationalism and nation-building, and when Syrian independence takes place in 1946, Kurds are further marginalized by a growing Pan Arab movement that led the social and political direction of the new nation (Tejel 2008: 8, 13, 15; Knapp et al. 2016: 19).

Meanwhile, Kurdish anti-sentiment grew during the Mandate period, when Turkey established itself as a modern nation-state in 1923. Through the creation of a protracted ‘genocide zone,’ Kurds and other ethnic groups<sup>18</sup> were subjected to ethnocide and linguicide, which lasted from around 1924 to 1998, until Kurds were officially excluded from Turkish citizenship in 1999 (Mojab 2003: 3). Around the same period, the government of Iraq unleashed a brutal genocidal campaign against the Kurds, known as *al Anfal*<sup>19</sup> (1998), which resulted in Saddam Hussein’s troops destroying thousands of Kurdish villages, the obliteration of the rural economy and infrastructure of Iraqi Kurdistan, and the killing of thousands of Iraqi Kurds through the use of chemical weapons. *Al Anfal* forced the migration of some 80,000 surviving Iraqi Kurds to

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<sup>15</sup>Khoybun League: (Be yourself) is a Kurdish nationalist movement that sponsored the Ararat Rebellion against the Kemalist regime in Turkey to defend women’s and the nation’s honor (1928-1931) and that led a Kurdish cultural renaissance, including Kurdish women’s voices

<sup>16</sup> 1928 Petition included demands for access to language, political leadership, and regiment aid,

<sup>17</sup> Argument that communities hold a fixed nature and for Kurds, they were ‘hard to unify’ because of linguistic and religious diversity (Tejel Gorgas 8).

<sup>18</sup> Armenians and Assyrians

<sup>19</sup> *Al Anfal* means ‘the spoils of war’

neighboring regions (Black 1993: 27). Chemical attacks ensure annihilation of Kurds in Iraq, as it intended to “cleanse” the region through mass death and deportation. Many reports describe Iraqi security forces rounding up civilians into concentration camps, the most notorious of which was Topzawa near the city of Kirkuk. Adult males and teenage boys were selected from the camps for mass execution, while many children, women, and the elderly perished from disease and starvation. It is estimated that, at least 100,000 Kurds lost their lives in Iraq, most of whom were non-combatants (Rutgers 1988). In neighboring Iran, after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, there were reports of systematic attempts to eliminate the Bahā í Kurd community in 1982, using genocidal campaign tactics that persecuted, tortured, killed, and displaced thousands of Kurds after decades of targeted violence in this region (Affolter 2005: 75).

Despite violence rooted in the colonial experience, Kurds have attempted to resolve their Western-imposed displacements and dispossessions, expressing a desire for sovereignty and self-determination through demands for the establishment of Kurdistan, their homeland. Kurdish negotiations for autonomy and self-determination are evidenced since the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres, and the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne; each time, Kurds were given false promises of sovereignty and self-autonomy and no hopes for Kurdistan to be recognized as an autonomous region (Black 1993: 24). As a result of systematic and layered colonial and statist-practices that sought to exclude Kurds and/or eliminate them (Kuper 1983: 85, 161), Kurdish communities adopted ‘*rebellion*’<sup>20</sup> as a Kurdish tradition of survivance, which they embrace and describe by calling themselves *peshmerga* or ‘those who face death;’ this indigenous ontology, rejects a Western epistemology of death as ‘bad’ or ‘final,’ centering it on their quest for existence (Black 1993: 26). For Kurdish communities, their political struggles for sovereignty and self-determination, and the establishment of Kurdistan, as an autonomous region, embody their right to native succession and of survivance; these struggles for survivance are intimately tied to the land, water, and most importantly to future life, even in death.

Following Syria’s independence in 1946, Kurdish communities were denied the right to nationality, after the 1962 Heseke census. Kurds who could not prove that they had lived in the region prior to 1945, within a 24-hour period, were declared *ajanib* (foreigner) and forced to migrate to the North and Northeast regions of Syria, where they settled down alongside the borders of Turkey, Jordan, Iran, and Iraq. Since then, these common ‘border’ spaces have functioned as the liminal places where Kurds share languages, social and political affiliations, cultural traditions, religious practices, and a sense of community and belonging (Allsopp 2015: 148). As stateless communities in Syria, Kurds who were stripped down of their Syrian citizenship in the 1962 census, could not own property, which led them to severe poverty. Other Kurds who missed the census, were considered *maktoumeen* (hidden) and faced even more relational discrimination than the *ajanib*. They could not apply for passports and travel abroad, work in the public sector, receive health care, stay in hotels, and participate in social and

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<sup>20</sup> Main Kurdish revolts of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: Turkey (1928), Iran (1920), Iraq (1974) and Syria (1962).

political life. They have been also marginalized for decades through various government bans (Ibid 136). For instance, the use of Kurdish languages, the registration of children with Kurdish names, the replacement of Kurdish place names with new names in Arabic, the prohibition of businesses that do not have Arabic names, the prohibition of Kurdish private schools, and the prohibition of books and other materials written in Kurdish have contributed to the vulnerability and marginalization of this community (Knapp et al. 2016: 19, 20).

Since becoming stateless, some 120,000 to 150,000 *ajanib* and *maktoumeen* Kurds in Syria have endured living without citizenship and/or legal documentation and access to vital records, a condition that is passed on to their descendants through reproduction and that attempts to render them structurally ‘invisible’ (Ibid 20). In 1966, the Ba’ath government implemented an “Arab Belt” policy that resulted in the expropriation of Kurdish lands and the installation of Arab settlers in the Halal region. Since then, the Syrian regime excluded, denied, and persecuted Kurds, reducing them to an internal colony used mostly, for economic exploitation of their agricultural labor, modeled after the French colonial period (Ibid 21).

As an act of state biopower, the 1962 denationalization of Kurds in Syria, I argue, is connected to settler colonialism and the logics of *Enlightenment imperialism*<sup>21</sup> where citizenship is imposed on the indigenous body and then, taken away, as a tactic of state biopower to enact itself and exercise the right over indigenous lives, where ‘Kurd’ and ‘Kurdish’ are perceived as threats to the security and stability of the nation and must be relegated to its outer margins. The making and unmaking of statelessness on indigenous bodies through regulations or state biopower, has forced Kurdish communities to live outside of the confines of state, where they exist in a permanent state of suspension inside and outside of the law, simultaneously. By their legal liminality and (in)visibility, Kurds in Syria are forced to inherit their condition of statelessness onto their children. Their basic rights to healthcare, education, employment, property ownership, social and political participation, legal marriage, movement, and historic claim to the land and water are severely limited, relegating them to the outermost margins of Syrian society (Allsopp 2015: 165, 168).

It is in the deployment of technologies of exclusion, such as ongoing displacement and dispossession from land and water, denial of citizenship, expulsion, and denationalization of indigenous bodies that state biopower exerts control over Kurdish lives, to discipline them into docile citizens. While state biopower has shaped the political destinies of Kurdish communities in this region since its colonial inception, it is also important to note that Kurds have also experienced the forces of state necropolitics<sup>22</sup> simultaneously, through the state’s right to kill those who are deemed a threat to the nation (Mbembé 2008: 11; Perera 2006: 643).

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<sup>21</sup> Jodi Byrd. *The Transit of Empire*. 2011:31

<sup>22</sup> Mbembé, 2008

From an indigenous studies' perspective, statist practices involving ethnicization, minoritization, nationalization, and denationalization of Kurdish communities impose the logics of indigenous nonexistence on Kurds, where state biopower engages in 'letting live' strategies, which on the surface, stand in contrast to the logics of elimination that Patrick Wolfe speaks of, when he refers to Native American genocide in the United States (2006). However, when Wolfe speaks about it through a historical claim of the land and water, state notions of 'letting live' begin to blur with the logics of elimination: "The question of genocide is never far from discussions of settler colonialism. Land is life - or, at least, land is necessary for life. Thus, contests for land can be - indeed, often are - contests for life" (Ibid 387). In this context, the denationalization of Kurdish communities and the removal of their land and water, and language ban through Arab Belt and Arabization policies that took place in the Mandate period, can also be interpreted not just as enactments of colonial biopower during state tutelage, but simultaneously, as the infliction of necropolitics on indigenous existence, which according to Mbembé (2008), define the ultimate expression of sovereignty that resides in the power of the state to dictate who may live and who must die. Hence, to kill or to allow to live constitute the limits of state sovereignty. To exercise sovereignty is to exercise control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power in the colony. (Ibid 11).

Further, while the colonial order instituted the norms and institutions that would create the political order for the new nation-state, Syria's reckonings with its own nation-building processes highlighted Kurdish ethno-religious difference, replicating in specific ways, a Eurocentric imperial yearning for a 'homogenous' nation and striving for Arab nationalism in response to French imperialism; these dynamics led to Syria's highlighting of the 'minority' status among Kurds and to internalizing Orientalist practices that constructed Kurdish communities as 'foreign' and 'subaltern' and the '*Other-Other*' (White 2011: 5). Yet, some Western scholarship posits that modern Syria is notorious for its disunity and ongoing political conflicts out of its inability to self-govern, which has allowed the conditions for dictators and authoritarian regimes to rule with despotism to maintain power (Goldschmidt and Davidson 2005: 302). Orientalist accounts of Syrian inability to govern itself and of disunity among its citizenry, contribute to Western understandings of seeing Syria as a contested site of 'non-nation-ness,' where distinctions are made between colonizing and colonizable societies that either assimilate or reject the 'unifying' benefits of empire (Black 1993: 6). In this light, the logics of empire deploy narratives of persistent political unrest to advance continual colonial intrusions and controls that started with European expansionism to that region and that continue today, through war (Fildis 2011: 138).

Even though this study does not focus on examining the trajectories of political unrest or power typologies exercised in Syria, I highlight the importance of recent cycles of protest and paths to radicalization that emerged with the Arab Spring of 2011 in Syria, and that culminated in war in 2012, noting the complexities of geopolitical struggles in the region, from a Western perspective. Additionally, Syria's role as a non-oil producer country, mediating oil and global capitalism between the 'ancient' cultures of 'the East'

and ‘the modernity of the West,’ must be critically considered within an imperial context that is not over, as war rages and Kurd communities continue to struggle for sovereignty, self-determination, and the recognition of Kurdistan as an autonomous region (Ibid 137; Goldschmidt and Davidson 2005: 302; Lesch 2005: 208; Mamdani 2005: 4; Yergin 2011: 447).

As such, I turn to Syria’s contemporaneous moment to elucidate ongoing contestations of power by Kurdish communities that have been (in)visibilized by state biopower through official denials of geopolitical and historical claims to territory, identity, exclusion of indigenous existence from its borders, and cartographic erasures.

In the context of early post-independence, Syria saw the height of pan-Arab nationalism against Western imperialist policies that imposed the state of Israel on Palestine in 1948 (Knapp et. al 2016: 20; Goldschmidt and Davidson 2005: 301, 336); during this time, the Ba’ath Party emerged, promoting Arab unity and freedom and taking the nation in a direction that the West perceived as ‘too militant,’ mainly because of Syria’s stance toward Israel, its alleged involvement with terrorist organizations, and its partnership with the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U. S. S. R.) after their collapse in 1990 (Gallhofer 2005: 12). By the year 2000, when Syrian President Bashar al-Assad took office after the sudden death of his older brother, Basil al-Assad, a military officer groomed by their late father, Hafez al-Assad, to succeed his 30-year rule, Syria was ready for major changes. Even though Bashar was only 34 years of age and a Western-educated Ophthalmologist of the Syrian elite living in London, he began instituting reforms, almost immediately (Lesch 2013: 114). Tasked with ‘modernizing’ Syria through the implementation of administrative restructurings in the Syrian ministries, Bashar granted amnesties to political prisoners, licensed private newspapers, and provided political forums to allow criticism and dissent of the government, which his father had guarded tightly. These changes resulted in the rapid growth of civic organizations, pro-democracy groups, social and political debate, and criticism of the al-Assad regime by the people of Syria. Known as the “Damascus Spring,”<sup>23</sup> the first few months of Bashar’s rule came to an abrupt halt, when the ‘old guard,’ a group of his father’s loyalists in high positions of power, warned him of the deleterious effects of opening the regime’s power base (Lesch 2013: 8). As a result, most of the political changes that Bashar had begun to implement, were reversed and a ‘winter retrench’ set in, followed by years of political violence and inadequate economic and administrative reforms without political reforms - in the sense of not allowing elections and multiple partisanship. As such, the single patriarchal Ba’ath Party that his father helped found, continued to dominate the political landscape of Syria (Lesch 2013: 9, 19).

Ten years later, in the wake of the 2011 Arab Spring, in a public speech given in late March 30, 2011, President Bashar al-Assad blamed international conspirators and the media for the unrest in Syria, citing that ‘they’ (the West), were pushing an “Israeli agenda.” Simultaneously, in his speech, President al-Assad also offered initial concessions and reforms to the Syrian people, including the lift of the 48-year-long state

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<sup>23</sup> June 2000- Spring 2001



of emergency and a new and approved Syrian Constitution that allowed multi-party elections by February 2012 (Lesch 2013: 89, 201; Marsh and Chulov, *The Guardian* 2011).

Despite these changes, at the heart of the contentious 2011 protests in Syria, sociological scholarship suggests that there was significant popular dissatisfaction with dictatorship and authoritarianism, absolute rule, ongoing human rights violations, political corruption, disenchantment with electoral processes, socio-economic decline, unemployment, extreme poverty, the concentration of wealth in the hands of few autocrats in power, and most importantly, the refusal of the youth to continue accepting the status quo, were among the causes (Kurzman 2012: 385). Despite Bashar's public denials of the causes of Syrian unrest and the concessions he made in the Spring of 2011, Syrians were suffering from the same underlying socio-economic vulnerabilities that existed in other non-oil producing Arab countries, which contributed to creating dissent, disenfranchisement and disempowerment, especially among the youth (Lesch 2013: 43). For instance, Syria's economic growth in 2003, was approximately 3 percent after the Soviet Union fell, which was too low to create jobs for its growing population; commodity prices were high, and unemployment was estimated at about 30 percent; altogether, these conditions contributed to the formation of below-subsistence levels for one third of the Syrian people (Lesch 2013: 57).

Additionally, Syria's generally 'closed or semi-closed' political space allowed high levels of government repression and corruption and created popular discontent (Lesch 2013: 46). Syrians had lived in an official state of emergency for the past 48 years. The state's military apparatus and security forces, the *mukhabarat*, were robust and coercive biopower bodies, patrimonially organized, consisting mainly of Alawi troops<sup>24</sup> that functioned to ensure their own survival and boast the secular version of Syrian society to undo Arab 'backwardness' and Kurdish 'primitivism' despite Syria being constituted by a 75% Sunni Muslim majority (Lesch 2013: 5, 51, 105). Given these arrangements, most Syrians were coerced to accept the al-Assad regime's means of maintaining control through violent crackdowns on protesters who threatened to disrupt the system. The *mukhabarat* had tremendous leeway to ensure state control and protect the regime, not so much by killing and disappearing in secrecy, but by making a spectacle of the killings and disappearances, so that others would remember its power over life and sometimes, death. The accumulation of power of the *mukhabarat* over the years, led to the systemic recklessness of the al-Assad's government, which eventually failed during the Arab Spring protests of 2011 (Lesch 2013: 65, 66). State repression further ignited protests, as state-sponsored violence can generate moral shocks with the public and sometimes with the international community (Jasper 1998: 6). Social Movements' scholars believe that the Syrian government's violent responses to protests, may have pushed challengers into more radical forms of organization and dissent, as they argue that the Syrian peoples became convinced that a complete state reform would be the only

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<sup>24</sup> The al-Assad family is a member of this Shia Islam sect,

goal of the protests (Goodwin 2001: 10, 50). Similar processes have been documented in other parts of the world, such as in El Salvador, which in 2016 became second to Syria, for its high homicide levels<sup>25</sup> in peace time (Almeida 2008: 126, 150, 161, 169).

In response to public uprisings, the Syrian military forces crushed popular dissent with blatant violence, which merely hardened the protesters' resolve to demonstrate in the streets. When the *mukhabarat* opened fire on peaceful demonstrations, people demanded that al-Assad resign. Towards the end of the spring of 2011, Western media reports from Syria indicated that despite massive repression from the regime, Syrians continued to protest in the streets, voicing their grievances against the al-Assad regime and demanding its end. Protestors shared civil resistance techniques involving strikes, demonstrations, marches, and rallies during sustained periods of time, as well as, the innovative use of social media to organize, communicate, and raise awareness in the face of state attempts at repression and internet censorship. For example, the unrests in Dera'a spiraled out of the control of the local authorities and dozens of people were killed, as tanks shelled residential areas and troops stormed homes, rounding up those believed to have attended the protests. Despite the use of lethal means, the government's crackdown failed to stop the unrest in Dera'a, triggering more anti-regime demonstrations in other towns and cities across the country, including the cities of Baniyas, Homs, Hama and the suburbs of Damascus (BBC 2011-2012 *Syria Reports*).

By June of 2011, there were news reports of widespread torture and massive repression, especially in the highly publicized case of 13-year-old boy, Hamza Ali al-Khateeb, who was kidnapped, tortured, and killed by the *mukhabarat*. This horrific case outraged the Syrian community and the public's perception that the al-Assad's regime had to go. As people launched to the streets to protest, the *mukhabarat* increased its presence and use of lethal force on them, leading to violent clashes (Lesch 2012: 51). Social movement scholars theorize that in non-democratic settings, when marginal constituents view opportunity and threat as ideal moments to voice their grievances, they may either be driven by the relative 'openness' of the system to protest and make demands or they may be pressed into action in response to the 'closeness' of the system, in fear of losing what goods and rights they currently have (Almeida 2008: 347). In the case of Syria - a generally closed system, as grievances went unheard and government repression escalated, protesters responded with more protests, instead of retreating. With threatening conditions peaking to an all-time high, scholars theorize that the social movement 'radicalized,' culminating in one of the most devastating wars in the modern history of Syria, that continues today (Bhardwaj 2012: 85; Mansfield and Snyder 2012: 729).

More research needs to be done to understand the complexity of these extraordinary historical events that led the protests in Syria in the aftermath of the 2011

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<sup>25</sup> Planas, Roque. How El Salvador Became the World's Most Violent Peacetime Country.

[https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/el-salvador-most-violent-country\\_us\\_56d9e239e4b0000de4047fbc](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/el-salvador-most-violent-country_us_56d9e239e4b0000de4047fbc)

Arab Spring, to a path of radicalization and war. With the caveat that it is too soon to understand the full implications of these ongoing events, I can - at the very least, assert that -in the context of empire and war, these events are transforming the history of Syria, the Middle East and North African (MENA) region countries, Europe, and the world, and their interconnectedness with one another, forever changing the lives of millions of people, who have been forced to become refugees.

Since the start of the war in Syria, an April 2016 Aljazeera report indicates that international human rights community estimates show that more than 400,000 civilians have been killed during this period; many argue that the actual death toll in Syria far exceeds estimates by the United Nations (UN). Given the inaccessibility of many areas and the complications resulting from conflicting Syrian Government and armed opposition groups' statistics, the UN no longer keeps track of the death toll (Aljazeera News, 2016). Meanwhile, 2017 reports by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimate that the number of refugees who left Syria in the past five years, has surpassed five million (5.1 million), while another 6.3 million Syrians are internally displaced, noting that this conflict has now lasted longer than World War II (UNHCR 2016 Mid-year Report). Meanwhile, data on Kurdish refugees from Syria are inconsistent and/or lacking.

In their struggle for survivance, refugees of the 2012 Syrian war - including Kurdish families, have fled to neighboring countries such as Lebanon, which hosts more than one million refugees, Jordan with approximately 667,000, Iraq with 233,224, Turkey with over three million, and thousands more remain unregistered and spread across Egypt and north Africa. The UNHCR 2017 Report also estimates that about 884,461 asylum claims have been filed in Europe between 2011 and 2016. Of the five million refugees from Syria who were forced to migrate to neighboring countries, only 250,000 have been resettled. Thousands more have registered with the UNHCR, but have not received 'refugee' status. Hundreds of thousands more have fled to Gulf countries, which are not part of the 1951 Refugee Convention, such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and United Arab Emirates and therefore, they will not register refugees (<sup>26</sup>Aljazeera News, 2017). Little to no information has been collected and/or released specifically about stateless Kurdish communities who fled from Syria. The Syrian Center for Policy Research,<sup>27</sup> estimates that since the start of the war, the life expectancy of Syrians<sup>28</sup> has dropped from 70 to 56 years, a 14-year drop in five years; and, they estimate that the total cost of war is estimated at around \$255 billion dollars so far, which they argue, completely wipes out the Syrian national wealth (Bernard 2016).

The severity and devastation of unprecedented forced migrations by war in such a brief time, is a manifestation of biopower, which operates under the notions of killing in the name of war to defend the nation under siege, while letting refugees live. Meanwhile, the forced migrations of millions, according to Western scholars, have escalated

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<sup>26</sup> UN: Number of Refugees Passes Five Million

<sup>27</sup> 2016 Forced Dispersion Report

<sup>28</sup> Unknown about the life expectancy of Kurds

international tensions in the region and attracted contested reactions from the global North about refugee movements from the South, which biopower has attempted to control through the closure of borders and the securitization of tent cities; at the same time, the inability of the West to contain refugee movements across borders and international waters poses new scholarly questions about the limits of biopower by how refugee movements decenter the nation-state through their survivance. With the rise of transnational fundamentalist factions, such as the Islamic State (IS), huge swathes of territories across Iraq and Syria have been violently disputed among these groups, adding an additional complex and violent dimension to the conflict in Syria; as the threat of war spreads to neighboring countries, the possibility for ‘a peaceful’ resolution becomes more elusive than ever. Without an end to the violences of war, Western scholars speculate that Syria could become a ‘failed’ state (Lesch 2013: 105).

Despite the unsettling numbers about the human cost, the direct and indirect effects of war in Syria that vast amounts of media and human rights organizations report, I argue that little is known about the displacement and dispossession and of the lives and deaths of Kurdish peoples in Syria, especially women. I point out these numbers, as a way of showing that Kurdish stories are lost in the myriad of reports written about refugee experiences of displacement, dispossession, forced migration, injury, and death. Furthermore, I situate Kurdish (in)visibility in Syria’s colonial and imperialist context, which Foucault’s notion of bio-power elucidates as being operationalized within an assemblage of relations of power at the state level, but also as Dobie and Stoler point out, along the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, religion, language, nativity and indigenous origin (Stoler 2010: 10, 16; Dobie 2004: 42, 11, 15).

From this perspective, I cite Espiritu’s reconceptualization of refugees (2014) as “intentionalized beings” whose agency demands our attention to their enactment of “hopes, beliefs, and politics” in their lives (Ibid 14). While Espiritu’s work on the militarized refugee points out that war is an important historical and discursive site of refugee formation and articulation of nationhood, she directs our attention to the relationship between war, race, and violence, and particularly to how ‘war-making’ may be profoundly shaped by a “social and cultural world beyond the conference table or battlefield” (Ibid 16). Despite Western epistemologies and symbolisms of war, she urges that we not forget of the “physical violence of “guns and bombs” unleashed on “expendable nonpersons,” those devoid of names and faces family and personal histories, dreams and hopes, politics and beliefs” (Ibid 17). Further, she posits that we must identify the humanity of those who are deemed not human and listen to their “fragmentary testimonies” that speak of things that we cannot see or hear in the narratives that are deemed ‘understandable’ by the West, as according to Toni Morrison, “invisible things are not necessarily not-there” (Ibid 19; Cacho 2012: 10).

The production of stateless and refugee communities by the Syrian state in the last few decades, is in intimate proximity with the systematic elimination of indigenous peoples around the world, as in the case of Kurdish communities and Kurdistan. To this end, the identification of intellectual spaces where we can interrogate the epistemological

gaps and silences of colonial histories of violence and re-envision decolonial practices of sovereignty, self-determination, and survivance are needed. Further, the reframing of Kurdish communities as indigenous and of their struggles for liberation as ‘political’ and as ‘historical’ allow us to lift biopower from Kurdish stateless and refugee bodies, to affirm their claims to the land and water, that protect life. This reframing also allows us to confront state biopower over Kurdish life, which is exercised through violent and exclusionary practices of invasion, occupation, colonization, forced displacement and dispossession, cultural erasure, war, forced migration, permanent detainment, encampment, criminalization, social death and ultimately death – and that appropriate the body, killing the flesh, and reducing refugees to objects of colonial acquisition, accumulation, and Western expansionism (Cacho 2012: 99; Mbembé 2008: 17; Puar 2007: 33; Said 1979: 123). Even when the future of Kurdish peoples remains unknown, their desire for Kurdistan remains central to Kurdish resistance and survivance.

## Section II. Method, Sample, Methodology, Analysis

The historical context analysis of Kurds in Syria shows that state biopower has rendered Kurd communities stateless in their own land and forced them to move across international waters, only to become refugees of war.

In this section, I use Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a method, to examine how the West produces knowledge about refugees that is constituted, expressed, and signaled by language and innocuously encoded in public discourse: “language is a medium of domination and social force... that serves to legitimize relations of organized power” (Habermas 1977: 259).

To theorize about relations of organized power in public discourse about stateless communities and refugees, through language signification, Ruth Wodak (1999) offers that CDA allows for an understanding of public discourse, as *historically* produced, interpreted, and situated in time and space, while recognizing that power is enacted, legitimated, and reproduced by the *ideologies* of dominant groups (Ibid 2, 3, 9). As such, I rely on CDA to help us remember the violences of the French colonial past in Syria, that span over the past 100 years of occupation of the land and that manifested in the colonization of the body and mind during the French Mandate period in the 1920s. I highlight the Kurdish denationalization of 1962, which occurred almost two decades after Syrian independence from France, and that replicated biopolitical forms of colonial governance through the enactment of technologies of exclusion of indigenous existence in the modern nation-state. These colonial violences, which I link to the current Syrian war of 2012, are in danger of being forgotten, as Kurdish communities continue their political struggles for sovereignty and self-determination, as refugees of war.

Concerned with making visible the interconnectedness of things that may be out of vision (Connerton 1989: 11-39), the use of *critique* in CDA to “unpack the ideological underpinnings of discourse that have become naturalized and acceptable, and that seem neutral to most people but, that exert ‘opaque effects’ to participants,” is central to this paradigm (Fairclough 1985: 739). Thus, I use CDA as a method to broaden our understandings of the socio-political context and historical conditions that shape public discourse about refugees to expose the construction of power structures through language:

“Prejudice cannot be regarded simply as a matter of misinformation or wrongheadedness... This is because racial prejudice serves a function, among other things, of maintaining whites in advantageous position relative to blacks. Prejudiced attitudes cannot be changed significantly, independently of the structural relationships to which they [whites] relate.”  
(Hartman and Husband 1974: 41).

Through understandings that language is not powerful on its own, but that it gains power by its use by powerful people (Wodak 1999: 10), I use CDA to critically analyze the language of those in positions of power, who are responsible for the production of knowledge through public discourse about refugees and reproducing the inequalities that it perpetuates. I highlight the *cognitive dimension of control*, which CDA associates to

the ways in which public discourse, such as newspaper, shapes the knowledge, attitudes, values, and ideologies of people in the interests of the dominant groups (van Dijk 2013: 84).

Given that power in democratic societies, is persuasive and manipulative, rather than coercive, public discourse in the media plays a crucial role in manufacturing the consent of others<sup>29</sup>. Therefore, CDA helps me pinpoint how ‘subtle,’ everyday forms of text and talk about refugees that appear ‘natural’ and ‘acceptable’ in newspaper articles, are central to manipulating the minds of people (van Dijk 2013: 85). If the minds of the dominated are manipulated in such way that they accept dominance, I borrow the term *hegemony* from Antonio Gramsci (1971), to describe the controlling of the minds of people (Hall 1986: 8, 10).

In *Elite Discourse and Racism* (1993), van Dijk offers that CDA decodes racism in the everyday negative opinions, attitudes, ideologies, and subtle conditions of discrimination against communities of color – including refugees, that function to maintain dominance. CDA also decodes racism in cultural dominance, differentiation, and exclusion of people’s languages, religions, customs, or worldviews, which is inexorably linked to the racialized and gendered criteria produced by white Eurocentrism (Ibid 5). Yet, research shows that as practitioners of racism uphold liberal political philosophies and democratic egalitarianism, they emphatically deny that they are ‘racists’ (Ibid 9). From this perspective, CDA delinks the ideological construction of racism, which according scholars, is imbricated within the structures of newspaper reporting about dominated groups, uncovering evidence of ‘*othering*’ and *stereotyping* by dominant groups that surface in uneven power discourses (Ibid 10).

Through CDA, I show in my analysis, that these practitioners of racism engage in racialized discursive strategies that blame *refugees* for their social, economic, and cultural disadvantages which manifest in newspaper discourse to exert ideological dominance (Teo 2000: 8). Further, CDA allows my analysis to demonstrate that power and access to public discourse are co-constitutive of one another, as the more powerful groups and institutions are, the more access to shaping public discourse they have. Similarly, the lack of power among refugees is measured by their lack of access to public discourse and to telling their stories (van Dijk 1993: 258).

Lastly, my analysis incorporates van Dijk’s formation of a discursive about *us* and *them*, which emerges through ‘negative statements about *them*’ and ‘positive statements about us;’ through what van Dijk calls *semantic strategies of marginalization* (Ibid 265), I seek to demonstrate how dominant groups use language against dominated groups, to discredit them. Among semantic strategies of marginalization in my newspaper sample, I look for *argumentation*, where negative facts in refugee stories arrive from ‘the facts;’ *rhetorical figures*, where enhancement of ‘their’ actions and denial of ‘ours’ are amplified; *lexical style*, which occurs with the choice of words that imply negative evaluations; *negative storytelling* of events personally experienced by others; *headlines*, where structural emphasis of ‘their’ negative actions are highlighted; *quoting* of only

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<sup>29</sup> Chomsky 1986

‘credible’ experts; and *humanitarian discourses* that emphasize ‘equality for all’ but that hold Western values on gender, class, caste, religion, language to differentiate and oppress communities of color (Ibid 265).

To gather data for my analysis, I utilized ethnic media as my primary source. My newspaper data search spans from January 1, 2012 to December 31, 2016, given that during this five-year period, UNHCR data show that the highest number of Mediterranean Sea crossings in history, from the Syrian-Turkey regions to Europe took place in 2015, with an excess of 300,000 people reaching European coasts and over 2,500 drowning or gone missing at sea (UNHCR News 2015).

To accomplish this task, I relied on ProQuest, a database with access to 20 million pages and three centuries of global, national, regional and specialty newspapers, including access to Ethnic NewsWatch™ (ENW). ENW is the only periodical resource that covers full text publications such as newspapers, magazines, and journals of the ethnic and minority press and provides access to more than 2.5 million articles from over 340 community publications. This periodical resource offers the following ethnic categories: African American, Caribbean/African, Arab/Middle Eastern, Asian/Pacific Islander, European/Eastern European, Hispanic, Jewish, and Native People. Additionally, ENW provides visibility into newer ethnic groups as they form distinct communities and develop their own presses. New ethnic presses are continually being monitored and new titles are added frequently. The ENW database is updated daily, with new content (ProQuest at ProQuest.com). I selected this periodical resource because sociological research on media, offers that ethnic media provides access to perspectives that may often go unnoticed, but that are crucial to understanding relations of power that impact among others, patterns of cultural transmission an assimilation among immigrant communities living in the United States (Viswanath and Arora 2000: 47-50).

To obtain my data sample, I conducted newspaper searches of articles published by ENW in English, in the five-year period described above. Using the key words: (Kurd) AND (refugee) AND (drowned) OR (rescue at sea), I selected ‘newspapers’ as the only document source and chose all ethnic categories.

To The total sample size yielded for this five-year period through multiple searches, under the above criteria, is 28 ethnic press articles in English that do not repeat.

Among limitations in my analysis and data sample are, the key words I selected for my query. These words (‘Kurd,’ ‘refugee,’ ‘drowned,’ ‘rescue-at-sea’) are very specific and limit finding refugee stories relevant to only Syrian Kurdish refugees, and only in the context of drowning and or being rescued at sea, denoting my intent to focus on a fragment of the totality of their lives. This choice, I recognize, could result in articles that sensationalize and even manipulate refugee stories for political reasons or economic profit. At the same time, the specificity of the query and the small sample of articles that my search yielded, allows me to think how public discourses on refugees contribute to framing Kurdish (in)visibility in ethnic media.



In selecting news stories published only in English, I believe limits the amount of data and especially, the content of the data that I analyze for this inquiry, given that there are thousands of ethnic press publications in languages other than English, serving diverse audiences around the world, which were not selected for this analysis. The perspectives of stories that were omitted from my research could have provided different findings. By privileging English to obtain primary data, I acknowledge that the framing of public discourses on refugees may be contextualized from the perspectives of the West, which raises my suspicions about the interconnections of ethnic press with empire.

Additionally, the dataset produced by the query will inevitably change in the future, as the 2012 Syrian War will likely continue after the date of this paper's publication. Given that ENW adds new articles to its database on an ongoing basis and not necessarily on a chronological basis, there may be additional articles that can be incorporated into this analysis. Moreover, the possibility that there may be further ethnic press sources that are not currently incorporated by ENW in its search engines, must be also considered.

Lastly, the question of who owns ethnic press, who writes for and edits ethnic press publications, and what are any potential affiliations or conflicts of interests with main stream media, that are obscured in the searches I conducted, cannot be disregarded. While this question is not the focus of this paper, it allows me to think about the prominence of the news media in our lives and of public discourse as a tool for Western hegemonic thinking and domination. At the very least, one must ponder on how powerful media affiliations may function to shape the ideology of dominant groups and privilege empire.

Moreover, in analyzing the 28 articles in the sample, I note a few general, but interesting observations outside of the thematic analyses, such as the inconspicuous deployment of *semiosis* when we speak of refugees and associate specific signs to certain words to produce 'coded' meanings or *signification*. Semiosis is at the heart of what CDA seeks to expose, such as when negative coded associations of *them* compared to positive coded associations of 'us,' seem 'natural' and they become 'credible.' These subtle controls of the mind, through semiosis, function to enact, legitimize, and reproduce power in public discourse, as part of white dominance.

For instance, the proximity of the word 'refugee' to the negative meanings of words such as 'terrorism,' 'war,' 'conflicts,' 'crisis,' 'murder,' 'Muslims,' 'immigration,' 'routes,' 'threats,' 'casualties,' Arab-Americans,' 'social integration,' etc. in contrast to the proximity of 'the [White] savior' with the positive and or powerful meanings of words such as 'Prime Minister,' 'Senator,' 'politician,' 'Jews,' and its associations with words such as 'law,' 'humanitarian aid,' civil law,' 'leadership,' 'traditions,' 'international relations,' 'immigration policy,' 'international organizations,' 'family,' 'sponsor,' and 'theology,' can be found at a quick glance in the subject classification of each article, produced by ENW, and which I illustrate with a few examples below:

## Figure 1

**Table 1: Signification by proximity in “Subject Classification of Articles” by ENW**

<i>Article</i>	<i>Subject Classification by ENW</i>
<b>Dames for Humanity to Sponsor</b> Family of Syrian Refugees	Initiatives; sponsors; <b>refugees</b> ; French Canadian
<b>Jesse Jackson, Officials and Community Leaders Urge Welcoming</b> of Refugees	Clergy; <b>refugees</b> ; terrorism; war
<b>Migrant Crisis: What is the Next Route Through Europe?</b>	<b>Refugees</b> ; boundaries; migration; routes; conflicts; quality of life
<b>Sen. Stabenow: We Should Accept More Syrian Refugees</b>	Senators; <b>refugees</b> ; humanitarian aid; civil war
Pictures of <b>Drowned Syrian Boy</b> Shock World as Refugee Crisis Grows	Drownings; boys; <b>refugees</b> ; war; management of crises
What a <b>Syrian Hanukkah</b> Custom Can Teach Us About the Refugee Crisis	Jews; Hanukkah; traditions; <b>refugees</b> ; civil war; immigration policy
The <b>Jewish Response</b> to the Global Refugee Crisis	Jews; <b>refugees</b> ; leadership; World War II; political asylum
Four <b>Reasons to Think</b> Before Acting on Refugee Crisis	<b>Refugees</b> ; war; social integration; Muslims; politics; morality
<b>Managing the Migrants</b>	<b>Refugees</b> ; political asylum; international relations; terrorism
<b>Syria’s Refugees: Testing Our Humanity</b>	<b>Refugees</b> ; civil war; threats; terrorism; casualties; political asylum

In the examples above, semiosis helps identify the power differentials between a refugee and a Prime Minister, and those who have access to public discourse; these power differentials are clearly evidenced in the fact that none of the 28 articles was written by a refugee. From this perspective, the articles’ *Subject Classification* as it appears in ENW, shows the process of signification in the text and talk of refugees, which is imbedded in the content of the articles themselves, as I will demonstrate later. This process contributes to the encoding of racialized meanings and associations to the word ‘refugee.’ Simultaneously, the [White] savior’s narrative, stands in sharp contrast to that of the refugee, as positive associations are naturalized and made credible to produce ‘exceptional’ and ‘benevolent’ narratives, encoded with ‘goodness,’ ‘legal rationality,’ and ‘religious values’ (see Table 1 Figure 1).

Additionally, power differentials are highly noticeable in the 28-article sample analyzed, as not a single article was written by refugees or about them. Furthermore, only

one article in the sample, quoted a refugee. This significant lack of refugee access to public discourse, is a powerful statement in and of itself of power differentials. By delineating who has access to shaping the text and the talk about refugees, and who does not, newspapers - including ethnic press, participate in ideology formation through hegemonic thinking, reproduction, and legitimation of Western tropes about refugees.

Moreover, one third of the articles were published in the *Opinion* section, and two fifths of the articles were published in the *News* and *International News* sections. The *Opinion*, *News*, and *International News* sections of newspapers are *document typologies* that are important to note, because the section in which newspaper articles are published, allows us to demonstrate who has access to public discourses and can influence them. We can also speak of the importance of an issue, based on what section of a newspaper, it appears, as news is organized by the principle of relevance or importance (Bell 1991: 174). Media studies have suggested that media productions are not necessarily always democratic endeavors, and that to compensate for this, the *Opinion* section allows for commentary pieces to help create a sense of democratizing public discourse, and that power and dominance of groups are measured by their control over access to discourse (van Dijk 1993: 257).

In the 28 articles analyzed for this paper, most of the articles in the *Opinion* section relied on narratives of ‘tolerance,’ narratives of ‘us’ versus ‘them,’ the rationalization of ‘fear’ and ‘threats’ that refugees present, and ‘we’ statements that ‘othered’ refugees and that can easily appear harmless and go unchallenged, as illustrated by an article published by Arab American News on September 5-11, 2015, titled “Syria’s refugees: testing our humanity.” In it, the author claims that “Germany is setting a positive example for the world by accepting 800,000 asylum-seekers this year.” Offering asylum to thousands of Syrian refugees, in the case of Germany, may seem as a benevolent act of generosity, but the word *asylum-seeker* functions to ‘other’ refugees; perhaps, this may be an absolution for past atrocities committed by Germans against other groups i.e. the Holocaust, or as exoneration for German colonial violences committed in the African heartland. German benevolence may even be rooted in Germany’s renewed commitment to ‘civility’ in the post-Holocaust years (Malkki 1995: 498). In the end, the rationale for offering asylum to refugees, may be as simple as fulfilling Germany’s economic need for a young, vibrant, and cheap workforce, since their rapidly aging population combined with one of the slowest birth rates in the world, is a demographic threat with direct impact on Germany’s economic future (Anderson 2000: 193).

A similar claim is made in “The picture that let in a million migrants”<sup>30</sup> published by Eastern Eye on September 11, 2015, which states: “Britain is just about the most humane and civilized country in the world, though its tolerance has been tested sorely by the behavior of some homegrown terrorists in recent years.” To depict Britain as

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<sup>30</sup> Anonymous. “The Picture that Let in a Million Migrants.” Ethnic Media Group Ltd., September 11, 2015.  
<https://search.proquest.com/docview/1715942423?accountid=14515>

‘humane’ and ‘civilized’ is to disavow centuries of settler colonialism and violence committed against peoples in the global South. To ‘tolerate’ refugees, is to center Britain’s superiority over Arab ‘barbarism’ and ‘evil.’

An Opinion piece “Four reasons to think before acting on refugee crisis”<sup>31</sup> published by The Forward Association, Inc. on September 18, 2015, promulgates white-anxiety, nationalisms: “How would this influx of people change the face of Europe? Will they prove willing to integrate into European society?”, “Are these immigrants fleeing for their lives, or are they trying to find a better economic and social futures for their families?” Fears of invasion of the European metropole, expressed by Orientalist tropes of ‘barbaric’ peoples who cannot be ‘civilized’ or ‘integrated’ in European society persist, along with populist beliefs that *they* will come and take ‘our’ jobs, ‘our’ housing, ‘our’ education, ‘our’ health care, and change ‘our’ language and religious beliefs. As described by Stoler in her critique of Foucault’s notion of biopower, the state’s management of sex was not confined to Europe, but became an assemblage of colonial politics of race that framed European superiority upon the construction of the *Other*, who was portrayed as ‘different’ and ‘inferior’ (Stoler 2010: 77, 147).

Despite Europe having closed its borders and expanded the architectonics of securitization and the Panopticon<sup>32</sup> of the colonial project to the modern nation-state, European fears that *they* will still come and consume every one of the nation’s resources and drain its coffers, materializes in the notion of the colonial difference. This difference, Said and Arendt argued, justifies the wrath of settler colonialism to impose racism as a technology of invasion, conquest, occupation, and settler colonialisms on the land to exalt European superiority, rationality, and morality and subjugate the *Other*, while appropriating black bodies and indigenous lands for imperial dominance. Most importantly, these fears are rooted in white anxiety, that when *they* come, *they* will unsettle the notion of colonial difference, and expose their humanity, changing the metropole, forever (Ibid 213).

Access to public discourse privileges those in the dominant group to shape the text and talk about refugees; in the examples highlighted above, I have shown evidences of how Wester media associates refugees with negative connotations and portray them as ‘problems to be solved,’ ‘victims in need of rescuing,’ as ‘dangerous,’ ‘backward,’ ‘uncivilized,’ and therefore, dependent on the West. A closer reading of the articles is needed to identify the main themes in the newspaper sample. Figure 2 Table 2, provides a summary of all the articles analyzed in this paper. There are additional findings in Appendix A.

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<sup>31</sup> Lipstadt, Deborah. “Four Reasons to Think Before Acting on Refugee Crisis.” The Forward, September 18, 2015.

<http://search.proquest.com/docview/1717315751?accountid=14515>

<sup>32</sup> Foucault, 2000

**Figure 2****Table 2: Summary of ethnic press publications about Syrian Kurdish refugees at sea**

	<i>Article Title</i>	<i>Publisher</i>	<i>Ethnic Coverage</i>	<i>Publication Date</i>
1	As Western Nations Drag Their Feet, African Children Drown	New York Amsterdam News	African American, Caribbean	June 2-8, 2016
2	During Passover, Welcoming All Who Seek Refugee	MetroWest Jewish News	Jewish	April 21, 2016
3	EU Closes in on Turkey Migrant Deal, Despite Rights Concerns	The Epoch Times, NY	Ankara, Turkey, Germany, Greece, Europe	March 18, 2016
4	Experts Tackle Community Concerns Over Refugee Crisis	Pittsburgh Jewish Publication and Education Foundation	Jewish	March 3, 2016
5	Charlie Hebdo Cartoon Featuring Drowned Syrian Boy Causes Outcry	Charlie Hebdo-France	Arab/Middle Eastern	Jan 16-22, 2016
6	Dames for Humanity to Sponsor Family of Syrian Refugees	The Weekly Gleaner; North American ed.	African American/Caribbean/African	Jan 14-20, 2016
7	Migrants Arriving in Europe Top One Million in 2015	The Epoch Times, NY	Italy, Spain, Bulgaria, Europe, Turkey, Greece, North America	Dec 23, 2015
8	Jesse Jackson, Officials and Community Leaders Urge Welcoming of Refugees	The Arab American News	Arab/Middle Eastern	Dec 5-11, 2015
9	Migrant Crisis: What is the Next Route Through Europe?	New York Beacon	African American/Caribbean American	Oct 22-28, 2015
10	Sen. Stabenow: We Should Accept More Syrian Refugees	Arab American News	Arab/Middle Eastern	Sept 19, 2015
11	New Boat for Refugees: 'If Every Indian American Contributed \$1'	India Abroad Publications	Indian-Americans, Asian Americans	Sept 18, 2015
12	We need a Sensible Solutions for Refugees	Ethnic Media Group, Ltd.	Asian/Pacific Islander	Sept 11, 2015
13	Photo of Drowned Syrian Toddler Alerts World to Refugees' Suffering	Arab American News	Arab/Middle Eastern	Sept 5-11, 2015
14	Pictures of Drowned Syrian Boy Shock World as Refugee Crisis Grows	The Filipino Express	Asian/Pacific Islander	Sept 4-10, 2015
15	Image of Dead Child on Beach Haunts and Frustrates the World	The Epoch Times NY	Greece	Sept 4, 2015
16	What a Syrian Hanukkah Custom Can Teach us About the Refugee Crisis	The Forward Association, Inc.	Jewish	Dec 4, 2015
17	The Jewish Response to the Global Refugee Crisis	Washington Jewish Week	Jewish	Oct 15, 2015

18	What the Aylan Kurdi Tragedy Can Teach Us About the U.S. Border Crisis	La Prensa, San Diego California	Hispanic	Sept 18, 2015
19	Four Reasons to Think Before Acting on Refugee Crisis	The Forward Association, Inc.	Jewish	Sept 18, 2015
20	The Wretched of the Earth	Communication ENG	African American, Caribbean/African	Sept 17, 2015
21	Managing the Migrants	Ethnic Media Group, Ltd.	Asian/Pacific Islander	Sep 11, 2015
22	Europe 2015	Washington Jewish Week	Jewish	Sept 10, 2015
23	The Syrian Refugee Crisis	La Voz Publishing Company, Denver, CO	Hispanic	Sept 9, 2015
24	Turning 31, Pain Mixed with Hope	Arab American News	Arab/Middle Eastern	Sept 5-11, 2015
25	Syria's Refugees: Testing Our Humanity	Arab American News	Arab/Middle Eastern	Sept 5-11, 2015
26	The Picture that Let in a Million Refugees	Ethnic Media Group Inc.	Asian Pacific Islander	Sept 11, 2015
27	Wrong Answer to a Tragic Problem	Irish Voice, Inc.	European/Eastern European	Sept9-15, 2015
28	Eye on the Refugee Crisis	The Jewish Press	Europe	April 8, 2016

In analyzing the content of the articles in the sample, several themes emerged, which I organized into three categories: (1) refugees as burdens to the nation, (2) [white] savior narratives, and (3) the invisibility of Kurdish women refugees.

For each of these themes, I provide examples from the 28 articles that illustrate the relationship between public discourse and power, as evidenced through newspaper claims about the state's right over life or the 'letting live' of populations, as described by Foucault's theorizing; here, biopower is deployed the state on refugees, as part of the colonial project in Syria and of Western imperialist practices in the Middle East that are not over; I identify newspaper statements that signal the logic of war and empire that produces refugees and deploys humanitarian discourses to rescue them, after enacting 'bare-life' through state controls.

To examine how public discourses frame refugees as burdens to the nation or as problems to be solved, I examine an article published on September 17, 2015, by the Montreal Community Contact titled "The Wretched of the Earth." The author makes the following claim: "Meanwhile, the Hungarian prime minister says his Country "will seal its borders" ... And that anyone-adult or child-caught trying to enter the country will be prosecuted"<sup>33</sup>. The article continues to say:

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<sup>33</sup> Thomas, Novel. "The Wretched of the Earth." Montreal Community Contact, September 17, 2015. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1749627567?accountid=14515>

“This country has become so overwhelmed by the human tsunami, that following a series of measures, including building a long- razor-wire fence to discourage immigrants, holding them in cages like animals and throwing food at them, threatening to order its security forces to use rubber bullets, and even live ammunition on anyone who tries to sneak into the country, essentially “threatening the national security,” according to the prime minister at a recent news conference. Hungary says its borders are officially closed.”<sup>34</sup>

The graphic nature of the lexical choices in these statements, I argue, are powerful semantic strategies that create a negative discursive about refugees. For instance, the use of the word ‘tsunami’ to speak of refugees as a rhetorical figure of speech, enunciates negative attitudes toward refugees that instill fear, given that a ‘tsunami’ is signified as a ‘catastrophe’ of high magnitude, a natural phenomenon that threatens the order of any nation-state in unknown and uncontrollable ways; this choice of words, shows a level of prejudice against refugees, that allows for their dehumanization at the hands of the West, only to subject them to brutalizing life-threatening measures that could deny refugees the right to life and most importantly, the right to a ‘good’ life as citizens of a nation-state. “Holding them in cages like animals” and “throwing food at them” are also extremely dehumanizing lexical choices, that allow for the West to rob refugees of their dignity, while highlighting ‘large numbers’ to create the ‘monster’ and then, justify its disciplining.

The “long razor-wire fence to discourage immigrants” statement, I argue, describes Giorgio Agamben’s notion of *State of Exception* (2005), as an example of state biopower being operationalized on Syrian refugee bodies in Hungary, where the Hungarian Prime Minister is quoted as expanding state powers to criminalize anyone - including children, for attempting to cross the border. The targeting of some of the most vulnerable members of a community – children, has been used historically to eliminate any possibility for futurities, especially of ethnic communities, such as in the case of indigenous massacres that targeted women and children in the South West (Guidotti-Hernandez 2011: 25, 81, 102), the forced sterilization of women of color in the 1960s and 1970s (Roberts 1999: 59, 66, 67; Davis 2011: 214), and the most recent forced sterilization of women prisoners in 2006-2010, who were wards of the State of California (Johnson 2013). I offer that, attempts by the nation-state to criminalize children and subject them to the carceral state for exercising their human right to move, become audible and visible deployments of biopower that seek to regulate bodies deemed ‘unintelligible.’

Another example that constructs refugees as burdens to the nation or problems to be solved, appears in a Charlie Hebdo’s cartoon titled “Drowned Syrian Boy Causes Outcry” published by Charlie Hebdo-France on January 16-22, 2016, a week after the first anniversary of the attacks on the Charlie Hebdo headquarters in Paris, which killed 12 people. The article makes the following claims:

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

“A drawing in the French satirical weekly magazine Charlie Hebdo suggesting Alan Kurdi, the 3-year old Syrian boy found dead on a Turkish beach last year, would have grown up to be a sex attacker caused outreach online on Thursday. The cartoon depicts two male creatures running after terrified women with the caption: “What would little Alan have become if he had grown up? A groper in Germany.”<sup>35</sup>

To make sense of the racialized, gendered, classed, and nativized meanings in this article, I start by noting that this multi-million-dollar French corporation, is targeting the lifeless body of a three-year-old stateless, refugee Kurdish boy, whose death on the shores of a popular Turkish beach can be traced to the logics of Empire that displaced and dispossessed, and eliminated him, as the indigenous *Other*, and to France’s settler colonial involvement in the Syrian region, which is directly tied to the taking of land and life, that are not over. These logics aim for the indigenous subject to remain permanently colonized and excluded within and without the legal borders and biopolitical institutions of the modern nation-state, as a condition of ‘being let live’ (Byrd 2011: xix). The anonymous author of this cartoon, who is associated with a powerful corporation, criminalizes the future of a Middle Eastern child, even though it will never be, by deploying orientalist imaginaries that see the child as a sex offender in the European metropole. Left unsaid, but spoken out loud, I point out the author’s racialized, gendered, classed, and nativized contempt against Middle Eastern refugees.

I cite Jasbir Puar’s work “Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times” (2007) and Paul Amar’s “Middle East Masculinity Studies: Discourses of “Men in Crisis,” Industries of Gender in Revolution” (2011), to problematize the incorporation of queer subjects into the nation-state, which depends on Western productions of Orientalized terrorist bodies that are highly regulated by racial, class, and gender national ideologies that function to differentiate the aberrantly sexualized and racialized terrorist body (Puar 2007: 53).

Puar’s definition of the Western ‘terrorist assemblage,’ deploys ideologies that reproduce highly regulated racial, class, gender, and national ideals that define the sexuality of terrorism through “homonationalisms” that function to distinguish the “hetero” and the “homo” U.S. patriots, from the aberrantly sexualized and racialized terrorist Sikhs, Muslims, and Arabs, who are destined to be detained and deported (Ibid 114).

Amar’s research on Middle East masculinities, seeks to demonstrate how everyday theories of masculinity and vernacular discourses of “masculinities in crisis” play crucial roles in misrecognizing, racializing, ‘moralistically-depoliticizing’, and class-displacing emergent social and political forces in the Middle East (Ibid 39). He argues that public discourses of Middle Eastern racialized masculinity operate as tools for

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<sup>35</sup> Anonymous. “Charlie Hebdo Cartoon Featuring Drowned Syrian Boy Causes Outcry.” Arab American News, January 16-22, 2016.  
<https://search.proquest.com/docview/1761603723?accountid=14515>



analyzing political change and social conflict in the region, and for shaping support for the geopolitics of war, occupation, and repression (Ibid 38).

The repugnant Western depiction of the lifeless body of a three-year old toddler through Western hegemonies of masculinities in crisis, attempts to misrecognize and displace the humanity of this young child, by making him a sexual predator before he could even learn to read and write, or even ever set foot on European soil. These orientalist ideologies that racialized and sexualized bodies of children refugees who tragically perish in water trying to reach European shores, demonstrate the worst excesses of the settler colonial, nation-state, and empire, in terms of needing to eliminate what remnants of humanity are left of a child that passed, in his ordeal for survivance.

Given the western's media notoriety of sexual assault cases, allegedly committed by refugees in Germany and in France in 2016, I anticipate Charlie Hebdo's next move of using the memory of this child as Puar coins it on her book, "a monster, terrorist, fag" to gratify Western masculine anxieties related to Europe's inabilities to stop the movements of thousands of refugees across international waters. The proximity of the publication of this article, to the first anniversary of the attacks at Charlie Hebdo headquarters in Paris, is not coincidental, as the provocative nature of the article is likely intended to re-inflate tensions and incite a renewed sense of collective indignation and anger against refugees.

A similar assertion that deploys state biopower on refugees through illustrations of Agamben's state of exception and Foucault's Panopticon, is made in the article "We need a sensible solution for refugees" which was published by Eastern Eye on September 11, 2015, and that states: "Kamall said there were facial recognition and accent experts to tell refugees from Syria apart from economic migrants from other places: "It does not matter how much Arabic I learn, people know I'm not from an Arab country. We only want to see those who are genuine"<sup>36</sup>. In this anonymous statement, the author highlights state biopower to authorize asylum, displaying orientalist racializations and nativisms about Arab and Arabic-speaking refugees. Lastly, he sanctions the West with vetting 'genuine' refugees, which erases the violences of racialized capitalism and globalization in the global South and depicts refugees' suffering as undeserving and their bodies as disposable. A parallel argument is offered by Jamey Keaton's article "Migrants arriving in Europe top one million in 2015" which appeared on the Epoch Times New York ed. on December 23, 2017, claiming that "Migration must be legal, safe, and secure for all - both for the migrants themselves and the countries that will become their new home," which eludes that refugees are a 'dangerous' problem to be solved.<sup>37</sup>

While portraying refugees as burdens to the nation and or problems to be solved is a public discourse about refugees that helps shape negative public understandings of refugees, not always refugees are portrayed in this light; literary reviews on media depictions of refugees, shows that often, refugees as portrayed as *victims* to center the

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<sup>36</sup> Anonymous. "We Need a Sensible Solution for Refugees." Eastern Eye, September 11, 2015. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1715942606?accountid=14515>

<sup>37</sup> Keaton, Jamey. "Migrants Arriving in Europe Top One Million in 2015." The Epoch Times, December 23, 2015. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1761128124?accountid=14515>

human rights regime and deploy humanitarian discourses that appeal to [white] savior narratives. These settler colonial narratives of benevolence and exceptionalism are important to the nation-state because through the deployment of humanitarian discourses, empire can justify invasion, occupation, and war in ‘far away lands’ as part of its expansionist project across the globe.

Examples of ethnic media portrayals of refugees as victims to be rescued, include assertions which appeared in “Migrant Crisis: What is the Next Route Through Europe?” published by the New York Beacon on October 22-28, 2015:

“The UN children’s charity, Unicef, has announced it is increasing help for women and children at reception centers in Serbia and Macedonia, amid fears people could become stranded. “As winter is approaching fast, the immediate needs for the protection and care of children and pregnant women require urgent action” it said in a statement.”<sup>38</sup>

The invocation of cold weather in the statement, plays into the mind’s eye of Western audiences, who through historicized narratives of conquest and war in the European metropole, can retrieve and visualize said imaginaries to envision the inhospitable and unbearable winter conditions that have trumped the aspirations of even the most legendary conquerors and infamous battles. Winter, in these passages functions as a referent for dark times and battles that refugees must fight, in the days ahead, without having guarantees of a new season. In this predicament, ‘reception centers’ function as a hospitable alternative for refugees, who per the Western literary script, yearn for the warmth of humanity to survive. By situating the ‘vulnerable’ and apolitical pregnant refugee, and her children in a winter stage, the story-telling that emerges is one that centers the humanity of the West’s life-saving mission, which cannot take place without the ‘vulnerable’ Orientalized woman. In the end, the human rights regime cannot be as humanitarian, as heroic, and as moral as its liberal political philosophies bestowed upon it, without women.

The depiction of gendered helplessness used in humanitarian discourses by the human rights regime, deploy the controls of the nation-state through reception centers and the militarized camp, to deny women their political agency, while simultaneously highlighting the heroism, benevolence, and exceptionalism of the West and the international humanitarian agencies. The subtle pleas for charitable support of the plight of ‘poor, defenseless’ refugee women and children, are noted to engage the public in the rescuing of the ‘*other*.’ White savior narratives deployed in these lines, naturalize and recreate colonial narratives that ‘civilize’ the ‘savage,’ while distancing from notions of militarized invasion, occupation, and war and the production of refugees itself. The use of women and children refugees, departs from public discourses about refugees that portray men as threats to the nation. While the use of vulnerable women and children as a

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<sup>38</sup> Anonymous. “Migrant Crisis: What is the Next Route Through Europe?” New York Beacon, October 22-28, 2015. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1728411563?accountid14515>

strategy for invoking humanitarian discourses distracts the public from negative perceptions of men refugees that the media creates, this strategy does not seek to unsettle the negative coverage that men refugees receive. In fact, I argue, that this strategy highlights the perception that men refugees are threats to the nation, by only highlighting the vulnerabilities of women and children. Both gendered public discourses on refugees function to simultaneously maintain the exceptionalism and benevolence of the West and the dependence on the human rights regime as justification for war, in the public's eye.

Additionally, Middle East feminist literature reviews show that in the post 9/11 context, discourses about women's safety have been appropriated by the West and used as tools for military invasion, occupation and war, such as in the case of the U.S. war in Afghanistan in 2001 (Eisenstein in Rohrer et al 2013: 1). Further, the work of Rettberg and Gajjala's (2016) shows that in the hashtag #refugeesNOTwelcome, the absence of Middle Eastern women's images depicted on social media, powerfully reaffirms orientalist notions that Muslim nations are places where women are oppressed and in need of rescuing because Middle Eastern men are 'dangerous' (Ibid 179).

Another article titled "EU closes in on Turkey migrant deal, despite rights concerns," published by The Epoch Times, New York ed., on March 18, 2016, asserts a familiar scenario: "At one tent, 29-year old Soukeina Baghdadi warmed herself by a fire shared with neighbors. Like many, she wants to move to Germany and is hoping that Europe's leaders can help."<sup>39</sup>

The story of the young woman refugee, is situated in the context of 'cold' weather and it is highlighted amongst the stories of a group of nameless refugees. By zooming into this woman's blurred profile and allowing her a name to be known, the authors seek to humanize her, without necessarily acknowledging her unknown histories, geographies, languages, stories of love, ambitions and fears. The state controls deployed by the human rights' regime, exert biopower on this woman through the barbed wired of European border sites and her geographical containment within the spatialities of a tent city; I note a careful management of refugees' subjectivities and lives, simultaneously happening, as the authors attempt to create a sense of intimacy in the confines of 'one' tent, a space designed to operationalize Agamben's notions of bare life, where Soukeina's violent emplacement by the West (un)veils.

Although, she is portrayed warming up by the collective fire, the authors assume her voice to speak for her, of her hopes and envisioned future that rests upon European willingness to help. In this tent, life stops for Soukeina. Her legal liminality and political voicelessness as a gendered refugee subject confined to a camp, allows the human-rights regime to deploy state biopower controls to speak of her, as a victim of her own exclusion from the nation-state. There, in a cold tent, a young Middle Eastern woman 'awaits' to be rescued by the West.

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<sup>39</sup> Cook, Lorne and Raf Casert. "EU Closes in on Turkey Migrant Deal, Despite Rights Concerns." The Epoch Times, March 18, 2016.  
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/1780144681?accountid=14515>

These types of media depictions epitomize the “margins of political order” that Agamben refers to, when he speaks of bare life (Agamben 1998: 13). The proximity of democracy and totalitarianism that are enacted within this tent, I argue, developed historically through what Foucault theorizes as the discursive on sex - as a site for the exercise of power. Knowing what political orders are best suited to control and use bare life, is the main difference between these two ways of organizing. Further, once bare life becomes the referent for political order, it loses its intelligibility and it enters into zones of indistinction, where decisions on life become decisions on death (Ibid 77).

The naturalized dislocations of Soukeina’s humanity, seek to erase Soukeina’s will to power and knowledge that Foucault eloquently speaks about and that Soukeina embodied when she first wet her feet to reach European shores. Her movements across international waters are her resistance and her reclaiming of life, through the imaginings of conditions of possibility and new geographies of survivance.

White savior narratives often affirm the paternalism of the West by highlighting the victimhood and dependency of the East on Western rescuers, to speak of refugees; for instance, the Jewish Chronicle article titled “Experts tackle community concerns over refugee crisis” published on March 3, 2016 states:

“Four Syrian families have been resettled in Pittsburgh by Jewish Family & Children’s Services. These organizations aid refugees by providing them a furnished apartment, helping them find employment, teaching them skills such as how to turn on a light and use a shower and enrolling them in English as a second language classes.”<sup>40</sup>

In this quote, the writer portrays refugees as being helpless and overly dependent on [white] saviors, for even the simplest tasks of daily life, such as turning on the shower or the light. This story is consistent with settler colonial narratives of incivility and savagery that justifies the exclusion of the *Other* in society, and that infantilize the *other* by creating paternalistic relations of dependency on the West. By portraying refugees as incapable of understanding basic tasks of daily life without the assistance of [white] saviors, refugees are depicted by Western media, as unable to care for themselves and their environments. These settler colonial discourses of uncivility, justify the racialization and gendering of refugees by the West, allowing the processes of subjection to be institutionalized and centering [white] saviors in refugees’ stories, which become more about the Western protagonist, than about the suffering and or humanity of refugees.

The quote strongly highlights the ‘backwardness’ and ‘primitivity’ of the Orient, in comparison to the modernity and enlightenment of the West by specifically showcasing Syrian refugees’ inability to understand how to operate a shower; this focus makes a direct appeal to colonial depictions of Arabs that refer to them as ‘dirty’ and

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<sup>40</sup> Tabachnick, Toby. “Experts Tackle Community Concerns Over Refugee Crisis.” Jewish Chronicle, March 3, 2016.

<http://search.proquest.com/docview/1774317468?accountid=14515>

‘smelly.’ These practices are commonly found in orientalist discourses and ideologies that reinforce and intensify the notion of difference in negative terms, between the West and the East. Lastly, it is not incidental in this story, to have centered two religious organizations to promulgate ideologies and practices that ‘save’ the ‘barbaric’ *other*. What was left out from the article are the colonial, post-colonial, and neocolonial contexts that explain the conditions by which Syrians have been uprooted from their homelands for the past one hundred years.

Similarly, a Washington Jewish Week article published on October 15, 2015, titled “The Jewish response to the global refugee crisis” states: “What makes this case unique, however, is that for the first time in Jewish history, our community is mobilizing to help refugees – not because they are Jewish, but because we are.”<sup>41</sup>

The preeminence of the uniqueness of the Holocaust as a historical event, may function as a framework in this quote, through which we can make sense of the centering of Jewish classic victimhood and exceptionalism, over that of other refugee groups, not because their suffering is special, but because Jews are – since they are ‘God’s chosen children’ (Finkelstein 2000: 121). In the statement above, this strong sentiment is conveyed through a resolute duty that is unique to Jewish peoples and that positions them to help refugees, in ways that other groups, cannot. This inherent exception for Jewish, signals an almost ‘sacred’ order, which functions to mystify the Holocaust experience, as if it were out of the realm of history and incomparable to the genocide experiences of indigenous peoples in the Americas, African slaves, Cambodians, Rwandans, and other groups. This uniqueness of experience, then solidifies power differences between the [white] savior who ‘saves’ and the refugee who is ‘saved.’

Similar intimacies of this nature, are also apparent in colonial relations between the colonizer and the colonized,<sup>42</sup> and in orientalist discourses between the Westerner and the Oriental<sup>43</sup>. In an article by Bennett Miller published in the Jewish News on April 21, 2016, titled “During Passover, welcoming all who seek refuge,”<sup>44</sup> the author states: “Inspired by the words of the Torah, the stranger who resides with you shall be to you, as your citizens” (Miller 2016). Here, the enactment of the word ‘citizen,’ which Stoler has described through the colonial politics of race and gender and being delimited by having access to sex, functions to re-center the biopower of the nation-state and its controls over life to define who belongs, and who does not. The extension of ‘citizenship’ benefits to ‘Syrian’ refugees from a religious stance, also deploys a [white] savior colonial narrative through the biopolitics of the colonial state that highlights both, the savior’s benevolence and the state’s power over the life of those deemed outside of it.

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<sup>41</sup> Hetfield, Mark J. “The Jewish Response to the Global Refugee Crisis. Washington Jewish Week, October 15, 2015. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1728132278?accountid=14515>

<sup>42</sup> Memmi, A. 2013

<sup>43</sup> Said, E. 1979

<sup>44</sup> Miller, Bennett. “During Passover, Welcoming All Who Seek Refuge.” Jewish News, April 21, 2016. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1788306113?accountid=14515>

In “Eye on the Refugee Crisis”<sup>45</sup> by Eliad Eliyahu Ben Shushan, published by The Jewish Press on April 8, 2016, he asserts: “The beneficial treatment Syrian refugees received at the Galilee Medical Center was highlighted, in addition to talking about social, economic, and ways in which Israel assists Syrian refugees – refugees from a state which has been an enemy to the state of Israel from the moment Israel was established” (Shushan 2016). These claims can also be associated with religious rescuing, which are related to colonial discourses that *save* refugees by depicting them as ‘poor,’ ‘uneducated,’ ‘foreigner,’ ‘stranger,’ and ‘vulnerable.’ Most importantly, these claims deploy the savior’s right to humanitarianism to rescue the vulnerable, which Uma Narayan (1995) refers to as discourses of “colonialist care,” which are based on sustaining existing relationships of power through paternalistic strategies of care that center the savior (Ibid 135; özlem 2010: 298).

Finally, an article published by the Arab American News on September 19-25, 2015, titled “Sen. Stabenow: we should accept more Syrian refugees,”<sup>46</sup> the author speaks of nation-building in relationship to refugees, in the following ways: “Our nation’s founders came to our shores to escape religious persecution, and the United States has a long tradition of providing safe heaven to refugees” (Harb 2015). This quote centers [white] savior narratives, which are deployed to emphasize the bravery and valor of founders in the context of U.S. formation to allow this country to be seen as an exceptional and benevolent nation of religiously persecuted immigrants, who practice the ‘saving’ other persecuted peoples, in this case, Syrian refugees (Johnson 49).

The description of the U.S. in the article, I argue, is very different from the historical realities of a settler colonial nation, borne out of slavery and the forced displacement and dispossession of indigenous communities, and the pilfering of their land, water, and natural resources. The colonization of the land and of peoples’ minds in the U.S. has been possible by practices of violent white supremacist ideologies that have relied on assembling legal violence and technologies of terror to sustain the colonial matrix of power, which maintains the logics of empire on foreign territories and over time and space (Mignolo 2011: 89).

Further, evangelical proselytization is a commonly deployed practice by the U.S. that has functioned as informal policy of ‘soft’ infiltration throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and other parts of the world for several centuries. This policy, thus paved the way for ‘social engineering’ and other intrusive development projects of global capital, including the harmonizing of education across empire through missionary projects such as the American University in Beirut (Makdisi 2011: 85-87). As for the U.S. having a ‘long tradition’ of helping refugees, I argue that, immigration policies in this country have not functioned primarily in the service of refugees, as extensive immigration

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<sup>45</sup>Shushan, Eliad Eliyahu Ben. “Eye on the Refugee Crisis.” The Jewish Press, April 8, 2016. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1787995061?accountid=14515>

<sup>46</sup> Harb, Ali. “Sen. Stabenow: We Should Accept More Syrian Refugees.” The Arab American News, September 19-25, 2015. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1719234655?accountid=14515>

policies have been adopted since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, to keep communities perceived as ‘non-free whites<sup>47</sup>,’ out of its borders<sup>48</sup>. In addition, there are many treaties signed with indigenous nations<sup>49</sup> and Mexico<sup>50</sup> that have not been legally recognized and honored (Dunbar-Ortiz 2014: 185).

Additionally, in the aftermath of War World II (WWII), Holocaust survivors were not initially allowed entry into this country, while simultaneously, the U.S. became a haven for Nazi scientists and Russian defectors. Since Korea, Vietnam and Indochina, U.S. refugee immigration policies have been continually amended to limit the number of refugees from the global South, making the refugee vetting and admissions process more stringent each time (Kerber 2005: 736). At the same time, the criminalization of undocumented immigrants from Central America and Mexico, has resulted in the most robust and aggressive mass deportations program in the history of this country (Abrego 2014: 8, 69, 71). All of this, while the U.S. is involved in occupation and war in many places around the world, producing thousands of refugees. These historical realities, do not support the statement made by Harb in the article cited above, presenting readers with historical misrepresentations and gaps of U.S. immigration and refugee policies.

So far, I have analyzed a few examples of how newspaper discourses make negative representations about refugees every day and negatively influence the ways in which we think of them; at the same time, newspaper discourses about refugees also naturalize this negative thinking, making it acceptable and at times, difficult to decode. To illustrate my point, I offer the notion of Kurdish invisibility - specifically, that of Kurdish women - as the last theme analyzed in this study. To decode Kurdish women’s invisibility in ethnic media representations of refugee movements across water, I highlight the innocence of children, as a recurrent narrative that hides the visibility of Kurdish women and men refugees in the sample analyzed.

I start my analysis of Kurdish invisibility, by pointing out, that in the 28-newspaper sample obtained for this study, only one article did not mention the tragic death of Aylan Kurdi. He was a three-year old Kurdish boy from Kobane, Syria, who drowned at a beach, near Bodrum, Turkey, along with his five-year-old brother Galip, and his mother Rehan, 35, on or around the early morning hours of September 2, 2015. They were among twelve people, including other children, who died that morning, when two boats capsized while trying to reach the Greek island of Kos (Arab American News 2015). Visual media experts estimate that in the first two weeks following this tragedy, Pulsar analysis gathered an approximate 2, 843,274 posts (social media, news, forums, and blogs) of Aylan’s images in death, that were published around the world (Vis and Goriunova 2015: 6).

The massive coverage of the initial photographs taken by Turkish journalist Nilüfer Demir, depicting a child’s dead body on a beach, made it possible for Demir’s images to become instantly iconic representations of the suffering of Syrian refugees, even though the child and his family are Kurdish. In many ways, these images created

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<sup>47</sup> Jacobson, M. 1999

<sup>48</sup> Gjelten, T. 2015

<sup>49</sup> Williams, R. Jr. 1989

<sup>50</sup> Gomez, L. 2018

unprecedented action around the world, changing the ‘before’ and ‘after’ historical consequences of this tragedy and the larger tragedy of Syrian refugees escaping violence of war, suggesting that things can no longer be ‘unseen’ the same way, after Aylan’s death, even though over 2,500 other refugees have suffered a similar fate (Burns 2015: 38 in Vis and Goriunova).

Every one of the 27 articles in the newspaper sample I analyze, that wrote about this tragedy, described the boy’s age, his clothes, and his body’s position at death. Visual analysis experts argue that, the physical condition of the body at the time it was photographed, played a significant role in the massive media coverage of the story, as the body appeared to be that of a sleeping child and it did not show any signs of exposure to the elements or disfigurement. The sanitized and aestheticized content of the image, appealed to the European imagination, helping people prime the image, as that of a ‘sleeping angel,’ recognizing the power inherent in the original image (Drainville 2015: 47, 48 in Vis and Goriunova).

None, but one of the newspapers, named or reported stories of Aylan’s mother and brother, who also perished in the same tragedy, and of his surviving father, Abdullah Kurdi. Only one article out of 28 articles that reported about Syrian Kurdish refugees that cross the Mediterranean Sea and drown, quoted Abdullah Kurdi. This silencing and invisibilizing of refugees is a pattern that speaks directly about the lack of power of refugees with regards to access to public discourse and the media. In this case, the lack of access of refugees to the media to tell their stories, indicates the complicity of bio-power in controlling their lives and imposing an invisible and inaudible ‘bare life.’ The only quotes attributed directly to refugees in the sample of 28-newspaper articles analyzed for this study appeared in “Photo of Drowned Syria Boy Alerts the World to Refugees’ Suffering,”<sup>51</sup> which was published in The Arab American News on September 5-11, 2015. The following excerpts are attributed to Abdullah Kurdi, the father of Aylan Kurdi, following the tragic loss of his family:

“I just want to sit next to the grave of my children and wife and rest. The things that happened to us here, in the country where we took refuge to escape war in our homeland, we want the world to see this, we want the world’s attention on us, so they can prevent the same from happening to others. Let this be the last.”

The same newspaper article also quotes Abdullah Kurdi, adding: “I was holding my wife’s hand. My children slipped away from my hands. We tried to hold onto the boat. Everyone was screaming in pitch darkness. I couldn’t make my voice heard to my wife and kids.” These two quotes demonstrate that Kurdish refugees are silenced in refugee stories published about their ordeals. And although, Abdullah Kurdi’s words speak of his tragedy and the despair about losing his family on that fateful September

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<sup>51</sup> Anonymous. “Photo of Drowned Syrian Toddler Alerts World to Refugees’ Suffering.” Arab American News, September 5-11, 2015.

<https://search.proquest.com/docview/1715900710?accountid14515>



morning is apparent, in this limited opportunity to speak and be heard, he powerfully articulates his wishes for the struggles of all refugees to be seen and heard, when he pleads: “We want the world to see this, we want the world attention on us.”

Media representations of the tragic and untimely death of this child let the world know of his family’s ordeal, creating outpouring waves of sympathy and altering at once, what the world had not wanted to know about the plight of refugees, before his death. The instant recognition of an innocent victim - a small child, dead in a position of sleep, triggered an urged the world to protect the vulnerable and to demand that Europe do more for refugees; for instance, in the article “Dames for Humanity to Sponsor Family of Syrian Refugees”<sup>52</sup> published by The Weekly Gleaner, North American ed. on January 14-20, 2016, the author states: “We were shocked and saddened by photographs of the body of little Alan Kurdi, who drowned while trying to flee Syria. We cannot solve the world’s problems, but we can make a difference to individual lives.” Another article, “Turning 31, Pain Mixed with Hope,” published by The Arab American News on September 5-11, 2015, states:

“Humanity was shaken this week by the image of Syrian child, lying face down on the shores of Turkey, after his boat capsized en route to Greece. Aylan Kurdi, the late refugee, is one of thousands of Syrians who have drowned in the Mediterranean while trying to reach Europe.”<sup>53</sup>

Despite these utterances of caring and concern, when the death of a child functions as a symbol of tragedy for thousands of suffering others, there is a danger that the child’s humanity will be taken away, as the child is no longer an embodiment of just himself and his life, but a representative of thousands who have perished in similar situations, placing significant responsibility on the image (Burns 2015: 38 in Vis and Goriunova).

In the days after the Aylan’s drowning, newspapers reported political leaders rushing to demonstrate a unified sense of dismay about this tragedy. The narrative below, appeared in “Europe 2015,”<sup>54</sup> an article published by the Washington Jewish Week on September 10, 2015, intertwined in political criticisms against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s for his decisions to fight a war and historical accounts of Hitler’s ‘final solution,’ and the British *White Paper* of 1939, which accordingly, restricted Jewish immigration to Palestine between 1940 and 1944, forcing more than 100,000 Jewish to enter Palestine illegally by boat. The retroactive placement of a child’s tragic death story, between two heinous world leaders known for their atrocities against civilians, points out the manipulation of innocence for political gain. A closer look at the historical inferences

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<sup>52</sup> Armstrong, Neil. “Dames for Humanity to Sponsor Family of Syrian Refugees.” The Weekly Gleaner, January 14-20, 2016. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1762072646?accountid=14515>

<sup>53</sup> Anonymous. “Turning 31, Pain Mixed with Hope.” Arab American News, September 5-11, 2015. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1715900618?accountid=14515>

<sup>54</sup> Gelman, Susie. “Europe, 2015.” Washington Jewish Week. September 10, 2015. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1714108053?accountid=14515>

made in this article about the parallels of human suffering attributed to al-Assad and Hitler, locate Jewish peoples at the center of ‘most deserving’ among others, including three-year-old Aylan.

Further, none of the articles reviewed in the sample, spoke of Aylan, as a toddler: his favorite games, his favorite food, his bedtime routine, who did he looked like? what was he afraid of, who were his friends’ names? etc. Aylan’s life dissipated at sea, as fast as his name emerged in the media and, even though he was named in the storytelling of his death and by that, recognized as a person instead of remaining anonymous in death - as most refugees who parish are, we know little to nothing about his short life. In the end, public discourses about refugees tend to mediate the representation of refugees and function to tell us what we can know about them and we cannot. With close to 3,000,000 posts about Aylan’s death, how can it be that we know nothing about his life?, as eluded by the following article: “The image of 2-year old Aylan Kurdi lifeless body being carried ashore any a Turkish policeman captured the world’s attention – if only for a moment.”<sup>55</sup>

Many believe that the image of the little boy acted metonymically, as a symbol of a larger human tragedy, representing the deaths of many in one, suggesting that guilt is produced by visual association, which in this case, the body of Aylan was used by the media to incur culpability on the West and on his father, enabling the child’s image to become symbolically powerful (Burns 2015: 7, 8, 38 in Vis and Goriunova). In “Image of dead child on beach haunts and frustrates the world” published by the Epoch Times on September 4, 2015, there are evidences of metonymic gestures: “If these images of a dead child don’t change our attitude to refugees, what will?”<sup>56</sup>

Even though this tragedy sparked powerful emotions, not all reacted in the same manner to this tragedy, many implying that Aylan’s father, Abdullah Kurdi, was responsible for his sons and wife’s deaths, as suggested in the article “Wrong Answer to a Tragic Problem,” which appeared in the Irish Voice on September 9-15, 2015: “What happened to Aylan Kurdi, is a tragedy, but it is a tragedy for which his father bears some responsibility... for some reason, the father did not buy life jackets for his wife and children” (Spain 2015).

The use of children to galvanize adult responses to larger and difficult political issues, in this case the forced migration of refugees from the global South to Europe, can be an effective tool that highlights orientalist tropes about refugees, such as claims made in the article “The Syrian refugee crisis”<sup>57</sup> published by La Voz Bilingüe on September 9, 2015, which states: “The child’s image represents all that is wrong in Syria and the

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<sup>55</sup> Gelman, Susie. “Europe 2015.” Washington Jewish Week. September 10, 2015.

<http://search.proquest.com/docview/1714108053?accountid=14515>

<sup>56</sup> Lush, Tamara. “Image of Dead Child on Beach Haunts and Frustrates the World.” The Epoch Time, September 4, 2015.

<http://search.proquest.com/docview/1781345416?accountid=14515>

<sup>57</sup> Mejía, James. “The Syrian Refugee Crisis.” La Voz Bilingüe, September 9, 2015.

<http://search.proquest.com/docview/1717290278?accountid=14515>

Middle East - what should be the youthful formative years and the epitome of happiness of childhood was sapped by a battle between a brutal Syrian dictator and a military group ironically operating in the name of religion.”

Orientalist narratives, such as those above stand to showcase the ‘backwardness’ of the East against the modernity of the West, and to encourage public consumption of ghastly spectacles of violence and death, as points of demarcation for Western audiences to mobilize and ‘do something’ about refugees, prodding European governments to ameliorate the suffering they cause. For instance, India Abroad, Inc. Publications’ article titled “New Boat for Refugees: ‘If every Indian American Contributed \$1’ ”<sup>58</sup> published on September 18, 2015, emphasizes the ‘generosity’ of the West and the public’s desire to do something to help refugees: “I launched People’s Armada last week, from London, with a small group of other young people, to see whether we could get the public to show leadership on this issue. And prevent the kind of deaths we saw last week, (like) of Aylan.”

In “What a Syrian Hanukkah Custom can teach us about the refugee crisis”<sup>59</sup> published by Forward on December 4, 2015, the article claims that “The extinguished flame of Aylan Kurdi’s life, the light of the extra Hanukkah flame of the descendants of Spanish Jewish refugees in Syria and the torch of our own Statue of Liberty should continue to enlighten us to help Syrian refugees and to seek responsible, secure ways to increase the number of refugees we absorb.” Imbuing a mistaken religious meaning to the body of a young Kurdish child who drowned at sea trying to escape the horrors of war, and whose identity belongs to a historically and currently oppressed ‘ethnic minority’ - while at once - invoking imperialist icons that stand for racist immigration and refugee policies that have banned<sup>60</sup> Syrian refugees from entering into the United States, while Israel does worse by admitting none within its borders, is at the very least, misguided and callous. Needless to say, this child is of Kurdish descent and his untimely death can be directly traced to the violences of state biopower, the international human rights regime, and the logics of colonialism, empire, and war.

Only two articles titled “What the Aylan Kurdi tragedy can teach us about the U.S. border crisis”<sup>61</sup> published in La Prensa in San Diego, California on September 18, 2015, and “As Western Nations Drag their Feet, African Children Drown,”<sup>62</sup> published

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<sup>58</sup> Jha, Ritu. “New Boat for Refugees: ‘If Every Indian American Contributed \$1.’” India Abroad, September 18, 2015.

<http://search.proquest.com/docview/1716007126?accountid=14515>

<sup>59</sup> Katzir, Frantz Afraim. “What a Syrian Hanukkah Custom Can Teach Us About the Refugee Crisis. The Forward, December 4, 2015.

<http://search.proquest.com/docview/1750035126?accountid=14515>

<sup>60</sup> United States Executive Order 13780: Presidential Proclamation 9645, signed September 24, 2017.

<sup>61</sup> Morones, Enrique. “What the Aylan Kurdi Tragedy Can Teach Us About the U.S. Border Crisis. La Prensa San Diego, September 18, 2015.

<http://search.proquest.com/docview/1718582240?accountid=14515>

<sup>62</sup> Anonymous. “As Western Nations Drag Their Feet, African Children Drown.” New York Amsterdam News, June 2-8, 2016.

<https://search.proquest.com/docview/1795919857?accountid?=14515>

by the New York Amsterdam News on June 2-8, 2016, recognize the hidden connections between the struggles of different border sites in the United States and North Africa, through the suffering of children. According to La Prensa, “they [children] have suffocated in trucks, died of dehydration in the desert, become victims of violence, all on U.S. soil as they were fleeing from persecution,” while the New York Amsterdam News’s article offers that “hundreds [of children] have perished in boats that capsized with many children and newborns abroad” referring to the plight of ‘migrants’ from sub-Saharan Africa and the Horn of Africa.

As I have demonstrated in my analysis, media representations of children refugees, such as in the case of Aylan Kurdi’s story, use the innocence of children to obscure and distract from larger, complicated political issues, such as the international community’s failure to account for the close to 3,000 other refugees from MENA who have drowned at sea attempting to reach European shores, the condition of four million others whose asylum cases are unresolved, and most importantly, the war in Syria which is continually producing refugees. Scholars offer that media representations of children refugees, fail to propose a solution to the problems that refugees face, and seldom offer closure to the immense grief the surviving families and communities are left with (Faulkner 2015: 53 in Vis and Goriunova).

Last, in the 28-article sample analyzed for this study, only three of 27 articles use the word ‘Kurd,’ even though ‘Kurd’ was the key prompt I used in my ProQuest and ENW searches. One article, “EU closes in on Turkey migrant deal, despite rights concerns” referred to ‘Kurdish’ in the context of “Kurdish rebels” and “bloody conflict with Kurdish rebels” twice, and two other articles “Eye on the Refugee Crisis” and “New Boat for Refugees” referred to ‘Kurdish’ to highlight the ethnic community of Aylan Kurdi, even though most articles identified the toddler as a “Syrian boy.”

The significant lack of Kurdish visibility in ethnic press articles written about Syrian and/or Kurdish stateless refugees crossing the Mediterranean Sea, signals a powerful disconnect about how [ethnic] media is reporting refugee stories [or not] and what we are allowed to know, hear, and see about them in the media. Indigenous to the land, displaced and dispossessed by colonial powers, and forced to become stateless by the Syrian nation-state and its biopower controls in 1962, Kurdish communities were already at the margins of the Syrian political order prior to the 2012 war. Now, as stateless communities who are forced to become refugees of war, they must reckon with the violences of empire in their homelands, in international water as they move across the Mediterranean Sea, in the European border sites, and around the world where their geographical dislocations are taking them.

While all the articles analyzed in the sample recognize Syrian refugees as a vulnerable and marginalized community, all but one article mentions Aylan Kurdi’s tragic story in connection with Kurdish political struggles for liberation. Most ethnic press articles I analyzed, conflate Aylan Kurdi’s national identity with being Syrian, denying any possibility for Kurdish existence to him and the world. Even when most ethnic press articles reported of his demise and used his death as a referent to mediate various Western political and ideological positions and concerns about refugees, Aylan’s tragic death on its own, leaves indeed traces of Kurdish political struggles in the world, in

a way that it can never be unseen and unheard, again. The visibility of his body at the shores of European border sites, carries the shame of the violences of the West against the East and places it, where it belongs. When refugee bodies move through desert lands or mountains, or flow at sea through the imaginative borderlands of water to the edges of empire, and even when they drown, they become visible and they speak their truths in irrefutable and resolute ways.

Amidst media obscurity of this unprecedented crisis of humanity for Kurdish refugees propitiated by the West in these parts of the world, I find two women's names in my five-year newspaper search. Soukeina, 29, emplaced in a tent at the Greek-Macedonian border, awaiting to receive asylum from Germany as a detainee; her life is managed by state biopower, rescued by the human rights regime from the cold, not from the war that is fought by proxy by the West. And Rehan, 35, mother, wife, daughter, sister, stateless, from Kobane, refugee at sea, dead nearby Bodrum, Turkey in the early morning hours of September 2, 2015. By media reports, her eyes never saw the dawn of this new day. The fleeting moments of Soukeina and Rehan's life, captured briefly by three newspapers in my sample of 28 articles, speak mostly of their unstoried journeys, which are barely audible and never visible, and overall, highly unrecognizable to Western readers. Who amongst us has been there, where they have been?

Through this Western (in)visibility, Soukeina's life stops there for now, in a tent. Rehan's death, bears witness to the violences of war and of the West, reminding us that the guilt, anger, and the shame for these atrocities belongs to those who create them - at the shores of the European continent. Her displacement, dispossession, and especially the translocation of her body, exiled from her ancestral homeland to a place where she is unwanted in life and in death, unsettles the inner workings of state bio-power, for she did arrive to spaces and places that were securitized and weaponized to prevent her entry.

Rehan's death, imaginably leaves her loved ones in overwhelming pain and in the solitude of grief and the enormity of grieving. Would they ever again visit her resting place? Is her grave marked with her name? Can the smell and sounds of the sea be felt from where she rests? Did her loved ones survive? These are evidences that we cannot know from the newspaper articles I analyzed, but that we cannot afford to not know as human beings.

We will never know Rehan's last thoughts and feelings. They are hers to keep and the seas to guard. From her movements across international waters, as evidenced by her final resting place, I imagine that she must have loved passionately, to embark on a journey of such courageous ambitions that defied the (im)possibilities of empire; Rehan must have dreamed of peaceful alterities for herself and her children and hoped for a new life for her and her family. In the two newspaper articles that mentioned her name, nothing else was written about her life. The lack of details about her, in these two stories that name her, will not let us forget what we no longer remember, that we forgot, what we have forgotten or never knew (Alexander 2005: 263).

Pausing to reflect on Rehan's untimely and tragic death in Turkey, I think of "Chayito," my dearest childhood friend from El Salvador. Through a brief newspaper report years ago, I learned upon returning from my first displacement to Guatemala, that she was kidnapped, tortured, and raped at age 16, by death squads during the 1980s war.

Her body was found on a dirt road leading to Lake Ilopango, partially dressed. These are the traces of her life that the media allows me to know.

In dreadful moments when the nation-state exercises power over life, the killing of young women is magnified by the ending of their futures and our futures with them; and by ending of the futures of their children, and that of their children's children, and ours together with theirs, inter-generationally. The loss of ancestral wisdom and community is so severe and overwhelming when indigenous women are killed by state biopower and the violences of colonialism, that we must meditate with urgency, if we have words that are adequate enough to account for what state power over life does to the flesh of women's bodies, and to our futurities. And, in the end, does it matter what we call it?

Connecting Rehan and Chayito's violent deaths through their geographic displacements and media invisibility, is connecting imperialist practices with the nation-state, settler colonialism, and war – all deployed at once on the racialized, gendered, classed and nativized bodies of women. Their lifeless bodies are evidences that speak of what it is like to die a young woman, experiencing different technologies of terror through the logics of colonialism, empire and war. And for me, it urges me to meditate about what it is like to bear witness to these senseless deaths.

Chayito's newspaper story, like Rehan's, leave only traces of their lives, but their untimely deaths have not ended their struggles for sovereignty, self-determination, and survivance, which, in the absence of the body, are evidenced by their last affirmations known to the world, about their political agency to confront the inhumanity of empire with their very own humanity.

## Conclusion

In the first part of this inquiry, I have shown that Kurdish struggles for liberation are historically and politically emmeshed in the violences of Western imperialist practices, colonialism, and war that were officially marked in this region, by the signing of the Sykes Picot Agreement in 1918, at the end of WWI, after a prolonged French colonial occupation of the land that started in the eighteenth century. This was followed by the imposition of the French Mandate in 1920, which lasted nearly two tumultuous decades until Syria gained independence from France in 1946, in the aftermath of WWII. It is during this time, that Pan Arab nationalism grew and Syria emerged as a modern nation-state, struggling to create a national identity through complex ethnic, religious, social and political ‘instability.’ During these transitions, Kurds were officially minoritized, subalternized, and subsequently, denationalized and forced to live on the margins of the nation-state. The residual colonial order and logic of empire inscribed in Syria’s biopolitical memory during its years under French tutelage, ensured that its contemporary authoritarian regimes replicated, in specific ways, the colonial intrusions and violences of empire. These included violent suppression of political life and brutal repression of ethnic and religious minorities by the state apparatus – *the Mukhbarat*, allowing little to no political opportunities for Kurdish liberation, until the popular waves of protests of the 2011 Arab Spring, which opened political space and a path to radicalization, culminating in the 2012 war that continues, today.

While this inquiry centers on illuminating our understandings of ethnic media representations of Kurdish women’s movements across Mediterranean waters, I have examined how Kurdish communities in Syria - despite being indigenous to the land, they became stateless in 1962, and were forced to settle in the border sites of four countries. I have shown in my analysis, that their denationalization by the Syrian state, is an exercise of biopower, which deemed Kurdish communities, a threat to the security and ‘stability’ of modern Syrian. For those reasons, Kurdish communities were let live on the margins of not one, but four nation-states. A few decades later, Kurdish communities in Syria, including women, are being forcibly displaced from these border sites, when the Arab Spring protests that started in Tunisia in late 2010, reached Syria and erupted in war, since 2012. This war, is responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people and for the largest forced migration of refugees from the Middle East to Europe and other parts of the world, since WWII. Many of the displaced and dispossessed are Kurdish stateless women. We don’t know the numbers.

As Kurdish women leave Syria and move across mountainous deserts and international waters to escape war, the management of displaced and dispossessed bodies on ‘foreign’ soils and/or in securitized international waters, becomes a necessary practice of state biopower, not just by Syria but also, by its neighboring nations. The deployment of the international human rights regime and its taxonomies, ensure that Kurdish women who flee war, become asylum seekers and perhaps refugees, upon which - state biopower authorizes permanent detention and emplacement in the militarized camp and tent cities, where bare life is enacted upon them, and from where asylum seekers refugee must re-learn to confront the (im)possibilities of empire. By placing refugees in permanent states of suspension and in spaces of exception inside and outside of the law, Kurdish women

experience biopower again, through war and then, through the militarization of their asylum seekers/refugee lives, living in a suspended state of transgression against life. Despite being subjected and re-subjected to the margins of the Western political order, where asylum seekers/refugees must face indefinite detention, repatriation, and exclusion from within the confines of the camp and/or tent city Panopticon, their quest for sovereignty, self-determination, and survivance continues to enact political agency and resist the logics of empire and war, by risking their lives to create conditions of possibility for their futures, in their movement.

For those who tragically drown at sea, state biopower is also exercised at the level of death or necropolitics, as war has expanded to territorialized waters and forced the invading 'foreign' bodies of 'fictional' enemies through the politics of fear and maritime surveillance, where the state's right to kill is inscribed on the safeguarding of the 'European way of life,' which allows racism, the right to take life or let die (Perera 2006: 649). The countless, nameless bodies of Kurdish women who drown in secret, speak of the violences of state biopower and, according to Perera's meditation on bodies of the disappeared as evidence, they define spatial and temporal borders between those who live and those who die, becoming the 'unofficial marker' between native bodies at the shore and stateless and refugee bodies at sea, who cannot be seen or heard (Ibid 649).

In the second section of this inquiry, I have shown through CDA as my method, a sample of 28 ethnic press articles published over the first five years of the 2012 Syrian war, that met the key words of my search. In my analysis, I identified and delinked ideological constructions of racism through orientalist rhetoric, which I found to be highly pervasive in public discourses about the talk and text of refugees. Teun A. van Dijk's works helped me demonstrate that while 'subtle,' everyday forms of text and talk about refugees that may appear 'natural' and 'acceptable' in newspaper articles, they are key to manipulating the minds of people through normative speech. Additionally, literary reviews of media representations of refugees have shown that when public discourse about refugees deploys blatant uses of racist language, makes negative associations of refugees, and or relies on semantic strategies of marginalization to influence negative opinions about refugees, it does so to authorize the Western production of knowledge about refugees that benefits dominant groups and enacts power over the native *Other*.

Based on newspaper evidence from my sample, I identified three emerging themes that indicate that ethnic media, frequently represents (1) refugees as burdens to the nation or problems to be solved, (2) refugees as victims in need of rescuing to justify the deployment of benevolent [white] savior narratives, and (3) refugees as invisible and inaudible 'on the record.' In general, newspaper evidence in the 28-article sample, places Kurdish communities in Syria in a reckoning with the violences of a colonial past, which rendered them as the '*Other*,' resulting in their displacement and dispossession, their denationalization, and their forced migration due to war; these violences are connected to the project of empire, which is not over.

Given that Kurdish refugees do not have access to public discourse - which functions to silence their voices and to obscure their lived experiences of colonialism, statelessness,



refugee-ness and war, they remain for the most part, (in)visible in the newspaper stories of my sample, except for a specific moment that is documented in the early morning of September 2, 2015, when most newspaper articles in my sample, covered the story of a young Kurdish child, Aylan Kurdi, who drowned nearby Turkey. While Aylan's mother, brother, and twelve others also drowned, no one spoke of their deaths. This young child's death became an extraordinary media event that caught the attention of the world. Yet, even through the explosive coverage of this tragic ordeal, Kurdish refugees remain (in)visible, as they are often conflated with Syrian refugees and their stories and political struggles for emancipation, remain hidden. Kurdish women, in particular, remain almost absent in public discourses about Kurdish refugees, as shown in the sample of articles I examined in this inquiry, which reveals only traces of their lives.

Last, my analysis found that Kurdish women's movements across international waters during the first five years of the Syrian war of 2012, are (in)visibilized and silenced in public discourses about refugees, including in ethnic media, in this particular newspaper sample. None of the articles in my sample addressed Kurdish women refugees' movements across water during the Syrian war of 2012, at all, much less depicted their movement as political struggles for sovereignty, self-determination, and indigenous survivance.

These findings lead me to conclude that state biopower exerts full control over the life and death of refugees, as both – the live bodies of women refugees are contained under permanent states of exception, while the drowned bodies of women refugees wash ashore or disappear in secret; in both instances, women bodies signify that state power is exercised over indigenous refugees, through war – simultaneously in life and in death, which is a necessary act for the survival of a state, under siege.

In spite of the (in)visibility of the drowned bodies of women that we can see at the shores and those we cannot see at sea or read about in public discourses about refugees, their (un)storied lives offer powerful evidences that lend to close readings of the text and talk of refugees and how state power operates. The (in)visibility of women refugee bodies offers new meaning to a poetics of justice and human emancipation that speak of conditions of possibility, that connect us to the past, the present, and the future in one instant. By giving space to their untold stories, we may begin to understand the fluidity and beauty of what it is like to carry one's histories and geographies on one's back, as we journey through life and death.

More reflection must be done about the ways in which Critical Race and Ethnic Studies dialogues with Indigenous Studies, Critical Refugee Studies, Feminist Studies, Middle East Studies, Queer studies, etc. to help frame difficult conversations about things that are barely there, but that we cannot not know they are. Who gives us permission to tell these stories? Why should we? Must we? And, how do we speak over the indigenous refugee body, in its absence, without replicating the violences it has already endured and without disturbing its aura? Where do we go from here, when the answers we seek to find, may not want to be found?

As Jodi Byrd describes it, using Vizenor words: "Native transmotion is survivance" (Byrd 2011: xvi).

## APPENDIX

Figure 3

**Table 3: Distribution of ethnic press coverage of Syrian Kurdish refugees at sea by Subject**

	<i>Article Title</i>	<i>ENW Subject classification</i>
1	As Western Nations Drag Their Feet, African Children Drown	Drownings; smugglings; refugees; human rights
2	During Passover, Welcoming All Who Seek Refugee	Freedoms; slavery; traditions; refugees; exegesis and hermeneutics; social support
3	EU Closes in on Turkey Migrant Deal, Despite Rights Concerns	Human rights; international law; prime ministers; political asylum; humanitarian aid
4	Experts Tackle Community Concerns Over Refugee Crisis	Religious organizations; refugees; community relations
5	Charlie Hebdo Cartoon Featuring Drowned Syrian Boy Causes Outcry	Cartoons; terrorism; social criticism; satire
6	Dames for Humanity to Sponsor Family of Syrian Refugees	Initiatives; sponsors; refugees; French Canadian
7	Migrants Arriving in Europe Top One Million in 2015	Boating accidents and safety; migration
8	Jesse Jackson, Officials and Community Leaders Urge Welcoming of Refugees	Clergy; refugees; terrorism; war
9	Migrant Crisis: What is the Next Route Through Europe?	Refugees; boundaries; migration; routes; conflicts; quality of life
10	Sen. Stabenow: We Should Accept More Syrian Refugees	Senators; refugees; humanitarian aid; civil war
11	New Boat for Refugees: 'If Every Indian American Contributed \$1'	Refugees; Asian Americans; fund raising
12	We need a Sensible Solutions for Refugees	Politicians; prime ministers; refugees
13	Photo of Drowned Syrian Toddler Alerts World to Refugees' Suffering	Preschool children; drownings; refugees; civil war; citizenship
14	Pictures of Drowned Syrian Boy Shock World as Refugee Crisis Grows	Drownings; boys; refugees; war; management of crises
15	Image of Dead Child on Beach Haunts and Frustrates the World	Boating accidents and safety; social networks; beaches; murders and murder
16	What a Syrian Hanukkah Custom Can Teach Us About the Refugee Crisis	Jews; Hanukkah; traditions; refugees; civil war; immigration policy
17	The Jewish Response to the Global Refugee Crisis	Jews; refugees; leadership; World War II; political asylum
18	What the Aylan Kurdi Tragedy Can Teach Us About the U.S. Border Crisis	Refugees; media coverage; families and family life; aliens
19	Four Reasons to Think Before Acting on Refugee Crisis	Refugees; war; social integration; Muslims; politics; morality
20	The Wretched of the Earth	Writers, non-fiction; war; refugees

21	Managing the Migrants	Refugees; political asylum; international relations; terrorism
22	Europe 2015	Refugees; immigration; civil war; political persecution; Holocaust; Jews
23	The Syrian Refugee Crisis	Refugees; terrorism; immigration; international relations
24	Turning 31, Pain Mixed with Hope	Racism; newspapers; anniversaries; Arab Americans; terrorism; radical groups
25	Syria's Refugees: Testing Our Humanity	Refugees; civil war; threats; terrorism; casualties; political asylum
26	The Picture that Let in a Million Refugees	Refugees; public opinion; photographs; immigration policy
27	Wrong Answer to a Tragic Problem	Refugees; emigration; civil war; humanitarian aid; international organizations
28	Eye on the Refugee Crisis	Jewish religions and Theology; Judaic, ethnic press

#### Figure 4

**Table 4: Distribution of ethnic press readership**

<i>Ethnic Readership</i>	<i>Number of Articles</i>	<i>Percent</i>
African/Caribbean/African American	4	14%
Arab/Middle Eastern	6	21%
Asian/Pacific Islander	5	18%
Europe/Eastern Europe	4	14%
Hispanic	2	8%
Jewish	7	25%
Total	28	100%

**Figure 5****Table 5: Distribution of ethnic press coverage of Syrian Kurdish refugees at sea by [newspaper] section**

<i>Sample</i>	<i>Section</i>	<i>Percent</i>
International News	4	14%
News	5	18%
Column	1	4%
Opinion	9	32%
Not section identified	9	32%
Total	28	100%

**Figure 6****Table 6: Distribution of ethnic press coverage of Syrian Kurdish refugees at sea by document type and source**

<i>Sample</i>	<i>Document Type</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Sample</i>	<i>Document Source</i>	<i>Percent</i>
News	16	57.14%	Newspaper	28	100%
Feature	2	7.14%			
Comment	9	32.14%			
Unidentified type	1	4%			
Total	28	100%	Total	28	100%

**Figure 7****Table 7: Background information on ethnic press publishers**

	<i>Newspaper Name</i>	<i>Founded</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Circulation (weekly)</i>
1	New York Amsterdam News	1904	New York	15,000
2	Metro West Jewish News	1946	New Jersey	24,000
3	The Epoch Times, NY	2000	New York	1,315,000
4	Pittsburgh Jewish Publication and Education Foundation	1962	Pennsylvania	8,500
5	Charlie Hebdo-France	1970	France	100,000
6	The Weekly Gleaner; North American ed.	1834	Jamaica	Unknown
7	The Arab American News	1984	Michigan	30,000
8	New York Beacon	1976	New York	32,000
9	India Abroad Publications	1970	New York	20,000
10	Ethnic Media Group, Ltd.	1989	London	247,450
11	The Filipino Express	1986	New Jersey	Unknown
12	The Forward Association, Inc.	2010	New York	27,000/
13	Washington Jewish Week	1930	Maryland	10,000
14	La Prensa, San Diego California	1976	California	35,000
15	Communication ENG			Unknown



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