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"Won't somebody please think of the children?"

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Representations of the Figure of the Child in Western Media Coverage of the Yemeni Conflict

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ABSTRACT

This research project examines media representations and discourses of the figure of the child in coverage of the ongoing conflict in Yemen. In October 2018, the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi drew international awareness to the actions of Saudi Arabia and its coalition in Yemen. In the months that followed, an overwhelming amount of Western media attention centered on the role that Western nations played in Yemen's destruction through their strategic and monetary support. At the heart of this media coverage was the plight of Yemeni children; images and stories of starving Yemeni children flooded the media, accompanied by calls to end their suffering.

Through a Critical Discourse Analysis of eight opinion pieces published in widely read Western news publications, this project seeks to answer the research question, "How is the figure of the child represented in Western media coverage of the conflict in Yemen?" Drawing on theories of representation and social constructions of the child, it investigates the place occupied by the child in global imaginary and situates this within larger power relations. The research argues that each text constructs the child as a universal and timeless figure in order to cast it as the ideal victim, and thereby evokes a moral imperative to take action against its suffering. It further argues that, in Western representations of the figure of the Yemeni child, entrenched mentalities of colonial infantilization of the Global South can be discerned.

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To my family, for their unconditional love and for inspiring my confidence, creativity, and determination in all my pursuits. To the incredible friends I have found this year, for sharing coffee, laughs, and aspirations. To André, for always helping me rise.

To those who are forced to pay the ultimate price for injustices they bear no responsibility for: may their stories be told bravely, boldly, and truthfully.

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1. INTRODUCTION

"Yemen, colleagues, is today a living hell for children...It is a living hell for every single boy and girl in Yemen."

This statement was made by the UNICEF Regional Director of the Middle East and North Africa after visiting Yemen in October 2018, shortly after dedicating his address to Amal Hussain, a seven-year-old Yemeni girl whose photograph drew international attention to the human toll of the conflict (UNICEF, 2018). The picture of her emaciated, frail body was published in The New York Times on the 26th of October, 2018, less than one week before she passed away from starvation (Walsh, 2018). Amal is one of 3.2 million Yemenis who suffer from acute malnutrition (OCHA).

The conflict has its origins in the Arab Spring of 2011, when an uprising forced the then president Saleh abdicate power to his vice president, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi. In September 2014, the Houthi rebels from the north, who belong to an established resistance movement of Yemeni Shiite Muslims fighting against what they see as Saudi Arabia's increasing influence and exportation of Salafist Sunni ideology to Yemen, seized control of the capital, Sana'a. It was in March 2015, when a Saudi-led coalition of predominantly Sunni Arab states began air strikes against Houthi rebels, that the conflict escalated dramatically. In an effort to economically strangle the Houthis and restore the government of President Hadi, the coalition has blockaded the war-torn nation, preventing access to food, water, and humanitarian aid.

Despite attempted peace talks, the fighting in Yemen has continued to intensify at the devastating expense of Yemen's civilian population. As of February 2019, the United Nations predicts that 14.3 million people in Yemen are in acute need of humanitarian assistance, with 80 percent of the population requiring aid in some form (OCHA). Compounded by a cholera outbreak that has affected over one million people, a failing economy, and relentless fighting across the country, Yemen has been declared by the United Nations as the world's worst humanitarian crisis and risks becoming the worst famine in a century (OCHA).

While it was Amal who managed to capture the hearts of readers, Western coverage of the conflict in Yemen regularly features images and stories of emaciated children, bones protruding and eyes solemn. *Why are our news stories full of starving children, particularly children from the Global South?* The underlying assumption here is evident: suffering children are potent symbols for human suffering. *What is it about a child that makes us feel so indignant and heartbroken at their suffering in a way that we would not immediately feel towards an adult in the same position? How does*

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the way we construct the figure of the child influence our engagement with distant Others? And finally, *what does this say about our ability to care?*

These are the questions that inspire this dissertation. The case study of Yemen provides a pertinent opportunity to engage with these issues, as Western reporting on the conflict in Yemen has been particularly marked by its use of images and stories about children. Furthermore, despite the brief period of media attention in the aftermath of the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, Yemen is once again largely out of sight and mind in international media. The outrage at Amal's suffering proved to be transient, a momentary perturbation that faded despite the intensification of the humanitarian crisis.

This dissertation will focus on the representations of the figure of the child in Western media coverage of the conflict in Yemen. It will consider and build on several important concepts. Firstly, that the media is powerful insofar that it mediates our interaction with distant others and makes the world symbolically available to us. Secondly, there is an assumption that the suffering of the child is a powerful symbol both emotionally and morally. This stems from the attributions of the child as being "out of space and time", transcending social, geographic, and temporal boundaries (James & Prout, 1997, 229). Finally, at the heart of this project is the understanding that discourse, as it operates through and within the media, plays a constructive role in reproducing power (Fairclough, 1989).

With this in mind, this dissertation hopes to contribute to existing literature an analysis of how the figure of the child is mediating the West's moral response to the conflict in Yemen.

2. THEORETICAL CHAPTER

2.1 Media and the Other

> *"The mediated images of strangers increasingly define what actually constitutes the world" (Silverstone, 2006, p.4)*

At the heart of this project is an examination of Western media representations of the suffering of distant others and the moral implications that arise in such contexts. The dialectic between

the self and the Other has been theorized in postcolonial studies, as in Said's seminal work, Orientalism (1978), in which he writes that, at the very core of this dialectic are constructed notions of both self and other, which function to sustain the discursive authority of the West to define itself in relation to the other. This dialectical and mutually constitutive relationship is further expounded by Hall (1997), who understands the concepts of binaries and difference to be "fundamental to the constitution of the self" (2). For Hall (1997), the symbolic power to represent the other is deeply implicated in the sustenance of the global order.

The media have increasingly become the arena in which these concepts of the self and the other, and the discourses that undergird them, are being constructed and negotiated. Silverstone (2006) argues that, in a global environment in which the media are the primary vehicles through which distant events are communicated, the media are increasingly important for sustaining the global order and confronting issues of morality in representation. It is precisely this clout of the media to "define the moral space within which the other appears to us" and thereby invite "an equivalent moral response" that underpins its significance and demands interrogation (Silverstone, 2006, p.7). Drawing on Said's (1978) work on the contrapuntal, Silverstone (2006) writes that, central to the fabric of the mediated environment is the interplay between sameness and difference, distant and close, and self and Other. Through the media appears to us the stranger, "that other whose presence or absence is crucial for our own sense of self" and through whom the media becomes entrenched in questions of power, hegemony, and morality (Silverstone, 2006, p.101).

2.2 The Figure of the Child

The twentieth century, frequently referred to as the 'century of the child', saw questions about the experience of childhood come to the forefront of pressing social, political, and legal issues (James & Prout, 1997a). The rise of a "child-centered society" brought about global discussions about the very nature of childhood and its corresponding place in both the local and global community (James & Prout, 1997a). In his influential work *Centuries of Childhood,* Aries (1962) scrutinizes and dissects the notion of the child as a natural phenomenon. Tracing this formation across centuries, he argues that the child as a "concept", and childhood as a distinct period of human existence, evolved as a modern concept. James & Prout (1997b) build on this social constructivist approach to contend that the current hegemonic and universalized discourse of childhood "can be temporally and culturally located in twentieth century western cultures" (p.230). This modern conception has since increasingly expanded to define and naturalize a universalized childhood experience, with an accompanying international children's rights

regime based on universal needs, rights, and interests (James & Prout, 1997a; Burman 1994; Pupavac, 2001).

This universalized conception of the child is characterized above all by innocence and vulnerability; As Holt (1975) writes, the ideal childhood is "Happy, Safe, Protected, Innocent" (p.23). These characteristics are requisite, and childhoods that deviate from this conception are often delineated as "stolen" or "lost", generating moral concern from the international community (Wells, 2007, p.59). With the rise of an increasingly mediated and inter-connected world came the emergence of a growing global consciousness for the wellbeing of the 'world's children' (James & Prout, 1997a, p.2). This consciousness rests on a fundamental understanding of the child as an entity that exists across times and cultures. It is these two qualities- universality and timelessness- that are at the core of this project's investigation of representations of the child.

It is from within this discourse of the child as a universal and timeless figure that the analysis will be conducted, and it is the naturalized assumptions about the child that it seeks to expose and interrogate.

2.2.1 The Universal Child

The salience of the figure of the child stems predominantly from the universality that it carries in a global context. Despite evidence that suggests that concepts of childhood differ significantly across cultures, societies, and time periods, the discourse of childhood assumes a singular childhood experience (James & Prout, 1997b; Burman, 1994). Unlike the divided world of adults, the world of the child transcends all identities. It is for this reason that Malkki (2010) suggests that the figure of the child is "supra-political": it exists above, untouched by, and beyond the limits and considerations of politics (p.59). This inability to inscribe the child into "discourses of moral blame and political calculation", Wells (2007) writes, is what constructs it as the embodiment of pure, innocent, and unified humanity (p.66). While the suffering of adults can be justified by the assumption of political affiliation or complicity, the same cannot be said of children. The child's status as 'victim' is unquestioned and unequivocal (Moeller, 2002)

The ensuing truism from the universality of the child, Wells (2007) writes, is that "the duty of care that adults have towards children should not be limited by the calculation of political or national interest" (p.60). The child therefore demands an acknowledgment of collective responsibility; the world's children require the world's adults who will protect them (Malkki,

2010). The universalization of the child, therefore, is often accompanied by a dehistoricization and depoliticization of the context in which the child exists; if the innocence of the child is unconditional, then its extenuating circumstances are rendered irrelevant for the moral response that it invites. The child in need of protection is therefore cast as a unifying symbol and embodied in it are fantasies of a united global community. As such, Malkki (2010) argues that "children occupy a key place in the dominant imaginations of the human and of the 'world community'" (p.58).

Sustaining this fantasy, however, necessitates the silencing of the child. Malkki's (2010) analysis notes that children are often stripped of their individuality; in order to be the archetypal innocent victims, representations of suffering children produce them as "*generic human beings* and not as culturally or socially specific *persons*" (Malkki, 2010, p.64).

2.2.2 The Timeless Child

The second attribute of the child that underpins its salience in the global imaginary is that of timelessness. James and Prout (1997b) write that childhood is inherently a temporal and teleological concept: it delineates a period of time in the existence of every human being and ends with the full maturation of the child into an adult. The concept of the child itself, they argue, is infused with temporal notions of what children have been, are, and should be (James & Prout, 1997b, p.230). It is for this reason that they contend that "it is during childhood… that time and perceptions of time have perhaps the greatest social significance" (James & Prout, 1997b, p.228).

Burman (1994) writes that children "signify our past" by establishing continuity between generations and allowing adults to indulge their nostalgia for their own childhood experiences (p.240). It is in relation to the future, however, that the child acquires its greatest significance (James & Prout, 1997b; Hendrick, 1997; Pupavac, 2001; Holland, 2004). Moeller (2002) writes that childhood acquires great significance in terms of the moral and political stability of a nation; the child becomes a "synecdoche for a country's future" and the future and wellbeing of the entire community becomes dependent on the child (p.39). This reasoning is based on the cycle of violence thesis, which holds that childhood experiences shape adult character; if a happy, safe childhood is a prerequisite for a healthy adulthood, then "children exposed to violence or trauma do not have the same capacity for moral development" (Burman, 1994, p.104). Because of this, Hendrick (1997) writes, narratives of the future of the nation come to be

inscribed upon children, and any threat to the child is abstracted as a threat to the nation itself (p.51).

Despite the temporal significance attributed to the child, it is only in relation to the past and the future that the child is given a presence. Paradoxically, in the present the child is wholly absent (James & Prout, 1997b). Qvortrup (1997) finds that children are largely excluded and marginalized in society as a result of childhood being perceived as a period of time that requires protection. This assumption of vulnerability often functions "to protect adults or adult social orders against disturbances from the presence of children" (Qvortrup, 1997, p.84). James & Prout (1997b) also highlight how the child is not allowed to be present in its own right. They suggest that time of childhood, a time when children should be protected, actually functions to relegate time in childhood, or the experiences of childhood, as invisible; adult ideas about what children need and deserve take precedence over children's voices (p.230).

What emerges is a child "lost in time: its present is continuously banished to the past, the future or out of time altogether" (James & Prout, 1997b, p.231). This timelessness is integral to and reinforced by universality; together, these qualities conjure images of an enduring childhood separated from the occurrences and passing of time in the adult world (James & Prout, 1997b, p.238).

2.3. Children in War Reporting

The universality of the figure of the child as a symbol of innocence and vulnerability, Seu (2015) writes, makes it a morally compelling media subject, able to effectively capture the attention of audiences (p.654). Analysing the use of children in humanitarian communications, Seu (2015) argues that children are "symbols of the humanitarian spirit" and confer a powerful emotional pull on humanitarian appeals (p.664). Given that children generate a "universal concern" for their wellbeing, representations of children are a call to tackle sociopolitical issues with the aim of protecting them (Pupavac, 2001, p.95). As such, the figure of the child is frequently employed in journalism, particularly war or disaster reporting with the aim of provoking moral concern.

Markham (2011) notes that one of the most frequently invoked moral principles in war reporting is that of bearing witness to atrocity (101). The act of bearing witness, Tait (2011) argues, functions as a way of assuming responsibility (p.1220). Strassler (2006) investigates the significance of the use of the child as a witness to atrocity, arguing that the child's eyes have a "redemptive power" for past violence. She argues that adults attribute to children's eyes the

authorizing stamp of an "authentic lens" unpolluted by political bias (Strassler, 2006, p.54). If bearing witness to atrocity is a fundamentally moral act of taking responsibility, then the child's eyes are the ideal vehicle: the moral imperative of bearing witness is amplified by the moral responsibility adults feel towards children as their protectors.

If, as Markham (2011) writes, at its core, war journalism is about "getting access to and understanding a mystified other", then the figure of the universal child provides an effective vehicle through which the other can be comprehended (p.82). War reporting confronts us with the question of whose lives are considered valuable and worth mourning (Butler, 2009). The child, in these confrontations, emerges as the universally grievable figure, making it a powerful tool in war reporting. Representations of children in war and disaster reporting therefore bring moral clarity by providing a relatable mnemonic to render complicated, distant events intelligible (Moeller, 2002, p.37). Wells (2007) writes that, because children are both blameless and the guardians of the future, they serve as "critical sites on which narratives about the legitimacy, justification and outcomes of war are inscribed" (p.55). The effect of war on children often functions as a measure by which the moral defensibility of war is determined.

2.3.1 Suffering Children

War reporting's moral implications are acutely pronounced in relation to portrayals of suffering because it presents us with the question of how to appropriately react and feel about distant others (Chouliaraki, 2006; Markham, 2011). Suffering is the most powerful and morally compelling emotion and works to create in the spectator a sense of urgency and responsibility to take action (Chouliaraki, 2006, p.7). Given that the figure of the child also works on an affective level, the child is a powerful symbol through which to convey suffering. Holland (2004) writes that the child is the archetypal victim, the perfect subject of the camera because it represents a sufferer whose suffering cannot be excused on the basis of political, religious, or ethnic affiliation (p.143). As a result, international media coverage of children often focuses on representations, and particularly images, of children as vulnerable victims of adult violence (Boyden, 1997, p.188).

Chouliaraki (2009) argues that the image has particular salience in journalism because it shapes our orientation to the other through affective discourse. Images are uniquely powerful in providing definition to world events by providing a sense of involvement, inviting the viewer to feel and engage with its subject (Chouliaraki, 2009, p.520-21). Holland (2004) notes that images of children, particularly in the context of war, tend to reinscribe the defining

characteristics of childhood: images of children looking into the camera longingly reinforce notions of helplessness and vulnerability, positing the child as the "bearer of suffering with no responsibility for its causes" and positing the adult viewer as the protector (p.156).

The significance of the image extends beyond what is depicted in it; images raise questions about the context, the moments before and after, and encourage an exercise in interpretive imagination of a scene (Zelizer, 2010). Images are therefore most powerful when they draw upon socially shared beliefs and values, allowing for identification with the victim. Children, as the universally relatable figure, are therefore powerful symbols that are often used as an explanatory tool used to bring "moral clarity" to complicated political conflicts in distant places (Moeller, 2002, p.36). As a result, Burman's (1994) critique argues that images of children rarely focus on the contextualizing, and often differentiating, circumstances that engender their suffering. Rather, images of children often privilege "a wrenching of emotion at the expense of understanding" by flattening the complexity of the nuanced political events in which the children exist (Holland, 2004, p.150).

Despite being bombarded with portrayals of distant suffering and humanitarian pleas in the media, spectators are rarely given the means to enact change (Ellis, 2000; Chouliaraki, 2006). Even when they are, Seu (2015) notes that images of suffering children no longer confer the same emotional appeal because audiences have become "desensitized" to them as a result of "compassion fatigue" (p.656). Dauphinée (2007) further notes that the impulse to access the pain of the other confronts an inherent rupture: it is not possible to access this pain and attempts to convey it through visualization only serve to "evacuate[s] the image of the one in pain" (p.153). This moral predicament begs the question: if images of suffering children no longer move audiences to action, and attempts to access their pain only disparage it, what purpose do representations of distant suffering serve?

2.3.2 Children and the Infantilization of the Global South

Despite a diversity of socially and culturally specific childhoods, the Western model has become the official standard by which all childhoods are judged (Burman, 1994; Lewis, 1998). Lewis (1998) argues that this functions to "effectively erase" all other childhoods and demonize adults in the Global South for failing to uphold this standard for all children (p.95). Burman (1994), in her critique of representations of Third World children in humanitarian communications, argues that the focus on the suffering of children in the Global South reproduces the "colonial paternalism" in which the infantilized Global South needs saving by the West (p.241). Her

critique suggests that these images reinforce the boundaries between adult and child, onto which are mapped boundaries between north and south (Burman, 1994, p.238). As such, images of suffering children in the Global South work to uphold Western superiority and omnipotence while confirming "Western assumptions of passive populations in need of rescue" (Burman, 1994, p.244).

There are three consequences of this infantilization of the Global South through images of suffering children. Firstly, the focus placed on the suffering of the child fails to address the sociopolitical factors that result in the suffering (Burman, 1994, p.247). Echoing previous critiques of images of children, this results in the dislocation, depoliticization, and thereby universalization of the figure of the child as a victim. However, this distracts attention from the wider context in which children suffer even though "the experiences of children cannot be separated from the conditions in society" (Boyden, 1997, p.102). Secondly, the implication that adults are responsible for the suffering of children often takes the form of dehumanizing the children and their communities, suggesting that their suffering is the result of an inherent inferiority in the culture (Burman, 1994). Finally, although images of suffering children in the Global South may be temporarily unsettling for Western audiences, Holland (2004), argues that ultimately, these images bring a sense of comfort to Western viewers "by assuring them that they have the power to help- in the same 'natural' way that adults help children" (p.148).

2.3.3 Starving Children in Collective Memory

Halbwach (1925) famously coined the term collective memory to assert that memory was in fact a social rather than individual phenomenon. Increasingly, the media have become active agents in the construction of collective memory, which bestows on journalistic reporting authority to report on new events by providing a "semblance of the familiar" to new and novel situations (Berkowitz, 2011, p.201).

Cohen et. al. (2018) suggest that there is an intimate connection between iconic photographs and collective memory, and Hoijer (2004) writes that, as a result of the global humanitarian movement of the late twentieth century (particularly targeted at Africa), images of starving children have become "engraved into the collective memory" of the international community (p.22). Zelizer (2010), in her analysis of about-to-die images, writes that they are powerful because they are generalizable and familiar: "the impending deaths from atrocities in Cambodia come to look like those in Iraq" (p.25). Images of starving children in the moments before

(implied) death draw familiarity across time, suggesting that they are important vehicles for collective memory.

The abundance of atrocity images and lexicon, Zelizer (1998) writes, may in fact desensitize viewers to the suffering of others, "flatten" the particularities of independent events, diminish the potency of both, and ultimately encourage forgetting rather than remembrance (205). The collective memory of images of starving children may then serve to reproduce the child as a universal and timeless figure, dislocated from any specific context, and ultimately forgotten.

2.4 The Child as Self and Other

In representations of the figure of the child, the dialectic of self and other is acutely pronounced: on the one hand, the suffering child is the distant other, on the other hand, the child is everyone's past and thereby universally relatable. Referring back to Silverstone (2006), these tensions between sameness and difference, distance and immediacy, and self and other, are at the core of media morality. The child is the other because it requires the complete segregation of child and adult in order to secure the child's innocence (Boyden, 1997, p.188). The Global South child is compoundingly othered in that they often do not conform to the ideal childhood model, and therefore "sit uneasy within this psychic economy" (Burman, 1994, p.230). Nonetheless, it is important to stress that the distress of Western viewers is ultimately safely distanced from the material conditions facing the children they seek to help (Burman, 1994).

At the same time, Moeller (2002) contends that, "stories about children are ultimately about "us"- "us" as individuals and "us" as a political culture" (p.44). In analysing audience responses to images of children in humanitarian campaigns, Seu (2015) found that children blurred the boundaries between self and other by offering "a psychosocial canvas" onto which adults project their own regrets, experiences and hopes for the future (p.664). This dynamic between otherness and sameness means that the figure of the child simultaneously asserts and denies difference, and embodies both self and Other.

2.5 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This project is centrally focused on representations of the figure of the child in Western media coverage of the Yemen conflict. Two overarching conceptual themes have been distilled from

the literature to frame this project. Firstly, the dialectic between self and other as it is inscribed onto the child will be a focal point of analysis, focusing on the juxtapositions and tensions inherent in the construct of the child. The second conceptual frame centers around discourse: this analysis takes as a starting point the understanding that discourse is constitutive of power, authorizing particular subjectivities and ways of thinking about the world (Foucault, 1971). As it operates through and on the media, discourse will be considered in its ability to make meaning through representation (Silverstone, 2006).

As such, this project will examine how the figure of the child functions as a universal and timeless symbol to convey suffering and create a moral imperative to protect children from adult conflict. It will also investigate how representations of suffering children exist and are produced in the Western imaginary, and the role that this plays in reproducing relations of power between the West and the Global South. The topic's timeliness and significance are proven by the abundance of media attention that Yemen generated in a short period followed by an almost complete silence on the conflict, and the central role that child representations played in this media coverage. It is further juxtaposed with the exacerbation of the humanitarian crisis and the fact that media attention has done little to abate the catastrophic effects of the conflict.

With these objectives in mind, the research question is:

RQ: How is the figure of the child represented in Western media coverage of the conflict in Yemen?

A set of sub-questions will further guide the research:

SQ1: What function does the figure of the child serve in portraying distant suffering of the other?
SQ2: What do representations of the child as the archetypal victim necessitate, and what are the ensuing consequences?
SQ3: In what ways does do representations of suffering children in the Global South reproduce global power dynamics?

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3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

The methodology employed for this dissertation will be Critical Discourse Analysis (hereafter CDA) as originally outlined by Normal Fairclough (1995) and expounded by subsequent scholars. CDA is a heterogenous and interdisciplinary methodological approach that commences from the fundamental belief that "ideology functions in and through discourse" (Breeze, 2011, p.520) and therefore rejects the fallacy of language as a neutral vehicle through which the world is described. Rather, CDA holds that language is *constructive* of reality, and that ideology is "an important aspect of establishing and maintaining unequal power relations." (Wodak, 2001, 9). As such, CDA is principally concerned with how various features and dimensions of language function to sustain, reproduce, and naturalise particular relations of power and domination that characterize social life (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak, 2001). This is CDA's distinguishing feature: as compared to other methodological approaches focused on discourse analysis, CDA takes an actively political stance, tackling prevailing social problems by operating from the point of view of those outside of power (Wodak, 2001). As such, CDA places a marked emphasis on analysing multiple dimensions of a text, and unmasking the meaning that emerges not only from the linguistic features of a text, but also the larger social structures and practices operating through discourse. This multifaceted approach allows CDA to comprehensively analyse the "complexities of the relationships between discourse structures and social structures." (Van Dijk, 2001, 3).

Given that the dissemination of ideology largely takes place through the mass media in today's mediated world, CDA is particularly suitable for the study of media representation (Gitlin, 2003). Fairclough (1995) writes that the power of the media is a "signifying power" whereby, through language and representation, the media is able to "influence knowledge, beliefs, values, social relations, social identities" (2). Therefore, media representations play an integral role in shaping social identities, subjectivities, and orientations about the world around us and are therefore vital points of investigation for understanding the role that discourse plays in the reproduction of dominance and inequality (van Dijk, 1993, 251). In this dissertation, the texts being considered are treated as vehicles through which to examine phenomenon much larger than the text itself, and CDA draws particular attention to the way in which power, identity, and social realities operate through and within (media) texts (Fairclough, 1995, 12).

It is CDA's integration of textual, discursive, and social elements, and its unique focus on cultural, historical, and political forces that informs my decision to use this particular

methodological approach for this dissertation. The research objective of this study is to examine the way in which texts make meaning of distant events and people, and CDA is uniquely equipped to elucidate the link between media representations, language, and power on an international scale. Furthermore, for the topic at hand, I believe that it will be commensurately important to consider not just what is included but also what is excluded from a text (Fairclough, 1995, 4). This will indicate how the media rely on and reinscribe societal assumptions and naturalized knowledge about the subjects they report on, specifically the figure of the child as a universal and timeless figure (Fairclough, 1995; Gill, 1996).

3.1.1 Research Design

To operationalize this methodological approach, I will adopt Fairclough's (1995) recommended three-tiered model of analysis. In this three-dimensional approach, I will consider *textual*, *discursive*, and *societal* dimensions of each sample text individually and intertextually. This model will allow for a comprehensive and multifaceted analysis of texts that targets the relationship between ideology and discourse in relation to larger societal forces[1].

Textual: In the textual dimension, emphasis will be placed on analysing the lexical features of a text, including syntax choice, grammatical features, verb tense, and sentence structure. Specifically, I will look at vocabulary used to describe children, the conflict, and the political actors.

Discursive: The discursive dimension highlights the concealed assumptions, motivations, and objectives that the text conveys. In this dimension, I will focus on tone, argumentation, intertextuality, and how texts draw meaning across time and space.

Societal: The sociocultural dimension examines the forms of knowledge that are privileged, legitimated, or silenced in a text. Here, I will consider the concepts that are drawn upon. This dimension will bring together all three dimensions to situate the finds within dominant ideologies and theories.

3.1.2 Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis

1. For examples of the operationalization of the methodology in sample text analysis, see Appendices.

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For the research objective of this project, it is important to analyse media representations in the form of both written and visual texts. The research objective relies on visual material, and images of children in news texts will also be analysed using CDA. CDA as a methodology acknowledges that meaning emerges out of the dialectic of word and image. Chouliaraki (2008) writes that CDA "treats the linguistic and visual choices on screen as subtle indicators of the power of media technologies to represent the world to us and orient us towards others" (691). Specifically, in relation to suffering, images make powerful claims to the "authenticity of suffering" and placing the spectator in the role of the "burdened" witness with a moral responsibility (Chouliaraki, 2006, p.68). The focus of the multimodal approach to this research project will therefore aim to analyse the interplay between the linguistic and the visual elements of representation to understand how meaning is created between the two, and the larger ideologies, social values, and beliefs that are authorized by these representations.

3.2 Sample Selection

To select the sample texts for this project, I employed a strategy of purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling, as defined by Patton (2002) is predicated on selecting "information-rich cases" that "permit inquiry into and understanding of a phenomenon *in depth*" (46). Rather than focus on generating a corpus that is empirically generalizable, purposeful sampling generates a specified, insightful, and targeted sample that "will illuminate the questions under study" (Patton, 2002, 230). This will ensure that the sample generated is both relevant and fruitful for the particular research objectives at hand. In order to select a sample corpus that is saturated with material, I will jointly adopt a strategy of intensity sampling and theory-based sampling. Intensity sampling focuses on selecting samples that "manifest the phenomenon of interest intensely" (Patton, 2002, 234). Samples should be rich in material but not constitute highly unusual cases of the phenomenon. In this regard, I selected texts that discussed the suffering of Yemeni children in relative depth. In conjunction, theory-based sampling was used to select samples on the basis of "their potential manifestation or representation of important theoretical constructs" (Patton, 2002, 238). Here, I selected samples in which a preliminary reading indicated that they contained analysable material in relation to the figure of the child as universal and timeless. This combination of intensity purposeful sampling and theory-based purposeful sampling yielded eight sample texts for analysis, ensuring that each provided individual and intertextual insight into how Yemeni children are represented in Western media.

The texts selected come from The Guardian, The New York Times, CNN, and The Washington Post. The ideological homogeneity of the chosen media organizations is intentional: all five of

the organizations lean to the centre/left of the political spectrum. The reasoning for is that right-leaning media rarely focused on the plight of Yemeni children or made moral or humanitarian pleas. First, a LexisNexis search was conducted to produce a number of texts published in the four sources. Next, each text was read and then eight were selected in accordance with the strategies discussed above.

3.2.1 Justification for using opinion pieces

The decision to focus on opinion pieces rather than news reports is underpinned by a belief that, as opposed to the orthodox "fact gathering" approach to news coverage of journalistic reporting, opinion pieces are typically more ideologically inclined, often with the explicit aim of moving readers to a particular action or influencing public opinion in one direction. Nonetheless, opinion pieces are still believed to be based on "factual opinion" (Van Dijk, 1998, p.30). In this way, opinion pieces, writes Greenberg (2000), are able to traverse the line between "normative prescriptions" and "social facts" (520). Furthermore, opinion pieces often employ affective discourse to make the audience *feel*, not simply to inform. Lastly, Greenberg (2000) notes that opinion discourse is focused on not only explaining and evaluating events, but also on attributing responsibility (p.521). Given that the research objective is to investigate the way in which the figure of the child is used to mediate the moral response of the West to the Yemen conflict, opinion pieces are best suited to explore this phenomenon.

3.3 Methodological Limitations and Reflexivity

Despite the aptness of CDA as a method for the research objective, CDA is not without its criticisms. The heterogeneity and flexibility that characterizes CDA has prompted criticism that it is unsystematic and unsubstantiated in its method of analysis (Breeze, 2011). While proponents of CDA attribute its prominence in social science research to its interdisciplinary nature, critics claim that the theoretical underpinning of CDA are too vast and vague to yield coherent, standardized results grounded in established intellectual frameworks and thereby resulting in CDA "operating somewhat randomly, moved by personal whim rather than well-grounded scholarly principle" (Breeze, 2011, p.497). This, Wodak (2001) notes, is the most prominent critique of CDA: that it provides too much space for the political biases of researchers to be injected into the analysis. This subjectivity means that researchers will 'find' what they are looking for by projecting it onto a text. CDA is therefore accused of lacking academic rigor. Widdowson (1995) argues that CDA only yields *partial* interpretations because

it allows analysts to "insist on the primacy of their own ideological position" and then select features of a text that confirm this bias, resulting in a situation in which "what is actually revealed is the particular discourse perspective of the interpreter" (Widdowson, 1995, 169).

CDA is further criticized for failing to adequately account for two integral factors in the study of how power functions through language in society: firstly, the context in which the text is produced and disseminated, and secondly, audience agency in reception (Breeze, 2011; Van Dijk, 1993). This, Breeze (2011) notes, may result in "naively deterministic assumptions about the workings of discourse and social reproduction" (494). Fairclough (1995) warns against extrapolating directly from a text to larger societal realities, nonetheless, critics claim that CDA lends itself to "linguistic determinism" and a failure to account for the ambivalence of the relationship between discourse, audience, and society (Breeze, 2011, 508). In this sense, CDA may operate in a top-down manner, imposing theoretical assumptions upon a text and emphasising dominance at the expense of highlighting moments of resistance (Breeze, 2011, 513; Van Dijk, 1993, 250).

In response to critics, CDA scholars have defended its interdisciplinary approach to analysis and explicitly political stance as strengths rather than weaknesses (Van Dijk, 2001). Furthermore, CDA acknowledges that analysts are saturated with their own biases and that ideologies being investigated work upon researchers as well, influencing textual interpretation (Fairclough, 1989, 151). Rather than deny these positionalities, however, CDA asks of analysts that they interrogate their own assumptions, and engage in rigorous self-reflexivity (Gill, 1996, 145). This is also revealed in the fact that CDA is a normative approach to studying power that seeks to not only uncover but also challenge existing inequalities and power dynamics: CDA's "explicit ethics" makes it constructivist in its approach to social issues (Van Dijk, 2001, 22). To address reflexivity concerns, the conceptual framework for this research project is grounded in established literature and theory, and textual evidence will be used to expound how the three-dimensional model of CDA was operationalised and demonstrate why particular conclusions were drawn from this study.

3.4 Ethics

The methodological framework and research objectives of this dissertation were approved by the researcher's appointed supervisor. In addition, an ethics form was submitted and accepted under the ethical guidelines of the London School of Economics.

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4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This section will present the results of the Critical Discourse Analysis in relation to the research questions: *What role does the figure of the child play in Western reporting of the conflict in Yemen?* By examining these texts for their similarities, differences, and intersections, the analysis focuses on three themes: the child as the archetypal victim that "personifies innocence abused" (Moeller, 2002); the depoliticization and supra-politicization of the child; and finally, the child as an embodied link between the past, present, and future.

4.1 The Archetypal Victim: "Innocence Abused"

In the sample texts, the suffering of children is prioritized and distinguished from the suffering of adults, and many of the sample texts identified the number of children who have died or are facing starvation separately from that of adults. This suggests that children are deemed as more worthy of moral outrage, and more morally compelling, than adults:

> *"Do the American people realize that our bombs are killing innocent children in Yemen or do we just not care?" (Sample Text 2)*

> *"The question now is what can be done to protect Yemen's children" (Sample Text 6)*

> *"Yet it is Yemen's children who suffer first and suffer most." (Sample Text 6)*

> *"This is not a reason to bomb and starve Yemeni children" (Sample Text 8)*

These phrases emphasize the ideal victim status that is de facto bestowed upon children; Western bombs are certainly bombing both children and adults, and yet it is only children who are spoken of as in need of protection. This corroborates with the notion of the child as exceptionally vulnerable and in need of protection by adults. Children were used to imbue stories about the conflict in Yemen with a moral imploration to address the plight of Yemeni children. In all of the sampled texts, the tone was one of urgency, outrage, and moral

indignation; rather than simply describing a political conflict, all the texts created a sense of duty to end a conflict that was putting children in harm's way.

4.1.1 Vulnerable, passive, and in need of protection

The discourse of vulnerability was used in the sample texts to render the child as both fragile and completely innocent. Children are always described in the context of suffering as passive victims, reinscribing the dominant belief that "childhood itself is defined by weakness and incapacity" (Holland, 2004, 143). Children were most frequently described as being "severely malnourished" or "starving". As such, much of the language used to convey the suffering of children relied on describing physical attributes that emphasized the physical debilitation and submissiveness of the child:

> *"His face was gaunt and his ribs protruding. He was fighting for his life." (Sample Text 1)*

> *"At 18 months old, Fawaz weighed a little more than 4 kg (9 lbs). Severely malnourished, Fawaz had been in the hospital for more than a month, barely able to hold the therapeutic milk he was being given. Yet, he persevered, determined to live." (Sample Text 5)*

> *"He is an 8-year-old boy who is starving and has limbs like sticks, but Yaqoob Walid doesn't cry or complain. He gazes stolidly ahead, tuning out everything, for in late stages of starvation the human body focuses every calorie simply on keeping the organs functioning" (Sample Text 8)*

> *"A few rooms down from Yaqoob was Fawaz Abdullah, 18 months old, his skin mottled and discolored with sores. Fawaz is so malnourished that he has never been able to walk or say more than "Ma" or "Ba."" (Sample Text 8)*

In each of these descriptions of malnourished children, the child is portrayed as a passive victim of circumstances that they are unable to change. Descriptions of the physical attributes of each

child create an image of sickliness, fragility, and incapacity. Furthermore, the descriptions focus on actions that the suffering children cannot achieve, creating an image of a child that is helpless and incapacitated, and that has agency to do little more than suffer. These descriptions of children are accompanied by images that "reinforce the defining characteristics of childhood-dependence and powerlessness" (Holland, 2004, 143). The images of starving children often focused on how thin and bony the child was; several photos focused on a specific body part such as the protruding ribs, skeletal arms or legs, or bony spine of a malnourished child. Finally, all of the children pictured and mentioned in the sample texts were prepubescent, affirming the notion that "the temporal progression built into the category of "children" is also a moral progression: it is easiest to attribute to children a pure, innocent presociality when they are youngest" (Malkki, 2010, 63-64).

Adults featured into only four of the pictures used in all eight articles, and in three of those cases the adults depicted were women in a maternal role, looking after or comforting a malnourished child. The only picture that did not feature a child was a picture of three male soldiers holding machine guns in the back of a military vehicle. The images in the sample texts reflect the role of children and the (gendered) role of adults as projected onto the Yemeni conflict: the children are always portrayed as suffering, whereas women are seen as caretakers, and men are only depicted as violent and responsible for the suffering of children.

The most glaring absence in the sampled text was that of a Yemeni voice; in eight texts, only one article provides a space in which those bearing the brunt of the consequences of war are able to share their realities and speak to their experiences. There is a pronounced juxtaposition between what is foregrounded and backgrounded in the sample texts; although stories and statistics about the suffering of children feature prominently into the text's overarching message, the child's voice is categorically absent; they are never given the right to speak to their own experiences. The figure of the child is thereby "rendered as a passive object made visually available for adult consumption" (Stressler, p.54). In fact, they are often only referred to in reduction terms as "a child", "a boy", or "a girl". This speaks to the silencing that is requisite for constructions of the universal child.

4.1.2 Stolen childhoods

Within the sample texts, there emerged a discourse of the stolen childhood. The concept of the stolen childhood refers to instances in which children are robbed of what are accepted markers

of the ideal universalized childhood experience (Wells, 2007, p.59). In the sampled texts, this notion of stolen childhood was most frequently conveyed through the concept of schooling. Education was used as a universal marker of childhood, and the inability to attend school or the danger of going to school were recurrently cited as indicators of the suffering of children. Aries (1962) writes of the importance of school as a key marker that "removed the child from adult society" (p.412). Of the eight sampled texts, four of them referred to children's inability to access schooling in Yemen when discussing the political consequences of the war. Furthermore, four texts made explicit reference to a particular instance in which 40 children were killed while on a field trip when their school bus was bombed:

> *"On 9 August, the US-backed Saudi-led coalition waging war in Yemen against a Houthi-led rebellion dropped a bomb on a school bus packed with children. According to reports, the excited kids had been on a school trip marking the end of their summer classes, and as they passed a busy marketplace, the bomb directly hit their vehicle.*
>
> *The results were horrific. Of the 54 people killed, 44 were children, with most between the ages of six and 11. The pictures of the dead and injured children, some of whom can be seen wearing their blue Unicef backpacks, are beyond heartbreaking." (Sample Text 2)*

The excerpt poignantly paints a picture of a universalized and quintessential childhood experience to then starkly contrast it with violence. The emphasis on how "excited" the children were, and the image of their "backpacks" powerfully conveys the purity, innocence, and vulnerability of the child while alluding to a universalized symbol of school as a marker of youth.

One of the sample texts made explicit comparison between a Yemeni child and a child in Australia to compare a stolen childhood to an ideal one:

> *"I was overcome by a profound sadness. My thoughts immediately went to my 10-month-old niece, the first grandchild for my parents. She is an absolute joy to my family: full of life, vibrant, cheeky and inquisitive. But above all, she is healthy and safe.*

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> *I couldn't help but compare the two children and the lives they were born into." (Sample Text 1)*

The description of the author's niece represents the ideal childhood, characterized by joy, vibrancy, health, and safety. In contrast, the description of the Yemeni child given immediately prior writes that the young boy was "suffering" and "gaunt" (Sample Text 1). This juxtaposition serves to highlight injustice against Yemeni children who are being denied an ideal childhood characterized by joy and safety. This simultaneously others the child while still playing on the child's element of relatability. The contrast serves to highlight the vastly different childhoods being described, while still implying that all children deserve one universalized childhood.

This interplay between sameness and difference, distant and close, and self and other, can be seen in the sample texts as well. This "stress on otherness, on its presence, its absence, and its character" (Silverstone, 2006, p.101) is achieved discursively by describing the suffering children as "Yemen's children" or the "children of Yemen", which dually universalizes and localizes them. Yemen in its entirety is further othered, described as a "far-off" (Sample Text 7) and "less well known" (Sample 4) country and Yemenis themselves described as "Muslim, brown, and poor" (Sample Text 2). The figure of the Yemeni child functions to simultaneously appeal to the universal while still asserting distance; this ensures that the boundaries between child and adult readers, and between the Global North and the Global South, remain intact.

The suffering of children is used to move people to do something (though it is not always clear what) to give back the children the childhood they deserve. Sample Text 1 ends on this premise, writing:

> *"Then the cries of children will revert back to laughter, and the long recovery process will get under way" (Sample Text 1)*

This closing statement signifies a recurring theme in the sample texts: the moral plea to end the conflict in Yemen is grounded in a desire to end the suffering of Yemeni children specifically rather than Yemeni civilians overall.

4.1.3 Children vs. Adults

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The archetypal victimhood and unquestioned innocence of the child rests on a corollary separation between child and adult that arises in all of the sample texts. In the sample texts, distinguishing between child and adult, and sometimes explicitly pitting the two categories against each other, preserves the figure of the child as the archetypal, universal innocent victim. Six of the sampled texts differentiated the suffering of children from that of adults, and noted separately statistics of starving, injured, or otherwise victimized children. For example, a number of the texts stated the number of child deaths separately from that of adult deaths (if this figure was even included at all) or overall civilian death. This implies that the suffering of children is more valid than that of adults, which can be expected, and excused, during war:

> *"We think of war casualties as men with their legs blown off. But in Yemen the most common war casualties are children like Fawaz who suffer malnutrition." (Sample Text 8)*

This statement reveals a recurring assumption about victims of war echoed in the sample texts: while the suffering of adults (and particularly men) can be justified as collateral damage, the suffering of children is inexcusable. Other sample articles went further in distinguishing between children and adults. One sample text explicitly posits children and adults against each other, writing:

> *"More than four years ago, adults started a war in Yemen despite knowing the terrible toll that violent conflict exacts on children." (Sample Text 6)*

> *"The longer this war continues, the more children are going to die on the world's watch. And if adults are the cause of Yemen's downfall, they must take responsibility for the solution." (Sample Text 6)*

This discourse posits the adults as blameful, irresponsible, and negligent while children remain blameless and completely at the mercy of adults. In this discourse, the figure of the child also acts as an admonition to violence and "lend(s) moral force to warnings about the damaging effects of adult conflict." (Strassler, 2008, p.56). By isolating the realm of innocent children from that of blameworthy adults, this discourse safeguards the figure of the child as the archetypal innocent victim and places the entire burden of responsibility on adults.

4.2 Depoliticized and Supra-politicized

In the sample texts, the universalizing of the figure of the suffering child functions primarily to create a moral imperative to end the conflict in order to protect children, one that takes precedence over complex geopolitical interests. Stories of starving children abstracted from their specific context are used to make news stories more comprehensible and relatable, and lend support for the moral imperative (whatever it may be) at the heart of the story (Moeller, 2002, p.37). The universality of the child is therefore used as a lens through which to tell the unknown. When telling a story about a "far-off" (Sample Text 7) and "less well known" (Sample 4) country such as Yemen, the figure of the child therefore becomes a cultural bridge invoked "to make the unfamiliar seem familiar" (Berkowitz, 2011, p.209).

The discourse of universality is accompanied in the sample texts by a depoliticization of the conflict in Yemen. As the universality of the child provides moral clarity to the conflict, it also functions to simplify it. This moral imperative to end the suffering of the child often supersedes a nuanced analysis of the complex geopolitical forces at play in Yemen. This results in a depoliticization of the Yemen conflict and a supra-politicization of the figure of the suffering child. The depoliticization of the conflict is achieved in the sample texts through heavily affective discourse; the conflict in Yemen is described as "unconscionable" and "infuriating" (Sample Text 8), "devastating" (Sample Text 5), a "hell on earth" and "humanitarian nightmare" (Sample Text 4), "moral catastrophe" (Sample Text 7), and "horrific" (Sample Text 2) specifically for what it does to children. The suffering of children in Yemen is described using terms like "misery" (Sample Text 3), "tragedy" (multiple), and finally "beyond heartbreaking" (Sample Text 2). This affective discourse works on the emotions of the reader and largely replaces a discourse of political analysis:

> *"During the past 15 months, I have seen first hand the hardships that children face - a direct consequence of an avoidable and unnecessary conflict that has engulfed this largely forgotten country, which boasts a population not much more than Australia's" (Sample Text 1)*

> *"Many global security issues involve complex trade-offs, but this is different. Our behaviour is just unconscionable" (Sample Text 7)*

> *"That's sophisticated realpolitik for you: because we dislike Iran's ayatollahs, we are willing to starve Yemeni schoolchildren." (Sample Text 7)*

These excerpts depict the war in Yemen in a depoliticized, dehistoricized, and reducing way. From a postcolonial perspective, this functions to fix violence into the culture of Yemen (Mamdani, 2007). While some of the sample texts briefly explain the conflict, only one provides a nuanced analysis of the political situation, and some fail to give any adequate contextual information. Rather, the sample texts often trivialize the conflict to something that was "avoidable and unnecessary" or flippantly reduced it to one sentence. The salience of the figure of the child rests on the truism that the suffering of a child is reprehensible without contingencies, eliminating the need for qualifying details about the context of suffering. Just as representations of children are depoliticized, so too are the accompanying demands. Malkki (2010) notes that the affective authority of the innocent suffering child is rarely able to cross into the realm of concrete diplomatic relations (p.67). This was observed in the appeals made in the sample texts: proposed solutions rarely involved a thorough diplomatic solution, or anything more than sending more humanitarian aid and simply ending the war or at least the West's participation in it.

4.2.1 Collective Complicity and Responsibility

A major theme that emerged in the sample texts in tandem with the universalization of the figure of the child was that of a collective responsibility for the children. In relation to the child there emerged a notion of a collective "we" in each sample text, signifying a sometimes unspecified community of adults who bear responsibility for both perpetrating and alleviating the suffering of Yemeni children. This "we" sometimes referred to the international community, but more often seemed to refer to the West specifically. Six of the sample texts explicitly named and shamed Western nations for their complicity in the destruction of Yemen:

> *"Your Tax Dollars Help Starve Children" (Sample Text 8- Title)*

> *"US bombs are killing children in Yemen. Does anybody care?" (Sample Text 2)*

> *"President Trump didn't mention it at the United Nations, but America is helping to kill, maim and starve Yemeni children" (Sample Text 7)*

> *"There is a US imprint on each of these civilian deaths." (Sample Text 4)*

The theme of Western complicity was often the central focus of the sample texts. In these sample texts, the collective "we" was used to establish a sense of culpability and thereby position of power. Furthermore, Western complicity then often became the focal point of moral indignation; rather than "be outraged" at civilian deaths, the message became "be outraged" specifically at the Western role in facilitating these civilian deaths. The sample texts establish a direct causal link between the West's actions and the suffering of children. In some instances, this took the form of a discourse of Western *ownership* over the situation in Yemen:

> *"The United Nations has called it the world's worst humanitarian crisis, and we own it" (Sample Text 7)*

> *"The suffering grows and no end is in sight. This is turning out to be our crime too" (Sample Text 3)*

Since the wellbeing of children supersedes political interest, suffering children posit that it is all adults, the collective "we", who are responsible for the safety of the world's children (Holland, 2004, 150). In this spirit, a theme of collective responsibility for the child emerges in the sample texts:

> *"Yemeni children are dying on the world's watch. Here's how we can help" (Sample Text 6)*

> *"It is in all of our interests to prevent the humanitarian tragedy unfolding in Yemen from deteriorating further. We owe it to Yemen's children and their families." (Sample Text 5)*

In these excerpts, a global "we" emerges. Other instances discuss the role "international community" in addressing the Yemeni conflict. Yet, even those that invoked a global "we" community are still targeted towards Western readers and centered Western powers as playing an integral role in alleviating the suffering of Yemeni children. In this way, the sample texts emphasize the West's position of power and superiority in alleviating the suffering in Yemen. While the sample texts do stress Western complicity, there is still a strong element of a Western saviour complex that absolves and redeems the West:

> *"Whenever I visit communities supported by Australian aid, I am greeted with appreciation that my government, a distant and seemingly utopian country, is extending its help. It is something we should all be proud of." (Sample Text 1)*

> *"A bit hesitantly, I told Ahmed that I thought that my country, America, had probably provided the bomb that had killed his daughters. He was not angry, just resigned." (Sample Text 8)*

> *"" I love the U.S.," Mr. Sharaf told me. "We Look to the U.S. as the only force that can stop this war."" (Sample Text 8)*

In these excerpts, and other instances, the West is often portrayed as "generous", which vindicates its complicity. This discourse implies not only that the West is benevolent, but more importantly that the people of Yemen themselves are grateful towards Western powers. This dynamic between a suffering Global South and a benevolent Global North work on the figure of the child; the infantilization of the global south is embodied in the figure of the suffering child, who is in need of help from the West. This affirmation of superiority and power accompanies acknowledgements of complicity and responsibility in the sample texts.

4.3 Children and Temporality

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In the sample texts, the figure of the child came to be a symbol onto which complex of notions of temporality were projected. The child emerged as a powerful mnemonic that linked the present to both the past and the future.

4.3.1 Lessons from the Past

Several of the sample texts conjured up collective memories from past humanitarian crises, specifically ones which are considered in the collective memory of the international community as moral failings, as a call to learn from the past and caution against making the same mistakes in Yemen.

> *"Washington is agonizingly slow at learning from its mistakes...And yet we are now back to making the same mistakes, this time in a less well-known country called Yemen." (Sample Text 4)*

> *"I've been an aid worker for more than a decade, deployed to emergencies in places like Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe and Timor Leste. But nothing prepared me for this. The suffering in Yemen is on a scale that's hard to fathom." (Sample Text 1)*

> *"If that happens, Aden may soon plunge into Somalia-like chaos." (Sample Text 8)*

By harkening back to mistakes of the past, these quotes invoke a sense of a failed international responsibility to protect the vulnerable and implies that Yemen has the potential to become another international failing if action is not taken. Edy (1999) writes that historical analogies use collective memory as a form of contemplating and reexamining the past. One sample text specifically references this process of introspection and reflection often undertaken in the aftermath of a moral mistake:

> *"After a major famine, there is always soul-searching about how the world could have allowed this to happen. What's needed this time is not soul-searching a few years from now, but action today to end the way and prevent a cataclysm." (Sample Text 8)*

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However, rather than praise the process of soul-searching, this excerpt points to a hypocrisy in the practice of collective memory. It can be argued that the collective memory of past events functions on a more contemporary and local scale as well. In the sample texts, instances juxtaposing narratives about a child who died with another who is at risk of death serve similarly to caution against repeating past mistakes. Finally, the call to learn from history, by bringing the past into the present, creates a sense of urgency to change the trajectory of the current situation in order to prevent repetition of past mistakes.

4.3.2 The Urgency of Now

Regarding temporality, the most consistently recurring theme found in the sample texts was that of urgency. All the sample texts stressed that the situation in Yemen is dire, that time is running out to prevent a catastrophe, and that action must be taken *now.* The urgent need to take immediate action was often amplified by framing the suffering of the child in temporal terms:

> *"We're running out of time and money to help the children of Yemen" (Sample Text 5 - Title)*

> *"Here in Yemen, one child dies every 10 minutes due to malnutrition and preventable illnesses" (Sample Text 1)*

> *"Each day, it is estimated that eight children are killed or seriously injured." (Sample Text 6)*

The use of time, and specifically curt temporal periods, to elucidate the suffering of children in Yemen triggers a sense of urgency; there is an immediacy, exigency, and temporal tangibility to the suffering that reinforces a call to action. This is compounded by the imagery of the child as "fighting for his/her life", a phrase that appeared in several sample texts. This sense of the incessant and acute presence of death, however, is not framed as disheartening or as if time has run out. On the contrary, the sample texts emphasize that more suffering is avoidable. This is achieved by locating Yemen's political situation as "on the brink of" catastrophe, as in the following excerpts:

> *"About 8.4 million people hang on the brink of starvation and another 7 million people lie malnourished." (Sample Text 2)*

> *"Half of the country's 22 million inhabitants are on the brink of starvation; 1.8 million are severely malnourished. For many it is already too late" (Sample Text 3)*

> *"The country is on the brink of famine and is in the midst of the worst cholera outbreak in the world" (Sample Text 4)*

> *"Out of 20 million people who need help securing food, nearly 10 million are just a step away from famine." (Sample Text 5)*

In these statements, the sample texts juxtapose a situation that is already bad with a situation that has the potential to be significantly worse to convey a sense of both urgency and hope; they stress both the impending suffering and the possibility of avoiding it. This notion of being "on the brink of" can be related to Zelizer's (2010) analysis of the about-to-die image, which she argues "draw viewer involvement" by contrasting the fragility of a body in the stages of death with the hope that death can still be avoided (25). The pictures of starving children featured in the sample texts support this argument, as they depict nameless figures of starving children without giving details about what happened to the child, allowing the reader to entertain the possibility of hope. This also allows the viewer to maintain a sense of power and agency over the child, reminding them that they are still in a position to help or save the child in a way that reinscribes the dynamic between adult and child.

4.3.3 The Promise of the Future

As suggested by the literature, the figure of the child acquired heightened significance particularly in regards to the future, and more specifically the future of Yemen as a nation (James & Prout, 1997b).

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> *"A generation of Yemeni children have also had their childhoods ripped out from beneath them, losing their access to education. These children are the future of this country – tomorrow's teachers, doctors and accountants – but how can they fulfil their potential if they aren't able to learn to read and write?...How will children recover once the weapons are finally downed?" (Sample Text 1)*

> *"Without education, the future of millions of children and the country itself could be lost." (Sample Text 6)*

> *"" These children are the future of Yemen," Dr. Aida Hussein, a nutrition speciality, told me, looking at Fawaz. "He will be stunted. How will he do in school?"" (Sample Text 8)*

In these excerpts, there are two themes that emerge in relation to the future of the child. Firstly, the hardships facing children in the present are projected into the future. In particular, the notion of the children of Yemen being "stunted" came up frequently. This act of "stunting" implies that the child was prevented from developing because they were denied the proper childhood to do so. The suffering of the child is thereby intensified in relation to the present state of despair and the potential that can no longer be realized, echoing the cycle of violence thesis outlined in the literature (Burman, 1994). Secondly, the figure of the Yemeni child becomes a symbol of the future the nation: the condition of Yemen becomes a reflection of the wellbeing of the child. As the Yemeni child becomes the "synecdoche for a country's future", a stolen childhood perpetuates into a stolen future of the nation (Moeller, 2002, 39).

5. 5. CONCLUSION

> *"There's really no such thing as the 'voiceless'. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard."*
>
> Arundhati Roy

This project sought to critically examine the way in which the figure of the child is represented in Western media coverage of the Yemen conflict, and what this reveals about the place that the child occupies in the global imaginary. In doing so, it bridges the fields of representation studies with theories about how childhood is constructed. Through a multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of eight opinion pieces about the conflict in Yemen, it has argued that the figure of the child is represented as a passive, innocent, and universal being that is deliberately separated from the complexity of historical and political context in order to confer a moral, humanitarian appeal. These findings are consistent with other literature on the figure of the child, which theorize that it is used to appeal to the compassion of adults while reaffirming their position as protectors. With specific reference to universality and temporality, the child is produced in Western media reporting on Yemen as an entity that is "out of time and space" (James & Prout, 1997, 229). In reality, however, the child exists very much in time and space, and displacing the child from its temporal and spatial context has material consequences for children outside the Western world (James & Prout, 1997b, 229).

In critiquing Western media representations of Yemeni children, the intention is never to diminish the suffering of Yemen's civilian population, child or adult. Rather, it is to expose and deconstruct the naturalized assumptions and veiled power dynamics that manifest in the figure of the child. It is to illustrate how the figure of the Global South child is manipulated by Western media to secure the discursive authority of the Global North. It is to recover the child from the liminal space in which it has been abandoned. And finally, it is to encourage reflexivity about how children often mediate our response to the suffering of distant others, and what this suggests about our ability to empathize.

To treat this as a question of media morality is to acknowledge that the power of the media is not only representational but also productive; the significance of media representations rests in how they construct the world by making meaning and are thereby "inscribed into the hegemonic struggle" for symbolic power (Silverstone, 2006, 101). It is also to acknowledge that perceptions and construction of children impact children's experience, realities, and engagement with the world around them (James & Prout, 2004, p.13). Sincere concern for the global moral order must grapple with our relationship with distant others, just as sincere concern for the suffering of children must delve into the messy and complicated factors that engender their circumstances (Silverstone, 2006, 8; Malkki, 2010, 82).

Future research into this field may benefit, then, from projects that embody the normative, interventionist spirit of CDA and highlight the "minority discourses and diasporic voices, emergent counter-discourses" by providing a platform for children to speak to their own experiences (Breeze, 2011, 517). By providing a space in which the child can be appreciated and

represented as a human being in and of itself, future research can challenge the silencing, abstraction, and dislocation that is endemic of current Western media representations of the figure of the child in the Global South.

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"Won't somebody please think of the children?"
Nadine Talaat

7. APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Sampled Articles

Lee, J. (2019, Jan. 29). Australia's generous aid to Yemen mustn't be undermined by its weapons sales. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jan/29/australias-generous-aid-to-yemen-mustnt-be-undermined-by-its-weapons-sales

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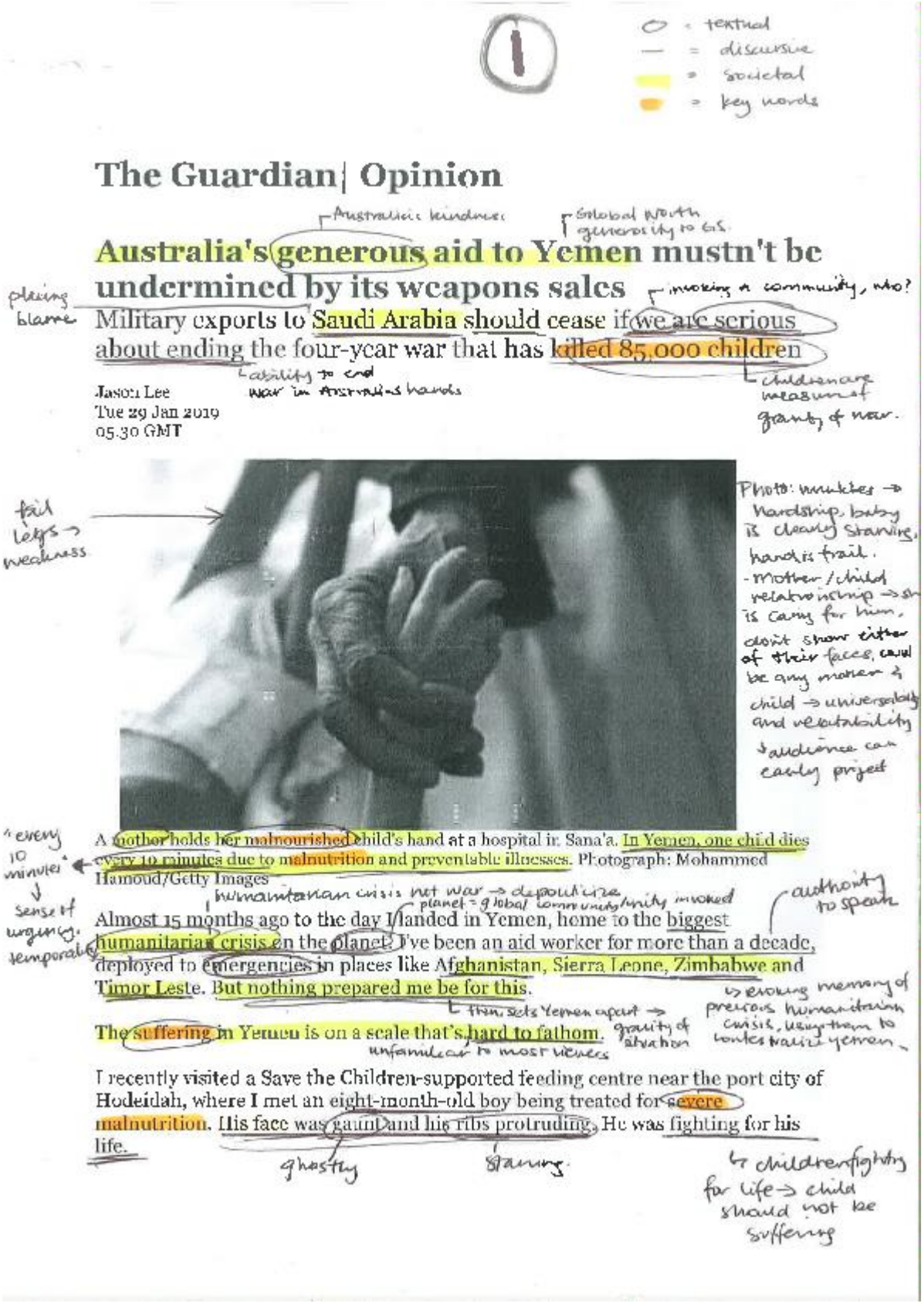
Appendix 2: Annotated Sample Text 1



"Won't somebody please think of the children?"

Nadine Talaat

no name

constantly children dying

The boy's 18-month-old brother had passed away from a fever not long before. While I knew well that thousands of children were suffering from malnutrition and stunting across the country, I couldn't hide my shock when I met the boy, who weighed just 4kg, or about half the average for his age.

Yemen worse than other things I've seen.

no name

focused on his feelings

I was overcome by a profound sadness. My thoughts immediately went to my 10-month-old niece, the first grandchild for my parents. She is an absolute joy to my family: full of life, vibrant, cheeky and inquisitive. But above all, she is healthy and safe.

child as relatable

all words that describe normative childhood experience → contrast to Yemen

no diff except circumstance

not their fault

I couldn't help but compare the two children and the lives they were born into. Despite the impact meeting this young child had on me, his story and situation are far from unique.

noname

people more likely to be moved by children

passive, doesn't assign blame

Here in Yemen, one child dies every 10 minutes due to malnutrition and preventable illnesses, with an estimated 85,000 children dying since the start of the conflict nearly four years ago.

sense of time, urgency, but also like this has gone on too long.

not clear why they die → who is responsible?

How much more can the children of Yemen endure?

again time, now much longer

reduces conflict

During the past 15 months, I have seen first hand the hardships that children face – a direct consequence of an avoidable and unnecessary conflict that has engulfed this largely forgotten country, which boasts a population not much more than Australia's.

draws causal relationship btw child death and war of adults

unknown through the familiar

Photo: face turned away, standing in rubble

A child looks out at buildings that were damaged in an airstrike in the city of Taiz. Photograph: Ahmad Al-Basha/AFP/Getty Images

“Won’t somebody please think of the children?”
Nadine Talaat

"Won't somebody please think of the children?"
Nadine Talaat

I cannot remember another time in my life when I witnessed such desperation and hunger. At the same time, I have also met some of the kindest people imaginable, who welcomed me into their homes despite having barely enough food to survive. Their kindness and resilience was inspiring.

I have also had the privilege of traveling across many parts of Yemen, a beautiful country with rugged mountains, fertile plains and a rich history that dates back thousands of years.

Before the war, Yemen was a bucket-list destination for adventurous travellers. Now it's one of the most dangerous places on Earth for children.

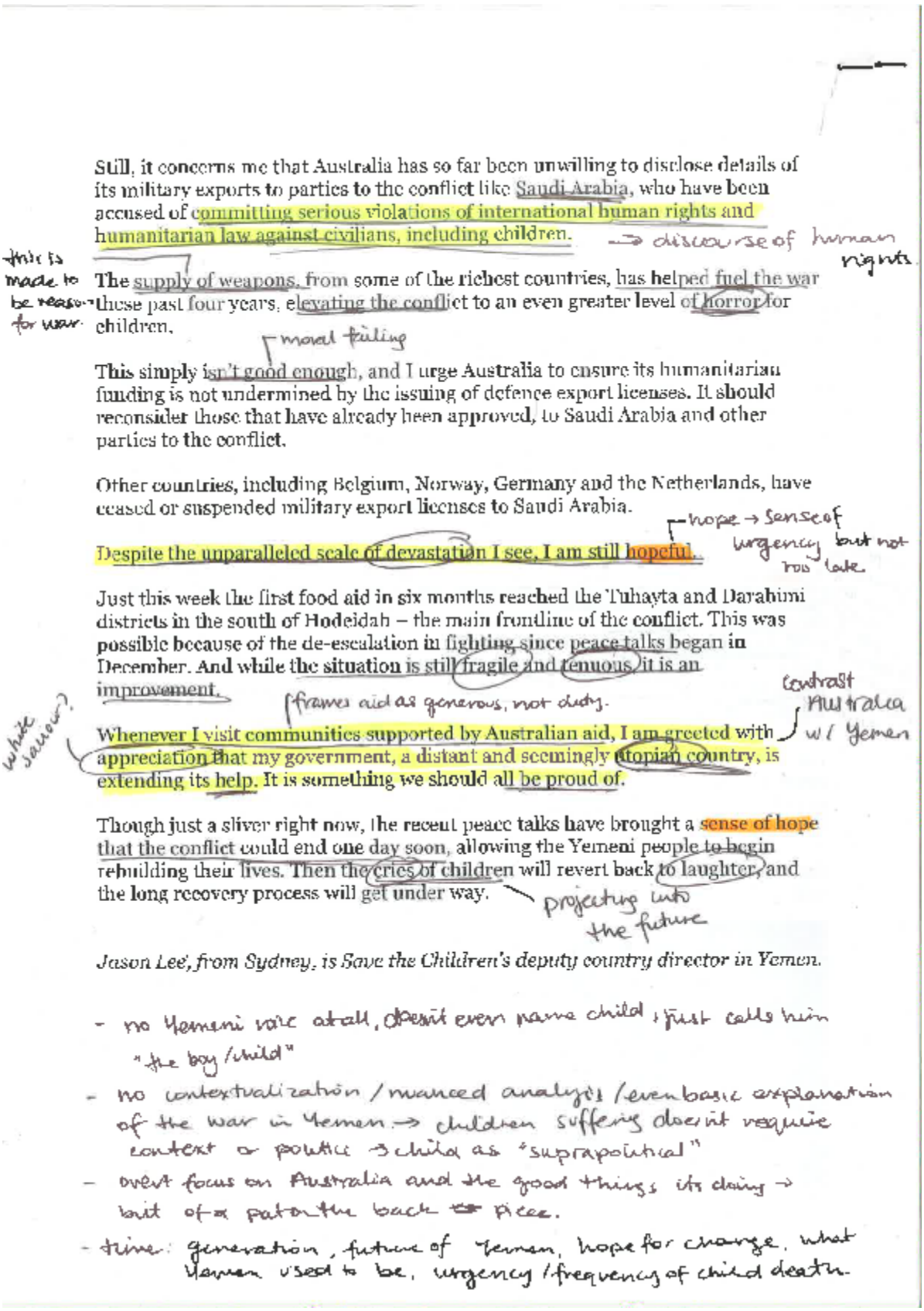
And the casualties of this senseless conflict go far beyond the physical injuries that children sustain during the fighting and airstrikes, and the emergence of preventable communicable diseases such as cholera and diphtheria, which are made worse by a health system under extraordinary stress.

A generation of Yemeni children have also had their childhoods ripped out from beneath them, losing their access to education. These children are the future of this country – tomorrow's teachers, doctors and accountants – but how can they fulfil their potential if they aren't able to learn to read and write? And what about the distress, trauma and mental health of children who have witnessed extreme violence and bloodshed? How will children recover once the weapons are finally downed?

For its part, Australia has been a generous humanitarian donor to the Yemen crisis. Its funding has helped begin the enormous task of rebuilding the healthcare system so that women can deliver their babies in functional facilities and access vital medical care and medication.

Save the Children has also used Australian funds to provide children and families with access to clean water and food, and to help prevent the spread of cholera.

A displaced child draws on the hand of his sister at a camp for internally displaced persons Yemen's northern province of Amran. Photograph: Yahya Arhab/EPA



Still, it concerns me that Australia has so far been unwilling to disclose details of its military exports to parties to the conflict like Saudi Arabia, who have been accused of committing serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law against civilians, including children.

→ discourse of human rights.

this is made to be reason for war

The supply of weapons, from some of the richest countries, has helped fuel the war these past four years, elevating the conflict to an even greater level of horror for children.

moral failing

This simply isn't good enough, and I urge Australia to ensure its humanitarian funding is not undermined by the issuing of defence export licenses. It should reconsider those that have already been approved, to Saudi Arabia and other parties to the conflict.

Other countries, including Belgium, Norway, Germany and the Netherlands, have ceased or suspended military export licenses to Saudi Arabia.

hope → sense of urgency but not too late.

Despite the unparalleled scale of devastation I see, I am still hopeful.

Just this week the first food aid in six months reached the Tuhayta and Darahimi districts in the south of Hodeidah – the main frontline of the conflict. This was possible because of the de-escalation in fighting since peace talks began in December. And while the situation is still fragile and tenuous, it is an improvement.

frames aid as generous, not duty.

contrast Australia w/ Yemen

white saviour?

Whenever I visit communities supported by Australian aid, I am greeted with appreciation that my government, a distant and seemingly utopian country, is extending its help. It is something we should all be proud of.

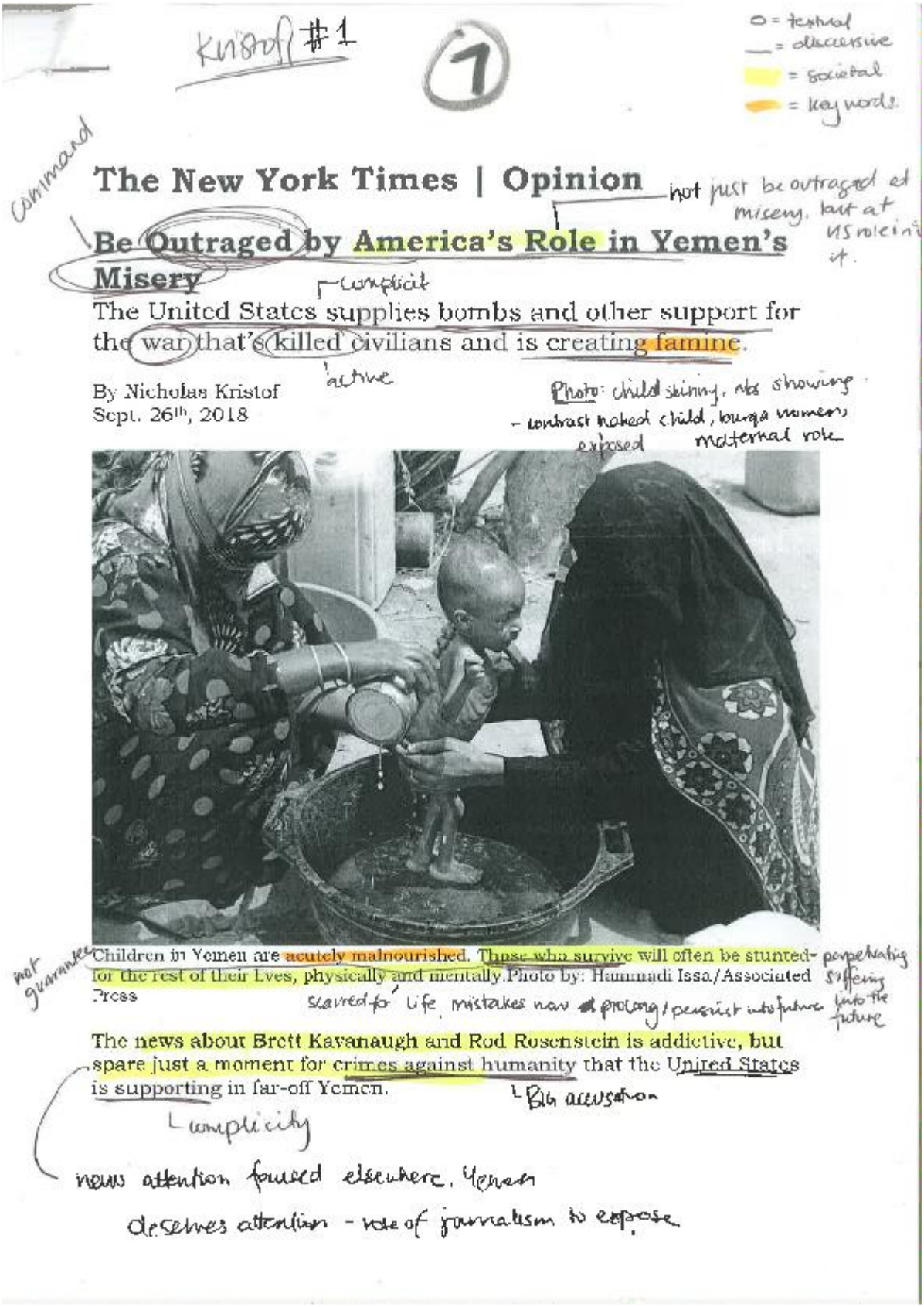
Though just a sliver right now, the recent peace talks have brought a sense of hope that the conflict could end one day soon, allowing the Yemeni people to begin rebuilding their lives. Then the cries of children will revert back to laughter, and the long recovery process will get under way.

projecting into the future

Jason Lee, from Sydney, is Save the Children's deputy country director in Yemen.

- no Yemeni voice at all, doesn't even name child, just calls him "the boy/child"
- no contextualization / nuanced analysis / even basic explanation of the war in Yemen → children suffering doesn't require context or politics → child as "supra-political"
- overt focus on Australia and the good things it's doing → bit of a pat on the back re: piece.
- tone: generation, future of Yemen, hope for change, what Yemen used to be, urgency / frequency of child death.

Appendix 3: Annotated Sample Text 7



“Won’t somebody please think of the children?”
Nadine Talaat

"Won't somebody please think of the children?"

Nadine Talaat

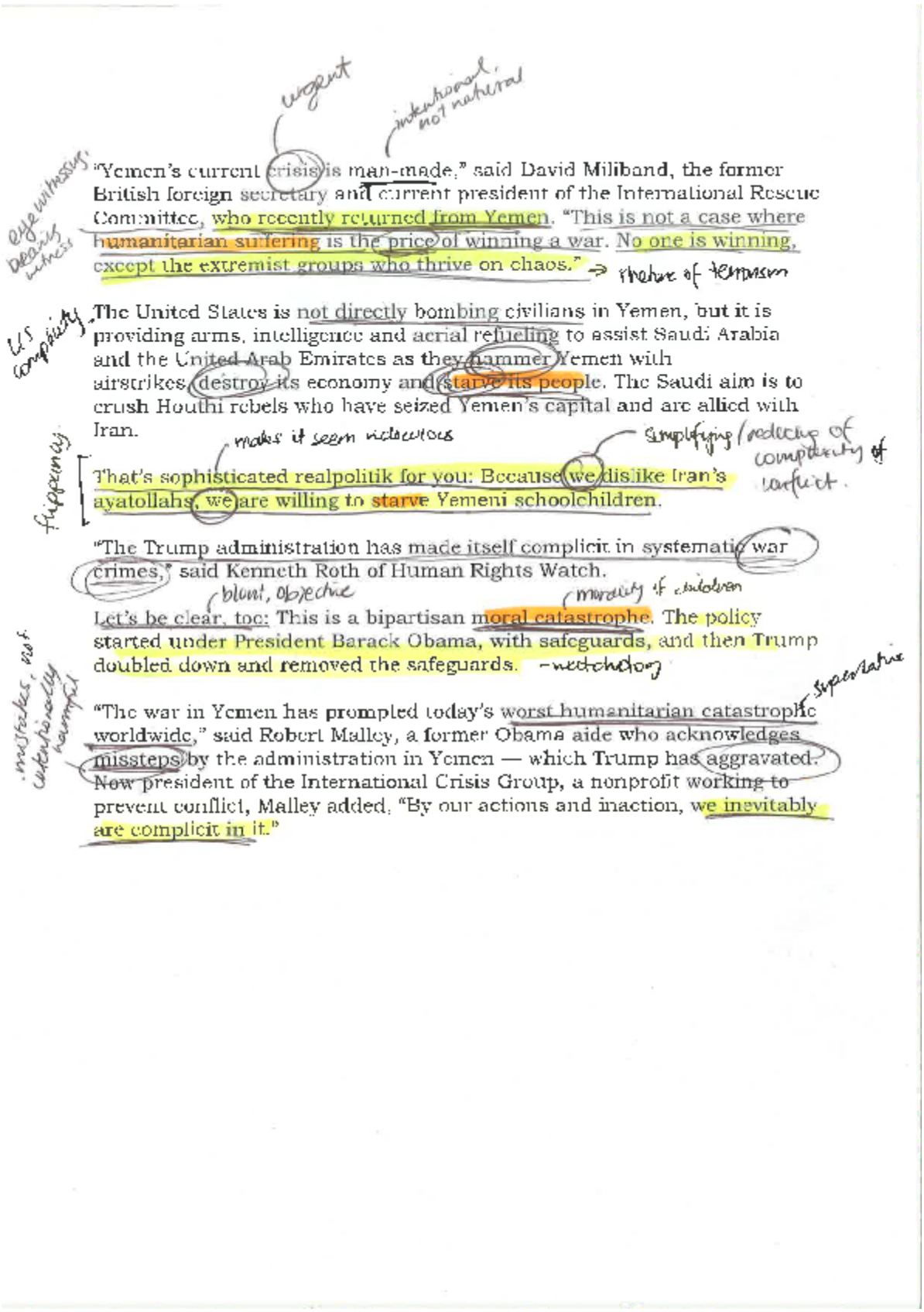
President Trump didn't mention it at the United Nations, but America is helping to kill, maim and starve Yemeni children. At least eight million Yemenis are at risk of starvation from an approaching famine caused not by crop failures but by our actions and those of our allies. The United Nations has called it the world's worst humanitarian crisis, and we own it.

An American bomb made by Lockheed Martin struck a Yemen school bus last month, killing 51 people. Earlier, American bombs killed 155 mourners at a funeral and 97 people at a market.

Starving Yemeni children are reduced to eating a sour paste made of leaves. Even those who survive will often be stunted for the rest of their lives, physically and mentally.

Many global security issues involve complex trade-offs, but this is different. Our behavior is just unconscionable.

At least eight million Yemenis are at risk of starvation from an approaching famine. Photo by: Essa Ahmed/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images



"Yemen's current crisis is man-made," said David Miliband, the former British foreign secretary and current president of the International Rescue Committee, who recently returned from Yemen. "This is not a case where humanitarian suffering is the price of winning a war. No one is winning, except the extremist groups who thrive on chaos."

The United States is not directly bombing civilians in Yemen, but it is providing arms, intelligence and aerial refueling to assist Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates as they hammer Yemen with airstrikes, destroy its economy and starve its people. The Saudi aim is to crush Houthi rebels who have seized Yemen's capital and are allied with Iran.

That's sophisticated realpolitik for you: Because we dislike Iran's ayatollahs, we are willing to starve Yemeni schoolchildren.

"The Trump administration has made itself complicit in systematic war crimes," said Kenneth Roth of Human Rights Watch.

Let's be clear, too: This is a bipartisan moral catastrophe. The policy started under President Barack Obama, with safeguards, and then Trump doubled down and removed the safeguards.

"The war in Yemen has prompted today's worst humanitarian catastrophic worldwide," said Robert Malley, a former Obama aide who acknowledges missteps by the administration in Yemen — which Trump has aggravated. Now president of the International Crisis Group, a nonprofit working to prevent conflict, Malley added, "By our actions and inaction, we inevitably are complicit in it."

“Won’t somebody please think of the children?”
Nadine Talaat

"Won't somebody please think of the children?"
Nadine Talaat

A girl being weighed at the Aslam Health Center in Hajjah, Yemen. Photo by: Hammadi Issa/Associated Press

I know, I know. All eyes are focused on the reality television show that is the Trump White House. But we can't let Trump suck all the oxygen away from life-or-death issues. Trump drama cannot be allowed to nullify global tragedy.

The carnage in Yemen hasn't stirred more outrage because the Saudis use their blockade to keep out journalists. I've been trying for two years to go, but the Saudis bar aid groups from taking me on relief flights.

Both sides in this civil war have at times behaved brutally, and the only way out is diplomacy. But Saudi Arabia's crown prince seems to prefer famine and a failed state in Yemen to compromise, and the more we provide him weapons the longer we extend the suffering. We should be using our influence to rein the Saudis in, not cheer them on.

“Won’t somebody please think of the children?”
Nadine Talaat