Everybody's Child: An Exploration of Images of Children that Shocked the World

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Abstract: Despite the passivity and vulnerability of childhood as a social construction, the image of the child is both powerful and transformative. Such is the power of images of the child they can and have shaped the history of nation states, shifted policy and become emblematic of a cry for change. In journalism, filmmaking, and news media the child can become the symbol of a nation, a conflict, a tragedy and the failure of policy, or indeed the adult world, to care and protect childhood itself. Using evocative images from across the 20th and 21st century, this paper interrogates how idealised notions of childhood become focal and challenged by images which reveal the death, deprivation and destruction of children. The image of 3-year-old Alan Kurdi's body on a Turkish Beach in 2015 resonated around the world. It became the biggest trending photo on Twitter within 24 h and graced the front of hundreds of global newspapers the following day. It also demanded a political response, as presidents and prime ministers scrambled to hold press conferences and generate policy to respond to the Syrian and wider so-called Mediterranean crisis. This is just a recent example in a long line of iconic images of 'the child' that have shaped policy and shifted hearts and minds. The power and influence of these photographs is traced here to highlight where the discursive vulnerability of a single child becomes emblematic of the failures of the powerful: adults, governments, nation states, and global governance. Using the examples of famine stricken South Sudan (1993) and the 'migrant crisis' of the Mediterranean Sea (2015), how these hitherto anonymous children briefly become everybody's child is explored here.

Keywords: childhood; social construction; images; photographs; media

1. Introduction

> 'I hope that the picture alone will catalyse this Congress, this senate, this committee to do something'
>
> (Ron Johnson, Chairman of Homeland Security Committee USA)

Valeria Ramirez and her father, Óscar Alberto Martínez Ramírez, were fleeing El Salvador with the desperate hope of reaching the safety and opportunities of the USA. Their bodies were found in shallow water on the banks of the Rio Grande on 26 June 2019 as they tried to cross from Mexico. The distressing image seen around the world was of both father and daughter face down in the water with Valeria tucked inside her father's tee-shirt and her arms around his neck. These deaths were by no means the first. Dozens of people died attempting to cross the Rio Grande in 2019 and in June of that year the water levels were high making the river and its currents very treacherous. Despite numerous previous deaths that year, these deaths or rather, Julia Le Duc's photo of them, triggered global attention (if only for a few hours in news feeds), and generated heated political and contentious exchanges in the USA concerning who was to blame, and how such deaths might be prevented.

This response, or the intensive ensuing debate about how to respond, becomes significantly more of an imperative when the death is one of a young child, a blameless, innocent victim of statecraft and

flawed political policy. Prior to these deaths President Trump had been using -inflammatory language concerning immigrants, describing them as 'animals' and suggesting that they were 'infesting our country' (Independent Newspaper 2019). However, as Valeria's image was seen in multiple countries alternative narratives became audible. The House speaker in the USA, Nancy Pelosi, called for political action saying, 'This isn't who we are as a country. We have obligations to humanity that are being completely ignored ... this is a manifestation of behavior that is outside the circle of human behavior' (Associated Press 2019). Pelosi suggested that this image should challenge the Trump Administration to do more for Central American migrants. As Ron Johnson, Chairman of Homeland Security Committee, said 'I don't want another picture like that on the US border' (Associated Press 2019).

The image of 23-month-old Valeria Ramirez is the most recent in a number of iconic images of children which have caused seismic shifts enough to shake (or threaten to) established political stances and policy approaches. In this article other such iconic images including the starving child and the vulture in South Sudan famine in 1993 and Alan Kurdi, a victim of the refugee crises in the Mediterranean Sea (2015), are discussed. Providing this genealogical lens enables an exploration of change brought about by these images as well as commonalities in the public and political response to them. Such responses reveal the social positioning of children, the collective emotional response towards infants and the power of the social construct of childhood. This article considers why the impact of these images is so significant and situates them in contemporary discourses of childhood. Initially these images need to be set into a social context where our collective ideas about children are established through a normative and dominant social construction of childhood. It is within this social construct that children are attributed particular characteristics which inform and shape their childhoods.

2. The Social Construction of Childhood

As individuals we have an idea about what a child is based on our own childhood experiences and our collective social and cultural values surrounding childhood. As Mouritsen (2002, p. 37) has argued, we each have a childhood in 'our baggage' which comes complete with experiences, memories, knowledge and attitudes. Some childhoods are happy, others traumatic, but no adult has escaped the childhood experience. This universal experience helps to build an assumption that everybody 'knows' what a child is, (James and James 2008). But, as Rogers (2003) argues, such familiarity can impede rather than illuminate our understanding of childhood. Fundamentally childhood is regarded as an early phase of human life in all cultures and all societies and this notion of a temporal stage at the beginning of a journey has particular characteristics associated with it. Childhood is encapsulated within a discourse of developmentalism, as a state of progression towards adulthood, where notions of becoming rather than being prevail (Qvortrup 2002). Adulthood is assumed to embody privileged traits such as independence, autonomy, rationality, competence, intellectual ability, power and knowledge. Childhood, as an earlier and less competent stage in the life course, is constructed as lacking both the biological and social characteristics of adulthood. Childhood then is categorised as a progressive journey of improvement towards adulthood, where the child's task is to acquire the attributes of adulthood through social institutions such as education and the family. Such improvements are acquired through years of economic investment on the part of the state and economic and emotional investment on the part of parents in terms of education, welfare and protection (James et al. 1998). Childhood as a category, is subordinate to, but inextricable from, the adult category which is socially constructed to provide and care for this vulnerable, dependent and unknowing child. The stance of childhood as socially constructed speaks to the perspective that childhood emerges through a set of socially held values and ideas, rather than being a natural state for children. Early childhood is considered to be a stage where children are perceived as being particularly cute and attractive which encourages adults to care and protect. Childhood has become socially constructed as a place of innocence, a time of perpetual play, with little or no responsibility. This discourse of childhood is both

redemptive and transformative where intractable social ills can be addressed preventatively for future social and individual prosperity.

These are the cherished adult-held ideas about what childhood should be. It is a discourse in which we situate and wrap around children to prepare them for adulthood but also protect them from it until they are sufficiently mature and thus no longer children. For adults, offering children such a childhood is seen as not only essential to parenting and a responsibility of adulthood but also, beneficial for society. A society which cares and provides for its children as vulnerable and less powerful members is regarded as good, cohesive and stable. So, when we ask what is a child? The question cannot be answered without revealing and making reference to who we are as a society or rather, who as a society we wish to be. Images of injured, desperate and dead children are therefore collectively destabilising and distressing to us, not just for those who parent, but for all members of societies who hold childhood as a protected and fragile state. 'How a society depicts children and how it articulates the concept of childhood engages a society's core sense of morality, social order and political integrity' and is inextricable from a nation's identity (Moeller 2002, p. 46). We judge a society by how it treats its children (Hendrick 2003). An image of a dead child can therefore convey collective anxieties of a society (Sánchez-Eppler 2005) and reflect a country's failure to provide. Within this social construct the proximity between the child and death is regarded as profane.

There is a distinct boundary between the social construction of childhood and death. Childhood is a state of innocence, health, longevity, vitality and light: a place of beginnings and immortal promise. In contrast, death is to be feared, a place of endings, sickness, and darkness, (Coombs 2017). Idealised childhood is protected from death and in a Western context children are assumed to not only survive childhood, but to thrive well into old age, thus fulfilling the emotional, social and political investment made by adults and society into childhood. Part of this protective role is to separate and distance children from death. It is therefore in part, the hegemony embedded in the disparate social constructs of childhood and death which make images of child death so impactful and profane to an adult gaze. Our collective concern is summed up in part by Sánchez-Eppler (2005) in contending that what happens to each child happens to childhood as a whole. Such close proximity of childhood and death reveals to us a failure of society as well as an inability of the adult to protect the child. In a single image the two opposing social constructs of childhood and death coalesce and immediately expose our socially held ideas about childhood as merely inaccurate assumptions or cherished conceits about what childhood is and indeed is not. Yet, cultural attitudes towards photos of dead children are relative. Memorial photographs of dead relatives were not unusual in the previous two centuries. In the USA for example memorial daguerreotype images of dead children posed alone or with family members from 1840s and 1850s were prevalent. Such imagery remains today in the form of photographs of still born babies (Fernandez 2011). The grainy black and white historical images also speak to a cultural and collective understanding of bereavement where the personal and private grief of families is experienced and replicated through the distribution and circulation of these photos. The 'lineage of feeling' evoked by these shared images is expanded and a dead child becomes a commodity in the public sphere (Sánchez-Eppler 2005).

In a present context where dominant social constructs of childhood seek to distance children from associations with death, these images can appear macabre. What such unsettling images also evoke is the temporal nature of childhood in that it always ultimately ends for every child either through death or emerging adulthood (Simonds and Rothman 1992). These photographs remind us of our collective desire to preserve childhood and of its precious nature (Sánchez-Eppler 2005). It is argued that these mortal childhoods are more stable, compliant, obedient and easier to adore than a living child who may yet grow to disobey or disappoint parents (Sánchez-Eppler 2005). A dead child protects the sanctity of the childhood construct in that childhood itself remains intact and uncorrupted. In social contexts where childhood is idealised as representing purity, innocence and a carefree state, the dead child remains permanently available as ever innocent, blameless and incorruptible. When we view these images, we bestow on the dead child the unfulfilled promises of their future, what they

might have become, achieved, experienced. Their image becomes a shrine for the life lived and lost, an encapsulation of the idealised notions we collectively endow on children, a safe place for the ideas and values that, had they lived, they would have inevitably grown away from or perhaps not realised.

In discussing the images of dead children, it is perhaps controversial or distasteful to refer to the cuteness of infants but it is relevant here. It is argued that infantile characteristics elicit caretaking behaviour (Borgi et al. 2014) and that adults respond in positive ways to 'babyishness' particularly if they perceive the infant as cute. A cute infant encourages and extends the attention of adults (Hildebrandt and Fitzgerald 1983). The emotional response to the cuteness of infants has been described as 'Kama muta' meaning moved by love. This social–relational emotion is argued to evoke empathy, to be communal, and to motivate the desire to care (Zickfield et al. 2017).

Our reactions to the image of a young dead child is therefore a complex combination of our emotional responses, the current social construction of childhood. our culturally relative perceptions of death and our anxiety around the failure of adults and nations to keep the most vulnerable in society safe. It is representative of a failure in the present, induces anxiety for the future and embodies a lost childhood cherished by adults as a place of safety in an uncertain world. It is with these socially held ideas about childhood and death in mind that the literature surrounding the ways in which images are used is outlined.

3. Literature Review

Communication through visual means is highly relevant to disseminate content (Seo 2014). Visual content is straightforward as a means of communication and can easily induce emotion (Seo and Kinsey 2012). Belicove (2011) argues that public engagement on social media is most increased when it involves images. Visuals are essential deliverers of information in a 24-h news cycle, immediate and powerful mechanisms of content. Such images take on perhaps even greater relevance when communicating across diverse cultures and countries (Fahamy 2005). For this reason, photographs have a long history of being used to evoke a response. However, in contrast to previous eras where, as Baer et al. (2019, p. 4) argue, we routinely received our world news through a daily newspaper and evening broadcast, we are now exposed to 'relentless and unpredictable media alters flashing from abundant devices'. Seo (2014, p. 150), contends that images distributed via social media can act as 'powerful propaganda tools during conflicts'. Seo uses the example of explicit images of violent civilian deaths being posted on Twitter accounts by Israel Defense Forces and Hama Alqassam Brigades during a rise in conflict in 2012. These images were picked up and used by mainstream media as part of their broader coverage (Peled 2012), eventually becoming, what Kleinnman and Kleinman (1996, p. 1) describe more generally as, 'infotainment' where, 'victims are commercialized' in a media world of commerce and business.

It is also evident that government bodies have historically used images (and continue to do so) as part of propaganda strategies to promote a response, further a cause, or particular political position (Jowett and O'Donnell 1999). During World War Two both the Germans and Americans utilised photography, posters and film to promote their perspectives and direct public opinion. The power of media images can be used to 'simplify, soften, and render contingent the untenable features of the geopolitical realities that they depict' (Chouliaraki 2012, p. 254). Such images and the popular sentiment they evoke, can also be used to trigger a collective call for action, demand an intervention, or a shift in policy, as evidenced by the political rhetoric surrounding Valeria Ramirez's image. Burt and Strongman (2005, p. 572) have explored the use of images of children in advertising campaigns for charity and describe them as being 'affect laden'. Eayrs and Ellis (1990) found that such images elicited greater donations whilst also inducing feelings of sympathy, pity and guilt. Given such emotional responses to infants it is unsurprising to see cute images of young children being extensively employed and exploited in commercial marketing (Duffy and Burton 2000). The continued ability of a photographic image to generate an emotional reaction in the viewer even in a digital age when we are skeptical about digital enhancement, speaks to what Barthes (1981) referred to as the 'magic' of a photograph which can capture the lived presence of another. Even if the photo is that of a corpse it

nevertheless captures a living image (Baer et al. 2019). Sánchez-Eppler (2005, p. 112) contends that the distributive capacity of the photograph creates an infinity from a single act of death, describing such an image as the 'returning dead'. It is unsurprising then that Barthes (1981) has argued that photographs be more accurately referred to as ghosts.

Sontag (1979, p. 15), like Barthes (1981), is critical of the use of photography, likening the taking of a photograph to participating in the 'mortality', 'vulnerability' and 'mutability' of another person. In an era of unprecedented access to photographs, videos and pornography, Sontag (2004) argues that there is a need to interrogate the ethical dilemmas that such access and visual ability evokes, not just for individuals but for the distribution networks. Galloway (2012 in Baer et al. 2019) argues that power lies not in the image itself but in the systems that disperse them. Yet the power of images of distressed or dead children is palpable as we are visually drawn into their narratives. As images are endlessly circulated and reproduced, the deeply private grief of a family becomes commodified and all who see them become connected with those who have lost this child through our capacity for 'sentimentality' (Sánchez-Eppler 2005, p. 108) and empathetic concern (Zickfield et al. 2017). Wells (2013, p. 277) contends that the emotional responses of the viewer or spectator can be a powerful and passionate agent for change and that it is critical to develop greater understanding of the structural causes of social injury', what Chouliaraki and Blaagaard (2013, p. 256), refer to as 'passionate politics'. Despite or perhaps because of this, images of those suffering are commonly 'appropriated to appeal emotionally and morally, both to global audiences and to local populations' (Kleinnman and Kleinman 1996, p. 1). Through such reproduction the personal sorrow of a family enters a system of possession and exchange where any social assumption regarding the opposition or incompatibility of grief and commerce is challenged. (Sánchez-Eppler 2005).

Historically, powerful photos were taken in the USA of mothers during the Great Depression. Women looking wretched were portrayed, often with limp, passive, weak and hungry young children in their arms. Moeller (2002) argues that previously, women made good victims of famine, their social standing ensured that they had little control of the situation unlike men and thus could appear as non-participating victims. However, 'since the feminist movement of the 1970s women have been replaced by children as the public emblems of goodness and purity' (Moeller 2002, p. 37). By mid-1998, author Ann Hulbert wrote in the *New York Times Book Review* that, 'it has become a bipartisan habit to turn vexing public problems into child-centred causes whenever possible' (Moeller 2002, p. 38). Children thus replaced women to become the barometer for social wellbeing.

When images are those of infants, the power of the image arguably increases. 'Children have become proxies' for diverse topics such as foreign policy, internet regulation, healthcare and alcohol control (Moeller 2002, p. 37). Arguably they are also becoming the face of the gun control lobby in the USA and a response to climate change too as epitomised by the activism of Greta Thunberg. Such direct action is representative of an emerging discourse of political agency for children. Within this discourse children's status as political subjects rather than objects of political policy challenge the innocent victim discourse that has made children such powerful emblems. In a similar way that the empowerment of women excluded them from be emblematic of a discourse of blameless victim, socially and politically active children are also omitted. It is younger children that remain available as motifs to trigger our social–relational response and through these emotions draw our attention to a social or political cause. Moeller (2002, p. 47) contends that images of the child 'emerge in public debate most commonly when contesting elites fight each other' and use the media to rejuvenate a flagging debate. The examples presented here beginning with the vulture and the child, certainly comply with this claim.

4. The Vulture and Child

The complexity of providing aid for famine victims in the war-torn country of South Sudan, where many thousands were displaced by famine and civil war, was a regular feature in the news in the early 1990s. However, according to Macleod (1994), the situation was regarded as too complex, too distant and too intractable to grasp by the populace and difficult to address in terms of aid

agency support and challenging diplomatic negotiations. Macleod (1994) claims that, as a global issue, the famine and war in South Sudan was often overlooked by the public. This changed dramatically on the publication of a photograph of a young child crouched in the dust and dirt whilst a vulture stood by in patient anticipation. The photograph was taken by Kevin Carter and published in the New York Times in March 1993 and was rapidly reproduced and circulated by other newspapers around the world. Macleod (1994) contends that this photograph immediately became 'the icon of Africa's anguish'. The image encapsulated and conflated the complex and extensive political and social problems in Sudan at the time. According to Struck (1993), it effectively summarised the enduring suffering of the population for a wider public who, through this image, engaged with South Sudan's ravaged circumstances. Cinders (2008) argued that 'the purpose of this photograph was to provide a shocking metaphor for what was going on in Sudan'. The vulture was interpreted as representative of the wider global population, who hitherto, had done little beyond watching the crises unfold (Cinders 2008).

Moeller (2002, p. 39) argues that 'children are a synecdoche for a country's future, for the political and social well-being of a culture'. Dougherty (2006) contends that the very purpose of this controversial photograph was to elicit shock and bear witness to the human tragedy in Sudan as well as inform people and call for action. The image of this young child and the vulture makes stark the failure of the nation's responsibility towards its children and the incapacity of international aid and diplomacy to make a sufficient difference to prevent this child's plight. The incorruptibility of this infant victim highlighted the pitiless malice and inhumanity of adult and state authority. Public interest in the plight and fate of this child was extensive. The New York times was inundated with enquiries and took the unusual step of publishing a note from the editor indicating that whilst the ultimate fate of the child was unknown, they had apparently got up and carried on walking towards food and shelter after the photograph was taken (Cinders 2008). Carter himself also indicated as much.

As the photographer, Carter received extensive criticism for not helping the child in his photograph. The St. Petersburg Times argued that he was as much a predator as the vulture in the image (Macleod 1994). However, others have claimed that whilst in South Sudan, Carter was constantly surrounded by armed soldiers who prevented such intervention by photojournalists bearing witness to the country's events (Neal 2014). Criticism of Carter continued even as he received a Pulitzer Prize for the photograph. Such criticism is perhaps inevitable. The power of this photograph lies in the lens through which we view it. The dominant Western social construction of childhood demands us to regard young children as cherished, vulnerable, dependent and innocent and thus simultaneously socially constructs the role of adult. Whilst not every adult is a parent, the role of an adult towards children as protector, provider and guardian of this 'priceless child' (Zelizer 1994) is explicit. This photograph was successful in demanding the world acknowledge the famine crises, but it was also interpreted as a young infant whose plight induced empathetic concern (Zickfield et al. 2017) and adult care. Through the lens of the social construction of childhood, Carter's role as an adult, should have been to provide aid in much the same way as Nick Ut did after photographing Kim Phúc during the Vietnam War. In such circumstances, the adult was required to rescue and save this child not simply to capture them on film. An adult transgressing this role becomes open to social reproach and censure. Carter's daughter later claimed that the photograph became a metaphor for how the world treated him after this photograph was published, where Carter became the infant and the world, the vulture (Cinders 2008). Carter committed suicide in 1994. Nick Ut who photographed Kim Phúc naked and burnt by Napalm in Vietnam stopped photographing and took her to hospital. He received similar acclaim to Carter for his image which became an iconic symbol for the anti-war movement in the USA in the 1960s, but none of the censure that Carter did. Demonstrating care and empathy he not only took his photograph but also responded in the way adults are expected to when faced with a child in need. The second image detailed here also involves an adult who depicts such empathetic concern and is of a young Syrian refugee in taken in 2015.

5. Alan Kurdi

In September 2015, the number of refugees attempting to reach the safety of Europe seemed to grow each day. It was the headline of every newscast, and arguably became too protracted and ambiguous for people to easily comprehend the extent of the human tragedy unfolding on and around the borders of a number of European countries. One photograph of a little boy from Syria changed the somewhat passive indifference of the public. Alan Kurdi was three years old and making the treacherous journey to the safety of the Greek island of Kos with his family. Alan, his mother and brother, along with up to a dozen other Syrians drowned in their attempt to reach the shore. He was found lying alone on the beach by a Turkish military policeman called Mehmet Çıplak, and another photo often used when Alan's death is discussed, is of Çıplak gently cradling Alan in his arms as he lifts him out of the shallow seawater. Wills (2019, p. 104) describes the photos of Alan as 'beautiful, calm, peaceful- and all the more horrific for it'.

This tragic death was not isolated, many had already drowned making similar journeys. The political and social discourse surrounding refugees at the time of Alan's death was less than sympathetic. Borders remained closed amid claims in some countries of not having enough room for 'economic migrants', a common parlance on the lips of many politicians. Inflammatory language which described migrants as 'a swarm', a 'human tsunami' and even 'cockroaches' (Plunkett 2016), featured in daily debates about the 'migrant problem' and the focus was how to keep them out of the very countries renowned in the past as sources of refuge to those fleeing such persecution and terror. The body of Alan Kurdi effectively silenced such debate. As Freedland wrote, 'somehow, it seems, we eeded to see those little shoes and bare legs to absorb the knowledge, to let it penetrate our heads and hearts' (Freedland 2015). As Justin Forsyth, CEO of Save the Children, said: "This child's plight should concentrate minds and force the EU to come together and agree to a plan to tackle the refugee crisis" (Smith 2015). In highlighting Alan Kurdi's small shoes and legs, Freedland effectively draws upon our collective ideas about the cuteness and vulnerability of very young children, and our role as protectors. The image of this young infant invites our response as caregivers and demands our attention through his infantile characteristics (Borgi et al. 2014). This image induces our empathetic concern and motivates us to care (Zickfield et al. 2017). Kama muta, our shared social–emotional response, is triggered by the infant characteristics in the image, his little shoes and exposed legs.

Logan (2015) claims that "Photojournalists sometimes capture images so powerful the public and policymakers can't ignore what the pictures show." An immediate demand for politicians to respond to the crises, and for something to be done to support refugees like Alan and his family reverberated in the very countries who had kept their doors closed to them hitherto. Canada as the country that Alan's family had been trying to reach removed some of the legal barriers which prevented the possibility of such a destination and under its new prime minister Justin Trudeau began to welcome 25,000 Syrian refugees. In the UK David Cameron, in a bid to appear humanitarian and responsive to the sudden shift in discourse surrounding migrants, altered his previous stance on refugee intake and announced that 4000 refuges would be accommodated directly from refugee camps bordering Syria annually until 2020 (Dathan 2015). No adult no matter how powerful was seemingly immune from the shared care and concern this tiny dead infant induced.

Germany agreed to admit thousands of refugees stuck in Hungary just two days after Alan's body was found. European nations agreed to collaborate and share the burden of supporting refugees across countries. "The principle is so important and reflects such a change of thinking that in itself this is a very significant development," an optimistic Peter Sutherland, the UN's special representative for international migration, told the Guardian newspaper on the night of the decision (Kingsley 2015). However, such political outpourings of humanitarianism and compassion have been short lived with many European countries abandoning their promises once public attention was drawn elsewhere (Kingsley 2015).

In contrast to rather hollow and short-lived political promises, those from the charitable sector have stood the test of time. Aid from public contribution was extensive in supporting refugees and has funded many initiatives as a result.

The use of images of young children is clearly provocative. These images demand public attention and can shore up or undermine a previously established political stance. When writing about the contested abortion debate, Pollack Petchesky (1987, p. 263) argued that the photo of a dead foetus was worth 'a thousand words' and that the discourse surrounding abortion was populated with 'necrophilic photographs'. Such photos were argued to shift the hearts and minds of those seeing them and to persuade viewers to the pro-life cause in the name of protection of the innocent. The photographs of children explored in this article employ similar tactics by reframing an issue and goading a reaction from adults who, without the emotional response induced by the photo, may feel very differently or have had little reasoned thought about the topic at all. In discussing the photo of Alan Kurdi, O'Neill (2015) contentiously wrote;

> The global spreading of this snapshot ... is justified as a way of raising awareness about the migrant crisis. Please. It's more like a snuff photo for progressives, dead-child porn, designed not to start a serious debate about migration in the 21st century but to elicit a self-satisfied feeling of sadness among Western observers.

The exploitative nature of the use of these photographs is evident, in that they sell newspapers, occupy space in social media and advance the careers of their photographers. Each photo highlighted the work of the photographer in some way. For her photo of Alan Kurdi the photographer, Nilüfer Demir won the Press Photo of the Year award in the 2016 Turkey Photojournalist Association Press. Moeller (2002, p. 38) claims that the many major journalism awards won by stories featuring children have encouraged other journalists to also take up children's issues. As Brauman (1992, p. 154) has argued, the power of an innocent child is compelling in an otherwise stale news story where the public have not engaged or moved on. This scenario is emblematic of the idealised social construction of both the child and the adult. Children who can be construed as pure and deserving of our protection make ideal victims, candidates for our adult compassion, and make it possible for adults to be the heroic rescuers (Brauman 1992). This recurring representation of childhood illustrates its subordinate social position relative to adulthood whereby certain children can continue to be depicted as victims, innocent and blameless. Other images of children, such as child soldiers or sex workers, though as profane as those explored here, depict children who can no longer fit into idealised, dominant constructs of childhood. These images illustrate a childhood lost through lived experiences incompatible with those of innocent childhood. Such children are not construed as cute, they are too old, too experienced, potentially inducing fear or disdain rather than Kama muta. Images of Valeria, Alan and the Sudanese child represent ghosts of childhood innocence retained even in death. Yet all these images represent the othering of childhood generally and the exploitative ways in which children are consumed by the adult world. Photographs of dead children in the world press reveal discourses of poverty, non-white, immigrants whose childhoods are distant, dangerous and removed from many of those who view them. These children remind the adults who gaze at their image from a distance of the need to protect, cherish and reinforce the dominant idealised notions of childhood in their own social worlds.

It is worth noting that such photographic images tend to be abstracted from their context and time and become what Pollack Petchesky (1987, p. 269) describes as, 'empirical data divorced from historical process or social relationships'. The allure of photos is that they appear to hold empirical objectivity and reality, or as Barthes (1981) argues, an 'evidential force' (Hirsch 2001, p. 14), 'a message without a code' or agenda when in fact the image may well be heavily situated in a specific context embedded with historical, social and political values and meanings. Barthes (in Sontag 1982) contends that photographs are the product of human labour and should be viewed as a cultural artefact which must always be associated with the social, political and historical meanings from which it is extracted. Furthermore, the knowledge it provides is a partial and potentially misleading image of a past event.

Extending this perspective, Pollack Petchesky (1987) calls our attention to Western privileging of the visual in the production of knowledge, in part due to its assumed relationship with detachment and objectivity—so that the eye is regarded as an objective and 'passive recorder' of the world. This sense is elevated above other senses as being able to deliver 'truth' and distance us from 'the corporeal' (Fox and Grontkowski 1983). It has been perceived as being a more reliable way of knowing than sensory or relational approaches. The connections with a positivist approach to knowledge acquisition are explicit here and perhaps unsurprisingly have been challenged by feminists as being associated with ways of knowing that are particularly masculine whereby man is perceived as the observer and woman as the exhibit (Iragaray 1981). Though rather essentialist and deterministic, the same argument can be applied to the images of children whereby adults are the viewers and children the spectacle. A spectacle that is susceptible to voyeurism, commodification and exploitation for individual, social and political gain. The social positioning of children certainly makes them vulnerable to such exploitation. Consider other established or emerging moral panics about the use of images of children; online sexual abuse for example, or the rising disquiet concerning parental postings of images on online platforms without the permission of the children. This prolific use of children's images by their parents is perhaps influenced by notions of cuteness, their infantile traits and kama muta but, it also evokes unsettling ideas of ownership and an almost unquestioned right of parents to commodify their 'own' children. Parents are not alone in this commodification, a casual glance at social media will reveal that 'photographs of children are some of the most ubiquitous in our social and familial lives' (Unframed 2012).

6. Everybody's Child

Images of the child hold what Pollack Petchesky (1987, p. 270) describes as 'symbolic transparency' in that we can put ourselves and our family lives into that image. The Prime Minister of Canada described his reaction to the photo of Alan Kurdi as being evocative of his own son playing on a beach. The military policemen who found Alan's body, Mehmet Çıplak spoke of his actions and emotions, "I checked for a signal of life, hoping he was still alive," says Çıplak. "I was so sad. I am a father first. I have a six-year-old son. I empathised, I put him in my son's place. There was an indefinable pain. Beyond being a military police officer, I behaved as a father" (Kingsley and Tmur 2015). This sentiment is summed up by Wills (2019, p. 106) by arguing that Alan as a 'baby exists relationally to all babies'. The most recent image of Valeria Ramirez lying face down in the Rio Grande, becomes everybody's daughter as we gaze upon her. The private tragedy of her family becomes our own and, as millions of us connect with her image Valeria fleetingly becomes our own real or imagined child. So powerful is this collective outpouring of care and concern that a number of the families of these children seek privacy at the funerals of their children, as a way of reclaiming the children to their own private families once again. Valeria Ramirez's funeral ceremony was held in private with no journalists allowed to attend and Alan's father claimed that he just wished to sit quietly by the graves of his family and rest.

Berger (1980) distinguishes between the photographs belonging to the private experience which are connected to us in some intimate way and public ones which speak to our collective lived experience. However, this would appear to be rather too simplistic a dichotomy to understand the images explored here. Parents may regard images of their own children as being intimate and private, but when viewed, these private images nevertheless are interpreted by us through the social representations of childhood, making them both public and private simultaneously. Likewise, the images of Valeria, the Sudanese child and Alan, are of other people's children but we interpret their image through our own personal contexts of what childhood is as well as our own private family experiences of children. Such images evoke ideas in us about how childhood should be or indeed should not be. Thus, when we view a public image of the child, it is imbued with our private knowledge and experiences of children and merges to make what I refer to here as everybody's child. Our personal responses to these images therefore are not just our intimate emotions as O'Neill (2015) contends, but a product of 'collective imaginations of the world, of self and other' (Chouliaraki and Blaagaard 2013, p. 254). It is through

such cultural interpretations and media representations that the suffering and experiences of these children are inevitably refashioned, diluted and 'distorted' (Kleinnman and Kleinman 1996, p. 2). Nevertheless, photographic images affect a change in the viewer and produce a connection between the image and ourselves, and inform us about the power of images to resonate with us across historical, cultural, social and political contexts. In a world where our attention is difficult to attract the emaciated child, the war injured child, the dead immigrant child, all situated in the public sphere, create a commanding statement, a motive to act (Moeller 2002). Perhaps they also induce a personal resurgence of the boundary separating the dangerous public sphere where children can come to harm, and the safety of the private sphere where, as a society, we try (and sometimes fail) to keep children safe. The social construct of childhood is wrapped ever more tightly around living children as a result of these images.

7. Conclusions

In this discussion two famous images of young children were used to demonstrate the ways in which young children as victims of social and political unrest have been used to highlight contested issues and used as catalysts for change. The motif of young, blameless victims encapsulated in these photographs was situated within contemporary ideas about childhood in order to explore the power of such images to undermine policy, change political perspectives and hold the attention of the adult world.

The rituals of death may be a social experience but, death itself remains sequestered (Coombs 2017) and a deeply private event. When photographs of dead children are taken, commodified and persistently distributed across the world, the private grief of one family inevitably becomes public property. These photos, perhaps intended to shock a jaded public, remind us of the failures of nation states, politicians and policies to protect the vulnerable. However, these images also connect to a wider audience through our capacity for sentimentality (Sánchez-Eppler 2005, p. 108) and our collective empathetic concern (Zickfield et al. 2017). In these photographs we recognise the fragility and temporary nature of all childhoods and our collective failure to fulfill the adult role of protection and care.

Though profane in their imagery these photographs nevertheless reinforce the essence of childhood and induce a collective desire to preserve childhood as both precious and fleeting. We see these children through our own experiences of childhood, or through an idealised construct that we might wish for children. These children thus exist in relation to all children and these profane ghosts briefly become everybody's child until their images fade from public view and the children they represent are wrenched back by their bereaved families into the private realm of grief.

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