

# *Life-Times of Becoming Human*

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## **ABSTRACT**

In this paper I discuss the current global political moment in terms of the complex, potentially antagonistic relations between what I call the war to be human and becoming human in a time of war. I focus on the legacies of an imperial capitalist order of humanity and its regime of disposable life in the contemporary context of the Philippines in order to consider the meaning and challenges of becoming human in our time. Looking at the expressions of nationalist struggle on the part of activists facing extrajudicial execution by paramilitary forces of the government and on the part of feminists confronting the dehumanizing conditions of overseas women domestic workers, I analyze the violence of globalization, neoliberal democratization, and human rights governmentality as the product of dominant processes of humanization. I argue that the global norms of these processes are predicated upon the utter devaluation of and relentless assault on the social reproduction of marginalized communities, who are continuously pushed beyond the brink of human belonging. Feminist and nationalist projects that seek to emancipate women from dehumanizing conditions of life through appeals to the rule of law or through participation in an expanding market economy ironically continue to depend on this dominant politics of humanization. To view the remainders of these present-oriented movements, I propose the notion of “life-times” as a concept for reckoning with the diverse array of acts, capacities, associations, aspirations in practice, and sensibilities that people engage in and draw upon in the effort to make and remake social life in situations of life-threatening hardship, deprivation, and precariousness. I reconsider the human question by attending to the recent work of Filipina artist and activist Kiri Dalena, whose documentary film work and art installations have focused on political atrocities, state repression, social movements, history, violence, and human loss. I focus particularly on Dalena’s recent exhibit, *The Present Disorder Is the Order of the Future*, to think about the political potential of remaindered life-times of struggle.



WE LIVE IN A TIME WHEN EVERY DAY BRINGS AMPLE EVIDENCE OF THE DISPOSABILITY of human life. This is a casual use of the word “human” because the very disposability of this life, its condition as destined waste, would seem to put into question the designation of this life as human, our inherited term for the defining conditions of ideal, valued, and invaluable existence.

In the middle of the last century, as philosophers grappled with the meaning and future of humanity in the aftermath of the terrible atrocities of World War II, Aimé Césaire charged Europe with the brutal, dehumanizing crimes of colonization perpetrated in the spirit of its own formal humanism. Of “the crowning barbarism that sums up all the daily barbarisms” and that, in its appearance as Nazism, jolted awake the humanistic, Christian bourgeois people of the “Western” world, Césaire charged, “before they were its victims, they were its accomplices.”<sup>1</sup> Held responsible for “the highest heap of corpses in history,” Western civilization stood indicted for its crimes before another human community, comprised of the very peoples whose systematic torture and destruction under slavery and colonialism proved the genocidal end and spirit at the heart of Man. A decade later, Sartre tolled the death knell of colonial Europe and decried the “fresh moment of violence” with which Europe answered the decolonization of the Third World as the desperate attempt of Man to hang on to the exclusive privileges of his racist humanity.<sup>2</sup> In this realization pressed upon Sartre by the raging struggles of the wretched of the earth, neo-colonial war was nothing less than a war through which the West attempted to remain human in the face of the monstrous barbarism that the Third World revealed to be the West’s own. Decolonization posed the question of what it might mean to become human in the wake of the destruction of colonial, racist humanism, a half-forgotten question for which our own present has yet to provide an adequate answer.

Today, neocolonial wars have resurfaced with a vengeance, in the name of the civilizing influence of a globalizing neoliberal democracy, and humanism has returned as the ethicopolitical arbiter of rights and responsibilities, privileges and burdens, value and nonvalue, in a world of unfathomable wealth and unmitigated violence and deprivation. It is in this context that I have described and continue to think about our political moment in terms of a complex, potentially antagonistic relation between a war to be human and becoming human in a time of war. The war to be human consists most spectacularly of the political-military project and the atrocities exemplified by the global war against terrorism, which continues to be waged by the United States and its subsidiary militaries throughout the world. The violence of this new imperial project to secure and further aggrandize the privileges and powers enjoyed as well as bequeathed by the already human within a capitalist order is amply documented and yet, woefully, so willfully ignored.

In the Philippines, since 2001—the beginning of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo’s stolen presidency—more than a thousand activists, human rights workers, and community leaders have been killed by paramilitary units directly linked to the government, under a state of emergency

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<sup>1</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 36.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, preface to Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (1961; New York: Grove Press, 2004), 24.

legitimated and financially and militarily aided (\$30 million per year) by, as well as legally-juridically modeled on, the domestic and foreign policies of the Bush regime. Closely conforming to the shift from the strategy of low-intensity conflict in counterinsurgency operations conducted through counterintelligence practices in the United States during the civil rights movement and through proxy wars in Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia during the Cold War to the strategy of open and preemptive aggression in the new imperial operations of global security in our own moment, the current Philippine state's politico-military campaign, Oplan Bantay Laya (Operation Freedom Watch), which directs these extrajudicial executions, is part of a concerted effort to extinguish all radical challenges to the prevailing order of neoliberalist financial and political sovereignty. A poem by Alexander Remollino in a recent collection of writings protesting these political killings depicts this order as an economy of ranked forms of life, in which the slain are "those who live so that they will again become human, they who are made to live as animals by those who rule by means of arrogated wealth and stolen power."<sup>3</sup> Remollino's poem portrays these political killings as a purposeful act of diminishing an entire social body, with every killing resulting in some part taking leave of each and every one of us, a diminishment inflicted to make us surrender to a groveling doglike existence and release our small hold (*bitaw*) on becoming human (*pagpapakatao*).

Steeped in the figurative conventions of four decades of armed revolutionary struggle (within which a postcolonial humanism is extant), the poem's depiction of radical social struggle as a form of dedicated living so that all may become human is undoubtedly also shaped by the prominent emergence of a discourse on human rights on the scene of global affairs since the end of the Cold War. The question of the liminal human status of certain strata of people was also raised in other contexts, notably in the context of the burgeoning "warm-body export" industry of overseas domestic labor. In the 1990s, the Filipina artist Imelda Cajipe-Endaya made a series of sculptural installations depicting the figure of the overseas domestic worker as, in one work, a humanoid assemblage of household cleaning implements, personal belongings, and bodily appendages and, in another work, as an installation of travel cases, personal effects, and furnishings of an absent transient. Responding to the increasing reports of the violent treatment and physical, sexual, and psychological abuse of overseas Filipina workers, feminists like Cajipe-Endaya called attention to the plight of these women by foregrounding the inhuman or dehumanized conditions of life that they are made to inhabit and even embody. From the side of her employment, the ideal migrant domestic worker images the archetypal robot, capable of offering emotional, as well as menial, help to humans, without expectation of human feeling in return. Migrant women workers not uncommonly suffer various forms of physical abuse, sexual violation, and even slave-like exploitation at the hands of their employers—treatment fitting with their status as maid-machines or domestic technologies. That status in part defines the dehumanizing conditions in which overseas Filipinas, among other migrant women workers, have been found, stirring nationalist and transnational outrage and lament over their plight and critical reflection on the human costs of the nation's participation as labor provider in the new global service economy.

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<sup>3</sup> Alexander Martin Remollino, "Huwag Tayong Bumitaw Sa Ating Pagkatao," in *Subverso: Mga Tula at Kuwento Laban sa Pulitikal na Pandarahas*, ed. Mykel Andrada, Joi Barrios, and Rolando B. Tolentino (Quezon City: Alliance of Concerned Teachers [ACT] and Congress of Teachers/Educators for Nationalism and Democracy [CONTEND], 2006), 70.

Since then, numerous feminist scholars and artists have commented on and depicted the conditions of inhumanity imposed upon and experienced by migrant female workers. As Aihwa Ong observes, “The underpaid, starved, and battered foreign maid, while not the statistical norm, has become the image of the new inhumanity in the Asian metropolis.”<sup>4</sup> For Ong, the ethical exclusion of foreign maids from the moral economies of their host societies and therefore the suspension of moral obligations to them create the conditions for their subhuman treatment. This hierarchic othering is not simply the product of national-ideological defense strategies against the putatively corrupting influence of morally suspect, because economically devalued, migrant populations, as is evident in almost all advanced capitalist nations. It is also the consequence of what Ong calls the neoliberalist norms of “techno-preneurial citizenship,” norms that are increasingly prevalent in those new industrial nations in which foreign maids are employed to help reproduce the intellectual-managerial classes serving the demands of global capital.<sup>5</sup>

Elsewhere, other geographical-bodily sites of realization of this new gendered inhumanity gain prominence. In Ciudad Juárez, on the border between Mexico and the United States, the horrific murders and forced disappearances of nearly four hundred women—almost all poor maquiladora workers—in the last decade have given rise to the Mexican maquiladora worker as a gendered figure of disposable humanity, whose expendability and nonvalue are variously accounted for as the consequence of the gendered and racialized logics of capitalist expropriation and of the equally gendered and racialized logics of an emerging necropolitical order of power.<sup>6</sup> For Melissa Wright, the disposable woman is a global figure of feminized labor whose destined worthlessness and diminishing capacity to produce value embody the wasting end of “the dehumanizing process behind forming variable capital.”<sup>7</sup> For Rosa Linda Fregoso, the “new category of the persecuted, disposable subject, the racially profiled mestiza or indigenous poor women,” is created by a necropolitical order in which multiple forms of sovereignty converge and operate through the suspension of human rights that the denationalization at the border enables.<sup>8</sup>

In response to the dehumanizing conditions that female migrant workers face (in foreign countries as well as in the borderlands), many activists have advocated for the guarantee of their human rights and/or for the ethicopolitical recognition of this population and their protection under a transnational regime of human belonging. Such claims on behalf of women unmoored by processes of globalization as well as war invariably invoke but also problematize humanity as a category of valuable life from which a growing global majority of people are systematically excluded. It is the violence that is inflicted upon, in order to construct, the expendable lives of female migrants that indexes and defines the condition of their exclusion from humanity. Violence and suffering become the constitutive traits of dehumanization, while humanity becomes equated with freedom from violence. It would seem that today “humanity” has become primarily a category of the protected, a status that accrues to fully-fledged subjects under the universal law

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<sup>4</sup> Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 195.

<sup>5</sup> Aihwa Ong, “Experiments with Freedom: Milieus of the Human,” *American Literary History* 18, no. 2 (2006): 229–44.

<sup>6</sup> Lisa Lowe, “The Gender of Sovereignty,” in “Borders on Belonging: Gender and Immigration,” ed. Neferti Tadiar, special issue, *Scholar and Feminist Online* 6, no. 3 (2008), barnard.edu/sfonline; Rosa Linda Fregoso, “‘We Want Them Alive!’: The Politics and Culture of Human Rights,” *Social Identities* 12, no. 2 (March 2006): 109–38; Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 11–40.

<sup>7</sup> Melissa W. Wright, *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 73.

<sup>8</sup> Fregoso, “‘We Want Them Alive!’,” 114.

of state sovereignty. Sold off by their own nation-states as commodified national natural resources, migrant women thus lose the universal guarantee of their humanity and are left exposed to the practices of violence that others engage in both to exercise their own claims to sovereign power and to ensure their own protected human belonging.

Although a more complicated story might be told about the genealogy and meaning of the humanisms invoked by activists in these postcolonial contexts than I am allowing for here, as these social struggles assume a transnational cast and international audience, their political claims increasingly tend toward advocating the legal protection of migrant women workers' human rights and/or the ethicopolitical recognition of this population (along with other "unprotected" groups such as refugees and undocumented migrants) under a global regime of human belonging. Or the political claims of these struggles are subsumed within the very logic of humanization whose consequences they were fighting against.

Many valuable critiques of the discourse and practice of human rights and humanitarianism have pointed to the limits and dangers that their implicit secular liberal humanism poses for diverse and radical social struggles and claims. Talal Asad and Inderpal Grewal,<sup>9</sup> for example, have criticized the work that international legal-judicial agreements and advocacy networks based on a human rights platform accomplish toward the building of a global hegemony of liberal norms, which underwrites an emerging transnational regime of truth and mode of governmentality. Departing from the critique of human rights discourse in particular, my own concern is with how the increasingly prevalent deployment of a broader logic of political emancipation to address conditions of disposable life as a matter of expulsion from a juridical (i.e., state-defined and protected legal) humanity may occlude and abet, by naturalizing, the violence of other dominant forms of humanization in the realm of everyday material social life.

We can see this most clearly in, for example, Catherine MacKinnon's project to make women human and, relatedly, in the deployment of "gender" as a technology of humanization in various economic and political projects to redress gendered forms of inequality, disenfranchisement, suffering, and oppression. MacKinnon's effort, in her book *Are Women Human?*, is to rethink international human rights and humanitarian laws in order to redefine "human" in a way that includes women.<sup>10</sup> No doubt there is much to be critiqued in MacKinnon's work in terms of the tiresome and aggravating ethnocentric universalism that continues to structure certain prevailing analytical tendencies of Western feminist arguments (e.g., the construction of "women" as a unitary, ahistorical social category or preconstituted social group subject to a transcultural logic of "patriarchy"; the construction of traditional, non-Western "cultures" as bounded social logics of constraint and repression, to be distinguished from invisible norms of freedom and individualism in an unmarked modernity), as Chandra Mohanty, Uma Narayan, and others have exemplarily shown us in other contexts.<sup>11</sup> However, I bring up MacKinnon here, not to make that critique, but rather to highlight the political limits of a particular emancipatory, even aboli-

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<sup>9</sup> Talal Asad, "Redeeming the 'Human' through Human Rights," in *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Inderpal Grewal, "Women's Rights as Human Rights," in Inderpal Grewal, *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diaspora, Neoliberalisms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Are Women Human? And Other International Dialogues* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> Chandra Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

tionist, approach to the problem of dehumanization,<sup>12</sup> and perhaps even of the ready critiques of such an approach in the name of “substantive” (rather than merely formal, legal) justice.<sup>13</sup>

MacKinnon’s strategic construction of “women” as a people, that is, as a unit of humanity that can gain legal recognition as a polity, is in response to their inhabiting what Hannah Arendt had theorized as a condition of “statelessness,” which, as a consequence of the merging of the question of human rights with the question of national sovereignty, that is, of the “identification of the rights of man with the rights of peoples in the European nation-state system,” became equivalent to one’s expulsion from humanity.<sup>14</sup> As we have seen, other feminists have identified this condition of “statelessness” and “rightlessness” with the denationalized status of female migrants, and while many would disagree with MacKinnon’s invocation of state power to redress women’s expulsion from legal humanity, I would argue that the increasingly prevalent use of a language of sovereignty, freedom, and rights to challenge the rule of exception under which new categories of inhumanity obtain may ironically result in similar ends.

As Tracy Higgins asserts, MacKinnon suggests that violence against women can and perhaps should be opposed through the intervention of transnational military forces justified by international state power.<sup>15</sup> I would go so far as to say that MacKinnon’s presumption of “women” as a people subjected to a transnational “gender oppression” or gender-based violence affirms, if not promotes, a condition of permanent (gender) war, one that requires the formation of a transnational state and its monopoly of local forms of “patriarchal” violence to keep the peace and ensure the protection of women in their newfound status as recognized citizens of global humanity. What is misguided about MacKinnon’s project to humanize women is not only her overestimation of the liberatory potential of the law or her inattention to the limited efficacy of the law in transforming the material conditions of women’s lives, as Higgins observes. It is also that the emancipation of women into the political category of the human serves only to naturalize and expand the authority and rule of Western liberal secular law, an expansion crucially supported in the contemporary moment by “democratizing” wars of economic restructuring as well as militarist regime change.

I am guided here by Marx’s critique of the nature and effects of political emancipation in the essay “On the Jewish Question,” in which he argued that political emancipation serves only to restore and preserve the social relationships of civil society (i.e., capitalist relations), on which the secular political state is founded.<sup>16</sup> As the site of alienation of human freedom and the sole guarantor of the rights of man, the secular political state actively *presupposes* and implements a conception of human confined to what Marx called “egotistic man,” or the private bourgeois in-

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<sup>12</sup> See Elizabeth Bernstein, “The Sexual Politics of the ‘New Abolitionism,’” in “God and Country,” ed. Elizabeth Castelli, special issue, *Differences: Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 18, no. 3 (2007): 128–51; and Elizabeth Bernstein, “Militarized Humanitarianism Meets Carceral Feminism: The Politics of Sex, Rights, and Freedom in Contemporary Anti-trafficking Campaigns,” in “Feminists Theorize International Political Economy,” ed. Kate Bedford and Shirin Rai, special issue, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 36, no. 1 (2009): 45–71.

<sup>13</sup> The latter include critiques based on the idea that the formalism of the law fails to address historical, structural social inequalities and that “substantive” justice requires an expansion of legally guaranteed “rights” beyond the abstract civil and political rights of citizens.

<sup>14</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), 291.

<sup>15</sup> Tracy E. Higgins, review of *Are Women Human? And Other International Dialogues*, by Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 18, no. 2 (2006): 101–22.

<sup>16</sup> Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question” (1843), in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978).

dividual upheld by the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* (1793). In the contemporary moment, Talal Asad has argued that the norm of human as sovereign, self-owning subject, which the (1948) *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* circumscribed within “the rule of law” politically enforced by imperial states, has converged with the norms of neoliberalism insofar as the political and economic regulation of “desirable conduct” in the world is made through the realpolitik use of cost-benefit market analysis.<sup>17</sup> Beyond its own “humanizing” effects and trajectory, political emancipation upholds and naturalizes the practices of “humanization” operating in the realm of “civil society,” or put another way, it normalizes the violence of everyday protocols for being human that are embedded in the practices of what Marx and Engels would later theorize more broadly as “a definite *mode of life*.”<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, far from portraying the dehumanizing conditions of violence facing migrant Filipina women and other disenfranchised laboring classes as the realization of a political state of exception, figurations of the not-quite-human in the works of Filipino poets and artists are depictions of an impossible form of everyday being in the world, of an ordinary violence of negated being that is the condition of survival of a disposable, surplus people, the waste product of global capitalism, the very refuse of a prevailing order of the human as valued life. Such depictions of the not-quite-human cannot but also be the expression of a grievous, yet potentially radical, question: “what kind of life?”

In contrast, constrained by polar oppositions between exclusion and inclusion, rights and rightlessness, security and threat, freedom and nonfreedom, human and inhuman, political emancipation evacuates the very organization of concrete material life as a site of political potential, serving to disempower and depoliticize other practices of making social life. These alternative ways of becoming human consist of tangential, fugitive, and insurrectionary creative social capacities that, despite being continuously diminished, impeded, and made illegible by dominant ways of being human, are exercised and *invented* by those slipping beyond the bounds of valued humanity in their very effort of living, in their making of forms of viable life. Meanwhile, through these projects of political emancipation, the reach of the “rule of law” broadens over the world, and a specifically US culture of legality, as a lived imagination of the law as actual or potential means and measure of justice, becomes increasingly globalized. As the massive social and human destruction resulting from the interlocking of immigration and crime control in the United States since the 1990s demonstrates (evidenced by the more than three thousand deaths on

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<sup>17</sup> Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 147, 157.

<sup>18</sup> For Marx, political emancipation was not to be confused with *human* emancipation, by which he meant, not freedom in these seemingly distinct spheres of political and civil society, but, rather, the liberating transformation of what he and Engels would call the prevailing (capitalist) “mode of production”: “a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite *mode of life* on their part. As individuals express, so they are.” Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1998), 37. On this view, the language of political emancipation expresses the limited mode of being human under capitalism.

By invoking the critique of “The Jewish Question,” I do not mean to endorse the implicit humanism of the young Marx, which assumes a latent “human” capacity to be emancipated; nor do I mean to endorse, as Katja Diefenbach (in remarks on an earlier version of this essay) puts it, “a force embedded in social relations ideally being able to positively generate social making and human becoming, and to negatively disrupt the existing order by its potential for insurrection.” As I hope the discussion makes clear, the insurrectionary potential of the becoming-human emerges out of the forms of life that people invent and improvise in the face of foreclosed and prohibited human being. My thanks to Katja Diefenbach for her incisive comments on this essay.

on the U.S.-Mexico border and the expanding prison industry),<sup>19</sup> the mechanisms of policing bolstered and socialized by this U.S. culture of legality (with its increasingly common sense of illegality as an ontological status, a criminalized state of being outside the bounds of human sentiment and response) only facilitate what many scholars and activists recognize as a broad-scale assault on entire communities' and peoples' capacities for social reproduction.

This assault is carried out as part of the civic, policing work of states, by military, paramilitary, and civilian agents, through preemptive war, counterinsurgency, the everyday disciplining and punishment of labor and nonlabor, as well as through more mundane international trade agreements and national domestic policies supporting systemic impoverishment, economic disenfranchisement, and social divestment and dispossession. In the manner that Darius Rejali<sup>20</sup> describes as the disciplinary work of torture in shaping the graded civic and human order of citizenship in modern democracies, the assault on the social reproduction of certain collectivities' capacities to subsist and survive tangentially to capitalist ways of life keeps vast populations in a permanent condition of the not-yet-human, "surplusing" people and their resources through war as well as through what Ruth Gilmore calls "organized abandonment"<sup>21</sup> and mobilizing technologies of social devaluation (racism, sexism, homophobia) to make those forms of disposability essential to capitalist productivity. At the same time, global industries of domestic and service work have arisen to employ the specifically gendered reproductive capacities of racialized disposable peoples for the everyday reproduction of the shareholders of humanity, who constitute the civil society of global democracy. This domestication or "feminization" of an entire array of diverse reproductive powers in the globalization of "women's work" is a case then of producing certain forms of humanity as the route out of social ruin and into viable existence. Filipina poet Joi Barrios suggests this in her poem "Ang Pagiging Babae Ay Pamumuhay Sa Panahon ng Digma" (To be a woman is to live in a time of war) when she describes the being or becoming (*pagiging*) woman as a living (*pamumuhay*)—that is, a form of work, of making life—under conditions of great violence. Today, in heeding this insight, we might also recognize that becoming human is a living in a time of war. The recourse to claims of illness and injury on the part of undocumented immigrants to gain legal residency and its attendant rights of economic subsistence in France through humanitarian exception (medical claims to protected belonging through the "limited and limiting" category of biopolitical humanity) might be considered an example of "becoming human" wielded as a living in the contemporary global context.<sup>22</sup>

For Barrios, who was writing during the counterinsurgent war of authoritarian modernization and, later, "democratization" waged by the Philippine state against its own people, to be a woman was not only a form of work but also a struggle to live and be free. For those who protest women's dehumanization as the consequence of the deprivation of rights concomitant with a condition of statelessness, however, freedom is always on the side of an already-achieved humanity. It should come as no surprise that Hannah Arendt's critique of the dehumanizing effect

<sup>19</sup> Mary Pat Brady, "The Homoerotics of Immigration Control," in "Borders on Belonging: Gender and Immigration," ed. Neferti Tadiar, special issue, *Scholar and Feminist Online* 6, no. 3 (2008), [barnard.edu/sfonline](http://barnard.edu/sfonline); Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007); Angela Y. Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003); Julia Sudbury, ed., *Global Lockdown: Race, Gender, and the Prison-Industrial Complex* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>20</sup> Darius Rejali, *Torture and Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

<sup>21</sup> Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*, 178.

<sup>22</sup> Miriam Ticktin, "Where Ethics and Politics Meet: The Violence of Humanitarianism in France," *American Ethnologist* 33, no. 1 (February 2006): 33–49.

of statelessness is predicated upon a notion of a specifically human life (*bios*) as enabled only by a transcendence of and liberation from a life enslaved by the endless and fruitless labors of necessity, a life (*zoe*) associated not only with the merely reproductive work of the domestic household (*oikos*) but also with the condition of slaves and the not-yet-human life of primitive peoples, who woefully remained in a state of nature.<sup>23</sup> Arendt's critique of dehumanization was in defense of a specifically *human* freedom attained through accomplishments that would endure beyond "the darkness of pain and necessity" that is the relentless toil of "life itself."<sup>24</sup> I bring up Arendt to exemplify a commitment to a politics predicated on an equation between humanity and freedom drawn in opposition to the denigrated sphere of the unfree, meaningless, merely reproductive labor of making life. It is not an accident that the transnationalization of this politics of emancipation coincides with the broad assault on and disciplining of forms of social reproduction that threaten to exceed the parameters of a dominant mode of producing human life. It is in fact the means of continuing and softening a war waged by a privileged global polity so that it might remain human.

It is in light of this bleak picture of our times that I view the profound importance and continuing timeliness of the work of Angela Davis and the radical political movements that her work crucially helped to shape and was crucially shaped by. Against the premises and prescriptions of this counterinsurgent philosophical and practical defense of the human that permeates transnational politics, Davis has always viewed the question of freedom from precisely the side of the delimited yet always potentially insurgent conditions of assaulted and remaindered life. In an early essay, Davis counters Sartre's existentialist notion of freedom with an understanding of "the fundamental condition of freedom, that is, the slave's experience of living, human reality."<sup>25</sup> Freedom is the abolition of the master-slave relationship and the negation of the slave's concrete condition, which this relationship defines. At the same time, however, it is this "living, human reality" that is the site of a potential insurgency and, as her later interventions clarify, the condition and object of radical social transformation that such insurgency makes possible. Davis's argument, in another early essay, that "the slave-master's sexual domination of the black woman contained an unveiled element of counter-insurgency" underscores this far-reaching political viewpoint. The specific subjugated conditions of the black woman's life under slavery, which shapes the experience of the "unnatural" character of her lot (conditions that Davis, in other essays, also characterizes as "the almost total prohibition of endemic social life within the community of slaves," the denial of motherhood and other norms of a natural human life; and the "surrogate" status they occupied with respect to such human norms), are the very conditions that enable her to play "a pivotal role in nurturing the thrust towards freedom."<sup>26</sup> It is the black woman slave's experience of living and making life under conditions of prohibition and exclusion from "human" life (including the denial of endemic social life and its own norms of "natural" human life) that enables the vital part she plays in "nurturing" insurgent potential. Rape was,

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<sup>23</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*.

<sup>24</sup> Arendt, *Human Condition*, 119–20.

<sup>25</sup> "Unfinished Lecture on Liberation II," in *The Angela Y. Davis Reader*, ed. Joy James (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), 54.

<sup>26</sup> "Women and Capitalism: Dialectics of Oppression and Liberation," "Surrogates and Outcast Mothers; Racism and Reproductive Politics in the Nineties," and "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," all in *Angela Y. Davis Reader*, 171, 211, 123.

on this view, a form of terrorism directed toward the destruction of the black woman's potentiality for insurgency as well as that of her community, a potentiality that was "directly nurtured by the social organization which the slaves themselves improvised."<sup>27</sup> We might say that rape was a counterinsurgent assault on the slave communities' independent, creative, and freeing capacities for producing social and domestic life, beyond the instrumental use of their individual and collective being for the human values begotten by capitalism and slavery.

It is difficult to overemphasize the importance of this critical viewpoint for our present moment, when all life appears to have been subsumed into the biopolitical and necropolitical logics shaping the resource wars of late imperial capitalism. The place of foreclosed humanity is also the place of improvised, experimental social making and organization—in my understanding, the place of different human becoming, which threatens the order of a proper (and propertied) humanity. Such forms of denied human personhood and surplus humanity are not confined to slavery. Davis views this status as obtaining in the post-Emancipation context of reinvented slavery in the convict lease system and in the context of black domestic life deemed superfluous and unprofitable under apartheid in South Africa, as well as in contemporary contexts of the systemically neglected and abused health and reproductive capacities of poor women of color, of ideological and physical offensives against single motherhood and against queer, gay, lesbian, and transgendered configurations of domestic life, safety, and well-being, and of the expansion of prisons as an institution for disappearing and incapacitating "the detritus of society." In all these contexts, the position of remaindered, not simply oppressed or exploited, life is a situation bearing potentials and possibilities of a transformative antagonism, potentials for the radical remaking of "human" social relations. In this way, it is also a site of necessary reconceptualization of certain naturalized politico-theoretical norms, whether those of worker, woman, or citizen, and of a critical revisioning of the strategies of political movements based on the claim of reappropriation of rightful property (whether understood as labor, sexuality, or rights).

I find both theoretical-political solidarity and inspiration in this consistent stance in Davis's work, which is profoundly abolitionist with respect to the human-destroying, socially ruinous practices and institutions of contemporary global life and unwaveringly focused on the reimagination and remaking of social life as the very condition and meaning of abolition. It urges projects of building new institutions and ways of life rather than the rehabilitation of old ones and bears an understanding of freedom that does not transcend the work of living in the here and now or forsake a yet-unrealized future for human flourishing. In my view, to embark on this radical project requires the cultivation of our available cultural literacies for expanding our political vocabulary for the forms of life that people generate in the process of survival against the willed destinies of their disappearance and in their thriving beyond the conditions of some putatively disposable existence to which they are constantly reduced.

It is to this end that I propose the concept of "life-time," which derives from the expropriation of domestic workers' whole bodily being in maintaining and enhancing the lives of others, as a useful concept for reckoning with the diverse, unrecognized life-producing capacities that people exercise in the creation of value as wealth and power, which only a small minority of the world's population is able to accumulate and enjoy. Just as women produce themselves as forms of normative femininity to meet the requirements of the domestic service industries that exploit their gendered creative capacities, people engage in a whole range of socially organized subjective, bodily, cognitive, psychic, and affective practices in the very production of their own lives

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<sup>27</sup> Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role," 115.

and beings as particular kinds of labor—particular forms of living—and in the production of their material conditions, including their social relations, which are the very conditions of capitalist exploitation.

The notion of “life-times” refers to these social and cultural capacities and practices and to the heterogeneous temporalities within which these capacities and practices concretely operate from the standpoint of people’s remaindered lifeworlds, rather than those activities contained within the homogeneous temporality of abstract labor from the standpoint of capital. We might think of life-times as “living labor,” a concept Marx used to denote “labor which is still objectifying itself, labor as subjectivity.” For Marx, this “living labor” exists, “not as an object, but as activity; not as itself *value*, but as the *living source* of value.”<sup>28</sup> The notion of life-times is an attempt to account for the productivity of social practices of life and experience, which appear to lie outside the formal sites of labor exploitation and yet are continuing sources of appropriable value. It is a concept that contributes to the broadening of the parameters within which “productive activity,” and therefore political agency, are defined.<sup>29</sup>

Just as, during industrial capitalism, the necessary work-time in labor’s reproduction disappeared in devalued “natural” forms of “nonwork” or supplementary “women’s work,” so here, in the postindustrial context of waged housework, the time of Filipinas’ enjoyment, now conducted outside the home as workplace, in public and other spaces converted into places of leisure, appears (to the subject of capital) as sheer unproductive consumption—and therefore a “waste” —of time.<sup>30</sup> However, this “time in which labor-power ‘belongs’ to itself,” this time of “waste,” is, as Filipina domestic work is in relation to the workers’ employers, a new vanishing time of reproduction, often reduced to one day of “rest” a week and expelled from the workweek altogether; during the workweek the women are working all the time as *producers of time* (both “free” time and additional work time) for their employers.<sup>31</sup> As devalued, racialized feminine labor within the globalized process of reproduction of valorized labor power (middle-class, racially and economically enfranchised professional and white-collar workers), Filipina labor reproduces itself and its new social relations not only within the spaces of domestic work but also in spaces out-

<sup>28</sup> Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Penguin, 1973), 272.

<sup>29</sup> Paolo Virno’s own contribution to this project is his redefinition of “‘production time’ as that indissoluble unity of remunerated life and non-remunerated life, labor and non-labor, emerged social cooperation and submerged social cooperation.” Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* (New York: Semiotext (e), 2004), 104.

<sup>30</sup> “Capital usurps not only free time, but also that part of necessary reproduction work time that appears as non-work time.” Fortunati shows how, within the process of reproduction, one part—“related to the production and consumption of non-material use-values—seems to disappear.” This “underdevelopment of reproduction” is the way that capital seeks to increase surplus labor time, without lengthening the working day. Leopoldina Fortunati, *The Arcane of Reproduction: Housework, Prostitution, Labor, Capital* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1995), 159–62. Needless to say, Fortunati is writing about tendencies within advanced capitalist societies, as many feminists involved in the “domestic debates” in the 1970s were. See, e.g., Maria Dalla Costa and Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of Community* (London: Falling Wall Press, 1972); and Annette Kuhn and AnnMarie Wolpe, *Feminism and Materialism: Women and Modes of Production* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978). In postcolonial societies, such as the Philippines, where industrialization never took hold on the same scale, “women’s work” and continuing older forms of colonial and deproletarianized labor were very much intertwined with, rather than separated from, waged labor.

<sup>31</sup> Fortunati, *Arcane of Reproduction*, 161. Time is the general nonmaterial use-value produced by waged domestic work. Its specific, concrete forms include bodily and affective care, domestic comfort and (sometimes sexual) pleasure, and companionship. A longer analysis of the gendered dynamics of time production and “times of waste” is in chapter 2 of my book *Things Fall Away: Philippine Historical Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

side the home, through activities of enjoyment that appear, in contrast to their work as producers of time, as a “waste” of time. The time of “waste” can be viewed as a time of recovery and restoration—indeed, the restoration of (life-)time lost in the production of time for others. Within this new time of reproduction, practices of socializing among other Filipinas and other “unproductive” practices of enjoyment not only support other women who are “freeing” themselves from their own naturalized reproductive functions but also support their own reproduction as waged reproductive labor (indeed, in place of the time-discipline regimes of the factory and the “homeworkplace,” serving as a form of their socialization as “feminized” labor).<sup>32</sup> Equally important, Filipina experiential use of this “free time” bears certain dimensions of their own “freeing” from commodified reproductive labor, that is, dimensions of living that exceed and even escape or corrupt their production as waged domestic workers.

At the same time, life-times is a concept for thinking about such social practices of making life not only as unremunerated forms of labor but also as unrecognized political acts of social struggle, political acts of freedom. In this register, the notion of life-times consists of those other forms of bodily, subjective, and collective presencing and continuity, improvised social capacities and senses (what might be called a particular social, rather than general, intellect), provisional pasts, presents, and futures summoned against conditions of foreclosed and surplused being, in the “never-ending” political struggle to live and be free.<sup>33</sup>

To consider these remaindered life-times as other times of human becoming, I turn to the recent exhibit of Filipina activist, documentary filmmaker, and artist Kiri Dalena, entitled *The Present Disorder Is the Order of the Future* (2010). For ten years before her first solo exhibition, *Found Figures* in 2007, Dalena was a political documentary filmmaker and member of Southern Tagalog Exposure (ST Exposure), an independent media collective committed to the representation of social struggles of disenfranchised and minority communities in the Philippines as well as of political resistance and liberatory movements in the Southern Tagalog region. Portraying internal refugees from militarized zones and documenting disappearances and extrajudicial killings of leaders of unions, peasant organizations, and human rights organizations, Dalena and her fellow ST Exposure collective members experienced the very conditions of violence that they were tracking directly, as activist leaders of the fact-finding missions that they were documenting and their own crew members were abducted by the military. While the latter were finally released (after being interrogated and having their equipment confiscated), the activists were summarily executed, their bodies dumped in shallow graves. ST Exposure continued to document these human rights violations and the ever-present threat of state-sanctioned death, which defined the conditions of not only the subjects of their films but also their own filmmaking practice. I offer this brief summary of Dalena’s experience as a member of the ST Exposure collective in order to provide a way of understanding the themes and modalities of her work as an artist, as well as the dangers incurred in oppositional representations and performances of political community.

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<sup>32</sup> For an account of the time-discipline regimes of the homeworkplace, see Nicole Constable, “Filipina Workers in Hong Kong Homes: Household Rules and Relations,” in *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy*, ed. Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild (New York: Owl Books, 2002), 115–41.

<sup>33</sup> In using the Heideggerian term “presencing,” I do not mean an unmediated, original disclosure of being. I use the term rather to refer to the practices and forms of emergence of personhood and sociality within dynamic and shifting interpretative communities.

In *The Present Disorder Is the Order of the Future*, Dalena projects, onto a bare floor strewn with bodily fragments in cast marble, outtakes of two of her documentaries, one of a violent dispersion of informal land settlers and the other of the Ampatuan Massacre, the abduction and brutal slaying of fifty-eight people, including thirty-four journalists, connected with an electoral candidacy challenging the ruling political dynasty in a province in the southern Philippines. Originally derived from two life-sized figures curled up with arms protecting their heads from police truncheons, which were cast in unfired clay for an exhibit two years earlier, *Barricade, Book of Slogans, Erased Slogans, and Isolation Room* (2008), and which had begun to disintegrate during the exhibit, the bodily fragments were first translated into wood by woodcarvers from Dalena's hometown for another show, *Found Figures in Stones Translated by Pakil Carvers* (2009), and then cast from wood into marble for this exhibit. Scattered on the moving landscape made by video images of roads, highways, and grassy areas shot en route to sites of forced disappearances and evacuations, human rights violations, and political killings, the bodily fragments stand absolutely still as human ruins, broken stumps, in a devastated human environment, leftovers of political movements targeted for disappearance by the state. Those political movements are referenced in the twenty-four found slogans sourced from archival photodocumentations of past protests and now engraved on marble funerary slabs that line one mausoleum wall, each ephemeral utterance of dissent serving as the name of, as well as a call to, a life entombed and memorialized (see **FIGURES 1–4**).



**FIGURE 1** Installation detail, Kiri Dalena, *The Present Disorder Is the Order of the Future* (2010).



**FIGURE 2** Installation detail, Kiri Dalena, *The Present Disorder Is the Order of the Future* (2010).



**FIGURE 3** "We are already dead, yet nothing is happening."  
Marble funerary slab, installation detail, Kiri Dalena, *The Present Disorder Is the Order of the Future* (2010).



**FIGURE 4** Installation detail, Kiri Dalena, *The Present Disorder Is the Order of the Future* (2010).

In this work, Dalena invokes social practices of radical bereavement that have propelled and shaped political uprisings and movements in the Philippines for more than a century. Such radical bereavement figures centrally in the modalities of social experience articulated in the poetry of Elynia Mabanglo, which, in the context of overseas migrant labor, imagines a political communion out of the sharing of suffering and the exhilaration of collective passage beyond existential human life. It is also evident in revolutionary poetry, in the experience of sentient communion with the dead in the time of divine sorrow, a time beyond human measure when the law of merely human sovereignty is suspended. In these contexts, radical bereavement becomes a grievous expiation—a breach in the order of merely human life, in which the remains of one life can fertilize the life-movements of others, a moment when the barriers between the living and the dead, between separate but linked forms of existence, become permeable, and social, personal debts to the dead are exacted, forgiven, or fulfilled.

In Dalena's work, the life lost and grieved is not "life itself," mere bodily life, the "bare life" on behalf of which humanist sovereignty is claimed, but rather the social lives of historical dissent and struggle. In gathering and mourning the words of past movements, she foregrounds a "life" that is inextricable from language and hence from a social intellect, a *sensus communis*, consisting of modes of thinking, acting, and feeling that can move beyond the enclosures of time and space of nationalist histories. The lives of social dissent eerily speak from their destined graves, continuing to create presence with the very markers of absence—presences of grief, humor, outrage, command, mockery, defiance, threat—modes of address that themselves remain utterly present, each slogan a testament to a particular moment of social effort, will, and aspiration, past and yet present, seemingly dead yet still calling us to action, staging mourners as readers who might receive and resurrect these words and a collective life that might also become theirs. At the same time, bodily fragments, which cannot be pieced together to form an individualized self, appear to be unmemorializable. They appear as the material remainders of a continuous process of "salvaging" (in the Philippines, extrajudicial executions) and, in the face of human waste-making, of the duration of a grievous search for justice. Such material duration, embodied in these recycled and transformed bodily fragments (clay, wood, marble), suggests the time of

abundance, accompaniment, and gathering, a time of revitalizing the remainders of life-times spent in struggle as resources for alternative human becoming. This is an example of those temporalities that postcolonial scholars have attended to as forms of subjectivity and forms of life that might appear “outmoded” or merely “superstructural” ways of life within a capitalist mode of production and yet are in fact intrinsic to its process of accumulation, temporalities that I understand as also the times of remaking of social relations that would redefine and comprise other potentials of life. In this way, words are akin to what the poet Mabanglo calls, in the context of overseas migrant labor, the ash that fertilizes the fate-playing voyages of others in search of a better life. They are part of a subjective commons, shared experiential resources of social survival summoned by political-artistic acts.

If this is what Dalena’s work makes sensible, I think it also raises, however, the possibility that the lives of these words (though not the lives beneath the words) might indeed be dead, that they cannot adequately deal with the remainders of contemporary projects of humanization—projects that entail not only the dispossession of human life but also the dispossession of other cultural resources and literacies of people’s striving. There is indeed in this work a difference registered between such ordinary striving and the organized struggles that heed, articulate, and act upon the insurgent potential of everyday life, a perceptible breach between the words of protest memorialized and the traces of remaindered lives that can appear only as rubble on the moving political landscape. In this way, perhaps, Dalena’s work points to the grave need, certainly in the Philippine context but also elsewhere, for different modalities and media of political imagination and constitution. It poses anew the problem of the relation between subaltern forms of striving—or the illegible “life-times” of historically and/or culturally remaindered political acts of freedom—and the political-artistic symbolic acts that summon and articulate those life-times for the struggles of the present, as poignantly staged in another work, entitled *Dear Activist, Write a Slogan for Me* (2010; **FIGURE 5**).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Dalena’s installation plays on Filipino artist Nilo Ilarde’s own appropriation of the title of German artist Martin Kippenberger’s 1981 exhibition, *Dear Painter, Paint for Me*, a series of paintings executed by a Berlin billboard painter, whom Kippenberger hired, and based on photographic images supplied by the latter. While Kippenberger’s mode of producing “his” work highlighted the close links between commercial work or commodities and art, Ilarde’s literal reproduction of Kippenberger’s title as the subject of his own artwork (in the form of a white-painted wooden board with paint scratched off to form the letters of the titular request), which included the display of hundreds of used-up paint tubes collected from fellow artists, foregrounds the material labor, the practical and social enterprise, and the process of evacuation of that materiality (or abstraction) that together constitute “art” (Ilarde’s show was entitled *Painting as Something and the Opposite of Something*). Dalena’s revision of the Kippenberger/Ilarde title into a plea for activism that is rendered in commercial neon lights can thus be read as extending this transnational political-artistic reflection on commodification and labor, and the politics of representation (as abstraction) and valorization that suffuses the art world, to a reflection on and staging of the unrepresented political claims of lives subtending the world of commerce and art.



**FIGURE 5** Kiri Dalena, *Dear Activist, Write a Slogan for Me* (2010), red neon lights.

My own aim in posing the current global political moment in terms of the complex, potentially antagonistic relations between what I call the war to be human and becoming human in a time of war is to foreground how, as a trace of the harrowing crises of the exterminating, destructive, sacrificial logics of colonial and global capitalist democracy, the human continues to be pressed into service as the condition and ideal of emancipation. To take up the human question in this context is thus not to endeavor to resolve this immanent antagonism with the promise of the human as either means or end; it is rather to persist in asking: What possibilities of human life might we participate in cultivating? What could it mean to become human? What forms of life, of living, might we create? How can we live otherwise?

These are, I believe, the urgent questions that confront us today. We are challenged by a burgeoning inhumanity to build an alternative milieu of political practice and transformation through an assiduous and creative involvement in the diverse life-times of other genres of being human, without resorting to a quick and easy translation of these life-times into the figurative categories of a dominant politics. To find and act on the revolutionary potential of these other life-times is the political wager we are compelled to make. Whether or not and how the political movements in which we engage take up this challenge are the questions we face—questions that will shape the differences that these movements might yet make to our singular and collective futures. A