Vulnerability and the
Politics of Care: Transdisciplinary Dialogues

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'THE POWER OF Vulnerability' by US research professor Brené Brown is one of the top five most-viewed TED talks to date (with more than 47 million views as of May 2020[1]). Brown's talk, her internationally best-selling books, and recent Netflix show, 'The Call to Courage', have sparked widespread interest in the ways that seemingly negative and immobilising feelings of vulnerability can in fact be 'the birthplace of joy, of creativity, of belonging, of love' (Brown 2010). Rather than resisting the notion that we are vulnerable, Brown encourages us to embrace our vulnerability as a means of engaging with the world and connecting with others. Her message has been taken up by everyone from corporate CEOs to school teachers to military veterans.[2] Vulnerability, it seems, is a concept that resonates deeply within our current historical conjuncture.

But while Brown's work clearly has popular appeal, significant concerns have also been raised. One objection is that the appeal to individual self-cultivation of vulnerability privileges a normative version of the lone self: venturing forth, 'putting ourselves out there', and 'braving the wilderness' to find a sense of worth, connectedness, and belonging (Brown 2017). This vision of selfhood is neither universal nor necessarily relevant to the situation of those who routinely contend with structural inequality, oppression, and precarity. Showing or embracing vulnerability, in many cases, may be a luxury one cannot afford. Moreover, absorbing the condition of vulnerability into a project of individual character-building risks reinforcing an ideology of self-responsibility – *It's up to you to transform your vulnerability into a source of strength* – that is integral to the maintenance of those very structures of inequality. It can also have the effect of diminishing the legitimacy of

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[1] This figure is based on the running tally on the TEDx website; see Brown (2010). 'TED talks' are hosted by an American media organisation TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) Conferences, LLC, which posts the talks online for free viewing. Brown's talk is in fact a 'TEDx' talk, which means it has been organised by an independent organisation in conjunction with TED Conferences LLC.
[2] There are dozens of examples where Brown's work on vulnerability is translated into practice for different specific groups. See Barned-Smith (2014); Brown (2016); Devine (2019).

other emotional responses to vulnerability, such as rage (hooks 1995) or mourning (Stevenson 2014), all of which have a role to play in contexts of violence and dispossession. Critical scholarship within feminist, queer, post- and decolonial, disability and crip studies,[3] insists that vulnerability must be firmly situated within political contexts if it is to become a mode of resistance and means of social transformation (see e.g. Butler *et al.* 2016: 6; Cooper 2015; McRuer 2006; Shilliam 2013).[4] Similarly, anti-racist critics expose the ways that individual expressions of vulnerability and compassion can function as mere performances of affective virtue – *Look how much I care* – when they do not contribute towards collective political resistance and world-building, or work to combat tactical deployments of vulnerability – like 'white women's tears'[5] – by the powerful or privileged (see e.g. Diangelo 2018; Hooker 2017; Lorey 2015; Oliviero 2016; Puar 2017).

Within such critical discussions, another term that prompts further scrutiny is 'care'. Care is often invoked as a straightforward corollary to vulnerability – its salve or its 'answer' – whether in the form of 'self-care' or care for others. At first glance, then, the relationship between vulnerability and care might seem to be complementary and harmonious: *vulnerability requires care, and care alleviates vulnerability*. Yet vulnerability often elicits responses of aggression, revulsion, or attack rather than care, and caring relations themselves are not always as benign as we might assume. 'Care' can manifest in highly ambiguous and contradictory ways, and in many contexts is intimately interwoven with coercion, exploitation, and exclusion. For instance, asylum seekers experience such convoluted regimes of care when conditions like HIV or cancer convert into 'distinct advantages' as the 'means to papers' and to 'prov[ing] one's "humanity"' and worthiness (Ticktin 2011: 3–4; Bornstein and Redfield 2010; Giordano 2014). And just as institutions of 'care' can operate as spaces of bullying, violence, incarceration, and even death (Biehl 2013; Mulla 2014; Stevenson 2014),[6] punitive or 'correctional' institutions can function as routine providers of rudimentary care when the social 'safety net' has collapsed (Knight 2015; Sufrin 2017). So whilst Lemn Sissay writes in his memoir *My Name is Why* (2019) of his brutal experiences as a child growing up in the UK 'care' system, Carolyn Sufrin explores in her ethnography *Jailcare*

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[3] 'Crip studies' brings together disability and queer studies to resist the potent intersections of heternormativity and ableism. See McRuer (2006).

[4] Robbie Shilliam (2013: 142), for example, argues that consciousness of, and education about, one's own cultural and social history of supremacy is crucial, in order to avoid turning a finding of one's own vulnerability into a narcissistic enterprise that fails to reflect on how 'find[ing] one's vulnerability is already a privileged pursuit'.

[5] The phenomenon 'white women's tears' refers to the deployment of white feminine fragility, or the 'damsel in distress' archetype: the 'weaponising' of tears by white women as a means of avoiding accountability, diverting attention, and silencing and demonising people of colour. For more, see Hamad (2020).

[6] One devastating example of this in the UK is the case of Connor Sparrowhawk, who died in a specialist NHS unit in 2013. To learn more, see Ryan (2017; 2019).

(2017) how – within contexts of poverty, violence, homelessness, structural racism, and mass incarceration in the USA – one jail in San Francisco has become a place where poor and marginalised pregnant women access forms of care they would not otherwise experience outside its walls (Sufrin 2017: 3).[7]

In 2017, we organised a British Academy conference in London to try to work through some of the complexities and contradictions that permeate the vulnerability/care nexus.[8] We brought together scholars from across a wide range of disciplines whose work pushes us to think beyond individualised and naturalised notions of vulnerability, as well as naive and romanticised notions of care. Conversations about vulnerability and/or care have occurred *within* the humanities,[9] but we wanted to push transdisciplinary conversations *between* the humanities and social sciences further, particularly between philosophy, anthropology, and International Relations as our own respective disciplinary backgrounds. This book has emerged out of that conference, and is structured in ways that seek to capture and continue the lively spirit of transdisciplinary dialogue that the conference enabled. We do not attempt, here, to reconcile contradictory manifestations or differing approaches to vulnerability and care; nor do we aim to draw fixed and determinate boundaries around what is meant (or not) by these shifting and variable terms. Rather, our aim is to further interrogate and prise open spaces of ambiguity, difficulty, and difference, as well as to find points of convergence and connection, by staging a series of transdisciplinary 'dialogues'. From these dialogues, several key themes have emerged: the fragility of embodied life; our embeddedness in hierarchical structures of power and unequal relations of dependence; our mutual exposure and openness to harm, exploitation, and violence as well as to love, creativity, and nurturance. Across the book's four parts, ethnographic and narrative accounts of vulnerable life and caring relations in various geographical regions – including Iraq, Japan, Micronesia, Mexico, Uganda, the UK, and the USA – are interspersed with perspectives from philosophy, bioethics, International Relations, decolonial, and psychosocial theory, to comprise a series of compelling intellectual encounters, creative possibilities, and provocative insights.

In what follows, we set out in more detail the intellectual debates within which our book is immersed, offering an account of some of the ways in which ideas of vulnerability and care have been constituted and contested through various forms of academic and public discourse. Finally, we will explain further the transdisciplinary nature, structure, and contents of the book, concluding with a brief overview of the parts and chapters.

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[7] Sufrin is careful to emphasise that she is referring specifically to one prison which has a relatively robust medical system, and is not making any universal claims. Indeed, she states that many jails and prisons in the USA have 'abysmal' pregnancy care. See this interview for more details: www.globalhealthhub.org/2017/12/21/jailcare-an-interview-with-carolyn-sufrin/.
[8] For details, see British Academy (2017).
[9] See, for example, Koivunen *et al.* (2018); Mackenzie *et al.* (2014b).

Invoking 'the Vulnerable'

In popular and policy discourses, vulnerability is generally framed as a condition of dependence, weakness, fragility, or incapacity which pertains to particular groups – 'the elderly', 'the disabled', 'the poor', and so on – in need of 'extra care' or protection (Mackenzie *et al.* 2014a: 2). Moreover, it is often treated as a problem that is simply *given*; hence, '*they* ["the vulnerable"] are the problem to be addressed' rather than the socio-political structures and institutions that render some more vulnerable than others (Clark 2013: 6). The UK government's 'Prevent' strategy, for instance, identifies particular individuals and communities that are 'vulnerable to radicalisation' or 'at risk' of being 'drawn into terrorist or extremist activity', and frames the 'threat of radicalisation' as something essentially external or 'other' to British society that needs to be driven away or at least prepared for.[10] Likewise, international humanitarian and development programmes identify 'the vulnerable' as those most susceptible to harm who pose a problem for 'us', the 'international community', to solve.[11]

Within mainstream academia, there has been a similar propensity to frame vulnerability as something that only affects specific individuals, social groups, or nations, and is caused by factors external to the basic structural functioning of a nation-state, geographical region, or set of institutions. International Relations and political geography have traditionally been interested in the 'geopolitics of vulnerability', which focuses on the vulnerability of one particular nation-state in relation to others, mainly conceived through the lens of military security (see e.g. Nathan and Scobell 2013; Smith and Timmins 2001; Suzuki and Wallace 2018). More recently, a number of studies have started to consider the vulnerability of certain states or regions to climate change, and various indexes have been established to measure the degree of harm, the 'adaptive capacity' of a population, and the possibilities for 'reducing' vulnerability (Nelson 2016: 113; see also Busby *et al.* 2013).[12] Biomedicine and epidemiology investigate the ways individuals and populations become vulnerable to phenomena and contagions such as SARS or Ebola.[13] In

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[10] See, for example, the 'Let's Talk about It' initiative that aims to 'provide practical help and guidance to the public in order to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism', supporting 'vulnerable individuals through intervention projects'; see Let's Talk about It: Working Together to Prevent Terrorism', www.ltai.info/, accessed 2 July 2019.

[11] In May 2018, for example, the United Nations (UN) humanitarian chief requested increased 'life-saving humanitarian support' for the '7.1 million vulnerable Sudanese' who have been worst affected by the conflict in Darfur – particularly 'returnees, internally displaced people and host communities', and 'women and children who are vulnerable to sexual violence' (UN News 2018). Or, as another example, the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention to Climate Change (UNFCCC) agreed to assist 'particularly vulnerable' developing countries in their climate change adaptation efforts (Weilerand *et al.* 2018).

[12] See e.g. David Wheeler's Climate Vulnerability Index or the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Index (referred to in Nelson 2016: 113).

[13] For critical views on this literature, see Gomez-Temesio (2018); Porter (2013); Wanderer (2017). As this book goes into production, in June 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic is under way across the globe.

moral philosophy, there is less concern with 'external threats' or contagions and more of a focus on naturalised conditions such as sickness and disability as human frailties that render 'the vulnerable' in need of special care and protection from those who must assume their obligations and answer the need (see e.g. Goodin 1985; MacIntyre 1999).

The call for those in positions of strength or power to take responsibility and do what they can to alleviate suffering carries a powerful normative charge. But, arguably, this also perpetuates the problematic idea that it is the powerful who care for the powerless, when, in actuality, 'the powerless tend to care for the powerful, and not the other way around' (Baraitser and Brook, this volume). Moreover, framing the problem of vulnerability as one of responding to 'external threats', or alleviating 'natural' afflictions or disasters, shifts attention away from the socio-political structures and cultural imaginaries that exacerbate or create harm and suffering in the first place. 'The vulnerable' has an almost euphemistic quality that serves to deflect attention from exactly what puts some people in much worse positions than others. As critical disability theorists, for example, have persistently argued, the naturalisation of disability means that the disabling effects of social arrangements are consistently disavowed (see e.g. Garland-Thomson 1997; Scully 2014). Moreover, contemporary narratives around the need to boost 'resilience' are often part and parcel of neoliberal discourses that shift the responsibility for dealing with vulnerability on to the shoulders of individuals and non-state actors such as markets or charities, by arguing that there is a need to adapt and 'bounce back' through accommodation (Corry 2014; Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Neocleus 2013; Tierney 2014).[14] Kevin Grove, for example, points out that since the mid-1990s there has been a progressive *depoliticisation* of the concept of vulnerability through discourses of resilience, making it difficult, if not impossible, to re-harness it for critical purposes (Grove 2014: 204).

The *repoliticisation* of vulnerability thus requires a thoroughgoing consideration of the societal, economic, and historical structures of oppression and injustice which determine the discourses of vulnerability, and render certain populations more vulnerable than others through the unequal distribution of risk and harm, as well as the unequal distribution and quality of care. In Guy Standing's terms (2011: 1), for instance, the 'central plank' of neoliberalism – the introduction of labour market flexibility into all spheres of life – has led to the creation of a global

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[14] Mark Neocleus points out that whilst in 2002, the *National Security Strategy* of the United States of America (2002), which was published as a major statement of US strategy following 9/11, mentions 'resilience' just once, five years later the *National Strategy for Homeland Security* (2007) is 'almost obsessed with the idea of resilience' (Neocleus 2013: 3). One year later, the UK's National Security Strategy claims that 'since 2001, the Government has mounted a sustained effort to improve the resilience of the United Kingdom', and created a 'Resilience Unit' within the cabinet office (Neocleus 2013: 3). It needs to be noted, though, that there is also a body of scholarship that critiques the argument that the concept of resilience feeds straightforwardly into neoliberal forms of governance (see e.g. Bourbeau 2015; Simon and Randalls 2016).

'precariat' consisting of millions around the world who live without any 'anchor of stability'.[15] Within the anthropological context, Joel Robbins (2013) and Sherry Ortner (2016) have tracked the emergence of critical views of vulnerability to post-colonial critiques of neoliberalism emerging in the 1980s, during which the dominant subject of ethnography turned from the 'exotic other' to the 'suffering subject'. Ortner (2016) calls this 'dark anthropology', comparing it to the bleak and moody work of indie filmmakers who try to distinguish their realist aesthetic from an inauthentic, glossy Hollywood movie industry. 'Dark anthropology''s compendium of suffering has exposed the intense vulnerability of copper miners in Zambia (Ferguson 1999), drug-injectors in San Francisco (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009), endangered indigenous groups in Brazil (Bessire 2014), and dozens of other groups that have been rendered precarious or 'abject' by the forces of global neoliberal capitalism.[16]

Critical treatments of vulnerability have also emerged within International Relations. Focusing on the significance of socially constructed norms, for example, Ian Clark argues that people are not simply vulnerable to 'natural harms' that befall humanity, but that the 'situation of the vulnerable' is largely conditioned by the 'values of international society' (Clark 2013: 2). For instance, the acceptance of war as an institution of international society leads to an unquestioned toleration of the vulnerability of those exposed to war, making the latter an 'inescapable consequence of war's social purpose' (Clark 2013: 6). Similarly, feminist theorists have broken down 'rape myths' that present rape and sexual violence against women as an inevitable 'fact of life', arguing that the vulnerability of women and girls to sexual violence stems from patriarchal sex/gender systems rather than natural male aggression or individual pathology. It is patriarchy that has constituted women's bodies as 'uniquely vulnerable' rather than biology or 'human nature' (Bergoffen 2003).

This critical body of work, across various disciplinary sites, is highly illuminating from a social justice perspective, starkly demonstrating the problems of treating vulnerability as something natural or inevitable, divorced from power and privilege. However, as Erinn Gilson has persuasively argued, there remains a tendency within many fields of academic literature to understand the concept of 'vulnerability' in a fairly narrow and reductive sense: as something entirely negative that only implies exposure to harm, and which must be eradicated to ensure well-being (Gilson 2014). That is, even critical accounts still tend to treat vulnerability as a problem to be solved, and this can inadvertently perpetuate the impossible ideal of the self-sufficient, invincible sovereign subject who is only ever

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[15] See also Levene and Conversi (2014) for a similar argument in relation to the responsibility of neoliberalism and developmentalism for rendering subsistence societies vulnerable to environmental degradation.

[16] The 'anthropology of the good' (Robbins 2013), including subjects like care, morality, and hope, does not fully resolve this, as it still rests on the view that vulnerability is only concentrated within particular groups.

vulnerable in temporary situations of adversity. Vulnerability, moreover, is consistently depicted as an affliction pertaining solely to underprivileged, oppressed, or marginalised members of society: 'the vulnerable'. Such approaches may be well intentioned, but can too easily isolate, stigmatise, or disempower particular groups of people, fostering paternalistic institutional responses to vulnerability that can be damaging rather than constructive. For example, whilst environmental justice movements have importantly insisted that climate change must not be framed as an external 'natural' problem divorced from the gross inequalities produced by global capitalism, the 'strategic necessity' to emphasise the uneven effects of climate change may reinforce the vulnerability of particular groups or regions if they are treated as helpless and in need of 'saving' (see e.g. MacGregor 2014: 624). As Judith Butler argues in this volume, 'the language by which ["the vulnerable"] are represented risks misrepresenting them, locating power external to their own action. Thus, named as vulnerable, they are deprived of their power.' Moreover, this binary framework 'does not give us a way to understand the ties that we have to one another, and to elaborate a politics on the basis of those ties'.

Vulnerability as a Constitutive Shared Condition

In light of such problems with paternalistic, reductive and binary approaches to vulnerability, various scholars in the humanities and social sciences have begun to develop an alternative way of conceptualising vulnerability in more neutral terms as *openness* or *exposure*, and moreover, as 'pervasive, fundamental, shared, and something we cannot ever entirely avoid' (Gilson 2014: 2). Rather than accepting vulnerability as something that must be eliminated as far as possible, the aim is to revalue it as a constitutive and potentially generative component of embodied life that underpins our very capacity for relations with others. It is thus understood as a fundamentally ambivalent and ambiguous aspect of embodied, intercorporeal existence:[17] an 'open ended condition that makes possible love, affection, learning and self-transformation just as much as it makes possible suffering and harm' (Gilson 2014: 38). This kind of ontological or constitutive understanding of vulnerability has been particularly prevalent within certain strands of feminist philosophy, which have problematised the 'wholly negative' notion of vulnerability (Shildrick 2002: 77) owing to its association with gendered binaries that align vulnerability with passivity and femininity, and foster paternalistic attitudes towards women as a passive group in need of 'protection' (see e.g. Butler 2004; 2009; 2016; Cavarero 2000; 2005; 2008; Diprose 2002; 2013; Gilson 2014; 2015; 2016b; Petherbridge 2016; 2019). From this perspective, vulnerability as such is not the problem.

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[17] As Gilson explains in her chapter in this volume: 'Whereas ambivalence names vulnerability's bi-directionality – how it opens us to care and injury, love and hate, etc. – ambiguity names the intertwining of that which dualist thought would separate.'

Rather, pretensions to *invulnerability* are what must be eliminated, because such pretensions shore up defensiveness and individualism as well as social hierarchies based on ideals of independence and self-sufficiency. Accordingly, it is proposed, recognising and revaluing vulnerability as a constitutive shared condition of 'intercorporeal openness' can engender a model of ethics and care based upon mutual interdependence and reciprocity, rather than paternalistic paradigms of protection or benevolence.

This body of work has strong links with feminist literature on 'care ethics' (Gilligan 1982; Held 2006; Noddings [1984]2003; Slote 2007; Tronto 1993), which has similarly posed a thoroughgoing challenge to normative masculinist images of the self-sufficient sovereign human subject. The ethics of care attempts to go beyond the reductive idea of care as a temporary or exceptional measure, a one-way 'means to an end' that simply 'flows out from the carer to the cared-for' (Baraitser 2017: 14). Instead, theorists have emphasised the need for ethics to emerge through situated relational processes between carer and cared-for, leveraging the capacity for empathy and displacement of self-interest, and highlighting the normative significance of mutual vulnerability (Laugier 2016; Noddings [1984]2003). Care ethics does not propose that caring is simply the moral solution for all situations. Rather, given our interdependence and vulnerability, it is caring that sustains us and can therefore serve as a starting point for imagining a different kind of politics.

The turn to thinking about vulnerability as constitutive and shared also has many crossovers with critical disability theory, which has been particularly concerned to break down presumed barriers between the 'vulnerable' and the 'rest', when the vulnerabilities of disabled people are marked out as 'exceptional' qualities to be eradicated as far as possible, rather then as part of normal life to be managed (Scully 2014). As Rosemary Garland-Thomson (2009: 19) writes: 'Each one of us ineluctably acquires one or more disabilities – naming them variably as illness, disease, injury, old age, failure, dysfunction, or dependence. This inconvenient truth nudges most of us who think of ourselves as able-bodied toward re-imagining disability as an uncommon visitation that mostly happens to someone else, as a fate somehow elective rather than inevitable.' Moreover, as with the ethics of care, critical disability studies de-naturalises the notion of clear boundaries between bodies, instead envisaging forms of embodiment as 'a complex process of encounters … with other bodies' (Hickey-Moody 2015: 111). Vulnerability can thus constitute a basis for an alternative understanding of the political economy of bodies and personhood.

We can track a similar understanding of vulnerability as 'intercorporeal openness' within social anthropology. Emile Durkheim's ([1912] 1995) theory of 'collective effervescence', for example, presupposes a capacity to enter into a state of embodied affective communion with others through rituals, generating intense feelings of belonging. For Durkheim, this capacity for opening embodied consciousness, as seen across the world in instances of trance possession, reveals a much more widely shared quality of experience that is the basis of social life. Similarly, Victor and Edith Turner (Turner [1969] 2017) describe the ways ritual

states of vulnerability (such as an arduous pilgrimage or a harrowing initiation rite) can produce profound changes in consciousness and a sense of solidarity, or 'communitas', that traverses normally divided social strata. It is proposed that if, as embodied beings, we are vulnerable, it is during these moments of communitas that we feel unified as one body, capable of caring for each other even after we return to our everyday lives. Medical and psychological anthropologists in particular have documented the various ways people around the world find themselves physically, emotionally, and spiritually vulnerable to a host of natural and supernatural forces (Evans-Pritchard 1991; Favret-Saada [2009]2015; Lepselter 2016; Stoller and Olkes 1987; Valeri 2000). That said, however, the ethnographic emphasis has typically focused on the ways cultural forms of bodily discipline and meaning-making, such as taboos, divination, or ritual violence, allow people to regain a sense of mastery over these vulnerabilities, rather than on how openness and uncertainty might say something about the 'human condition' as such.

More recently, anthropologists have started linking vulnerability to an enhanced capacity to care. This has come partly as a result of a more reflexive ethnographic writing which began in the late 1970s before firmly taking hold in the 1980s with the publication of Clifford and Marcus' highly influential text, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (1986). Since then, anthropologists have experimented with ways of breaking with the disembodied, distant, authoritative voice of the 'invulnerable researcher' in order to understand what it means to become a 'vulnerable observer' (Behar 1997) who puts themself on the line and is affected in the process of becoming part of the lives of their interlocutors. By becoming vulnerable in the field, these anthropologists have tried to break with the fieldwork traditions of colonial surveyors and missionaries and sought ways to make caring mutuality part of the ethnographic ethic (Sanjek 2014). This approach is particularly important in understanding the narratives of 'wounded storytellers' (Frank 1995) and the first-person experience of pain and affliction (Das 2015; Scarry 1985). Practising a more vulnerable anthropology has proved critical to formulating an anthropology of vulnerability in diverse contexts.[18]

In International Relations, a feminist ethics of care has been invoked against the dominant rationalist tradition in the discipline that has – as its 'founding myth'[19] maintains – been grappling with how to achieve global order and maintain peace (mostly in the sense of preventing war) ever since the First World War, and has fetishised notions of autonomy, non-interference, and self-determination (albeit in

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[18] Recent discussions revolving around academic precarity, decolonisation, repatriation, and other social justice issues have stirred voices within the anthropological community showing the persistence of challenges within the discipline.

[19] In recent decades a growing body of literature has been arguing that the 'myth' of the discipline of International Relations as having emerged from the horrors of World War I covered over the fact that the origins of the discipline go further back: in the early twentieth-century International Relations was concerned with questions of colonial administration and worries about the possibility of coming 'race wars' in the context of emerging uprisings in the colonies (see e.g. de Carvalho *et al.* 2011; Vitalis 2005).

relation to states rather than individuals). Care ethics has become a way to respond, from a feminist perspective, to the abstract 'language of rights' that is prevalent in International Relations (Robinson 1997: 117);[20] to show 'concern for the particular other' who is in need (Fierke 2014: 788); and to pay attention to the 'significance of local stories and experiences' (Aggestam *et al.* 2019: 25).[21] Amanda Russell Beattie and Kate Schick (2013: 3) argue that the concept of vulnerability allows for a 'broader conception of what it means to be human' in International Relations, making it possible to include emotion, relationality, and community rather than solely focusing on 'a narrow instrumental rationality' (Beattie and Schick 2013: 2). At the same time they recognise that although it is shared by all humans as a primary condition, vulnerability is 'not equally distributed throughout the globe' (Beattie and Schick 2013: 6). All of this allows for a different engagement with topics that have always been central to International Relations, such as security, global ethics and rights, war, and foreign policy, and also more recently climate change and migration (see e.g. Aggestam *et al.* 2019; Beattie and Schick 2013; Beattie 2016; Gammon 2013; Gregory 2016).[22]

The work of Judith Butler on vulnerability warrants particular mention in this survey, given the level of influence that texts including *Precarious Life* (2004), *Frames of War* (2009) and *Vulnerability in Resistance* (Butler *et al.* 2016) have had upon revised notions of vulnerability and care in various intellectual contexts. Indeed, many of the contributors to this volume extract and develop insights articulated in these texts, as they think through the ethical and political implications of a philosophy that understands vulnerability, first and foremost, as a constitutive feature of embodied relations. Whilst those such as Adriana Cavarero emphasise above all the corporeal, fleshy nature of our bodies as that which makes us constitutively vulnerable (2000; 2005; 2008), Butler situates vulnerability within a social ontology which proposes that bodies are always produced and mediated within the fabrics of social life, and subjected to the latter's 'operations of power' (Butler 2016: 1). As she writes in the opening chapter of this volume, embodied cohabitation means that 'I am the kind of being whose persistence is already from the start dependent on a social form for its existence, and that means that my life is a social organic life, and depending on that social form, my life will be more or less livable.' The body is

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[20] Thinking about the 'justice vs. care' debate in the context of world politics, Virginia Held (2008: 2) argues that ultimately justice needs to prevail over care in the context of International Relations, but that this does not mean that both are mutually exclusive.

[21] See also Cynthia Enloe's seminal book *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, which, over now several editions ([1989]2000, 2014), has continued to raise the question as to 'where the women are' in International Relations, and which has investigated, among other things, the (caring) role of diplomats' wives, of domestic servants, and of female factory labourers. Albeit not coming from a care ethics perspective, this book deals with the significance of care in the context of international politics, and how it is rendered invisible in the mainstream approaches to the subject.

[22] For attempts to bring together notions of vulnerability (or a relational ontology more generally) and ethics of care in International Relations, see Aggestam *et al.* (2019); Robinson (2011).

thus 'given over to others in order to persist'; it is never 'just vulnerable' but 'vulnerable on a social form, whether it is another person or an organised form of care'. Although 'formally, there is no living being that is not at risk of destruction', war, as she stresses in *Frames of War* (2009: xvii), is not waged against everyone to the same extent, and humanitarian disasters are responded to differently, depending on who is affected (and where). The implications of this philosophical starting point are, for Butler, thus inherently political as well as ethical. What is needed is a normative project which seeks to overcome the 'difference between grievable and ungrievable lives … in the name of an interdependent world and within the terms of a more radical and effective form of egalitarianism' (Butler 2009: xxii).

Vulnerability, Care, and Power

The model of constitutive, shared, intercorporeal vulnerability associated with Butler and others has been taken up in various directions across various disciplinary sites, to think through issues including human rights and legal personhood (Fineman 2008; Fineman and Grear 2013; Matambanadzo 2012; Turner 2006), climate change (Gammon 2013), migration (Beattie 2016), war (Gregory 2016), food justice (Gilson 2015), sexual violence (Gilson 2016b) and mass incarceration (Gilson 2016a; Guenther 2013). At the same time, however, some important questions have arisen over the past few years concerning the political risks that the apparent 'ontologisation' of vulnerability entails (Gunaratnam, this volume). Various feminist theorists, for instance, have expressed concern that reconceptualising vulnerability in abstract terms as 'intercorporeal openness' may obscure more than it illuminates if it comes with a lack of 'ontological precision' (McWeeny 2014: 270; cf. Cole 2016; Coole 2008: 12; Levine *et al.* 2004; Lloyd 2008: 100; Mackenzie 2014; Schroeder and Gefenas 2009). Jennifer McWeeny, for example, argues that the fear of essentialism within contemporary feminist thought means that ontological claims are often left 'sufficiently vague', such that *how* one particular person is actually 'connected to or different from another' cannot be conceptualised (McWeeny 2014: 270). That is, although it may be recognised (in the abstract) that vulnerability is differentially distributed, reconceptualising vulnerability as a shared constitutive condition does not *in itself* offer up analytical tools to analyse inequalities and the specific operations of power that 'transform primary vulnerability into a state of suffering' (Michel 2016: 244). Nor does it necessarily enable us to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate, 'progressive' and 'reactionary' vulnerability claims (Oliviero 2016), or develop a liberatory political project (Ferrarese 2016; Kramer 2015; Mackenzie *et al.* 2014a: 8; Murphy 2011).

From within feminist theory, criticisms have also been levelled at the very conception of 'the political' implied by accounts of vulnerability as 'intercorporeal openness', with some cautioning that the agonism of radical politics is in danger of being eclipsed by a universalising ethics of identification and compassion (Berlant 2011; Butler 2016; Honig 2010; Mills 2015). Others have taken issue with apparent

implications that 'interdependent' processes, boundlessness, and mutual imbrication are necessarily valuable, which can have the effect of 'flattening out' power relations. As Sophie Lewis (2018: 311) has stressed, 'the *differential* character of imbrication, which the more euphoric theorizations downplay, is everything. Social co-imbrication may sound polymorphously sexy and exciting to many of us, but … For some, to simply be "imbricated" without the mitigating help of boundaries, barricades and weapons is simply to be unsupported.' Indeed, it has been argued that efforts to de-couple vulnerability from its over-association with violence and harm have actually made it more difficult to talk about these things, for fear of appearing 'negative' (see e.g. Cousens 2018; Murphy 2009).[23]

Comparable critiques have been made of the ethics of care literature over the past three decades. Care ethics has been taken to task (sometimes unfairly) for valorising and yoking caring to the 'feminine' – due to Gilligan's (1982) apparent elevation of the mother–child relation as paradigmatic of caring relations *per se* – and for promoting a universalising ethics of care modelled upon interpersonal relationships at the expense of a fine-tuned *politics* of care that can grapple more precisely with how care is affected by power (see e.g. Card 1990; Hoagland 1990; Spelman 1991). It would be disingenuous to present the politicisation of care as wholly missing from care ethics, when the political significance and ambivalence of care has been consistently emphasised by many of its key exponents (see e.g. Held 2006; Kittay 1999; Tronto 1993). Yet it is also important to recognise why 'care ethics' may continue to generate a certain wariness or suspicion, within feminist theory at least. Just as black feminist philosophers and theorists such as Angela Davis (1981), Patricia Hill Collins (2000) and Hazel Carby (1982) have consistently highlighted the racialised dynamics of care, and the denigration and exploitation of black women's caring practices, there is a huge body of literature examining grossly asymmetrical and exploitative care structures at the global level, such as global 'care chains' and the 'care burdens' (both paid and unpaid) placed upon migrant women carers (see e.g. Hochschild 2000; Parreñas [2001]2015; Pearson and Kusakabe 2012; Razavi and Staab 2010; Sassen 2000; Williams 2010; Yeates 2004).[24] Accordingly, it has been argued that 'care ethics' must 'stretch'

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[23] Emily Cousens (2018), for example, proposes that recent discourses of vulnerability within feminism have at times implicitly invoked a 'progress narrative' of feminist theory, which opposes an 'old' ('negative') formulation of vulnerability to a 'new' ('ambiguous') understanding. The 'old' notion has become associated with to-be-dismissed 'second-wave' feminist reflections on the specific vulnerabilitiy of women, which, Cousens (2018) argues, has led to a 'lacuna in feminist thought regarding the possibility of theorising sexual violence'. Meghan Morris (1987) similarly asserts that it can be hard for feminists to think through political problems like rape and sexual violence when such topics are associated with the 'negative' or 'heavy' feminist (1987: 186).

[24] Moreover, care practices and arrangements are inevitably bound up with *failures* of care (Baraitser 2017: 16), as well as the invisibility of care practices that are not *counted* as care. Reproductive justice theorists and activists, for example, have shown how the sterilisation abuse directed at poor women of colour within the USA has consistently been justified through the idea that certain (stigmatised) groups are 'unable to care' (Ross and Solinger 2017; see also Bordo 1993: 76).

itself further 'beyond sites in the global North' (Rhaguram 2012; 2016), and remain vigilant against any form of romanticisation. In Lewis' (2018: 313) words,

> We do not always want to see the violent side of care … [Processes of care] are the strangely undervalued and at the same time fiercely defended contribution of a disproportionately feminized and racialized contingent of humanity. But this in itself does not prove that they are good by default … politicization of these processes would need to radically transform and not just revalue the domains of care and reproduction.

To fully politicise regimes and relations of care, and understand their intersection with global capitalism and (neo-)colonialism, feminist theorists of 'social reproduction' have used Marxian analytical tools to shift the terms of debate altogether, speaking less of 'care' and more of reproductive, biological, emotional, or affective 'labour' (see e.g. Dalla Costa and James 1972; Federici 2004; Fortunati [1981]1995; Fraser 2016; Mies 1986). But whilst this approach importantly brings the production of value and 'non-value', commodification and coercion, to the fore, it can have a 'flattening' effect itself, if it obscures aspects of care that exceed economies of contractual exchange or exploitative (re)production (Arruzza 2016; Vora 2012; 2015). Baraitser, for example, argues that 'to care is never simply a matter of labour … To care is to deal in an ongoing and durational way with affective states that may include the racialized, gendered and imperially imbued ambivalence that seeps into the ways we maintain the lives of others' (2017: 53–54). Indeed, the designation of what is 'labour' and what is not, as well as the relationship between 'care', 'labour', and 'social reproduction', is notoriously difficult to determine. As Alessandra Mezzadri (2019: 37) insists, 'social reproduction' and 'care' must not be treated as synonyms, when the former 'encapsulates both the reproduction of life and of capitalist relations *at once*'. But this does not make 'care' any easier to conceptualise. So whilst the field of 'social reproduction theory' is currently flourishing (see e.g. Bhattacharya 2017; Mezzadri *et al.* 2019), it does not subsume the study of 'care', and meanwhile, 'care ethics' has become ever more attuned to the political aspects of care.[25] Elizabeth Porter (2006), for example, claims that the ethics of care has been extended far beyond the caring professions where it has tended to concentrate, constituting what Fiona Robinson (1999) calls a 'critical politicized ethics of care' that draws our attention to the 'contextual relations within global politics' (Porter 2006: 105). Just as an 'ethics of care' can be practised in a classroom or dementia ward, Porter proposes, it can be applied within both ordinary relationships and matters of global politics (see also Fierke 2014).

Finally, scholars interested in care within 'more than human worlds', like Donna Haraway (2016), Ana Tsing (2017), and Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017), have brought this renewed attention to power relations to the problem of living in

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[25] For recent events, see for example the First Annual CERC Conference 2018 on the theme of 'Care Ethics and Precarity' (Care Ethics Research Consortium), and the conference 'Critical Care: Advancing an Ethic of Care in Theory and Practice' held at the University of Brighton 13–14 September 2012 (University of Brighton).

complex and endangered webs of interdependent forms of life and life-sustaining matter. Efforts to describe life and care in the Anthropocene highlight the vulnerable affectability of living in the world, troubling and being troubled by it at the same time (Haraway 2016). As Thom van Dooren (2014) writes, 'Time and again I have witnessed how care for some individuals and species translates into suffering and death for others, the "violent-care" of conservation: predators and competitors are culled, expendable animals provide food or enrichment for the endangered, the list goes on …' (2014: 292). Indigenous peoples and communities located in the midst of such webs, with specific perspectives on how to sustain them, are particularly vulnerable to 'violent care', such as forced culling of animals in order to uphold conservation laws for others.[26] Violence can also be manifested through an appropriation of conservation knowledge systems that reify Indigenous peoples as 'natural carers' of an environment they are seen to live in harmony with. In some instances this leads those very peoples to actively seek to conceal their knowledge and practices, in order to preserve what is not regarded as being sufficiently 'natural' and 'harmonious' (see e.g. Rubis and Theriault 2019).

This book is deeply embroiled within these complex discussions concerning the convoluted relations between vulnerability and care, ethics and politics. Each chapter grapples in a unique way with the task of balancing attention to the potentially generative effects of recognising vulnerability as a shared intercorporeal condition, with adequate attention to the socio-political realities that make for vastly unequal experiences and structures of vulnerability and care.

Transdisciplinary Dialogues

As the brief sketch offered above has demonstrated, academic discussions around vulnerability and care are immensely complex and wide-ranging, which presents significant challenges when it comes to mapping the field. There is no single definitive account of academic scholarship on vulnerability and/or care that can be written, or a teleological 'progress narrative' whereby 'newer' approaches and knowledges necessarily supersede older ones as academic wisdom reaches ever higher heights (Hemmings 2010; Sandoval 2000; Shilliam 2013: 139). Accounts that present themselves as too 'neat' or 'tied up' can serve as a block to thought – stopping us from seeing potential in 'unfinished ideas', and bolstering an image of the academic as an unaffected, impartial knower who can triumphantly overcome problems that are in fact integral to the very workings of academia itself. Taking vulnerability seriously, then, should ideally impact back on to academic practice itself, puncturing over-confident assumptions that we have passed beyond

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[26] In 2018 Jovsset Ante Sara, a Saami reindeer farmer in Norway, lost his case before the Supreme Court, in which he challenged the government's order to put down two-thirds of his reindeer herd as he was deemed to be in breach of existing conservation laws. See Cohen (2018).

the problems we identify (Fleissner 2002), or that we are somehow outside the power dynamics that perpetuate the uneven effects of vulnerability and circumscribe relations of care (Knight 2015: 215–217).

Working with such complexity and diversity also raises serious epistemological questions concerning research methods and theoretical frameworks, especially when the effort to render our epistemological practices 'continuously vulnerable' comes into conflict with the requirements of conventional academic writing (Gunaratnam, this volume). To engage in 'vulnerable' or 'caring' research and writing (Behar 1997; Lugones 1992; Page 2017; Shih 2002) requires a careful interrogation of the limits of one's own perspective and position, not only reckoning with overarching unjust power structures, such as colonialism, capitalism, or patriarchy, but also with the different epistemic locations (not only generally from outside academia but also more specifically from the locations of colonised subjects)[27] from which knowledge about vulnerability is generated. As Rosalba Icaza points out in this volume, a normative approach not only necessitates the pursuit of egalitarian projects on the basis of shared vulnerability (as Butler emphasises), but should also involve making oneself 'vulnerable to foreign ways of thinking, relinquishing safety' (Lugones 1992: 35).[28] This can help avoid the danger of narcissism that lurks around the corner of any effort to establish that we are *all* vulnerable. As Robbie Shilliam (2013: 134) points out, 'effective therapy of the white-Western subject' (in terms of making the latter focus on its vulnerability rather than its rationality) has to go hand in hand with 'a social commitment to the overturning of structures of injustice that it might favourably inhabit'.

One thing our project on vulnerability and care has made very clear to us is the limitations of strictly 'disciplinary' knowledge and methodology, and the necessity of reaching beyond the boundaries of traditional or hegemonic disciplinary modes of knowledge – listening to and learning from those working outside our respective disciplinary 'homes'. For instance, whilst philosophies of vulnerability and care can bring welcome conceptual precision, or can offer renewed ethical/political impetus to academic endeavour, the philosophical impulse towards universalisation can be checked and enriched by detailed ethnographies of relationships of vulnerability and care within various social and geographical locations. As bioethicist Jackie Leach Scully puts it succinctly in this volume: 'theory needs fine-grained

[27] For decolonial theorists such as Walter D. Mignolo (e.g. 2000), modern epistemes and their claims for universal reach have always gone hand in hand with the annihilation of other ways of knowledge and being, a development for which they coin the term 'modernity/coloniality'. The argument for the need to shift to different epistemic locations is grounded in this understanding. Similarly, Kathryn Yusoff (2018) has shown that the evocation of the Anthropocene 'might seem to offer a dystopic future that laments the end of the world, but imperialism and ongoing (settler) colonialisms have been ending worlds for as long as they have been in existence. The Anthropocene as a politically infused geology and scientific/popular discourse is just now noticing the extinction it has chosen to continually overlook in the making of its modernity and freedom.'

[28] See also Anzaldúa (1999); Icaza (2015); Icaza and Vázquez (2013); Lugones (2003; 2010).

empirical knowledge about specific cases in order to be any good'. We have also found that the micro-level of analysis in anthropology can usefully complement the focus on the 'macro' that we find in much of International Relations, or large-scale meta-theoretical analyses of knowledge production and discursive framing. Anthropologist Clara Han, for example, argues for the value of an experience-based analysis of the relations of power which determine vulnerability in the 'bits and pieces of social life' (2018: 339). Ethnography, she continues, can be used to show how 'vulnerability and politics are interwoven in concrete lives' (2018: 340) in ways that are dense, heterogeneous, and dynamic.

What has also become apparent, however, is the inadequacy of a vision of academia that presumes there really are discrete, neatly bounded 'disciplines' that have their own autonomous methods and canonical texts, and only occasionally come 'outside' to talk to each other. This is the vision underpinning the notion of 'interdisciplinary' research, in contrast to our preferred notion of 'transdisciplinarity', which denotes 'a movement across existing fields (as opposed to simply a thinking between them or a multiplication of them)', and 'locates the source of transdisciplinary dynamics pragmatically in a process of problem-solving related, ultimately, to problems of experience in everyday life' (Osborne 2011: 16; see also Osborne *et al.* 2015). Many of the individual contributions to this book can in themselves be deemed 'transdisciplinary', as anthropologists draw on existential philosophy alongside ethnographic material to generate theory, or philosophers draw on legal, sociological, or media sources alongside classical phenomenology; and several of the key texts and concepts we are dealing with can be considered 'transdisciplinary' too. For instance, we have highlighted the work of Judith Butler as a body of texts that moves across disciplinary contexts with particular frequency and apparent fluidity; indeed, as Peter Osborne (2015: 4) points out, '[v]ery few of the most important works in the area of "theory, culture and society" … over the last 50 years, are "disciplinary" in character'.[29] Our project has also made apparent the transdisciplinary functioning of concepts such as 'relationality' or 'intercorporeality', and above all, 'vulnerability' and 'care' themselves. Hence we understand the book as staging 'transdisciplinary' dialogues and encounters as we recognise the transformative cross-fertilisation already at work, rather than as a showcase of 'interdisciplinary' research that envisages each discipline as neat and contained, and able to 'go back home' at the end of the conversation.

Having said this, however, whilst there are common concerns and references, and points of connection and 'porousness' (Chakrabarty 2000: 152–153), we cannot shy away from the more difficult issues that push at the limits of transdisciplinary analysis. There do remain specific disciplinary dynamics at work within a project like this (evident, for example, in questions about how the 'anecdotal' relates to or differs from the 'ethnographic'), and whilst certain concepts or theories do travel widely across different sites of enquiry and knowledge production, seemingly

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[29] Other notable 'transdisciplinary' texts include Spivak (1988) and hooks (1981).

intractable issues of conceptual translation do inevitably arise. For example, the term 'phenomenological' is commonly used to describe work in both philosophy and anthropology, but given that 'phenomenology' has historically been understood and practised very differently within the heterogeneous discipline of philosophy and within empirical disciplines that involve 'data gathering', points of misunderstanding or confusion cannot easily be avoided.[30] Indeed, as the project has gone on – from workshop to conference to book – there have been times when it has been unclear whether the philosophical notion of vulnerability as an ambiguous shared condition is really compatible with the more 'situated' approach to vulnerability and care found within anthropological, social, or political studies; and times when more 'critical' or 'political' approaches have seemed at odds with more affirmative understandings of vulnerability and care.

As editors, we have not attempted to resolve these difficulties and points of tension – for instance, by ensuring all our contributors adhere to the same definitions or taxonomies of key terms, or by trying to drive forward a singular approach.[31] Instead, the organisation of the book makes visible points of divergence and contestation as well as points of convergence, as each Part incorporates scholars with varying disciplinary affiliations. We have intended this as a form of transdisciplinary experiment designed precisely to see what possible differences in approach might be at work, which, after all, are what keep the conversation going.

Book Overview

The chapters in Part 1 – 'Bodies, Resistance, Despair' – forcefully establish that vulnerability cannot be separated from concrete bodies, within concrete spaces and worlds that are socially and historically constituted. As Judith Butler argues in the opening chapter, each body is straightaway given over to someone else, and its liveability depends on whether the condition of shared bodily vulnerability leads to care or exploitation (while care can also be in itself a form of exploitation, particularly as an organised form). Butler emphasises here that vulnerability, as the fundamental interdependence between bodies, does not designate specific individuals or populations as passive or weak, but manifests itself in the making of political

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[30] For an illuminating discussion of the different ways 'phenomenology' is understood within the heterogeneous discipline of philosophy and empirical disciplines that involve data gathering, see Sandford (2016). She focuses here on the 'methodological imprecision' that arises particularly from the issue of the 'third-person' perspective, asking what makes a 'phenomenology' premised upon gathering 'the voices of others' count *as phenomenology*, given classical phenomenology's commitment to the first-person perspective as the only legitimate methodological standpoint.

[31] For example, Mackenzie *et al.* (2014a) set out a taxonomy of 'inherent' and 'situational' vulnerability as a way of providing a 'more precise theoretical vulnerability' that they claim is 'necessary for understanding the different duties involved in responding appropriately to different kinds of vulnerability' (Mackenzie *et al.* 2014a: 8).

demands and actions of resistance. Using a variety of examples, from refugee protests in Germany to anti-government demonstrations in Turkey, Butler argues that in resistance, vulnerability is demonstrated rather than overcome.

In Chapter 2, Rosalba Icaza considers what vulnerability might mean from the perspective of 'border thinking': an epistemological position in which the world is thought from the 'concrete incarnated experiences of colonial difference and the wounds left'. Drawing on the work of Maria Lugones and Gloria Anzaldúa, Icaza argues that vulnerability is central to a decolonisation of how we think about the geo- and body politics of knowledge, coloniality, political economy, and gender. By way of demonstration, she engages in an auto-ethnographic reflection across a series of three vignettes that introduce 'places in the cartography of contemporary violence in Mexico', contending with the global politics of migration, development, and drug-cartel-related violence.

This Part, however, does not only recognise the potentially transformative effects of vulnerability when it is harnessed in resistance or decolonial border thinking; it also highlights how vulnerability can produce despair. This is particularly significant for Jason Throop in Chapter 3, as he examines local responses to two devastating typhoons which hit the island of Yap (Federated States of Micronesia) about a decade apart, and situates those responses within a broad ethnographic and historical discussion of Yapese moods in relation to events such as these. '[R]adical vulnerability', Throop writes, implies being 'exposed to, and wounded by, a world that takes away our possibilities for being' – through contemporary practices of domination as well as centuries of colonial destruction of other ways to live and know. His ethnographic research documents the 'despair' that characterises contemporary existence on the island of Yap, and he argues it goes beyond the precarity felt in an immediate situation or context, revealing as a 'mood … the various and shifting ways that we register our conditioned existence'. As Throop shows, taking such moods seriously is not merely an ontological imperative, but an ethical and political one as well.

Part 2 – 'Ambiguity, Affect, Violence' – further demonstrates the merits of bringing together conceptual and discursive analyses with ethnographic research, as a means of grasping and reckoning with the concrete complexities of vulnerability and care. In Chapter 4, Erinn Gilson proposes a conceptual account of vulnerability which foregrounds its fundamental ambiguity and ambivalence. Only such an account, she argues, can provide a sufficiently nuanced concept that can do justice to 'the complexity and diversity of experiences of vulnerability'. The chapter unpacks three core aspects of vulnerability – its commonness, its connection to affect, and its relationship to social identity, inequality, and oppression – before conducting a practical demonstration of Gilson's claims through analysis of two recent assertions of vulnerability in US immigration politics.

Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 also put into practice the sort of analysis that Gilson's conceptual framework enables, acknowledging the commonness of vulnerability as a condition of embodied interdependence, whilst also assessing its socio-political

mediations and unequal distribution. In Chapter 5, Thomas Gregory examines civilian casualties at coalition checkpoints in Afghanistan and Iraq, focusing on the use of lethal force against individuals perceived to be hostile. Drawing on the testimony of US soldiers, Gregory argues that the decision to use legal force can be understood as an affective judgement, informed by a socio-politically mediated set of background assumptions that mark certain populations as dangerous, threatening, and hostile 'before they even arrive on the scene'. To understand what made civilians so vulnerable to death and injury at coalition checkpoints, he contends, it is necessary to enquire into the affective schemes of intelligibility that render certain lives disposable and certain bodies profoundly injurable in war.

From a different perspective, Omar Dewachi argues in Chapter 6 that physical wounds inflicted in war provide a useful starting point for ethnographically analysing the 'lived relations of vulnerability and care' in post-intervention Iraq, where decades of war and western interventions have produced toxic legacies of wounding and affliction. Starting from the 'wound' enables Dewachi to analyse wider 'ecologies of war', moving beyond a focus on the human subject and tracing through his ethnographic research how social and ecological modes of life intersect through weapons, buildings, bacteria, pollutants, and so on. Dewachi's engagement with wider ecologies demonstrates that in actual practice, different dimensions of vulnerability cannot be separated. Sharing and violating are both part of the complex reality of 'lived relations of vulnerability and care', and they are social and material.

Part 3 – 'Narrative, Relationality, Disclosure' – considers vulnerability and care through the lens of storytelling, attending to the making, unmaking, and remaking of selves and relations. All three chapters recognise what Jackie Leach Scully calls 'narrative vulnerability', or the potential for the ways we organise identity, subjectivity, and experience to become damaged, broken, or unrecognised. Starting with a personal account of living in the aftermath of an emergency liver transplant, Scully argues in Chapter 7 for a disruptive politics of creative engagement with storytelling (and re-telling), in ways that embrace complexity, fragility, and relationships of care. Her notion of 'narrative vulnerability' challenges the biomedical narrative arc that depends on the possibility of a clean final cure, a full recovery to health. Rather, she shows how even after successful treatment, a patient remains vulnerable as they reassemble a narrative identity to fit the still uncertain 'new normal' of post-crisis recovery. Scully's chapter compels us to see the politics of care, or the responsibility of communities to respond to narrative vulnerability, as a matter of moral commitment to narrative enrichment. Narrative vulnerability makes one more sensitive and aware, not only of one's own imperfect ability to fully solidify a complete identity, but also of what Scully calls the 'cognitive and practical conditions of possibility' for emergent 'counterstories'.

Like Scully, Jason Danely argues in Chapter 8 that counterstories are relational, dependent on the vulnerability of both teller and listener, responding to each other. Rather than focus on identity, Danely is interested in counterstories that shift

away from oneself in compassion. Describing his fieldwork with carers in Japan, Danely describes how compassion emerges from the intimate process of caring for an older family member and the sense of woundedness that it creates. Although carers in Japan and England carry similar wounds, the care they provide depends on the narrative process that makes the wound meaningful as well as the political institutions that fix meanings of care in the service of social reproduction.

Relationality is also at the heart of Chapter 9 by Ann Cahill, which explores the ethical dimensions of 'a fraught and promising moment: the moment when a survivor of sexual assault discloses their experience to a trusted person (a confidant)'. Cahill's argument here is that this moment entails and produces multiple forms of vulnerability and possibility, for both the survivor and the confidant, and that attending to the moment of disclosure reminds us that vulnerability is not only openness to harm or injury, but also a necessary condition of intersubjective meaning-making. As legal or institutional encroachments (such as Title IX in the USA) threaten to undermine the promise of disclosure for intersubjective meaning-making, Cahill concludes, the 'vulnerability of vulnerability' must be protected.

The final chapters in Part 4 – 'Dependence, Distribution, Waiting' – turn to large-scale institutions of care, considering how dependence on institutional forms of care intersects with multiple fluctuating temporal embodiments and vulnerabilities: age, generation, addiction, illness, recovery. In Chapter 10, Lotte Meinert draws on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in northern Uganda to examine the complex impacts of Senior Citizen Grants upon intimate intergenerational relations within the Ik community. She demonstrates that care in the form of cash transfers to the elderly does not stay still: within a fragile context of poverty and insecurity, the initial point and time of distribution is only the start of further familial redistributions that, in some cases, have brought security and, in others, friction, suspicion, betrayal, and even death.

In the final chapter of the volume, Lisa Baraitser and Will Brook are similarly interested in the unpredictability, uncertainties, and failures of care, considering the temporal experiences of waiting produced through an institution 'in crisis': the UK's National Health Service. Drawing on anecdotes provided by Brook as a London-based general practitioner, the authors argue in Chapter 11 that 'waiting' can be understood as a form of care and response to vulnerability, signifying not only health service failure, but also a practice of careful attention. Care, in turn, can thus be understood as a practice that '*produces* time in conditions that are otherwise felt to be stuck and unable to change'.

In order to bring a richer sense of transdisciplinary dialogue to the book, each of these four Parts concludes with a short reflective response: by Rahul Rao, Véronique Pin-Fat, Yasmin Gunaratnam, and Tiffany Page. The respondents not only weave the themes of the chapters together, but also draw out loose threads to be taken up by our readers, provoking further thought and ongoing critical conversations beyond the covers of this volume. If a more just politics is to emerge from vulnerability and care, it can be helped along by such conversations, as we

strive to remain open to the challenges and possibilities that other perspectives and experiences bring, and thrive on complexity and the risks of observing deeply. These are conversations that begin with questions that matter, and continue to ask them for as long as it takes.

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