



Vulnerability and Security in Human Rights Literature and Visual Culture (Routledge Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Literature)

Alexandra Schultheis Moore

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This book responds to the failures of human rights?the way its institutions and norms reproduce geopolitical imbalances and social exclusions?through an analysis of how literary and visual culture can make visible human rights claims that are foreclosed in official discourses. Moore draws on theories of vulnerability, precarity, and dispossession to argue for the necessity of recognizing the embodied and material contexts of human rights subjects. At the same time, she demonstrates how these theories run the risk of reproducing the structural imbalances that lie at the core of critiques of human rights. Pairing conventional human rights genres?legal instruments, human rights reports, reportage, and humanitarian campaigns?with literary and visual culture, Moore develops a transnational feminist reading praxis of five sites of rights and their violation over the past fifty years: UN human rights instruments and child soldiers in Nigerian literature; human rights reporting and novels that address state-sponsored ethnocide in Zimbabwe; the international humanitarian campaigns and disaster capitalism in fiction of Bhopal, India; the work of Médecins Sans Frontières in the Sahel, Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Burma as represented in various media campaigns and in photo/graphic narratives; and, finally, the human rights campaigns, fiction, and film that have brought Indonesia's history of anti-leftist violence into contemporary public debate.

These case studies underscore how human rights norms are always subject to conditions of imaginative representation, and how literature and visual culture participate in that cultural imaginary. Expanding feminist theories of embodied and imposed vulnerability, Moore demonstrates the importance of situating human rights violations not only in the context of neo-liberal development policies but also in relation to the growth of security networks that serve the nation-state often at the expense of the security of specific subjects and populations. In place of conventional victims and agents, the intersection of vulnerability and human rights opens up readings of human rights claims and suffering that are, at once, embodied and shareable, yet which run the risk of cooptation by security rhetoric.

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