

Geographies of Children and  
Young People 11

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Christopher Harker  
Kathrin Hörschelman *Editors*

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# Conflict, Violence and Peace

 Springer

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# Geographies of Children and Young People

**Volume 11**

**Editor-in-Chief**

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National University of Singapore

Singapore, Singapore

*Geographies of Children and Young People* is a Major Reference Work comprising 12 volumes that pulls together the best international reflective and innovative scholarship focusing on younger people. Volumes 1 and 2 establish and critically engage with the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological groundings of this geographical sub-discipline. Volumes 3–11 provide in depth thematic analysis of key topical areas pertinent to children's and young people's lives: space, place and environment; identities and subjectivities; families and peer groups; movement and mobilities; politics and citizenship; global issues and change; play and well-being; learning and labouring; conflict and peace. Volume 12 connects both academic, policy, and practitioner based work around protection and provision.

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Editor-in-Chief

# Conflict, Violence and Peace

With 3 Figures and 1 Table

 Springer

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## Series Preface

Geographies of Children and Young People now constitutes a major subdiscipline within Geography. This is a very exciting and influential time in its development. Hence, it is important to capture the dynamism, depth, and breadth of the subdiscipline within a Major Reference Work (MRW). Springer Major Reference Works are produced in such a way that updating and editing of the online version can be done every few years. This means that the publication does not fix the data, debates, and delivery but rather moves and evolves with the subdiscipline it self. The intention and expectation of this MRW is that this substantive collection will be *the* go-to resource for scholars, educators, and practitioners working with children and young people.

While founding scholarship was published in the 1970s and 1980s, the dramatic expansion of research and publication in the field really began in the late 1990s and has continued exponentially. The last decade has witnessed a substantive increase in graduate student research projects and a surge in university-level teaching related to children's and young people's geographies. It is therefore extremely timely that this 12-volume major reference work has been produced. Together as Editor-in-Chief, Volume Editors, and Authors, we have developed the largest single collection of geographic work focusing on children and young people in the world. Intellectually, the work reaches beyond geography to the wider social and behavioral sciences; many of the authors in the series are not geographers, and so, the collection is healthily and engagingly transdisciplinary. Anyone working with children and young people will find chapters that connect very effectively with their own interests. Specialists as well as graduate and tertiary education students will find relevant work distributed throughout the MRW or locate everything they might need within one thematic volume.

This Series was founded on certain key intellectual and political principles. Working with young people and children within the academy has not always been easy nor a straightforward pathway for academics. It has taken time for scholars to convince their colleagues of the following: that children and young people really matter; that they should not be marginalized by the academy; that they have competency and agency and play important roles in society; and that they should be taken seriously as people regardless of age or size. This 12-volume collection is material evidence of the academic importance of children and young people in our

world. The MRW is determinedly international in approach, in authorship, and in content. The huge diversity of nations and territories explored in the collection as well as the geographic locations of author contributors is a real testament to the commitment of the Editor-in-Chief and Volume Editors to be genuinely international. Children and young people are everywhere on the planet, hence it is imperative that this Series reflects that ubiquity. Drawing from scholars and scholarship from within and about the majority world has been a key achievement for each volume. Another aspect of inclusivity relates to authorship. Foundational, well-established, and early career scholars are all well represented throughout the volumes.

The 12 volumes work collectively as a series and also stand alone as single books. The volumes are lengthy and contain between 25 and 35 full chapters; each volume is an excellent resource of expertise, content, and analysis. Volume 1, *Establishing Geographies of Children and Young People*, is designed to pull together some of the foundational work in the subdiscipline; demonstrate the emergence and establishment of particular philosophical, theoretical, and conceptual themes; and capture the diversity of geographic work on children and young people as it connects with other sub- and disciplinary approaches. This volume presents the key founding elements of the subdiscipline. Volume 2, *Methodological Approaches*, explores the grand array of methodological approaches and tools that children's and young people's geographers, and other social and behavioral scientists, have worked with, adapted, and invented. Chapters explore research practices, techniques, data analysis, and/or interpretation. Working with younger people in research demands different ways of doing research and hence addressing the complexities of power relations. Methodologically, innovation and experimentation have been very important. *Space, Place, and Environment* (Vol. 3) takes these three central geographic concepts and debates and extends them. The volume is structured around five subsections: Indigenous Youth – Space and Place; Children, Nature, and Environmental Education; Urban Spaces; Home Spaces and Homeless Spaces; and Border Spaces. Several of these themes are explored in fuller depth in subsequent specialized volumes. Volumes 1 and 3 will be particularly useful starting points for readers less familiar with geography as a discipline. Volume 4, *Identities and Subjectivities*, is designed to focus on the stuff of life and living for younger people. The chapters examine who young people and children are and what their social identities and subjectivities mean in the context of their spatial experiences. The volume explores identity formation and the spatial meaning of identities and subjectivities in relation to a broad range of social relations. The chapters explore how young people's senses of selfhood and belonging emerge through complex processes of inclusion, exclusion, and marginalization and the important role played by representation, discourse, and creativity. In Vol. 5, *Families, Intergenerationality, and Peer Group Relations*, the focus is on the ways in which children and young people are relationally connected with others. Section I demonstrates that familial relationships and the spatiality of the home are extremely important in all children's and young people's lives, even though the patterns and structures of families and the spaces/places of home vary geographically and temporally. Section II innovatively examines the complexities

and spatialities of extrafamilial intergenerational relationships and the complex meanings of age relationality. Section III emphasizes children's and young people's relationships with one another. This includes work on geographies of emotion and affect, bodies and embodiment.

The mobility turn in geography has been highly influential in the social sciences. Children's and young people's geographers have been significant in the paradigmatic shift around mobilities and immobilities. In Vol. 6, *Movement, Mobilities and Journeys*, contributors examine the role children and young people play in these "travels" in a range of diverse global contexts. The chapters collectively provide theoretical, empirical, and methodological insights and examples of actual movement combined with analysis of a range of complex contexts, spatialities, and temporalities that facilitate or hamper mobility. Volume 7 takes us into the realm of children and young people as political beings. *Politics, Citizenship and Rights* explores the political geographies of younger people in order to bring analytical attention to intricacies of the *policies* that specifically affect young people and children, alongside the *politics* at play in their everyday lives. Divided into four sections, the volume interrogates the spatialities of the rights of the child, children and young people's agency in politics, youthful practices and political resistance, and active youth citizenship. Volume 8, *Geographies of Global Issues*, unites three broad research themes that are often examined separately: economic globalization and cultural change; international development; and children and young people's connections with climate change, natural hazards, and environmental issues. What pulls these themes together is the recognition that younger people are important actors and agents within these processes and that their engagement/disengagement is crucial for the planet's future. In Vol. 9, *Play, Recreation, Health and Wellbeing*, important, well-established, but often contentious foci of children's and young people's lives are examined conceptually, temporally, spatially, in practice, and through representation. Many of the debates about children's embodiment revolving around obesity, unfittness, wellness, and neglect are relatively new in the social sciences, and geographers have played important roles in their closer scrutiny. Volume 10, *Laboring and Learning*, provides an integrated and multidimensional approach to understanding what learning and laboring mean to children and young people. The two concepts are explored in depth and breadth in order to capture the variance of what work and education mean and how they are practiced in different places and at different times through childhood and youth. Key thematic areas for this volume include social reproduction, transitions, aspirations, and social and cultural capital. In *Conflict, Violence and Peace* (Vol. 11), the emphasis is on the ways in which children are impacted and affected by, and involved with, highly problematic and fragile conditions of war, violence, conflict, and peace. As more and more younger people experience a range of conflicts and social, economic, and political violence, it is essential to examine what happens to them and what roles they play in processes such as asylum, child soldiering, terrorism, counterterrorism, ending conflict, and building peace. Volume 12, *Risk, Protection, Provision and Policy*, serves to connect academic research and policy and planning that affects children and young people. Policy, planning, and provision are often purportedly



about reducing risk and offering protection but are also associated with the control and containment of younger people, particularly spatially. The chapters explore the ways in which policies at different scales affect children and young people in terms of their access to space and their life chances.

This Series is an extremely rich, varied, and vibrant collection of work centered on geographies of children and young people. Just as children and young people bring vibrancy, diversity, and complexity to our worlds, so this MRW is designed to showcase, deepen, and develop the geographic scholarship that captures, albeit partially, the fascinating social heterogeneity and diverse spatialities of children's and young people's lives.

National University of Singapore, Singapore  
May 20, 2015

Tracey Skelton  
MA Oxon, Ph.D.  
Editor-in-Chief

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## Preface

This volume seeks to examine the different ways in which children and young people become entangled with violence, conflict, and peace. These relations extend across subject positions that breach dualistic divides between perpetrators and victims and that also include bystanders and postconflict engineers.

The volume begins by examining how violence might be conceptualized when viewed from and through the youthful/child subject. Violence is an everyday reality for many children and youth around the globe, tied up with and part of a wider spectrum of power relations that map across different scales, times, and spaces and that include structural inequalities, cultural marginalizations and exclusions, political conflict, as well as interpersonal abuse. In some circumstances, violence itself is remembered, articulated, and given meaning by being framed as youthful. Age and generational power are further key to understanding how and why violence affects young people's place in the social world. Dominant constructions of age and of the "proper" place of children and youth frequently glance over the violence suffered by young people. Such constructions furnish simplistic understandings of the complex motivations for and feelings about violence amongst young people in different circumstances. The first chapters in this collection seek to untangle this complexity.

The volume then assesses the different ways in which warfare and conflict can shape children's lives, whether as child soldiers, orphans, street children, or citizens. It is important to understand that these experiences also extend in time and space, to include postwar experiences of coping, recovery, and reconstruction. The second half of the volume examines the relationships between children, family, and violence; the violence of borders and transnational migration; and the economic violence that shapes the lives of children and young people.

Spanning all of the chapters is an attention to the specificity of place in connecting and disconnecting young people and violence, and the different spatial relations and processes that create, modify, and undermine violent youthful relations.

Durham, UK  
Leipzig, Germany

Christopher Harker  
Kathrin Hörschelmann

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## About the Editors



**Christopher Harker** Christopher Harker received his Ph.D. from University of British Columbia, Canada, in 2009 and now works in the Department of Geography at Durham University, UK. His work examines the practice and politics of everyday life in the occupied West Bank. His previous research examined the assembling of place through homemaking, mobility, and family. His current project, “Families and Cities,” funded by The Leverhulme Trust, explores how the recent and rapid growth of debt in Palestine have enabled and undermined contemporary forms of endurance in the city of Ramallah. His future research seeks to develop

a broader account of the spatiality of debt through comparative research. As part of this process, he has recently launched the Financing Prosperity Network, in collaboration with the Institute for Global Prosperity at UCL.

He has published widely, including in the journals *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *Environment and Planning A*, and *Geoforum* and *Children’s Geographies*. He is currently writing a monograph based on his most recent research, tentatively titled “Debt Space: Obligations and Endurance in Ramallah, Palestine.”



**Kathrin Hörschelmann** Kathrin Hörschelmann is a Research Associate at the Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography in Leipzig (IfL), Germany, whose work focuses on postsocialist transformations, geographies of (in)security, critical geopolitics, the political and cultural geographies of children and youth, gender, transnational identities, and social inequalities. Prior to taking up her position in Leipzig, she worked as a Senior Lecturer at the Universities of Durham (UK) and Plymouth (UK). She is currently conducting IFL-funded research on the “New Regional Geographies of (In) security in the Common House of Europe” and

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coordinating a work-package-lead in the EU-Horizon 2020 funded project “NATURVATION,” where her work focuses on participatory processes and governance trajectories for sustainable cities. She is further contributing to an EU-Horizon 2020 funded project on “Spatial Justice and Territorial Inequalities in Europe” (IMAJINE) and supervising research in the Leibniz-Association funded Campus on “Eastern Europe as a Global Area.” Dr. Hörschelmann’s publications include a coauthored monograph on *Children, Youth and the City* (Routledge), several coedited volumes and articles in international journals such as *Political Geography*, *Geopolitics*, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *Environment and Planning A*, and *Children’s Geographies*. She is also currently writing a research-monography on “Children in War and Peace – Perspectives from the West” for Routledge and coediting special issues young people’s landscapes of (in)security and security, and peripherality for the journals, *Social and Cultural Geography*, and *Geopolitics*.

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## Editor-in-Chief



**Tracey Skelton** is Associate Professor of Human Geography in the Department of Geography at the National University of Singapore. She was previously Professor of Critical Geographies at the University of Loughborough in the UK. The essential elements of her research career focus on people who are socially, politically, and intellectually excluded. Her early work focused on the Caribbean and issues of gender and racial inequality, feminist geographies, and methodological analysis. She has contributed to culture and development debates, particularly through her longitudinal research on the island of Montserrat. Recently, A/P Skelton returned to this field of scholarship through research with volunteers and host organizations in Cambodia as part of a major comparative and collaborative project on development partnerships. She was the principal investigator of a major comparative urbanism research project on the livability, sustainability, and diversity of four Asian cities: Busan in South Korea, Hyderabad in India, Kunming in China, and Singapore.

A/P Skelton is a recognized international leader in the subdiscipline of children's and young people's geographies. In particular, her work has served to challenge the invisibility and marginalization of young people from geographic academic research at the same time as it has demonstrated the rich and varied ways in which young people live their lives both spatially and temporally alongside, but differently from, adults. Her research work has been funded by key research institutions such as the Economic and Social Research Council and the Arts and Humanities Research Council of the UK; the Faculty of Arts and Social Science Academic Research Fund and the Global Asia Institute, both of the National University of Singapore; the Australian Research Council; and the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

A/P Skelton was a founding editorial board member of the international journal *Children's Geographies* and has been the Viewpoints Editor since 2005 and became the Commissioning Editor for Asia in 2010. She is on the editorial boards of the following journals: *Geoforum*, *the Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, *Geography Compass*, and *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*

(open access). She has coauthored 2 books, edited 3 collections, guest-edited 2 special journal issues, and published more than 70 journal articles and chapters. She is a passionate teacher and graduate supervisor. She is committed to the politics of research dissemination in accessible formats, in particular to enable the participants in her research projects to understand and recognize their coproduction of knowledge whether through specialized small-scale workshops, translation of reports into local languages, or production of audiovisual materials.



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# Violence of Youth and the Youthfulness of Violence

# 1

Dhana Hughes

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## Abstract

This chapter considers how conceptualizations of youth are used to remember, articulate, and give meaning to violence, by those who have perpetrated it. It does so by analyzing the memories and narratives of former insurgents in Sri Lanka, and is anchored in a period of violence known as the Terror (*Bheeshanaya*), which convulsed Sri Lanka’s central and southern regions in the late 1980s. The chapter suggests that former insurgents draw on the construction of “youth” as a narrative strategy to mediate morally discomforting memories of violence. Former insurgents use the cultural idiom of “youth” to explain their own involvement in the perpetration of violence, and to comprehend their own past experiences of violence. The chapter argues that through their narrative manipulation of “youth,” former insurgents reconstruct their violent pasts and project a particular representation of the self in moral terms. This allows them to disassociate themselves from violence, and to deflect moral culpability for it.

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**Keywords**Youth • Violence • Perpetrators • Sri Lanka • Memory • JVP

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## 1 Introduction

The late 1980s opened a new chapter in the turbulent modern history of Sri Lanka. This period witnessed the dramatic escalation of the well-documented civil war in the north and east between the state and minority Tamil militants of the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam), which violently ended in 2009. At the same time, the state was locked in a violent conflict with insurgents from the majority Sinhala Buddhist “community” in the southern and central regions of the country, which is little known outside Sri Lanka. This entailed a bloody insurgency launched in 1987 by a radical youth movement called the JVP (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna/ People’s Liberation Front) whose guerrilla cadres were largely vernacular-state educated, unemployed, rural youth from economically and socially marginalized backgrounds. The JVP adopted a strategy of guerrilla warfare aimed at overthrowing the center-right UNP (United National Party) government, and replacing it with a Marxist-nationalist state. It relied on the utilization of terror to bring about state paralysis, launching attacks on military bases and police stations, and destroying public institutions and infrastructure (Samaranayake 1997). The targets of JVP violence were wide-ranging – from members of the government, numerous other political opponents, civil servants, and military personnel to academics, media personalities, trade union leaders, and those civilians who dared to defy the orders issued by the self-fashioned “patriots.” The violence here took place within the majority Sinhala “community,” and was not “inter-ethnic” like the conflict in the north and the east between the state and minority Tamil militants of the LTTE. However, both conflicts were underpinned by grievances around state power and politics, discrimination and exclusion, resource distribution, and concerns about education and employment.

The turning point of the insurgency came in 1989 when the JVP, which seemed to be on the brink of success, issued an ultimatum to the state security forces demanding that all military personnel desert their posts and “join the revolutionaries.” The JVP ominously warned that failure to do so would result in the families of military personnel “paying the ultimate price.” There soon followed spate of murders targeting family members of military personnel. The enraged security forces responded by directing their own public threat at the JVP: “give up or your families will be killed” (Moore 1993, p. 638). There ensued a bloody battle between the security forces and the JVP that led to what has been described as “one of the most horrifying counter-insurgency operations in South Asia”. Within the space of a few months the insurrection was ruthlessly crushed by state counterinsurgency violence. Estimates of those who died vary from around 40,000 to 100,000, while thousands more “disappeared.” This period is locally remembered simply as “the Terror” (*Bheeshanaya*).

This chapter explores how those who have perpetrated violence use cultural conceptualizations of “youth” and “youthfulness” to remember, express, and give meaning to violence. It does this through an analysis of the memories and narratives of JVP insurgents. The chapter is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted with former JVP insurgents who had participated in the 1980s insurgency. Semistructured interviews and informal conversations were carried out with 32 ex-insurgents, some 20 years after the *Bheeshanaya*. Their ages ranged from approximately 35 years to 65 years. The fieldwork was multisited, covering several towns and villages in Sri Lanka’s southern and central regions.

The chapter explores the ways in which many former insurgents draw on the idiom of “youth” to rationalize their violent pasts and to grapple with issues of accountability. It is argued that their narrative “manipulation” of “youth” enabled former insurgents to reconstruct their violent pasts, and to project a particular representation of themselves, grounded in the moral. Moreover, by negotiating their memories through the idiom of “youth,” and by selectively drawing on positive and negative understandings attached to this cultural construction, former insurgents engaged in a form of disassociation from violence and a deflection of moral culpability for it. In other words, while not denying outright their involvement in violence, former insurgents at the same time refused to acknowledge moral responsibility for it. They refashioned notions of the self in relation to their unsettling pasts through the idiom of “youth,” in a manner that allowed them to continue living with their memories of violence in the aftermath. This narrative strategy functioned as a coping mechanism, and provided former insurgents with a means of dealing with the consequences of their actions in a post-terror environment where reconciliation and justice were not forthcoming.

The “youthful” character of the JVP guerrillas featured consistently in people’s stories of the *Bheeshanaya* (Terror) during the course of this research. Former insurgents said that they were *taruna* (youth) at the time of the *Bheeshanaya*, and commonly attributed their motivations for participating in the insurgency to what they called *tarunakama* (youthfulness). In present-day Sri Lanka, the JVP insurrection is popularly remembered as a “youth rebellion” fueled by “youth unrest” (*taruna asahanaya*). This “problem” of “youth unrest” featured in a brief flurry of popular and academic debates that took place in the aftermath of the JVP insurgency. In 1989 a “Presidential Commission on Youth” was established to investigate the causes of youth discontent that had led to the 1980s JVP insurgency. Its somewhat hurried report was published in 1990, with recommendations for reforms in education and employment, for democratization of the state, and to address the abuse of political power. Its findings remain relevant but continue to be largely ignored, due to a lack of political will.

Social Scientists have emphasized the pivotal role of youth in social transformation, and have shown that youth is culturally constructed, socially contingent, and relational, a social category that often attracts much ambivalence from those who fall outside it (Durham 2000, 2004; West 2000). Valentine’s (1996) important work on the construction of childhood in the UK shows how understandings of what it means to be a child changes over space and time. This resonates with the varying and

contested understandings of youth and childhood in other global contexts, including Sri Lanka. Valentine goes on to illustrate how the dominant Western construction of childhood has teetered between simplistic negative and positive representations of children as either “devils” or “angels,” in spite of the convoluted and multiple realities of children’s lives (Valentine 1996).

The Sinhala term *taruna* (youth) may be understood as “young hopeful” or “one with potential,” but it is also often regarded with disdain and associated with immaturity, dependence, and lacking responsibilities (Hettige 1992). In a post-terror climate of silence, fear, and amnesia, the idiom of “youth” and the varying and often oppositional meanings attached to this cultural construction appeared to function as a relatively safe repository for memories of violence for many of the people who participated in this research. Memory is commonly invoked to heal, blame, and legitimize the past, and it plays a significant role in the construction of identity (Antze and Lambek 1996).

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## 2 Youth in Sri Lanka

Social scientists have pointed to difficulties in pinning down “youth” as a general category for analysis, and have raised questions around what or who youth is. They have shown that the named life-stage category of “youth” is fluid and often an ambiguous social experience (Valentine 2003; Vigh 2006; Beck 1992). Durham suggests that invoking youth is a pragmatic or political process, where youth is constantly being reconstructed through claiming it for oneself, or assigning it to others (2004). She urges us to think of youth as “a social shifter,” which situates it “in a social landscape of power, rights, expectations, and relationships – indexing both themselves and the topology of that social landscape” (2000, p. 116). To draw attention to youth is to recognize the dynamics of power, agency, memory, history, governance, and globalization, among other things (Durham 2000). The following pages show the ways in which former insurgents inscribed their constructions of youth with specific affective characteristics and powerful cultural meanings, drawing on representations of youth to provide elaborate moral critiques of violence.

The youth who spearheaded the JVP insurgency (like their Tamil insurgent counterparts in the north) belonged to a demographic cohort of educated, unmarried, aspirational youth that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s in Sri Lanka (see Thiranagama 2011). This cohort had benefited from the free universal healthcare and education (from primary to tertiary levels) provided by the post-independence state. However, this generation was by no means homogeneous. Their “contact” (Mannheim 1952) with the social, economic, and political world around them was shaped by their gender and class, ethnic, religious, geographic, caste, and linguistic backgrounds.

The state-educated Sinhala Buddhist youth who participated in the JVP insurgency belonged to a youth cohort that harbored aspirations for social mobility and an escape from poverty. These aspirations were thwarted, however, by the failure of the prevailing socioeconomic and political system to provide adequate opportunities

(e.g., decent employment) on a just and equitable basis. The result was widespread frustration, and anger at the state. This generation had come of age during the economic liberalization policies of the UNP regime post 1977, which resulted in a sharp rise in social and economic inequalities, in effect reversing many of the achievements gained by the post-independence welfare policies of the previous decades (Venugopal 2011). The communities to which these youth belonged further bore the brunt of the escalating rural agricultural crisis. Economic liberalization also led to an increase in state patronage in the distribution of economic and political resources (Moore 1990), and the 1980s witnessed the rapid rise of the politicization of society. The importance of political connections and bribes to securing state employment, for instance, discriminated against youth from socially and economically marginalized backgrounds.

Sinhala youth from poorer backgrounds, already frustrated at their inability to access decent employment and opportunities for social mobility, also found themselves politically excluded. The political system that this youth cohort (and subsequent generations) were faced with was one based on power and connections, dominated by politicians from English-educated, urban-elite backgrounds. This left little opportunity (if any) for rural youth to influence policy, and elite politicians failed to recognize the serious social and economic challenges faced by young people from marginalized backgrounds. The independence in 1948 that followed over 400 years of brutal colonial subjugation had seen the departing British colonists hand over state power to a select English educated, westernized, local elite. This small elite, which now held the reigns of political power, were hopelessly disconnected from “the masses” in terms of language, culture, and lifestyle (Spencer 1990).

This segment of Sinhala Buddhist youth experienced further seismic political shifts – most notably the outbreak of civil war between the state and young Tamil militants in the north and east in 1983, increasing state violence and authoritarianism, and the unwelcome political intervention of India in the war between the state and the LTTE in 1987. Some scholars have rightly argued that explaining away the insurgencies in the north and the south of Sri Lanka as “ethnic” or “youth” problems respectively detracts attention from the economic and political issues that produce social discrimination, which lie at the root of young people’s readiness to engage in political violence against the state (see Hettige and Mayer 2002). Indeed, social problems such as escalating suicide rates (particularly among rural youth) in the 1980s and 1990s indicate the hopeless sociocultural circumstances from which both Sinhala and Tamil militant groups drew their recruits (Spencer 1990). While ethnic discrimination was undoubtedly a critical factor that fueled the violence between Tamil militants and the state, scholars have importantly emphasized that it is one among many interconnected and complex factors that gave rise to, and shaped, the conflict in the north. It is equally important to recognize the pernicious workings of discrimination embedded in the socioeconomic and political structures, which excludes monolingual youth from marginalized backgrounds across the ethnic groups in Sri Lanka (see Amarasuriya 2010).

Youth unemployment, particularly among educated youth, and the disjuncture between aspirations and available opportunities is perhaps most widely recognized

by local commentators as a key factor that fueled the JVP insurrection. Debates on youth unemployment in Sri Lanka have tended to draw a narrow causal link between unemployment and youth unrest, often pointing the finger of blame at young people themselves. This has largely contributed to “youth” being considered a “problem” and predisposed to violence. Much has been made of the “unrealistic aspirations” of youth and the mismatch between education and the skills required by the labor market by local commentators. But comparatively little has been said about the failure of the economy and the private sector to provide decent employment opportunities to meet the needs of these young people on a fair and equitable basis. The institutionalization of political patronage and favoritism in the distribution of state welfare and resources has excluded poorer monolingual youth from accessing decent state employment. At the same time, other insidious social and cultural factors (e.g., the value assigned to English language and education, social networks, cultural symbols of Westernization, which are perceived as markers of progress) lie at the source of discrimination against these youth in the private sector (see Amarasuriya 2010).

While the post-independence welfare state made commendable strides in providing free universal education, there were serious problems relating to the education system in Sri Lanka, particularly concerning access, and the type and quality of education offered, which caused widespread discontentment among young people. Formal education carries great value in Sinhala society, and is seen as a marker of social status and a vehicle for social mobility. Education in itself, however, is often a “contradictory” resource that can draw some people tighter into structures of inequality, while also providing some opportunities (Jeffrey et al. 2004). Some of the grievances specific to the education system in Sri Lanka that led to violent youth protest included the woeful lack of resources for, and poor quality of education offered in, state schools (particularly in deprived rural areas); the politicization of the education system; and the barriers faced by educated youth who are products of the state-sponsored *swabhāsha* (national languages) education system in a labor market that privileges the English language/education and Western cultural demeanor. The latter issue in particular has led to further polarization between *swabhāsha*-educated youth and their English-educated multiethnic urban peers from wealthier backgrounds. The harsh reality of frustrated aspirations and social discrimination continue to form the basis of the youthful experience for the majority of young Sri Lankans today.

The JVP’s revolutionary ideology spoke to these very issues in a way that other more “out-of-touch” elitist political parties in the mainstream did not. These issues were firmly identified by former insurgents as fueling their initial motivations to join the insurrectionary effort, and they drew on examples of personal experiences of poverty, social discrimination, state violence, and political corruption to substantiate this in their narratives. All the former insurgents who participated in this research claimed their goal to be that of overthrowing a corrupt and unjust regime, in order to replace it with a state based on justice and equality. But in retrospect they did not offer these widely acknowledged causes of “youth unrest” as the sole or most significant factors motivating their decision to take up arms against the state (while



they did mention them in relation to the unjust and unequal state they wanted to overthrow). Neither did these factors feature elaborately in people's recollections of their overall experiences of the *Bheeshanaya*.

In hindsight, former insurgents overwhelmingly reflected on their involvement in the insurrection in terms of their "youthfulness" (*tarunakama*). Through this, they went on to project a particular representation of the kind of "youthful" insurgents they were, and demonstrated how this shaped their experiences of violence. Rather than subscribing wholeheartedly to the causes of "youth unrest" identified as being the prime motivators of their involvement in violence (discussed above), former insurgents drew on the constructed concept of *tarunakama* to give meaning to their relationship with violence and to allocate an ethical space for it post terror.

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### 3 Representations of Youth in the Master Narratives

Former insurgents' depictions of youth who participated in the JVP insurrection were founded on certain aspects borrowed from existing notions of youth found in the "master narratives" of the *Bheeshanaya* propagated by the state (backed by the media and powerful elites), and by the JVP. Through their memory work and representations of "youth," former insurgents spoke to these master narratives in interesting ways. The master narrative of the state has been subject to change over the years, depending on the political party in power. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that the state narrative on the Terror overall is marked by silence and a denial of its part in instigating violence. Both the state and JVP master narratives construct a particular stereotype of the JVP insurgent, which is built around the concept of "youth." According to the state narrative, the insurrection was a "youth rebellion" in which "restless youth" with certain grievances were "misled" into joining a rebellion against the state, and exploited by the JVP for its own political ends. Exposed to violence and power, these young "subversives," who included criminal elements, went on the rampage posing a threat to democracy and Sinhala society. The portrayal of youth in the state narrative draws on simplistic stereotypes and throws negative light on the category of insurgent youth as a group of actors. It somewhat patronizingly implies that the youth who participated in the insurgency were gullible (idealistic and easily led), immature (predisposed to "rebel"), and devoid of agency. For example, some journalistic and academic studies published in the aftermath of the *Bheeshanaya* describe the young people who joined the JVP as "hard-boiled *yakkos*" (uncouth thugs or demons) and downtrodden "desperados" who were manipulated by a "ruthless JVP leadership" (Chandraprema 1991), and as "idealistic young rebels supposedly dedicated to usher in a brave new world (who) became indiscriminate killers" (Perera 1999, p. 19).

The narrative of the JVP is significantly less influential than the official state narrative, but similarly constructs a one-dimensional stereotype of youth in its representation of the insurgents. Here, the JVP positions itself as vanguard of the youth and portrays former insurgents in heroic terms. For instance, the JVP holds an annual "heroes" day to commemorate its cadres who were killed in the

*Bheeshanaya*, whereby former insurgents are depicted as heroic martyrs. The JVP narrative denies responsibility for violence and instead accuses the state of committing the violence of this period. The former insurgents who participated in this research drew on some aspects of these depictions of youth, while rejecting others, in their reconstructions of the past.

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#### 4 Youth as a Conveyer of Discomforting Memories

At the time of conducting this research, the reality on the ground was one of increasing state authoritarianism and repression of political criticism. This served to intensify people's fear of discussing any issue deemed politically sensitive (let alone the *Bheeshanaya*). Moreover, the ethical ambiguity surrounding the violence of the *Bheeshanaya* further rendered the resurrection of its discomforting memory all the more complicated. This is evident when compared to other contexts of violence such as that of the Holocaust, Apartheid South Africa, and the Rwandan genocide, which were clearly judged as human catastrophes with identifiable "perpetrators" and "victims" in its aftermath (see Kirmayer 1996; Langer 1991; Hatzfeld 2005). The problem facing many "perpetrators" of violence was how to move these ethically and politically loaded memories from the private sphere of silence and forgetting into the public realm of remembering and telling. Here, the idiom of "youth" functioned as a relatively safe narrative strategy for beginning the work of mediating unpopular memories. It provided a space for the reworking of memory in a highly charged and convoluted post-terror environment.

During this research, an innocuous question that was frequently put to insurgents at the beginning of interviews in a bid to put people at ease was "What do you remember of the *Bheeshanaya*?" This allowed for respondents to answer in whatever way they felt comfortable. Former insurgents would most commonly respond with a reference to their youth, followed on by stories of their involvement in the insurrection, which they would hook onto this notion of "youth." For instance, Rahula, an ex-insurgent who had joined the JVP insurrection as a schoolboy, responded with:

You know, it was those youthful years [smiles]...At school I was well-known for my art-work. One day my friends asked me to draw some posters with them. I thought we were just drawing some anti-Indira Gandhi posters [to protest against Indian intervention in Sri Lanka in 1987]. I didn't know it was for the JVP. Through that, I was drawn to it (participating in the insurrection).

In prefacing his story with "You know it was those youthful years" accompanied by what appeared to be an indulgent smile, Rahula conveyed the concept of "youth" to be pregnant with meaning, which in turn suggests that it had narrative functions other than the mere facilitation of easing people into their stories. Rahula implies this temporal category of "youth" to carry special meaning and to have played a significant role in his involvement in the insurrection.

This is not to say that the legitimate socioeconomic and political grievances underlying the motivations of the insurrection were entirely dismissed by former insurgents. These issues were to a large extent tacitly or explicitly affirmed in people's narratives. Nevertheless, it was "youthfulness" (*tarunakama*) that the vast majority of former insurgents consistently emphasized when reflecting on their participation in the insurrection some 20 years after the *Bheeshanaya*.

Through their narrative work, former insurgents infused representations of *tarunakama* with a mix of negative and positive meanings, which they described as having colored their own experiences of violence. According to them, being a youth entailed characteristics such as courage, dynamism, energy, and enthusiasm, which propelled young people to actively pursue change. The thirst for new experiences in one's youth was emphasized by Kirihami, a former insurgent, who stated, "when you are a youth, you like to grasp new things [makes a grasping motion with his hands]. I got involved in the JVP for my *tarunakama* and its need to get involved in new experiences."

By referring to his "youthful need" for new experiences, Kirihami implies some of these characteristics to be instinctive, diminishing a young person's agency. He appears to suggest that those who occupy the temporal category of youth (youth as a life stage) cannot be held entirely responsible for their actions, due to their subjection to the strong pull of youthful traits. *Tarunakama* was also depicted as a time of heightened social awareness and emotionality, intensifying sensitivity to issues such as social injustice. As Kavindu, another former insurgent who had long since left the JVP, put it, "When you are young, things like injustice and inequality really get to you. You feel it here so strong [taps his chest with a clenched fist]. You want to do something about it."

Being youthful apparently brought with it a burden of negative qualities, along with the positive. People explained these as being naivety, irresponsibility, impulsiveness, obsession with social image, the inability to foresee the consequences of one's actions, an attraction to weapons, bravado, emotionality/quickness to anger (*āvēgashīli*), and being "up for scraps" (*valiyāta bara*). The conceptualizations of youth that former insurgents drew on were masculine and referred to male youth. This reflects the fact that the research was conducted solely with male participants, and that the vast majority of JVP insurgents were male. Many former insurgents who had left the JVP claimed that being a youthful party itself, the JVP (leadership) was aware of these qualities and often targeted their mobilization efforts around them.

#### 4.1 *Tarunakama* as a Driver of Violence

Kavindu drew on *tarunakama* to frame his motivations for participating in the JVP insurrection:

I was doing my A' levels [Advanced Level school leaving qualification age 18+] at the time. So, I was a prime target for that kind of thing (insurgent activity)... The JVP was a party for

the youth. The youth were attracted to it because of the language they used, the way they spoke, and the kinds of things they wanted people to do, like go and smash things up. I had so much energy in those days. When you are young you want to smash things up, to be a part of it. . . I wanted to change things. I liked their ideas (because) they believed in creating an equal society. I felt angry when I saw how rich some people were, and how poor others were. . . if you didn't know (speak) English you were ridiculed. I was angry about that. I remember once I threatened a police guy who I had gone to school with. He left school after his O' levels [Ordinary Level school leaving qualification age 16+] and joined the police, but I continued my education and finished my A' levels. During the *kalabala kālaya* (period of chaos) I went up to him in my scheme (housing estate) and physically threatened him. I warned him not to take any of my friends in for questioning. He then grabbed me by the neck and slammed me against the wall and threatened to take me in (to detention) and kill me [laughs]. At that time it was about *chandikama* (thuggery) also. I was young. I wanted people to know. Because when I wore a red T-shirt [the colour symbolising the JVP] and said I was a JVPer people were scared.

An assortment of negative and positive characteristics ascribed to youthfulness crop up throughout Kavindu's narrative, ranging from courage, energy, and a concern for social justice to obsession with image, bravado, "being up for scraps," and irresponsibility. He infers that *tarunakama* and its contradictory experiences contributed to his decision to engage in the insurrection. At certain points in his narrative Kavindu divests his youthful years of agency (e.g., by claiming JVP manipulation), while at other points he speaks of being deeply affected by social injustice and his desire to effect change. Kavindu shows his "youthfulness" as involving emotional intensity: anger and frustration at social injustice, which in turn fueled his desire to participate in insurrectionary violence. Social discrimination engendered by the privileged position allocated to the English language, which is widely acknowledged as a factor that motivated Sinhala youth to take up arms, is also mentioned. But it is situated firmly within the wider frame of *tarunakama*. Kavindu's narrative points to the ambivalence of youth, representing it as a liminal category with meanings that are constantly in flux.

Through his story, Kavindu further paints a picture of the kind of young insurgent he was, by drawing on attributes of "youthfulness." He represents himself as having been sensitive and keenly aware of social injustice, educated (he makes it a point to state that he had completed his A' levels while his peer in the police had merely studied up to his O' levels), full of bravado, somewhat naive and easily led, and carrying many of the usual traits of "youthfulness." Kavindu relates his story with an air of nostalgia, indulgently laughing at his youthful escapades of acting the "hard-man" in his housing estate. He shows his own life as an insurgent to involve ambiguous youthful experiences and emotions (e.g., showing off to friends and beating people up on the one hand and being sensitive and deeply affected by social injustice on the other hand). Kavindu seemed to suggest that he could not be held morally responsible for the actions he took in his youth, under the influence of *tarunakama*. In drawing a clear distinction between his life now as a responsible adult and his life then as an irresponsible and emotional youthful insurgent, Kavindu was putting distance between the person he is now and his past as a "youthful" insurgent.

This form of narrative rationalization raises questions about the continuity of the self and the moral responsibility for violence committed in the past. Kavindu, like many other insurgents, appears to be saying that as an adult he is not the same person that he was during his youth, and so implies that he cannot be held responsible for the actions he committed at that time. This echoes arguments put forward by philosophers such as Hume and the Buddha, who reject the notion of a continuing identity and a permanent conception of the self. Buddhism emphasizes the transient nature of the self and its lack of ego. As one local Buddhist monk put it, “We are all in a constant state of flux and everything is impermanent.” For Hume, the self is a series of experiences and the feigned conception of a continuing self is based on the memory and imagination that connects a person to her/his past (Sirswal n.d). Scholars of memory have argued that the evocation of memory signals association and continuity. Memory presupposes a continuity of identity, carrying the assumption that the person who committed a crime in the past is the same person who should be held accountable today (Antze and Lambek 1996). What former insurgents like Kavindu seemed to be suggesting was a redundancy of moral culpability of the self by reworking their memory. They remembered their involvement in the insurrection to have taken place during their youth when they were particularly susceptible to violence, and when they were different people.

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## 5 Deflecting Blame: “Good” Versus “Bad” Insurgents

Remembering violence has deep moral and practical implications for the self and one’s relationship with others in the present, and this was reflected in the ways in which people portrayed themselves as the type of insurgents they were during the *Bheeshanaya*. Through their utilization of “youth,” former insurgents carefully constructed two distinct categories of insurgent youth, “good” insurgents and “bad” insurgents. Former insurgents remembered one cohort of youth as being the genuine revolutionaries, driven to participate in the insurrection by a selfless commitment to its honorable goals. People overwhelmingly drew on specific words to describe these moral insurgents, and in turn went on to project a particular representation of themselves. These youth were said to be *daksa* (talented), *buddimat* (learned or knowledgeable), *ugat* (educated), with *avabōdaya* (knowledge, understanding, or awareness). When people like Kavindu used the term “educated,” they did not merely mean formal education alone. Instead, they were suggesting something broader – young people who were also “critical thinkers,” and who had cultivated a sense of social, political, and ethical awareness.

Invariably, all the former insurgents who participated in this research remembered themselves as having belonged to this “moralistic” youth cadre. Through their use of these terms they carved out a particular niche for themselves in the violent past as “good” insurgents who were “educated,” possessed a social and ethical conscience, and with the capacity to analyze the world around them. It was in these terms that former insurgents remembered and perceived themselves. They drew on these terms to sharpen the distinction between themselves and the “undesirable” or “immoral”

youth who had apparently joined the JVP in their droves without any real understanding of, or commitment to, the honorable cause of the revolution. The word most commonly used by people to describe the latter youth cohort was *rälla*, which may be translated as “herd.” Its use here suggests young people lacking the capacity to think for themselves, and simply following what others in “the herd” do. It was the *rälla* that former insurgents held accountable for the violence that occurred.

Nalanda is a former local insurgent leader who continues to be politically active within the JVP. Having asserted his own “honest” (*avanka*) motivations for joining the insurrection, which he stated were grounded in concerns about social injustice and political corruption, Nalanda went on to say that some young people signed up to the JVP under the influence of the negative traits of “youthfulness.” He blamed this for the ultimate failure of the JVP insurrection:

Being a youth without a doubt had an impact on people participating in the insurrection. Many youth tend to have a war-like mentality (*yudda mānasikatvaya*). They like weapons. A lot of young people were attracted to the JVP because of the weapons. They are the ones who brought us all down. They made the JVP look bad and people got fed up of us. I’ll give you an example. A group of us on foot once went to collect identity cards from a house [forcibly seizing identity cards from civilians, often at gun-point, was a strategy commonly used by the JVP to sabotage military stop-and-search operations]. The young son of the family whose house we went to was somewhat drunk. He kept saying that he wanted to join us. We kept trying to put him off. But he insisted and followed us. We were on foot and on our way back we were ambushed by the army. The rest of us ran away and managed to escape. But he was caught. He was tortured and then killed. The pieces of his body were strewn around the area for people to see. His head was in one place and his limbs in another.

Nalanda’s story is centered on “youthfulness” to get across a number of salient points. He uses it to stress various negative characteristics that form part of *tarunakama*, such as the inability to assess the consequences of one’s actions, impulsiveness, naivety, and an attraction to weapons and power. He distinguishes between different categories of insurgent youth through the use of this idiom. A clear differentiation is made between the youthful protagonist of his story on the one hand (i.e., insurgents driven by the negative qualities of *tarunakama*) and “authentic” insurgents like himself on the other hand, who he portrays in moral terms and represents as astute young insurgents selflessly committed to the “righteous” revolutionary cause. After all, they were able to avoid being captured and even attempted to dissuade the inebriated young man from joining the revolutionaries for all the wrong reasons.

This image of the “undesirable insurgent” appears to affirm the generic stereotype of the JVP insurgent at a popular level. Nalanda blames the failure of the insurrection and the loss of popularity of the JVP on the “undesirable” youth element (symbolized by the protagonist of his story), rather than on the violent actions of the JVP itself. This appears to be an attempt on Nalanda’s part to protect both his own and the JVP’s political image. Furthermore, through the graphic illustration of the brutal violence inflicted on the young boy who joined the insurgents on a youthful whim, Nalanda offers a veiled critique of counterinsurgency violence perpetrated by the

state, often against those who were innocent of any wrongdoing. This is largely in keeping with the master narrative of the JVP, which draws attention to violence perpetrated by the state, but remains silent, or denies outright, that perpetrated by its own cadres during the Terror.

Kanchana's story below provides further insight into how people use the idiom of "youth" to reconstruct their own experiences of the Terror. Kanchana is a former insurgent who no longer supports the JVP. Having spent several years in hiding as a young insurgent, he successfully managed to evade capture by the security forces, and ultimately left the JVP due to disagreement with its policies. Kanchana, unlike many other former insurgents interviewed for this research, firmly invests his youthful years with agency and explains his decision to participate in the insurrection as being based on rational choice. His narrative provides an interesting glimpse into the political context that prevailed at the time, around which the JVP mobilized youth for its attempted revolution:

I was a youth then but no one from the JVP came to mobilize me. I went out and joined them. . . I joined the insurrection because of the anti-democratic political regime of the UNP. They broke the rule of law, abused human rights, and stifled the media. J.R. (President Jayawardene) was like a dictator. He singularly took decisions (*tanimatayen*) and carried them out. Workers who went on strike were simply sacked. They were anti-democracy. I wanted to change the system. I felt very strongly that we needed democracy. We needed to protect the rule of law, and human rights. I knew that we wouldn't achieve this through Socialism as the JVP preached. But they were the best alternative available. They were the only ones who stood up against the Government. So I joined because of anti-UNP reasons.

Kanchana articulates clear and well-thought-out reasons for his decision to take up arms to topple the state. He accepts responsibility for this decision, which he roots in specific political grievances. Kanchana's narrative diverges from the explanations of many other insurgents who instead blamed their youthful vulnerability and its exploitation by the JVP for their involvement in the insurgency. Kanchana intimates that his youth was not one characterized by naivety and idealistic faith in the JVP's agenda. He states that he believed the JVP to be the only viable alternative available at the time. Kanchana does not represent his youthful years as having been blinded by the burden of *tarunakama*, which makes one particularly vulnerable to violence. At the same time, in representing the JVP as the best available alternative to the prevailing system of injustice and violence, and in basing his involvement in the insurgency on this rationale (rather than being driven by ideological passion), Kanchana attempts to distance himself from the violence. Kanchana went on to state,

People joined the insurrection with various agendas (*vivida balavēga*). Intelligent leaders would have co-ordinated these different motivations and led them towards one goal. But the JVP leaders couldn't. The JVP was about youth and youth is about strength and emotionality (*āvēgashīli*). You can't solve problems through these two things. . . Youth are attracted to weapons. In addition, if they couldn't work with weapons by joining the army, then this provided an alternative for them to carry out their desires. Many young people came with the *rālla* (herd). I realized that the JVPs actions did not develop democracy. That the problems of a corrupt and anti-democratic regime could not be solved through further acts that were anti-

democratic. The JVP also killed a lot of people. Then the intelligent people (insurgents) started criticising it (the JVP) and moving away from the party.

It should be noted here that Kanchana's admission that the JVP itself committed murder was significant, given that the majority of former insurgents either avoided, or denied outright, the perpetration of violence by the JVP. This was largely down to a fear of personal and political repercussions, and particularly in the case of those who continued to support the JVP, concern to avoid tarnishing its political image.

According to Kanchana, the incompetence of the JVP's own youthful leadership and its inability to exercise control over the "herd" of "undesirable" youth that flocked to its ranks ultimately led to the failure of its attempted revolution. The *rälla* here is represented as lacking intelligence and joining the JVP in their droves for all the wrong reasons (i.e., for personal gain, such as access to weapons and power). On the other hand, "intelligent" and "righteous" insurgents like himself, Kanchana implies, were driven by selfless goals based on ethical conviction. In other words, "undesirable" youth joined the insurrection for immoral self-fulfilling purposes, ultimately engaging in unjustifiable acts of violence, while the moral insurgents (like himself) were willing to sacrifice their lives for the righteous goals of bringing about social and political justice. This demonstrates the importance he attaches to the intentions that underpinned people's involvement in insurrectionary violence. The former he blames for the escalation of violence and the ultimate downfall of the JVP. The latter (including himself) he remembers as having raised moral objections to the violent and unethical direction that the JVP veered off to, ultimately disassociating themselves from the JVP and its insurgency altogether. Through his use of the idiom of "youth," Kanchana refashions himself as having been a "moral" and "righteous" insurgent, and creates a gulf between himself and the "immoral" *rälla*, who he blames for the violence of the insurrection. In remembering his own actions in moral terms, he finds a way of continuing to live with himself and his past, post terror.

Tissa is a former insurgent leader who continues to be politically active in the JVP:

When the Bheeshanaya became harsh (*darunu*), party workers started being identified (by the counter-insurgency officers). So we had to get new people in to try and make sure the leaders' identities dissolved into the background. This was our biggest weakness. That's when the insurrection fell. In the early days the JVP had educated youth. If we had stayed with them the insurrection would have been a success. When support fell and people started getting caught, then the new people began to get more responsibility. These new youth came with the *rälla*. They were uneducated, some couldn't even write properly, they just wanted to fight and to own a gun. Like you get some boys joining the army just to use a gun. The JVP then couldn't control these people. This was our failure. But we had to get in new people to protect the main activists and leaders like Rohana Wijeweera. Many of the ones who came with the *rälla* also died.

The idea of "youthfulness" is used by Tissa to explain, or rather justify, violence on the part of the JVP, and to rationalize the overall failure of its insurrection. He deflects responsibility for both on to an "undesirable" and "uneducated" youth



cohort, which was blighted by the negative traits of *tarunakama*. Tissa further distinguishes between key activists and leaders of the JVP (like himself) and the youthful “herd,” positioning the leadership as a “morally righteous” group of youth selflessly committed to the honorable revolutionary cause. In averting culpability for violence in this manner, he attempts to protect the image of the JVP (and himself), admitting instead to the lesser charge of being unable to control the problem of youthfulness within the ranks of the JVP. He attempts, however, to dilute even this, drawing parallels between the JVP and the security forces, stating that the army too suffered from problems of *tarunakama*, with young recruits being attracted by an access to weapons. Here he hints at both organizations being on a level footing when it comes to violence.

By remembering their own involvement in the insurrection as rooted in an ethical conviction, former insurgents attempt to find ways of continuing to live with themselves and others in the aftermath of terror. This was particularly significant in a post-terror environment that lacks reconciliation. If, as Taylor has argued, “selfhood and the good, or . . . selfhood and morality . . . (are) inextricably intertwined” (1989, p. 3), rooting one’s memory of the self in the good is an important coping mechanism in the face of a discomfiting past in which the self is complicit in violence that is widely judged to be morally unjustifiable. It enables the continuation of life and sociality after violence, and helps people reform their sense of selfhood, which had been thrown into question by violence. Through a reworking of memory, these former insurgents then create a morally acceptable role for themselves in a reconstructed past, and thereby recreate their experiences of violence. In refashioning their self-identity and their relationship to the past in terms of the morally good, they are able to continue living with memories of violence.

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## 6 Conclusion

Remembering one’s complicity in violence has significant consequences for life in the aftermath, in a post-terror context of silence, fear, and forgetting. Moreover, when the overall moral judgment on the violence perpetrated during the *Bheeshanaya* is negative, acknowledging responsibility for violence potentially poses challenges to the moral foundation of one’s life and sociality with others after terror. But it is also important to question whether it is fair to expect former insurgents to acknowledge moral responsibility for violence when they believe themselves to be innocent of any wrongful action, and when they further consider their present self to be different to that of their youthful self that engaged in insurrectionary violence some 20 years earlier.

Through their use of “youth” as a narrative strategy, many former insurgents engaged in a form of “retrospective cleansing” of their pasts, which allowed them to continue living with themselves, their pasts, and with others after violence. Perhaps for former insurgents then, remembering themselves in terms of the good and the moral is an effort necessary to continue justifying their right to survive, both to themselves and others. This is particularly important in the face of challenges posed

by the stigma attached to the JVP insurgent. In using “youthfulness” as a narrative frame to distance and disassociate themselves from their violent pasts, to deflect blame and avoid moral responsibility for violence, and to project a reworked representation of the self in terms of the “good,” former insurgents were justifying their own survival to themselves and others. This then is part of the memory work they engage in to recreate life and negotiate sociality after terror.

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# Children's Experiences of Sexual Violence, Psychological Trauma, Death, and Injury in War

# 2

Karen Wells

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## Abstract

Bringing children's bodies back in: children's experiences of sexual violence, psychological trauma, death, and injury in war. This chapter argues for a research agenda on war-affected children focused on how the specificity of children's bodies impacts on their experiences of sexual violence, psychological trauma, and exposure to injury and disease. It claims that children's geographies have paid little attention to the impacts of war on children and youth. In general, the focus of childhood studies and child protection policy on children in war has been on child soldiers. This obscures the wider impacts of war that many more children are subject to than those who join or who are forced into the armed forces, whether militias or government forces. Psychology and the health sciences have led the investigation of the impacts of sexual violence, psychological trauma, death, and injury on children and young people. This chapter argues that children's geographies has an important contribution to make in researching how the spaces of childhood (especially children's bodies) shape children's experiences of war and

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in connecting the scale of the body with the scale of national and international political economy.

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**Keywords**

War-affected children • Sexual violence • PTSD • Rape • War casualties

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## **1 Introduction**

This chapter aims to outline a research agenda for war-affected children and youth that is specifically social spatial and child focused. To that end this chapter focuses on the impacts of war on children's bodies, thinking of the body as a specific space that shapes our engagement with and experiences of the world. In order to bring the effects of international powers and US foreign policy into the frame and thereby to understand war as a manifestation of the interaction between the global and the local, this chapter attempts to focus as much on the Syrian, Iraq, and Afghanistan wars as on conflicts in Africa (principally Sierra Leone, Northern Uganda, and Eastern DRC) that have tended to dominate the social science and political science literature on the impacts of war on civilians.

The chapter begins with a consideration of child soldiering as a single-issue campaign and situates this within the wider context of international child protection. It argues that single-issue campaigns necessarily simplify the impacts of wider political structures on people's lives in order to identify discrete problems that can be the target of specific interventions whose success can be monitored and evaluated, usually in quantifiable terms. This chapter is then divided into three sections, sexual violence, psychosocial trauma, and injury and death that draw on the psychological and health sciences and to a lesser extent social science literature to describe the impacts of war on children's bodies and psyches. These sections show the visceral impact of war on children's bodies to warrant a claim that war impacts differently on children than it does on adults. To be clear, this chapter is not suggesting that war is not destructive to adults' lives too but rather it is emphasizing the specific vulnerabilities of children's bodies. The conclusion sketches out what a research agenda that is sensitive to the space of children's bodies and draws the connections between the different scales of children's bodies and national and political economy might look like.

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## **2 Child Soldiers: A Single-Issue Campaign**

Although the term "war affected" has gained currency in scholarship and policy and practice in recent years, the focus of war studies in relation to children continues to be on child soldiers. This focus obscures the much wider impacts of war on children and youth. In part, this limited focus is a product of policy development and the practices they shape which tend to focus on specific issues that are simple to frame

and are amenable to being resolved through relatively straightforward legal instruments. Diverse responses on the part of individuals to a range of circumstances tend to become congealed into a specific object of policy concern that can be framed, targeted, and evaluated. This is evident in the shifting foci of international child protection policy that has moved through a focus on street children, to child sexual exploitation, and child soldiers. In each case, a set of disparate behaviors with complex motivations and circumstances are gathered together as a specific object of concern that can be targeted (Wells 2015).

There is much to commend single-issue campaigns. Precisely because they resolve complex issues into a simple target of reform that can be codified in law and then monitored, they do impact to some degree on improving some children's lives. However, they also inevitably tend to obscure or gloss over the complexity of children's lives. In particular, in the case of war-affected children they have obscured the wider impacts of war on children and young people. In this, as in other single-issue campaigns, a specific target allows the whole structure that surrounds the core objective or target to remain unchanged. In this case, the objective of eliminating child soldiering allows war as a political structure to continue as a legitimate response to political conflict. Clearly, to challenge the continuing use of war to resolve political conflict will itself require political mobilization at different scales.

The campaign for an end to child soldiering was successful in its efforts to secure an optional protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The attention it brought to the issue of child soldiers probably contributed to the decision at the end of the Sierra Leone civil war to treat young rebel fighters as victims rather than perpetrators of war (Shepler 2005). It may also have contributed to shifting public opinion against the Tamil Tigers in the separatist civil war in Sri Lanka, although this shift did not necessarily support a just outcome to the war. It probably led to a change in practice in the UK towards the recruitment of under-18s in the armed forces who are now not deployed until they are 18, although recruitment of under-18s to the British Armed Forces continues if there is parental consent (Armed Forces Act 2006, s328, see also Wells 2008, 2014b). Other factors also shaped recent policy in the UK on under-18 recruitment, including a report on the deaths of four soldiers at the Deepcut army barracks in Surrey between 1995 and 2002 (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2008). Nonetheless, children in armed forces (both government and rebel forces) worldwide never exceeded 300,000, whereas children displaced by war continue to be around 30 million, children subjected to sexual violence has been estimated by UNICEF as 150 million girls and 75 million boys with children in conflict zones being especially vulnerable, civilian children disabled by war four to five million, and civilian children killed in war around two million in the decade before the publication of Graca Machel's report (1996). Unlike child soldiering, which has a clear and specific target, these kinds of effects of war can only be addressed by ending violent intrastate and interstate political conflict. Clearly, such an aim is utopian but it is nonetheless important to bring attention to the specific impacts of war on children and youth rather than only focusing on those that are amenable to specific and targeted interventions.

The representation of the child soldier in the campaigns against child soldiering and the popular discourse which surrounds it (e.g., circulated by films like *Blood Diamonds*, 2006 or *Beasts of No Nation*, 2015) is of a very young African (no specific country named) boy who is abducted, drugged, and brutalized into perpetuating violence. The racism of these signs is far from subtle. What is signified by these representations is the idea that “Africa” (an imagined space of inexplicable chaos and inevitable evil rather than any specific nation) is the uncivilized space that generates the problem of child soldiering (Hron 2016; Martins 2011; Schultheis 2008). Child soldiering is imagined as an atavistic practice, outside of modernity and detached from the civilized rules of engagement that characterize European wars. The focus on a specific objective allows the violence of global powers and its impacts on children and youth to be ignored or glossed over. This violence includes the whole machinery of colonial rule, of contemporary USA torture of prisoners of war, recruitment of under-18s to the armed forces in UK and USA, the “accidental” bombing of civilians by US forces in Afghanistan, the collapse of medical services in Iraq following the illegal international invasion of Iraq, and other issues.

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### 3 War-Affected Children: Bringing the Body Back In

The bracketing out of hegemonic states and international capital from the impacts of war continues to be a problem. However, some progress has been made in expanding the focus of child protection in war from child soldiering to the broader impacts on children of armed conflict since the publication in 1996 of Graça Machel’s report prepared for the United Nations on the *Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*. Her report highlighted the disproportionate impact of war on children and identified them as the primary victims of armed conflict. In response to this report, the UN General Assembly created a Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. In 2005, a monitoring and reporting mechanism was established to report on “six grave violations” against children in war. These are: the killing and maiming of children; recruitment or use of children as soldiers; sexual violence against children; attacks against schools or hospitals; denial of humanitarian access for children; and abduction of children. The legal basis for action on these six violations is drawn from a range of international and humanitarian law (Machel 2001).

There has been little research in the subdiscipline of children’s geographies on the impacts of war on children other than as child soldiers (Woodward and Galvin 2009) or refugees and displaced persons (Grabska 2010; Hopkins and Hill 2010; Sporton et al. 2006; Valentine et al. 2009; Wells 2011). Exceptions include research on child evacuees and rural childhood during WWII (Kallio 2008; Paksuniemi et al. 2015; Smallman-Raynor et al. 2003), on young Germans’ responses to the 2003 Iraq War (Hörschelmann 2008), the reintegration of former LRA recruits/abductees in Northern Uganda (Cheney 2005; Verma 2012), and a special issue of the *Journal of Children’s Geographies* on war, political conflict, and youth subjectivity (Wells 2014). Research on the impacts of war on children and youth has predominately

been done by psychologists, and the literature on psychosocial interventions and assessments of war-affected children is substantial (for meta-reviews see Betancourt et al. 2013; Jordans et al. 2009). A smaller body of research from anthropologists has focused on conflict and postconflict in West Africa (Coulter 2009; Hoffman 2011; Utas 2003; Vigh 2006) and more broadly on youth, violence, and social change in Africa (Honwana and de Boeck 2005). With few exceptions in medical anthropology (e.g., Eggerman and Panter-Brick 2010) anthropologists and psychologists have kept their distance from one another. Anthropologists argue that psychology encodes unwarranted global assumptions about children. Anthropologists may agree with psychologists that all bodies share a capacity for pain as a corporeal response to harm, and emotional states like bereavement and shock are experienced in the body. However, their commitment to understanding how particular cultural contexts give meaning to bodily experiences, meanings which mediate the relationship between physiological response and emotional affect, undermines a straightforward account of the body in pain, to borrow the name of Elaine Scarry's seminal book (Scarry 1987). In relation to childhood, this presumption that cultural meaning overdetermines bodily response has most often been played out in the debate on what constitutes child abuse (Korbin 1983; Wells et al. 2014) and the debate on female genital cutting (Wells 2012). In theorizing the impacts of war, David Rosen's claims about the shifting meanings attached to child soldiers has been very influential (Rosen 2015) and a long-standing debate on whether posttraumatic stress syndrome is a Western construct (Hart 2008) has also shaped the debate in anthropology of childhood.

Psychologists are not unaware of how culture shapes the interpretation of experience, including bodily harm. They recognize that violence and healing involve culturally specific practices and, particularly among psychosocial studies, they also recognize the importance of social context (networks, for example) to children's capacity to heal and recover from the psychological impacts of war. However, psychological research is grounded in the assumption that humans share certain universal capacities and responses (for example to shock, bereavement, and bodily pain).

Childhood studies, including both the anthropology and geography of childhood, was founded on distancing itself from the classic studies of children and childhood, rooted in the psy-disciplines and the health sciences. It was also founded on a rejection of the structuralism of socialization theory, emphasizing children's capacity for agency. The crucial issue of what children's "biological immaturity" bought to children's experiences was underplayed, and the similarities between children's and adult's capacities were emphasized.

This inattention to children's bodies on the part of childhood studies has not deterred psychology and the health sciences from researching war-affected children. Indeed, most of what we know about the impacts of war on children is from these disciplines. This chapter therefore draws on their work to describe the impacts of war on children's bodies and psyches. In the following three sections, this chapter shows that children are much more vulnerable to violence than adults are and that this vulnerability is rooted in the differences between the bodies of children and



adults. This chapter begins with sexual violence. Readers may want to be aware that what follows is graphic and tries to convey some of the visceral impacts of sexual violence on children's, especially girls' bodies.

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## 4 Sexual Violence

Research on sexual violence in war tends to collapse together the experiences of women and girls. Childhood researchers should instead aim for specificity in describing and analyzing children and young people's experiences of the world. Although sexual violence has latterly come to the fore of the security agenda there is still little attention paid to the experience of girls in armed groups and therefore "there is insufficient understanding of their wartime experiences of sexual violence or their long-term security needs, particularly post-conflict" (Denov 2006, p. 323). One clearly child-focused research agenda that is emerging is the experiences of children born of wartime rape (Carpenter 2010; Denov 2015; Seto 2013; Watson 2007). More generally research on sexual violence against girls (there is still no research on wartime sexual violence against boys) tends to treat girls, once raped, as if they are women. The gap between academic discourse and the visceral and psychic impacts of sexual violence tends to obscure the effects of sexual violence on young bodies. An exception is the medical literature on the health outcomes for rape survivors. Kalisya et al. (2011) in a retrospective study of children, 95% of whom were girls, in Goma, DRC, found that the incidence of rape did not decline after the cessation of formal hostilities, suggesting that wartime rape impacts on postconflict sexual cultures. Children in this study were more likely than adults to know their assailant. Genital trauma was also correlated with children's age, whereas studies of sexual violence in wartime indicate that severe genital injury is related to whether or not the victim knew their assailant. This implies that rape was more violent when the rapist did not know their victim. They note that children and youth have been understudied in reports of sexual abuse in DRC. Similar findings were reported by Nelson et al. (2011) whose convenience sample of girls under the age of 18 presenting for post-sexual violence care at Panzi Hospital, South Kivu, DRC were more likely than adult survivors to have been gang raped and to have been attacked by a civilian perpetrator. These two studies suggest that wartime sexual violence is not only perpetrated by armed groups and that the smallness of girl's vaginas make them vulnerable to genital trauma from rape leading to postrape complications including fistula.

Within security studies, political scientists have analyzed large-scale data sets to explain why sexual violence increases during war. Since the publication of Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will* (1975), the idea that rape is a "weapon of war" has become a general view. However, it does not explain how or why it becomes a "weapon of war." Haer et al. (2015) note that in their study of witnesses, victims, and perpetrators ( $n = 250$ ) all three groups said that rape occurred because war afforded the opportunity for men to rape with impunity. Caroline Nordstrom (1997) makes a similar point in *A Different Kind of War Story*. In contrast, Cohen and Nordas (2015)

argue that rape is not a general feature of militias. They claim that of 224 groups active in the study period “only [sic] 38 or about 17%” were “reported as perpetrators of sexual violence.” Progovernment militia groups (the full dataset) who raped were overrepresented but “still constitute a minority (about 30%) in the African context” (Cohen and Nordas 2015, p. 882).

Cohen and Nordas' point is that government forces do not delegate shameful violence (rape, for example) to militias in order to avoid the sanctions of international law. To be clear, Cohen and Nordas are not arguing that rape and other forms of sexual violence are not as widely perpetrated in war as Brownmillar, and subsequent research following her conceptualization, has claimed. What they want to do is to explain why sexual violence occurs, when it does, by showing that it is done for instrumental reasons by particular kinds of militias. Although they show that sexual violence is not enacted by all progovernment militias, and in fact is used by a minority of them; they also show that government forces continue to be sexually violent even when there are progovernment militias that are also sexually violent. Indeed they say “In fact, data on all militia groups in the fifty countries engaged in armed conflicts from 1989 to 2009 show that in all but one case of militia-perpetrated sexual violence, state forces were also reported to be perpetrators (Cohen and Nordas 2014). Additionally, in all but four countries, state forces named as perpetrators committed the same or higher levels of sexual violence than did the militias” (Cohen and Nordas 2015, p. 880).

Since sexual violence in war is not delegated to militias, but is widely, although not universally, used by government armed forces and progovernment militias, what explains why some militias are perpetrators of sexual violence and others are not? They suggest that to understand the dynamics of sexual violence during war we need to focus on training, socialization, and recruitment. They note, “Starting from the earliest work in this realm (e.g., Shils and Janowitz 1948), scholars have found that violence builds new loyalties and severs previous ties. Building on these prior studies, Cohen (2013) argues that the level of internal cohesion in an armed group can be critical for understanding variation in wartime rape” (Cohen and Nordas 2015, p. 882). Building on Cohen's 2013 work, they propose that militias that lack social cohesion are more likely to rape than those that do not – therefore militias formed through abduction use sexual violence to build bonds. Cohen uses this thesis, that sexual violence builds cohesion in otherwise inchoate forces, to explain why women were often active participants in sexual violence in Sierra Leone (for example by holding down victims).

However, this seems to presume that those who were subjected to sexual violence were a distinct group from those who were in the rebel forces. This was not the case; there is substantial evidence that women and girls who were raped were then also integrated into the rebel forces and that being in the rebel forces did not protect women or girls from subsequently being raped.

In their study, Cohen and Nordas (2015) used child soldiers as a proxy for low cohesion and high abduction and confirm through their analysis of the dataset that nearly one third (34%) of progovernment militia groups that recruited children (and are therefore presumed to have low cohesion) were perpetrators of sexual violence,

whereas “only [sic] 12% of militia groups that did not recruit children were reported as perpetrators of sexual violence” (p. 885). (They also found that ideology was not correlated with lower levels of sexual violence, as previous qualitative studies have proposed; gender-egalitarian ideology, for example, in revolutionary movements does not protect women and girls from rape and other forms of sexual violence).

Sara Meger (2010) in her attempt to theorize rape in DRC notes that between 2005 and 2007 alone, 32,000 cases of rape and sexual violence were reported in South Kivu, likely to be a fraction of all cases. Meger notes that all parties to the conflict, including the UN, have perpetrated sexual violence against women *and girls*. However, she does not speak specifically about what it means that girls were raped. Her argument is that men raped because they could not live up to the culture of masculinity (sexual ability, multiple wives, ability to protect their homes), but this argument cannot be warranted either anthropologically or sociologically: Nowhere in Africa is it considered either masculine or hyper-masculine to, for instance, insert a chili pestle into a woman’s vagina and pound it so hard that the woman now has to urinate into a bag through a hole in her stomach (Meger 2010, p. 217 citing Ohambe et al. 2004, p. 42) or to rape a 6-month-old baby (2010, p. 126 citing Lynch 2004, p. A27). Meger’s argument is that the militias seek to terrorize the population through extreme violence in order to control the mineral resources of the Eastern Congo, on which the entire economy now relies. She says, “What distinguishes wartime sexual violence is that, in addition to exploiting the social and interpersonal dimensions of violence as found in peacetime rape, sexual violence in warfare assumes a political and/or economic dimension, in which the systematic abuse of women in conflict is a strategy by which to terrorize a population, communicate a political message between men, or to strip women of their economic and political assets” (Meger 2010, p. 121 citing Turshen 2001, p. 55). Rape then is not a kind of heightened version of an existing culture of masculinity, in her account, but a terrorist act.

If Meger is correct in her argument that rape is intended as a message “between men” or to “strip women of their economic and political assets,” what message is intended by the rape of girls, who have no independent economic or political assets? Is their rape, a message between adults, is the violent attack on girls an attack on their parents, a destruction of their reproductive futures? These questions cannot be answered within the scope of this chapter, but they are questions that children’s geographers have the theoretical tools to address.

Sexual violence in Sierra Leone has probably been more thoroughly researched than in many conflict zones (Mazurana and McKay 2004; Coulter 2009). Zoe Marks in her research with 150 combatants in Sierra Leone in 2010 (some 10 years after the end of the war) argues for an unpacking of the “black box” of sexual violence to understand the dynamics of sexual violence in specific contexts. In the case of the Sierra Leone war she notes, as have others even during the war, that the Revolutionary United Forces (RUF) had a code of conduct that included an injunction against rape. She says that most women who experienced sexual violence do not describe this as rape, using the Krio word “virgination.” However, in the interview transcripts women do refer to themselves as having been raped, a disjuncture that Marks does not comment on. Marks does make some distinctions between the

experiences of women and girls in the Bush (in the rebel camps), suggesting that younger children would not be kept as “wives” in the camp and might instead be adopted by senior women until they “aged” out. However, she also comments on the extreme disjuncture between the RUF prohibition against rape, supposedly punishable by death, and the rape of even very young girls during raids on villages. Her wider point seems to be that in the rebel camps a kind of domestic order prevailed in which rape was not common. She seems to be making a distinction between a kind of moral domestic code of conjugal relations that prevailed in the RUF camps and the vicious and uncontrolled rapes done during “battle.” However, this distinction is belied by other evidence; for example, in Denov’s a qualitative study with 80 war-affected children (organized through Defence of Children International – Sierra Leone; DCI-SL), one respondent reported the following:

Girls [in the camp] were dying of rape all around me. Every young girl was terrified of rape. The first time I was raped was by the commander who abducted me. . . . He left me bleeding. I was so afraid and I thought I was going to die like the other rape victims. . . . This commander continued having sex with me against my will. Other officers also came around and had sex with me. Even the young boys were attempting it . . . Ever since I was raped, I get horrible stomach aches. I think it’s because of the rapes. (Denov 2006, p. 326)

This girl had been living in the camp since she was a very young child (about 4) and was raped when she reached puberty, the same time as she was sent to the front. In the same study another girl recounted:

I was raped the moment they captured me by an older man and I bled and bled. They gave me some medicine, but I could not walk. The man who raped me later carried me on his back. The same day other girls were raped too. They would just rape you and leave you. It happened to me so many times, I can’t even count. (Denov 2006, p. 326)

Both the Sierra Leone Civil War and the wars in the South Kivus in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) were marked by extraordinary levels of sexual violence against women and girls. Although the extent of this violence has been recognized and has generated research agendas and medical interventions to heal girls and women, there has been very little research on the psychological trauma of sexual violence or the different affects of sexual violence if one experiences it as a girl or as a woman. Indeed, most of the research on the psychosocial impacts of war on children focuses on the experience of collective violence and the trauma of witnessing death and experiencing injury, as the next section discusses.

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## 5 Psychosocial Impacts

Most studies of memory of war-related trauma have focused on adults (Panter-Brick et al. 2015, p. 814). Panter-Brick et al. point out that the sparse literature on child and adolescent trauma memory has shown that “the impact of war on mental health depends on whether youth are able to make sense of collective

violence. . .and the nature of postwar social experiences” (2015, p. 815). In particular, nurturance, family stability, social capital, and neighborhood safety have “a disproportionate influence on mental health outcomes over time” (2015, p. 815). A study of war-affected Afghan youth intended to understand the inter-relationship between how trauma memories and subsequent social experiences impacted on mental health found that “Memories of violent events are malleable, embedded in social experiences, and present heterogeneous associations with posttraumatic distress” (Panter-Brick et al. 2015, p. 814). They found that youth were unexpectedly resilient to wartime trauma, with a third of the cohort reporting no trauma at baseline and 44% reporting no trauma at follow-up and 20% reporting no trauma at either point. Their results resonated with reviews “that conclude that ‘posttraumatic resilience’ is often the norm, where measured by the absence of clinical psychopathology” (2015 p. 821). Higher trauma exposure (especially, four or more traumatic events), ongoing stressful domestic violence, and being girls correlated with sustained high distress (2015, p. 821).

A specific impact of war is parental bereavement. This remains an under-researched area in non-Western populations. Neshat Doost et al. (2008) argue that early parental bereavement impacts on autobiographical memory and that this, in turn, impacts negatively on adolescent development. Their psychometric tests of Afghan children living in Iran found that reduced autobiographical memory specificity was correlated both with parental bereavement and with depression. The lasting impact of parental bereavement resonates with Panter-Brick et al. in their emphasis on the importance of context, for example, family stability in developing resilience to war trauma.

The impact of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars on children has not been extensively researched. Perhaps surprisingly, most of the available research in English is on the impacts of the war on children in the UK and the USA, either on media exposure or on the effects on soldier’s families of the deployment of their parents to war zones. An exception is Dyregov et al.’s (2002) study of the psychological impact of war on children in Iraq who had witnessed the bombing of the al Ameriyah shelter in Iraq in February 1991 in which an estimated 1000 people were killed. They interviewed their respondents in 1991 and again in 1992 and 1993. The results “reveal a highly distressed population of children” who are “harbouring high, stable levels of psychological distress over time” (Dyregov et al. 2002, p. 64) albeit with some diminishment in intensity. In other words, as time passed children were less traumatized by their memory of the event, but they still showed high levels of psychological distress identified in psychometric tests. In response to these studies and the need that they identified for specific psychosocial interventions with children, UNICEF cosponsored a center of psychosocial care for children.

Posttraumatic stress syndrome has been criticized as a “Western” concept in some of the anthropological literature. Hart (2008), for example, says that “Established conditions of enquiry [into the impacts of war on children] have been shaped primarily by mental health practitioners and rights activists. Both have relied heavily on instruments and measures that are highly normative and context-blind”

(2008, p. 3). However psychometric instruments are generally adapted for the specific cultural conditions in which they are used, as was done in both the studies cited above. Diab et al. comment that "Research confirms that war-affected children have an increased risk for developing PTSD, characterized by reexperiencing the horrors in dreams and flashbacks, by avoiding reminders of trauma and numbing of feelings, as well as by constant arousal and vigilance to threats" (Diab et al. 2014, p. 215). Family and social relationships are known to be protective of the impacts of trauma, but of course war disrupts social relationships. In the editorial to a special issue on "Children Affected by Armed Conflict: Views from the Global South," Martha Bragin says "the experience of extreme violence is not a disease to be treated and cured, but rather a changed knowledge of human reality that must be engaged to help both children, adults and whole communities to move forward" (Bragin 2012, p. 180). In a comparable register to PTSD she notes that, "For children exposed to mass murder in a very short time, the fear that aggressive instincts may at any moment burst out from anyone and anything, including their own nightmares, creates an insidious sense that the world is unstable; fostering a chronic sense of dread" (Bragin 2012, p. 181).

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## 6 Injury and Disease

Children die in war from the direct effects of gunfire and explosive devices, but they also die from their vulnerability to unexploded ordnance and landmines, often long after conflicts have ended. Adolescents, especially boys (presumably because of their greater spatial freedoms) are most vulnerable to injury by landmines. Shabila et al. (2010) found that around one third of landmine injuries in Iraq were of under-18s and two thirds over-18s with a high proportion of 7–12-year olds having to be treated with upper limb amputations, compared to other groups. This suggests that children are handling landmines although no studies have established why children might play with or pick up landmines. Other studies have found a higher incidence in children (Bilukha et al. 2003).

Direct attacks, for example, on hospitals and indirect impacts, for example, of sanctions disproportionately affect children. Guerrero-Serdán (2009) found that following the 2003 Gulf War children in areas of the most violence had stunted growth because of their lack of access to nutritional foods. A study of 16,076 Iraqi children between 1985 and 1991 to investigate the impact of the USA-led invasion of Iraq and sanctions against Iraq found that child mortality in Iraqi children under 5 years of age had increased threefold. The authors "estimate that an excess of more than 46,900 children died between January and August 1991" (Ascherio and Chase 1992). A Harvard study team doing a rapid assessment of the impacts of war and sanctions on under fives in Iraq in April and May 1991 found that the war had directly led to increases in waterborne diseases, including cholera, typhoid, and severe gastroenteritis. Young children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of increases in diarrheal diseases, malnutrition, respiratory infections, and other infectious diseases. These are the same diseases that would affect children preconflict but

during war there are significant increases in child mortality from these diseases. Once humanitarian relief is in place, under-five mortality relative to over five mortality decreases during conflict. This may be because humanitarian aid targets young children (Guha Sapir and van Panhuis 2004). Attacks on hospitals also make parents reluctant to take their children to hospital for treatment leading to increases in death from disease and injury.

In addition to injury caused by accidental damage from landmines and unexploded ordnance, children are directly disproportionately affected by the state's failure to protect civilians. Child civilian deaths as a result of the Iraq War in the period 2003–2008 identified 2146 children killed with the major causes of death being small-arms gunfire, suicide bombs, aerial bombing, and mortar fire (Hicks et al. 2009). In Iraq in 2013, three children were killed every two days in attacks, shelling, and cross-fire (War Child 2014). The continuing deterioration of security in Iraq since 2014 has led to the deaths of at least 14,947 civilians and 29,189 wounded. These figures are not disaggregated by age but are indicative of a rapidly deteriorating security situation (UN Security Council 2015). The UN report on Iraq in 2014 identified 1831 injuries of children and 1256 child deaths in the period from January 2014 to April 2015. Death and injury to children in 2011–2013 were mostly the result of attacks (improvised explosive devices and indirect fire) from armed (nonstate) groups. In 2014 and 2015, documented child casualties (injuries and deaths) increased further as the government and international forces “initiated and intensified” counter-ISIL operations leading to the indiscriminate killing of civilians, including children, in clear defiance of “the principles of international humanitarian law that call for the exercise of distinction, precaution and proportionality” (UN Security Council 2015). In the conflict in Syria, civilian deaths have been very large. 113,735 recorded civilian and combatant deaths were recorded by the end of August 2013 and of these 11,420 were children aged 17 years or younger. Save the Children says that 15% of civilian casualties (injury and death) worldwide are children. Most of the children (71% of the 10,586 for whom a cause of death was recorded) killed in Syria were killed by explosive weapons. A further 26.5% of recorded deaths were caused by small-arms fire (Dardagan and Salama 2013).

Children's bodies have specific vulnerabilities to war-related death and injury including narrower airways making them more prone to bronchospasm and obstruction, more compliant chest walls which mean that thoracic injuries can occur without evidence of external injury, their smaller and more pliable ribs and thin abdominal walls give them less abdominal protection than adults, and they have larger organs, proportional to body size, than adults which makes them more prone to injury. They are more vulnerable to spinal injury because of having relatively large heads and immature neck musculature (<http://www.acep.org/blastinjury/pediatrics>).

This section has shown that children's bodies, their “biological immaturity,” makes a critical difference to their experience of war. Recognition of this fact needs to come to the center of our attention when researching war-affected children.

## 7 Conclusion

Social science research agendas on the impacts of war on children and youth have tended to focus on topics that have clear policy agendas (demobilization of child soldiers, settlement of young refugees) but also raise interesting theoretical questions, for example, about violence and masculinity, the boundaries of childhood, territory, and identity. The broader impacts of war on children, including the UN's six grave violations mentioned above, have not attracted as much attention. This chapter has taken the child's body as a central space in thinking about how children's geographers might develop a research agenda for war-affected children. The research reviewed in this chapter has drawn on several disciplines including the emerging agenda in security studies on sexual violence, the research of the psy-sciences (psychology, psychoanalysis, and psychosocial studies) on war trauma, and research on injury and disease in the health sciences and medical anthropology. This chapter has focused on these three areas (sexual violence, injury and disease, and psychological trauma) because they have (gendered) child-specific impacts but also because they tie different spaces and scales together: the space of the child's body with the space of national (in)security; the scale of the (injured) individual with the scale of the international (laws, forces, and capital). It has shown that the specific capacities and vulnerabilities of the child's body are central to the affects of war on their lives, indeed on whether they will live. This is not only, as geographers will appreciate, about the individual child's body but where it is positioned in relation to national spaces, for example is the child living in a region that is the site of a contested political economy? Is the government able to guarantee the security of the geography of the child? Does international law protect girls, for example, in making rape a war crime or does it further harm children, for example, in authorizing international military action that destabilizes a region? This chapter therefore makes an implicit case for a research agenda on war-affected children and youth that investigates what difference spaces (the child's body, national boundaries, international firms) make to how war impacts on children and youth. This necessarily will involve being more attendant to what difference bodies make to experiences of the world and how the specific vulnerabilities and capacities of children's bodies shape their exposure to war. Children's geographies may traverse the local spaces of children's bodies, the ethnographic contexts in which children live, and the global-national spaces of political economy that structure their lives, to map the shared vulnerabilities of children, *qua* children while also attending to how different bodies (say, sex and age) in different contexts (say, social networks or cultural meanings) render children more or less vulnerable.

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# Ethno-religious Identification and Latent Conflict: Support of Violence among Muslim and Christian Filipino Children and Youth

# 3

Carl Sterkens, Agnes Zenaida Camacho, and Peer Scheepers

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## Abstract

This contribution focuses on the involvement of children and youth in conflicts between Muslims and Christians in the Philippines. Contemporary Filipino youth, especially in the southern part of the country, grows up amidst this conflict. At first, a brief background on Moro conflict in the Philippines is presented in order to understand the specific positioning and experiences of children and youth. We then try to explain several pathways to children and youth support of

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violence and participation in conflict. Political minorization and economic marginalization play a key role, but equally important are perceptions of discrimination and negative stereotypes. In this context, children and youth grow up needing to assert their identities in ethnic and religious terms. Personal experiences of violence further trigger involvement in conflict and may lead children and youth to participate in private armed groups. We cite some theoretical approaches in social science literature that help to explain the intergroup conflicts and youth's involvement in it.

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**Keywords**

Ethno-religious identification • Intergroup conflict • Philippines • Ethnic group conflict theory • Social identity theory

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## 1 Introduction

Violent confrontations along ethnic and religious lines have been erupting and continue to devastate lives and properties in many countries. The factors that create these conflicts like historical political marginalization, poverty and economic deprivation, and discrimination and denial of a group's identity, often remain unaddressed, serving to strengthen the relation between ethno-religious identity and conflict. Over the last 10 years, there has been a steady increase of social hostilities involving religion, both in terms of number of countries and percentage of people of the world population involved (Pew 2014). The vast majority of contemporary wars is (partly) related to religious, ethnic, or national identity, and only few of them begin as interstate conflicts (Appleby 2000, p. 17).

In the Philippines, a protracted armed conflict has pitted the Philippine government and its Christian majority against the Muslim minority (collectively called the 'Bangsamoro' or 'Moro') who lives predominantly in Mindanao, in the Southern part of the country. The violence in the South intensified in the 1970s with the serious military challenge posed by Moro non-state armed groups to advance the cause of Muslim self-determination. In response, succeeding governments have launched military offensives to defend the state interests – to preserve peace and order and protect its territorial rights. The conflict has brought not only tremendous losses to lives and properties but also pain, fear, and deep resentment among those affected.

Contemporary Filipino youth, especially in the southern part of the country, grows up amidst this conflict. The youth are considered as a highly vocal group in the expression of dissent and violence. Their support and participation in protest and violence help inform, form, and shape public opinion and policy affecting conflict, violence, and peace issues of a nation.

Most research on Christian-Muslim relations in the Philippines has looked at the manifest dimensions of the conflict (McKenna 1998; Gomez 2000; Gutierrez 2000; Busran-Lao 2005; Schiavo-Campo and Judd 2005; Buendia 2008; Kaufman 2011).

The question of why people engage in protest and violence, in the Philippines and elsewhere, has received diverging answers (Simon et al. 1998; Klandermans et al. 2008; Van Zomeren et al. 2008). Only few studies have focused on latent dimensions of conflict in the Philippines. Latent conflicts may vary in intensity, e.g., from intergroup prejudices, avoidance of contact between ethno-religious groups, from support of discrimination to support for the instrumental use of violence against ethno-religious out-groups. Just like intergroup violence, latent dimensions of conflict are also strongly influenced by ethno-religious identification in the Philippines.

This contribution looks into the positioning and experiences of Filipino children and youth in the latent dimensions of the conflict situation in the Philippines. In what follows, a brief background on Moro conflict in the Philippines will be presented in order for the reader to understand the specific positioning and experiences of children and youth (Sect. 2). We then try to explain several pathways to children and youth support of violence and participation in conflict. In so doing, we cite some theoretical approaches in social science literature that help to explain latent intergroup conflicts (Sect. 3). We then end this contribution with a short conclusion (Sect. 4).

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## 2 Background to the Moro Conflict in the Philippines

The southern Philippines has been contending with the Moro rebellion and the concurrent government's military offensives, as well as problems of communist insurgency and terrorism, all of which contribute to the volatile security in southern Philippines. The conflict in Mindanao has resulted in an estimated 120,000 deaths since the 1970s (Schiavo-Campo and Judd 2005, p. 5) and the displacement of around 3.5 million people since 2000, with at least 123,800 new displacements in 2014 against 70,700 returns (IDMC 2015, p. 86). The military solution favored by the succeeding governments after President Marcos (1965–1986), particularly the all-out war policy of President Joseph Estrada (1998–2001), resulted to the displacement of some 500,000–800,000 Muslim civilians in Central Mindanao in 2000 (Rasul 2009, p. 29). Between 2000 and 2010, over 40% of families in Central Mindanao were displaced at least once, with one in ten displaced five times or more (WFP & WB 2011).

The signing of 'the comprehensive agreement on the Bangsamoro' on 27 March 2014 between the Philippine Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) has paved the way for the creation of a new autonomous political entity to replace the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). The signing drew positive reactions from government and Moro leaders as well as from peace organizations who all expressed hopes that the agreement would translate to positive changes in the lives of the Bangsamoros and will eventually bring lasting peace in a region beset with conflict for the last 45 years. However, intermittent fighting continues to occur as waged by Moro insurgent groups who feel left out in the comprehensive agreement. There are also those who reject outright a peace

agreement and continue with the struggle for complete independence. The vertical manifest conflict between the state and Moro insurgent groups are complicated by struggles at the local level between clans and power holders, hence making the security environment in Mindanao far from secure.

The causes of this conflict are many but should be viewed historically as resulting from the systematic marginalization and minoritization of the Bangsamoros in their homeland in Mindanao, dating from the Spanish colonial times (1521–1898). Without undermining the economic and political grievances that incited the Bangsamoros to wage an armed resistance against the Philippine state, the struggle is equally about safeguarding and preservation of their Islamic identity. The conflict therefore has further accentuated divisions between ‘us’ and ‘them,’ with the resulting threat of violence adding volatility to social interactions across identity boundaries. Tensions between Muslims and Christians are not only prevalent in Mindanao but in the entire country. This has generated public sympathy and support for the avowed goals of the competing armed groups, including support for (the use of) violence.

At the heart of the struggles in Mindanao is the strongly held perception that the Bangsamoros have been persecuted, oppressed, and marginalized since colonization. Their centuries-old struggle took a significant turn in the late sixties with the Jabidah massacre (cf. Aljunied and Curaming 2012) which heightened calls for separatism and independence from the Philippine state. The two major armed groups, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and, its breakaway group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) were founded by Moro youth leaders fired up by ideals critical of the social order. The MNLF was founded by Nur Misuari, a student leader and professor from the University of the Philippines, while the MILF was founded by Salamat Hashim, a graduate student and student leader from Al-Azhar University who believed that the teachings of Islam should be the main thrust of the organization as opposed to the secular-nationalist approach of the MNLF. The formation of both groups was borne out of the grievances, oppressions, and injustices suffered by the Bangsamoros under the Christian-dominated Philippine state.

Through the years, the Bangsamoro struggle has varied in calls, extent, and magnitude, which started in the form of a secessionist or separatist movement that fought for complete separation of a portion of the state territory. This was later abandoned by some groups in favor of an autonomy movement which involved demands for greater control over governance of local affairs. Through it all, the Bangsamoro struggle has been sustained by a broad and popular protest movement composed of groups and individuals who perceive themselves as belonging to, representing, or supporting the aspirations of the Bangsamoro people resisting against state policies or conditions that they consider as unjust and unacceptable.

Defending the interests of the Philippine sovereign state, the Philippine government tried to quell unrest and dissent in southern Philippines with military force which resulted to the displacement of a magnitude of people disproportionately affecting the Muslims (World Bank 2003, p. 12). As a result, life in Muslim Mindanao for children, youth, and their families became a never-ending story of fighting and fleeing (Risser 2007; De Castro et al. 2013). Schools made way for

evacuation centers where distressed families and clans stayed for long periods under dismal conditions. The civilians were forced by the protracted armed conflict situation to express support and take sides. “Civilians blame the external big actors as the culprit. A Christian barangay captain argues that, ‘if armed groups from outside don’t come into our community, there would be no trouble.’ The implication is that the AFP and the MILF have dragged civilians into the conflict, forcing them to take sides, usually along ethnic lines” (Quitoriano and Libre 2001, p. 23).

Children and youth have also taken sides, making up a sizable portion of the Muslim armed groups mass base support. Their support and involvements range from being combatants to taking part in activities in the context of armed conflict such as foot patrol, guard/sentry posts, food preparation for combatants, courier services, and medical team duties. Guided by this definition, an estimated 10–30% of children under 18 years of age in any given community influenced by an armed group can be considered as providing support, if not actively participating in the armed group (Cagoco-Guiam 2002).

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### **3 Pathways to Youth Support of Violence and Participation in Conflict**

In the Philippines, the armed resistance movements, both ideological (e.g., Communist Party of the Philippines) and ethno-religious (e.g., Muslim liberation movements), have broad mass base support. This support reached its peak during the martial law period (1972–1981) when civil liberties were suppressed and avenues for dissent were curtailed. There was massive support for underground insurgent groups and for armed struggle as justified means for toppling the dictatorship and bringing about structural change in society. The student movement aligned their goals with a broader range of social movements calling for the establishment of a socialist state or a separate Islamic state and even played a leading role (Abinales 1985; Caouette 2013).

Various scholars have looked at the objective features of the children and youth’s preconflict and conflict-related experiences as a factor for their support for and participation in violence and conflict. Political minorization and economic marginalization play a key role. Equally important are perceptions of discrimination and negative stereotypes among children and youth. In this context, children grow up needing to assert their identities in ethnic and religious terms. Personal experiences of violence further trigger involvement in conflict and may lead children and youth to participate in private armed groups.

#### **3.1 Political Minorization and Economic Marginalization of Muslims**

The Mindanao conflict, expressed in Muslim armed resistance against the Philippine state, was deemed difficult to resolve not only because of its deep historical roots but



also because of the competing goals of the two groups each with their own narrative of the conflict – the struggle for self-determination rights of the Moro separatist movement versus the defense of Philippine nation-state's sovereign right to territorial integrity (Buendia 2005). Muslims remain underrepresented in national political institutions (US Department of State 2006, para. 27). At the House of Representatives of the 16th Philippine Congress (as per results of the 2013 elections), Muslim representatives number only 13 out of a total of 289, or 4.5% of the representatives. There are no Muslims among the 24 members of the Senate. Muslims' continuing misrepresentation and exclusion perpetuate the perception of Muslims as a politically disadvantaged group.

Not only do the Bangsamoros claim that they have been deprived of their homeland, they also argue that they have been systematically dispossessed of their land and reduced to a minority in their own homeland. Government resettlement programs, particularly under the American rule (1890–1946) which continued after independence (1946), facilitated the large-scale migration of Christian settlers from the northern islands of Luzon and the Visayas to Mindanao which resulted to the dispossession of large areas of land that were communally owned by the Muslims and indigenous peoples. With continuing migration and rapid population growth, land became increasingly scarce and this led to escalation of tensions between communities of Muslims and Christian settlers which undeniably was also fuelled by centuries of distrust between the two groups.

Although the region is agriculturally fertile and resourceful, decades of conflict have left the area among the most impoverished in the Philippines. The ARMM fares especially poorly on national economic indicators, with a poverty incidence among families of 48.7% (against 19.7% in the Philippines and 2.3% in the National Capital Region). Of the 16 poorest provinces in the country, 10 are from Mindanao. Of these, two provinces are from the ARMM: Lanao del Sur, the province with the highest poverty incidence at 68.9%, and Maguindanao, which ranked fourth with a poverty incidence of 57.8% (PSA/NCSB 2012 figures). In 2012, the average yearly family income in the Philippines was PHP 235,000 with big regional differences between the National Capital Region (PHP 379,000) and the ARMM (PHP 130,000) (PSA/NCSB 2012 figures).

The interplay of political marginalization and poverty provides a sure pathway to youth support and participation for the avowed goals of Muslim resistance groups (Cagoco-Guiam 2002). The six young members from the MILF and Abu Sayyaf Group interviewed for the UNICEF (2002) case study on child soldiers have varied reasons for joining, but their environment was a cauldron ready to produce child soldiers. The six boys were from the provinces of Maguindanao and Basilan, two of the poorest provinces in the country. To this day, the conflict-affected areas in Mindanao have the highest poverty levels and, at the same time, the lowest levels of human development indicators in the Philippines (Adriano and Parks 2013).

When Philippine local government leadership is not felt and basic social services are wanting, the armed group leadership becomes the *de facto* governing officials providing education, health, livelihood, and other services. In many Moro areas, people rely on the armed group or their local leaders for protection, social services

and livelihood, provisions that the government fails to deliver. This accounts for the reciprocity and conciliation in the relationship between community members and the local leadership which are often extended families. It is not unusual for families to support local leadership and its armed groups as an obligation to the clan and to ensure their members' survival.

In MILF camps, community members, including children and young people, are provided basic military training. MILF camps are described as self-contained and self-sustainable communities. As any other community member, children and young people help out around the camp, do chores, and give other types of support for the armed group. Daughters and sons of MILF fighters spend their everyday lives in the camp, thus rendering insignificant the element of coercion prevalent in the literature on child recruitment to armed groups (Camacho 2004; Özerdem et al. 2010). Support, participation, and eventual membership to the armed group are considered as part of the natural order of things, accepted, and even encouraged by their families (Cagoco-Guiam 2002; Camacho et al. 2005; Özerdem et al. 2010).

As can be explained by the realistic group conflict theory, intergroup conflicts arise due to incompatible goals and competing claims to scarce resources. The competition over scarce resources is likely to take place along lines of group identification (Coser 1956; Sherif 1966, LeVine and Campbell 1972). As argued by the ethnic group conflict theory, competition over scarce resources will trigger intergroup conflict if this competition is interpreted or perceived along the lines of the groups involved (Coenders and Scheepers 1998; Scheepers et al. 2002). In addition, youth bulge theory (Wells 2015) clarifies relevance of the population pyramid for tensions between social groups. Societies with rapidly growing young populations are likely to have high unemployment rates and disaffected youths who are more susceptible to recruitment into violent groups. Socioeconomic deprivation herewith mediates the relationship between an expansive population pyramid and (participation in) conflict between groups. However, empirical data suggest that youth bulge only affects the onset of conflict when there is no further involvement of substantial (ethnic or religious) identifications (Yair and Midownik 2016).

### 3.2 Discrimination and Negative Stereotypes

The Moros consider their poverty as a result of centuries of political neglect that reduced them to being a minority in their own homeland and rendered them marginalized in the economic and political spheres. This sense of injustice is aggravated by their perceptions of discrimination coming from the Christian majority towards their ethno-religious identity. Perceptions of discrimination by Muslims are not without basis. Filipinas Foundation (1975) found Muslim Filipinos as the least likable among nine ethnic groups in the selection, with a majority of the negative traits attributed to Muslim Filipinos such as being hostile, unreliable, and proud, despite the finding that only 21% of the total respondents had Muslim acquaintances. Three and four decades later, the pattern remains. A specially commissioned opinion survey for the 2005 Philippine Human Development Report

corroborated a significant degree of anti-Muslim bias across the country (between 33% and 39%), even if only 14% of the respondents had experienced interaction with Muslims (Pulse Asia 2005, p. xiv). More recently, Abanes (2014, pp. 118 and 167) observed considerable levels of religiocentrism (i.e., the combination of positive attitudes towards the in-group and negative attitudes towards the out-group) among Christian Filipinos in ARMM and in Metro Manila.

Moros likewise harbor a negative image of Christians: “the Christian is a coward, a cheat, a bully, a land-grabber who, if he could, would destroy Islam” (Gowing 1969, p. 85). “Bisaya” is a generic term Moros use to designate the Christian Filipinos in a derogatory way. It refers to the large-scale migration of Christian settlers to Mindanao particularly from the Visayas (central Philippines) during the period of American rule. They were accused of conspiring with the Christian government of dispossessing them of their ancestral domain. Kaufman (2011, p. 948) asserts that this perception of Christians as land-grabbers who are out to destroy Islam is not inaccurate given the Spanish colonizers’ explicit goal of subjugating the Moros and the implicit goal behind the integration and resettlement policies of the American colonial government and which was continued by post-independence Philippine governments.

One explanation for the continuing hostilities that characterize Christian-Muslim relations can be found in how the hostile image of a Moro has been consistently propagated in media and reinforced in schools through time. A thematic content analysis of the image portrayal of Muslims by the *Bulletin Today* in the years 1971, 1976, and 1981 revealed the paper’s persistence in portraying Muslims as “rebel,” “terrorist,” “killer,” or “outlaw” (Café 1985). The discrimination of Muslims in local and national media continued unabated and even intensified in the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States. So much so, that a senator of the 15th Philippine Congress (2010–2013) was compelled to file a bill seeking to provide penalties for “the use of the word ‘Muslim’ or ‘Islamic’ in print, television, and other forms of broadcast media to refer to or describe any person convicted of any crime or suspected of committing any unlawful act” (Senate Bill No. 2017, 26 July 2010). The Pulse Asia (2005, p. ii) survey shows that – even in the Southern part of the country – most Christian respondents base their judgment of Muslims on information from television (78%), radio (44%), and newspapers (29%) rather than on actual social interaction, a testament of the media’s influence in perpetuating an anti-Muslim bias in mainstream culture.

As to the complicity of the education system, an analysis of the representation of Muslims in two officially prescribed history textbooks, one used in high school and the other at the tertiary level, found that Filipino Muslims are portrayed as “other” and their contributions to national history misrepresented, downplayed, or even at some points denigrated (Reilley 2011). The continuing problematic representation of Filipino Muslims in Philippine history just serves to perpetuate the cultural misunderstandings that have characterized Christian-Muslim relations through time. Among primary school students in Metro Manila, the Muslim pupils are already well aware of the common cultural stereotypes associated with Muslims in the wider culture outside the school: Muslims are “‘traydor’ (treacherous), ‘bully,’ ‘fearless,’

“fierce’ and ‘bloodthirsty,’ and ‘they gang up against their common enemies’” (Lanuza and Gonzales 2010, p. 55). Because of this, Muslim pupils become excluded and feared by their Christian classmates, thus preventing the formation of intimate social contacts between Muslims and Christian students or a relationship that is based not on fear but on mutual respect.

It should be noted that there have been headways towards accommodation and close integration between Muslims and the Catholic majority in the country. The International Religious Freedom Report notes that in general, amicable ties among and between religious communities are common (US Department of State 2012, p. 6). However, there is reason to believe that this accommodation is based on fear and exclusion (Lanuza and Gonzales 2010). Latent anti-Muslim biases of Christians can easily manifest when a threat of a “Muslim take-over” becomes real or imminent, such as the construction of a mosque in a predominantly Christian neighborhood in Metro Manila and this often leads to hostile attitudes and exclusionary actions (GRP/HOR 2004).

In conflict-affected areas in Mindanao, the once harmonious relations among residents of mixed religious communities can easily be disturbed and feelings of fear and distrust can affect intracommunity relations. In a study on children in conflicts in the Philippines (Risser 2007; De Castro et al. 2013), the children in Cotabato and Basilan shared that their relationships with their Muslim or Christian friends became strained as a result of the recurring military operations and rebel attacks. The Christian children expressed that after the conflict, they became wary of striking new and meaningful friendships with Muslim children, and vice versa. They called each other names, with Muslims calling Christian children as *baboy* (pigs), and Christians calling Muslim children as *muklo* (a derogatory term for Muslims). The Christian children shared that they do not want to build their houses next to Muslims nor marry one. The Muslim children felt the same way.

The line of theorizing on ‘realistic’ conflicts based on political and economic competition described in the previous section, started from the bedrock assumption, explicated by Bobo (1988, 1999) that dominant group members affectively distinguish themselves as group members from other subordinate out-groups. This distinction is linked with presumed traits of both the in-group and the out-groups. Here discrimination and stereotypes come into play. This proposition has been substantiated by social identity theory (Tajfel 1982), according to which individuals have the fundamental need to achieve a positive social identity which induces them to perceive their in-group as superior to out-groups. Subsequently, they apply favorable characteristics that they perceive among members of the in-group to themselves via mental processes labeled as social identification, and they value out-groups negatively via mechanisms of social contra-identification. Social identity theory doubts, in general, the assumption of realistic conflict theory that competitive intergroup relations are a necessary condition for intergroup conflicts. Tajfel (1982) proved with his ‘minimal group experiments’ (called ‘minimal’ because there was neither a conflict of interest nor a history of hostility between the groups) that mere group identification is sufficient to induce in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination. Tajfel (1982, pp. 2 and 21) defined a group on the basis of both internal and

external criteria. Internal criteria refer to an individual's identification with the group, while external criteria refer to the fact that others perceive individuals as members of a common group on the basis of characteristics they do not possess themselves. Both internal and external criteria are necessary for group identification. Social identity processes interact as well as supplement the motivations postulated by realistic conflict theory. There has, in other words, always been some overlap and mutual influence between realistic group conflict theory and social identity theory. Nevertheless the complementarities of aforementioned theories become clearer in ethnic group conflict theory (Scheepers et al. 2002; Brown and Hewstone 2005). We know from ethnic group conflict theory that intergroup competition and conflict reinforces the mechanisms for group identification, the eventual outcome of which are exclusionary attitudes, intolerance, and other forms of latent conflicts such as prejudice, discrimination, contact avoidance, and support of violence (Coenders and Scheepers 1998; Abanes 2014; Sterkens et al. 2014; Pamungkas 2015; Subagya 2015).

### 3.3 Assertion and in Defense of the Moro Identity

Ethno-religious groups facing difficult social and material realities are likely to emphasize those elements within its cultural repository to promote group cohesion toward the improvement of the group's condition (Seul 1999). Religion and ethnicity foster stronger loyalty and commitment than other identities in the sense that these traditional forms of social identity provide stability, continuity, and belonging or a sense of "solid ground" especially in times when an individual's or community's sense of safety, security, and identity has been undermined or threatened (Juergensmeyer 1993; Ysseldyk et al. 2010). In the context of the Bangsamoro people's collective experience of persecution and marginalization, Islam offered a definite sociocultural marker of difference and became the unifying force and a point of mobilization for resistance and support. From being an ethnic slur, the label "Moro" was appropriated to represent the politicized collective identity of the 13 disparate ethnolinguistic groups as Muslims, proud and assertive of their religious and ethnic identities, and unified in their resistance against the Christian-dominated Philippine state (Brazal 2004).

Moro children grow up needing to assert their identities both in ethnic and religious terms. As a consequence of their marginalization and minoritization, they accept it as part of their religious and moral obligations to defend their faith, clan, and homeland. This could explain the steady stream of support families and communities offer to armed groups such as the MILF. The children associated with the MILF, labeled as child soldiers in international human rights discourse, were found to strongly identify with the Bangsamoro cause, rationalizing that it is part of their religious and moral obligation to do "jihad" in defense of their way of life and in order to attain liberation for their fellow Muslims who they perceive are oppressed by the dominant government in Metro Manila. More often than not, their parents or relatives are themselves part of the armed group. These factors make support and participation in the armed group activities unproblematic for the children who are

found to move seamlessly between life with MILF and their home life given that there are no sharp distinctions between these two contexts in the first place (Cagoco-Guiam 2002; Özerdem et al. 2010).

Muslim Filipino parents feel proud of their sons and daughters who are contributing to the Bangsamoro cause. Parents who send their children to military training in MILF camps feel confident that their children are in “good” hands because they will not become influenced by the excesses of western, “Christian” ways such as drug or alcohol addiction, gambling, and free sex (Cagoco-Guiam 2002; Camacho 2004; Özerdem et al. 2010).

In the same vein, Muslim parents used to hesitate to send their children to public schools for fear that they will lose the purity of being Muslims. Nowadays however, Muslim children attend public schools and at the same time are sent to madaris where the curriculum focuses on Arabic literacy, Islamic values, and Islamic religion. Muslim parents believe that by sending their children to madaris, their children are able to sustain their identity as Muslims while not foregoing their chances for social and economic mobility that the public school system could offer. Though these two systems of education offer different value systems, most Muslim Filipino families believe that they must negotiate through these to sustain both their religious and civic identities (Milligan 2004).

While Moro and Muslim identity are inseparable, nurtured by centuries-old resentment about stolen sovereignty and collective experiences of subjugation and marginalization, traditional identity construction along clan and ethnic lines strongly persist beneath the overarching Moro identity. Although Muslims are united in belief in Islam and can be mobilized as a unified group to advance the Bangsamoro cause, they differ in terms of norms, values, and traditions according to their clan and ethnic groups. Understanding these overlapping layers of identities helps explain conflict dynamics across Mindanao where inter-elite and communal (horizontal) conflicts may be closely linked or may even escalate into (vertical) state-minority conflicts (Guilal 1998; Kreuzer 2005; Adriano and Parks 2013).

### 3.4 Personal Experience of Violence as Trigger Factors

Armed conflicts in Mindanao are not only brought about by military campaigns against rebel forces. It is also brought about by land disputes, family feuds (*rido*), and political rivalries between Christian and Muslim residents and even among Moros themselves. This is another facet in the militarized life of a Moro youth. In a society where the formal justice system is faulty, people are left with hardly any option but to settle perceived affront or grievances themselves. This sparks a series of retaliatory acts of violence between families and kinship groups.

In stories shared by children for the study on children in conflicts in the Philippines, the children expressed anger and hatred towards the perceived instigator of conflict or violence (Risser 2007; De Castro et al. 2013). They themselves are victims of violence or are witnesses to violence inflicted on their relatives or friends. It is not uncommon for children to express desires to become a soldier so they could

go after the “bad people.” Children’s plays depict the image of one group as the cultural “enemy” reinforcing fears that children may increasingly see violence as a legitimate means for managing disputes. When revenge and retaliation is the main form of justice to protect family honor, gun training for children starts at home at an early age. Personal experience of atrocities and injustice fuels a desire for revenge in children, and this serves as a pathway for their support for and participation in violence (Cagoco-Guiam 2002; Camacho et al. 2005).

### **3.5 Case in Point – Children and Youth in Private Armed Groups in Maguindanao**

The armed violence in Mindanao take on many forms with actors in the vertical conflict between the Philippine government and its Christian majority and the Muslim minority intertwined with actors in intra-elite competition, and intergroup communal rivalries (Camacho et al. 2005; Adriano and Parks 2013). In places where resources and governance is under the control of the local elite clan, and where the incumbent’s control is continually being contested by other dominant local elites, the children and youth inevitably interact with the structures of dominance and control, becoming involved in the activities of the local elites’ private armed groups.

In Maguindanao, the private armed groups were transformed into Civilian Volunteer Organisations (CVO) when private armies were declared illegal in the 1987 Philippine Constitution (section 24, art. xviii). Some members of the private armed groups are former members of MILF and MNLF or are linked to these groups through kinship or ethnic ties. In other areas, some active members of MILF or MNLF likewise serve in the security detail of the local ruling elite, paid as members of CVOs which are sometimes mobilized by the government’s armed forces to fight Muslim or communist insurgents. In this complex map of actors in conflict, children and young people inevitably find themselves expressing support or association with one or more groups, and even in the frontline of hostilities (Camacho et al. 2005).

Maguindanao is a primarily agricultural province with a predominantly Muslim population. It is one of the ten poorest provinces of the Philippines. Maguindanao figured in the headlines worldwide with the massacre of 58 men and women by the private army of the Ampatuans, a political warlord clan allied to then President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. Children and young people were documented to be part of the private army used by the Ampatuans to keep itself in power (Camacho et al. 2005).

Being members of the community, with kinship ties or ethno-religious ties to the ruling clan, their pathways to participation in organized armed violence often goes through a gradual progression of involvement. It often starts through tagging along with family or friends who are members of the private army, doing small errands and various chores for the armed group. Through time, they are asked to do “major jobs” for the group until they are eventually hired as a CVO member. For some, the process of acquiring membership is expedited when they are taken in as replacement

for their fathers who were killed in action. In a few cases, a son is compelled to join the private army due to the family's indebtedness to the local politician.

Poverty is an inescapable way of life for the children and youth in Ampatuan's private army. Their families rely on the ruling elite for livelihood and protection; hence families offer its support to the local elite and its private army as a means to ensure the family's survival. However, it should be mentioned that the ruling elite commands fear more than respect such that to say that the relationship is based on reciprocity and conciliation may be arguable. For those whose families experienced atrocities in the hands of their enemies, revenge is a source of motivation for joining the private army. For some children and young people, the mere fact of being associated with an influential family with many resources is motivation enough to tag along, support, and be involved in the armed group's activities.

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## 4 Concluding Remarks

While Christian and Muslim youth are not in a permanent stage of manifest conflict, their relationships are nevertheless shaped by mutual prejudices, hostilities, and in-group bias. For the Muslim minority in the Philippines, experiences of minorization and marginalization through time have stimulated them to focus on the positive side of their, increasingly important, ethno-religious identities. Muslim children and youth seek positive identification with their ethno-religious group in order to achieve solidarity and form a common basis for struggle and resistance to threat and criticism against their politicized collective Moro identity.

We have tried to contribute to a better understanding of latent intergroup conflict among Christian and Muslim children and youth in the Philippines through various theoretical lenses such as realistic conflict theory, ethnic group conflict theory, youth bulge theory, and identity theories. Typically, research on the conflict and peace situation in the Philippines looks at the manifest dimensions of the conflict with focus on the armed conflict between the Philippine government and ideologically motivated armed groups. This is not surprising, since the protracted nature of the conflict and its widespread economic and social costs has caused profound psychosocial harm and insecurity at individual and societal levels. This contribution has broadened the discourse on the discordant context of Filipino children and youth by looking at latent conflicts between Christians and Muslims and their political, economic, and social dimensions. The main implication of these findings for the theory and practice of peace building is that respect for people's sense of distinctiveness and differentiation as members of a group is vital to any peace-building initiative.

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# Geographies of Citizenship: Muslim Youth in Post-9/11 United States

# 4

Thea Renda Abu El-Haj

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## Abstract

This chapter examines two key questions about youth from Muslim-majority countries and communities living in the United States after 9/11. How are these children and youth positioned in the US national imaginary by imaginative geographies of war? In turn, how do they develop a sense of belonging and citizenship in this post-9/11 context of exclusion and war? An exploration of these questions illustrates the ways that violence, conflict, and war shape the lives of these young people from transnational Muslim communities both in active conflict zones but also in contexts of relative peace such as the United States. Many youth from Muslim transnational communities living in the United

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States migrated in order to get away from violence and wars – violence and wars that have often been an outcome of US imperial policies. These experiences with war and violence shape young people’s political perspectives, sense of belonging, and citizenship practices in ways that make them critical of the unfulfilled promises of US democratic ideals – ideals that are rarely realized at home or abroad. At the same time, within the US context, cultural and political discourses engendered by the “war on terror” frame everyday interactions that youth from Muslim-majority communities have in their schools and other public spaces – interactions that often position these young people as suspect or dangerous members of the nation. These exclusions represent the local fallout of a violent, imperial policy the United States is fighting far from its shores.

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### Keywords

Muslim youth • Transnationalism • Belonging • Citizenship • Post-9/11

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## 1 Introduction

[My friends and I were] all sitting down on the computer, and we’re munching on a couple of snacks. The teacher never ever told us put away the snacks. And we’re sitting down on the computer and we were talking, I think. And the guy [i.e. the teacher] was giving us rude looks ever since we went in there. So he comes to us and he tells us, he tells my friend, “Put the food away. You’re eating like a pig over the computer.” So when he said that, you know, we like freaked out. What do you mean? He just called you a pig? So my friend tried to get back at him, and she’s sitting there yelling at him and he’s yelling at her. And then he starts telling her, “I know how the men in your country treat you. I’ve been to your country twice already. If you talked to your family member like that he would smack you across the face.” I said, “This is our country. What country did you visit?” And so he’s like, “Trust me, I know, I know.”

Samira Khateeb, Palestinian American high school student. (Abu El-Haj 2015)

How can we understand the ways that a fairly routine conflict between US high school students and their teacher turned into a debate about national belonging? To what country did this teacher imagine these young women belonged, and what fantasies did he hold about the reigning “cultural” practices in that place? What does Samira’s response that “this is our country” tell us about young people’s bids for citizenship within the United States today? What does this interaction have to do with war?

Samira Khateeb’s story highlights the way that she and her peers were positioned as belonging to the “imaginative geographies” (Said 1978, p. 49) of the “Muslim world” – an indeterminate place putatively characterized by women’s oppression and men’s violence. Despite her claims to the United States as “our country,” this teacher refused to accept these young women as insiders who belong to the nation. Since the end of the Cold War, and with increasing focus after September 11, 2001, in the United States, children and youth from Muslim-majority countries and communities, along with those imagined to belong to these communities – immigrant and native born, citizen and denizen alike – often find themselves positioned

as members of “Other” places. These “Other” places have been painted in monochrome, rendering invisible the diverse and complex cultural, linguistic, ethnic, social, and historical contexts of the “Muslim world.” Moreover, these “Other” places have been imagined as geographies of enmity ruled by and breeding hostility to and aggression against the United States and other “Western” nations (Gregory 2004). Most important, framing its foreign policy around a “war on terror,” the United States imagined a diffuse enemy that could be lurking anywhere that Muslim people lived. The consequence for young people from Muslim-majority countries living in the United States (and other “Western” countries) has been that these geographies of enmity frame them as suspect members of these states. Within this post-9/11 context, young people from Muslim-majority countries and communities have had to figure out how to position themselves in relation to these dominant American political discourses that see them as threatening outsiders to the national community.

Carving out a place for themselves as members of US society has been rendered particularly difficult by the black and white thinking that has characterized political discourse since 9/11. Immediately following September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush (2001) admonished the nation, “either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists”; this signaled the political climate within which many young people from Muslim-majority countries and communities have wrestled to give voice to the complex sense of belonging and citizenship developed within their (for many, transnational) communities. They have had to engage in a complex dance as they make bids for citizenship and belonging in the United States in the context of the “war on terror.” As this chapter shows, at some moments, such as the one described above by Samira, youth choose to call upon their status as insiders – as Americans – to demand fair treatment. At others, they reject primary national connections with the United States, choosing instead to identify more strongly with their religious or national/ethnic affiliations (Grewal 2014; Ghaffar-Kucher 2009, 2014). Most, however, try to articulate more complex citizenship identities that reflect the transnational social fields that shape their lives (Abu El-Haj 2007, 2009, 2015; Ewing and Hoyler 2008; Maira 2009).

This chapter examines two key questions: How are children and youth positioned in the US national imaginary by these imaginative geographies of war? In turn, how do they develop a sense of belonging and citizenship in this context of exclusion and war? An exploration of these questions illustrates the ways that violence, conflict, and war shape the lives of these young people from transnational Muslim communities both in active conflict zones but also in contexts of relative peace such as the United States. Many youth from Muslim transnational communities living in the United States migrated in order to get away from violence and wars – violence and wars that have often been an outcome of US imperial policies. These experiences with war and violence shape young people’s political perspectives, sense of belonging, and citizenship practices in ways that make them critical of the unfulfilled promises of US democratic ideals – ideals that are rarely realized at home or abroad. At the same time, within the US context, cultural and political discourses engendered by the “war on terror” frame everyday interactions that

youth from Muslim-majority communities have in their schools and other public spaces – interactions that often position these young people as suspect or dangerous members of the nation. These exclusions represent the local fallout of a violent, imperial policy the United States is fighting far from its shores.

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## 2 Key Concepts

This section defines two key theoretical frameworks that shape much of the research on youth from Muslim-majority communities living in the United States: national imaginary and citizenship and belonging.

### 2.1 National Imaginary

National imaginary references the ways that nations construct an ideal of membership and community. Nations are not natural givens. They are made and remade, in part through everyday practices of nationalism that continually organize people's sense of belonging to particular nation-states (Anderson 1983/1991; Appadurai 1996; Beni 2008, 2011; Billig 1995; Calhoun 2007). Even long-existing nation-states must continually reestablish the nation, constructing a national imaginary that articulates its normative values and beliefs, along with the parameters of belonging (and exclusion). Moreover, the boundaries of national belonging are fluid, negotiated over time in relation to different groups of people (Anderson 1983/1991; Hall 2002; Ngai 2004; Yuval-Davis et al. 2005; Yuval-Davis 2011). Who belongs to a nation? Who is "self" and "Other?" What kinds of people are viewed as capable of being the nation's citizen-subjects? Wartime is a period during which these discursive constructions of the nation are re-articulated – the edges of belonging and not belonging sharpened (O'Leary 1999). However, although these edges are hardened in the face of war, they rely on boundaries that are already there.

### 2.2 Citizenship and Belonging

This chapter takes an anthropological perspective on citizenship as lived experience through which people negotiate "the rules and meanings of political and cultural membership" (Levinson 2005, p. 336; see also, Ong 1999; Rosaldo 1994; Yuval-Davis 2011). Young people's citizenship practices entail the myriad ways they fashion social, economic, cultural, and political belonging within and across the boundaries of nation-states.

Belonging references the affective dimension of people's sense of connection to nation and community. Yuval-Davis et al. (2005) argue that belonging is a "thicker concept" than citizenship – a social connection that is created, to some extent, through experiences of inclusion or exclusion. Even before, but especially after 9/11, youth from Muslim-majority communities living in the United States have

had to carve out a sense of belonging and create bids for citizenship in relation to their broader positioning as outsiders to the US national imaginary.

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### 3 Geographies of Enmity: The New Orientalism

For Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, “us”) and the strange (the Orient, the East, “them”). This vision in a sense created and then served the two worlds thus conceived. (Said 1978, p. 43)

Said’s groundbreaking work *Orientalism* (1978) traces the long history of knowledge production about the “East” by Westerners that simultaneously created the “Orient” and “Orientals” and constructed an oppositional relationship between “East” and “West.” He argues that this knowledge production is crucial to the structures of imperialism, supporting the economic, military, and political ambitions of Western nations in the East.

Although Orientalism was launched by European actors in the context of their imperial ventures in the East, in the post-World War II period, the United States inherited this European legacy as it became increasingly involved politically, economically, and militarily in MENA (Middle East and North Africa) and South Asia (Gregory 2004; Khalidi 2004; Mamdani 2004). After the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1980s, the United States trained its focus on the “Muslim world” as the primary threat to the United States and its Western allies.

In dominant political discourses, this threat is imagined to derive from fundamental cultural differences between “Islam” and the “West.” Described by some scholars and political pundits (Huntington 1996; Lewis 2002) as a “clash of civilization,” Islam – or in more nuanced discussions, its radicalized variants – is imagined to be *a culture*, one that holds values contradictory to those foundational to liberal democracies. This “clash of civilizations” hypothesis has been resoundingly critiqued. Two of these critiques are particularly relevant for the purposes of this chapter. First, the notion that Islam represents a culture or a civilization is at once reductionist and essentialist and overreaching in scope. On the one hand, this discourse creates an imagined holistic and static culture out of the vast cultural, linguistic, religious, and ethnic diversity and history that exists among Muslim communities worldwide. Lila Abu-Lughod (2013) writes of “Islamland” as a “mythical place” produced in Western cultural and political discourses. The notion of a culture clash between Islam and the West must, if it is to be coherent, construct this imagined Islamland and the people said to inhabit this land. However, no such place or people actually exist; rather, there exist only highly diverse, geographically disparate places where Muslims and many other people live together.

The second important critique involves the question of why this “culture talk” (Mamdani 2004) dominates so much of US popular and political discourse. The answer to this question is that culture talk does political work. It coproduces knowledge and power (Foucault 1977), constructing what “we know” about the



“Muslim world” in relation to the political actions the United States takes in Muslim-majority regions of the world. At the extreme, this culture talk has been leveraged to justify the US military actions on behalf of the many values seen to be the provenance of the United States and the West. The invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq were defended, at least in part, in terms of freeing “women of cover” and bringing democracy to the region. What remained hidden behind this rhetoric was the United States’ past complicity with both the mujahideen in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein’s regime during the 1980s (Gregory 2004; Khalidi 2004; Mamdani 2003). Instead, the complex political histories of US involvement in the region that lead, at least in part, to the contemporary conflicts are hidden behind the mantle of an insurmountable culture clash.

### 3.1 Key Components of This Imagined Culture Clash

What are the critical differences attributed to American democratic versus Muslim “culture?” In dominant political discourses, individual liberty, diversity, and tolerance make up the triumvirate of American values (Abu El-Haj 2010, 2015; Abu-Lughod 2013; Brown 2006). Americans are presumptively free to make individual choices: about the beliefs they hold and the lives they pursue. The language of freedom and individualism is deeply embedded in dominant American political discourses. At times, this political language has been leveraged to increase rights for some groups of people, as, for example, the recent tide of marriage equality laws being passed in now a majority of states. However, more often, these ideals obscure deep-seated oppressive conditions. If individual freedom is the cornerstone of US democracy, then the lives people lead are attributed to the choices they make, seemingly floating free from conditions that help shape these choices.

The second value in the triumvirate is diversity. The United States prides itself on being “a nation of immigrants.” Unlike many other nation-states that construct “imagined communities” (Anderson 1983/1991) around notions of a shared ethnicity, the United States has instead imagined its national community around shared democratic values that unite its diverse racial/ethnic groups. Of course, this ideal of diversity is belied by a long history of racial and gender exclusions, beginning with the original constitution’s restrictions on voting to free, white, and propertied men and continuing through centuries of denial of citizenship for racially minoritized people and for women. However, with the erosion of racial and gender restrictions on citizenship, the United States has projected an image of itself as a democratic society enriched by its multicultural heritage. The early twentieth-century images of the nation as a “melting pot” that blends all cultural influences have given way to the United States as a “salad bowl” in which each culture contributes its distinct flavor. This ideal of multiculturalism came to fruition after World War II (Melamed 2006). With its newfound status as a global superpower, and in the midst of the Cold War, the United States was in the uncomfortable position of claiming to promote democracy on the world stage while practicing a racial dictatorship (Omi and

Winant 1986) at home. With the civil rights movement's successful campaign to strike down legal racial restrictions, and the end to racial restrictions on immigrant citizenship, the nation reimagined itself as a multicultural democracy that values diversity: an ideal that is often understood to make the United States a beacon to all other nations (Melamed 2006). This ideal of multicultural diversity hides the ongoing legacy of racial exclusions that accords full national membership to white Americans.

The third leg of the US triumvirate is the value of tolerance. Tolerance as a political value is not instantiated in the US constitution. Nevertheless, it is the implicit glue that holds together this diverse national community. Americans imagine themselves as a nation tolerant of all kinds of differences. Civic education is based around the idea that young people must learn to be tolerant of other ideas and other people. Tolerance has been resoundingly critiqued as a weak tool for promoting equality in a diverse society (Brown 2006). For one, tolerance does not necessarily seek or require mutual understanding or respect; it merely requires that people learn to "tolerate" ideas and people they find disagreeable or reprehensible. Moreover, tolerance fails to acknowledge inequalities and politics that structure interactions between unequal parties. It is typically non-majoritarian views, or even persons, that are seen as needing to be tolerated. However, what is most important for the purposes of this chapter is that in the post-9/11 era, tolerance became a "civilizational discourse." Brown argues that this civilizational discourse imagines that the United States, as a tolerant nation, must rid the world of intolerance – intolerance that has been most recently attributed to radical Islam.

If the United States is imagined as a national community that values individual freedom, diversity, and tolerance, it is projected against an image of the "Muslim world" as a landscape of oppositional values. In the place of individual liberty, cultural conformity and individual repression reign. If Americans imagine themselves to act out of individual conscience and to choose their lifestyles freely, they imagine the beliefs and behaviors of people from the "Muslim world" to be driven mechanistically by cultural traditions hardened by centuries of sedimentation. And they imagine these rigid traditions to cut across Muslim-majority countries and communities without attention to the diverse cultural, linguistic, religious, and ethnic societies represented. It is the constraint on women's freedom that generates some of the most concern in US political discourses about Muslim-majority countries. Muslim women in particular, and especially those who cover their heads or bodies, are typically viewed as agency-less victims of an oppressive religion. This belief was exemplified in the interaction between Samira and her teacher that opened this chapter.

The rich diversity of Muslim-majority countries and communities is washed out by the dominant images of these geographies that produce a monochromatic essentialized Islamic culture. US political discourse, media pundits, and popular opinion do not see the linguistic, sectarian, ethnic, religious, and cultural distinctions that exist across these wide geographies. It is not atypical to hear, for example, all Muslims being cast as Arabs, or as Arabic speakers. In the US geopolitical imaginary, the "Muslim world" fails to conjure up the rich diversity that exists both

within and across the far-flung Muslim-majority countries, from Morocco to Indonesia, Palestine to Pakistan, and Iran to Niger.

It is not only the diversity of peoples in the Muslim-majority world and communities that is rendered invisible in the US geopolitical imaginary. It is also the diversity of thought that is inaudible within dominant US political discourses. Construing “Muslim culture” as incompatible with democracy, dominant US political discourse characterized Muslims as intolerant of diverse ideas and opinions. The historical record of US support for authoritarian regimes in many Muslim-majority countries plays no part in helping explain why individuals have been punished for political speech in many of these countries. Rather, Americans are left with the impression that it is Muslims, and “Muslim culture,” rather than particular political regimes, many of which have been supported by the US government, that are intolerant of differences in opinion. Focusing on instances when intolerance seems to be the rule, the United States sees its mission as a civilizational one. In dominant political discourse, it is the intolerant who become intolerable. And, as the beacon of democratic values, the United States bears the burden of ridding the world of the intolerant. Thus, in recent decades, the cultural politics that produce the US national imaginary co-constructs an imaginative geography of the “Muslim” world, one that is presumptively ruled by a set of values oppositional to fundamental democratic ideas, constituting a landscape of enmity toward the US and other Western powers.

### **3.2 Imagining Others in “Our” Midst**

How have these cultural politics, then, positioned children, young people, and their families living in the United States who are seen to belong to this imaginative geography of the “Muslim world”? The encounter between Samira and her teacher cited at the beginning of the chapter illustrates the reality that many children and youth from Muslim-majority countries and communities living in the United States have had to weather, especially in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks. Positioned as perpetual outsiders to the US national imaginary, these young people (and their families) have routinely faced the presumption that they do not (and cannot) belong as full members of the United States. This presumption reflects the mutable processes of racialization in the United States that produce some citizens as “impossible subjects” (Ngai 2004) of this nation. Similar to Latino/as and Asian-Americans, many members of Muslim-majority transnational communities find it difficult to be seen as full members of the United States.

The processes of racialization come along with assumptions about these “impossible subjects.” These assumptions are particularly robust around gender roles. Youth from Muslim-majority countries and communities continually battle the presumption that girls and women are uniformly oppressed and that boys and men oppress women and have a tendency toward violence and radicalism. The effects of this latter presumption had dire consequences for Muslim men, when after September 11, 2001, thousands were detained without cause by the federal

government. These presumptions about gender roles have also had consequences in public schools where education is seen as a pathway for freeing young women and disciplining young men (Abu El-Haj 2010, 2015; Ghaffar-Kucher 2009, 2012).

### 3.3 Cultural Imperialism

To experience cultural imperialism means to experience how the dominant meanings of society render the particular perspectives of one's own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one's group and mark it out as the Other. (Young 1990, pp. 58–59)

In delineating various, interlocking facets of oppression, the late philosopher Iris Young (1990) pointed to the critical role that cultural imperialism plays in controlling the meanings and representations attributed to groups that are marginalized in society. For children and youth presumed to belong to Muslim-majority countries and communities, the imaginative geographies of the “Muslim world” lead to the two opposite problems produced by cultural imperialism: hyper-visibility and invisibility. Although people living in the United States who are presumptively seen as Muslim have long faced scrutiny, discrimination, and hate crimes (particularly in the aftermath of international incidents such as the Iranian hostage crisis or the first Gulf War), they have been subject to more intensive forms of racism since September 2001. Individuals who “appeared” to be Muslims – from women who wear hijab to Sikh men who wear traditional head coverings and are not Muslim – became highly visible, positioned as outsiders, and potentially dangerous enemy aliens. Much public popular and political discourse has focused on Muslims, with particular attention to the question of whether they can or cannot be fully integrated into US society and whether they pose a specific threat to the nation.

The intensive focus on Muslim identities reduces the complexity and rich cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and national diversity of many different communities to a single dimension associated with radical Islam. The primary focus on Muslim identities makes other kinds of diversities invisible. The perspectives and experiences of a wide range of individuals, from those who identify as secular to religious, linguistic, and ethnic minorities from Muslim-majority countries, are almost entirely missing from the discussions. They are simply lumped into a political discourse about Muslims (e.g., Muslim and Arab identities are often collapsed, even though many Arabs are not Muslim; Arabs and Iranians are often mistaken for each other, although ethnic, linguistic, and, for some, sectarian diversity characterizes these groups). This invisibility is not only reflected in broad public discourses but also subtly reinforced in much of the research literature that has focused primarily on the experiences of Muslim youth living in the United States. Some of the research that has built a focus on Muslim religious *versus* American identities into the design has failed to explore other possible identifications that are also important to, and intersect with, these young people's religious identities (e.g., nation, ethnicity, and sexuality). Moreover, the focus on Muslim youth has

overlooked young people who identify as secular or identify more with sources of identification other than their religious ones.

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## **4 From Identity to Belonging and Citizenship: Rethinking Research with and for Youth**

In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, there is growing concern that there is little knowledge about youth from Muslim-majority countries living in the United States. While much popular public discourse was whipping up moral panics about the threat that local Muslim communities posed to the United States and its values, researchers sought to explore the actual experiences of, and perspectives represented within, Muslim communities. How have youth from Muslim-majority communities made sense of the broader political climate that positions them as dangerous outsiders to the nation? How has this positioning played out in their everyday experiences in schools and communities? Two sets of related questions have driven the growing field of research that focuses on children and youth from these communities. One body of research has focused on questions of identity, particularly examining how Muslim youth negotiate between their ethnic and religious identities and their identities as Americans. This research is driven by a US national and multicultural framework: How do youth balance affiliations to mainstream US society and to their religious and ethnic communities? Moreover, it is primarily characterized by survey and interview research. A second approach has shifted from a focus on identity to questions of belonging and citizenship practices. This body of research explores how these young people are fashioning themselves as social, cultural, and political actors in the face of the post-9/11 climate and shows that for many youth, it is not national, but transnational social fields that shape their experiences, understandings, and commitments. This work has relied most often on ethnographic methods. As a consequence of this methodological choice, this research has been able to illuminate close-up the relationship between the everyday experiences through which young people develop a sense of belonging and citizenship across transnational social fields and the ways they understand and navigate the rocky terrain of being viewed as members of “imaginative geographies of enmity.”

### **4.1 Negotiating Diverse Identities: Lives in Multicultural Societies**

Much of the research has focused attention on the space between Muslim and American identities. In general, this research is underwritten by a view of multiple cultural systems that come into contact with each other within multicultural states – a framework that follows from the larger literature on immigrant incorporation. That is, this research explores how youth from immigrant communities navigate between the values and expectations of their home community and mainstream US society. Research with Muslim American youth undertaken after September

11, 2001, has recognized that the cultural politics surrounding the “war on terror” created a pervasive hostile climate within which many youth from Muslim communities have experienced an increased tension between their identities as Muslims and their identities as Americans. This recognition of the political context is important, showing how youth identities are shaped within particular, often contentious, social, historical, and cultural contexts. However, for the most part, this research is designed in such a way that it inevitably builds a picture of youth navigating between cultural/religious identities that are treated as fairly stable, often in conflict with each other, and bounded by concerns of integration into the United States – a picture that a second body of research calls into question.

Although undertaken before 2001, Loukia Sarroub’s ethnographic research with Yemeni American girls stands out as one of the most in-depth, nuanced portraits of youth from a Muslim immigrant community in the United States and for this reason is included in this review. (Her capacity to build such a detailed picture of this community can be attributed to her choice of ethnographic methods.) Her study explores how Yemeni American girls creatively negotiate between the norms, values, and practices of their cultural and religious home community and those of mainstream American society. Studying the girls’ literacy practices as they moved between home, school, and mosque, Sarroub paints a picture of the girls navigating the rocky waters between “two worlds” and “different ways of being.” She writes that these young women’s lives, “illustrate that *an inevitable clash* occurs at the intersection of US republican values and the sociocultural practices of the Southend” (2005, p. 44, emphasis added) in which families, rituals and religious practices, early marriages, ongoing ties to Yemen, and so forth are seen to create a set of expectations at odds with promises of academic achievement and future careers for the girls. Sarroub sees the young women as responding creatively to these conflicting cultural systems, forging new hybrid spaces and identities. However, by framing the tensions as an outcome of an “inevitable clash” between different cultural systems, this work ultimately does not theorize possible sources of this conflict, sources that include systems of race and class in the US context. As such, it risks being read as evidence for the “clash” between Western and Muslim values – a reading that Sarroub would likely not endorse.

Studies undertaken in the wake of September 11, 2001, suggest that rather than an inevitable clash of cultural systems, the particular ways that young people experience and take up cultural and religious identities are continually reshaped within a maelstrom of historical, economic, cultural, and political processes and the power relations that ensue from these processes. Research illustrates that the post-9/11 political context reoriented many young people from Muslim communities to consider religion as a primary focus for identification (Ewing and Hoyler 2008; Ghaffar-Kucher 2009; Grewal 2014; Sirin and Fine 2008; Mir 2014). This research shows that youth from various racial, ethnic, and national groups have increasingly come to identify primarily with their religious identities, as either Muslim Americans or pan-Muslims. This collective identification as Muslims serves as a source for mutual support and also for civic and political engagement. The research undertaken after 9/11 understands that youth identities are mutable, imagined, and reimaged within particular sociopolitical contexts.

Research in the post-9/11 era has shown that experiences with racism and the state's surveillance of their communities have led many youth from Muslim communities to question the relationship between their identities as Muslims and as Americans (Ewing and Hoyerl 2008; Ghaffar-Kucher 2009; Maira 2009; Sirin and Fine 2008). The rupture that many felt between their Muslim and American identities developed for several reasons. Although many Muslim American youth experienced fear, shock, and anger in the wake of the September 11, 2001, attacks, they and their communities were immediately positioned as outsiders to the national imaginary. Another source of this rupture developed from the United States' ensuing invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, political decisions that were largely unsupported in many Muslim communities in the United States – communities that were more likely than mainstream Americans to have access to media that shed critical light on the effects of these invasions on the populations of those countries. In light of experiences with racism close at hand, and the witnessing of military invasions of Muslim-majority countries, many youth from Muslim communities began identifying more consciously as Muslims, highlighting their religious over ethnic or national affiliations, as a source for developing meaning, support, and collective action to counter the racialized discourses about their communities (Ewing and Hoyerl 2008; Ghaffar-Kucher 2009, 2010; Grewal 2014; Mir 2014; Sirin and Fine 2008).

Given the public fear about disaffected Muslim youth that has periodically gripped the United States (and other “Western” nations), particularly in the wake of violent attacks undertaken by a small number of individuals, it is critical to note that the majority of youth from Muslim-majority communities identify as Americans, even in the face of the widespread prejudice and racism facing their communities. Nevertheless, youth describe and experience the relationship between their American and Muslim identities in diverse ways. Sirin and Fine (2008) conducted a large research study with young Muslim Americans from immigrant communities in the New York metropolitan region (surveying 204 youth ages 12–25, leading focus groups and creating identity maps with a subset of those surveyed, and conducting six life history interviews). Their research concluded that a majority of Muslim American youth navigated post-9/11 US society, taking “integrated paths – skillfully melding their ‘Muslim’ and ‘mainstream US’ cultures” (2008, p. 141). Others experienced their “Muslim” and “American” identities as existing in “parallel” worlds; however, they created bridges between these two worlds. Among Sirin and Fine's participants, only a very small number felt a conflict between their Muslim and American identities. Other research has documented more struggles on the part of youth to negotiate the relationship between their identities as Muslims and as Americans. Ewing and Hoyerl's (2008) study with South Asian Muslim youth from professional families showed that these participants felt conflicted about the possibility that these identities could be comfortably bridged. Importantly, the youth did not see this struggle as the outcome of an essential or inevitable religious and cultural divide between the norms and expectations of their families and communities and those of mainstream US society. Instead, they interpreted the struggle to be an outcome of their experiences with social exclusion in the post-9/11

context in which Muslims were positioned as “impossible subjects” (Ngai 2004) of the United States. Moreover, these young people called upon their status as American citizens to demand justice and democratic rights for their communities.

Although the preponderance of evidence is that a majority of Muslim American youth integrate, and navigate successfully, their identities as Muslims and as Americans, there are some young people who assert a sense of “authentic” or “true” Muslim/ethnic identities that they feel cannot be easily reconciled with mainstream American identities (Ghaffar-Kucher 2009, 2010, 2014, Grewal 2014). Importantly, this research illustrates that the development of this sense of a “true” Muslim identity at odds with mainstream American identities is in large part a response to the ways that Muslims have been positioned as outsiders to the imagined national community. Ghaffar-Kucher’s work with working-class Pakistani immigrant youth examines the intersection of systems of class and race-based exclusions that make the American dream difficult to realize, contributing to their disenchantment with the promises of migration. Instead of attributing the conflict some Muslim youth feel to a fundamental clash between “American” and “Muslim” norms, values, or “cultures”, these studies take seriously the politics within which a sense of conflict is generated.

## 4.2 From Identity to Belonging: From National to Transnational Citizenship

A second, related (and, in the case of Ghaffar-Kucher and Grewal, overlapping) body of research shifts focus from Muslim American youth identities to a broader question of how young people are negotiating belonging and citizenship, not only within the boundaries of the nation-state but also in relation to the transnational social fields across which their lives unfold. This body of research makes two subtle, but critical moves. First, moving from a framework of identity, to a concern with citizenship as lived experience, it focuses attention on the everyday practices through which young people negotiate social, cultural, and political belonging. Second, rather than taking Muslim and American identities as the boundary for investigation, this research illustrates the ways that many young people are creatively constructing a sense of belonging and citizenship well beyond the boundaries of the United States.

The works of three researchers are illustrative of this approach to understanding Muslim youth in the post-9/11 United States (Abu El-Haj 2007, 2009, 2010, 2015; Ghaffar-Kucher 2009, 2012, 2014; Maira 2009). Sunaina Maira’s (2009) ethnographic study with South Asian Muslim immigrant youth focuses on expressions of national belonging and citizenship during the “war on terror.” Tracking young people across home, school, and community contexts, Maira shows how “the micropolitics of citizenship practices and performances of immigrant youth in these everyday contexts are linked to the macropolitical processes of the imperial state and global capital” (2009, p. 5). Thus, this work shows how young people forge particular forms of “cultural citizenship” in relation to both contemporary



patterns of global capitalism that led them to migrate to the United States and the cultural politics of the “war on terror” that position them as enemy aliens in the United States. Cultural citizenship – a term coined by Renato Rosaldo – refers to “the right to be different and belong in a participatory democratic sense” (1994, p. 402). Maira’s work situates these South Asian-Muslim youths’ experiences with citizenship centrally within the workings of US imperialism. She notes that US imperialism entails not only economic, political, and military domination across the globe but also works through cultural politics that hide imperial power behind a discourse of democracy and freedom. These politics have proven particularly problematic for Muslims. As she writes, “The state of preemptive and ‘perpetual war’ is built on the assumption that certain categories of citizens and subjects are criminal, undesirable, and unworthy of national belonging and so must be purged from the body politic” (Maira 2009, p. 70).

The question Maira addresses then is how, in this context, youth understand and practice citizenship – perspectives and practices they develop through their everyday experiences in schools, workplaces, and with popular culture. This approach situates young people as active shapers of their societies, and it understands citizenship to encompass more than traditional markers of political membership such as voting. Maira argues that there were three primary ways that the South Asian Muslim youth practiced cultural citizenship: flexible, multi- or polycultural, and dissenting.

Flexible citizenship (Ong 1999) references the ways that immigrant youth and their families leverage citizenship to access a range of rights (primarily economic, but also social, civil, and political) to respond to the conditions of neoliberal economic policies and the global unequal distribution of rights. As people move across borders in search of these rights, they maintain connections (economic, affective, cultural, political) to the places from which they migrated. For South Asian Muslim youth, this ability to maintain connections and to identify as Pakistani, Indian, and Bangladeshi was facilitated through transnational pop culture. In the wake of 9/11, these practices of flexible citizenship were risky for South Asian-Muslim youth because their affiliations to places other than the United States were viewed as suspect.

Maira argues that youth also forged multicultural and polycultural citizenship practices in response to the economic realities they faced in the United States. As members of a working-class immigrant community, they experienced firsthand economic inequalities that are deeply racialized. At the same time, they are exposed to circulating discourses of US multiculturalism and consumer culture. Maira suggests that many young South Asian Muslim youth turn to multicultural citizenship that “foster(s) a cultural rather than a structural analysis of social inequality” (2009, p. 173). Schools encourage this type of citizenship by putting celebrations of “diversity” at the center of the educational endeavor. However, she also found that some youth affiliated with other students of color, particularly African American students, understanding shared experiences with racialization. Maira sees these affiliations as nascent “polycultural citizenship” which she suggests is “a more complex, less culturally essentialist notion of difference that allows for political,

not just cultural, conjunctures between different groups and is situated in the realm of power relations” (2009, p. 179).

Finally, Maira found that some young people were beginning to articulate a position of dissent, refusing to simply line up with the politics of the state. After 9/11, Muslim youth were often called upon to educate members of the dominant public about Islam. There was a scripted quality to this education. It had to fit within a multicultural framework – one that sidelines conversations about political injustice, in favor of simply learning about cultural and religious diversity. However, some of the youth were aware of the inadequacy of this approach and started to develop more critical views on US politics at home and abroad.

Ghaffar-Kucher’s (2009, 2012, 2014) multi-site ethnography with working-class Pakistani American youth living in New York City illustrates what she calls the “religification” of these youth. Conducting research across home, community, and school sites, Ghaffar-Kucher shows how, in the wake of 9/11, the possibilities for identification were narrowed in scope. On the one hand, racist discourses in both the public spheres of politics and culture, and in the intimacies of everyday encounters in schools and communities, focused on Islam as the most important aspect of these young Pakistani Americans’ identities. This focus on a monolithic view of Islam rendered invisible other rich sources of identification such as nationality, ethnicity, and linguistic diversity that characterize the variable Muslim communities living in the United States. On the other hand, as Pakistani American youth encountered these racist discourses about Islam, they increasingly adopted religion as the primary focus for their identification, setting aside other sources of identification. Thus, Ghaffar-Kucher shows that the sense of opposition between “American” and “Muslim” culture was produced out of particular political processes at a specific historic moment.

Whereas the broader political climate had a hand in shaping this turn toward religious identities, Ghaffar-Kucher (2014) shows how this process of “religification” unfolded through the everyday experiences young people had at home and at school. She argues that imagined nostalgia on the part of both their American teachers and Pakistani immigrant parents created essentialized and idealized notions of American versus Pakistani “culture.” At school, teachers longed for an imagined time when newcomers appeared to assimilate seamlessly into “American” culture. They contrasted this assimilationist goal with Islam, which they viewed as a problematic culture – one that was characterized by troublesome boys and oppressed girls. Pakistani immigrant parents, by contrast, imagined Islam as a form of cultural capital that could guide young people to be “good Muslims” and to resist what they perceived to be corrupting influences of American culture. Although both teachers and parents had stated goals for these young people’s academic success, teachers desired assimilation to American norms, and parents wished their children to be “good Muslims” and resist behaviors and values they viewed as American. Caught between these views, the Pakistani American youth experienced an incompatibility between the spheres of home and school. Increasingly identifying with their religious identities, youth drew on an idea of Islam as a superior culture to resist the racist views of their religion they

encountered in school. Unfortunately, this resistance, at times, translated into some of the youth appropriating the terrorist stereotype or being attracted to gangs.

Abu El-Haj's ethnographic research (2007, 2010, 2015) with Palestinian American Muslim youth has focused attention on what she calls "disjunctures of citizenship" – conflicts between the ways that young Palestinian Americans experience citizenship as flexible and transnational and the rigid, patriotic, and exclusionary views of citizenship they encounter in US schools and society. Palestinian American youth, growing up within transnational social fields, developed a sense of belonging to a Palestinian national imaginary – one that aspires for an independent state. Many of the youth had moved from the United States to Palestine with their mothers and siblings when they were children. Parents desired to offer their children a cultural, religious, and political education through which they forged a deep sense of belonging to the Palestinian national community. These families returned to the United States after the Israeli military response to the second intifada disrupted all aspects of life in Palestine. Returning to the United States as teenagers, these youth had a strong understanding of themselves as Palestinian nationals, but they also were deeply appreciative of and committed to the rights of democratic citizenship afforded them by their status as US citizens. They knew the injustices that follow from not having rights-bearing citizenship. It was, however, not only those young people who had lived in Palestine who developed a sense of belonging to a Palestinian national imaginary. Even young people who had grown up entirely in the United States forged a sense of themselves as Palestinian nationals. As members of a transnational community that sustained everyday connections to Palestine through language practices, familial relationships, remittances to family members living in the Middle East, cultural and political activities, and media consumption, these young Palestinians grew up with a strong experience of *being Palestinian*.

At the same time, the youth spoke of themselves as US citizens, and they understood well the value of the rights this citizenship conferred. As members of a stateless community, they knew the importance of democratic citizenship rights. They did not take for granted the rights that so many Americans have never had to question, and they believed these rights should be universal. From the most basic political and civil rights of movement, due process, and voting to social rights such as educational opportunity and social welfare, young Palestinian Americans described their appreciation for the rights their citizenship status conferred. Thus, the experiences of growing up in a transnational community made Palestinian Americans aware of injustices that crossed national borders and committed to an ideal that centered rights, rather than nationality, as the foundation for citizenship.

However, these rich transnational commitments were at odds with the expectations for citizenship they encountered in their school. Here it was patriotic affiliation to the United States and its putative ideals that was demanded. Similar to the teachers in Ghaffar-Kucher's research (2014), a majority of educators in Abu El-Haj's (2010, 2015) study viewed education as a pathway for liberating Palestinian (and other Muslim) youth from what they imagined to be their community's antidemocratic "culture." From educators like the one Samira encountered who assumed that all Muslim women were oppressed, to others who believed that

violence and intolerant attitudes characterized these young people's families and communities, teachers imagined education as a disciplinary mechanism through which young Palestinians might be taught to be the free, tolerant citizens of the United States. Teachers' expectations that the Palestinian American students would assimilate and express unambiguous loyalty to the United States had serious consequences for the youth. Students were silenced and even disciplined for expressing their political perspectives on a range of issues from the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq to the unrealized commitments to "liberty and justice for all" at home. Thus, the ambivalence that many of the Palestinian Americans expressed about their identifications as Americans was an outcome of the rich, multifaceted relationships they had with the Palestinian national community, the paradoxical experiences they had with the rights conferred by US citizenship, and the exclusionary cultural politics they faced in schools and in wider society.

Most important, Abu El-Haj's research illustrates that the disjunctures of citizenship that Palestinian American (2007, 2010, 2015) and other Arab American (2009) youth experienced spurred most to be actively engaged in resisting oppression and inequality both within the United States and elsewhere. The sense of relationship that these young people had built with communities near and far led them to feel deeply injustices and denial of rights that were not bounded by the patriotic borders of nation-states. Thus, their lived citizenship practices suggest that rather than negotiating *between* identities they experience as oppositional, many young people from Muslim communities are figuring out creative ways to carve out practices of cultural and political belonging across national imaginaries.

This point is best illustrated by the words and actions of Samira Khateeb, the Palestinian American youth whose voice opens this chapter. Samira had, along with a Jewish peer, cofounded a student group at the community college they both attended to educate about and advocate for an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestine. A trip she had taken to Palestine after her senior year in high school led Samira to become more explicitly politically active on behalf of Palestinian independence. Samira described her goals for initiating the community college student organization.

My main goal is to get people to be aware of what's going on there because not a lot of people do know. Everybody can hear stories about what's going on but they really don't know you know the full story. And really my main focus is on Americans, you know whether you're white or black. Some people might not just care. Some people would like to listen to it for you know two minutes, think about it for a day and then get on with their lives, like you know, what can I do? Some people really do care and do want to help. I'm planning to work on you know, getting, grabbing people's attention and have them focus on this in their everyday lives. I want them to really think about it—think about what the kids are going through, think about what the mothers are going through. Just forget the fact that they're Arabs, just you know they're people and this is what they're going through everyday and hopefully when we do get a lot of people to think about it and the boycotting starts and we have good feedback or whatever from the boycotting and from informing a lot, as many people as we can, hopefully the [U.S.] government is able to do something. Hopefully once the government sees that so many people really want change over there they would do something about it.

Samira felt that her firsthand experiences with the harsh and violent Israeli military occupation of Palestine put her in an excellent position to make those stories come alive for Americans who rarely see the impact the occupation has on the lives of ordinary Palestinians. Samira believed that if she could make those stories visible, more and more Americans might be drawn to pressure the US government to push for an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

Her words illustrate two moves important for realizing the political actions she desires. She hopes that the stories of ordinary women and children will push Americans to think outside of the categorical boundaries – transforming Palestinians from “Arabs” into “people.” Samira’s perspective, born out of her experiences in transnational social fields, calls upon humanist, universal values to make a case for breaking down nationalist affiliations and recognizing all humans as equal. Perhaps just as important, if not more critical, she speaks of the need to get Americans to care about justice in Palestine in their everyday lives – rather than moving on quickly and getting reimmersed in their local lives. Samira aspired to make visible the lives of Palestinians in ways that highlight the interconnectivity of US policies in the region and the ongoing brutality of the Israeli occupation, in the hopes that more and more Americans might come to understand how deeply injustices occurring elsewhere are inextricably interwoven with policies – policies that too often engender violence and conflict – made in this country.

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## 5 Conclusion: Reimagining Belonging in Modern Times

For over a decade now, Muslim communities living in the United States have been subjected to much public handwringing about the extent to which they can be included within the imagined national community. Popular cultural and political discourses position Muslims as belonging to “Other” places – imaginative geographies seen as inimical to “Western” liberal, democratic values. Young people from Muslim communities have had to figure out what it means to fashion themselves as citizens – to develop a sense of belonging and learn to act upon the social, cultural, and political landscapes across which their lives unfold.

Research with and about youth from Muslim immigrant communities in the United States tells two important stories. The first is that contrary to the moral panic about Muslim communities that have gripped many Americans (and Europeans) since 9/11, the majority of youth from Muslim communities are not alienated from US society. They are articulate about the ways their communities have been racialized by the cultural politics of the “war on terror,” and as a result, similar to other racially minoritized communities, they often feel a sense of being on the margins of the unfulfilled promises of American equality. However, for many this spurs a commitment to the realization of those promised rights for all.

The second story is perhaps the more important one. It suggests that nationalist longing for affiliation to one nation-state no longer reflects facts on the ground of modern globalization. Young people from Muslim immigrant communities (similar to newcomers from many other communities) are creating enduring affective

relationships across transnational fields. Transnational communities illustrate the reality that increasingly, people residing in one nation-state may see themselves as belonging to other national imaginaries, and they may be affected by, and struggle for, the rights of people living elsewhere. For an increasing number of young people, transnationalism shapes their identities, political sensibilities, and capacities to participate both in this society and on a global stage. The commitment to and engagement with transnational issues must not be taken as a sign of disloyalty or a problem for citizenship but as opportunity to think about rights and justice across national borders and to develop activist citizenship practices that might realize a more just and peaceful world.

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# Constructing and Deconstructing Child Soldier Narratives

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Helen Brocklehurst and Krijn Peters

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## Abstract

This article looks at how research on child soldiers has been undertaken, especially during the 2000s which marked a time of significant humanitarian interest and intervention by NGOs especially in West Africa. It is argued here that despite inroads into children’s rights and new understandings about children’s agency, these research relationships illustrate a largely asymmetrical dynamic, in which short term gains by individual children diminish the return for the majority and in effect help further victimise or disempower children affected by armed conflict. Furthermore, ‘drive by’ interventions which source primary narratives of children often fail to take into account the complexity of their childhood and the manoeuvres that they may be performing in order to survive.

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## Keywords

African Union (AU) • Armed forces • Autobiography • Backwardness • Benin home • Child soldiers • Actor-oriented approach • Advocacy • Central characters •

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Demobilization • Disembodiment of narratives • In Africa • Machel report • Narratives of • Phenomenon • Plot lines • Primary narratives • Protecting children • Reintegration of • Representation • Research opportunities • Social networks • Sound bites • Victimcy • Cold War • International agenda • Cold War proxy • Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) • Interim care centers (ICCs) • New England Ville • New wars • North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

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## 1 Introduction

In 1996, one of the authors, Krijn Peters, traveled to war-torn Sierra Leone to study the reintegration process of underage combatants. With only a limited budget at his disposal – he was an MSc student at the time – he rented a room in the “New England Ville” neighborhood in Freetown, from where he made regular visits to two interim care centers (ICCs) for disarmed child soldiers: “Benin home,” located in eastern Freetown and run by the Catholic Mission, and a center run by the army, located near the small village of Crafton outside Freetown.

At these residential homes, young people were “prepared” for civilian life again. Coincidentally, some of the underage ex-combatants who already passed through these ICCs were living with their foster families in the New England Ville area. This provided a good opportunity to study and talk to ex-child soldiers in their day-to-day environment and away from the institutionalized ICC setting. One of the youngsters lived with his uncle a hundred or so meters uphill from where Peters stayed, and after a few informal interactions, they arranged a time for a more structured interview. Sitting on a rock overlooking Western Freetown, the boy told Peters about his war experiences and his prewar childhood days. He also expressed his passion for rap music, dating back to his time before conscription. In fact, he and his half brother – another ex-child soldier who was living with him in his uncle’s house – had recently recorded a cassette of songs, which was now on sale in the local stores. The interviewer and the interviewee agreed to go downtown to have a look in the music shop. When Peters asked for the particular tape, the salesman was somewhat puzzled by the interest of the “white man” for the recording. Peters joked that in Europe these two rappers were the biggest hit of the summer and that they were known by everyone. “How could that be?” asked the salesman. “Look at the picture [on the jacket] of those two rappers, in those ragtag clothes. You must be joking.” No one present – the salesman, Peters, and the ex-child soldier cum rapper – could imagine that within a few years, one of the two boys (the interviewee) portrayed on the jacket would indeed be famous, well beyond Europe, and would go on to meet with dignitaries including Bill Clinton and Nelson Mandela. Not because of his rap music, but because he, Ishmael Beah, had written down his experiences of being a child soldier in Sierra Leone in an autobiography titled *Long way gone: memoirs of a boy soldier* (2007). The book itself has become an

international best seller, described by some as “marking the arrival of the African boy killer” in popular culture (Cowley 2007).

The example above is as yet unparalleled in its impact but not atypical of the experiences of former child combatants whose lives have been documented, reconstructed, and mediated through processes of humanitarian intervention. In this chapter, the authors note how child soldiers have been framed and represented in a number of key transitions, from warzone to safety, from combatant to peace-maker, from perpetrator to victim, and ultimately from obscurity to ambassador and celebrity. Like other writers, the authors are keen to draw attention to the representation of child soldiers as an issue area in itself, which may drive and shape their resourcing and treatment (Rosen 2007; Macmillan 2009). Children may be complicit in these narratives, providing the central characters and plot lines but, unlike Beah, rarely able to have the last word.

The authors first comment on the well-documented rise in humanitarian interest in child soldiers, a phenomenon which provides the setting in which child soldier narratives are usually placed. Organizations have produced significant amounts of policy documents, best practice guidelines, and advocacy material on child soldiers. The digital age has brought a new immediacy to these humanitarian campaigns as organizations manipulate and juxtapose images and accounts in the jostle for impact and resources (Wells 2008). The desire for pictures and sound bites that “give life” to war-affected children and perhaps also bolster master narratives of ideal childhood remains undiminished. In turn these narratives may be republished and reframed multiple times (Pedersen and Sommerfelt 2007) increasingly via online social networks – creating a vast sea of fragments that can be trawled by Internet search engines. This secondary displacement and disembodiment of narratives, through the circulation of cropped comments and often sourceless images, represents a Pandora’s box beyond the scope of this chapter. Here, we draw attention to first accounts – primary narratives of child soldiers created through the interview process itself. The authors begin with an overview of the “market” for child soldier testimonies and its impact on their representation and then move on to look at the power relations of children with such a voice.

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## 2 Two Decades of Child Soldier Advocacy

Attention among academics, policy makers, and development practitioners to the phenomenon of underage combatants has significantly increased since the early 1990s. Contrary to the widespread expectation that the world would enter an era of relative peace, the end of the Cold War saw a surge in the number of intrastate conflicts, notably civil war in developing countries, with sub-Saharan Africa and Central and South Asia regions particularly affected (HSRP 2008, p. 11). Among the documented characteristics of these so-called “New Wars” were the high and rising numbers of children (forcibly) becoming members of armed groups and taking part in hostilities. The participation of child soldiers in armed conflicts and wars was

not itself a new phenomenon. As Rosen notes, it was the construction of the “humanitarian child,” coupled with concern over teenage combatants in particular that produced a crisis over their use (2007). Images of young and underage fighters participating in the (Cold War proxy) conflicts in Central America, East and Southeast Asia, and the Middle East were already circulating in the international press, but it would be Africa where a majority of images and reports would begin to appear. An estimated 40% of the world’s underage soldiers are in Africa (Drumbl 2012a), although the media’s disproportionate interest in this continent may have been enabled by a glut of photographic images from Sierra Leone in the 1990s, subsequently misappropriated to a wide variety of African conflicts.

During the 1990s, the principle of state sovereignty was also quickly, if selectively, eroded, and armed conflicts were no longer a state’s internal affair. Regional bodies, such as North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), and the African Union (AU), increasingly intervened in civil conflicts. But most significantly the United Nations expanded its mandate of diplomacy and peacebuilding/peacekeeping, placing more military observers and blue helmet troops on the ground. Intrastate conflicts became much more exposed to the gaze of the international community and its attendant norms and international legislation. The 1990s also saw a wave of new international human rights and humanitarian laws coming into action after the stagnation of the Cold War. A major reference point is still the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, drawn up in 1989 and now the most widely ratified treaty in the world. International non-governmental organizations, working on development or in humanitarianism, became significantly more active and more vocal using similar instruments.

Child soldiers, it has been suggested, became vital capital in diplomacy, convenient signifiers of incapable states offering a ready narrative of regime failure (Brooten 2008) and paving the way for international intervention on their behalf. As Moeller argues, by the 1990s “the concept of protecting children emerged as a core obligation” (2002, p. 53), a profitable humanitarian driver which also eased in some of the “uneasy” truths about childhoods in the new Millennium.

Perhaps benefiting from a post–Cold War interregnum, scholarly research on armed conflict was also no longer dominated by security analyzers and international relations scholars but increasingly became the subject of study for ethnographers, sociologists, and human rights specialists. It did not take long before the participation of large numbers of underage combatants in civil conflicts was conceptually (re)discovered. Among the first major post–Cold War publications on the issue of underage combatants was *Child Soldiers: The Role of Children in Armed Conflicts* by Guy Goodwin-Gill and Ilene Cohn. This 1994 study, commissioned by the Henry Dunant Institute in Geneva, documented and discussed the role of underage combatants in contemporary conflicts throughout the world. But the phenomenon was really put on the international agenda after the publication of the 1996 United Nations report *Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*. The report was the result of the appointment of Ms Graça Machel by United Nations Secretary

General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, as the expert to prepare an in-depth report on the impact of armed conflict and war on children. In August 1996, the report was presented to the UN General Assembly's fifty-first session and covered a wide range of topics, ranging from child soldiers, sexual exploitation, and gender-based violence to promoting psychological recovery and social reintegration (Machel 1996). The report was a prelude to a number of key events. In 1997, following the recommendations in the Machel report, the *Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict* was established. That year also witnessed the adoption of the *Cape Town Principles and Best Practices on the Prevention of Recruitment of Children into the Armed Forces and on Demobilization and Social Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Africa* (UNICEF 1997). These Principles, designed by practitioners also mirrored the complexity of child soldiers' roles and attempted to create more realistic criteria for their treatment. In 1999, the UN Security Council passed its first resolution on children and armed conflict, and in 2000, the *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict* (United Nations 2000) was adopted, and the first-ever UN Child Protection Advisor at a UN peacekeeping mission was deployed – in Sierra Leone. The United Nations Security Council has since regularly reported on the presence and abuse of child soldiers, and the UN's efforts are equally matched by major international NGOs. More recently, the *Paris Principles* (UNICEF 2007, p. 7) have updated the *Cape Town Principles* and “child[ren] below 18 years of age recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity” are an international policy domain.

INGOs created and/or focused specifically on the child soldier phenomenon remained in the ascendance and child soldiers arguably became the poster boys of contemporary conflict. In 1993, *War Child International* was founded (in a reaction to the wars in Yugoslavia) with the two main offices in Holland and Canada, respectively opening in 1994 and 1998. *War Child* has continually advocated against the use of children in armed forces. In 1998, the *Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers* was formed by six human rights and humanitarian organizations, to campaign for the demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers and lobby armed groups and governments which were known to use children in combat roles. *UNICEF*, *Save the Children Alliance*, *Amnesty International*, and *Human Rights Watch* are just a few of the many organizations which have launched major campaigns against the use of underage people in armed conflicts during the 1990s and after.

It is speculated that there are more child soldier NGOs than any other international issue area, and in general, child combatants are much more likely to be represented as victims than agents by such organizations. This is an age of humanitarian childhood – and of apparently transcultural constructions – the victim child, the lost child, and the problem child. Partly this is a pragmatic response to society's unparalleled reaction to vulnerable and infantile images and the legitimacy these appeals can secure. The growth of child-centered media reporting and humanitarian campaigns is one factor in explaining how child soldiers' also garner direct interest

and reportage. Narratives of child soldiers may be deliberately selected by aid agencies because of their apparent, stark reality and the ameliorative action that is immediately suggested by giving attention to such accounts. In a minimal sense at least the story telling has represented a reprieve in these children's vulnerability and opens up the possibility of a safe future. As many authors have documented, aid agencies of all kinds can feel direct pressure to focus on experiences of victimhood and downplay other aspects of young peoples' lives. As Shepler (2005, p. 199) notes, communities that want access to development funds must accept the official view that former child soldiers are primarily "children" and "victims" who are worthy of reconciliation and reintegration into society. In this environment, agencies and funders may also be tied into rehabilitation projects and evaluation-dependent funding. Practitioners in rehabilitation programs may be keen to evidence recovery and impact of particular treatment program on children – "reduced victimhood" if not recovered childhood. Children, however, who reject participation in a treatment or study will often not be included in the assessment of a treatment's efficacy. They are part of the unwritten narrative. As Stott observes of a recent study of Children Affected by Armed Forces (CAAF):

their thoughts, concerns and needs were, in the main, those of adults: livelihood strategies, vocation and parenting. Their carers, on the other hand, tended to communicate the notion of former CAAF as dependent youth in need of nurturing. As such, former CAAF were expected to be submissive to adults and respectful of their rules. (2009, p. 66)

Reflecting on the child-combatant reports in general and more specifically on NGO commissioned ones, Susan Shepler observes that: "Child soldier studies almost always begin from a human rights framework, and focus mainly on estimating the numbers involved, recounting individual horror stories, describing the legal instruments against the use of child soldiers, and evaluating reintegration programming" (2010, p. 298). Shepler then lists the four most often cited reasons in these reports for the recruitment of children into armed forces, namely: (1) demographics – there is a youth bulge in many countries which have underage conscription; (2) the changing nature of warfare – more intra- rather than interstate conflicts with civilians rather than the military becoming the target; (3) poverty – increasing the level of conscription as a survival strategy to secure basic needs such as protection, shelter, and food; and (4) characteristics of "the" child – that is children are supposedly more easily indoctrinated and intimidated than adult conscripts. To illustrate this last point, she presents two excerpts (2010, p. 299) from Human Rights Watch and the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers advocacy material, which clearly capture the perspective held or fostered by child centered NGOs on the phenomenon of child soldiers:

Physically vulnerable and easily intimidated, children typically make obedient soldiers. (Human Rights Watch 2004)

Both governments and armed groups use children because they are easier to condition into fearless killing and unthinking obedience; sometimes, children are supplied drugs and alcohol. (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers 2004)

Most reports dealing with these issues include child soldiers' "voices," represented as a separate, personal narrative (i.e., in a textbox) or as "sound bites" punctuating a report. In this sense at least former child soldiers may be afforded more opportunity to speak than other children affected by war. The critical factor here may be these young children's relative isolation from family or group "politics." Hart, for example, has written of the near ventriloquism of refugee children within established refugee communities whose adults cannot imagine that "the young say anything better" (2004, p. 175). Their narratives typically illustrate the horrors of what it is to experience war as a child (let alone actively take part in it), the deep traumas war evokes, and the subsequent need for demobilization and reintegration support for ex-child combatants (and subsequently the need for funding).

In contrast with the spirit of child-centered initiatives (including the UNCRRC), the extent to which children directly inform or even challenge their representation is still being realized (Boyden 2003). With few examples of southern counter-discourse (Martins 2011, p. 444), child soldiers of Anglophone and Francophone Africa have arguably become a "perpetual reinscription of the 'backwardness' of child soldier societies, of their victimhood, instability, and amorality in the unjust wars they partake in and in their use of children to fight them" (Macmillan 2009, p. 45). In turn, the widely mediated war-portraits of underage combatants still "believe a much more sublime, humanistic and granular reality of resilience, agency, potential, and globality" (Drumbl 2012b, p. 2). The sheer volume of humanitarian information about child soldiers is ironically suggestive of certainty about their presence and war's impact but arguably fails to illuminate the complexity of child soldiers' experiences. Child combatants have thus yielded powerful advocacy material albeit from finite resources, selective sympathies, and adult standpoints.

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### 3 Opportunities in Research and Representation

Interviews with (demobilized) child combatants have, however, provided important insights into the different roles children take in armed groups, war's psychosocial impact, and their own coping mechanisms. A general view has now emerged among scholars that child combatants are not without agency, even in situations of extreme adversity, and that conscription into armed groups does not necessarily always take place by blunt force (Mcintyre 2004; Denov 2010). Put simply then, children in war may actively negotiate their participation in war. Coercive conscription may be followed by autonomy in other areas of life affected by fighting forces. Alternatively, voluntary enrolment may yet be structurally produced and create little space for agency within a fighting force. And as constructivist thinkers would remind us there is still room for a black box of "unknowns" in between these positions. As James (2007, p. 266) reminds us:

childhood research is not simply about making children's own voices heard in this very literal sense by presenting children's perspectives. It is also about exploring the nature of the "voice" with which children are attributed, how that voice both shapes and reflects the ways

in which childhood is understood, and therefore the discourses within which children find themselves within any society.

Correspondingly there is now a critical academic focus on the social construction of childhoods forged in war (Shepler 2010; Denov 2010; Dupuy and Peters 2010; Jacob 2014; Kim Huynh et al. 2015). Scholarly research on child soldiers has begun to show, amongst other things, the agency of underage combatants even in difficult situations (Peters and Richards 1998; Peters 2004; McIntyre 2005), the gender dimensions of recruitment and participation (Mazurana and McKay 2001), and the historical dimensions of their use (Shepler 2010; Twum-Danso 2003). Studies have also questioned the assumed universally high levels of posttraumatic stress disorder experienced by war-affected populations, including child soldiers, and discussed vital but underreported evidence of resilience (Bracken and Petty 1998). These discussions and research findings have in turn enabled practitioners to come up with much more informed, tailor-made and participatory approaches when it comes to the demobilization and reintegration of former child soldiers and even the prevention of recruitment. For instance, acknowledging that Palestine children can be politically motivated in their violent struggle against the Israeli occupiers (Hart 2008), rather than being necessarily indoctrinated by Hamas cadres, opens the way for the discussion of more peaceful means of protest. Research has also shown how young people may utilize their experience of war to create opportunities for civic political participation (Blattman 2009, p. 245).

Following from this, researchers have turned their attention to hegemonic or viral stereotypes of child soldiers and how particularly barbaric aspects of child soldiering have been exaggerated or sensationalized. For instance, in the case of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda, child testimonies have been extrapolated and recycled amongst agencies and charities until they seem to be bearing truths common to all child soldiers. The voices of girl wives of commanders, subject to detention and rape have also circulated in this way. These stories in turn fuelled the contemporary and unprecedented, global, viral media campaign *#Kony 2012* which relied upon an historic and inaccurate collage of LRA atrocities. This complexity represents a critical juncture in studies of child soldiers and as Rosen (2007) has stated, the humanitarian discourse of childhood may be powerfully out of step with reality.

This article will now turn to the presence of the particular and the first person in stories of former child combatants. It will focus on the period of disarmament and demobilization of child soldiers and the ways in which it brings particular challenges to bear in giving testimony. It is argued that this process itself may require more critical attention than it is currently afforded. In turn, interview material yielded from child soldiers can be used and indeed manipulated to reaffirm conflicting (although not necessarily mutual exclusive) perceptions on underage combatants. Partly this is because the interviewers can be selective in the topics they raise and, more problematically, because of the ability of editors to be selective in the use of child soldier interview extracts. Moreover, the authors suggest that ex-child soldiers may also be responsible for this tension; they are, it will be argued, exceptionally trained in

“sensing” what other people want to get from them (e.g., certain answers during an interview). Here, one should not forget that many ex-child soldiers had to develop their wits and streetwise skills to the extreme just to survive.

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#### 4 The “Voice” of the Child Soldier?

Over the last one or two decades it is increasingly acknowledged that people themselves rather than researchers or policy makers are the real experts on their daily lives and the challenges they face. Clearly the emerge of participatory-oriented approaches (e.g., Chambers (1994), see also Long and Long (1992) for the actor-oriented approach) in research and development in the 1970s and 1980s allowed subjects to take a much more central role, being recognized as knowledgeable and capable agents. The emergence of rights-based approaches in the 1990s further stressed that people are rights holders, which includes the right to be heard. Even the World Bank, not widely known for its people-centered, participatory, and bottom-up approaches, did seem to somewhat change its paradigm, reflected in the publications of the Voices of the Poor project. According to the Bank’s website:

At the turn of the new millennium, the World Bank collected the voices of more than 60,000 poor women and men from 60 countries, in an unprecedented effort to understand poverty from the perspective of the poor themselves. **Voices of the Poor**, as this participatory research initiative is called, chronicles the struggles and aspirations of poor people for a life of dignity.

In the first half of the 1990s, interviewing (ex-) child soldiers was not necessarily considered as important as it is now. Perhaps reflecting both the paternalistic nature of international intervention and the slow pace of Western engagement with children as social agents, children were rarely directly interviewed by those trying to understand the phenomenon of high and rising number of underage combatants. It also goes without saying that they were rarely brought into research processes or consulted afterwards. It should be noted, however, that participatory research with children per se is arguably little realized in practice anywhere (van Beers et al. 2006). Mainstream views on child soldiers also indicated that it was precisely the experiences of having been forcibly conscripted, indoctrinated, and politically or ideologically brainwashed, which were thought to compromise the research value of their responses. Or they were assumed to be just too young or too deeply traumatized for their responses to be taken seriously. The mainstream perception of child soldiers at this time is perhaps best illustrated by the excerpts of the HRW and the Coalition presented above (although worryingly these are much more recent than the 1990s). Hence, to better understand child soldiers, researchers depended much more on secondary sources, such as social workers, psychologists and psychiatrists, school teachers, religious leaders, and parents or guardians.

In addition, when interviews did take place, widely held ideas about child soldiers as victims, forced into committing atrocities under the influence of drugs, physical



threat, and indoctrination, also framed the initial focus of the questions asked to ex-child soldiers. The below extract of an interview with an ex-child soldier in Sierra Leone illustrates this:

Question: Can you tell me other bad things [you did in the army]?

Answer: *Well, other bad things like, we kill most of them. Cut their head off. Like the rebel, not the civilians. We kill most of the rebel, if we go to attack, we catch a rebel. When we come they will say like this: 'You boy, go and kill that rebel.' He will be down like a chicken. We take a knife and cut it off.*

Q: And the commander gives the order to kill?

A: *Yes, like us. I too kill two times. I slaughter because one of the rebel, they have pulled the rebel, and then: 'Okay, you boy, go and kill.' So they would not even bother, they just say: 'Okay you boy, go and kill that rebel,' and they went away. So if you don't kill that rebel, they will kill you. If you let that rebel go free, well, you will die for the rebel.*

Q: Did you find it difficult to kill?

A: *It was difficult, because I do not do that any before. Yes, it was difficult when I... even I want not to do that. When I want not to do that, one of lieutenant fired a shot in ground, ground-level, say if I don't, he will kill me. So they force me to kill. So at that time I kill, I have the mind now to kill.*

Here it would seem that the interviewer is particularly interested in the atrocities committed by the child (and by asking about them runs the risk to provoke further trauma, which may then be left unaided). The “down-to-earth” response of the ex-child soldier is horrifying and must be the result of deep trauma and intensive indoctrination, or so the reader must conclude. The responses also underline a complete lack of agency and the high level of victimhood of child soldiers: they are used, like the interviewee, to slaughter their captured enemies and if unwilling their own lives are threatened.

A rather different picture of the agency of child soldiers emerges from the following extract. Here the interviewer is not interested in the number of people the young ex-combatant killed or in the different atrocities he committed but aims to understand the conditions for recruitment of young and underage combatants better. The young male (again from the armed conflict in Sierra Leone) indicates that he voluntarily joined the soldiers. Among the reasons he stated for joining is to free his home town from rebel occupation, which probably refers to his desire for a normal family life with his family around, a house, and the opportunity to go to school again:

Question: Did you ask them or did they ask you to join?

Answer: *Actually, I asked them for me to join because I was not a soldier, and all of us were going up and down, up and down. Like this, if the rebel is here, they want to come and attack here, all of us will go. And I don't have a weapon so I told them that I want to join them, that I want to join the force.*

Q: So what was your reason to join?

A: *Well, why I wanted to join the army? That place I love it so much, R. [his place of birth]. So I want to defend the place. That is why I really joined the army. So that we fight against the rebels so that the place will get free.*

Q: Do you have another reason for joining?

*A: The more reason? Yes, I have another one. If you don't join the army, they will kill you, they will kill you. Because if they see you running they will kill you. So I too join the army so that I can be free at that time. One week after the rebel attack, I joined the force.*

What becomes clear from the above two interview extracts is that the focus and interests of the interviewer – that is the kind of questions that are asked, often based on certain assumptions (and prejudices?) – do influence the emerging picture of what it is to be a child soldier. And there is another way in which the interviewer/researcher can influence this. Few reports, campaigns, or academic journals give the opportunity to publish interviews with ex-child soldiers in full. Rather, the researcher (or editor) looks for those extracts which most clearly communicate or illustrate a certain issue. In the case of campaigning material these may be no more than one or two lines. The extent to which this selective ability of researchers and editors can influence the emerging picture can be illustrated by the above two interview extracts: the first one of the traumatized boy soldier and the other from the rather agentive young (but underage) fighter. Although they were presented as extracts of interviews with two different ex-child soldiers, in reality they were taken from a single interview with one ex-child combatant conducted by Peters in 1996. Clearly, the full interview included material which could be used to underscore the perception of child soldiers as poor victims forced to commit terrible atrocities as well as material that could illustrate the argument of child soldiers having much more agency – and for instance making deliberate and rational choices to join – than is traditionally assumed. The use of terms such as “child or boy soldier” versus “young (male) ex-combatant” only adds to this construction, arguably to be further compounded by the pejorative associations of African youth (Wells 2008). In Sierra Leone, demobilization began in 1993 and was organized by UNICEF.

Besides the interviewer and/or editor, the interviewee him- or herself is also able to manipulate the emerging picture. Interviewees can decide to just tell part of their experiences or even lie about their experiences and lives, although not all people would find it easy to lie consistently. The question therefore is if ex-child soldiers are any good at fabricating facts and events, and if so, what reason or advantage could they have to do this? As already explained, children caught up and actively taking part in warfare are likely to have developed extremely good skills to adapt to and survive a hostile environment. A skill most useful for those caught up in conflict is the ability to switch “identities.” With shifting and diffusing frontlines as one of the main characteristics of many of today’s low intensity conflicts, it may be essential for civilians to show (government troops) that one is a loyal supporter of the government and nothing more than a humble peasant. While the following day, after a rebel offensive, it becomes paramount to portray oneself as a strong rebel supporter and a vigilant person in the community, ready to report any suspicious movement. Young people caught up in the midst of conflict have an additional role among their repertoire: they can switch between the image of a more or less helpless and innocent child, or if required, to that of a young but commanding and aggressive young adult. This ability is one of the reasons why young and ultra-young combatants are tactically welcomed by commanders. They may be cheap, loyal, and fearless but

they also have a particular skill in spying and intelligence work. It is here where the boy child soldier and perhaps even more so the girl child soldier assumes the role of an innocent child, perhaps making up a story of how he or she has lost his or her parents, after which he or she then mingles with civilians or presents himself or herself to the soldiers to perform domestic tasks while secretly carrying out intelligence work for several days or even weeks on a row. The success and frequency of this particular tactic is rather cynically underlined by populations and soldiers becoming increasingly suspicious of “abandoned” children presenting themselves in need of care, as war progresses.

These fluid articulations of perpetrator/victim child shed light on the challenges of learning directly from children associated with fighting forces. However, this recognition may not be shared by researchers or the media. In a further twist, child soldiers’ rehabilitation programs have provided a unique opportunity for child soldiers to tell their stories again. Many child soldiers who undergo demobilization end up – at least temporarily – in an interim care center. The centers provide a peaceful environment where young people receive (at least) two meals a day, educational and vocational training, sports and counseling, and shelter for the night. The anticipated stay of young people in these centers is 6–9 months – sufficient time for them to recuperate, learn a trade, and become accustomed to a civilian way of life while regaining their childhood again – or so it is thought. After this period, young people are – preferably – reunited with their parents or, if not traced, with their family members. If these cannot be located, families in the capital who could act as foster parents are identified. Unlike the issue area itself, care centers and their “patients” are probably in danger of receiving too much outside attention. The centres provide an almost ideal situation or incubator for any interested journalist, researcher, or human rights activist, with no or little need to travel into more dangerous areas and with informants nicely in one place and focused on the exercise in hand. It offers the opportunity to write about a heartbreaking topic, often portraying and photographing children who have undergone the most gruesome experiences.

It is perhaps surprising that more attention has not been paid to the asymmetrical social dynamics between children and interviewers. For children who are tuned into survival and experiencing a temporary refuge and an even briefer episode of therapy, their contact with a potentially philanthropic outsider must represent an unrivalled opportunity. Through his work in Liberia, Utas has observed the methodological issues raised by assumptions of donor status of interviewers and consequent tactics of “victimcy” by interviewees:

From the informant’s point of view, there is much to gain by supplying a complete victim image. Such an image is intended to rid the person of social blame in a particular moral landscape and creates a platform for both social (re)acceptance and socio-economic possibilities. A victim image opens up possibilities not only for partaking in lucrative emergency aid projects but also for the creation of compassionate bonds with important social actors in both war zone and postwar settings. (2005, p. 409)

Utas describes this staging of “victimcy” as “a form of self-representation by which a certain form of tactical agency is effectively exercised under the trying, uncertain, and disempowering circumstances that confront actors in warscapes” (2005, p. 403). And as Susan Shepler convincingly showed in her research on Sierra Leone, child soldiers also quickly become adept at understanding and reflecting back the needs and perspectives of the agencies [or persons] assisting them (Shepler 2005). The young people in the ICCs are notoriously quick to find out what journalists and some researchers want to extract from them, perhaps terrible stories about murder and rape, preferably told by very young-looking children. While the stories themselves may not be made up, the content has not necessarily been experienced by the informant himself or herself. One example is that of a young Liberian ex-child “soldier,” who reached American newspaper headlines with his story but back in Liberia was identified by social workers of a long-established NGO as being a street-child, who never took active part in the fighting. While most contacts between ex-child soldiers in interim care centers and journalists and researchers may only give the ex-child soldier a small token or gift, once in a while the relationship is continued. There are several cases where researchers, journalists, and NGO staff have tried to help and support ex-child soldiers on a more personal basis. Again knowing of and being able to play the role that benevolent Westerners expect might prove to be beneficial. For journalists and NGO workers, this character might be that of an innocent child. For researchers, it might be that of a more outspoken and politically conscious person.

Ironically, looking and acting more like a child may be an imperative in avoiding recruitment or being accepted for demobilization and an ICC. In places where birth documentation may be limited, the first challenge is in proving one is still a child. In practice such youth may also be social and political actors – providing labor, experiencing parenthood, and wielding violence – and yet as members of the international community they are circumscribed by a framework of children’s rights which does not capture or reward their agency. McEvoy-Levy captures this well:

...under international law, an 18 year old is left out of the child category and therefore does not have access to the psychological and social reintegration resources provided to children whereas a 16 year old who led her peers into battle may require support beyond just helping locate her family. (2011)

Child soldier rehabilitation programs in turn touch only a fraction of combatants and typically exclude older children (Del Felice and Wisler 2007) or fail to provide a structurally adequate guard against remobilization (Stark et al. 2009; Ozerdem and Podder 2011). A quick scan of images of children used in accompanying humanitarian narratives will also show an absence of tall or mature looking children or those probably between the ages of 15 and 18 for example. And as Wells analysis of NGO campaigns about child soldiers suggests, reliance on young and also female “voices” is evident further up the chain:

both Oxfam and Action Aid almost exclusively use images of women and children and offer narratives of *their* [emphasis added] experiences of war. One of the most visually striking aspects of the websites of all three NGOs is the almost total absence of images of African men. (2008, p. 246)

Conversely, analysis of post-conflict reconstruction programs shows that it is “community”-based approaches that most adequately support children’s voices and integration of their needs, despite the (necessarily) child-centric foci of INGO campaigns (Schwartz 2009). The humanitarian drive to identify child victims and child soldiers has perhaps unhelpfully diverted attention away from more general shared experiences and even their own perceived responsibilities in war. The instrumentalizing of child soldier’s particular victimhood is one such further consequence (Wessells 2006). Ironically, dependency is now more required, and recognized by humanitarian actors, than resilience or agency.

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## 5 Conclusion

In war zones and in ICCs, the truth is, in a corporeal sense, tantalizing and seemingly portable. But it is also inevitably compromised by the nature of war, where reporting and being reported can bring immediate physical risk or opportunity to either party. It could be argued that independent testimonies in any sense are few. The risk of remobilization or retribution is real and child soldiers undergoing demobilization are referred to by number to reduce these possibilities (Stark et al. 2009, p. 525). For former combatants in war, a “safe harbor” may still represent an extension of these politics. Just as peace treaties between states may make little reference to state parties’ use of child soldiers, underage participants may also choose silence or partial truths. The concern here is of the consequences for children. Children may be “finishing off” adults’ sentences – and inadvertently completing humanitarian stories with both parties holding little regard for the truth. Of course this represents a grim reality in itself, but in such a critical and yet under-resourced issue area these junctures and their pliable narrations are unlikely to be challenged.

James draws attention to how “voices of children” characterize the humanitarian scene, even though children themselves remain in very weak partnerships with the adults who hear them (2007, p. 1). One might ask if “the story of the child soldier” is also a convenient modern day fairy tale for “online adults.” The key character is isolated from family and society and fighting to ward off death. We implicitly learn that the child has survived to tell the tale and in some small way overcome and outgrown the experience and indeed the agency that we are most unsettled by. We have some closure in each exposure, regardless of the efficacy of their treatment. What our efforts also reveal is commitment to tell or narrate (our) fears and stories: to cope – or warn – but not necessarily solve.

Clearly, all those working on issues around child soldiers have moral and professional responsibilities. Guided questions or a single focus should be

prevented, and the selection of extracts from interviews with ex-child soldiers should be done with care. To guard against fabrications, triangulation of data should take place, and interview material should be compared across a different range of child combatants (rank, age, gender, mode of conscription, etc.) and ideally with the experience of noncombatant but war-affected youth. Further contextualization should take place by means of a historical, cultural, and socioeconomic analysis of the country and the conflict to better understand the meaning young people themselves and the local communities give to underage participation in violence. Finally, we know that understandings of de facto childhood can differ considerably from de jure childhood, varying across different cultures. The most common threshold of childhood, prior to which children are treated differently to adults may in fact be closer to 12 years, or even earlier, before puberty or developed labor capacity. To think about children politically is to be engaging with many disciplines and multiple realities – which all anchor down the *child* we may seek to protect or frame the *childhood* that is useful to deploy. In terms of violence against young people, we return to the observation that the issue area of “war” and also “children in war” is an important one but that it conceptually drives a wedge between children and other relevant stages and contexts.

In a few well-profiled cases, the creation of first-person narratives has been an exit strategy for children who know that an emotive and yet rationalized testimony may lead them out of conflict. As Utas argues, this potential for “upwards mobility” through victimcy must be considered in research methodology. Despite this, methodology is “neglected” and often involves quantitative approaches and short-term field work (2004, p. 209). He notes that “generally research on young soldiers (as well as their wives or girlfriends) worldwide is carried out by ‘strangers’ seeking to collect stories of private and deeply traumatic character during one or maybe two interactions” (Utas 2005, p. 409). Thus the importance of building rapport with the interviewees – however time-consuming this may be – cannot be overestimated. We cannot afford for the real value of academic, policy, and advocacy research on child soldiers to be undermined by the convenient equivalent of speed dating and “drive-by” ethnography.

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# Addicted to Orphans: How the Global Orphan Industrial Complex Jeopardizes Local Child Protection Systems

# 6

Kristen E. Cheney and Karen Smith Rotabi

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## Abstract

While many scholars and activists from multiple disciplines have reported on various aspects of orphan policy and the international adoption industry, there has been little synthesis of this information and its implications for global child protection. This chapter therefore puts the pieces together to argue that the misidentification of “orphans” as a category for development and humanitarian intervention has subsequently been misappropriated by many Western individuals and charitable organizations. Promoting a discourse of orphan rescue,

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they foster the growth of an “orphan industrial complex.” In developing countries like Guatemala and Uganda whose children are targeted for “rescue,” the discourse and practice of “orphan rescue” is subsequently jeopardizing child protection and even driving the “production” of orphans as objects for particular kinds of intervention-counter to established international standards of child protection.

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**Keywords**

International adoption • Child protection • Orphans • Humanitarian intervention • Orphan rescue • Orphan industrial complex • Guatemala • Uganda

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## 1 Introduction

In the midst of global conflict and violence, children often come to represent the tragedy of suffering and the motivation for the restoration of peace. International responses to child suffering, and orphans in particular, can easily become a barometer for global humanitarianism. Many charitable organizations promote the building of orphanages, encourage volunteer work at such institutions, and even posit international adoption as a solution to purported “orphan crises” in the wake of social upheaval – despite their cost inefficiency or lack of support for local efforts to improve overall child protection. Persistent narratives of “orphan rescue” thus drive an industry that, counter to its stated goal, often spurs the proliferation of “orphans” and even child trafficking.

While many scholars and activists from various disciplines have reported on numerous aspects of orphan policy and the international adoption industry, there has been little synthesis of this information and its implications for global child protection. This chapter therefore puts the pieces together to argue that the misidentification of “orphans” as a category for development and humanitarian intervention has subsequently been misappropriated by many Western individuals and charitable organizations. Promoting a discourse of orphan rescue, they foster the growth of an “orphan industrial complex.” In developing countries whose children are targeted for “rescue,” the discourse and practice of “orphan rescue” is subsequently jeopardizing child protection and even driving the “production” of orphans as objects for particular kinds of intervention counter to established international standards of child protection.

This chapter first traces the etymology of the definition of “orphan” and its attendant “crises.” Then, using examples from Guatemala and Uganda, we consider how the idea of an “orphan crisis” has traveled from development to charitable responses and what effects this has on local child protection systems. It then weighs the implications of ostensibly humanitarian interventions for orphans and offers some alternative care models.

## 2 Defining “Orphans”

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, UNICEF increased efforts to highlight the plight of children affected by AIDS. Since the Convention on the Rights of the Child makes no specific mention – and therefore offers no definition – of orphans, UNICEF defines an orphan as “. . . a child under 18 years of age whose mother, father, or both parents have died. . .” (UNICEF 2006, p. 4). They promoted this purposefully broad definition in order to draw development aid’s attention to the challenges the AIDS pandemic was posing to child well-being, particularly in Africa. By this definition, they could claim that an estimated 53 million sub-Saharan African children had been orphaned by 2006 – 30% (15.7 million) of them by AIDS (UNICEF 2006, p. iv).

Though UNICEF’s interpretation of orphanhood has been criticized for emphasizing static, biological definitions of kinship and orphanhood in contexts where, traditionally, orphans are socially defined within a broad and pliable kin care network, their definition has become standard. In efforts to raise their visibility, international NGOs highlighted the plight of AIDS orphans, sometimes focusing on orphanhood at the expense of other children who may have similar or greater needs (Foster et al. 2005, p. 3). Further, by focusing on orphans themselves, aid efforts can easily label them in reifying ways that ignore crucial family and community support. Such reification creates an orphan identity that is both pathologized (Henderson 2006, p. 304) and made a site for benevolent humanitarian intervention (Ferguson and Freidus 2007). But this humanitarianism often comes with adverse consequences, intended or unintended. Such targeting may cause household conflicts over resources and alter community priorities (Foster et al. 2005, p. 3).

Local vernaculars rarely have words that mean what “orphan” does in international development parlance. For example, many African countries with a strong ethos of caring for children who lose their parents use vernacular terminology to describe orphans by circumstance, historically based on social delineations in which situations of actual care are emphasized. Under traditional kin obligations, children typically have to lose not only their mother and father but also most of their aunts and uncles, and become essentially homeless, to be considered orphans. Most African vernacular translations of “orphan” therefore mean something more like “left behind or abandoned” (Chirwa 2002, p. 96).

However, as if to exacerbate the overwhelming statistics generated by the UN definition of “orphan,” the aid industry has also cultivated the terms “orphans and vulnerable children” (OVC) and “children affected by AIDS” (CABA) to emphasize childhood vulnerability generated by the disease. Orphanhood makes children “vulnerable,” but NGO field workers also recognized other HIV/AIDS-related vulnerabilities based on multiple structural factors. NGOs quickly realized that deepening poverty due to HIV/AIDS was often a greater issue than orphanhood itself. The acronym OVC thus evolved within the aid industry to encompass the range of children at risk or in difficult circumstances, above and beyond

orphanhood – as well as those made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS even before they are orphaned (Robson and Ansell 2000). In response to the challenges of trying to program specifically for HIV/AIDS-affected orphans, aid organizations began to consider widening the scope of childhood vulnerability due to HIV/AIDS beyond orphanhood. The heightened level of vulnerability is variously attributed to global economic downturn, the ways fostering households are affected by taking in orphans in crisis, more grandparents becoming primary caretakers, and particular dimensions of rural/urban poverty. Employing the term “OVC” also allowed NGOs to consider their work from broader social development, child protection, and children’s rights mandates because it acknowledged that orphans, depending on their circumstances, may not be in as precarious a position as certain other children who still have their parents. Such terms thus help recognize that children other than orphans are in need of assistance. As for CABA, “Children are affected when their close or extended family, their community, and, more broadly, the structures and services that exist for their benefit are strained by the consequences of the HIV/AIDS pandemic” (Gruskin and Tarantola 2005, p. 138). However, by this broad definition, practically every child in sub-Saharan Africa is now a “CABA.” This leads one to wonder what in fact such broad targeting actually achieves – especially as the notion of vulnerability becomes increasingly delinked from HIV/AIDS.

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### 3 The Construction of a Crisis

The way UNICEF’s definition inflated orphan numbers led to an outcry about an imminent “orphan crisis” that threatened to overwhelm extended family systems. Following UNICEF, scholars and practitioners began to use the term “orphan crisis” both widely and uncritically (Guest 2003; Roby and Shaw 2006; Drah 2012). Yet, the “orphan crisis” that UNICEF had predicted early on never actually came to pass, as extended family networks – with the help of strong social protection policies – were largely able to absorb children who had lost their parents. However, as discussed above, UNICEF’s broad definition distorted local definitions by singling out orphaned children as particularly vulnerable (Meintjes and Giese 2006; Sherr et al. 2008). Nonetheless, international responses have tended to focus on the “orphan” in isolation from the extended family and even the broader community. While this elicits a variety of charitable, humanitarian responses out of sympathy for parentless children, inflating orphan numbers to attract scarce resources ultimately does little to remedy the structural issues that lead to orphanhood in the first place (Cheney 2010).

Despite these disjunctures, the notion of an ongoing “orphan crisis” persists, and it has spread beyond the professional development community to be commonly used by charitable organizations. In particular, the “orphan crisis” has been appropriated by the US evangelical community as a justification for widespread congregational encouragement to internationally adopt (Joyce 2013). Arguing that the Bible (specifically James 1:27, which says, “Pure and undefiled religion before God

and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble. . .”) commands Christians to help widows and orphans, the evangelical community is fueling the misappropriation of the term “orphan” to promote a missionary agenda that can actually put children at risk of trafficking. More and more Western evangelicals are buying into the discourse of orphan rescue, calling on followers to adopt and serve in orphanages as a way to “minister” to millions of orphans around the world through a gospel-centered method called “orphanology” (<http://www.orphanologybook.com/>). For example, the Christian Alliance for Orphans (CAFO) promotes an annual Orphan Sunday to “defend the cause of the fatherless,” (following Isaiah 1:17). They also hold an annual Orphan Summit, which has “become the national hub for what Christianity Today called, ‘the burgeoning Christian orphan care movement’” (<http://www.christianalliancefororphans.org/summit/>). Rather than questioning the definition of orphans or what constitutes an “orphan crisis,” the summit – which caters mainly to prospective adoptive parents and US adoption agencies working worldwide – encourages adoption over family preservation. As alternative care consultant Mark Riley points out, “CAFO are still funded partially by adoption agencies, and adoption agencies need orphans. . . And the easiest way to need orphans is to make sure that you can categorize as many children as possible as orphans.”

Other Christian organizations like 147 Million Orphans (implying the number of “orphans” in need of “saving”) heed the call by selling merchandise “to raise awareness and ignite discussion about the orphan crisis” ([http://www.147millionorphans.com/About-Us\\_ep\\_7.html](http://www.147millionorphans.com/About-Us_ep_7.html)). 147 Million Orphans also fundraises for orphanage construction and maintenance, “serving trips” by young missionaries to feed children at various orphanages around the world and to help families raise money for their adoption costs. One young missionary even started an “Addicted to Orphans” merchandise line in 2012 to support her mission trip to orphanages in Uganda, so people can now advertise their obsession with orphans and adoption (<http://emonamission.blogspot.nl/2012/12/are-you-orphan-addict.html>).

Many well-meaning Westerners hoping to ameliorate the circumstances of orphanhood have traveled to poor countries and established orphanages, which are often funded by both soliciting donations and charging foreign tourists to volunteer for several days, weeks, or months. Such orphan tourism has sparked what Walker and Hartley call “the orphan industrial complex” (<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/06/cambodias-orphan-industrial-complex/276472/>), in which orphans and orphanages become tourist attractions. These discourses of orphan rescue also tend to reinscribe children as passive victims, rather than dealing directly with child protection. While many orphan tourists coming from afar think they are offering children the love and attention they deserve, in reality they may be causing serious damage to individual children’s development as well as broader child protection systems. The building of orphanages, especially in poor communities, attracts or even entraps children in the institutions, which alienate them from their families and communities, as it solidifies the stigmatizing label of “orphan.” Even for those legitimately placed in institutional care, having many different volunteers stream

through for short periods exposes children to repeated abandonment, ultimately making it all the more challenging for them to form attachments to adult caregivers (Richter and Norman 2010). A study of orphan tourism in Ghana found that children quickly formed and broke attachments as they “. . .are used to constant arrivals and departures of volunteers, seem to get attached quickly, but are very conscious of the fact that there is a leaving date” (Voelkl 2012, p. 36). For children exploited in this manner, relationship formation is distorted, resulting in anxious attachment and superficial relationships.

But the orphan industrial complex actually goes well beyond tourism and orphanage establishment to pushing toward adoption and even child trafficking. Encouraging international adoption thus drives a highly lucrative adoption market that unnecessarily institutionalizes children and even “manufactures” orphans for profit (Smolin 2010; Cheney 2014). For this reason, UNICEF has responded to the pro-adoption community’s appropriation of their orphan estimates with concern; they have made qualifying statements in line with the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption that reemphasize community-based care over institutionalization and international adoption (UNICEF 2007), but this has only earned them pariah status among various adoption proponents who, while using their orphan statistics, also call UNICEF anti-adoption and even anti-child (Bartholet and Smolin 2012).

The pro-adoption lobby has also become very powerful in the USA, which already receives 47% of all internationally adopted children (Selman 2013). In 2013, Senator Landrieu of Louisiana introduced the Children in Families First Act (CHIFF), which unabashedly aims to allocate federal resources “. . .to strengthen intercountry adoption to the United States. . .” (“Children in Families First Act of 2013” 2013). Premised on the idea that adoptable children are languishing in institutions while US families are waiting to adopt them, the bill ostensibly eliminates unnecessary bureaucratic barriers in order to help settle institutionalized children around the world in American families. Yet CHIFF’s authors minimize recent adoption scandals as they ignore how children end up in orphanages in the first place. Further, CHIFF implies that the USA could link aid to developing countries to adoption policy – a practice explicitly prohibited by the Hague Convention, to which the USA is a signatory.

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## 4 Guatemala: A Look Back at a Past “Orphan” Disaster

One does not have to reach far back into adoption history to see the effects of such emphases on adoption and orphan rescue. Guatemala entered into an intercountry adoption moratorium at the end of 2007 after sending at least 30,000 children abroad as adoptees from 2000 to 2007; most children joined families in the USA. Fundamentally, there was a pervasive belief among those adopting that impoverished orphans were in desperate need of homes and that intercountry adoption was a noble and just means of child rescue, no matter how much it cost. As such, the term *disaster* is not an overstatement; the loss of such a great number

of children who were not *true orphans* would be called such if the children were to be swept from their families and communities in any other manner. The system closure only came after years of criticism from a variety of sources; internally, human rights defenders documented a *baby market* including child sales and documented cases of child abduction (Casa Alianza et al. 2007). The international community made similar observations, ranging from the UN special investigations and resulting reports to media scrutiny documenting personal stories of force, fraud, and coercion including falsified DNA tests and children lost or abducted into international adoption (Bunkers and Groza 2012).

Compelling but lesser-known stories included accounts of those living and working in Guatemala who tried to bring attention to child sales and abduction; Shyrel and Steve Osborne (US citizens) who run a faith mission and children's home called *Amor de Nino* (Love the Child) were outspoken, for example. They openly identified the corruption, often calling out those posing as evangelical missions or noble organizations while really being a profit-driven entity set up simply to entrap children and families in the orphan machine (Rotabi et al. 2010). Shyrel Osborn repeatedly went to the US Embassy to report force, fraud, and coercion in adoption and to advocate for Guatemalan women and birth families (Personal communication, August, 2009). In time, when she realized that the US government was not going to cease adoption from Guatemala – largely as a result of pressure from powerful adoption proponents such as Senator Landrieu – Osborne joined women who lodged hunger protests as a result of their children being abducted into adoption (Rotabi 2012a). The last starvation protest, in July 2009, eventually led to important legal movement; the most notable result was a Guatemalan court order for a young girl to be returned to Guatemala as a victim of child abduction rather than a child sent to the USA as a bona fide adoptee (Rotabi 2012a).

Embedded in many of these stories, either explicitly or implicitly, was the assertion that most of the children adopted from Guatemala did not truly meet the definition of *orphan*, as they had one or two living parents, an extended family, or others in their local community who were willing and able to care for them (Roby et al. 2014). However, the international adoption system was so powerful that children were swept from their communities and institutionalized (some were spared the grief of institutions and lived in foster care) and awaited new families in the USA (Bunkers and Groza 2012). The wait time for the child to join their new family was relatively brief in most cases, and the cost to secure such a child was approximately USD\$25,000 and upward – relatively inexpensive compared to other sending countries like China and Russia at the time (Casa Alianza et al. 2007). While this is an obvious distortion, in a country that is one of the most impoverished in the Western Hemisphere, those hoping to adopt turned a blind eye and wired large sums of money to secure their adoptions. As a result, adoptions from Guatemala remained at a record high with an estimated 17 children leaving the country daily as adoptees during the peak years (Selman 2012).

The avalanche of mounting evidence that Guatemalan adoptees were “manufactured” through adoption intermediaries who were profiting from trafficking children into adoption forced Guatemala to sign the Hague Convention, and in

2007, they suspended their adoption programs to bring the child adoption system into compliance (Rotabi 2012b). As Guatemala closed to intercountry adoptions, other countries became the new cause for concern. Most notably, there was a clear shift to Ethiopia, which began to rise as the next *orphan* destination (Bunkers et al. 2012). Other African countries have also gained a high profile in the “orphan rescue” market and the rush to “help” orphans ostensibly due to war and the AIDS epidemic. Troubling practices continue to spill over from one international adoption destination to another; as countries like The Democratic Republic of Congo and Kenya close to adoption due to irregularities, agencies seek new footholds in other countries with less regulation (Cheney 2014). Often, adoption agencies promote the narrative of rescue to justify opening a new country program in order to remain financially viable (O’Connor and Rotabi 2012).

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## 5 Uganda: The Next Destination for Orphan Addicts

Today, Uganda makes a good case study for considering the effects of focusing on orphans as opposed to other vulnerable children, as recent trends there reflect well-established and problematic patterns in orphan care – from orphan tourism and the mushrooming of orphanages to infestation by a voracious and corrupt orphan industrial complex. Already-convoluted OVC targeting questions (Cheney 2010) have been further complicated by the influx of foreign missionaries setting up orphanages, orphan tourists, international adoption agencies, and prospective adoptive parents. All of these actions are disrupting local systems of community-based care and disrupting the development of effective national child protection policies. A closer look at how the orphan industrial complex acts as a pull factor helps illuminate what is problematic about the rush toward orphan rescue.

### 5.1 Abandonment, Institutionalization, and Adoption: The Ugandan Case

It is important to first note that Uganda has no significant history of institutional care. In 1992, after decades of civil war and at the height of the AIDS pandemic, only 2,900 children were in institutional care in Uganda (Williamson and Greenberg 2010, p. 7). Today, 14% of Uganda’s 17.1 million children – or 2.43 million – have lost at least one parent to death, an increase from 11.5% in 2000. 45.6% of these children have lost their parent(s) to HIV/AIDS (Uganda Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development 2011, p. 4). Though this might easily be interpreted as an “orphan crisis” threatening to overwhelm traditional extended family care, about 90% of orphaned children are cared for in their families and communities (The Joint Learning Initiative on Children and HIV/AIDS 2009, p. 2). These facts both problematize the very notion of “orphan” as a salient local category and fail to explain trends in institutionalization: by 2009, the number of children in institutions had skyrocketed to 40,000, and in 2013, it had jumped to



50,000 (<http://www.alternative-care-uganda.org/problem.html>). According to Riley, “We don’t have an orphan crisis in Uganda... I think we have a family and child protection crisis.”

These numbers also seem disproportionate to what policymakers know about child abandonment in Uganda. While it is difficult to find reliable numbers, social workers estimate that about 100 children are abandoned annually, half in the capital city, Kampala. They are typically left at hospitals or in semipublic places such as bus depots or pit latrines, where they are likely to be found. However, social workers indicate that where they are able to reunify abandoned children with their families, poverty tends to have been an overriding consideration in abandonment (as well as an obstacle to reunification). They also surmise that child abandonment is increasing due to a breakdown in the extended family structure that would otherwise support families and children. But there is a question of cause and effect here: according to social worker John Kasule, who has decades of experience working in babies’ homes in Kampala,

People are positing that the reason kids go into homes is poverty, and they’ll be better tended in the homes. But in actuality they’re making them – and their families – more vulnerable... In a country like Uganda, children are a source of support for the family. They enhance the support because their parents are poor but they get support of the children, and then they can prosper... as one unit. But now when you pull out those children from there... the support you are giving the children far away from [their parents], the families are not benefiting from it.

Nevertheless, as orphanages spring up around the country, so do children to fill them. Though many people may assume that orphanages are being established to meet the increase in orphans due to child abandonment, it is more likely the other way around. Riley says, “If you look at the 50,000 kids we’ve got in institutional care in Uganda, the truth is most of them are there for education or because the orphanages are an attractive option for vulnerable families – rather than they need protection and care outside of their family structure. It’s an attracting force, and this is sometimes what Westerners don’t understand.”

## 5.2 Addicted to Orphans: Building the Orphan Industrial Complex

Kasule laments the misuse of the term “orphan” in Uganda; many children he has seen in orphanages are not in fact parentless. As with most children in institutions around the world, a Ugandan baseline study on the state of institutional care in 2012 estimated that 85% of children in institutional care have living, locatable relatives (Riley 2012). At the same time, less than 25% of care institutions have family tracing and reunification programs (<http://unitingforchildren.org/2014/06/changing-lives-in-uganda/>). Kasule, who has traced many relatives of children in his care and reunified institutionalized children with their families throughout his career, says, “The extended-family system is still working quite well... Why is the child protection system not drawing on that strength?”

The answer is that the orphan rescue discourse is more powerful, and adoption proponents more moneyed, than Uganda's child welfare system – and it is driving the establishment of orphanages along with the institutionalization of children, sometimes for the explicit purpose of international adoption. The number of childcare institutions increased from 212 in 2009 to over 600 in 2012 (Riley 2012). According to Riley, who helped draft Uganda's first Alternative Care Framework, by late 2013, the number of institutions had risen to over 800 – almost all of which are funded by foreign faith-based organizations. Only 30 of these institutions are licensed and recognized by the Ugandan government (<http://unitingforchildren.org/2014/06/changing-lives-in-uganda/>).

Though external support is often assumed to be benevolent and unconditionally positive, it can obstruct local efforts to address an issue like orphanhood (Drah 2012, pp. 8–9). “There’s a number of reasons why people would start an orphanage,” Riley says. “One is, they actually care, but they just don’t know what the right thing to do is. The second is money. It’s become an easy way of making money in Uganda because people just love giving money to orphans. The third is ego: possibly more Westerners are ego-driven. . .because they can save orphans, and that makes them a hero. So it’s colonization all over again.”

Due to loose enforcement of regulations and the government's limited capability to oversee such rapid orphanage establishment, it is quite easy to open a childcare institution in Uganda – and with the reduction or suspension of international adoption in previously popular spots like Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the rate of international adoption in Uganda has soared. Uganda was not initially seen as an ideal candidate by the international adoption community, despite its supposed abundance of orphans: the Uganda Children Act of 1997 imposed a restrictive 3-year residency requirement for foreign adoptive parents (Government of Uganda 1997). However, when the US Embassy issued a visa for a Ugandan child under the legal guardianship of US citizens in 2007, the international adoption community discovered that applying for legal guardianship could act as a loophole that would allow them to bypass adoption laws. Legal guardians can take Ugandan children out of the country and then finalize adoption in their home countries, though technically, legal guardianships are still under Ugandan courts' jurisdiction. Legal guardianship is explicitly designated as a temporary arrangement *not* to be used as a means to adopt, but due to legal precedent (and, many surmise, financial incentive), Ugandan courts continue granting legal guardianship orders to foreigners knowing full well that they intend to take the children out of Uganda and file for adoption in their home countries. According to the US State Department, only 311 Ugandan children were adopted by US citizens from 1999 to 2010, but in 2011 alone, 207 Ugandan children were adopted by US citizens (<http://edition.cnn.com/2013/02/27/world/africa/wus-uganda-adoptions>). In 2012, 240 of 400 total international adoptions were to the USA. Ninety-five percent of those adoptions are now done by legal guardianship and finalized in US courts (<http://www.monitor.co.ug/OpEd/Commentary/-/689364/1521464/-/115vw10z/-/index.html>).

These numbers may still seem small in light of the purported “147 million” or more orphans in the world, but at approximately USD\$40,000 per adoption, Ugandan institutions are now recognizing that international adoption is a highly lucrative business. Thus, evidence is already pointing to alarming irregularities similar to those of the Guatemalan adoption boom, including recruitment of children for international adoption, “child laundering” through altering and forgery of records (Smolin 2010), inducement of birth parents to relinquish children, and extortion of funds from prospective adoptive parents. And as in Ethiopia just a few years ago (Bunkers et al. 2012), Ugandan children are not only being handpicked for international adoption from institutions but from impoverished slums and villages where “scouts” are pressuring poor parents with little understanding of formal adoption to give up their children – particularly the healthy infants and toddlers preferred by potential adoptive parents. This is often achieved by recruiters presenting adoption as educational sponsorship – and thus an opportunity that no impoverished parent could turn down.

Uganda has not signed the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption – and indeed had not even approached the Hague Conference about the possibility until 2012 – so it could be some time before more safeguards are in place to protect against adoption irregularities. In the meantime, child protection and alternative care specialists are trying to close the legal guardianship loophole by calling for a moratorium, but certain key figures – including the Attorney General whose signature is needed for a proposed moratorium – have vested interests in keeping the adoption pipeline flowing (Namubiru 2013). The Netherlands has already halted adoptions from Uganda due to evidence of corruption, but other Hague signatory nations continue to allow for adoption from Uganda.

The orphan industrial complex in Uganda is further fueled by other successful international campaigns drawing attention to hardships suffered by Ugandan children. Most notable of these is Invisible Children, a campaign (also run by young US evangelicals) to help children affected by the civil war in northern Uganda. The organization was roundly criticized after the release of their video *Kony 2012* for distorting the facts about the insurgency (which has not in fact directly targeted northern Uganda for years), but according to Riley:

The knock-on effect of the Invisible Children campaign is [that] we’ve seen hundreds and hundreds of children institutionalized because other organizations have thought, ‘Great! If we talk about the LRA and Kony and the war, that’s a great way of raising funds!’ So we now have organizations who’ve got children who have never been to the north of Uganda using Kony and the war in the north as a fundraising PR exercise. . .

An October 2012 op-ed in the national Daily Monitor newspaper calling for regulation of foreign adoption also refutes the story that war has led to the increase in adoptions: “. . . children from the Acholi sub region only contributed 9.6% of the adoption total between 2002 and 2007. . . All things considered, the essential motivating factor behind foreign adoptions seems to be money” (Agaba 2012).

## 6 “The Rescuers”: Cogs in the Wheel of Child Protection

Many organizations promote international adoption as a solution to the “orphan crisis,” often without noting its inefficiency (high amounts of resources to “rescue” few children) and its politics (how did children become “orphans” in the first place, and *who* is entitled to parent *which* children) or supporting local efforts to improve child protection. According to Riley, the idea of raising money to help a particular well-meaning Western family adopt one particular African child is far more popular among evangelicals than providing funding to build a child protection system in an African country. As shown, their actions can actually put orphans and other vulnerable children at further risk. As with earlier development interventions, the current evangelical orphan movement is concentrated on the “orphan” demographic to the detriment of other children with even greater vulnerabilities. Though generous, evangelical “orphan addicts” tend to direct funding toward orphanages and international adoption, when in fact, according to child protection specialists, these interventions should have the least funding. Because of this, Kasule notes that a pattern of intergenerational orphanhood is emerging in Uganda: children raised in orphanages are now placing their own children in orphanages.

Some concerned individuals are trying to challenge the underlying assumptions that are endangering the development of stronger child protection measures, but real change cannot come until donors, particularly those in the evangelical movement, understand the dynamics of orphan care on the ground. While some faith-based organizations are doing excellent work in child protection and family reunification, others are at the forefront of child institutionalization and thus disruption of the establishment of an effective child protection system. As Riley notes,

Almost 100% of orphanages in Uganda are funded by some kind of church or faith-based organization, faith-motivated and faith-driven – which tells you that people of faith care passionately about impoverished and vulnerable children. . . [but] the truth is, if you have the tough conversation about the damage of supporting and building orphanages and international adoptions being a huge part of the solution – and that it shouldn’t be – it actually puts them in a place where they are not the heroes. They are actually a cog in the wheel of a wider child protection system. . . rather than being the ones driving and pushing and being the heroes of the situation. And that’s tough for people’s egos; that’s tough for people to hear.

However, Riley and many others in child protection in Uganda keep pushing for change: “. . . we need to challenge this, because until this develops into something appropriate – and I’m pretty sure it can, but it needs to be led differently – then. . . whatever we do here is going to always be trumped by the money that comes from [the evangelical movement]. . . sadly, because we just don’t have the strength in the systems here to be able to withstand a barrage of do-gooders who are doing the wrong thing.” Thus, more evangelicals need to question their motives and actions concerning “orphan rescue,” based on empirical evidence from people working in child protection.

## 7 Distortions of Truth and Practice: Child Protection System Development Thwarted

Looking at the whole system, the promotion of institutionalization and intercountry adoption is not only damaging to children, families, and communities but can have a profoundly negative effect on attempts to professionalize a child welfare system that promotes family support and preservation. Intercountry adoption as an endpoint after a thorough exploration of the child's natural supports – including engagement and support of the child's birth family and kinship group – is an ethical imperative consistent with the principles of the Hague Convention. However, when intercountry adoption and the evangelical movement to rescue “orphans” takes hold over the child protection system, institutionalizing a child and sending her abroad often become the first response to a child-and-family crisis rather than recognizing that, according to the Hague Convention, it is a final option after all familial and in-country options are explored.

The implications of system subversion are profound when one considers issues of workforce and long-term planning and development of systems of child and family care. Not only do children get pulled into the orphan industrial complex as their families and kinship group are discarded, but social workers and allied professionals become beholden to the system. Researchers have often observed that in such instances, social worker incomes become dependent on external adoption-related monies, and the placing of healthy infants and young children abroad demands most of their time. It is a simple social systems phenomenon: being paid based on children successfully sent abroad undercuts good child protection work oriented toward preserving families. That is, concerted efforts of family support, preservation, and family-child reunification for those children living in institutions are no longer a priority as social workers respond to the international demand for healthy orphans. This is what is currently happening in Uganda: at an October 2013 alternative care workshop in Kampala, several social workers from area orphanages said that, while they had known that foreigners could adopt Ugandan children, it was the first time they had learned that they had a duty to the subsidiarity principle that posits international adoption should be a last resort to institutionalization. Further, many had not even been aware that Ugandans *could* adopt (at virtually no cost) within their own country.

By spuriously diverting attention to the plight of “orphans” in developing countries, the orphan industrial complex undermines child protection mechanisms for *all* children and has an exponential risk effect in the greater community. One must therefore question just how many more children have fallen into the orphan industrial complex as a result of this subversion. While Uganda's child protection system is only beginning to experience these sorts of pushes and pulls of intercountry adoption and the distortion of child protection activities, one only needs to look back at other countries like Guatemala and Ethiopia, where the orphan industrial complex – and particularly the emphasis on intercountry adoption – has distorted natural family care strategies and professional child protection and social work practice (Bunkers et al. 2012).

## 8 Another Look at Guatemala and Child Protection System Subversion

By the time Guatemala entered into an intercountry adoption moratorium due to corruption allegations, extreme international pressure, and a 2007 domestic law related to the country's ratification of the Hague Convention, the intercountry adoption system boasted a variety of actors who were all invested in preserving their well-paid jobs (Bunkers and Groza 2012); many attorneys processing international adoptions had become millionaires, while birth mother recruiters and some institution directors had also earned sizeable incomes. A UN impunity commission investigation found that the orchestration of intercountry adoption fraud also necessitated some family court judges to engage in graft and corruption (Comisión Internacional Contra la Impunidad en Guatemala 2010).

In the social service sector, social workers and foster parents' jobs became entirely anchored to children being streamlined into intercountry adoption. Social work wages ranged from modest to very good: a 2007 investigation by the Hague Permanent Bureau documented that family court/government social workers earned approximately USD\$550 monthly (Hague Conference on International Private Law 2007). However, it is known that social workers involved in private children's homes and the management of foster care as agents of adoption agencies and attorneys earned three to four times that amount. While this assertion is not well documented, the lack of transparency in salaries and fees in general during this era is indicative of a highly corrupt system.

In this impoverished country, the effect on the social service sector included a flood of untrained individuals calling themselves "social workers" so that they might be employed by private attorneys and adoption agencies in the service of expediting cases. Among their tasks were biological family social history reports, and today it is known that many of these reports were poorly written with errors, in the best cases, and were even falsified in cases related to child sales and abduction (Siegal 2011). In a few cases, adoptive parents halted their adoptions midway through the process because they realized that the child to whom they had been matched was not truly an orphan (cf. Siegal 2011). Unfortunately, these cases had all of the prerequisite paperwork – including a social worker's signed social history report verifying orphanhood, as was necessary for a child to leave Guatemala free and clear through adoption (Hague Conference on International Private Law 2007).

Now, as Guatemalan adoptees and their US families are going back to trace their roots, some are identifying inconsistencies in their personal documentation. For example, some have learned that their biological family's street address never even existed or that there were other "errors" in their files that suggest fabrication of information. This has led some adoptive families to question whether their children were kidnapped (Larsen 2007). To child protection specialists in Uganda, Guatemala's experience suggests that if they do not get the current proliferation of the orphan industrial complex under control, they too will be found wanting when adoptees return to ask hard questions about the circumstances of their adoptions.

## 9 Conclusion

Increasingly, child protection advocates are calling for ethical and appropriate alternative care systems. This requires consideration of a child's natural resource system as well as the wider context, that is, supporting families and communities in a manner that is economically and socially relevant to local systems and culture (Rotabi et al. 2012; Roby et al. 2014). For example, in Uganda, ethical approaches to child care include a concerted effort to identify the misuse of the term "orphan" and the distortion of the system with the use of residential care institutions in a country with a strong history of family and community engagement in responding to the needs of vulnerable children (<http://www.alternative-care-uganda.org/resources/safe-campaign-brochure.pdf>). Workforce training has commenced, underscoring the importance of family preservation, including means and methods consistent with best practices in social casework. Deinstitutionalizing children is now a policy goal in many impoverished countries (Williamson and Greenberg 2010), but they are up against an orphan industry that posits their institutions as good places for children – particularly for parents and guardians who see in them the opportunity to provide a decent education to their children at no cost to themselves (<http://unitingforchildren.org/2014/06/changing-lives-in-uganda/>).

In the aftermath of Guatemala's intercountry adoption boom, bust, and ratification of the Hague Convention, systems for social care began to transform to support and preserve families in an effort to repair and reform a distorted child protection system (Rotabi et al. 2012). For example, in 2012 a group of 45 social workers and psychologists gathered in Guatemala City to be trained in family group conferencing (FGC) (Roby et al. 2014). This family support intervention brings the family together with their kin, along with friends and other close supporters of children who are at risk of out-of-home care, in an effort to prevent child institutionalization. FGC brings these actors together to agree upon and implement a plan to safeguard vulnerable children and their families (Pennell and Anderson 2005).

Family group conferencing, founded upon traditional practices common to many cultures, was first legislated in *Aotearoa*/New Zealand after a series of protests by indigenous Maori peoples against Eurocentric child welfare practices that undermined familial and tribal networks and unethically removed children from their families and communities (Pennell and Anderson 2005). In response, FGC was developed as a child rights-based social intervention that engaged the family and larger community while honoring and reinforcing cultural connections and community-government partnerships. FGC employs social workers, psychologists, and others trained in the methodology in the role of planning as they pull together a "family conference" to negotiate a family strategy for a vulnerable child (Pennell and Anderson 2005).

Training in family group conferencing was well received by Guatemalan social workers and psychologists, who reported that they were already engaging in similar practices (Roby et al. 2014); the training provided added tools and structure to their existing practices oriented toward family-based care. This training, taking place some 5 years after the intercountry adoption moratorium in Guatemala, is one

example of capacity building to address the needs of vulnerable children and their families. FGC is a pro-family child welfare intervention, as opposed to previous approaches that pulled children into institutions as holding areas and then streamlined healthy “orphans” into intercountry adoption. FGC underscores the role of child protection professionals as agents of family support and preservation, resisting the influence of the international orphan industry (Rotabi et al. 2012; Roby et al. 2014).

Family group conferencing is presented here to illustrate evidence-based child protection practices that build upon the fact that most children are not “orphans”; rather, they have a social network of loved ones who will often respond to a child’s needs when engaged appropriately. It is a low-cost intervention with little utility for facilitating institutionalization and intercountry adoption. Instead, in most cases, it precludes such extreme measures, in compliance with international standards. Fundamentally, FGC builds upon organic family strengths, kinship and community processes, and aligned responses to vulnerability that were previously undermined by large sums of orphan industrial complex money. This example of FGC in a previously active intercountry adoption country illustrates the possible distortions of child protection systems and family life and the subsequent need to rebuild ethical approaches to family preservation.

Hoping to avoid situations like those Guatemala experienced due to international adoption pressure, Uganda’s Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development’s Alternative Care Initiative is spearheading a similar effort to improve family preservation and bolster local child welfare systems through cooperation with government and child protection experts. Their SAFe Campaign (“Strengthening African Families”) aims to bolster the existing child protection system by drawing attention to sound policies and legal frameworks that are already in place but which they have limited resources to enforce. Their hope is that the campaign will prompt those wishing to assist “orphans” to “Re-evaluate well-meaning activities that may unintentionally destabilise children and create more demand for institutionalised care” (<http://www.alternative-care-uganda.org/way-forward.html>). If they succeed, they may yet avert a family and child protection crisis. But “orphan addiction” lies on the demand side of the orphan industrial complex, so it is also imperative to continue to challenge the prevailing global “orphan rescue” myth that feeds that complex and causes structural violence against families and children.

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## Abstract

This chapter reviews key debates about street children and everyday violence, drawing on both geographical and wider social science literatures. It shows that there is often an assumption that children face greater violence in the streets than they do elsewhere. Street children continue to be viewed as either victims or delinquents and are considered “out of place” on the streets. A growing number of studies have challenged such conceptualizations, emphasizing children’s agency and the way they choose to move to the street as part of an active strategy to mitigate or avoid some of the violence in their lives. These contributions also point to the diversity of the experiences of street children and the importance of considering the spatial context and a range of other factors that shape children’s

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encounters with everyday violence. Yet, in celebrating children's agency, such literature may indirectly downplay the very real risks that young people face in the context of the street. The chapter goes on to review key contributions that examine the streets as contradictory spaces of both opportunity and violence. The chapter moves beyond a focus on physical violence to look at children's exclusion and marginalization as important factors affecting their well-being. It argues that discourses based on the binary of street children as either victims or delinquents may inadvertently contribute to the persistence of other forms of violence, namely, by failing to consider children's own experiences, the contexts of their everyday lives, and the structural factors that affect their well-being. Social policies and programs continue to be formulated on the basis of narrow conceptualizations of street children, with the ultimate goal to remove children from the streets. The chapter concludes by suggesting the importance of incorporating more recent research insights into policies, in an effort to address the everyday violence in young people's lives. It further emphasizes the need for a more holistic approach to analyses of violence and street children.

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**Keywords**

Street children • Everyday violence • Agency • Discourse • Structural violence

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## 1 Introduction

It is commonly believed that street children are exposed to significant violence in the course of their everyday lives. Yet, the causes of that violence, and the various strategies that children use to negotiate their daily situations, are not closely interrogated. In order to address the needs of children in street situations, it is crucial to more closely examine the specific types of violence that children face in various spaces and to consider the ways in which they are not only exposed to greater violence in the streets but also use the streets to resist or escape from violence.

This chapter reviews key debates about street children and everyday violence, drawing on both geographical and wider social science literatures. Early accounts of the lives of street children tended to be descriptive and established a framework that still provides the basis for much policy work and research on street children today. In the context of this chapter, street children broadly refers to children for whom the street (or other public spaces, such as plazas and markets) is a main reference point or plays a central role in their lives (Thomas de Benitez 2007). The term itself, however, is linked to violence in many people's minds. Street children were conceptualized as either victims of violence or as delinquents and themselves perpetrators of violence. Such understandings have been reinforced by the spread of global discourses of childhood, which position children as belonging in the home or in school (Ennew and Swart-Kruger 2003). If they are in the "street," then their childhood is seen to be violated in some way (Aptekar and Stoecklin 2014). Studies

that begin from such a premise assume that to address the violence in children's lives, it is necessary to remove them from the street.

A significant strand of literature, building on trends from the new childhood studies of the 1980s, challenges this idea of street children as victims and instead focuses on their agency. This research examines the ways in which streets may offer children and young people alternative sites of identity formation and social networks that they are unable to find in more abusive home situations. By choosing to move to the streets, then, children can actively avoid some of the abuse and violence that they face in the home. Such studies emphasize the ways in which young people may create subcultures or niches for themselves on the street and find some level of acceptance, rather than just exclusion (Beazley 2002, 2003). This research also draws attention to the diversity of the street child population, and the importance of historically and spatially situated studies. It highlights the ways in which the street can also serve as an important space in children's livelihood strategies. By incorporating children's own perspectives on violence and their everyday lives, newer research has also revealed the ways in which children distinguish between "just" and "unjust" violence (Conticini and Hulme 2007), as well as the ways in which exclusion and marginalization can be as painful as some physical violence (Butler 2009). Such insights reveal the importance of incorporating broader, more holistic understandings of violence into analyses and programs directed at street children (Thomas de Benitez 2007).

However, there is still a great need for research that connects structural violence, or violence that results from inequality, poverty, and other forms of oppression, with child-centered analyses (Wells and Montgomery 2014). While children clearly demonstrate agency in moving to the streets, the majority continue to encounter very significant levels of violence and marginalization in the contexts of their daily lives. The chapter reviews key contributions that examine the streets as contradictory spaces of both opportunity and violence. It broadens understandings of violence beyond direct physical abuse to also consider forms of exclusion, marginalization, and structural violence. Research on structural violence acknowledges the "constraints and burdens that inequality places on the lives of the poor are a form of violence" (Wells and Montgomery 2014, p. 5). This includes psychological hurt, such as alienation and deprivation (Winton 2004), as well as more "concealed" forms of everyday violence, including structural adjustment programs, poverty, and discrimination (Wells and Montgomery 2014). While these types of violence are often neglected in more traditional analyses of violence, they are extremely important for understanding street children's lives.

Despite these insights from research, global discourses that present children as "out of place" on the streets, and thus in need of rescuing, continue to inform many policy efforts. These discourses can in and of themselves constitute a form of violence by failing to accurately reflect children's identities and needs and have provided the justification for various street cleansing efforts (Aufseeser 2014c). The chapter concludes by emphasizing the importance of utilizing research on street children's everyday lives to inform international discourses of childhood and current policy agendas. It also suggests the need for more research

that acknowledges children's agency while recognizing the very real constraints placed on that agency.

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## 2 The Street as a Place of Violence

### 2.1 Street Children as Victims of Violence

In cities throughout the world, street children negotiate violence in the context of their daily lives. They face abuse from police, contempt and hostility from the public, and violence from peers or adults. In many regards, this violence has come to define street children in mainstream literature (Panter-Brick 2002). Much early research on street children assumed, almost by definition, that such children were victims of violence. One study began by stating that "street children are maltreated, imprisoned, and in some countries, killed" (le Roux and Smith 1998, p. 683). Another study defined street children as "among the most deprived," viewed as worthless and subject to violent measures to remove them from the streets (Scanlon et al. 1998, p. 1596). Within this literature, some articles focused on reforming the behavior of street children or their families, while others emphasized how structural factors such as increased unemployment, poverty, and structural adjustment policies had contributed to children's presence on the streets (Aptekar and Stoecklin 2014). Yet, authors shared the assumption that the street itself was a place of violence and danger for children.

Beliefs that children in the streets are victims of violence are linked to the spread of modern discourses that promote childhood as a time of play, schooling, and innocence, to be spent in the space of the home or school (Ennew 2003). Thus, children who are in the streets are viewed as "out of place" (Ennew and Swart-Kruger 2003). Much national and international legislation regarding childhood is based on this model and focuses on protecting street children, who are automatically assumed to be at greater risk in the street, and placing them back in the context of the family. Geographers and childhood studies scholars have argued that such beliefs are actually relatively new and are specifically linked with modernization and industrialization (Ruddick 2003). Yet, they have become the model for understandings of global childhood and provide the justification for various efforts and interventions to remove children from public spaces. In particular, ideas of modernity and development also combine to render certain groups of people, such as street children, as out of place and thus expose them to more violence. Street children are frequently removed from public spaces in diverse cities around the world, ranging from Lima, Peru, to Kampala, Uganda, in efforts to remove visible signs of poverty from city streets (Aufseeser 2014c; Young 2003). Such street cleansing is especially common before big public events, such as international sports events or political meetings (van Blerk 2011). The very presence of children in the street serves as a sign of embarrassment and more specifically as an indication of a lack of "modernity" (Beazley 2002). Yet, efforts to remove street children are

often justified by appeals to discourses of streets as dangerous places (Aufseeser 2014a).

In many situations, street children do experience violence in the streets (Herrera et al. 2009). They are more “at risk” for suicide than are other children their ages (Jones et al. 2007) and are often victims of assault or sexual violence (Aptekar and Stoecklin 2014). Police violence is also extremely common in cities throughout the world. In addition to physical violence by police, children reported being asked for bribes or having the materials they use for their livelihoods taken from them (Aptekar and Stoecklin 2014; Ali 2014). They also report experiencing frequent harassment, verbal abuse from the public, and exclusion (Bourdillon 2006). While street children do experience violence in the streets, then a number of scholars have challenged discourses that present children as victims, arguing that such constructions of children’s lives actually stigmatize them and their families (Young 2004). Further, studies that exclusively focus on violence in the streets have been critiqued for failing to recognize the multiple spaces of violence in children’s lives and the way in which violence needs to be socially contextualized and addressed more holistically (Montgomery 2014).

## 2.2 Street Children as Perpetrators of Violence?

While much literature on street children presents them as victims in need of rescuing, another strand of thinking regards street children themselves as perpetrators of violence. Much of this literature focuses on older children, using different language to convey the threats they pose. For example, articles will refer to street children as gang members, delinquents, or criminals instead of as children or will talk about the potential risk that children in the street face to become criminals (Aufseeser 2014c). Ursin (2011) discusses how, at some point, children transition from being seen as victims who need help to instead being seen as threats. Street children are very aware of the different discourses regarding their presence in the street, which can further their feelings of anger and exclusion. In one study of street children in Brazil, Butler (2009, p. 24) found that adolescents’ constant exposure to those who assumed they were criminals led to shame and sometimes “an acute experience of exclusion, discrimination and violence.” In such regards, understandings of childhood constitute a form of symbolic violence that has material effects on children’s well-being (Bourdieu 1989). Symbolic violence “refers to assaults on human dignity, sense of worth, and one’s existential groundedness in the world” (Scheper-Hughes 2004, p. 14). In this case, as older children face more limited opportunities to earn money through informal vending or begging, they may be drawn to more criminal activities, such as robbing or assaulting, an assertion backed up by multiple studies of street children (Beazley 2003). While street children may in fact engage in violent or criminal acts, state responses to them are often disproportionately violent (Aptekar and Stoecklin 2014). Children are frequently incarcerated or detained by police, despite posing no real danger to society (Pinheiro 2006; Aufseeser 2014a).



In many regards, views of street children as perpetrators of violence directly contrast with discourses of street children as victims. What these two strands of thinking have in common, however, is that they construct the street as a site of violence from which young people should be removed. Programs tend to view street children as a social problem, rather than addressing the larger challenges that they face in their daily lives. While a tendency in policy circles to view children as either victims or threats remains strong, research indicates that such a dichotomy bears little resemblance to street children's actual lived experiences and own identities (Thomas de Benitez 2007, 2011).

### 2.3 Diversity of Street Child Populations

Part of the tension over whether children are victims or perpetrators of violence has to do with who exactly is being researched. There has been a lot of debate about how to define the street child population (Ennew 2003; van Blerk 2014). The term "street child" has been used to describe older homeless street youth as well as younger children who work on the streets during the day and then return to familial homes at night, as well as various groups in between. However, as has been pointed out by multiple studies, street child populations are often quite fluid, with children moving on and off the streets (van Blerk 2014). These fluid identities are important for assessing the everyday conflicts and tensions that young people have to negotiate. However, the diversity of the population makes it challenging to design effective legislation. While the word "child" often refers to those who are under age 18, children of different ages tend to evoke different reactions. Various studies indicate that younger children are much more likely to be viewed sympathetically when contrasted with adolescents (Butler 2009; Ursin 2011), despite both being subject to laws that regulate childhood more generally (Aufseeser 2014d).

Many of the inherent assumptions about street children are modeled after the experience of street children in Latin America. However, critics have pointed out that these conceptualizations do not always apply to the situation of street children in other places, such as sub-Saharan Africa (Ennew 2003). A number of studies have drawn attention to the importance of considering socio-spatial context and, in doing so, challenge universal narratives of street children's lives. Civil war and the AIDS epidemic provide a very different context for understanding street life. In Uganda, for example, children lost whole families due to violence, a factor that is directly linked to some children's presence in the street (Young 2004). In other contexts, there are very few street children who are actually orphans. Further, in some countries, children may not experience violence in their own homes but instead may flee because of fear of abduction or rape by soldiers, or may escape from situations of trafficking or forced military recruitment. Children who migrate in such contexts are often labeled as internally displaced and are eligible for more services to help unite them with their families (Young 2004). In this sense, the way

children are labeled has very important implications for their material well-being, as well as how stigmatized they feel.

Further, part of the inherent assumption is that street children are mostly a problem of the global south. Yet, street children also exist in the context of the global north, although often categorized as homeless children and youth (Gibson 2011; Pain and Francis 2004; Ruddick 1996). As is the case among street children in the global south, violence, especially parental abuse and rejection of one's sexual orientation, is key to understanding children's presence in the streets in the global north (Aptekar and Stoecklin 2014). Finally, studies of street children initially tended to focus on male street child populations, although this has been challenged over the years (Beazley 2002; Ritterbusch 2013). Overall, multiple factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, geography, and social context affect children's experiences of violence and risk in the streets. Geographers and childhood studies scholars have done much to illuminate details of street children's specific encounters with violence. However, the diversity of these experiences is often overlooked.

Spatial context becomes especially important when thinking about what counts as everyday violence. Wells and Montgomery (2014) describe everyday violence as violence which is routine, inescapable, and mundane, in the specific contexts in which children live. Thus, what is considered everyday violence for street children, and the way they view this violence, varies. In extreme cases, street children have been the victims of police extermination and social cleansing. In Brazil, for example, street children were killed by extermination squads (Butler 2009), an event that galvanized international attention and the perception that something is needed to be done to stop the plight of street children. Human Rights Watch has reported similar violence in places like Guatemala and Colombia (Thomas de Benitez 2007). In some situations, the high levels of societal violence have led to extreme forms of violence becoming part of the everyday reality of street youth. Ritterbusch (2013) describes how in Colombia bodies are disposed of daily, with death used as a form of social control on a somewhat regular basis. In Haiti, street children face multiple forms of violence, police abuse, and attacks from other children and youth, which have intensified with the proliferation of hand guns in the area (Kovats-Bernat 2014). Such situations indicate the ways in which extreme forms of violence become part of street children's everyday encounters. However, not all street children experience these forms of violence. Some children use the streets as a source of livelihood and socialization, building meaningful relationships that actually improve their well-being (Abebe 2008). While more longitudinal studies are needed, in some situations, children are even able to use their experiences in the streets to reintegrate into "dominant society" and find jobs (Panter-Brick 2004; Aufseeser 2012). In the context of the United States, street children are a more "invisible" population, which comes with its own risks and challenges. It is these factors that shape the ways in which youth experience and negotiate life on the streets and their encounters with everyday violence.

### 3 Street Children as Agents: “Choosing” the Street

Rather than viewing street children as either innocent victims or deviant delinquents, new research in childhood studies has focused on recognizing children as active agents (van Blerk 2005; Evans 2006; Conticini and Hulme 2007). In doing so, such studies challenge the idea that children are vulnerable and in need of rescuing. In contrast to assumptions that street children are abandoned, studies draw attention to the decision that children have made in moving to the street and suggest that such a move is an active strategy on their part to avoid forms of violence and conflict to which they are exposed in the home (Beazley 2003; Veale et al. 2000; Conticini and Hulme 2007; Butler 2009).

Street children often come from homes and communities with substantial levels of abuse, conflict, and instability. Multiple studies indicate the role that violence in the home plays in shaping their decisions to move to the street (Beazley 2003; Conticini and Hulme 2007; Young 2004; Ursin 2011). In such a context, the street, rather than being presented as a threat, offers possible solutions to some of the violence to which children and young people are exposed. Children actively use the streets as part of their livelihood strategies, to create opportunities for themselves, as spaces of socialization, and as ways of mitigating the risk and violence to which they are exposed in other places (Van Blerk 2005; Evans 2006).

Further, the violence in children’s lives needs to be considered in its social context. Children do not perceive all types of violence in the same way. A number of studies have actively sought children’s own interpretations of violence, offering important insight into understanding why some move to the streets. Specifically, some research indicates that it is when violence is perceived as unjust that children are most negatively impacted and may decide to flee the home. In a study on street children in Bangladesh, children contrasted illegitimate violence with situations in which adults punished them for misbehaving or in order to educate them (Conticini and Hulme 2007). It was illegitimate violence that caused much greater distress and feelings of insecurity. Similarly, street youth in Brazil distinguished between violence to “break” them and being hit as a form of education (Butler 2009). In such situations, a move to the street represented an act of rebellion against such unjust forms of violence.

Additionally, feeling unloved or unwanted can be even more painful for some children than is physical violence. In the aforementioned study of street children in Bangladesh, while children reported that violence occurred in the streets more frequently than it had in their homes, the perceived intensity of that violence was actually lower in the streets than it was in their homes or government institutions and schools (Conticini and Hulme 2007). Conticini and Hulme (2007) hypothesize that violence committed by strangers or those of whom children have few expectations for trust and support does not violate relationships or expectations in the same way as violence committed by family or others perceived as sources of protection and is therefore seen as not as painful. When violence is committed by family members, children may respond by blaming themselves (Hecht 1998). The emotions around violence, such as shame, low self-esteem, and guilt, last much

longer than immediate acts of violence (Conticini and Hulme 2007). While streets themselves may be spaces of violence, Conticini and Hulme (2007) argue that the loss of so-called innocence associated with street life may actually occur in the household itself. Recognition of the multiple spaces of violence in children's lives challenges an exclusive focus on the street as a space of danger.

Some children also move from neighborhoods and communities that themselves face high levels of violence. In this sense, while they often continue to experience some violence on the streets, depending on the geographical context, they may nonetheless actually be better off. In Brazil, for example, children sometimes decide to occupy public spaces in elite neighborhoods specifically because they feel safer. In the favelas from which they come, children are exposed to high levels of violence, with an average of six people a day being killed as of 2008 (Ursin 2011). In contrast, they reported that street life felt more peaceful and had more police and security guards, compared to the drug trafficking and high number of firearms in the favelas. Further, despite common assumptions of street child behavior as being criminal, in the case of a few youth in Brazil, they felt that they could actually earn money more honestly in the streets than they could in the favelas (Ursin 2011). This again reiterates the importance of considering spatial context when assessing children's interactions with violence.

Thus, despite dominant discourses of childhood that present the home as a place of protection and the street as a place of danger, some studies indicate that in the lives of street children, the situation may be the reverse (Butler 2009; Veale et al. 2000); the street itself may provide security (Conticini and Hulme 2007). Children encounter a wide range of different individuals on the street, including adults working in the informal economy; children, police, and educators; and other members of the public (Hecht 1998). While some of these adults may pose a threat, others provide children with important supports, look out for them, and may even teach them useful skills that help them better engage in livelihood strategies in the streets. Ursin (2011) found that street children's social networks increased on the street, giving them access to more work, consumption, and leisure activities. In fact, some children specifically talked about how it was safer to earn money in the streets than in other places. In Lima, Peru, children who do not have strong support networks in the home may find alternative mentors through their work in the street (Invernizzi 2003). Streets can expose poor children to resources and networks that they would not otherwise have in their homes of origin. Violence also needs to be understood as a trade-off. While working in the streets may expose children to some forms of risk, it can serve as a protective measure for others. For example, if children know how to negotiate public spaces and earn income for themselves, it increases their chances of survival if something happens to their parents (Invernizzi 2008).

Street children are on the streets for a wide variety of reasons and utilize the streets in diverse ways. For many young people, the street is not so much a dangerous space but a site of labor, providing much needed income for food, education, and some consumption items. Multiple studies focus on the ways in which the street serves as an important space in which to earn one's livelihood

(Swanson 2010; Abebe 2008; Invernizzi 2003). Children migrate in search of informal labor opportunities, to earn money to pay school fees, and for the possibility of food and social interactions that they cannot find by staying home. Rather than being victims then, conducting certain activities in the streets may be a means to get ahead. Multiple studies show that street children often have more access to food, money, and material items than they do at home (Aptekar and Stoecklin 2014). In her study of children who go to beg in the streets of Ecuador, Swanson (2010) concludes that begging may actually be a path to progress for young people who otherwise do not have many other opportunities. At the same time, while migration can sometimes open up more opportunities, indigenous children continue to face high levels of discrimination when they work on the streets (Swanson 2007). Thus, it is important to consider street children's experiences with everyday violence in the context of structural violence.

There is also some indication that moving to the street can improve children's overall well-being and strengthen characteristics that help them respond to violence and conflict. In some situations, the street may provide an environment in which children can build up resilience and important coping skills. In Colombia, for example, some research indicates that street children have better mental and physical health than do siblings who remain at home (Aptekar 1991), and in Makutano, Kenya, children who live on the streets have a higher standard of living than their home-based siblings and peers (Davies 2008). Children also report feeling less confined on the street and instead being able to play and meet friends (Butler 2009; Hecht 1998; Aufseeser 2014b). Through contributions to their household, children are also sometimes able to negotiate and strengthen their position within the family (Abebe 2008). In this regard, children utilize the streets in ways that allow them to address some of the poverty and structural violence in their lives and possibly even better position them to respond to domestic violence as well.

### **3.1 Resisting Marginalization: Creating a New Identity on the Street**

As part of a move toward recognizing children's agency, a number of studies examine how children actively reject the labels society puts on them, develop their own subcultures, and recreate personal identities as a way to counter marginalization and some of the violence in their lives (Beazley 2002; 2003; Van Blerk 2005; Herrera et al. 2009). By developing a sense of solidarity with other street children, they build up support networks that can protect them from violence and social exclusion and actually raise their well-being (Thomas de Benitez 2007). For example, in one situation in Indonesia, when a boy was stabbed, his friends took care of him until he was able to work again (Beazley 2003). More generally, being part of street children's subcultures can improve self-esteems and provide children with access to more resources than would otherwise be the case. Children frequently share food and materials and teach each other how to survive on the streets

and where to find places to sleep, bathe, or eat (Ennew and Swart-Kruger 2003; Evans 2006).

Some of the strategies used to recraft identities and improve well-being are distinctly spatial. In some cases, street children use their mobility in order to reduce the amount of violence they face on the streets (Young 2003; Aufseeser 2014c). They often move strategically, depending on the time of day or in order to avoid detection or abuse by police or social workers. In multiple cities, rather than accepting their exclusion, street children try to create niches in which they feel safe and are also able to earn money, play, or engage in various behaviors that are not considered acceptable in more central areas of public space (Beazley 2003; Young 2003). In Makutano, Kenya, children create spaces that are intimidating to adults and, in doing so, are able to partly avoid adult scrutiny (Davies 2008). However, they also reinforce understandings of street children as threatening or delinquent. Further, while street families may offer protection from some forms of violence, they are also sites of violence themselves. Being beaten up in order to join a street family or if a child's behavior deviates from group norms is common. Again, in these situations, however, it is important to consider the meaning that children attach to the "violence." Visible scars can indicate a toughness and tolerance for pain and help children gain respect (Herrera et al. 2009). Violence may also help children and young people resolve conflicts (Winton 2004). In such regards, including children's own perspectives on their situations is important.

Although the street may serve as a space of freedom and a way of minimizing some of the everyday violence to which street children would otherwise be exposed, there is also a danger of overly romanticizing street life. It is worth reiterating that street children do experience frequent violence and often face significant physical and mental health difficulties (Aptekar and Stoecklin 2014). Assumptions that street life is either a space of violence or a space of safety overlook the diversity of the street experience itself and the ways in which it may be both simultaneously. For example, the streets are highly gendered spaces. Street girls may face double stigmatization in the streets as both children and females (Evans 2006). Some girls explain that their gender makes them more vulnerable to sexual violence on the street. They specifically faced the risk of becoming pregnant and the subsequent stigma accompanying such pregnancy (Evans 2006). At the same time, moving to the streets allowed some girls to simultaneously defy gender expectations and to experience a level of freedom that they did not always find in their homes (Evans 2006; Beazley 2002).

The level of economic opportunity children find, the violence to which they are exposed, and the way street children are viewed vary considerably over space and time. Children engaging in the same activities can be viewed in very different ways, depending on the context. Young (2004) points out that while children were working in the markets of Kampala in the 1970s, it was not until the 1980s that they began to be referred to as street children. Similarly in Peru, street children were referred to as "pajaros fruteros" or orchard birds in the 1960s. Today, however, they are viewed as much bigger threats and instead are called "pirañitas," or little piranhas, because of their tendency to rob in groups (Aufseeser 2012). Such labels

can in and of themselves be stigmatizing and also provide justification for various police and social workers' efforts to respond to street children. Further, different children may interpret the same spaces differently, making it hard to generalize about the dangers and benefits of street life. Some children do see the street as a dangerous place, while others find it exciting (Young 2003). Taking children's perspectives into account necessitates a more nuanced understanding of risk and danger and is important for understanding the way they negotiate and respond to everyday violence.

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## 4 The Contradictory Space of the Street

A desire to emphasize children's agency and resilience may ironically obscure a focus on certain risks or violence that street children face. There have been extremely important advances in incorporating street children's own interpretations of their lives and environments into both academic analyses and social policy. Studies have challenged the idea of street children as victims and highlighted their resourcefulness and agency. However, such studies only pay limited attention to children's exclusion, as well as the ways their lives are connected to wider societal factors (Van Blerk 2014, p. 192). Some of the strategies in which street youth engage may actually indicate high levels of stress, expose them to risks, and possibly indicate suicide ideation (Jones et al. 2007). Drug use is also a frequent way in which young people try to withstand violence and exclusion in their daily lives (Aptekar and Stoecklin 2014). While it does numb the pain, long-term drug use may also wreak havoc on young people's bodies (Jones et al. 2007) and can further their exclusion in other ways (Aufseeser 2014c).

In such regards, children's decisions to move to the streets may have contradictory or ambiguous results in terms of their overall well-being and exposure to violence. Many young people do report negative aspects of street life, revealing some of the contradictions in their decisions. For example, in the case of street children in Kampala, Uganda, occupying marginal spaces allowed them to escape and play. At the same time, children were exposed to various health risks in these spaces (Young 2003). Similarly, in Peru, while children's attempts to avoid police persecution by moving to more marginal areas or renting rooms inside were largely successful, they also furthered their own marginalization by making themselves invisible and cutting themselves off from much needed social services (Aufseeser 2014c). Such studies contribute to an important body of work within childhood studies that is more critically analyzing the idea of children's agency to focus on the ways in which it may be negative or ambiguous (Bordonaro and Payne 2012). There is still a need for more studies that acknowledge children's active attempts to address the violence in their daily lives while also looking at some of the constraints on these efforts. Van Blerk (2014) emphasizes the importance of connecting accounts of children's lives with wider societal factors. Although it has been more than three decades since street children received widespread international attention, violent efforts to remove them from public space and policies to protect

them formulated on the basis of narrow conceptions of childhood and street life continue to exacerbate the violence in their lives (Van Blerk 2014; Thomas de Benitez 2007; Aufseeser 2014a).

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## 5 Shame, Exclusion, and the Violence of Discourse

Street children's interactions with everyday violence extend well beyond physical violence and conflict to encompass various forms of exclusion and stigmatization. Shame is a constant theme in reports of street children's lives, and many people assume that street children are marginalized from mainstream society and subject to abuse. What has also not received much attention is the ways in which mainstream discourses of universal childhoods and assumptions that children need to be rescued may actually exacerbate young people's feelings of marginalization. Children are increasingly exposed to discourses of global childhood as a time for play and school. However, when their daily lives do not meet this reality, they may feel particularly excluded. In Tanzania, Evans (2006) found that street children had internalized beliefs that they were "out of place." In Lima, Peru, children had similarly internalized beliefs that they should not be working in the streets (Aufseeser 2012). In such regards, although the material conditions of children's lives have not changed, they perceived them in a much more negative light because of the messages they are receiving about how childhood ought to be. Feelings of marginalization may then be linked to other types of violence. For example, Jones et al. (2007) found that street youth who had contemplated suicide also mentioned feeling abandoned, not having work, or having been affected by the death of friends. In other situations, children and young people act out, engaging in various forms of violence, as a result of their exclusion.

Discourses are not harmless. The way in which childhood and street children are conceptualized and assumptions about the street and behaviors of children in the street shape children's own actions, as well as the way others respond to them, in ways that have material consequences for their exposure to everyday violence. Even well-intentioned efforts to raise funding or awareness can contribute to their exclusion. For example, charities frequently present children in a decontextualized way, which obscures the real issues in their lives and ironically may hinder more effectively addressing the challenges they face (Ruddick 2003). Efforts to "rehabilitate" children based on inaccurate assumptions about their lives can also invalidate the positive things that they have achieved and may actually be more painful for them than the forms of physical violence. Adolescent sex workers in Ho-Chi Minh reported that even though they faced multiple forms of abuse on the streets and through their work, it was the "disrespect for their dignity" that hurt the most (Rubenson et al. 2005, p. 391). Rehabilitation programs cost them financially and did not improve their situations.

Categorizing children as street children without allowing them the ability to represent themselves and their experiences in and of itself constitutes a form of violence. The label of "street child" denies young people agency, generalizing their



experiences and linking them with both victimization and delinquency (Panter-Brick 2002). There have also been some important studies that emphasize the role that research methodologies themselves can play in either contributing to or countering forms of everyday violence against street children. Ritterbusch (2013) argues that labeling of “street girls” can itself be a form of exclusion. Instead, she examines how Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) can be a form of empowerment in which youth negotiate and resist the relationships of power in their lives. YPAR made the girls more visible and provided them with a space from which to reclaim the city and fight for safer spaces. More generally, including children in the design and evaluation of services intended for them is important for creating more effective policies to address young people’s needs (Thomas de Benitez 2007).

### **5.1 Programs and Policies for Street Children: Reducing or Exacerbating Violence?**

There have been a wide range of policy and programming efforts to address the violence and tensions in street children’s lives. While some programming does connect children to much needed resources and helps them develop relationships with supportive adults, too often, programming is based on narrow understandings of childhood and limited views of the types and locations of violence in street children’s lives (Thomas de Benitez 2007). Despite significant gains made in recognizing children as active agents, policy makers and program directors often still design interventions based on narrow assumptions of streets as dangerous places for children. This can ironically expose them to more abuse.

When children are excluded from participation in various programming or face rejection and abuse at the hands of those who are supposed to be helping them, they may distance themselves from other outreach or social workers (Ali 2014), limiting them from getting any assistance that would potentially be useful and arguably further marginalizing them. Street children may view educators and social workers as threats if they are trying to force children into programs that do not meet their needs. This is especially the case with closed programs, which are programs that do not give children the freedom to come and go based on their own initiative (Thomas de Benitez 2003). Such programs are themselves often sites of physical abuse. Young people report preferring the “freedom” of the streets to the abuse and strict regulations that they find in some children’s homes (Conticini and Hulme 2007). In Bangladesh, Conticini and Hulme (2007) found that violence occurred as frequently in government institutions as it did on the street, challenging views that children are better off in institutions than they are in the streets.

There have been a few programs that attempt to help children deal with the conflicts in their everyday lives by meeting street children more on their own terms.

Such programs are largely influenced by the philosophies of Paulo Freire and place an emphasis on street education. One such program, Peru's Educators of the Street, sends social workers and educators to the streets to provide education, resources, and social support to street children. Rather than forcing them into rehabilitation centers, the program strives to create space for children to form trusting relationships that recognize children as active agents with multiple facets to their lives, not just vulnerable victims to be rescued from the street and reformed. However, such programs have been limited in recent years by international children's rights campaigns that remain rooted in discourses of global childhood as a time for play and school, and to be spent with a nuclear family, not in the streets and not working. This has limited the ability of such programs to maintain street-oriented philosophies and has arguably further marginalized and excluded the very children they are trying to help (Aufseeser 2014d). Further, there is a lot of criticism that NGOs that work with children in the spaces of the streets are enabling them to stay there (Thomas de Benitez 2007). Such criticism reflects an inherent tendency to assume that the end goal is to get young people off the streets, rather than to improve their overall well-being.

When programs narrowly conceive of streets as negative violent environments and attempt to remove children from these spaces, they eliminate a primary space of work and support in some children's lives. In doing so, they directly hinder children's ability to effectively create livelihood strategies and protect themselves. Even when children are sleeping in the streets, they often still maintain connections to various family members, who will provide them with support or care on a periodic basis. Some children may see the street as a temporary refuge, before they return home or to other residential facilities (Conticini and Hulme 2007). In this sense, efforts to keep children off the streets may make them worse off by eliminating a space that is essential to their coping mechanisms. Aufseeser (2014c) found that anti-child labor and begging laws, and the police persecution that follows, push children into more marginal situations but nonetheless continue to be justified in the name of children's own "protection." More generally, Bourdillon (2006) found that children working in the streets are exposed to greater levels of aggression and harassment from police when their work is considered to be illegal, and Van Blerk (2005) argued that frequent street clearances disrupted children's social networks. Rather than assuming what outcomes are best for children, policy makers and practitioners should incorporate young people's own perspectives of what matters (Thomas de Benitez 2007).

There is also often a tendency for programs addressing violence in street children's lives to focus on the children themselves, or the families from which they come. However, such narrow focuses overlook the relationship between structural inequality and the violence in children's everyday lives, as mentioned above. Instead, responses need to focus on communities, as well as specifically address poverty and inequality in society more generally (Thomas de Benitez 2007).

## 6 Concluding Remarks

The above discussion has shown that street children do negotiate significant violence in their everyday lives. Yet, there continue to be a number of inherent assumptions about what the lives of street children are like that are based on narrow understandings of childhood, the street, and violence. Ironically, such limitations may expose children to more abuse and violence than would otherwise be the case. The diversity of street child experiences and the range of responses and strategies that individuals use to negotiate everyday violence speak to the importance of research and policies that include children's perspectives and voices and call attention to the need for historically and spatially situated studies and policy responses.

Yet, even some of the studies that recognize children's agency question insufficiently whether the goal of preventing children from going to the street should be the main policy focus. Many policy makers and even activists continue to focus on preventing children from moving to the streets (Conticini and Hulme 2007). This author would urge that efforts instead focus on reducing children's exposure to violence and improving their well-being overall, while not assuming that sending them back to their homes or stopping street migration is automatically the way to do this. Davies (2008) argues for the importance of using some of the positive attributes that result from street child subcultures, such as friendship and play, as a starting point for programming, rather than automatically discouraging them. In particular, activists should work with street children to identify their needs, without necessarily removing them from their peer groups or limiting their freedom (Davies 2008). Such an approach would require a reconceptualization of the types of childhood that are acceptable in contemporary society. However, meeting children half-way, rather than dismissing their coping strategies, although not easy, is an important place to start.

At the same time, researchers need to recognize that even though street children do exercise agency, they nonetheless need support and resources in order to combat larger issues of structural violence. The tensions between acknowledging individual initiative and situating those efforts in wider societal contexts move beyond childhood studies and connect to debates within critical poverty studies and participatory development more generally.

As Thomas de Benitez (2007) points out, in order to improve the well-being of street children, it is essential to understand both the violence to which children are exposed as well as the ways in which they respond to that violence. As mentioned, children's response to violence is shaped by the social context in which that violence occurs and how unjust they interpret that violence to be. Thus, rather than focusing exclusively on physical violence, research and programs should seek to better understand children's perceptions of violence and the pain, both emotional and physical, that it causes them. In particular, more critical analyses of the ways in which discourses shape material realities of children's everyday lives, their exposure to violence, and their responses to that violence are necessary. Further, many current policies tend to overlook the multiple spaces in which street children are

exposed to violence. A more holistic approach would allow programs to more effectively address the challenges in children's everyday lives (Montgomery 2014).

In conclusion, this author would endorse efforts that examine the tensions between children's agency and their ability to exercise that agency, looking not just at physical violence but at the structural violence to which young people are exposed and the ways in which they negotiate and rework the constraints of their everyday lives.

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# Youth Reintegration, Power, and Okada Riding in Post-war Sierra Leone

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Andie Buccitelli and Myriam Denov

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## Abstract

Former child soldiers in post-conflict urban Sierra Leone contend with a complex social context characterized by stigma, marginalization, and patrimonial politics. While these challenges have rendered it difficult for youth to achieve sustainable livelihoods, many have overcome such barriers by joining and building their own economic and social networks. *Okada* riding (i.e., motorbike taxi riding) is a case in point. As an emerging economic sector in Sierra Leone's urban centers, the *Okada* industry has offered numerous former child soldiers' avenues through which to achieve economic security and social support. While the industry has proved integral for many youth's reintegration into post-conflict society, "Big Men's" autocratic power over the industry has entrapped many

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youth into hierarchical clientelist relationships. Based on 14 interviews with former child soldiers turned riders, the present study seeks to explore the ways in which they negotiate the Okada taxi rider sector in urban Sierra Leone. The study reveals the potential opportunities for reintegration and challenges arising from a former child soldier-led socioeconomic initiative. Implications for future research and practice are outlined.

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**Keywords**

Former child soldiers • Sierra Leone • Big Men • Okada riding

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## **1 Introduction: Big Man Politics and Post-conflict Sierra Leone**

Postwar environments can offer new opportunities for peace, healing, and rebuilding. While there is no question that the profound violence and injustices that transpire during times of armed conflict can be inherently deleterious to societies' social fabric, they also have the potential to offer individuals, communities, and society a chance to reflect on the past and construct a more equitable, inclusive, and violence-free society (Coulter 2009; Ibrahim and Shepler 2011; Murphy 2010). However, for many countries, the structures, social conditions, and networks that initially fuelled violent conflict may diffuse into the postwar era (Cubitt 2012; Denov and Buccitelli 2013; Denov 2010; Murphy 2010). In such contexts, the state, and its populace, may be susceptible to a resurgence of violence, disorder, and, in some cases, continued social injustice. The postwar realities of former child soldiers in urban Sierra Leone are a case in point.

Despite having to navigate a context characterized by marginalization, violence, poverty, and societal stigma, many former child soldiers have been successful in building supportive communities and in creating new economic livelihoods. *Okada* riding, a private form of transport involving motorbikes, has emerged as a major economic sector within Sierra Leone's urban centers. The industry has proven crucial for offering former child soldiers the opportunity to engage in an economic activity that is both beneficial to post-conflict development and integral to their reintegration (Bürge 2011; Peters 2007). The vast majority of those participating in the industry are former soldiers, making this a "space" wherein former soldiers can join with others with similar experiences of violence and oppression (Peters 2007; Menzel 2011). Moreover, in light of the country's deteriorated infrastructure due to the war, particularly road networks, motorbikes have become the most sought after and efficient means of transport. Relative to four-wheeled vehicles, motorbikes can more easily maneuver through urban centers and dilapidated roads (Denov 2011; Ibrahim and Shepler 2011).

While *Okada* riding can be thought of as a dynamic new industry that thrived after the war, its members continue to contend with power structures similar to those they negotiated in the prewar context. Overtime, the industry has become



increasingly controlled by “Big Men.” Often former soldiers themselves, these Big Men have assumed positions of power within the industry and have tactically entrapped “former child soldiers turned riders” in exploitative patrimonial networks. By instituting a complex web of fees, policies, and regulations, these Big Men seek to further their own political and economic objectives all while constraining the socioeconomic mobility of “small men” bike riders.

This chapter considers how Big Man patrimonialism plays out and impacts former child soldiers in Sierra Leone’s urban motorbike taxi industry. In particular, the chapter reveals the social realities of former child soldiers turned riders (i.e., “small men”) and the opportunities and challenges they face in maneuvering through Big Men networks within this emergent economic sector. Drawing on 14 interviews with former child soldiers working in the motorbike industry in Sierra Leone, the chapter highlights the ways in which Bigmanity in post-conflict urban settings can offer new hopes for some of the most marginalized members of the country. At the same time, however, while these Big Men patronage networks provide new chances for former combatants to lead viable lives in an unstable post-conflict context, they simultaneously limit these youths’ mobility, thereby potentially increasing their state of dependence, insecurity, and marginality.

The chapter is organized into eight sections. Following the introduction, the second section describes the research methodology. The third section explores the phenomenon of Bigmanity and highlights the unique features of this patrimonial system. The fourth section describes the emergence of the motorbike taxi industry in Sierra Leone and considers former child soldiers’ participation in it. The fifth section outlines the key players of the motorbike taxi industry, along with how resources and power are amassed and distributed. The sixth and seventh sections center the voices of the research participants and offer accounts of their experiences as former child soldiers turned bike riders. Concluding remarks are then offered in the final section.

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## 2 Methodology

This chapter draws upon in-depth interviews conducted with 14 former child soldiers turned bike riders in three provincial towns: eight from Makeni, five from Bo, and one from Kenema. The participants were between 21 and 35 years old at the time of the interviews. All respondents had been forcibly recruited by an armed group when they were very young (ranging between 10 and 17 years of age) and remained with the armed group for periods ranging from two to approximately 5 years. Only four of the participants had benefited from a disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration program in the aftermath of the war.

Open-ended qualitative interviews with the 14 participants were conducted by the second author in 2011. Interviews, which were conducted in Krio and English, were audio-recorded with permission and later transcribed. A key aim of the interviews was to gain an understanding of participants’ post-conflict realities, and reintegration experiences, but also their reflections and interpretations of

these experiences. Questions posed to participants explored their lives and experiences since the end of the war, as well as their daily lives as Okada riders, particularly in relation to livelihoods, social relations, community opportunities and challenges, and future goals.

Participants were found through local social workers who were engaged in community outreach in each town. Social workers facilitated introductions to six individual bike riders who became participants. The remaining eight participants were found through the local Bike Riders Association (BRA). Two leaders of a local BRA initially suggested eight individuals who were interested in participating in the study. However, prior to interviews, it was learned that all eight individuals were part of the BRA's Executive Council, representing those with greater power and control within the BRA structure. To ensure a variety of rider viewpoints, the researcher suggested that the BRA propose a mix of potential participants from multiple positions and perspectives. One BRA leader wanted to sit in on an interview with a bike rider prior to allowing others to be involved in the research (this interview was subsequently not included as part of the research). The recruitment process and the involvement of the BRA executive in that process shed light not only on the power relations inherent to the bike riding industry but also the relative power of BRA executive members. The BRA's involvement in the selection of eight participants needs to be taken into account when considering the study's findings, and the data can in no way be generalized to the broader population of bike riders. Nonetheless, the data do offer a vital spotlight on the realities, opportunities, and challenges of local Okada riders and the implications of Big Man politics in their daily lives.

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### 3 Big Man Patrimonial Politics

It has been argued that in contexts where state institutions are weak, individuals must seek security and opportunities for socioeconomic mobility through alternate means, mainly by entering into reciprocal, clientelist relationships with "Big Men" patrons (Boas 2010). Whether politicians, prominent religious figures, military commanders, chiefs, or wealthy businessmen, these Big Men do not necessarily rely on their access to formal political structures to acquire power and wealth. Instead, they garner power through the creation of expansive political and economic networks (Christensen 2012). Through these networks, Big Men tactically distribute resources to and extract resources from their less privileged clients (Utas 2012). While "clients" are often conscious of the unequal nature of this exchange and the ways in which it is deliberately organized to bolster the prominence of the Big Men, without support from formal state institutions in times of insecurity and need, clients are left with little choice but to ensure their connection to one or several Big Men. The Big Men's legitimacy is heavily contingent on their ability to gauge the amount of resources required to satisfy their clients. If a Big Man fails to offer the support he has promised, clients may leave him for another Big Man, thereby weakening his power base. In this respect, the power of the Big Man is not fixed, but

dynamic, and intrinsically connected to his capacity to secure a large foundational network of clients (Utas 2012). In other words, in such contexts, “wealth” is located “in the people” and not necessarily within formal political and social apparatuses and institutions (Guyer 1993).

In times of conflict and violent upheaval, Big Men, and the general populace, are provided with new opportunities for innovation and creation. In such contexts, fresh spaces materialize as a result of the deterioration and outright destruction of formal state institutions (Murphy 2010; Vigh 2006). Such a void can be taken advantage of by those seeking to nurture new or older structures, with the intent of creating avenues for economic, social, and political mobility. While this sometimes takes the form of emerging, industrious grassroots economic endeavors, such as Okada riding, this can also take the form of widened opportunities for creating expansive networks of patronage in areas where the state has retreated (Lindell and Utas 2012).

It is also important to note that Big Men are best understood to be nodes in an expansive and interconnected network of clients (i.e., “small men” or “followers”) and other Big Men. In fact, Big Men collaborate and rely on one another to enhance their access to wealth, resources, and security as well as opportunities for network expansion (Utas 2012). It is this peer element that distinguishes Big Man webs from our traditional understanding of patron-client relationships, which are conceptualized as being inherently hierarchical and organizationally vertical (Kähkö 2012). By drawing support from other Big Men, Big Men are able to broaden their network base, thereby bolstering their capacity to amass wealth. As Kähkö (2012) elucidates:

As patron-client networks have commonly been described as hierarchical and vertical, these networks must be understood as constituting a wider concept as they also include the horizontal dimension in the form of peers. Additionally, unlike what is expected in patron-client relationships, clients in these networks belong to different networks and therefore have several Big Men, who in their turn have their own Big Men. (p. 188)

While the notion of the Big Man, along with his networks, stems from Sahlins (1963) exploration of politicosocial structures in Melanesia and Polynesia, this analytic lens is increasingly being adopted in studying similar modes of relations in the African context (Christensen and Utas 2008; Utas 2012). Bigmanity, as a conceptual framework, has the potential to enrich our understanding of how non-state actors, and informal networks, accumulate and distribute wealth, particularly within post-conflict settings. It can further shed light on how these networks provide opportunities for security but, simultaneously, risk fostering climates of profound social injustice through the entrapment and marginalization of large segments of society.

The realities of “Bigmanity” and Big Man politics have characterized the prewar, wartime, and postwar contexts of Sierra Leone. The structural antecedents of Sierra Leone’s decade-long civil war (1991–2002) are complex and multifaceted and are intimately connected to the legacy of colonialism, a weakened state, institutional collapse, structural violence, growing mass disillusionment, and small arms proliferation (Denov 2010). Like much of sub-Saharan

Africa, Sierra Leone was integrated into the world system in a way that marginalized its traditional social systems and left its economy colonized by international enterprises and a kleptocratic governing elite. Over time, the institutionalization of what Reno (1995) has referred to as the “shadow state” characterized government conduct and activities. Through a patrimonial system of rationed favors, theft of public funds, illicit payments, as well as bribes, state corruption became institutionalized and is regarded as an important antecedent to the war. Murphy (2010) argues that patrimonial politics – represented by discretionary, autocratic power of Big Men – not only formed the prewar conditions triggering violent conflict in Sierra Leone but also shaped the organizational structure of the military regimes during the civil war. Perhaps not surprisingly, such patrimonial Big Man relations continue to be deeply entrenched in everyday informal relations in the post-conflict period, whereby a variety of non-state actors enjoy privileged power over the accumulation and distribution of wealth and resources (Chabal and Daloz 1999; Boas 2010; Utas 2012; Käihkö 2012; Christensen 2012). While these networks offer individuals and communities important opportunities for accessing scarce resources and finding security in an often tumultuous postwar climate, they may simultaneously limit chances for meaningful economic and social mobility.

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#### **4 Former Child Soldiers and the Motorbike Taxi Industry in Sierra Leone**

Many of those engaging in Okada riding today in Sierra Leone are former child soldiers. However, it is important to note that the motorbike taxi phenomenon is not unique to the post-conflict period in Sierra Leone (Bürge 2011). In fact, the industry first emerged during the civil war, specifically in the latter half of the 1990s (Bürge 2011). During this time, Okada riders mainly used motorbikes between different cities for both commercial and personal purposes. This minor economic endeavor meant to compensate for other transportation methods that ceased given the dangers associated with traveling throughout the country during the war. As Bürge (2011) remarks on bike riding in Makeni:

In those early years, commercial bike riding remained a marginal enterprise, involving just a handful of bikes, mainly in extraurban transport. Intraurban motorbike transport started to grow after 1998 with the arrival of people unwilling to walk within town: fighters of different national factions; ECOMOG [The Economic Community of West African States’ (ECOWAS) Nigerian led ECOWAS Monitoring Group]; and later on, UN soldiers. People who already owned a bike adapted quickly to this new demand and offered their services to those requesting them. (p. 68)

With the influx of foreign soldiers and nationals, bike riding slowly became a requisite service and means of transport during the war. Significantly, Nigerian soldiers and members of ECOMOG began to purchase bikes and hire individuals living in Makeni as riders (Bürge 2011). The industry began to notably expand

following the end of the civil war (Bürge 2011; Denov 2011; Menzel 2011; Peters 2007; Voldby 2011). Okada riding, as it is referred to locally, has evolved as a common mode of transportation in the country's major provincial towns. As Ibrahim and Shepler (2011) remark:

(...) riding motorbikes (*okada*) has become not only a source of youth employment, but the most effective and, in some places, the only means of transportation in the country. Weaving among cars, sometimes without wearing a helmet, these young people have created a subculture and entrenched it in the country. (p. ix)

Various factors contributed to the aggrandizement of the industry. Importantly, economic forces drove the industry's development, mainly the demand for commercial and personal transportation. A vast number of four-wheeled taxis, a ubiquitous means of transport before the war, were destroyed (Denov 2011; Fithen and Richards 2005; Peters 2007). This, in conjunction with the structural damages the nation incurred, specifically to its road networks, resulted in the demand for an alternative means of private transportation.

Motorbike taxis carry numerous advantages over other means of transport in Sierra Leone. For one, motorbikes enjoy superior maneuverability as they have the capacity to swiftly weave through traffic, navigate poorly maintained and often dilapidated routes, and avert obstructions on the road (Peters 2007). Yet other factors influencing the growth of the industry were the limitations of the country's disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs. It has been argued that these programs did not sufficiently provide youth with the skills requisite for reintegration in the post-conflict era, particularly in light of the country's frail economy (Bürge 2011; Denov 2010; Menzel 2011). The DDR process in Sierra Leone was deemed vital in transitioning ex-combatants from a military to a civilian lifestyle. Approximately 79,000 combatants signed on to the nation's DDR program (Leff 2008). By equipping former soldiers with vocational skills in areas such as bricklaying, carpentry, agriculture, and auto mechanics, it was presumed that social and economic reintegration would be achieved. Although the underlying objectives of the DDR program may have been well intentioned, they failed to seriously consider numerous factors upon which their success depended on. For one, the DDR program primarily concentrated on the supply of skilled labor while overlooking the actual demand for such labor in the economy. In the absence of labor demand in the market, the country was faced with a growing pool of unemployed, skilled, educated, and demoralized youth (Body 2005). Moreover, the DDR process did not entertain the possibility that ex-combatants were already in possession of skills necessary for reintegration. It was presumed that ex-combatants lacked the industriousness and agency to fuel this process in solidarity with one another and independently from DDR. However, as both Peters (2007) and Leff (2008) highlight, 7,000 ex-combatants opted out of the DDR program in search of alternative paths to reintegration. Many flocked to urban areas where the promise for carving out new livelihoods was relatively rich, particularly in the motorbike taxi industry.

Unlike those uninvolved in armed combat, former soldiers developed a distinct set of skills, attitudes, characteristics, values, and desires through their participation in the war, which rendered them “suitable” for the motorbike taxi industry. Significantly, during the war, youth were provided with myriad opportunities for accessing power and status (Denov 2010; Peters 2007). For instance, through an armed group, youth could progressively make their way up the military ranks. Moreover, looting communities and cities often provided these youth with economic resources they never believed they could access (Denov 2010). For some youth, brandishing a weapon instilled a sense of power and control. This sense of wartime empowerment marked a clear departure from the prewar context where many youth were socially and economically immobile (Keen 2003).

However, the post-conflict context constituted a reversion to the zero-power, zero-opportunity reality many youth found themselves in prior to the war. Economic opportunities, such as the motorbike taxi industry, specifically drew in former soldiers given their continued desire for power, authority, control, status, and excitement (Bürge 2011; Cubitt 2012; Denov 2011; Peters 2007). In an interview with a former child soldier turned bike rider, Denov (2011) reveals the parallels between motorbike taxi riding and postwar power:

I love bike riding. When I am on top of my bike, I become the boss. I choose who to carry on the bike and who not to carry. I am in total control in the absence of my boss. . . The bike gives me authority and I'm someone that likes authority so much.

In this regard, motorbike taxi riding can be viewed as an “acceptable substitute in times of peace” (Peters 2007, p.15). Harnessing the skills, knowledge, resources, and strengths they developed during the war, former child soldiers have managed to engage in what Cubitt (2012) considers “autonomous economic integration” (p. 34). Manifesting itself outside of the confines of DDR and national employment initiatives, the motorbike taxi industry is demonstrative of these young people’s ingenuity in identifying and filling in a post-conflict economic vacuum. Through this endeavor, former combatants are not only rebuilding their own lives but also contributing to the economic and social development of the country by providing a crucial means of transportation while, simultaneously, creating employment (over 150,000 jobs) for the masses of urban underemployed youth (Cubitt 2012).

Yet, importantly for this chapter, how does the Okada industry function within the broader context of Big Man networks in postwar Sierra Leone? Before exploring this further, the study’s methodology is addressed.

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## **5 Bigmanity Networks in the Rider Industry: Key Players and Nodes**

Through the motorbike industry, many former child soldiers have discovered a viable means of making a living while contributing to postwar urban reconstruction. By providing a vital service, which the social and economic livelihoods of many

other Sierra Leoneans depend on, former child soldiers have played an integral role in post-conflict society (Voldby 2011). However, although bike riding offers new livelihood strategies for urban youth in general, and former child soldiers specifically, the influence of Big Man patrimonialism cannot be overlooked. Specifically, the power of Big Men in the industry, including executive members of the bike rider associations and bike owners, continues to have a powerful impact upon riders' agency and socioeconomic mobility (Voldby 2011).

Urban motorbike Bigmanity in Sierra Leone can be best understood as a confluence of networks and nodes that shape the industry and influence how riders both gain and lose from their involvement in it. These networks are expansive and encompass not only riders and the Big Men who control the disbursement of resources in the industry but also bike owners or "masters" as well as police and traffic wardens who equally benefit from their ability to gain power and resources from "clients."

## 5.1 The Bike Riders Associations (BRAs)

Riders, or Okada men, are normally affiliated with an organizational network of the Bike Riders Associations (BRAs) (BBC News 2003). Each town typically has their own BRA, which serves various functions. From investigating and mediating disputes between riders, clients, and police, to assisting riders should they have an accident, to aiding in life events such as weddings, naming ceremonies, and funerals, to enforcing rules concerning safe and appropriate riding etiquette, the BRAs play a central role in overseeing and managing the industry and its members (Baker 2006; Peters 2007; Voldby 2011). Nonetheless, the BRA represents a highly hierarchical social structure. Members of the BRA executive board find themselves in a privileged position in this arrangement, which will be addressed further in Sect. 7.

## 5.2 Bike Owners

Bike owners, "masters" or "bosses," represent another form of Big Men who occupy powerful positions as "nodes" within the motorbike industry network. While some riders have accumulated enough wealth to purchase their own bikes, the majority of urban riders must enter into patrimonial relationships with these masters in order to access a bike. In exchange for using their bikes, riders must hand over a portion of their daily earnings to bike owners. In many cases, riders must ensure they accumulate enough earnings during the day to pay masters anywhere from Le 25,000 to Le 30,000 (approximately USD 5.80 to USD 7). This arrangement makes it very difficult for riders to accumulate any personal savings.

### 5.3 Police and Traffic Wardens

Riders must also contend with fines administered by urban police forces and local traffic wardens. Reports suggest that police are using the failure to wear helmets as a way to extort money from both riders and passengers (Massaquoi 2008). Officers allegedly request bribes of 30,000 leones (approximately USD 10) or risk being taken to the police station and subsequently charged in court. If convicted, many are forced to pay fines of up to 150,000 leones (approximately USD 50). Alongside altercations with police, traffic wardens accuse riders of violating traffic rules and driving dangerously. In turn, riders report that traffic wardens favor well-connected riders in the community and are unnecessarily rough during arrests.

Riders find themselves negotiating a dynamic urban network characterized by hierarchical *and* horizontal power relations. In its vertical organization, Big Men exercise their privileged status to extract resources from less powerful network members (i.e., riders) in exchange for protection, support, and access to goods and opportunities. In its horizontal organization, Big Men nodes (i.e., BRA executive members, bike owners, and police forces) function simultaneously to maintain a large socioeconomic network from which to amass wealth and political power. However, it is equally important to acknowledge the reality of horizontal organization and *possibilities* for political mobilization among the riders themselves. While it may appear that riders passively accept the unjust social position they inhabit, riders, as will be demonstrated later on, are in many ways critically conscious of the abusive system they navigate. This awareness can potentially serve as a base from which to counter the oppressive forces that aim to marginalize them.

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## 6 Carving a Livelihood in Post-conflict Sierra Leone: The Benefits of Bike Riding

Having laid out the complexities of the postwar era, particularly the juxtaposition of opportunities and challenges brought forth by Bigmanity social arrangements, we can now explore the ways former child soldiers have sought to carve out new livelihoods in a context of persistent insecurity and uncertainty. By honoring the voices and experiences of former child soldiers turned bike riders, the following section offers an in-depth examination and assessment of how the weight of entrenched Bigmanity networks within the industry both facilitate and strain former child soldiers' capacity, agency, and industriousness in carving out promising and secure livelihoods in the postwar era.

### 6.1 Post-conflict Survival and Livelihoods

As previously noted, bike riding has provided former child soldiers with an important avenue through which to access resources. As many participants



remarked, the industry has played a central role in meeting their economic and survival needs:

I can feed and take care for myself. [...] [I became involved in riding] due to lack of employment and that I couldn't further my studies. In short, it was a faster means of getting money. (Bo rider)

At least, through bike riding I've been able to pay my school fees. . . I pay my bills. . . and my sister in fact stays with me and I give her Le 5000 everyday. (Bo rider)

After the war, bike riding was the only fast means of having money for us ex-combatants. (Makeni rider)

It is plenty. Just after the war, I slept with four or five others on a single bed and also ate a basin of food with the same number. But now. . . I go home and ask for my own food and sleep with my wife on a bed just for us. (Makeni rider)

In other cases, participants shared how the industry has enhanced their ability to care for loved ones and family members:

I say thanks to God now because I can solve my mother's, girlfriend's, young sisters' and my own problems. I pay my sisters' school fees who are sitting to the Common Entrance Exams [to enter secondary school], and as well buy them books, give them lunch (Le 2000 every day) and other things. (Makeni rider)

I even help my two younger brothers and a brother-in-law with their school fees [...] I pay a house rent of Le 15000 every month through earnings from the bike and my life is OK with it. (Makeni rider)

Creating and engaging in this economic venture has afforded former child soldiers the chance to carve out viable livelihoods (Cubitt 2012). As these participants reported:

Also, as a bike rider, my life is well managed as compared to my life just after the war. (Makeni rider)

I decided riding so that I would not be a thief and a criminal and to solve my problems and my family's. (Makeni rider)

My standard of living has improved as compared to the time that I was not riding. At first, I gambled and did a lot of bad things and dubious acts. We were thieves but since bike riding started, it has put a stop to all that. (Bo rider)

By paving avenues through which former child soldiers can contribute to family well-being and economic development, participation in the industry has instilled a sense of hope, pride, and societal connectedness in many riders. Furthermore, by engaging in an activity that benefits the urban populace, former child soldiers are challenging the unjust and socially constructed characteristics that have been accorded to them, including being idle and dangerous:

Well, [the public] thinks of me positively and seeing me riding tells them that I don't idle around and that I've a family to take care of. (Bo rider)

I'm not a 'Big Man' in life as at yet, but through bike riding I'm at least a member of the society. (Makeni rider)

Yes, people always comment that this guy was around languishing before but he is now riding and is better off. On the street, people express that the Police should stop disturbing us because bike riding has so much engaged the youths and theft and criminality has drastically reduced within communities. (Makeni rider)

If I was jobless, even my family would despise me. But since I ride and can earn a bit of money, they respect me. I also help people in the community as recent as last night, a neighbor knocked on my window to help her take her child to the hospital. So, people know I'm a rider and they do come to me to help with problems within my reach. (Makeni rider)

The industry has thus been crucial in the reconstruction of former child soldiers' postwar identities (Denov 2012). In a similar vein, the above narratives shed light on the ways the endeavor has bridged the combatant-civilian divide, particularly by fostering a more favorable and respected notion of former child soldiers' place and role in the post-conflict era among the wider public. By "merging people with different histories and trajectories," the industry has "[contributed] to what is often called *reintegration*" (Bürge 2011, p. 70).

## 6.2 Protection and Solidarity

Through bike riding, former child soldiers have successfully converged to develop supportive and caring communities. During the war, many of these youth lost all ties to their families, communities, and other social networks as a result of being recruited into different armed groups. Although the public's perception of them has shifted to varying extents, former child soldiers continue to face a great deal of stigma given the atrocities they perpetrated during the war (Search for Common Ground 2006). Accordingly, they are left with few opportunities for social support. However, through their prolonged involvement in the war, former child soldiers have developed a set of shared norms and values, namely, solidarity, competition, as well as the desire for power and status (Leff 2008). In light of the similarities between their past experiences and current struggles, it is not surprising to witness former child soldiers coming together in the creation of "new" postwar communities. As Utas (2005) remarks:

To have participated in the war, as opposed to not having done so, was clearly seen as a 'touchstone of fraternity'. On the basis of war experience, ex-combatants remained part of a sub-culture with distinctive social codes and standards. (p.150)

Many participants alluded to the advantages of creating and attaching themselves to a network whose members often shared wartime experiences. Maintaining old and forging new ties with former child soldiers was cited as a way to access social support by the participants:

[One good thing about riding is that] you meet and make new friends. (Bo rider)

Well [the association does] help riders who are involved in accidents with their medical costs and they also contribute to family members when a rider dies. Solidarity exists between us. They also loan bikes to members. (Bo rider)

We are close friends and we do everything in common. All the bike riders are ex-combatants. (Kenema rider)

Joining together in a “community of sameness,” in the context of the motorbike industry, was not only a strategy former child soldiers employed to seek social support but also likely an attempt to protect themselves from the social phenomenon of stigma. Participants shared their and their peers’ experiences of discrimination and retribution on account of the stigma attached to their identities as former child soldiers *and* as urban young men:

Yes, they usually say ‘let this boy to go, they are rebels.’ [...] It is really painful sometimes. . . . (Bo rider)

While my friend was riding, somebody cut him off suddenly which led him to hit a pedestrian. However, bystanders as usual, insulted and even beat him up saying that he is an ex-combatant. (Bo rider)

They sometimes called us ‘rebels’ and it is done in the open. (Bo rider)

Yes, most of our friends ride roughly which makes bystanders or passengers tell us that we are rebels. And so, we are rough and we don’t care. Even when accident happens, they blame us. . . . (Bo rider)

Just going into riding early, we were seen as dirty and reckless people by the community. We had no respect because [they said] we put passengers’ lives at risk when they board our bikes. We are also often hissed at and despised (. . .) Even now, there were people who do not talk to me on account of my past behavior or attitude to them during the war (. . .) Whenever we rode in an area and blew horns continuously for people to give way, they told us that we are yet to change from our rebellious attitudes. And up to this time, people do say nasty comments against us (. . .) It has not stopped and it happens every day. If I go out now and ride recklessly. . .our past status is reminded. They know we are ex-combatants and so whatever behaviors bad and unfortunately we put on, is linked to it. (Makeni rider)

These statements highlight the negative and often stigmatizing perceptions many urban citizens continue to have of former child soldiers, specifically, and of urban youth, in general. Viewed as rough, irresponsible, and destructive, former child soldiers struggle to detach themselves from what Menzel (2011) describes as an “aesthetics of danger” (p. 100). Despite riders’ vital contributions to the economic and social mobility of the country, the dangerous nature of their work constrains their capacity to divorce their postwar identities from the undesirable characteristics associated with the wartime socialization processes they underwent. In instances where the “roughness” of their past is emphasized, a common occurrence in the bike riding profession as one can imagine, riders risk facing verbal and physical assaults by the public (Bürge 2011). The stigma attached to former child soldiers’ identity, in this respect, can be seen as extending to all those affiliated with the riding industry, including other young men who may have never participated in the war.

Urban youth in Sierra Leone are generally relegated to an inferior social class (Bolten 2012; Menzel 2011). Perceived as uncontrollable, defiant, and lazy, the youth across the country face overwhelming barriers in accessing opportunities for socioeconomic and political mobility (Bolten 2012; Bürge 2011; Cubitt 2012;

Maina 2012). The civil war has only served to amplify this negative perception, particularly in light of the large numbers of youth who voluntarily or forcibly joined armed groups.

In this regard, popular beliefs and perceptions of urban youth and former child soldiers as ruthless, destructive, and living a life of impunity work to conflate the stigma and oppression these young people must contend with. The situation effectively entraps urban youth in a vicious cycle of marginality and immobility. In light of such disempowering forces, it is unsurprising to see former child soldiers, and other urban youth, bond together in order to forge new communities, economic ventures, and support systems. Within such spaces, youth can, to varying degrees, find solace from an otherwise hostile and uncertain social landscape.

While social bonding is useful in fostering a sense of community and security among riders, it does little in terms of protecting them from the extractionary power of Big Men external to the BRA membership, namely, bike owners and the police. By attaching themselves to Big Men motorbike networks, former child soldiers stand to benefit from the far-reaching influence and status embodied in the BRA executive board. Interventions initiated by the executive, on behalf of riders, serve two functions. On the one hand, they offer riders a form of paternalistic protection from the abusive power of other Big Men. On the other hand, they work to maintain the BRA's network of clients from which to accumulate resources. These participants report on the various ways the BRA has supported and protected them:

Indeed, riding an unlicensed bike was a problem I knew of, but I had hoped that through maneuvering skills, I wouldn't be caught by the police. The [bike] owner initially had not wanted to pay [for the license] but the timely intervention of the BRA ensured the Boss paid the [license] fee. (Makeni rider)

If my bike is seized and impounded at the [police] station, BRA will do all it can to have it released. The association will intervene if I'm held by the police. It's good. (Makeni rider)

Now the association insures that members have a license even if it is expensive. When you have a problem as well, you can rush to them for help. (Bo rider)

I was charged with riding an unlicensed motorbike, riding without a helmet, driver's license and insurance; All five (5) charges were levied against me (...) I was fined a hundred thousand Leones for each of those five charges. But through the advocacy of the BRA's Chairman, the fines were reduced to fifty thousand Leones each and I ended up paying Le 250,000. (Makeni rider)

The Chairman also secured a loan of thirty million Leones from the Bank which he used to acquire driving licenses for 108 riders with beneficiaries paying back by soft loan. (Makeni rider)

A few days ago there was a general meeting for all riders where the chairman told us that he has bought helmets [which the police always arrest riders for] from Guinea which he will sell to us for Le 25,000.00 instead of the Le 70,000.00 price at a shop. Also, he has ensured that members secured a one year driving license which riders pay immediately Le 50,000.00 and later pay the remaining Le 50,000.00 by instalment. (Makeni rider)

As these passages reveal, there are numerous advantages associated with attaching oneself to the BRA network. Not only does the BRA offer material resources to its members but also extends protection from legal authorities in

instances where riders are in conflict with the law. In the absence of BRA paternalism, many riders would face long-term imprisonment and stiffening fines, thereby undermining their capacity to secure a living through the economic service they played a central part in making.

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## 7 **Big Men Extortion, Small Men Frustration: The Perils of Bike Riding**

Although former child soldiers reap benefits from the industry, the infiltration and growing power of Big Men within the motorbike riding network risk re-marginalizing these youth. Significantly, the extractionary and gerontocratic nature of social arrangements characteristic of the industry continue to effectively impose limits on riders' social mobility and overall socioeconomic status. Numerous participants in the study highlighted the constraining and debilitating impacts of Big Men extortion. The following statements reveal participants' struggles in accumulating the required finances for their masters (i.e., bike owner's/"bosses") along with the consequences they suffered when unable to do so. The related strains on their personal lives and constraining effects on their aspirations for mobility are also emphasized:

But two things can't go together – being in school and as well figuring out my survival from the bike and again to provide the daily boss man fee. So I decided to drop out of school and concentrate on business. (Makeni rider)

One rider underscored the precarious nature of the relationship with his boss, his dependence upon him, and the uncertainty of his economic situation as a whole:

My present trouble is that I don't have a bike of my own and am just making money for someone else. . .My boss owns the bike. He can ask me to leave at any time because there is really no guarantee in the relationship – there is no blood relation to keep us together. . .My relationship with my boss is not 100 percent okay. Sometimes when I'm unable to raise 25,000 Leones from the bike, he abuses me verbally and insults me. . .He threatens that he will take the bike from me, as if our relationship is just tied around the bike. . .[When this happens] I try to talk to him and beg him to return the bike to me, as I can't survive without it for now. . .When his anger subsides, he usually returns the bike to me. . .but he doesn't care about me or my situation. All he cares about is the money. . .He is arrogant and disrespectful. (Kenema rider)

When this participant was asked if his boss ever beats him, he replied:

Well he pushes my head all the time like this [motions to his head]. I consider that even more humiliating than beating. It makes me feel very bad. . .Sometimes when this happens, I argue with him or think about physically attacking him. . .The war had a big impact on me in that I am now very hot-tempered and I just act [impulsively]. . .But people around always talk to me to calm down. What makes me cool off is when I think about my future, which is partly in his hands now. (Kenema rider)

Participants also reflected on the immobilizing and adverse impacts stemming from Big Men police extraction.

My worries remain about fear of traffic police and revenue collectors who often disturb us and take money from us. (Makeni rider)

They used to [harass] us for [not having] driving mirrors. We removed them because the light from another bike reflects on us [and we can't see]. So if we are held because of this, we have to give them Le 5,000 if they do not accept Le 2,000 or even more than that to avoid problems. To ride without a helmet and improper footwear brings an additional fine which we must pay for. (Bo rider)

The above testimonies reveal the intricate web of fees, fines, and abusive power relationships former child soldiers turned riders must negotiate. While the industry is considered by many to have been integral in building rewarding livelihoods, it simultaneously exposes them to structures and social arrangements that undermine their capacity to accumulate wealth and shift to more secure and self-sustaining social positions.

Riders now find themselves integrated as “small men” within a highly hierarchical socioeconomic structure through their membership to the BRA. The BRA, and the social relationships riders have forged through the network, has effectively served the varying needs of former combatants in urban Sierra Leone. However, the emergence of an expansive social and economic base within this network has created lucrative opportunities for extraction, specifically for those at the top. Many participants described the ways their marginal position as “regular” members within the BRA have exposed them to the extractory powers of members occupying higher rungs of the association’s social ladder.

There are people referred to as taskforce who give us tickets of Le 1, 000 every day which some for my friends are not happy but I’m ok with it (. . .) But again this same group raids and coerces riders to pay tickets or give money to attend social functions which I’m really against. [This costs] Le 5, 000 (. . .)[My friend’s] bike was taken from him [for not attending a social function] until he paid a fine of Le 10, 000. (Bo rider)

We do sometimes fight those taskforce members for the tickets but they outnumber us and they have the right, so we can’t succeed. [Bo rider in reference to how regular members of the BRA must buy tickets from the association’s taskforce members]

One’s bike will be seized and the taskforce members put up road blocks to collect these monies. One must buy [the daily ticket]. (Bo rider)

Other participants explained the benefits they reap on account of their privileged status within the BRA:

Yes, now I am a member of the association’s executive as one of the task force members. I am not riding at present but engage in selling tickets occupying the sixth position in the task force membership. At 6:00am, I am out to sell tickets and in fact my respect has increased. I can board any bike at any time without paying a dime. (Makeni rider)

Many of the above quotes shed light onto the very hierarchical and unequal nature of participation in the association. While some members greatly benefit from

their involvement in the association, namely, executive and task force members, the majority of riders, also referred to as “regular” members, are unfairly and disproportionately impacted by the extractionary nature of the system.

Based on the analysis thus far, it would appear that riders under the BRAs are complacent or passively accepting of the extractionary environment they negotiate. However, as Voldby’s (2011) research reveals, riders assert that this is the best position to be in given the prevailing context of insecurity and uncertainty in the country. The conceptualization of riding as the best possible alternative was alluded to by some of the participants:

Well if I can see any opportunity for me to make money than what I get from the bike, I’ll leave the bike. (Kenema rider)

I didn’t learn any skill job though I can trade in pepper, palm oil and such other cooking condiments. But I’m satisfied with bike riding for now. (Makeni rider)

Instead of viewing former child soldiers as “buying into” the unjust network they are a part of, it is important to situate these young men’s continued connection to these Big Men networks in light of the wider context. As previously noted, confronted with a post-conflict urban terrain marked by rampant poverty, few employment opportunities, and weak state institutions, former child soldiers’ attachment to Bigmanity networks, however oppressive such arrangements are, can in fact be understood as an active and tactical decision. Failing to do so, in many cases, could render former child soldiers’ realities more precarious and insecure.

Nonetheless, many participants expressed their frustration with the industry, in general, and the BRA, specifically, in light of failed promises, the unjust allocation of resources, and a growing recognition of regular members’ static, marginal position within the network:

They have a loan facility from a Bank which they use to buy bikes for members (. . .) But, the beneficiaries in the first scheme were the same in the second scheme. So there is an outcry within the BRA membership that beneficiaries should be changed in the pending scheme. (Makeni rider)

For me, it is not helping. They have never helped me and I have never involved in an accident (. . .) It bothers me so much, because they are not doing much with [the membership fees]. I expected them to have completed the office structure by now [which is what they said they were using the membership dues to construct]. (Bo Rider)

The executive always . . . determines the beneficiaries of the loans. But we as ordinary riders pay Le 1,000.00 every day as ticket fee which is altogether accumulated to secure the loan which they buy these bikes with. The executive members themselves have been the only beneficiaries of this scheme. (Makeni rider)

These passages reveal how riders acknowledge not only the unequal power dynamics within the BRA but also the executive’s failure in honoring their side of the patron-client moral contract. By co-opting funds that are theoretically meant to benefit riders, the executive is insidiously undermining the reciprocal social arrangement upon which riders’ decision to join the BRA rested on. In so doing, the executive is effectively delegitimizing their exclusive claim to power, status,

extraction, and control over the network. Such circumstances risk engendering mounting frustration and disillusionment among former child soldiers, potentially leading to mass defection or rebellion. In this respect, instead of offering viable opportunities for social and economic mobility, Bigmanity networks are working to threaten former child soldiers' capacity to survive and grow in the postwar era.

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## 8 Conclusion

The participants' narratives contribute, in numerous ways, to our understanding of the opportunities and challenges that characterize the urban post-conflict terrain. For one, postwar landscapes can potentially offer fresh new social and economic spaces within which innovative and instrumental endeavors can be constructed. The motorbike taxi industry in Sierra Leone is a case in point. While offering viable opportunities for employment to the country's urban youth population, this economic venture has simultaneously filled a gap in the nation's urban transportation industry. In so doing, the industry can be considered to be of great importance to the country's urban economic and social reconstruction and development.

Secondly, former child soldiers have demonstrated their unique capacity to carve out their own paths for reintegration without the support of DDR and government. By drawing on the skills, resources, social networks, and knowledge developed during the war, former child soldiers have innovatively built enterprises and supportive communities that meet their economic and social needs. This reality challenges the notion that all ex-soldiers are in need of sophisticated, paternalistic reintegration programs, which are, for the most part, created and imposed by external agents. Often such programs do not recognize the agency and industriousness of former child soldiers, nor do they seriously consider the state and needs of the labor and broader economic market.

The findings stress the need to more meaningfully consider alternatives to postwar reintegration, specifically endeavors that are relatively more "grassroots" in nature and that directly implicate marginalized youth, including former child soldiers. While international and governmental programs such as DDR may be beneficial, based on the current study, they may fall short of meeting ex-soldiers' and post-conflict societies' social, political, and economic needs.

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## Abstract

This chapter discusses resilience and capacities for coping among young people in the highly violent context of eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). It synthesizes and draws upon the psychological resilience literature and uses this to elaborate a three-part resilience framework for examining how young people cope with the adversities and constraints of entrenched military and structural violence. Based on fieldwork conducted in North and South Kivu in 2010 and 2011, the chapter presents narratives offered by three young people who explain their daily challenges of survival and development and who describe the coping

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mechanisms they rely upon. The concept of *la débrouille*, or “finding one’s way,” is described as a common coping approach in the DRC. The chapter concludes by arguing that young people’s capacity to effectively cope with the constraints imposed by violence should not be confused with resilience and should even be considered as part of the social and political processes which contribute to perpetuating the structures of violence which young people in the DRC are so busy trying to survive.

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**Keywords**

Agency • Coping • Democratic Republic of the Congo • *La débrouille* • Resilience • Violence • War • Young people

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## 1 Introduction

This chapter draws upon a larger research project on young people’s experiences and means of coping with violence in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (Seymour 2012, 2014). It is organized into three sections: The first section, after briefly critiquing the assumptions of trauma as a necessary consequence of war experience, presents an overview of the psychological literature on children’s resilience to violence and adversity and outlines a three-part framework which can be used to support examination and analysis of how young people attempt to cope with the often extreme constraints and adversities presented by violence and war. The second section focuses on one dominant expression of coping among young people in the DRC, namely, *la débrouille* or “finding one’s way”; through the presentation of narratives of three young people, perspectives are shared on the often profound challenges and constraints for survival and advancement facing young people in the highly militarized and structurally violent context of the Kivus. The final section describes why effective coping should not be confused with resilience.

The setting for the research is the provinces of North and South Kivu, DRC. Long affected by violence, the situation in the Kivus is often described as “the world’s deadliest humanitarian crisis” (Coghlan et al. 2006, p. 44), where there are at least 1.5 million people displaced by violence at any given time (United Nations 2013), and considered “the rape capital of the world” (BBC 2010). The conflict dynamics in the Kivus are exacerbated by its dense natural resource wealth, its high population density, and its long and historically entrenched politics of contestation over identity and belonging (Mamdani 2001; Jackson 2006; Prunier 2009). The larger research project in which this chapter is embedded drew on doctoral fieldwork as well as earlier experiences living and working in the DRC between 2006 and 2011. Over the course of 40 months, the author either worked as a child protection professional with the United Nations and various NGO organizations or was conducting doctoral fieldwork. The narratives which feature in this chapter were documented during doctoral fieldwork conducted in South Kivu between March and July 2010 and in North Kivu between July and September 2011. Data collection relied on ethnographically influenced methodologies and included

extensive interviews, formal and informal group discussions, participant observation, and “deep hanging out” (Geertz 2000) with young people between the ages of 12 and 24 years – 44 of them in South Kivu and more than 200 young people in North Kivu. During this period, the main forces of militarized violence included the national army – the *Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo* (FARDC); the *Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple* (CNDP), a breakaway faction of which would, in 2012, become the M23 movement; the *Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda* (FDLR); and a wide range of Mayi-Mayi militia which ostensibly organize to protect local interests. Although the Kivus remained highly militarized at this time, actual battles and confrontations were relatively rare, with the main upsurges of violence being over control of land, mines, and trade routes.

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## 2 Young People’s Resilience in Contexts of War: A Three-Part Resilience Framework

### 2.1 Transcending Assumptions of Trauma

Children’s capacity to cope with the destruction and loss associated with war has been the subject of study since at least World War II (Freud and Burlingham 1943). Much of this literature has focused on the psychologically traumatic effects of war (Macksoud and Aber 1996; Neuner et al. 2004; Jordans et al. 2009) and often from a perspective of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD, a classification initially applied to certain American war veterans on their return from Vietnam, is defined as “an anxiety disorder caused by the major personal stress of a serious or frightening event, such as an injury, assault, rape, or exposure to warfare or a disaster involving many casualties. The reaction may be immediate or delayed for months. The sufferer experiences the persistent recurrence of images or memories of the event, together with nightmares, insomnia, a sense of isolation, guilt, irritability, and loss of concentration. Emotions may be deadened or depression may develop” (Oxford Concise Medical Dictionary 2002).

This trauma literature considers that children’s extended exposure to conflict will result in a range of mental health disorders, from somatic complaints to “altered levels of cognitive functioning and moral reasoning” (Ladd and Cairns 1996, p. 14) as well as “anger, despair, and severe psychic numbing” (Garbarino and Kostelny 1996, p. 33). Yet such presumptions of psychological trauma tend to obscure individuals’ highly varied and complex experiences of war (Summerfield 2001), while recent research on children’s experiences of war in places as diverse as Afghanistan (Miller et al. 2009), Sri Lanka (Fernando et al. 2010), the West Bank (Al-Krenawi et al. 2007), and Chad (Rasmussen et al. 2010) has shown that the correlation between war experience and the expression of trauma is far less significant than assumed. Other studies in Palestine and Israel (Punamaki 1996; Garbarino and Kostelny 1996), Northern Ireland (Killian 2002; Muldoon 2004), and

South Africa (Dawes 1990) show that children are generally able to adapt to and cope quite well with the daily risks and adversities associated with political violence.

## 2.2 Resilience and Individual Agency

Resilience theory offers insight into adaptive processes and how individuals may experience better-than-expected developmental outcomes and how they are often able to cope effectively with protracted conditions of violence and adversity (Ungar 2005; Annan et al. 2006; Zraly 2008; Seymour 2012). Resilience theory considers the qualities, factors, and conditions which protect individuals from the development of psychopathology (Garmezy 1985; Masten et al. 1990; Richters and Martinez 1993; Rutter 2007). Drawing on the field of epidemiology, where resilience is defined as “the factors that accentuate or inhibit disease and deficiency states, and the processes that underlie them” (Haggerty et al. 1994, p. 9), psychological resilience is defined as a dynamic process of adjustment that leads to a “relatively good outcome despite suffering risk experiences” (Rutter 2007, p. 205). While early resilience studies were focused on the situation of children growing up at the margins of Western European or American society (Elder 1974; Werner and Smith 1992), or in families where parents were mentally ill (Luthar et al. 2003) and dependent on drugs (Barnard 2003) or alcohol (Werner and Johnson 1999), their findings offer a useful framework for understanding how young people living through experiences of high risk are able to adapt and adjust effectively.

Three core aspects of resilience theory have been drawn upon to establish a theoretical framework for examining how young people cope with experiences of protracted structural and political violence: individual coping capacities, social support mechanisms, and processes of meaning attribution. In terms of individual coping capacities, young people’s ability to deal effectively with adversity is strengthened when they are able to plan and take life decisions (Rutter and Quinton 1984), when they feel they have control over their environment (Werner and Smith 1992), and when they maintain a positive conception of themselves with a high level of self-esteem (Rutter 2000). Personal agency – or the human capacity to “act mindfully to make desired things happen rather than simply undergo happenings” (Bandura 2001, p. 5) – and the capacity to act in one’s world are especially important in long-term resilience, as “unless people believe they can produce desired results and forestall detrimental ones by their actions, they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties” (ibid, p. 10).

While young people are able to play an active role in their own circumstances and can thus contribute to their longer-term outcomes (James and Prout 1997; Boyden and de Berry 2004), in conditions of protracted violence and entrenched poverty, individual agency can only do so much, and thus the broader structures and conditions in which young people live need to be taken into account. Understanding young people’s experiences of violence and conflict requires an examination of the spaces at the “intersection between agency and social forces” (Christiansen et al. 2006, p. 16), a consideration of how young people may take advantage of the new and changing

circumstances presented by war (Arnfred and Utas 2007), how social orders may be remade (Richards 1996), and how otherwise proscribed life trajectories can be negotiated, navigated, and reconfigured (Vigh 2006). Although at times conflict may present young people with opportunities to shift confining social norms, the collateral damage of war and the tactics and mechanisms adopted by young people as they cope – or “deal effectively with something difficult” (Oxford Dictionaries nd) – may also contribute to longer-term harm (Seymour 2014).

### 2.3 Social Support in Coping with Conflict

Beyond the individual, the second aspect of the resilience framework presented here examines the role of social support and how one’s social environment can contribute to or weaken individual capacities for adapting to risk and adversity. Healthy family functioning has been shown to help children cope effectively with conditions of adversity (Garbarino et al. 1991). For example, early psychological studies conducted among children during World War II demonstrated how family support and social attachment are essential for mitigating the impacts of displacement and separation from parents, with the negative effects of war on children only becoming “significant the moment it breaks up family life and uproots the first emotional attachments of the child within the family group” (Freud and Burlingham 1943, p. 149). In more recent studies, children have been found to be better able to cope with the impacts of political violence in a “context of healthy family functioning and parental well-being” (Garbarino and Kostelny 1996, p. 43) and supportive family environments (Qouta et al. 2008; Macksoud and Aber 1996; Betancourt and Williams 2008).

Although families are usually considered to serve as a source of protection for young people, resilience research also shows how family breakdown can present greater risks to the healthy psychological development and well-being of children (Elder 1974; Garmezy 1985; Masten et al. 1990; Werner and Smith 1992; Rutter 1994). For example, disorganized family environments, alcoholism, and disturbed parent-child relationships have a clear impact on children’s development outcomes, although these impacts vary by individual, in some cases leading to the development of some type of psychopathology while in others leading to a “steeling effect” in which the child develops heightened capacities for coping (Rutter 2007). Studies among young single mothers in the United States have examined the impact of stress levels among mothers on children’s psychological situation (Cramer and McDonald 1996). The stresses associated with family breakdown can have long-term impacts on an individual’s life course, and resilience research shows how “serious disruptions in the early relationships with caregivers – in the form of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse – strongly impair the chances of resilient adaptation later in life” (Luthar 2006, p. 780).

Specifically in contexts of violent conflict, the constraints and challenges associated with survival can distort “the powerful socializing influence of the family toward abusive and malign effects” (Ager 2006, p. 50). Multiple studies have

shown how violence can negatively feedback on parental capacities (Buka et al. 2001; Lynch and Cicchetti 2002), with research showing that the stress associated with violent conflict and its resulting social instability may lead to an increased incidence of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse of children (Triplehorn and Chen 2006, p. 228). For example, as seen among young people in Palestine, domestic violence can have an even greater negative impact on children's psychological well-being than political violence (Al-Krenawi et al. 2007). In Sri Lanka, the complex feedback between political violence and family functioning is demonstrated via pathways through which child abuse is linked to paternal substance abuse which is in turn related to the levels of exposure to war-related violence (Catani et al. 2008). Often the conditions associated with or resulting from violent conflict – for example, political uncertainty, forced displacement, food insecurity, illness, and death – increase the strain on available local resources (Ager et al. 2005) and leave caregivers unable to meet basic physical needs of their families (Ager 2006). In such situations, it is possible that “systems that are normally sources of support and protection, such as the family, become sources of risk and developmental damage” (Boothby et al. 2006, p. 5).

Resilience is an inherently “intersubjective” and relational concept (Delage 2008, p. 8), and social networks beyond the family are essential for supporting effective psychological adaptation, providing individuals with a sense of their place in the world (Garnezy 1985; Gilligan 2001; Masten and Obradovic 2006). A broadened perspective on the social allows for appreciation that the capacity to effectively cope is “not a condition of individuals alone, but also exists as a trait of a child's social and political setting” (Ungar 2008, p. 220). The social ecology model of child development as elaborated by Bronfenbrenner (1986) emphasizes the foundational role of social relationships in children's development processes, where relations within families, among peers, and with local institutions and authorities are central elements that protect young people from the developmental risks associated with conditions of adversity (Lynch and Cicchetti 1998; Ager et al. 2005; Berckmoes and Reis 2013). The essential role of social support for individual resilience has been demonstrated in a diversity of contexts. For example, during the civil war in Sri Lanka, it was shown that “the first common community coping strategy was to fall back on group-based networks and family ties” (Goodhand et al. 2000, p. 401). Similarly, research in post-conflict Cambodia (Colletta and Cullen 2000) has emphasized the importance of social ties in supporting an individual's process of emotional recovery. In South Africa, young people who were engaged in the political struggle against the apartheid regime were shown to be psychologically protected from the worst impacts of state violence by community members who offered their support and considered them to be heroes (Dawes 1990).

## 2.4 Meaning Attribution and Coping

The third element of the resilience framework considers how the meanings attributed to experiences of violence can have an impact on coping capacities. Meaning



attribution is defined as the processes through which “people think about their experiences and how they incorporate them into their overall schema of themselves, their environment, and their relationships with other people” (Rutter 2000, p. 674). The psychologically protective attributes of meaning attribution are evident in how individuals connect themselves with the world around them: “People are meaning-makers insofar as they seem compelled to establish mental representations of expected relations that tie together elements of their external world, elements of the self, and most importantly, bind the self to the external world” (Heine et al. 2006, p. 89). Along these lines, Viktor Frankl’s (2006[1959]) foundational studies with Holocaust survivors attempted to understand how people were able to construct and reconstruct meaning of their experiences in the concentration camps. One of his main conclusions was that a “will to meaning” is the primordial drive which motivates human experience. Others have shown that an inability to attribute meaning to life events leads individuals to become “existentially frustrated” and mentally depressed (Crumbaugh and Maholick 1964, p. 200). The attribution of meaning thus serves to protect individuals from the development of psychopathology following experiences of extreme adversity.

Psychologists working with young people in contexts of political violence have shown that their long-term well-being is directly linked to the meaning that they attach to their experiences (Rutter 2000; Boothby et al. 2006; Slone and Shoshani 2008; Barber 2009), with the role of political ideology being especially important (Garbarino et al. 1991). The sense of coherence and predictability between an individual’s internal and external environment which is essential for coping with adversity (Werner and Smith 1992) can be derived from political or religious ideology, especially in contexts affected by political violence (Punamaki 1996; Hart 2008; Barber 2009). A comparative study conducted by Brian Barber (2009) of the psychological impacts of violence on Palestinian and Bosnian youth shows how “an ability to understand the conflict (i.e., interpret, make sense of it) was a significant parameter that distinguished the degree to which youth felt injured by the violence” (ibid, p. 289). Through his presentation of narrative data, Barber shows how the political, social, and ideological meanings applied to the conflict in Palestine are psychologically protective, helping young people to effectively cope with political violence. In contrast, Barber finds that in Bosnia, young people do not apply meaning to their experiences of war; as a consequence “the lack of this explanatory information – in any of the variety of cultural, political, historical, or religious systems that it could have been packaged – was what frightened, embittered, and traumatized the Bosnian youth” (ibid, p. 302). Although in some cases the attribution of meaning can be protective to young people, in others it can be damaging to their capacities for coping with violence. For example, a study conducted with more than 3,000 Palestinian secondary school students demonstrates that exposure to events which are perceived as “humiliating” and “unjust” are correlated with increased reports of subjective health complaints (Giacaman et al. 2008, p. 563). Research by Wessells and Strang (2006, p. 204) explores how processes of “enemy imagining,” such as the portrayal of political opponents “as demonic, savage and inhumane,” can lead to increased fear among young people, as

well as to the rationalization of acts of violence against others. In this way, political ideology can contribute to the hatreds and enmities that perpetuate violence. As with ideology, identity has been shown to interact with young people's coping processes in contexts affected by violence, often serving a psychologically protective function and providing meaning and coherence to experiences of suffering and loss – even as it can also contribute to continued violence.

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### 3 ***La débrouille*: A Dominant Approach to Coping in the Kivus**

This section considers in greater detail the first aspect of the resilience framework – individual coping. Coping is defined as the capacity to “deal effectively with something difficult” (Oxford Dictionaries nd). In the Kivus, coping consists of tactics which offer young people the best short-term options, but which do little to influence the structures of violence in which they are embedded (Seymour 2014). While the coping mechanisms relied upon by young people in the Kivus may represent an extremely limited form of agency, more often their coping mechanisms merely provide them with the means to survive the violence of each day and should not be confused with the notion of resilience described in the section above.

As shown through the data collected among young people, they are left fending for themselves in a context where the state provides little or no services or protection and where traditional support structures have all but broken down. They have thus few survival alternatives beyond *la débrouille*. *La débrouille* is a ubiquitous concept throughout the DRC and indeed throughout much of Franco-phone sub-Saharan Africa (Olivier de Sardan 1996). The word is derived from the French verb *se débrouiller*, which can be translated as “to find a way,” “to make arrangements,” “to use one's own means” or “to be satisfied with” (Larousse Online Dictionary nd). *La débrouille* is a specific way of coping which has come to dominate discourses on survival in the DRC, a term which also serves as an epithet to justify the absence of government services and the prevalence of corrupt practices. At the individual level, *la débrouille* serves as a key coping mechanism which is primarily associated with finding a way to meet one's material needs. Given the lack of employment alternatives and difficulties in finding a way to earn a living, the capacity for *la débrouille* allows young people to survive and to make the best of challenging circumstances. However, it does not allow them to significantly influence or act upon the structures of violence in which they are embedded.

Serving as a key coping strategy, *la débrouille* remains extremely relevant in the lives of young people today. As the research participants were keen to teach me, the response to the casual Kiswahili greeting when seeing a friend on the street, “Unaenda wapi?” [Where are you going?], is usually met with the response: “Ninaenda kujidebrouiller” [I'm going to find my way – *me débrouiller*] (group discussion, May 2010). The capacity of *la débrouille* was clearly demonstrated by

the young research participants who would engage in multiple tactics as they tried to ensure their daily survival, from accepting daily wage labor tasks such as cultivating the fields of others or transporting rocks for a road construction project, to seeking handouts of food or money from others, to more risky tactics such as occasionally trading in sex for money. As they explained, one always has to be alert as the capacity for *la débrouille* depends both on one's individual ability to appraise and make use of potential opportunities and on the chance that such opportunities present themselves at any given time. To demonstrate the diversity of possible ways in which young people use their capacities for *la débrouille*, this section shares the narratives of three young people.

### 3.1 Living with "Intelligence"

The first example is offered by Richard [pseudonym], who was 19 years old when this research was conducted in 2010. Richard had been comparatively successful at taking advantage of the limited possibilities available to a young person living in rural South Kivu, yet his capacity for "finding his way" required significant personal struggle. During his biographical interview, Richard recounted how, following the death of his father in 2001, he had become responsible for the survival of his family:

My father died when I was 10 years old. From then I had to ensure our survival. My mother wasn't in good health so I was responsible for us both. After my father died, I dropped out of school because it was no longer possible to pay my school fees. I travelled to the nearby mines in search of gold. The conditions in the gold mines were so demanding and I eventually realised that I'd probably never find any gold. So then I began selling beer at the mine. With that I was able to make just enough money for us to live with, but the work was so heavy. The following year, I thought I would try to earn more in the cassiterite mines further away. There the conditions were impossible. It was so hard, and I spent all the money I earned just to buy food each day and to pay for a place to sleep.

I came back home in 2009, then rented some land to cultivate. I'm growing cassava now, and even with the *mosaic* [plant virus] we manage to cultivate enough for eating. Last year I also participated in a carpentry skills training programme [offered by a local NGO] and now I get some jobs as a carpenter, making doors mostly and some furniture. This helps me to support my mother, my wife and our two children.

Richard's capacity for coping with generalized rural poverty required his ability to search out new opportunities and a willingness to travel far and work under extremely difficult physical conditions. It also required the skill of discerning when to end a venture that was proving to be unprofitable. Richard was committed to ensuring the survival of his ailing mother and to supporting his wife and children.

During a return visit in September 2011, 1 year after the fieldwork period had ended, Richard continued to demonstrate his ability to effectively cope within the structures of violence. His carpentry workshop was doing relatively well, and his family's needs were provided for; Richard was facing the constraints of

poverty far better than any of his peers. For him, it was the personal sense of responsibility he felt toward his family which kept him constantly in search of the next possible opportunity. Richard's capacity for coping with the hardships associated with rural poverty demonstrates what the young research participants would frequently refer to as "intelligence." According to them, successful coping requires the capacity "to live despite it all. We depend on our intelligence. Intelligence is our capacity to know how to exploit our potential and to seize possible opportunities" (interview, Bunyakiri, May 2010). This kind of intelligence requires:

the capacity to look for one's livelihood [*chercher la vie*]. We don't cross our arms, we look to others for help. . . Intelligence requires the ability to change behaviours. . . to think about solutions and to know how to realise them. It's knowing how to use what we've been given. . . Intelligence comes from experiencing difficulties. If one isn't hungry, one won't learn intelligence. (focus group discussion, Bukavu, April 2010)

### 3.2 Survival and Risk Taking

The second example of young people's capacity for *la débrouille* discussed here offers insights into the risks which can be associated with young people's efforts to ensure their best survival outcomes. It demonstrates how the structures of violence – in this case protracted displacement and a lack of alternative livelihood possibilities – can transform short-term coping mechanisms into longer-term risks. The context of this narrative is Masisi Territory, an area in North Kivu which has long been affected by militarized conflict. In Masisi, the local population has repeatedly experienced forced displacement, and consequently many families have lost access to their land, rendering them dependent on daily wage labor for their survival.

As the young research participants repeatedly explained, the constraints of poverty, lack of livelihood alternatives, and displacement from family land lead many girls to choose transactional sex as the most accessible and reliable income-earning tactic (Seymour 2011). In the cash-based urban economies of the Kivus, young people would note that "some girls are so poor that sex is the only way that they can get any money" (focus group discussion, girls 14–17 years old, Goma, July 2011). This phenomenon is also prevalent in rural areas, as explained by a 14-year-old girl in rural Masisi (interview, July 2011): "We're ten children in my family. There are nights that we don't eat. When we're in this situation, I have no choice but to prostitute myself to earn some money. This is how I survive." Parents would admit that their daughters were engaging in sex to support their survival or to buy material goods, and while they asserted that they wished this would not happen, they felt helpless in changing the situation: "As we are unable to respond to the needs of our daughters, they will find their own means" (focus group discussion with parents, Butembo, August 2011).

For many people in Masisi Territory on the edge of survival, an armed attack on a village, looting of personal property, or a brief period of displacement can lead to a collapse into total poverty. One of the young people participating in the North Kivu research was Safia (pseudonym), an 18-year-old living in one of the displaced settlements not far from Kitchanga town in Masisi Territory. This area had witnessed repeated waves of population displacement due to regular clashes between the CNDP and the FARDC, and Safia had been displaced several times in recent years. The economic strain on her family was heavy, and eventually her father left the family. Soon after having met a new husband, Safia's mother also left home, making Safia the head of the household at 13 years of age:

About five years ago our father left us. Our mother eventually married another man— then she abandoned us too. We were three girls and three boys. It was up to me to take care of my younger brothers and sisters. My brothers joined the army so they could take care of themselves. But I was responsible for the survival of my sisters.

As seen through Safia's description, tactics for *la débrouille* are highly gendered in the Kivus. Boys and men are able to choose survival options such as working in the mines, serving as porters, or joining one of the several armed groups active in the area. For Safia's brothers, the most viable option to ensure their livelihoods and their own protection was to enroll in the CNDP forces. For Safia and her younger sisters, however, survival options were far more limited. They were living in a displaced settlement far away from their family land and thus could not cultivate, while the high level of military activities in Masisi at the time made work as a daily laborer in the farms an unreliable and insecure alternative. Unable to conceive of other viable livelihood options, Safia turned to transactional sex:

From the age of 14, I started going to boys and old men so that I could provide food for my little sisters. That's how I got pregnant the first time. I had my first child when I was 14 and my second one when I was 16 years old. I didn't want to have children then but life made it happen. The money that I was given by men helped me so much that I was able to provide food for my sisters and to pay for our school fees.

Initially sex in exchange for money and food was a temporary survival measure for Safia, but once she realized that she could support herself and her family in this way – even to the point of paying her sister's school fees as well as her own – it became a more permanent way of earning a livelihood. Safia was aware of the risks involved in prostitution and was articulate in expressing the difficulties that she experienced in this line of work:

Prostitution isn't easy work. I have to leave my children with my little sisters, and sometimes when I come home in the morning they're crying. But if I don't do it, we won't have enough to eat or to pay our rent. When I spend the night with a man, he might easily give me US\$5, or sometimes he'll give me absolutely nothing. He might threaten me because he is a soldier and so I have to return home without anything.

Like so many young people in eastern DRC, Safia was left with a limited range of choices which forced her toward decisions that were highly rational, even if they came with significant risk to her own personal health and well-being. Her capacity for *la débrouille* demonstrates her ability to survive in the otherwise overwhelming constraints of the structural violence of North Kivu. Such short-term coping mechanisms lead to longer-term risks which are likely to weaken young people's capacity to emerge effectively from the violence in which they are embedded.

### 3.3 Submission and Defeat

The structures of violence which define the spaces of each day in the Kivus are not merely associated with the militarized aspects of violent conflict. Indeed, the use and threat of violence are strategies employed by local government authorities to exert their power over those who are weaker, demonstrating how Kleinman's (2000, p. 227) "cascade of violence" flows from the highest to the lowest levels of the political and social hierarchy. Although government authorities in the DRC are not themselves armed, they have the power accorded by their position to mobilize force as or when needed. In a place where power is determined by violence, and where the means for survival and advancement are extremely limited for the vast majority, Simone's notion of "people as infrastructure" (Simone 2004, p. 409) shows how authorities tactically rely on the weakness of others to maximize their advantage, using the artifacts of a largely dysfunctional state to force weaker individuals to comply with their demands.

The way in which authorities use the structures of violence to their advantage at the expense of those in a position of relative weakness was demonstrated by Vainquer, whose name loosely translates from the French as "victor" or "he who defeats" (his real name is used on his request). Vainquer had been displaced from his home village as a child with his family and had lived along the roadside for most of his life. Overcrowded conditions at home and increasing tensions with his father's second wife had led Vainquer and his brother to move into a two-room mud-brick house a few months before I first met him in 2010. To earn money to buy food and to pay his rent, Vainquer's tactics of *la débrouille* were primarily restricted to daily wage labor such as carrying rocks and sand from the hills to the roadside or transporting materials between towns on market days.

Vainquer was skilled in art – a rare talent in the Kivus, where quality formal education is increasingly exceptional. As seen with the illustrations on the situation of women in rural South Kivu above, Vainquer would often supplement his responses to my research questions and complement group discussions by drawing sketches or illustrations. He had trained himself in drawing and painting and had gained renown as the local artist, painting signs for local businesses or NGO projects whenever such opportunities presented themselves. In an effort to make the most of his talents, Vainquer had recently tried to set up his own art shop. After having worked arduously at various daily wage labor jobs over many months, he

had managed to save up just enough money to build a stall where he would be able to receive clients and perhaps generate small contracts. With pain-staking preparation and great anticipation, he finally opened his shop.

Within the very first hours of opening his business, however, Vainquer described how “the authorities came to me and demanded that I pay them.” The authorities included the *Direction Générale des Recettes Administratives, Judiciaires, Domaniales et de Participation* (DGRAD), or the tax authorities; the *Agence Nationale de Renseignements* (ANR), or the state intelligence service; and the police. Exercising their separate powers, these state authorities demanded immediate payment of various taxes and fees. Vainquer had no money to offer and knew that these authorities would be willing and capable of imprisoning him until he – or someone in his family – would pay the requisite amount to ensure his release. Vainquer was able to negotiate himself out of arrest, but was left with no other choice than to close down his shop.

Vainquer’s description of the event was controlled and careful, yet the anger and the helplessness he felt on recalling this experience was palpable in his expression and body language. Powerless to repel the structures of violence, Vainquer was left in a position where he had no choice but to submit to them. The aspiration which Vainquer once had for creating a better future for himself had been leveled by the forces of violence in which he lived. Despite his previous efforts to make a better life, the structures around him would not offer the terrain of possibility that is often associated with violent contexts (see Vigh 2006). Rather, Vainquer had to yield to the violence in order to ensure his own survival. Vainquer’s opportunities for *la débrouille* would thus be relegated to carrying out daily wage labor with little reason to hope for advancement.

Vainquer would regularly reflect on the frustration he felt in his inability to advance and would express his emotional and psychological sense of defeat. While he had once believed that his artistic talents would have opened up possibilities for a different kind of life, he had since lost this aspiration as he submitted to the forces of violence everywhere around him. His low morale permeated many of our conversations, and he still felt a sense of failure in not having been successful in realizing his dreams: “Now I’m 20 years old, I’m an adult. . . Today I should be somewhere else in my life” (interview, Bunyakiri, July 2010). Yet he had also learnt that the structures of violence proscribing his present and his future were too powerful for him to take on: “I don’t have any means to change things.”

As demonstrated through Vainquer’s narrative as well as through the description of the failed uprising of the students in Bunyakiri in 2007, submission to violence does not just happen. Rather, submission is often the coping mechanism adopted by young people following a considered evaluation of events. Capacities for rational appraisal were evident among my research participants; for young people in Bunyakiri, their way of dealing with the structures of violence was best articulated by a local proverb: “When the tree is too big to cut down, we learn to live with it” (interview, Bunyakiri, May 2010). Submission has in this way become for them the best way to cope with the structures of violence which they have learnt they are unable to change.

#### 4 **How Effective Coping Should Not Be Confused with Resilience (And How Coping May Itself Contribute to Perpetuating Cycles of Violence)**

The coping mechanism of *la débrouille* serves as an essential tool in young people's efforts to deal with their experiences of violence at an individual level. The young people who participated in this research were adept at using various individual coping mechanisms depending on the situation they faced at any given time, revealing their capacity for pragmatic appraisal and the ability to discern the most relevant action in a particular situation.

The varied repertoire of coping mechanisms available to young people living in conditions of adversity is considered by resilience theory:

there is a substantial range of effective coping mechanisms (or psychological defences), that the coping style that works best for one sort of stress experience may not work equally well with a different kind of adversity, and that there are substantial individual differences in the coping styles with which people are most comfortable... [S]tress and adversity cannot usefully be viewed as passive experiences that simply impinge on people; instead, they involve an active process by which people deal with their environments. On the whole it has appeared advantageous for people to have a varied repertoire of coping mechanisms in order to deal with the range of adaptive responses required by contrasting life challenges. (Rutter 2000, pp. 652–653)

By exploring the kinds of life challenges facing young people in the Kivus today, this chapter has shown how young people cope at the individual level with the structures of violence. The narratives reveal how young people are merely coping – more or less effectively – given the constraints of their environments and the opportunities with which they are presented. The forms of rationality demonstrated through young people's coping mechanisms exemplify what applied economic research terms “bounded rationality,” a concept elaborated by Herbert Simon (1957) which considers how the human capacity for rational choice is necessarily limited by the complexity and constraints of the environment in which choices are made. Without access to perfect information as proposed by a rational choice model, “good enough” outcomes might be the best that can be expected, replacing “the goal of *maximizing* [utility] with the goal of *satisficing*, of finding a course of action that is ‘good enough’...” (Simon 1957, pp. 204–205). In this way, the coping mechanism of *la débrouille* exemplifies how “satisficing” usually represents the best possible outcome available to young people. Such “good enough” outcomes may allow them to survive in the short term but do not allow them to engage in the structures of violence in any way that might eventually lead to a change in these structures; rather, the structures of violence are reinforced. In this way it is clear how the resilience conceptions of “thriving” and “positive adaptation” are not currently possible to realize for young people in the context of the Kivus.

Within the structures of violence, definitive determinations of whether or not an individual is coping effectively are not always possible. Recalling the definition of coping as being able to deal effectively with difficulty, a lack of coping would mean



not dealing effectively. Yet because the structures of violence are so powerful and all pervasive in the Kivus, effectiveness can usually only be exogenously determined. Young people may be able to deal with the situation they are facing as effectively as possible – and thus they can be considered to be coping – but without being able to change or influence the structures in which they live, then the effectiveness of coping is ambiguous. For example, it is clear that Richard, through his impressive capacities for *la débrouille*, has been able to cope effectively when compared to his peers. He has demonstrated his intelligence and adaptability and has consequently managed to support his family and build a relatively successful carpentry business. Yet despite Richard's constant efforts, the environment in which he lives severely limits the possibility of emerging from the conditions of rural poverty and political violence. As he explained, in the highly militarized environment of the Kivus, simply provisioning the wood for his workshop each week comes with significant risks. Usually he has to pay soldiers, police, or other armed elements a high price in order to negotiate his safe passage to and from the forest where he buys the wood. Although Richard does everything in his power to ensure that his children receive the best care and opportunities available, his ability to pay their school fees or medical bills offers objectively little when considering the poor standards of primary education or the unreliability of health-care services throughout the DRC today. Despite his greatest efforts, Richard remains trapped within the structures of violence. Without a change in these structures, the possibilities for his children are not any more promising.

The complex processes involved in navigating the structures of violence mean that the results of any given coping response can be equivocal and changeable over time. Young people will sometimes be able to cope with their situation more effectively than at other times. Safia, who was supporting herself, her children, and her younger sisters through transactional sex work, was proud of her ability to care for her family and would continue to make the necessary sacrifices to be sure that their needs were met. Yet the choices involved in Safia's coping processes created significant new risks: she had become pregnant against her will and she was constantly at risk of contracting a sexually transmitted disease or of being harmed by her clients. *La débrouille* for Safia entailed little more than a short-term survival tactic that allowed her to cope as best as she could with her situation in the present, yet which offered few prospects for an improved future. In these ways, it can be seen how the capacities for young people to effectively cope with violence in the short term might become maladaptive in the long term. The potential for maladaptation is considered in resilience theory:

Although there are certainly a few styles of coping that are usually maladaptive, it has not proved easy to come up with a valid differentiation between effective and ineffective coping styles. (Rutter 2000, p. 653)

The extent of maladaptation can only be evaluated through long-term study, yet it is evident that for Safia, the risk of HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases is part of her everyday, as is the risk of becoming pregnant and thus further increasing

the strains of material and emotional responsibilities she faces as a mother and head of household. For Vainquer, the maladaptation associated with his submission and defeat means that his aspirations to succeed as an artist have waned, his sense of well-being has diminished, and his expectations of what he is able to achieve in his life have reduced.

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## 5 Conclusion

In the Kivus, *la débrouille* may support the maintenance or reinforcement of the structures of violence. This is in accordance with Bourdieu's "law of conservation of violence" in which individuals "subject or sublimate themselves in order to adapt to their structures" (Bourdieu 2000, p. 165), but by so doing also "contribute to their own domination by tacitly accepting, in advance, the limits imposed on them" (ibid, p. 169).

Having lived most or all of their lives within the structures of violence prevents young people from imagining any other kind of situation. As explained by an adult participant in this research:

A child born into this has never known anything different, he cannot believe in another kind of reality. For those of us who are older, we knew something different. We have a feeling of nostalgia, we want to revolt. But for the youth, they know no other way. (interview, Bunyakiri, June 2010)

Young people in the Kivus today often express a definitive lack of hope about their future. This lack of hope is translated into the choices they make and the risks they take, both of which are based on present-oriented calculations. So occupied with surviving in the present, young people are not able to engage with the structures of violence in ways which would challenge or change them in the long term. My young research participants had no interest in mobilizing for political change, seeing that previous efforts had only resulted in repression and violence; having grown up fully embedded in the structures of violence, they could not even fathom what kind of change might be possible. Their capacity to effectively cope with the structures of violence today had thus become an essential component of the dynamic ensuring the conservation of violence in their future.

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# Young People's Recovery in Eastern Sri Lanka: From War to Postwar and Beyond

# 10

Fazeeha Azmi, Cathrine Brun, and Ragnhild Lund

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## Abstract

The intention of this chapter is to inform already existing scholarly narratives of recovery where a perspective of youth is found to be limited. In Sri Lanka, youth are not visible in the general discourse on post-conflict recovery and its manifestations. Given the account by youth about their experiences and strategies during the war and postwar, the chapter shows that multiple transitions take place in the process from war to postwar and not all processes reach all relevant groups. Among youth, multiple restrictions on social and spatial mobility have led to frustrations instead of increasing hopes for a safe, peaceful, and just society. As the research presented in this chapter shows, young people see

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these restrictions as injustices relating to ethnicity and the histories they have brought with them from living through war. Such experiences of exclusion by the young people of Eastern Sri Lanka show that recovery includes social and cultural aspects and point toward the need for both distributive justice (actions which may benefit the less advantaged groups in postwar Sri Lanka) and corrective justice (actions which may restore a situation of rightful distributions of benefits and resources in the country).

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**Keywords**

Youth • War • Postwar • Social and spatial mobility • Justice • Sri Lanka

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## 1 Introduction

Moving from war to postwar recovery involves long and contested journeys. There are no blueprints for how a society can rise from the ashes that a war has created as the history, context, causes, and nature of war vary across countries. As such, postwar recovery should be carefully implemented, as actions taken may revert people back to conflict. In Sri Lanka, postwar recovery commenced in 2009, after more than three decades of conflict. Focusing mainly on the physical infrastructure programs in war-affected areas, however, the Sri Lankan government's rhetoric of recovery does not focus on young people in spite of the violent history of youth uprisings in the country.

Sri Lanka's 30-year-old civil war, fought between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Sinhalese-dominated Sri Lankan government forces from 1983 to 2009, is well documented (Azmi 2012, 2014; Brun 2005; Hyndman and Amarasingam 2014; Höglund and Orjuela 2011; Jayatilleka 2013; Rotberg 1999; Shanmugaratnam et al. 2003). It was not just a bipartisan conflict between Sinhalese and Tamils, but spread to include the minority group of Muslims (recognized as an ethnic group in Sri Lanka). As the authors have reported elsewhere (Azmi and Lund 2010; Azmi et al. 2013, 2016), youths' involvement in politics in Sri Lanka dates back to the pre-independence period, but it was not until independence was gained in 1948 that the country saw the development of youth uprisings by rural youths, unemployed educated young people, and nationalist groups mobilizing around ethnicity (Amarasuriya 2009; Fernando 2002; Hettige 2008). As a result of this history of youth uprisings and conflict, youth politics in the country have been understood as violent and troublesome. Consequently, young people participating in politics are often regarded as suspicious; there is societal anxiety accompanying discourses on young people and politics in the country which tend to restrict many young people's participation in politics.

Generally, young people do not figure prominently in the recovery process in Sri Lanka. They are not visible in the general discourse on post-conflict recovery and its manifestations in the Sri Lankan context as mentioned above (Azmi et al. 2016). Some attention is given to young people in the reintegration of former combatants, which is often a main priority after war (Annan et al. 2011). Scholars have



emphasized that there are risks involved in overlooking young people in postwar recovery and particularly regarding employment (Izzi 2013). They have cautioned that differences which created violent relationships during the war may be cemented in a postwar setting and may harbor the risk of renewed violence (McLean Hilker 2014). Neglecting the need for employment among young people may lead to new unrest (Azmi and Lund 2010). The intention of this chapter is to inform already existing scholarly narratives of recovery where a perspective of youth is found to be limited (Blaikie and Lund 2009; Hilhorst 2013). The chapter's main concern is the young people who did not join the LTTE or young people who were involved with the LTTE for a short while but came out of the movement before the war ended. The chapter shows that youth could potentially play a crucial role in recovery. War and postwar are experienced by young people as radical uncertainty (Horst and Grabska 2015), and we show how young people navigate these volatile war and postwar settings in Eastern Sri Lanka by analyzing how social and spatial mobility is practiced and negotiated with a view to achieving social justice in an uncertain environment.

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## 2 Navigating Toward Social Justice

“Social navigation” is a way of understanding how young people cope with social and political uncertainty in a terrain of uncertainty (Utas 2005; Vigh 2008, 2009). This approach is helpful in explaining how young people live with social transformations from war to postwar and beyond. The concept of “navigation” is used here literally, as well as metaphorically, to denote practices of movement in the context of social volatility and opacity. Vigh (2006, p. 14) notes that in such situations one cannot navigate the way as one wants:

[W]hen navigating we are aware that we might be repositioned by shifting terrains and circumstances. As we seek to move within a turbulent and unstable socio political environment we are at the same time being moved by currents, shifts and tides, requiring that we constantly have to attune our action and trajectory to the movement of the environment we move through.

As Vigh suggests, navigation is a concept that integrates agency, social forces, and change, particularly in contexts where people need to invest considerable time and energy into interpreting and understanding how to act within situations of flux and social change – such as a postwar setting. With respect to the situation in former combatant zones in Sri Lanka, this calls for more knowledge about how to go about the new social terrains that shape how people can live and act. The postwar setting has created new possibilities, but new restrictions are also emerging. Social navigation may be helpful here for analyzing how people make sense of their constantly shifting worlds and strategize in conditions of uncertainty.

Vigh's ideas have been applied by several authors, to both war and nonwar contexts, in order to better understand and realize the political and economic

instabilities that young people experience worldwide (Archambault 2013; Langevang and Gough 2009). Central to the notion of navigation is the movement that it involves. Langevang and Gough consequently understand navigation in terms of social and spatial mobility and this focus will be applied in this chapter. In particular, the chapter examines social mobility in relation to employment and education and the associated spatial mobility that is understood as necessary for achieving social mobility in these two key domains of young people's lives. Young people may be understood as mobile in two ways. First, their navigations allow for a much greater diversity of paths and emphasize practice/becoming. Second, young people are often understood as "in between" childhood and adulthood, and they face a great deal of societal expectations based on this assumption. This means that they may experience their lives as in flux and in a heightened state of transformation. In a more general sense, mobility may be perceived as social processes. It includes more than spatial (and thus corporeal) mobility and may affect changes in local structures and relationships. Mobility as a strategy for change may also be perceived as a "positive agency in choices" (Dyer 2010, p. 307). However, in a postwar situation, mobility may be restricted and take unexpected forms.

Restricted freedom to move, lack of development opportunities, insecurity, and fear among young people imply limited access to justice. Justice itself is a term used in various ways. In legal terms injustice includes lawbreaking, grasping, and unfairness. Grasping is taking too much of what is good only; unfairness is concerned with both what is good and what is injurious (England 2009). Amartya Sen's seminal work on rights and development as freedoms (1999) brought new attention to the issue of justice within development and poverty studies as well as gender studies. Justice here is generally perceived as the provision of fairness and equal opportunity and frequently divided into distributive and corrective justice. The former term addresses the equal distribution of goods and services, while the latter approach aims at restoring a situation of rightful distribution that was interrupted due to breach in the rights of a person or group (Endut forthcoming; Hammerton 1927; Hossain forthcoming). In both perspectives, justice is about identifying strategies that may transform society to make it more just and equal and recompense for past wrongs. In the context of this chapter, moving from war to postwar has already created a hope for people that they may find a way out of uncertainty and marginalization toward social justice. However, when people are unable to move freely and participate in postwar recovery processes, distributive injustice is occurring. Corrective justice arises as a legitimate claim to improve the ability to (re)integrate into society, ideally irrespective of ethnicity, and more importantly irrespective of people's previous roles in the war. In such a situation, the possibilities and restrictions related to movement are crucial for understanding the way young people experience the postwar situation and the prospects for social justice. The next section therefore addresses the lack of equality and fairness in postwar recovery in Sri Lanka and questions the lack of corrective measures on behalf of the authorities to address grievances and inequalities relating to minority youths.

### 3 Young People, Costs of War, and Stages of Recovery

Present mobilities are shaped by past mobilities, and hence, the costs of war are imprinted on people's bodies and minds. During the three decades of war in Sri Lanka, people lived in fear and youth were vulnerable in multiple ways. In interviews, young people recollect feelings of fear whether they served as frontline combatants or hid themselves from public spaces to avoid forceful recruitment or surveillance by government security forces. In Eastern Sri Lanka, Tamils and Muslims were both profoundly affected by displacement, loss of family members, lack of education and livelihood opportunities, and restrictions to their mobility (Brun and Lund 2009; Azmi and Lund 2010; Azmi et al. 2013). The end of the war opened up possibilities to recover from the losses. The term "postwar," however, is not easy to define. What is described as "postwar" may vary immensely in character from case to case, and the boundaries between before and after war are not easily defined. In eastern Sri Lanka, the government defeated the LTTE in 2007, but the fighting continued in northern Sri Lanka till 2009. During the first years after the LTTE's defeat in the East, there was a stage of no-war/no-peace in the area – a power vacuum that created uncertainty and violence where it was difficult to distinguish between what violence was exercised by military and criminal perpetrators. However, since the first year of no-war/no-peace, the people of Eastern Sri Lanka have experienced a gradual transformation of society in many ways: schools remain open and follow a usual schedule, shops have gradually increased their opening hours till late evening, farmers have gone back to their paddy fields and fishermen could start their fishing activities, businessmen have stopped paying taxes to illegal tax collectors, and links with Colombo, the capital, have resumed in various forms from business to jobs wherever possible.

It may be helpful to consider multiple transitions when referring to a country's postwar development (Kasumagic 2008). UNDP (2008), for example, characterizes post-conflict countries according to their progress along a range of such transitions: ceasing hostilities and violence; signing of peace agreements; demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration; return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs); establishing the foundations for a functioning state; initiating reconciliation and societal integration; and commencing economic recovery. In many respects, Sri Lanka could be said to be faring quite well on UNDP's list: the country's hostilities ceased, although violent clashes between groups that were not in the center of hostilities during the war have emerged. The Sri Lankan peace is a victor's peace and a peace agreement has not been signed. Demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration have been a priority for the government, but this has been a secretive activity, and former LTTE cadres have been held in closed camps under strict control with little contact with their families. Return of internally displaced people is taking place, but many have not returned as some areas continue to be contested or are classified as militarily strategic territories over which the military maintains control. Refugees – mainly Tamils in diaspora numbering about a million people – are not returning voluntarily, which may be seen as an indication of the deep fear and mistrust still prevailing among large sections of the population. The Sri Lankan

state is functioning and has strengthened its control over institutions in society by centralization. In order to create economic opportunities in a postwar setting (UNDP's final point), the government has initiated rapid economic and infrastructure programs called "*Uthuru Wasanthaya*" (Northern Spring) and "*Nagenahira Navodaya*" (Eastern Revival). However, the recovery process has been fraught due to differing access to resources and unequal progress in recovery (Brun and Lund 2009; Hyndman 2007; International Crisis Group 2009; Ruwanpura 2009). In this sense, transitions toward building a postwar society may be said to take place at some levels. However, as will be discussed here, some areas have seen successful recovery, while in other areas there are fewer achievements. Additionally, transitions do not necessarily benefit all segments of the population and this affects young people particularly. In the Sri Lankan context, "development" is still very narrowly defined as economic change and the implementation of infrastructure projects (roads, bridges, and railways), while social dimensions are not deemed equally relevant, despite a government discourse on reconciliation and societal integration (Azmi et al. 2016).

For most young people living in Eastern Sri Lanka, the period immediately after the war was – and to some extent still is – characterized by a continuation of militarized political and social relations. This not only causes problems for democracy (Goodhand 2012) but also affects the everyday life of people. This is similar to the situation that Vigh (2009) describes for Bissau, where he uses the concept of "navigation" to describe how young urban men survive socially and physically in a conflict-stricken country. Rather than considering their situation an exceptional state ("a radical event"), he points to social turbulence as a regular, ongoing feature of everyday reality and therefore describes it as "radical continuity," rather than "discontinuity." In Sri Lanka, although stability is there, the continued monitoring and surveillance of young Tamil people in the former conflict areas, together with the fear it generates of speaking out in public, mean that there is both continuity and change from war to postwar. Some of those continuities are linked to a persistent insecurity and uncertainty in young people's lives. In the following sections, we show how young people navigate this terrain from war to postwar and beyond.

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## 4 Study Population and Methodology

To be young is to be a pioneer to the society. (Young man, interview March 2010)

In Sri Lanka, adolescence is commonly defined as the period between 16 and 30 years of age. It is generally understood as characterized by dependency rather than being an individual with a personal identity, with agency, and with rights. Young people are still perceived as youths in the traditional sense until the time they marry. During the research for the study on which this chapter is based, participants themselves identified youths as those between the ages of 15–30 years. The term "youth" is imbued with different meanings in different locations in Sri Lanka and the definition should not simply be limited to age. The

sociocultural context in which young people live must also be taken into account, as experiences of young people within the war-affected areas vary, depending on their gender, religion, and ethnicity, whether they were combatants or noncombatants and whether they were displaced persons. The chapter focuses on some of the experiences that Tamil youth express as a minority in Sri Lankan society, having grown up in the war zone of Eastern Sri Lanka.

The ethnic composition of the population in Sri Lanka as a whole is uncertain, but drawing on the 2011 census, the commonly cited proportions are 74.9% Sinhalese, 11.2% Sri Lankan Tamils, 9.2% Muslims, and 4.2% Indian Tamils, with the balance made up of other groups, including Burghers, Malays, and indigenous groups (Department of Census and Statistics 2012). In the Eastern District of Batticaloa, the majority of people are Tamil and people tend to live in ethnically segregated towns, villages, and neighborhoods.

The material used to analyze young Tamils' experiences and how they navigate the volatile landscape of war and postwar consists of interviews, life history interviews, and discussions with groups of youth, as well as interviews with representatives for organizations and institutions working with young people. Fieldwork and follow-up interviews were conducted between 2009 and 2014. Despite the end of war, the areas in which fieldwork was undertaken were still militarized and people there continued to fear for their safety. In such circumstances, the ethical considerations required for understanding researchers' responsibilities become crucial in order not to cause harm. The measures taken during fieldwork to maintain safety of research participants and researchers alike have been described extensively elsewhere (Azmi et al. 2013; Brun 2013; Lund 2012). In short, safe spaces were enabled by encouraging the young people to help in determining where interviews could be held and what could be talked about. To maintain anonymity, the locations where the fieldwork took place were not disclosed, but the areas under study represented both urban and rural areas, areas formerly controlled by the LTTE, areas affected by war and the presence of LTTE, and areas with little LTTE influence that were nevertheless affected by war. The names given to interviewees in the following sections are pseudonyms.

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## **5 Navigating Through a Changing Terrain: From War To Postwar**

### **5.1 War: Displacements, Militancy, and Mistrust**

As our previous research has shown (Azmi et al. 2013), young people in Eastern Sri Lanka were faced with numerous restrictions, such as on movement, access to education and jobs, and on what they could say in public. Also the young people interviewed lived in different types of areas during the war: some lived in areas that were controlled by the LTTE, some lived in areas where control fluctuated between the LTTE and the government, and yet others lived in areas territorially controlled by the government but with heavy presence by the LTTE. Even where the LTTE did

not control an area, it had a strong influence over people. Particularly prominent was the demand for support by all Tamils in the East (and North), and the recruitment of cadres was an ever-present dimension of people's lives (Brun 2005, 2008). LTTE demanded that each family should contribute one member to the organization. In the LTTE-controlled areas and in the so-called border areas, most families had young people and children involved with the LTTE. Early marriage was a common strategy for young women and girls to escape the recruitment, and girls married as early as 13 to escape forced recruitment. This created difficulties for the future, however, as the girls then commonly stopped their school education. The war thus had effects on most people, including those who were not recruited or participated in armed combat. As one young woman stated "Nobody can blame anyone today and everybody had to go through the same war situation." During the last stage of war, recruitment to the LTTE was very high. Everyone – even parents – was trained in school grounds to prepare for what was later termed "the final war."

During the war, borders were drawn between government-controlled and LTTE-controlled territories. Movements between the different areas were monitored, and there were restrictions on what one could bring into the areas controlled by the LTTE (the lack of goods and medicine was felt deeply during the war). Moving from one area to other involved checkpoints (Hyndman and de Alwis 2004) and, according to several young people we talked to, harassment at the checkpoints was common, particularly against young women. Amidst the restrictions of movement, the lack of teachers and lack of higher-level educational opportunities in many of the LTTE-controlled areas meant that many young people had to move away from their families in order to go to school elsewhere. The movement back and forth between school and home was also fraught with risks, as this narrative by Darini shows:

I will tell my own experiences. It is personal. I will tell. Yes, I sat the GCE A/L exam {University entrance exam} in 2007. But I should have done that in 2006. My parents kept me in Batticaloa town as our area was under LTTE control. I attended tuition classes there. It was in 2006 August I came home and stayed. Just one week before the exam, when my friends came to know that I came home, they wanted to meet me. So we decided to meet in the Kovil (Hindu temple). I also wanted to do some special prayers for my exams. Five of us went there. A group of LTTE cadres both men and women came to the Kovil and they captured us telling us they need more people. I cried and did not cooperate to go with them. (...) They dragged us forcefully away and pushed us in to a van, we screamed. Nobody could help us as they were with guns. I cried all the way. I was beaten severely on my legs. We were taken to a place called (name withheld for anonymity). I saw many girls like me. Some had come there willingly, some were taken by force. (...) From the first day I had the intention to escape. I did not eat a thing given. I kept on crying. One night, I escaped along with my three friends. The fourth one could not join us as she was kept in a different building. It was a scary experience. We had to walk in the forest. We were afraid of LTTE who were in the forests. It took almost two days to reach home. I was fully tired when we reached home. My parents felt happy and I cried a lot on that day. I missed my university entrance exam because of this. (...) We are still worried and we cry if we think of the other friend who could not come with us. (Interview, March, 2011)

Other young people were less directly involved in the battles but were struggling to survive in LTTE-controlled areas and had histories of displacement, often

repeated displacements. One young man, Kumar, had come with his family to the East from a village in the North Central Province. The family had been displaced multiple times during his childhood, living with friends and family and in displaced people's camps. In 1993 he came to a village in the LTTE-controlled area of the Eastern Province to live with his brother and to study. He came here because it was easier as a young man to live in an LTTE-controlled area. He completed his O-levels in the village, but had to go to the government-controlled area to sit his exam as he was registered in that area. When he came out of the exam, he was arrested on the suspicion that he was in the LTTE. He spent a total of 16 months in three different prisons, in different parts of the country. In 1998 Kumar came back to his village, married, and started a thriving business, which was still operating when interviewed in 2011.

A particularly remarkable feature of the stories told by young people about their experiences during the war is their ability to move on with life. Many lost their opportunities to complete education, to get training for suitable jobs, and to get employment, but there were many stories of those who managed to move on. Darini managed to escape the LTTE by embarking on a dangerous journey through the forest and managed with delays to finalize her A-levels after the forced recruitment. Kumar recovered from 16 months in prison and gradually built a successful business. Another young man living in a border area told how he and his family were displaced multiple times, often having to leave their house in the night for a few days. He learned to keep his schoolbooks with him, at all times, so that he – despite the displacement – would not lose out on his education. People thus learned to live with their wartime experiences and how to get on with their lives during times of volatility and uncertainty. Many did not just pursue strategies to stay alive but kept ambitions for their future, largely through educational efforts to enable social mobility once the war was over.

## **5.2 Postwar: Limited Opportunities for Social and Spatial Mobility**

We are free from LTTE recruitment, but we have fear about unknown persons in the area. (Interview female NGO employee, March 2010, referring to new militant groups)

When the violence and fear eased after the initial phase of negotiating peace, the postwar setting created hope and what young people saw as an opportunity for social mobility through education and employment. From 2007 and in the years that followed, the immediate postwar period was distinguished by continued monitoring, checkpoints, and house roundups by the military and the police to check that everyone in the household was registered in the village. The militarization of communities was very prominent. Freedom of movement changed and to some extent improved after the war, as there were fewer risks involved in moving around, and there was no fear of forced recruitment. However, young people still had to

navigate suspicion and build in the time that it required to go through multiple checkpoints on their way from the villages and into the towns, for example.

Checkpoints were used by the government as a way of monitoring people's movement in and out of former LTTE-controlled areas. There were also major checkpoints between the East and the rest of the country. In 2010, one young male student, Rajan, said he was still being asked at the checkpoints about whether he had weapons or not. He explained the anger he felt at checkpoints:

We do not have the freedom to move like other Sinhalese people. When they ask for IDs in some checkpoints I feel really angry. Anger becomes double when I see some incidents like this: Once I was getting ready to go to the university (...) at around six in the morning. I noticed that all the buses and other vehicles were stopped and waiting in queues. So I asked the driver what is happening. He told me that the temporary bridge is broken due to the floods and they are going to do some temporary arrangements. At the same time, I noticed there were two trip vans (tourists), one with a Buddhist monk (Sinhalese), they got a special attention and the army helped those two vehicles to cross the bridge, while they did not allow a single motorbike. I heard two boys were selling boiled corns, looking at each other faces and telling as the van had a Buddhist priest they are allowing. So will this situation make us think we are citizens of this country? Although they are telling that there are no ethnic differences in practice we cannot see that. (...). (March 2010)

Harassment toward young women often took place at checkpoints and other places (both during war and after). Young women also found it very difficult to approach the military to obtain passes to go to the lagoon, and many felt unsafe approaching the military in the forest when collecting firewood or honey. When harassment took place, young women were reluctant to report the problem. As one young woman said "No, no, we cannot do that because the politicians are also dependent on the security forces and the police, so no use of going to any of them." However, gradually more trust was established between security forces and people. The war-related violence was no longer there, and the organized crime and insecurity of the first years after the LTTE was defeated in the East in 2007 gradually eased.

After the war, aid organizations located in the area focused on vocational training and creating jobs for the former cadres who came out of the LTTE. However, there was limited availability of employment for all groups of young people. A gender officer in one of the local NGOs described young people's challenges in March 2010:

Employment for young people. Education is a big problem. Those who have finished A-levels cannot find a job. But very few have finished A-levels here. During the war, the parents hid their children and did not send them to school so there are many drop outs as a result. After that the children could not continue their schooling. So there are many youngsters with very little education here.

Generally economic participation of youth is low in the Eastern District according to field officers in a local nongovernmental organization (NGO). Mobility played an important role in moving on with lives after the war ended. Because of the disruptions in education and lack of employment opportunities, many young



people tried to move out of the region. Very soon after the war ended in the East, agents recruiting people for employment in the Middle East established themselves in Eastern Sri Lanka (Brun and Van Hear 2012). In the beginning mainly women – including married women – went mainly to work as housemaids. They were leaving their children behind to be looked after by other family members. Later, adult men started to go to the Middle East too, often working in construction industry or in the hospitality sector. During the later fieldwork periods, it became apparent that increasingly young men and also some young widows had started to follow. In fact, spatial mobility takes place at different scales. Internationally, many young people interviewed dreamt about going abroad. Very few of the young people who grew up in rural areas in the Eastern Province had connections to the Tamil diaspora, formed largely of high-caste people and people from other areas of the island who went abroad during the war. A new trend was the illegal boarding of boats to go to Australia (IRIN 2012). Very few people made it there, but stories abound of young men who were arrested, faced trial (which included restricted mobility), and as a consequence experienced even fewer possibilities for social mobility in the future.

In addition to moving out for work, many families interviewed tried to send their children to universities to do external degrees as their grades were often not good enough for standard university education. Parents had invested in their children's education and made many sacrifices during the war in order to keep up their children's education. Education and migration are seen by many as the only ways to escape poverty in the area. However, even weekend classes on open degree programs at universities are a challenge for families to afford due to the socioeconomic differences in parent's ability to send their children for higher education. In addition to the costs, the lack of transport from some of the more remote areas – also former LTTE-controlled areas of Eastern Sri Lanka – makes it difficult for young people from these areas to get access to education. For young women particularly, transport becomes a main restriction on accessing higher education. Even higher-level school courses in commerce, science, or math are not available in the remote schools.

As explained above, social life also changed after the war. There had been very few possibilities for civil society participation during the war, but afterward, young people used opportunities to become more actively engaged in their communities. For instance, youth began taking part in youth clubs for sports and cultural programs and special awareness campaigns (Azmi et al. 2013). One key informant in an NGO told us (March 2011):

We cannot expect a very quick change when it comes to their contribution to development. They [former LTTE-cadres] are gradually getting membership of some organizations. But they are not yet prepared to take any administrative responsibilities. But in the future they may take such opportunities as well. Because USAID, KPNDU, RDS, and Samurdhi programmes give trainings and conduct meetings for people. So those people will also get the training and in the future they can contribute to the development of our village.

Many young people worked closely with the Rural Development Societies in their areas, and both young men and women were involved. However, because of

limited transport facilities, young women were more restricted in their ability to participate. Young men came by bicycle, but young women would not do the same over long distances. Particularly in the evening, parents did not allow their daughters to take part in meetings without what was considered safe transport. Access to transportation thus played a role in shaping young people's spatial mobility and thus their possibilities for social mobility, exemplifying how unfair conditions and gender injustices are created in postwar society.

### 5.3 Beyond Postwar: Can Youth Navigate Toward Justice?

Once people were afraid of being young in the east, but now the situation has improved. We feel a little bit fearless and we want this situation in the future too. (Female student, March 2010, quoted in Azmi et al. 2013, p. 117)

Much has changed since the end of the war in the East. By 2014 checkpoints are totally removed, monitoring of people by the military and police is less visible, even though "everyone" knows that monitoring is still taking place. The military still plays an active role; it has taken over vast areas of land and runs farms and to a large extent controls the NGOs operating in the area. The military is also involved in civil administration. From the interviews in 2011 and 2014, the prevailing attitudes among the young interviewees were that their lives were still affected by restrictions of movement, persistent inequalities, and the lack of political representation.

However, in the later interviews we conducted, we became aware of a shift in some of the young people's attitudes. Three different attitudes were prevailing in the final interviews in March 2014. First, some people wanted to disassociate themselves with the postwar setting. They were tired of having to relate to their past and did not want to be defined through their experiences of war – they wanted to move on and hence navigated the new insecurities that emerged in the post-conflict context.

The second set of attitudes is more associated with the feeling of unequal treatment and injustice. Young people feel they are not treated equally in development-related allocations. As farming and fishing still dominates the employment structure in the East, lack of attempts to improve these sectors may push more people into poverty in the absence of any other viable livelihood options. When asked, *Do you have a hope that this area will develop in the future?* A young man responded:

If Sinhalese people come to this area, then the area will develop. Because, only then the government will be interested in developing the area. Because the government provides all the facilities where the Sinhalese people are living. They would provide irrigation facilities three times a year. We also have many ponds, if they were maintained we could cultivate more, but they never consider these ponds. (A young man, March, 2010)

The third set of attitudes is more associated with LTTE nostalgia, mourning for losing the war and the feeling that the LTTE was the only actor that tried to do something for the Tamil people. This has led to dissatisfaction with the lack of political representation for Tamil interests. Despite the horrors of war like

abductions and fear, several youths mentioned that the situation was better in the past because under LTTE rule young people could get better access to education, there was less corruption, and society was better organized. This nostalgia may have arisen due to the present deprivation of freedom and equality, making young people feel more disempowered and deprived of fairness and equal rights than under the LTTE. Fear and suspicion linger not only among local people but also among their political representatives. This nostalgia from the LTTE is closely linked with young people's position in society and their experience of government disinterest in their concerns, which keeps alive the dreams of a separate Tamil government because they do not feel that they have politicians representing them at the national level:

The President is making an effort to show the world that we are fine. . . . But we are not. . . . because we are forced to be silent. . . . youth like us do not want any further problems in the country. . . . we have to tolerate. . . . It is not the president who should be blamed but politicians from Batticaloa and Tamil community who want us to be silent. (A young man interviewed in March 2014)

Questions regarding political representation and power have been a central issue in Sri Lanka's ethno nationalist conflict and imply a quest for corrective justice. In recovery programs it is important to consider whether such programs accommodate problems related to political representation and power in the war-affected areas. The current volatile political climate in the country requires careful navigation to find one's place in society and impacts on young people's experience of representation, membership, and consequently citizenship and access to justice. The different attitudes of young people toward the postwar situation in the east clearly come together in how they feel included as members in the Sri Lankan society. Previous work by the authors (Azmi et al. 2016) shows how many young people in the area are gradually withdrawing from formal politics as they lost faith in the system and in their own safety. This may partly be related to the fact that, despite the dominant one-nation discourse promoted by the Sri Lankan government today, young people in the East often do not feel like full citizens in the postwar state. When asked how she felt as a citizen of the country, one interviewee explained:

Being a citizen of this country, I feel freer than earlier. It is a good place to live if there is peace and people are good. (Young woman interviewed in March 2011)

For minorities in the country, being a citizen of Sri Lanka is much broader than the identity documents people carry to prove their citizenship. In the above conversations, although the interviewees felt like a free citizen in the postwar period, movement outside Tamil-speaking areas in order to find employment was limited due to poor or no knowledge of Sinhala, the majority language:

Although Sinhala and Tamil are considered as official languages, we cannot work in Tamil if we go out. We did not have the chance to learn Sinhala previously. Now many are moving out of the village to get employment but language is one of the main problems to get the jobs. (Young woman interviewed in March 2011)

How young people feel as citizens in Sri Lanka and to what extent they feel included in the society becomes clear through their experience of language. As opportunities for employment had already dried up in the study area, people, especially youth, were learning Sinhala in order to find work outside the East. Young men had gone to Colombo to work in companies, and they often helped their friends and relatives to move there through established networks and experiences. The experience of a restricted effective citizenship rights and of multiple forms of political, economic, social, and cultural marginalization is often expressed by young people as being afraid of the entering the space of dominant ethnic group:

If I go to Sinhala areas I always get afraid. Even though it's peace, I feel frightened. I am unable to go alone to Colombo. I have to renew my license {driving license} but I am afraid to go. I can't speak Sinhala. (Young man interviewed in March 2010)

Although the situation in Sinhala-dominated areas has also changed since the end of the war, the perceived fear still exists in the minds of Tamil youth, especially those who live in the former war areas. Further, due to centralized administration system, people from all parts of the country had to go to the capital in order to get their official works done, such as obtaining a passport, driving license, or national identity card. In such a situation, lack of Sinhala knowledge creates a vulnerable environment where they can be bribed or cheated by middle men. However, young people do not stop moving out of their areas as a result of the fear, restrictions, or lack of Sinhala knowledge. Rather, they find ways of challenging the fear in search for social mobility, even crossing national boundaries in search of employment.

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## 6 Concluding Discussion: Troubled Past, Harsh Present, and Uncertain Future

Conflicts are not easily replaced by a peaceful state of existence (Moore 2000). Moving from war to postwar represented profound transitions in young people's lives in Eastern Sri Lanka. This chapter has shown that a state of postwar as defined above had not been fully reached in Eastern Sri Lanka in 2014 when fieldwork ended. The accounts of young people's experiences and strategies during and since the war show that the concept "postwar" does not fully describe present realities. In the multiple transitions that take place in the process of moving from war to a postwar situation, not all of the changes had reached far enough or included all relevant groups.

Loss of family members, properties, homes, education, and livelihoods became imprinted on young people's lives and their communities during the war. After war, the level of security increased and violence decreased gradually while some losses were not fully recouped, such as access to jobs and education. As documented in this chapter, multiple deprivations and immobilities from the war continue to be

created postwar – both socially and spatially – leading to frustrations instead of increasing hopes for a safe, peaceful, and just society among the youths studied (see also Sommers 2013).

Exclusion of youth in conflict-affected communities due to lack of jobs and education is according to Sommers' (2009) key factors that need to be addressed in postwar contexts. Employment creation for youth in postwar countries should be considered as a peace-building measure (Izzi 2103). The paper has shown that associated with education and employment are injustices relating to ethnicity and the histories young people have brought with them from living through war. Such aspects need to be addressed in the process of moving from war to postwar.

The interrelated dimensions of social and spatial mobilities represent a useful starting point for understanding both the continuities and changes that young people have experienced and are contributing to in Eastern Sri Lanka. Some of the continuities are linked to persistent insecurity and uncertainty in young people's lives, while some of the changes that have taken place in the course of transition, reinforcing and redefining the insecurities and uncertainties that young people experience in their lives. Furthermore, the inability to speak Sinhala prevents young people from having opportunities elsewhere in the country and contributes to the sense of disillusionment and loss of trust in the government.

If postwar issues pertaining to youth are not adequately tackled, problems such as economic exploitation and stigmatization may contribute to young people turning back to violence (McEvoy-Levy 2006; Azmi and Lund 2010; Kurtenbach 2014; McLean Hilker 2014). Additionally, research has documented how post-conflict situations must address community level processes in addition to cater for the needs of families and individuals (Betancourt et al. 2014). In such a perspective socialization of youth into adulthood stands at the center of postwar recovery. It is of great concern that little emphasis is currently present – in policy and practice – to enable youth to participate more actively in the ongoing recovery processes. Although the young people we talked to are, to some extent, able to navigate the restrictions they experience, many also do not feel like full members of society. They perceive the Sri Lankan government as disinterested in protecting them and facilitating their inclusion in the nation state, even though they were Sri Lankans and felt that they did not belong to a separate state. This is a good opportunity for the postwar policymakers to include the youth in recovery programs as they can contribute to the future development of the country in general and East in particular. Sri Lankan policymakers might learn from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lebanon, and South Africa (Jeffrey and Staeheli *in press*), where efforts are made to produce young people as good citizens through a process of "learning." The Sri Lankan government has, however, mainly focused on infrastructural measures for recovery. Young people's experiences of exclusion in Eastern Sri Lanka point instead to the need to take socioeconomic, cultural, and political aspects into account, as recovery has a broader meaning. It seems pertinent to include in this a quest for distributive justice (actions that may benefit less advantaged groups in postwar Sri Lanka) and a quest for corrective justice (actions which may restore a situation of rightful distribution of both benefits and resources in the country).

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# Evaluating Children and Youth Participation in Peacebuilding in Colombia, DRC, and Nepal: Lessons Learned and Emerging Findings

# 11

Michael McGill, Claire O’Kane, and Annette Giertsen

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## Abstract

This chapter introduces a participatory evaluation of children and youth participation in peacebuilding undertaken in Colombia, the Democratic Republic of

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Congo, and Nepal between July 2014 and June 2015 by the Global Partnership for Children and Youth in Peacebuilding. The evaluation methodology is introduced, and some key lessons learned are shared about the process of engaging children and youth as evaluators. Key findings concerning the impact of children and youth participation in peacebuilding are presented, together with an analysis of factors which hinder or enable their positive impact. The evaluation found that diverse children and youth peacebuilding initiatives allowed young peacebuilders to (1) become aware and active citizens for peace, (2) increase peaceful cohabitation and reduced discrimination, (3) reduce violence, and (4) support vulnerable groups. The findings reveal the importance of increased recognition of, collaborations with, and investments in children and youth as peacebuilders.

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**Keywords**

Children • Youth • Violence • Conflict • Peacebuilding • Active citizens • Participation • Participatory evaluation • Impact • Conflict prevention • Conflict management • Gender • Discrimination • Conflict transformation • Civic engagement • Countering violent extremism

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## 1 Introduction

Forty-three percent of our world's population is under 25 years old (UNICEF 2014; United Nations 2012, p. 1). One billion children live in countries or territories affected by armed conflict – almost one sixth of the total world population (European Commission 2014). Armed conflict and its aftermath result in direct violations of children's rights and human rights including death, loss of parents, displacement, challenges in accessing basic services, and increased risks including sexual violence, recruitment into armed forces, and emotional distress (SGCAC and UNICEF 2009). While much of the literature focuses on children and youth as victims of conflict, there is also increasing recognition of children and youth agency (Hart 2004; Kemper 2005; O'Kane et al. 2009; Nosworthy 2009). Some young people engage in violent protests and act as individuals or as members of militias, gangs, armed factions, and ideological and extremist groups (McLean Hilker and Fraser 2009). Other children and youth are actively engaging as peacebuilders to prevent conflict and violence, to raise awareness, and to rebuild social relations to promote sustainable peace (Boothby et al. 2006; Feinstein et al. 2010; Hart 2004; McGill 2012; O'Kane et al. 2013; SFCG 2009; Magnuson and Baizerman 2007; Kamatsiko 2005, p. 12; Brainard and Chollet 2007, p. 13; McEvoy-Levy 2006; Nosworthy 2009; Schwartz 2010; Save the Children 2008, 2012).

This chapter introduces and shares key findings from a multiagency, multicountry, and multi-donor (3M) evaluation of children and youth participation in peacebuilding that was undertaken in Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Nepal over 1 year period from July 2014 to June 2015 (McGill et al. 2015). The chapter provides a brief introduction to the Global Partnership

for Children and Youth in Peacebuilding which organized and implemented the participatory evaluation process. The evaluation methodology is introduced, and some key lessons are shared about the process of engaging children and youth as evaluators. Key findings concerning the impact of children and youth participation in peacebuilding are presented, together with an analysis of factors hindering or enabling their positive impact. A brief conclusion emphasizes the importance of acting upon recommendations from child and youth peacebuilders to strengthen the quality and impact of their peacebuilding initiatives.

There is no universally agreed definition of peace. The understanding of peace often includes the absence of war or other hostilities, an agreement or treaty to end hostilities, freedom from quarrels and disagreement and harmonious relations, reconciliation, nonviolence or conflict-transformation efforts preventing or limiting violence, public security and order, and inner contentment and serenity. In this evaluation, peacebuilding was defined as “work to prevent, stop, or heal the occurrence of any form of violence. Peacebuilding includes reconciliation, nonviolence or conflict-transformation efforts, and prevention or limitation of violence.” It was recognized that peacebuilding could be done at the individual, family, community, subnational, national, and global level. This evaluation focused upon majority world contexts affected by armed conflict. However, it also recognized that children and youth are affected by different forms of violence, some forms of which may not be directly related to armed conflict. Galtung (1969) described three types of violence: direct, cultural, and structural violence which are interrelated. Direct violence can take many forms. In its classic form, it involves the use of physical force, like beating, killing, torture, or rape. Verbal violence, like humiliation or being threatened, is also considered a form of direct violence. Cultural violence includes forms of violence that are justified or encouraged by cultural attitudes, beliefs, or social norms. Structural violence exists when some groups are discriminated against and have unequal access to resources compared to other groups based on gender, ethnicity, class, or other factors. It is structural violence when the discrimination is built into the social, political, and economic systems that govern society. Galtung recognized that cultural and structural violence could cause direct violence. Thus, in peacebuilding work it is important to identify and to prevent each of these forms of violence.

The importance of child and youth agency and participation is increasingly recognized by practitioners, researchers, and academics who are guided by rights-based approaches to programming (Hart 2004; Theis and O’Kane 2005; Nosworthy 2009) and by theories concerning the social construction of childhood (James and James 2008; James and Prout 1990). Childhood studies acknowledge children as agents who participate in the construction of their own lives and recognize the diversity of childhood experience which is also influenced by wider sociocultural, political, and geographic factors (James and James 2008).

The human rights framework recognizes people as agents and right holders who should be empowered to participate in decisions affecting them, to claim their rights, and to hold duty bearers accountable. Rights-based approaches reaffirm the indivisibility, universality, inalienability, interdependence, and nondiscrimination

of human rights. However, it is only in the past three decades that children under the age of 18 years have been recognized and valued as social actors and right holders. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989) promulgated children's rights to participation, alongside their rights to survival, protection, and development. Children's participation is recognized as one of the key principles of the UNCRC. Children's views should be considered in all matters affecting them while taking into consideration their evolving capacity and their best interests. The UNCRC is the first human rights treaty to explicitly assert children's civil rights. Every child has the right to information, to express his or her views, to be involved in decisions affecting him or her, to form or join associations, and to be part of peaceful assembly. Children's participation is identified as a right to be fulfilled in its own right and as a means to achieve other rights.

In contexts affected by violent conflict, human rights abuses are frequently both a cause and a symptom of conflicts (Brainard and Chollet 2007; Collier 2003). Thus, action to address human rights and child rights violations should be a vital component of practices and policies to secure sustained peace (International Council on Human Rights Policy 2006). Support for citizenship participation and good governance, including space for children and youth participation and representation is imperative to increase space for articulating and addressing rights violations and other root causes of violent conflict in order to better secure peace (Feinstein et al. 2010; O'Kane et al. 2013; Nosworthy 2009; Save the Children et al. 2012).

Youth bulge theorists use demographic and historical evidence to show that most nations with large portions of their population between the ages of 15 and 24 (or 19) – as a portion of their population older than 14 – have significantly increased risk of armed conflict (Ludwig 2013; Urdal 2011a, b; Cincotta and Leahy 2006; Dhillon 2008; Dhillon and Yousef 2009; Urdal 2004). Limitations of youth bulge theories have been identified (McLean Hilker and Fraser 2009). For example, the statistical relationship cannot be used to predict war or violence with a high level of certainty. Furthermore, while a correlation between a high relative youth population and higher risk of violence supports a causal claim, it does not prove causality and reveals little about circumstances and processes at work and why certain young people engage in violence (McLean Hilker and Fraser 2009). It is imperative to better understand the reasons why some young people engage in violence and also to better understand and support the positive role that children and youth can play as peacebuilders. It is crucial to better understand what does and does not work in the field of child and youth participation in peacebuilding, so that efforts to support sustainable peace can be better supported.

Child and youth participation in conflict, post-conflict, and peacebuilding takes different forms. As described by Feinstein et al. (2010) in their respective child clubs, groups, and associations, children and youth are participating actively to ensure their own protection and to contribute to peacebuilding through:

- Organizing meetings among children and youth with discussions about how to live, to relate to each other and to respect each other, and to better protect themselves

- Preparing poems, songs, dance, drama, debates, magazines, and radio programs to sensitize peers, family, school, and community members on child rights and peace
- Promoting conflict transformation, dialogue, and supporting peer advice, peer support, peer education, and peer counseling
- Encouraging all girls and boys to go to school and to study (including children who were formerly associated with armed forces and children with disabilities)
- Raising their voice to tackle discrimination, abuse, violence, and corruption within school and community settings
- Promoting children and youth participation in school governance, local governance, and policy and practice developments to address issues which affect them

Children and youth are also taking specific action according to the particular sociocultural and political context of their country and immediate environment. For example, in the DRC youth are addressing land conflicts, in Colombia children and youth are engaged in environmental protection to prevent exploitation of natural resources, and in Nepal children and youth have been working collectively to reduce discrimination based on caste and ethnicity.

This chapter starts by briefly presenting information about how the evaluation was organized as a global partnership. This is followed by an introduction to the evaluation methodology, its limitations, and the participant groups that were included in the evaluation. The evaluation tools are briefly presented, followed by an overview of lessons learned when children and youth are involved in a participatory evaluation. Most attention is given to findings concerning the impact of child and youth participation in peacebuilding and a series of factors enhancing and hindering positive impact. A conclusion ends this chapter by underlining the importance of increased recognition of, collaborations with, and investments in children and youth as peacebuilders.

Key findings concerning the quality of participation are not shared in this chapter. However, interested readers are encouraged to read a full report from this evaluation which was published by the Global Partnership for Children and Youth in Peacebuilding in July 2015 (McGill et al. 2015).

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## **2 Global Partnership for Children and Youth in Peacebuilding**

In 2012 a Global Partnership for Children and Youth in Peacebuilding was established to increase recognition of, and support for children and youth participation in peacebuilding. The Global Partnership is composed of agencies, individuals, institutes, and organizations (including youth organizations) who are working collaboratively to support children's and youth's effective participation in peace processes and peacebuilding across individual, family, peer, school, community, national, regional, and global levels.

### 3 3M Participatory Evaluation: Introducing the Methodology

The Global Partnership seeks to improve children and youth in peacebuilding (CYP) practices and impact and strengthen the evidence base supporting CYP. As one step toward this end, the Global Partnership undertook a *multiagency, multicountry, multi-donor* (3M) evaluation. The 3M evaluation objectives were to:

1. Map who is doing what and where to support CYP.
2. Nurture durable partnerships increasing CYP quantity, quality, and impact.
3. With children and youth, assess the quality and impact of child and youth participation in peacebuilding and variables influencing CYP impact.
4. Build the capacity of children and youth to meaningfully participate in CYP evaluations.
5. Present key findings and recommendations to stakeholders to help increase the quantity, quality, and impact of CYP work.

#### 3.1 Implementation Structure and Evaluation Methodology Development

The evaluation methodology supported a participatory evaluation process involving children, youth and adults as evaluators in Local Evaluation Teams (LETs). The evaluation was primarily qualitative. A multi-method approach was applied, including focus group discussions (FGDs) using participatory evaluation tools with different age groups, online mapping, interviews, drawing, stories, and analysis of available secondary data. In particular, visual participatory evaluation tools including a timeline, a before and after body map, and other tools were adapted (Save the Children et al. 2014) and applied to help “capture complex social change processes and illuminate interactions between interventions and the context” (OECD 2012, p. 32). Visual participatory tools used during FGDs offered increased opportunities for participants of different ages, especially younger participants, to interact and share their views, experiences, and feelings concerning child and youth participation in peacebuilding (O’Kane 2008; Kitzenger 1994). The Reflecting on Peace Practice (RPP) approach (CDA 2009) also provided useful frameworks for analyzing the impact of CYP initiatives evaluated as case studies. Furthermore, the Guiding Principles on Young People’s Participation in Peacebuilding (Working Group on Youth Participation in Peacebuilding 2014) and Basic Requirements for Quality Children’s Participation (Save the Children et al. 2014) informed the development of eight indicators evaluating the quality of child and youth participation in peacebuilding.

In each of the three countries, a Country Steering Team supported the initiation of the evaluation process in their respective countries, including hiring a fulltime country evaluator, considering the necessity of hiring a partnership coordinator, identifying 3 to 4 regions within each country where Local Evaluation Teams

(LETs) were to be formed, identifying LET coordinators, and organizing a 4-day capacity-building workshop to launch the process. Eleven Local Evaluation Teams were formed across the three countries, one in each of the following regions:

- Four regions of Colombia: Bogota-Soacha, Cali, Manizela-Armenia, and Montes de Maria
- Three districts in DRC: Bukavo, Goma, and Kitchanga
- Four districts in Nepal: Doti, Mahottari, Nawalparasi, and Rolpa

An evaluation protocol, ethical guidelines, participatory evaluation tools, forms, information leaflets, and other documents were developed by the global lead evaluators to support the in-country processes. During the evaluation all participants were required to sign informed consent forms. In addition, informed consent for the participation of children under 18 years was also gained from their parents or guardians. All evaluators were required to sign the evaluators' Code of Conduct and Behavior Protocol, which included adherence to child safeguarding policies. Furthermore, global lead evaluators supported facilitation of the country's capacity-building workshop and participated in regular Skype calls with the country evaluator, to mentor and support the evaluation process, paying particular attention to quality and ethical evaluation practice (see McGill et al. 2015).

## 3.2 Evaluation Limitations

The evaluators recognize a number of limitations to the methodology including:

- Most initiatives evaluated lacked baseline data on CYP quality and impact. Furthermore, due to the complexity of undertaking evaluations of multiple initiatives to examine their cumulative impact, it was not feasible to gather data from control groups. In the absence of baseline data and control groups, the importance of triangulating data from different sources and evaluation methods was crucial to ensure valid and robust findings.
- Limited conflict analysis and examination of CYP's theory of change due to time constraints and choice of priority evaluation tools. To respond to this, a conflict analysis problem tree tool was used by LET members at the initial capacity-building workshop in Colombia and Nepal and at the Analysis Workshop in DRC.
- A user updated online platform was intended to broadly map and analyze the location, type, quantity, and quality of CYP initiatives across each country. As described below, a web platform was developed for such purposes, but technical challenges led to delays that prevented its effective use during this evaluation (see [www.GPCYP.com/map](http://www.GPCYP.com/map)).
- Time and financial constraints greatly limited the amount of data collected, the number of initiatives evaluated, the number of countries in which the evaluation was conducted, and more quantitative data analysis using research software.

### 3.3 Participants Defined

Different cultures and organizations define groups of young people differently. In this evaluation child and youth peacebuilding (CYP) generally refers to peacebuilding efforts of any person younger than 30. In this evaluation, participant data was organized in the following four groupings, and FGDs were organized separately with these groups (Table 1).

Efforts were made to include an equal number of boys and girls in FGDs, and efforts were made to reach children and youth from the most marginalized backgrounds, including children and youth from ethnic or social minorities. Furthermore, body map FGDs were conducted separately with female and male children and youth to ensure space for gender-sensitive expression of views and experiences. Body maps were conducted in male and female mixed groups with CYP adult supporters. Disaggregated data analysis and triangulation of data from different sources and methods helped increase reliability and validity of findings, with attention to gender, age, and other diversity factors (Table 2).

### 3.4 Overview of 3M Evaluation Tools

**Online mapping.** In addition to using the participatory evaluation tools, the Global Partnership collaborated with other agencies to expand an existing web platform to allow users to add information on who is doing what and where to support children and youth as peacebuilders. The platform allows users to record information on different types of CYP work, when and where the work was conducted, and the number of young people from different age groups involved. It also allows importing of peace and violence indicators. However, development delays prevented the use of the platform until the end of our evaluation process. See more and register CYP initiatives here [www.GPCY.com/map](http://www.GPCY.com/map) (Table 3).

**Focus group discussions (FGDs).** Several evaluation tools were designed for focus group discussion (FGD) facilitated among a group of 4–12 participants involved with a particular CYP initiative. The timeline and body map were two participatory evaluation tools that were used with separate age groups within each CYP initiative evaluated. The children and youth in context and pots and stones

**Table 1** Definitions of Evaluation Participant Groupings

Participant groupings definitions	Term used	
1. 10–14-year-old girls and/or boys participating in peacebuilding initiatives	<i>Child</i>	<i>Child and youth participants</i>
2. 15–17-year-old girls and/or boys participating in peacebuilding initiatives	<i>Adolescent</i>	
3. 18–29-year-old female or male youth participating in peacebuilding initiatives	<i>Youth</i>	
4. 18+-year-old adults supporting child or youth peacebuilding initiatives	<i>Adult supporters</i>	



**Table 2** Number of participants who participated in FGD or interview by gender, age, and location (excluding draw and write). Participants are only counted once in this table though some participants participated in multiple evaluation activities

	10–14 years		15–17 years		18–29 years		18+ adult supporters		Total		All total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M and F	
<i>Colombia totals</i>	63	98	49	103	61	42	5	30	178	273		451
<i>DRC totals</i>	59	62	59	68	79	58	13	10	210	198		408
<i>Nepal totals</i>	79	70	122	132	114	104	69	18	384	324		708
<b>Participant totals</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>303</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>772</b>	<b>795</b>		<b>1,567</b>

**Table 3** Number of FGDs completed by tool and participant group

Focus group discussions	10–14 years	15–17 years	18–29 years	18+ adult supporters	All total
Timeline totals	19	45	36	8	<b>108</b>
Body map totals	48	56	37	6	<b>147</b>
C and Y in context totals	8	11	10	6	<b>35</b>
Pots and stones totals	8	14	11	5	<b>38</b>
<i>Total Colombia FGDs</i>	30	36	18	6	<b>90</b>
<i>Total DRC FGDs</i>	20	28	19	9	<b>76</b>
<i>Total Nepal FGDs</i>	33	62	57	10	<b>162</b>
<b>All FGD totals</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>328</b>
<b>Draw and write poems and stories</b>					
<b>Colombia</b>	~	~	~	~	<b>121</b>
<b>DRC</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>Nepal</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>330</b>
<i>Draw and write totals</i>	<b>202</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>540</b>

FGDs were primarily intended for use with case studies that focused on a more limited number of CYP initiatives to gather more data and evidence concerning the quality and impact of CYP. A brief description of the tools is provided.

**Essential Tool: The Timeline FGD** explored the history, developments, successes, and challenges of a CYP initiative over time. Participants identified success factors and shared their ideas to improve the impact of their peacebuilding initiatives.

**Essential Tool: The Body Map FGD** used body parts to explore changes in child and youth experiences before and after their participation in a particular peacebuilding initiative. It explored positive, negative, and unexpected outcomes, changes, and impact of their participation.

**Children and Youth in Context FGD** used a diagram of children and youth in the context of their families, schools, community/district, and national contexts to help identify their peacebuilding impact. This tool helped (1) identify objectives of CYP initiatives at different levels, (2) analyze positive or negative and expected or unexpected impact at different levels, and (3) identify other data sources to verify CYP impact.

**The Pots and Stones on the Quality of Participation in Peacebuilding FGD** was used to discuss and score eight principles relating to CYP quality and to share ideas to improve quality.

**Draw and Write Poems and Stories on “Peace and Violence: Choices and Change.”** This was an optional individual activity that allowed participants to share more about their CYP experiences and feelings, choices they faced to engage in peace or violence, or changes arising from peacebuilding or violent experiences.



**Case studies.** They provided more detailed information and analysis of the quality and impact of key CYP initiatives identified through the initial evaluation process. In each country 3–4 CYP initiatives which were considered “most effective” in building peace were selected. Additionally, the Reflecting Peace Practice Matrix (CDA 2009) was also applied. This matrix was developed from the Reflecting on Peace Practice Project (RPP), which is an experience-based learning process that involves agencies whose programs attempt to prevent or mitigate violent conflict. Its purpose is to analyze experience at the individual program level across a broad range of agencies and contexts. Its goal is to improve the effectiveness of international peacebuilding efforts. RPP found that all programs work at two basic levels, the individual/personal level and/or the sociopolitical level. In this evaluation, one of the RPP matrices was applied to better understand conflict issues addressed, the vision and the extent to which (a) individual and sociopolitical changes were supported through the initiative and (b) whether more people and key people were involved.

**Data analysis.** Workshops in each country brought together LET members, country partnership steering team members, the country evaluator, and lead evaluators. Children and youth were supported and encouraged to play active roles as facilitators, presenters, analysts, and advocates in these workshops. Each data analysis workshop enabled a review of data transcriptions from the FGDs, identification of emerging themes, and development of recommendations. Furthermore, the global and country evaluators came together for a 4 day data analysis workshop in May 2015 to compare and contrast findings and themes across the three countries.

### 3.5 Lessons Learned on Involving Children and Youth in a Participatory Evaluation

In this section, the factors which influenced meaningful participation of children and youth in the evaluation process are described.

**Capacity building and mentoring of children and youth as evaluators.** The evaluation process consistently focused on capacity building and mentoring of youth and children as evaluators while also applying ethical guidelines ensuring their participation was safe, relevant, and appropriate to their developing capacity and time availability as volunteers. The only paid positions were the Local Evaluation Team (LET) coordinators (mostly undertaken by youth), the country evaluators, partnership coordinators, and the lead global evaluators. The initial 4-day capacity-building workshop provided a crucial opportunity to enhance the skills, knowledge, and confidence of children, youth and adult LET members, partnership coordinators, as well as the country evaluators. Furthermore, the country evaluator's field visits, phone calls, and emails provided opportunities to mentor and support the LET members in planning, data collection, data storage, documentation, and analysis.

While key efforts were made to apply the evaluation tools in similar ways to ensure comparability of data, it was also crucial for the LET members to internalize and gain ownership of the evaluation tools and methods. Good translation of the tools into the national language was an enabling factor when done well and a hindering factor where it was not done sufficiently well. Opportunities to pretest the tools were helpful in Nepal, and the use of the tools in their own peacebuilding initiatives before applying them in other initiatives also increased LET members' confidence and internalization of the tools in each country. "The dynamic of the Local Evaluation Team allowed us to feel confident in front of other initiatives" highlighted a LET member from Colombia.

Providing opportunities for children and youth to be part of planning, data collection, data analysis, and development of key messages and recommendations increased child and youth engagement, feelings of respect, and their sense of ownership of the tools and findings. Child and youth LET members expressed how they developed and strengthened their facilitation, communication, leadership, and evaluation skills and gained knowledge to strengthen their peacebuilding initiatives.

**Access to budget, materials, and equipment.** Budgetary and material support to the LETs was crucial for implementing planned evaluation activities. In Colombia and Nepal, the LET coordinators were paid a monthly wage in line with their additional responsibilities for coordination, support to LET members, transcription, and data storage. These paid positions significantly increased the efficiency and effectiveness of the LETs. In contrast miscommunication in the DRC context resulted in a lack of payment to LET coordinators which contributed to reduced motivation and delays in data collection and transcription. In early March, the DRC team employed a database manager to transcribe, verify previously transcribed data, and translate documents. Other LET members from all three counties were

volunteers and were provided mobile phone credit, transport, and food allowances. Each LET was also provided with sufficient material such as flipchart, pens, and colored card to undertake the evaluation activities, and a camera was either purchased or borrowed for the duration of the evaluation. Refreshment and snacks were also provided to participants during activities.

**Ethics and risks.** Open channels for communication to address ethical concerns and risks and to ensure voluntary and informed consent, child safeguarding, and personal security of evaluation team members were crucial. In the Colombian context LET members recognized that there were some inherent risks for youth, children, and their accompanying adults to travel to new areas to collect data from CYP initiatives. To minimize risks, LET members always traveled to new areas in small groups, and they ensured that a member from that specific peacebuilding initiative and community was actively involved. In both the DRC and Nepal, LETs had to adapt their action plans to postpone planned activities due to political strikes and insecurity during the month of January 2015.

Complex ethical dilemmas regarding payment or nonpayment of LET members were carefully considered. Paid positions of LET coordinators were taken on by experienced youth, while other LET members who were volunteers were provided with phone, transport, and food allowances, as well as certificates recognizing the skills and knowledge they gained as evaluators. The decisions were informed by the consideration of existing local practices, national laws regarding child labor, and the principles of do no harm and best interests of the child. Sincere efforts were made to support planning with and by child and youth evaluators to ensure work plans that were realistic considering their roles as volunteers while also considering their existing responsibilities to study, support their households, and enjoy leisure time.

**Geography, diversity, and travel.** Efforts were made in each country to establish LETs in diverse urban, rural, and remote locations. Illustrating their commitment to inclusiveness, some LET members in Colombia walked for several hours and used small boats to reach some of the CYP initiatives. Similar efforts were made by LET members in Nepal and the DRC. However, time constraints also resulted in fewer FGDs being organized in remote locations. If more budget and time had been available, the Country Partnership Steering Team members (and District Advisory Committee members in Nepal) were interested to involve more CYP initiatives across a wider number of districts and regions of each country. “The model of the program is unique, so this should be continued in the long term and we would like to request to reach more child and youth initiatives” emphasized a district official in Nepal.

**Selection and motivation of children and youth.** Selection of experienced child and youth peacebuilders who were interested in volunteering time to the 3M evaluation process was a critical factor enhancing LET effectiveness. Having little time to select LET members was a hindering factor, and in the DRC and Nepal, there were some changes in LET composition after national capacity-building workshops. Child and youth LET members in Colombia and Nepal were primarily motivated by opportunities that the evaluation provided to build their capacity and

to strengthen their peacebuilding initiatives. In all three countries, the evaluation enabled interaction and learning among children and youth who were engaged in other peacebuilding initiatives in different parts of the country.

**Time availability.** Time constraints were one of the most significant factors negatively affecting the meaningful participation of children and youth in the evaluation process. As recognized at the outset, children and youth are busy with school, household, and other responsibilities and have limited time availability for organizing or being part of data collection activities. It was crucial to make maximum use of nonschool days – weekends and school holidays – for organizing evaluation activities. Another time constraint concerned the length of time taken to use each of the evaluation tools. Although it was planned that one tool would take 90 min, it often took up to two hours to ensure clear introductions, icebreakers, and completion of all the questions within the tool. As a result a few participants left before the end of the FGD.

**Coordination and planning** among the country partnership members increased the success of the participatory evaluation process. Furthermore, collaborative participation and commitment among youth organizations, a national NGO, and INGOs in the Nepal partnership contributed to the effectiveness and success of the process in Nepal. Two youth organizations who were members of the steering team in Nepal commented how “Youth and local level organisations were able to sit together and work together with national and international NGOs in the Nepal Partnership and 3M evaluation. This type of collaboration and partnership increases peacebuilding by children and youth.”

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## 4 Key Findings

### 4.1 The Impact of Child and Youth Participation in Peacebuilding

Before I was not interested about what was happening to me and I did not care about others. I did not like the way I was, and I rejected myself and others. Now, I take more care of myself and I am interested in the common well-being, I can control myself without medication and I am kinder to others. I value myself and others.

A 16-year-old girl from Armenia, Colombia

The evaluation results revealed that child and youth peacebuilders have contributed to impact in four key areas: (1) young peacebuilders often became more aware and active citizens for peace, (2) young peacebuilders increased peaceful cohabitation and reduced discrimination, (3) young peacebuilders reduced violence, and (4) young peacebuilders increased support to vulnerable groups. A few of the changes under each of these key impact areas, particularly the changes concerning children and youth as aware and active citizens, were experienced by males and females of different ages participating in different peacebuilding initiatives across different regions. Other changes were more localized resulting from specific

peacebuilding initiatives carried out by children or youth, often in collaboration with adults in particular geographic areas.

**Theme One: Young peacebuilders often became more aware and active citizens for peace.** This prominent theme covered numerous impact subthemes emerging from individual changes, development, and actions. Child and youth involvement in peacebuilding helped them develop as individuals and become more responsible citizens. Practicing peacebuilding not only allowed young people to improve their peacebuilding skills, more broadly, it contributed to their more effective positive involvement in their communities. Participants highlighted that individual changes and actions resulted in positive impact at community, family, and school levels.

The transformation of young people into more aware and active citizens for peace seemed to start as they became more aware of peace as a concept and possibility. They then began to hope and believe in peace in their families, communities, and nation. This energized young people to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to do so. As their knowledge and skill improved, both through training and through practicing peacebuilding action, young people's confidence in their ability improved. This dynamic process increased their commitment to peacebuilding which increased their peacebuilding actions and improved their knowledge, skills, and confidence. These young, skilled, and confident peacebuilders applied their developing capacity throughout their daily lives and, thereby, became aware and active citizens for peace. This development process was critical for increasing the impact of their peacebuilding actions.

**Children and youth become aware of their peacebuilding ability.** In DRC a 13-year-old boy from Goma wrote, "I had no vision for peace," and a 14-year-old boy from Bukavu explained, "I lost all hope for peace." A 14-year-old girl from Kitchanga was afraid "the war would never end," and a 14-year-old boy from Bukavu confessed, "my heart was not interested in the question of peace." Their responses implied that they had a different mindset in the past. Now they recognized the importance of peace and they believed in a peaceful future.

In Nepal, participants from all four districts evaluated mentioned increased positive thinking and that they take more responsibility. Children and youth described how they used to have negative thinking that "children and youth could not contribute to positive change" as mentioned by a 17-year-old adolescent from Nawalparasi.

In Colombia responses also indicate changes in young people's mindsets, attitudes, values, and perceptions that resulted in significant peacebuilding impact at community, family, and school levels. For example, A 14-year-old girl from Cali described how she "used to think [she] was superior and fought at school. Before, I was a very fighting girl and I did not want to know about peacebuilding."

***Young peacebuilders became personally committed to peace and practice peacebuilding actions, more responsible and capable.*** The changes in thinking and attitude were consistently noted as the precursor to young people practicing peacebuilding actions. The next step from a changed mindset is changed behavior.

Children and youth who were engaged in peacebuilding programs showed increased personal commitment to peace and took individual peacemaking actions. First, they wanted to learn more about peacebuilding. For example, a 13-year-old girl from Kitchanga, DRC, expressed increased interest in peace publications, and a 12-year-old girl from Goma similarly explained that she watched documentaries on peace now and wanted sustainable peace.

Second, young people practiced peacebuilding actions. “When I meet children fighting, I do everything possible to sensitize them and build a climate of peace,” a 14-year-old boy from Goma, DRC, explained. A 13-year-old girl from Kitchanga confirmed being capable to mediate between people with land conflicts. In Nepal a 15-year-old girl described how “children and youth who are involved in peacebuilding see their responsibility and work to reduce violence, abuse, and exploitation and to end child marriage, conflict, and social ills.”

Third, participants also expressed that children and youth became more responsible and capable as a result of their peacebuilding involvement. For example, in the districts of Goma and Kitchanga in the DRC, and to a lesser extent in the district of Bukavu, children and adolescent participants said that before their participation in peacebuilding, they only thought about fighting and stealing. Now, these children and adolescents have become peaceful actors. “I don’t fight anymore, I hit the drums of peace,” wrote a 12-year-old boy from Goma. A 14-year-old boy from Goma explained that, “even if someone provokes me, it’s peace I seek with him.” They further described how they go to school, study, and help with housework now and that they have become polite and respectful and listen to others, including their family, parents, peers, and teachers. They are interested in their advice and follow them when they can. Similar personal changes were described by children and youth in Colombia and Nepal. In Nepal, increased respectful communication with elders, parents, and peers was described by participants of all age groups in each of the four districts. According to a 14-year-old girl child from a child club in Mahottari “I used to not to listen to my parents and give negative response, now I realize and give respect to elders.”

This personal development to be more responsible and considerate children and youth helps them to stay focused and engaged and to collaborate with others in their peacebuilding efforts. Young people’s peacebuilding mindset, commitment, actions, and increased responsibility and skills not only improved their peacebuilding impact but also freed them to play more active roles as productive citizens in whatever ways they chose to do so.

**Theme Two: Young peacebuilders increased peaceful cohabitation and reduced discrimination.** Cohabitation moves beyond coexistence, toward peaceful dynamic relationships within and between diverse groups, resulting in identifying and supporting norms such as interethnic marriages, visiting or studying interethnically, and intergenerational civic collaborations. Children and youth contributed significantly to increased peaceful cohabitation within and between a variety of different groups.

**In Nepal,** sociocultural beliefs and traditions have contributed to discrimination based on age, gender, ethnicity, and caste. Ethnic and caste discrimination has been



one of the root causes of conflict and violence in Nepal (Save the Children et al. 2008). Furthermore, gender and age discriminations contribute to domestic violence against women and children, different forms of gender-based violence, as well as cultural forms of violence including early marriage and chaupadi practices in which menstruating females are expected to sleep outside of the home during their menstruation. Child and youth peacebuilders prevent and address different forms of discrimination due to age, gender, ethnicity, and caste which contributed to increased peaceful cohabitation. Other available secondary data reports provide additional case examples of child clubs' efforts which have reduced discrimination based on caste and ethnicity (CCWB and Consortium 2012; Save the Children 2013a; O'Kane 2003).

Child, adolescent, and youth from all four districts of Nepal mentioned that they have increased understanding of caste and ethnicity through their engagement in peacebuilding and that there is a gradual reduction in caste discrimination. Previously they used to treat each other differently, but through their peacebuilding they have started to treat and see everyone equally. Systematic peacebuilding efforts by youth to address caste discrimination and "untouchability" were illustrated in a community in Rolpa district where youth had initiated and mobilized collaborative efforts engaging village officials, political parties, and women's groups to declare their village as "untouchability free." Through their efforts, changes in perceptions and thoughts and traditional practices among children, youth, and adults have been achieved. Different castes are now able to visit and eat in each other's homes and drink from the same water source, and children are allowed to play together.

Children and youth in Nepal also emphasized changes in gender relations and reduction in gender discrimination which is being brought about by their participation efforts. A female youth shared how "Girls participation was less accepted by society, but now we are seeing how this has changed... Before girls were not encouraged to leave their home and they were expected to marry at a young age. Now children and parents attitudes have changed.... Girls are now more able to participate in social issues. There are positive changes at the individual level and in society."

There was wide reporting that CYP improved relationships between children and youth and also with their parents and elders. Other studies also provide evidence of positive changes in social norms regarding the place and roles of children (Central Child Welfare Board [CCWB] and Consortium 2012; Theis and O'Kane 2005; O'Kane 2003). Furthermore, collaborative efforts by the Government of Nepal, UN, and civil society agencies are supporting increased institutional support for child clubs and increased opportunities for child and youth participation in local governance (CCWB and Consortium 2012; UNDP 2014). Specific efforts to promote Child Friendly Local Governance are also being supported in 61 districts, 18 municipalities, and 317 village development committees (UNDP 2014).

**In Colombia** participants emphasized improved cohabitation and reduced violence at family, school, and community levels. Children, youth, and adults from eight of ten CYP initiatives described positive changes and impact in terms of reduced violence and peaceful cohabitation.

“The neighborhoods were united as one community,” explained a group of children from Cali when describing a 2012 march against violence. Children and young peacebuilders stressed that regardless of the invisible borders created by gangs and other groups, they dared to take advantage of community spaces and promote peace in different neighborhoods. In the Montes de Maria region, participants underscored the significant impact of cultural activities to unify communities. “Youth communities have widened their knowledge, their stigmas of mistrust have decreased, and they have reconciled between each other,” explained a 23-year-old male youth from Macayepo.

In the paper, *Youth Violence Prevention in Colombia* (2014), Pracher argued that projects should focus on long-term collaborative programming, violence prevention, and youth empowerment and emphasize sports and arts activities. This report highlighted how different peacebuilding initiatives effectively implemented these strategies and engaged communities to increase peaceful cohabitation and prevent youth violence (Backer and Guerra 2011, pp. 31–33).

In its National Policy on Peacebuilding and Family Coexistence 2005–2015, the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar (ICBF)) underlined how preventing and addressing intra-family violence requires an intersectoral strategy focused on individuals, families, and communities. (The Colombian Institute of Family Welfare is a Colombian state entity, which works for the prevention and comprehensive protection of infancy, childhood, adolescence, and well-being of families in Colombia.) Promoting values of peaceful coexistence and equipping families with tools to peacefully solve conflicts were highlighted as key strategies (ICBF 2005, pp. 9–10). Evaluation participants were part of peacebuilding initiatives working at the community, family, and school levels. They all recognized how crucial it was for them to learn to use dialogue, instead of fighting to resolve conflicts. The values and skills acquired during different processes were applied in their homes and significantly improved their cohabitation.

In DRC, body map FGDs revealed that children and youth were highly ethnicized. Ethnic hatred was especially pronounced in Kitchanga where 163 responses expressed ethnic hatred out of a total of 181 responses expressing such hatred during all body map FGDs. Participants mentioned 256 times that CYP initiatives reduced discrimination or increased peaceful cohabitation. (This is not the number of participants highlighting this impact as some participants commented more than once about reduced discrimination and/or increased peaceful cohabitation.) Of these 256 responses 179 were given in Kitchanga. Additionally, the majority of draw and writes from Kitchanga expressed the positive change of increased peaceful cohabitation. For example, a 15-year-old boy gave the title for his vivid and colorful picture below, “All tribes are the same” (Fig. 1).

Participants in Goma similarly mentioned that there is less tribalism and that people of different ethnic groups have started appreciating each other. “I am not tribal anymore,” said a 13-year-old girl from Goma. “Certain very extremist tribes have understood today that only love counts. They marry each other, which was impossible before. They’ve understood that ethnic segregation has no importance,”



**Fig. 1 All tribes are the same.** Drawing of people of different tribes, ages, and gender farming together harmoniously, drawn by a 15 year old boy in Kitchanga, DRC. On top is written, “all tribes are the same”

an 18-year-old adolescent from Goma explained. In fact, interethnic marriage was mentioned several times by participants.

**Theme Three: Young peacebuilders reduced violence.** Child and youth peacebuilders prevented and reduced different forms of violence and exploitation as evidenced by evaluation participant’s claims and supporting research. The type of violence reduced varied significantly in each country. Following are just some of the examples of reduced violence in each context.

**In Nepal,** reduced violence against children, women, or men and creation of a more peaceful environment were widely reported by evaluation participants. This included reporting of reduced gender-based violence and domestic violence, including reduced scolding of children by their parents. Children and youth also described positive changes in their own behavior and attitudes to be less violent as a result of participating in their CYP initiative. Reduced alcohol use and associated domestic violence and fighting in two communities was reported. In one such community, collaborative efforts by youth clubs, women’s groups, and local officials resulted in the declaration of an alcohol-free VDC. (In Nepal, the lower administrative part of its Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development is the Village Development Committee (VDC). Each district has several VDCs. Each VDC is further divided into several wards depending on the population of the district; the average is nine wards.) Reduced early marriage was reported by

children, adolescents, and youth from six child clubs (2 Doti, 2 Rolpa, 1 Nawalparasi, 1 Mahottari) and four youth clubs (3 Rolpa, 1 Doti). Interagency research on child marriage in Nepal carried out in 15 districts identified how, “the activities of child clubs, adolescents and girls were found to be very useful in preventing child marriage” (Plan Nepal et al. 2012, p. 10).

**In DRC**, CYP appeared to reduce violence of different kinds in all three LET areas. In Kitchanga, participants suggested there was success peacefully resolving and reducing a number of individual land conflicts. This impact came about through peace education on the land law and the importance of solving conflicts peacefully, as well as through mediation of existing land conflicts. Children and youth were especially involved in awareness-raising efforts, while some youth also mediated conflicts. Acts of land conflicts signed, and actual recuperations of land, were mentioned by several organizations as evidence. Children and youth also reduced sexual- and gender-based violence by raising awareness on gender equality within families, schools, and communities and by addressing forms of sexual exploitation.

**In Colombia**, a clear difference was discerned between participants under 18 and youth participants. There was an observable majority of children and adolescents (10–17-year-olds) stressing that they had learned to dialogue instead of fighting, to respect their relatives and peers, and to recognize their own emotional feelings. By contrast, youth, and adults, directed their responses on impacts that increased integration between communities and improved communication within families. More than 50% of answers under the category of reduced conflicts and violence in schools and families ( $n=94$ ) used terms related to “communication” to describe how children and youth had experienced greater peace in their relationships at home and in school. Dialogue, listening to others, using proper language, and expressing their feelings are considered as the main strategies they learned and used through their involvement in peacebuilding activities. Participants from Cali described how bullying significantly decreased in their school and led to decreased school dropout.

**Theme Four: Young peacebuilders increased support to vulnerable groups.** In Colombia, DRC, and Nepal, CYP increased assistance offered to vulnerable groups. Following are some examples.

**In Colombia**, in the Montes de Maria region, the Antonio Restrepo Barco Foundation created a multipurpose fund providing child and youth groups and organizations with crucial support to develop sustainable and income-generating projects. These initiatives positively impact the society by supporting recycling and trash collection youth brigades, creating a playground for disabled children, creating music schools, and offering economic opportunities for children and youth in a region highly affected by poverty and unemployment (Fundación Restrepo Barco 2008).

**In DRC**, children and youth implemented concrete activities to allow children and youth to develop in safe environments in all three sites. In Bukavu, child and youth peacebuilders claimed to have improved the conditions of children in prisons and reduced the number of children there in the first place. A 34-year-old adult supporter from Bukavu explained that there is now an “acceptance [by prison

authorities] to liberate children from prisons.” Also, “children find food now,” an 18-year-old male youth claimed, and “children have their own space in the prison,” a 22-year-old female youth confirmed. In Goma and Kitchanga, children and youth have contributed to reunifying children and their families who were separated by war and supporting their reintegration in families and communities.

**In Nepal**, participants reported increased reintegration of conflict-affected children and youth. Dialogue and interaction programs among young people who were part of armed groups and youth club members in Mahottari led to increased understanding of their motives and needs. Increased reintegration support of conflict-affected children and youth in their communities, schools, and families as a result of child and youth club initiatives was also reported by others (Binadi 2011; Save the Children Nepal 2008; Save the Children et al. 2008, 2013a).

## 4.2 Factors Influencing Child and Youth Peacebuilding Impact

Eleven key factors have been identified which hinder or enable the impact of child and youth peacebuilding efforts. To varying degrees, each of these factors can both positively and negatively influence CYP impact depending on the context and different circumstances. Furthermore, there is a strong interplay and dynamic relationship between each of these factors contributing to the cumulative successes or, conversely, the cumulative barriers preventing or limiting the impact of peacebuilding efforts.

1. **Attitudes, motivation, and commitment of children and youth and their organizations.** Good role models, effective communication, teamwork, and the responsibility and commitment of individuals were identified as key success factors. Children and youth were motivating each other, accessing information, and organizing themselves in their own clubs, associations, and movements to organize peacebuilding and violence prevention initiatives. As described by an 18-year-old female in Nepal, “in our child club we raised our voices against child abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and use of drugs. We conducted many awareness-raising programs, collected small funds which were used to buy stationery for children from the poorest families to help them to continue their study. We also organized debates and quizzes on children’s issues.” A lack of commitment and interest by children and youth was described as significant hurdles to successfully implementing peacebuilding programs. When only a few children and youth were actively participating and when sufficient preparation was not undertaken for their peacebuilding activities, their initiatives struggled to have significant impact. Reasons for limited participation in peacebuilding initiatives were varied. For example, in Nepal reasons included a lack of parental support for their children to participate, difficulties in reaching children and youth from the most remote communities, insufficient information and awareness about peacebuilding, a lack of local government support, and poor communication and internal conflicts within the

clubs. Shyness, rivalry, a lack of information sharing, and disrespectful communication were identified as hurdles in Colombia.

2. **Capacity, knowledge, skills, and experience of children and youth.** Through their CYP initiatives, some children and youth in different contexts have gained increased opportunities to access training on child rights/women's rights, peacebuilding, conflict management, and leadership skills. A male youth in Nepal described, "leadership development in children and youth is effective as children and youth have more confidence and skills to raise their voices about problems affecting them in their communities to concerned stakeholders, so that the concerns can be solved." Children and youth peacebuilders in Colombia emphasized the importance of disseminating their learning among their peers so that wider numbers of children and youth could be mobilized and engaged. In the well-functioning associations and clubs, children and youth had improved leadership, communication, analysis, and problem-solving skills which enhanced their competencies as peacebuilders.

Insufficient capacity building and efforts to consider conflict analysis findings when developing their peacebuilding or violence prevention initiatives has also contributed to some ineffective efforts. For example, some village cleaning and water tank building initiatives by children and youth in Nepal were organized under the name of peacebuilding, but they were not very effective in contributing to peace as they did not identify or address the underlying causes of conflict. Furthermore, some local-level income generation activities with female youth were not effectively contributing to peace, as they were not accompanied by peacebuilding awareness. Such findings are reinforced by an earlier multiagency study in Nepal (Care Nepal 2012) regarding the importance of conflict analysis and theories of change.

3. **Family attitudes and support.** Parental support for children's participation in peacebuilding was crucial. When there was a general lack of parental support for child peacebuilding efforts within the community, there tended to be lower morale among children and less active participation from girls and boys. Parental permission was also important for female youth in the Nepali context, as they faced more restrictions in terms of their mobility compared to male youth. In addition, some families who were most affected by poverty tended to be more reluctant to allow their sons and daughters to engage in peacebuilding activities, as they felt their time could be better spent contributing to the family livelihood. Findings from the evaluation exhibited positive indications that children and youth peacebuilders in a number of locations were gaining increased support from their parents for their CYP efforts.
4. **Cultural attitudes, beliefs, and practices.** Cultural attitudes and traditions concerning gender equality, marriage within tribal groups, and inheritance rights were mentioned as factors affecting peacebuilding efforts in the DRC. For example, cultural attitudes regarding male inheritance negatively affected efforts to promote gender equality. Similarly, in Nepal traditional cultural attitudes, beliefs, and practices toward gender, caste, ethnicity, and age were deep-rooted and contributed to different forms of discrimination and cultural

violence, including early marriage. It has been recognized that social norms take time and persistent effort to change (ActionAid et al. 2012; O’Kane 2003) and that restrictive social norms and attitudes toward children, girls, women, and other marginalized groups hinder opportunities for meaningful participation (ActionAid et al. 2012).

5. **Key stakeholders motivation, commitment, and support.** In some communities in Colombia, the DRC and Nepal children and youth reported a lack of willingness and commitment from the local government authorities and other relevant stakeholders to engage children and youth in peacebuilding. Thus, children and youth in some areas felt unsupported and were less able to address direct, cultural, and structural forms of violence without support from adults. In some communities in the DRC, some youth and children faced hostility and negative reactions to their peacebuilding efforts from key stakeholders. For example, in Kitchanga certain local chiefs prohibited awareness-raising activities and mediations on land conflicts due to vested interests.

In a number of communities in Nepal and in some communities in Colombia, close collaboration with key stakeholders (in schools, communities, local authorities) has increased the successful impact of CYP.

6. **Awareness raising, sensitization, and campaigns among key stakeholders.** Significant awareness raising and sensitization on peace, nonviolence, different forms of violence, as well as positive roles that children and youth can play in peacebuilding have been required with community members, parents, elders, and officials to change the attitudes and practices that contribute to violence and conflict. Awareness-raising activities in schools, communities, municipalities, and districts have been a key component of peacebuilding initiatives by child and youth peacebuilders in diverse locations in Colombia, DRC, and Nepal. In the Nepali context, national and district level campaigns on Children as Zones of Peace, School as Zones of Peace, and Child Friendly Local Governance have played an enabling role in creating more widespread awareness on issues relating to peace, nonviolence, participation, and respect for rights. The media (radio, television, and new forms of social media) has also played an important role in raising awareness and sharing information about peacebuilding and good governance initiatives among the general public.
7. **Culture, theater, arts, and sports as a means of engaging children and youth.** Creative methods are being effectively used to engage and sustain the motivation of children and youth in peacebuilding and to promote awareness and peacebuilding messages. Cultural arts, theater, drawing, poems, games, quizzes, debates, speeches, singing, and dancing were identified as effective approaches for children and youth to show their talents; to express their views and messages on peace, violence, and conflict issues concerning them; and to build social relations among groups. Children aged 10–14 years old in Colombia expressed their wish to participate in fun and artistic peacebuilding activities, for example, by “writing songs about peace with our thoughts” or “organizing more games so that children can have fun.” Furthermore, participation in cultural programs was also identified as important approach to

empower girls and female youth in Nepal. As described by one of the female youth members: “Female participation in cultural programmes is important to increase young women’s self confidence, and these young women can be a source of inspiration for other girls and women in their community.”

8. **Existence and implementation of government laws, policies, strategies, and provisions.** In line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, numerous laws, policies, and directives have been developed to protect people from different forms of violence and discrimination including child marriage, child labor, trafficking, discrimination, etc. Furthermore, there are increasing development of laws and regulations supporting children and youth participation in decision-making processes concerning them. In Colombia, a recent law has also mandated incorporation of the topic of peace in all school curriculums. However, despite provisions for child and youth representation in various local governance structures concerning them in Nepal, there continues to be a lack of provision for child and youth representation in Local Peace Committees, which have formal mandates to consolidate peace from the community level, to provide a common forum for people to resolve conflicts and disputes locally, and to directly address the impact of conflict. In addition, some parents, community members, and sometimes even local government officials remain unaware of relevant laws and policies, and there is insufficient implementation and monitoring of laws and policies, especially at the local levels.
9. **Financial and material support given to CYP efforts.** Child and youth peacebuilders in the DRC emphasized that financial means allowed them to reach a larger number of participants in peacebuilding, in more numerous and remote places. For example, in Bukavu, participants mentioned the need for funds to organize more multiethnic debates and to do more peace education. It was suggested that while financial means were important, financial support should also go hand in hand with peacebuilding, capacity building, and other inputs. In Colombia, while participants affirmed that long-term financial and logistical support was needed, they placed more emphasis on the importance of the support from stakeholders, particularly the need to increase and strengthen partnerships with the state institutions, as well as with other public and private institutions. Child and youth clubs in Nepal are increasingly gaining access to financial and material support from the local government; and they are influencing local government planning and budgeting processes which is increasing the sustainability of their efforts. Yet, many CYP initiatives continued to face challenges in securing sufficient material and financial support for their CYP initiatives in Nepal.
10. **Income generation support for marginalized groups.** In Nepal evaluation participants reported that efforts to reach and engage marginalized youth and children in their CYP efforts were more successful if their programs included income generation or skill development opportunities for youth or family members. The evaluation revealed the importance of approaches which are



conflict sensitive and the importance of analyzing the unintended economic impact of child and youth peacebuilding activities on families, particularly the most marginalized families, so that risks and negative impacts can be avoided. For example, in efforts to ban alcohol production in Doti, it was found that some of the most marginalized families who gained an income from alcohol production left the community when alcohol production was banned. An adult male supporter from Doti stressed that “The families who used to make local alcohol as an income generating source, after the declaration of alcohol free VDC, have to bear economic loss. They have to move to another place, this not only have negative impact in their livelihood, but also in the education of their children.”

11. **Conflict, political instability, and insecurity.** In the context of Eastern DRC, violence and conflict were identified as an important hindering factor. Implementation of peacebuilding activities created risks for child and youth peacebuilders. In addition, the experience and fear of violence and destruction, often with ethnic connotations, influenced the readiness of community members to accept peacebuilding messages. Political insecurity, armed conflict, and strikes were also reported as hindering factors to CYP initiatives in Nepal. During the period of armed conflict, some child and youth club activities were stopped due to insecurity and associated risks (Save the Children et al. 2008). Furthermore, in recent years political strikes have created delays and adjustments to child and youth peacebuilders plans and activities.

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## 5 Conclusion

These findings reveal the importance of increased recognition of, collaborations with, and investments in children and youth as peacebuilders. In efforts to develop safe and inclusive families, schools, communities, and societies, it is imperative that children and youth are recognized and supported as active citizens for peace. Child and youth peacebuilders are calling for inclusion of peacebuilding in the school curricula and increased capacity building on peacebuilding and conflict management skills. They are advocating for increased space for their participation and representation in peacebuilding and governance processes concerning them at local, district, and national levels to enhance collaborative efforts for sustainable peace and good governance. Furthermore, children and youth are calling for increased intergenerational dialogue and partnerships to reduce misunderstanding among the younger and older generations and to enhance collaborative efforts to prevent and address different forms of discrimination and violence. Children and youth also recognize their own responsibilities to better reflect on issues of inclusion and exclusion within their participation and peacebuilding initiatives, to strengthen their strategic efforts to reach and engage the most marginalized children and youth, and to ensure gender sensitivity and increased gender equality.

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## Abstract

Over recent years, humanitarian agencies have developed a range of spatialized practices within their child protection efforts. The containment of children within dedicated spaces may offer particular benefits in settings of outright warfare. However, political violence manifests in different forms with varying levels of intensity. In the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), the violence issuing from Israeli forces and settlers has continued over decades and is embedded within the everyday lives of Palestinian children. Here a spatialized approach may be less appropriate, possibly even harmful. Starting with a brief overview of the genealogy of enclosure in the field of humanitarianism and in relation to childhood, examination is then made of spatialized practice in the oPt. The chapter reveals

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that in this setting, efforts to promote the protection of children through containing them within bounded space raises both practical and political concerns.

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**Keywords**

Protection • Children • Palestinian • Space • Humanitarianism

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## 1 Introduction

According to Stephen Levinson, “from classical times to the present, the centrality of spatial thinking in human cognition has been fundamentally presupposed” (1998, p. 16). Yet, as this author has also noted, *how* we think about space is affected by culturally specific patterns of thought. This observation encourages us to consider the invocation of space not as natural or inevitable, but rather in relation to the specific context of its deployment: both across societies and over time.

Spatialized thinking is strongly evident in the contemporary discourse and praxis of child protection in settings of humanitarian emergency. This is a field of endeavor that strives to “prevent and respond to violence, exploitation and abuse against children” (UNICEF 2006). In recent years, a plethora of space-based strategies have been developed to ensure the relative safety of young people at risk of harm as a result of armed conflict and natural disaster. “Child-friendly/safe spaces,” “children as zones of peace,” “protective environment” are just some of the terms coined by practitioners in recent years. Each implies a direct, causal relationship between the circumscription of space and the better protection of the young.

The spatialized approach to child protection is predicated upon assumptions about the separability of children from the wider environment, not only physically, but in cognitive and emotional terms as well. This in itself reveals the dominance of a mode of thought that has been evident within Europe and North America since at least the nineteenth century, growing stronger ever since. The important question here is whether a spatialized approach to child protection, which is informed by such thinking, is effective across the diverse settings where humanitarian organizations operate. This chapter is a modest contribution toward answering such a question, drawing upon research conducted in a single location: the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). Its aim is to illustrate the challenges to the spatialized approach in this setting, paying attention to the specific additional motivations for international and UN agencies working there. While the findings from the oPt may be highly specific, it is hoped that the line of enquiry pursued in this chapter may prove helpful for examination of child protection practice in other locations.

The chapter begins by offering a tentative genealogy of thinking about enclosure and separability as it has evolved within humanitarianism generally and child protection more specifically. The intention in this is to explicate the historical and cultural contingency of the spatialized thinking that informs much of the current work undertaken by child protection professionals.

## 2 Spatialization Within Humanitarian Praxis

The rationale for bringing people together within a defined area for their better protection is not difficult to grasp. Concentration of a vulnerable population enables the delivery of food, medical care, and basic services in situations where the essential materials for survival are otherwise hard to obtain. Moreover, agencies concerned for the protection of people that may be especially vulnerable are more able to observe and, if necessary, intervene on behalf of an enclosed rather than dispersed population.

Enclosure of a population in a clearly marked space can, however, create its own risks. Such containment may become a virtual prison or, at the least, a hindrance to livelihood strategies and the conduct of conventional social relations (Tefferi 2007). Disease can spread more easily in a congested space with limited infrastructure, and various risks associated with the enforced mingling of disparate groups can arise. In many humanitarian settings, encamped populations have been rendered a highly visible target for attack or exploitation (e.g., Lischer 2005). Flight, dispersal, and hiding may, in some situations, be a more effective means of self-protection. Over half the 14.4 million refugees “of concern” to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 2014 were believed by that organization to live in urban areas: a fact that partially reflects the preference to avoid encampment (UNHCR 2015a). This preference has been evident, for example, in the recent mass exodus from Syria to neighboring Jordan where it is estimated that only around 20% of those crossing the border take up residence in the camps constructed to house them, despite the efforts of the authorities to contain the refugees (UNHCR 2015b). Globally, the numbers of self-settled displacees are no doubt considerably higher than the UNHCR figures when one takes into account internally displaced persons, Palestinians, and other refugees not addressed by UNHCR.

Given that the benefits of enclosing a population within a defined space are not automatic, and that dispersal has often proven advantageous, we should look beyond intrinsic factors to understand the growing employment of a spatialized approach to protection since the mid-twentieth century. Here the recent history of refugee encampment – the most obvious mode of spatialized humanitarian practice – is instructive. The evolving use of the displacement camp in the period since World War II has been driven by more than concern for refugees’ better protection, as Liisa Malkki has observed:

The segregation of nationalities; the orderly organization of repatriation or third-country resettlement; medical and hygienic programs and quarantining; “perpetual screening” and the accumulation of documentation on the inhabitants of the camps; the control of movement and black-marketing; law enforcement and public discipline; and schooling and rehabilitation were some of the operations that the spatial concentration and ordering of people enabled or facilitated. (Malkki 1995, p. 498)

As this range of functions indicates, encampment serves the needs of authorities as well as those of the displaced population themselves. Encampment also enables

efforts to impart norms of behavior and disposition that are taken for granted as beneficial by (mostly Western-originating) organizations.

In the various functions that the camp enables, we see the relationship of organizations involved in establishing and managing such camps, such as UNHCR, to the agendas of host governments and donors. Common to these is concern to manage the movement of peoples who might otherwise make unwelcome claims on national resources or pose problems for social cohesion. Encampment also offers agencies charged with the welfare of displaced populations the opportunity to demonstrate their own efficacy, thereby strengthening their efforts to secure further funding. As Barbara Harrell-Bond has noted:

To attract money, refugees must be visible. It is difficult to count the numbers of self-settled refugees, and even if they could be identified, the policies of most refugee agencies are too inflexible to allow them to devise a programme which would assist a target population which is 'mixed up' with the local community. (1986, p. 8)

In short, encampment offers a number of advantages to humanitarian organizations, the governments that host them, and the donors that provide their funding which extend far beyond the better protection and support of resident populations. The continued use of camps and other enclosed facilities cannot, therefore, be seen as an inevitable response to a protection crisis.

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### **3 Spatialization of Childhood**

The spatialized approach to child protection should be understood in part as the extension of practice commonplace in the humanitarian field more generally. As such, it is motivated by similar considerations as evident in encampment discussed above: considerations that include the institutional needs of implementing organizations, the political agendas of host nations and donors, and the imposition of certain (usually Western-originating) norms upon disparate (usually non-Western) populations.

In addition, there are ideas and practices relating to children within Euro-American societies that prompt the use of enclosed space for the protection of young people living in settings of political violence and natural disaster. The separation and enclosure of childhood itself from the larger "adult world" has been a defining characteristic of many such societies since at least the late nineteenth century, becoming ever more evident in the decades since. Thus, current spatialized child protection efforts need also to be understood in relation to this recent history within the settings from which contemporary humanitarianism emerged.

The proposition that childhood should be conducted away from the contaminating effects of the "adult world" is particular to a tradition of European thought that finds its genesis in the Romanticism of Jean Jacques Rousseau (1762). However, it was not until the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that such separation



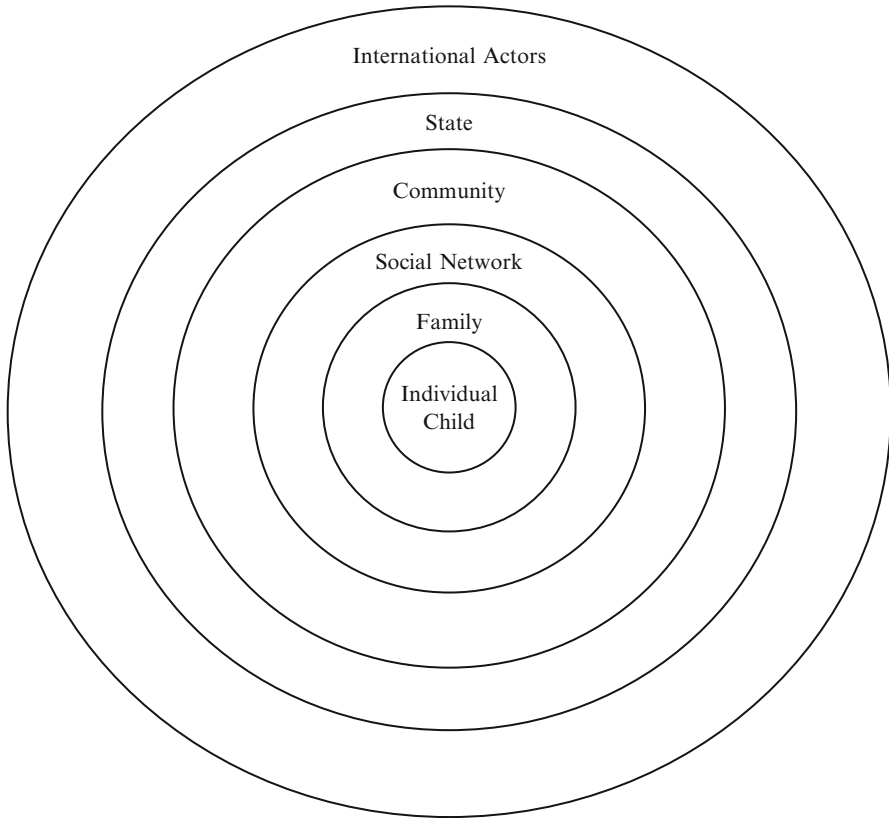
became a social reality among the masses. On one hand, children were withdrawn from industrial work, partly due to moral concern but also as a result of various material factors (Zelizer 1985). On the other hand, the establishment of mass, compulsory schooling was driven by a mixture of motives that included the wish to curtail delinquency among unemployed young people from the “dangerous classes,” the surveillance needs of the state, and an aspiration to give children a “proper” childhood (Hendrick 1997, p. 46). A key feature of such a childhood was its separation from “adult life”:

Childhood and adulthood... became almost opposites of one another. If adults were burdened with responsibilities, children should be carefree. If adults worked, children should not work. If adults had to live in towns, children were entitled to contact with nature. (Cunningham 1995, p. 160)

During the twentieth century, particularly in the latter decades, the separation of children from adults and their enclosure within “appropriate” spaces increased considerably. Sociologists have drawn attention to the “islanding of children” within many Euro-American societies, whereby “children have been systematically excluded from the former mainlands of urban and suburban existence, especially the streets and other public spaces” (Gillis 2008, p. 316). The reasons proffered for the increasing containment of children within designated spaces are complex, relating in the view of some to the conditions of postmodernity and a sense of rootlessness among adults (Jenks 1994). The spate of moral panics witnessed in recent years and the emergence of discourse around “stranger danger” are also implicated in such enclosure (Valentine 1996, 2004). Ignoring both the lack of evidence that children are at any greater risk than in previous times as well as the proof that they are most likely to experience harm within the home, such “islanding” continues.

The regulation of young people’s access to public space is also motivated by the converse concern: that they may be a source of risk to others (Valentine 1996, 2004). As we shall see, this concern has considerable salience in the context of the occupied Palestinian territories, notably for the Israeli authorities who invariably treat young Palestinians on the street as a security threat. The system of curfews, checkpoints, and permits introduced by the government of Israel to manage the movement of Palestinian civilians living under occupation has specific consequences for children in their quest for leisure opportunities, education, and family interaction.

In the late 1970s, social psychologist Bronfenbrenner suggested a model of child development that captured the spatialized thinking around childhood extant at that time and increasingly since (1979). This “ecological model” depicts the child at the center of a series of concentric circles each of which represents a level of social interaction at an increasing distance: from “family,” at the most immediate level, to “state” and other macro level duty bearers at the outer circles (Fig. 1). Since the early 1980s this model has been used for diverse purposes that include child participation and child protection. In respect of the latter, a key task for each of the identified duty bearers is to secure the space implied by the gaps between the lines through removing the threats to children.



**Fig. 1** ‘Onion model’ of Child Protection as adapted from Bronfenbrenner, 1979

The ubiquity of Bronfenbrenner’s model not only reflects existing assumptions but has also served to naturalize further the spatialized thinking around child protection. The influence of this model can be seen in the notion of “protective environment” employed, often implicitly, within social work practice in Western Europe and North America (e.g., Jack and Gill 2010). The significant role of social work expertise in the development of child protection in emergency settings has been an important means by which the model of Bronfenbrenner has become central to ways of thinking in this field. Permutations of the basic figure appear in numerous handbooks and presentations seeking to guide current practice (e.g., Ager 2011). According to the model, family and community constitute the primary duty bearers, securing an immediate locale within which protection is best achieved. A major focus of humanitarian organizations is to strengthen the protective functioning of these duty bearers through interventions that typically include psychosocial work, family reunification, and creating referral networks to alert duty bearers at outer levels when problems occur within the family or community. As shall be seen, in the oPt the basic topography of this model is brought into question. However, before turning to consideration of the protection of Palestinian children, the spatialization of child protection practice in humanitarian efforts generally needs to be considered.

## 4 Spatialization of Child Protection in Emergencies

As noted above, within the humanitarian field there are various initiatives that explicitly invoke an assumption that the young are best protected by enclosing them within a defined space. The family and immediate community are seen as the central space where protection is best achieved and therefore efforts are commonly made to strengthen these institutions. However, there is an evolving range of initiatives pursued across different emergency contexts in which outside agencies, often working with local partners, pursue an approach involving the identification or creation of additional safe space. An obvious example of this is the “child-friendly space” – a notion invoked by many humanitarian organizations. According to the understanding of World Vision, for example, a “child-friendly space” is

...a structured and safe place where children and youth meet other children to play, learn competencies to deal with the risks they face, be involved in some educational activities and relax in a safe place. It gives the children a sense of safety, structure and continuity that provides support amidst overwhelming experiences. (2005, p. 1)

In some locations, agencies are active in promoting the notion that the space of protection should be coterminous with the physical being of individual children. This can be witnessed in advocacy campaigns to treat “children as zones of peace” (CZOP). In addition, the territory to be kept apart from the surrounding conflict may be defined in terms of the institutional space that children are assumed to inhabit routinely – most obviously the school. Thus, for example, in Nepal, a campaign focussed around CZOP has led to a further campaign of SZOP – “schools as zones of peace.” The stated aim of the SZOP campaign is “to keep all schools free from political and other interference; discrimination, violence, and corporal punishment; neglect and exploitation” (CZOPP 2011). This speaks to a range of aims, only some of which relate directly to children’s needs for protection from the threats resulting from armed conflict. In the Nepali context, for example, discrimination in schools on the basis of caste is a long-standing issue that far predates the Maoist-led “People’s War.” The inclusion of an aim to end discrimination (as well as corporal punishment, neglect, and so on) illustrates the ways that the securing of space in the name of children’s protection often goes hand in hand with the pursuit of other aims that have little to do with risks arising from conflict. As for the general population in refugee camps so for children: enclosure can serve a range of functions beyond immediate protection.

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## 5 Spatialization of Child Protection in the oPt

The policy is clear: Palestinians on both sides of the Green Line are to be treated like sheep, penned into ever-smaller areas, while Jews will have unrestrained access to a Greater Israel envisioned by Netanyahu. (Cook 2013)

## 5.1 The Setting

Discussion about child protection in the oPt is informed by fieldwork conducted in 2009, supported by prior qualitative research conducted on different occasions over several years, by subsequent interviews and by extensive engagement with practitioner and academic literature. The research undertaken in 2009 focussed specifically on the role of organizations in protecting Palestinian children (Hart and Lo Forte 2010). It was conducted in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Therefore, most observations relate to these parts of the occupied Palestinian territory. The children of Gaza, at that time and since, have faced a partially different set of conditions and challenges. Furthermore, the UN and international organizations working there contend with a set of limitations that differ in important respects from the West Bank and East Jerusalem, not least due to the policy of major Western donor nations toward the Hamas-led government in Gaza.

There is not the space here to offer a detailed description of the oPt as a setting of political violence for which a plethora of excellent publications exist (e.g., Gordon 2008; Gorenberg 2007; Perugini and Gordon 2015; Zertal and Eldar 2005). The intention, rather, is to offer sufficient contextual information to make clear the implications of employing a spatialized approach to child protection.

Within the media and in popular political debate in the West the notion of an “Israeli-Palestinian conflict” is commonplace. UN and international humanitarian organizations similarly invoke the conflict paradigm connoting enmity between two approximately equivalent forces fighting across clear lines of battle. These agencies respond with a range of measures drawn from a basic toolkit intended for all settings of humanitarian emergency – both natural disasters and armed conflict. Such conceptualization obscures the fundamental point that the risks faced by Palestinian children arise not because of conflict as conventionally understood but as a result of Israel’s occupation. In the oPt, the notion of battle lines from which children may be kept distant has little purchase given the reach of the Israeli authorities and the activities of extremist settlers living in the midst of the Palestinians.

Occupation in this setting is not static: the “matrix of control” that Israel exerts over East Jerusalem and the West Bank enables the progressive appropriation of land and resources (Halper 2000). As more is taken for the construction of settlements and in the name of security or environmental protection, so the Palestinian population find themselves confined within shrinking pockets of land that can be sealed through checkpoints, curfews, and the closure of gates in the “separation wall.” This process of colonization and accompanying enclavization is evidenced in numerous statistics. For example, in East Jerusalem some 23,378 dunams (ca. 5,750 acres) of Palestinian land were appropriated for Israeli (Jewish) use in the period 1967–1991, while, in the period 1967–2010 more than 13,000 Palestinian Jerusalemites were forced to leave the municipality through revocation of their residency rights. Almost 500,000 Jewish settlers have moved into settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Additionally, Palestinians are routinely denied permits to build in areas under Israeli civil control (all of East Jerusalem and 59% of the West Bank) leading to the demolition of homes necessarily built without permits (300+ in the period

2007–2011). As of October 2010, there were 99 fixed checkpoints, 62 of which were internal to the West Bank hindering the population from moving between areas of Palestinian civilian life. So-called flying checkpoints further compound the obstacles on movement, which are especially severe for males aged 16–35 (for all statistics see [www.btselem.org](http://www.btselem.org)). The evident intention of such practices is to concentrate the Palestinians within enclaves around the main cities and towns, while securing land for construction and agricultural projects from which Israeli Jews derive principal benefit (Dajani 2005).

The actions of the Israeli authorities intended to promote the removal of Palestinians from certain areas of the oPt and their emplacement in a number of “cantons” or “bantustans” impact upon children in particular ways. Such actions are especially evident in locations within “Area C.” As part of the Oslo II Accord signed in 1995, the West Bank was divided into three zones, A, B, and C, with different security and civil arrangements. The largest of these zones – “Area C” comprising 60% of the land – was placed under full Israeli control (UN 2011). Over the years since then numerous measures have been taken to constrain the lives of Palestinians in “Area C.” For example, it is virtually impossible to obtain permits from the Israeli authorities to build upon Palestinian-owned land, with the consequence that even children’s play areas are subject to destruction. This happened in the village of Azzoun near Qalqilya where a children’s park was built in 2005 with international funding and shortly afterward partially demolished by the Israeli authorities. Foreign agencies were warned by the Israeli authorities not to respond to this action and thus the park remained in ruins (see Hart and Lo Forte 2010, p. 15). Furthermore, access to basic resources including water is severely limited with serious implications for children’s health. While Israeli settler children enjoy a plentiful supply of water, their Palestinian peers, according to UNDP, “experience one of the highest levels of water scarcity in the world” (2006, p. 216).

In the village of al-Hadidiya, visited in the course of field research, a well that had once served the community was found to have been fenced off by the Israeli authorities and the supply diverted to nearby settlements where it was used for the large-scale production of vegetables. In consequence, the UN estimated that the residents of this village accessed water at “humanitarian crisis levels”: around 20 l per capita per day (UN n.d.). This was considerably below the 50–100 l per capita per day recommended as a minimum requirement for health by the World Health Organisation (Roberts 1998).

Child-focussed efforts to make life untenable for Palestinians so that they abandon their homes include attacks upon students passing to and from school. This has occurred, for example, in the South Hebron Hills – a part of the West Bank within Area C. Here around 40,000 Palestinians have been subjected to sustained efforts from the Israeli authorities and settlers aimed at their removal. Homes are routinely demolished along with water infrastructure. Over a period of several years, settlers have threatened and assaulted children from villages near the Israeli settlement of Ma’on and its outpost Havat Ma’on as they walk to and from their school in al-Tuwani. International volunteers have maintained a presence in the immediate vicinity in order to minimize the risk to children. Nevertheless, settler violence has

continued on a fenced-off section of the path to which no Palestinian or foreign adult is allowed access (CPT and Operation Dove 2010; DCI 2013; Operation Dove 2014). This is despite the army patrol mandated by the Israeli parliament to accompany the children along this stretch.

The violence against children here described – in terms of demolitions, denial of access to basic resources, and settler attacks – is clearly intended to promote the displacement and enclavization of Palestinian communities. Notwithstanding intermittent and generally muted advocacy efforts, the larger NGOs and UN agencies have not sought to intervene directly in situations where Palestinian children have been subjected to such violence. Instead they have focussed more on programmatic work on the ground: work that is often informed by conventional thinking about the protective value of children’s separation and enclosure. The forms that spatialization takes in the oPt and the implications it entails in light of Israeli policy will both be discussed. In addition, it is important to consider the institutional agendas that are served by a spatialized approach to child protection in this setting and that may enable, in part, their perpetuation in spite of the problematic implications.

## 5.2 Spatialization

In the oPt spatialization takes many forms, some more explicit than others. These might be categorized as follows: (1) efforts to strengthen the presumed protective spaces of family and community; (2) efforts to transform existing institutional spaces, making them safer and more child friendly; and (3) efforts to create social spaces that serve a protective function. All of these will be described in turn and observations offered about the particular implications of each in the context of occupation and colonization.

1. *Efforts to strengthen the presumed protective spaces of family and community:* In recent years, a large proportion of child-related programming in the oPt has focussed on psychosocial interventions of various kinds. For some organizations, psychosocial programming has become virtually synonymous with child protection programming, while for others the two remain distinct. Under the psychosocial label, several organizations focus on efforts intended to enable families to support children better by aiding caregivers to manage their own stress or by imparting techniques intended to equip caregivers to support children through traumatic times more effectively. Thus, for example, in the wake of Israel’s bombardment of the Gaza Strip in 2008/9 (“Operation Cast Lead”), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) undertook a program the rationale for which was explained as follows:

Conditions in Gaza are so overwhelming that it’s very difficult for children to live normal lives. . .we try to rehabilitate these children and teach them how to lead a normal life in abnormal conditions. (UNRWA 2009)

In cases where families and communities are deemed to fail in their responsibility to care appropriately for individual children, referral networks have been created. Part of their function is to identify “at-risk” children and ensure that proper institutional support is given.

The popularity of such measures among international and UN agencies, and the governmental donors that fund them, can be attributed to at least two factors. First, these are standard responses employed in other settings of emergency. Undoubtedly, efforts to support families through psychosocial programming are important and valued in the oPt and a growing number of local organizations are involved in their delivery. However, the immense investment of UN agencies and INGOs in such programming, particularly in light of local competence, should alert us to other factors behind this focus. Certainly, psychosocial programming enables agencies to achieve (and demonstrate) some degree of efficacy by limiting the goal to coping and reducing harm *within* the conditions of occupation, rather than challenging the source of the problems. While not all domestic violence can be attributed to occupation, there is no doubt that caregivers are commonly placed under unbearable strain and may express their frustration in behavior that is abusive or neglectful. As one 12-year-old girl explained:

Now if you experience the occupation, you have someone in prison or you don't know where they are. . . you will feel angry, stressed, you feel you cannot protect yourself; that will affect how you respond to the environment around you. So if my dad who's a taxi driver, if the soldiers take his ID or his driving license, when he comes back home he will be angry and doesn't want to listen to us.

Agency staff interviewed in 2009 readily acknowledged the negative impact of occupation upon the domestic realm. Nevertheless, in practice the focus of interventions was on the enhancement of coping strategies or upon identifying children “at risk.” Arguably this follows, in part, from a conceptual separation made by many practitioners in the oPt between “external”/“occupation-related” issues, on one hand, and “internal”/“traditional” issues on the other. The employment of such a dichotomy contributes to a sense that these can be addressed in isolation from one another and that behaviors within the space of the home can be improved without challenging the conditions of occupation.

For some Palestinian children – particularly those living in refugee camps, in neighborhoods close to extremist settlers, and in the Jordan Valley – the boundedness of the domestic/community realm is fragile. For these children, the separability of the space of family/community from the larger political setting is questionable given the experience of Israeli soldiers entering their homes at will, wrecking property, and arresting them or family members. Moreover, homes themselves are routinely destroyed on the grounds that they were built without (unobtainable) permits. Between 2007 and 2011 nearly 1,000 children were made homeless in this way ([www.btselem.org](http://www.btselem.org)). Assumptions about the ability of family and community to secure the most immediate spaces of children's lives and afford

them protection, which lie at the core of the spatialized approach, are clearly questionable in light of such experiences.

2. *Efforts to transform existing institutional spaces, making them safer:* At the global level, considerable attention has been given to the school as a potentially protective space for children living in situations of emergency. Initiatives such as “healing classrooms” involving the International Rescue Committee or “Schools as Zones of Peace” mentioned above seek to realize this potential through advocacy, community involvement, and capacity building. In the oPt, the “Protective Sphere” project has pursued a similar objective of transforming the existing school space into an environment more conducive to children’s wellbeing. This is a project of Save the Children UK (SCUK) partnered by a local NGO, with funds from the European Commission. As SCUK describes the project:

...we’re building a ‘protective sphere’ to reduce violence in schools and in the wider community. We’re carrying out activities in 15 schools...benefiting 7,500 children. Working with teachers, children and their parents, we provide training on children’s rights and alternatives to corporal punishment. Other activities include setting up school-based education committees (SBECs) in each of the 15 schools we support, training teachers and parents on how they can make children safer. (2009, p. 3)

Working to create a school environment in which children are less fearful of violence from teachers or their peers is an important endeavor in any setting. However, in the oPt, the achievement of this aim rests on the assumption that violence within the school can be countered separately from the violence of occupation. As a child quoted in a report by SCUK/SC Sweden observed:

Teachers themselves are deprived of their rights and they are stressed. That’s why they practice violence. (2004: 22)

As with the domestic/community realm, school premises and other institutional settings frequented by children, including clinics, are commonly subject to threatening actions by the Israeli authorities. Leaving aside the attacks on school buildings and health facilities during Operation Cast Lead in Gaza during winter 2008/2009, Palestinian children have been routinely put at risk during military operations and incursions or as a result of attacks by settlers. Some schools have been targeted repeatedly, such as al-Qurtuba school in Hebron which lies amid neighborhoods inhabited by some of the most extremist settlers in the oPt. Due to repeated attacks with rocks, and Molotov cocktails, the windows of this school are now covered with metal netting. In order to reach their school, children must choose between the risk of physical and verbal abuse from settlers in an area near the school or a lengthy detour around town to reach al-Qurtuba from a different direction (DCI 2014, p. 22) In East Jerusalem, meanwhile, many children are obliged to learn in overcrowded, unsuited, and, in some cases, unsafe buildings due to a shortage of facilities and Israeli constraints on creation of the needed infrastructure.



More broadly, children risk verbal and physical abuse and may witness the humiliation of parents and other family members on their journey to and from school through Israeli checkpoints. One consequence is dropout, as a 14-year-old girl from Ramallah enrolled at a school in Jerusalem explained:

Our parents send us out early in the morning and don't know if we will return. There are girls who gave up school because of the trouble on the way and the cost of the journey.

For Palestinian children, the challenges of traveling to school and other institutions offering needed services suggest that the focus upon safe space alone is inadequate. Also needed in this setting are concerted efforts to achieve safety in movement. In many emergencies, people prefer to stay in a limited but relatively safe area until immediate danger has passed. However, the oPt is not a conventional emergency context where immediate survival is the primary goal. Palestinians have lived under occupation for decades and endeavor to pursue a normal existence. Obstacles to movement and the risks associated with travel through checkpoints or on routes near to settlements create numerous acute and long-term problems for the young. For their part, child protection organizations and international donors have made few concerted efforts to challenge the Israeli authorities over the mobility of Palestinian children and their treatment by soldiers and settlers. As a senior Palestinian children's rights expert related:

A lot of resources are being put into developing isolated programming simply because the donors don't challenge Israel on allowing children to travel to different places. The donors will fund the Palestinians to build two or three additional classrooms rather than building one school in a central locality where everyone can come. We'll say 'it's cheaper just to buy a bus and to use the bus'. And they'll say 'no, we can't guarantee that the bus is going to go'.

3. *Efforts to create social spaces that serve a protective function:* Rather than seeking to transform an existing institutional space into a place of greater protection, some organizations create distinct new spaces. For example, UNICEF has instigated initiatives such as "Safe Play Areas" and "Adolescent Friendly Spaces" working with local authorities and communities to mark out and maintain space where young people have "opportunities to meet, socialize, and play in a protected environment" (Dolan 2006). Some spaces come into being for a limited time period and specific aims. Most notable among these are the numerous summer camps that are held every year involving UN agencies and INGOs together with Palestinian organizations in a program of activities intended to "give young people a safe place to spend their days, a desperately needed chance to have some fun, and an important opportunity to pick up vital life skills to cope with the daily challenges they face" (UNICEF 2002).

Judging by the large numbers who participate in these various initiatives, they are meeting a need for social and leisure opportunities otherwise lacking in children's lives. Nevertheless, as with all gatherings of children in a politically unstable setting there are risks entailed. Not only are such spaces vulnerable to

violence from Israeli sources, there have also been incidents of attack by extremist elements within Palestinian society affronted by the mixing of girls and boys that typically occurs in many of these projects.

In the oPt, the spatialized approach to child protection – as exemplified by efforts to create distinct and bounded spaces for social interaction – raises an additional and quite specific concern: children’s development as members of a larger political collectivity. Focus groups and interviews provided the opportunity to explore with children, parents, and local experts the physical mobility of today’s children in comparison to that of older generations when they were young. This involved the use of maps to mark out the places visited on family outings and school trips. In each location, the challenges to mobility differed somewhat and were inflected by socio-economic status. Nevertheless, it became apparent that overall children in 2009 had far less possibility to travel even within the West Bank than their parents or grandparents. The options for trips beyond a child’s village or town and the immediately surrounding countryside were typically few in number, with Jerusalem and especially Gaza off-limits. This has serious implications at a societal level as one government official explained:

What protects children is a state, and a state cannot function as a bunch of little cantonettes. The idea that we all share certain commonalities together: that we’re all bound by the same laws and principles. Children living in isolated cantonettes never pick up what a state is because they’re living in this little area where everything is sort of set apart and they do their own thing.

Considered in terms of children’s right to membership of a national community and to know the heritage of that community, as well as their right of access to family, the obstructions to their movement across the territory of the oPt can be seen as a violation with serious, long-term implications. As suggested by the quote above, the localization of young people’s lives risks not only limiting their cognitive horizons but also fracturing the bonds that might otherwise unite them with a larger collective of people among whom they could reflect upon a collective history and build a common future.

### **5.3 Institutional Agendas**

The foregoing discussion has offered description of a number of ways in which the spatialized approach to child protection – in the various forms that it takes – may be unsuited to the realities of children’s lives in the oPt. Some of the problems inherent to this approach are widely acknowledged: such as the inadequacy of efforts to address intrahousehold and intracommunity tensions in isolation from the pressures associated with life under occupation, or the basic fact that even “safe space” may be violated at a moment’s notice and with impunity. Other limitations of the spatialized approach are noted less often. Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that current protection efforts, in which separation and enclosure are core, have proven

ineffective in preventing the systematic violation of Palestinian children's lives and rights. We should therefore seek to understand why spatialization remains so strongly entrenched in practice.

To some extent, the spatialized approach in the oPt continues due to its widespread acceptance within the global child protection field: acceptance that is the product of a tradition of thought about children and within humanitarianism that dates back several decades. However, it is also necessary to consider the institutional purposes of spatialization that may have little relation to the aim of protection. As with the use of refugee camps for the containment of people that might otherwise prove a threat, so enclosure of children within agency-determined domains may serve a number of important additional functions – three of which are described as illustration.

First, by seeking to work with or support children within distinct spaces agencies circumscribe the arena wherein their own efficacy is estimated. Enclosure narrows the focus of evaluation: within a defined location such as a school, summer camp, or inside their homes, improvements to children's lives as a result of agency intervention can be measured.

At the same time, questions about the inability of organizations to influence the conditions of children's lives more broadly, such as to remove the obstacles to their movement or the risks they encounter passing through checkpoints, can be averted. By positively impacting rates of domestic violence or school bullying – worthy aims in themselves – agencies can be seen as effective in enhancing child protection and thus to be active in pursuit of their mandate. In this light, it may be fair to suggest that a “child-friendly space” also serves to define the boundaries within which an agency proves itself to outsiders.

Most of the UN agencies and INGOs working on children's protection in the oPt claim to pursue a human rights-based approach. This is rooted in international law and entails addressing the causes of suffering (Fox 2001; UNICEF 2010). A narrowing of focus to issues emerging within specific domains, some of which have been created by the same agencies, constitutes curtailment of the rights-based approach.

In any setting, humanitarian organizations are likely to be nervous of engagement in matters deemed “political”; in the oPt, such anxiety is especially pronounced. Here UN agencies and INGOs must operate around the agendas of western governmental donors that are often shaped by domestic lobbies, including representatives of powerful corporate interests. In consequence, such governments have often prioritized trade with Israel and appeasement of the pro-Israel lobby over international law and children's rights (Hever 2010; Cronin 2011; Winstanley and Barat 2011).

At the same time, agencies are faced by the expectations of young people and their caregivers for effective action. In recent years, young Palestinians have been outspoken in expressing concerns and aspirations, attracting international attention: their statements often discussing the violations resulting from occupation and, in some cases, criticizing international organizations over their failure to call Israel to account. One such statement includes the following sentiments:

... We are sick of the indifference we meet from the international community, the so-called experts in expressing concerns and drafting resolutions but cowards in enforcing anything they agree on; we are sick and tired of living a shitty life, being kept in jail by Israel, beaten up by Hamas and completely ignored by the rest of the world. (Gaza Youth Breaks Out 2010)

The spatialization of child protection activities thus offers a means by which children's voices might be managed. Within bounded, agency-organized spaces, the participation of young people can be 'localized'. This may reduce the risk of their frustration at donor governments role in perpetuating occupation becoming a matter of public debate. Concomitantly, children's aspirations can be encouraged toward matters that agencies are able to address, thereby providing the opportunity to demonstrate accountability to intended beneficiaries.

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## 6 Conclusion

This chapter has described and accounted for the particular dominance of the spatialized approach to child protection efforts as designed at the global level. This was the precursor to discussion of the limitations of this approach when applied to the oPt. The intention in discussing the problematic implications of spatialization was not simply to draw attention to the need for greater contextualization of globally defined approaches – important though this is in an era of increasing standardization. A deeper aim of this chapter has been to consider the obstacles to questioning normative thinking and standardized practice. As suggested, the spatialization of child protection is partly the product of trends of thought within humanitarianism and in relation to children as these have developed through the twentieth century in Europe and North America. In the setting of the oPt, however, we can also see how spatialization serves the institutional needs of implementing organizations and the agendas of major western donors. In essence, the pursuit of programming built on the assumption of children's separability from the predations of the occupying forces provides both humanitarian agencies and donors with the opportunity to be seen to be making a contribution to Palestinians' lives while avoiding direct challenge to Israel over its systematic violation of international law. As a consequence, the sources of risk to children remain. More worrying still, the evident goal of the Israeli government and settlers of enclosing the Palestinian population within ever-shrinking enclaves is potentially enabled by an approach to child protection that seeks to enclose the lives of the young within "safe space." Ironically, such "safe space" and the inaction that it partially conceals may constitute a considerable threat to young Palestinians in their current lives and for their future.

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## Abstract

Building on recent critiques of the marginalization of violence and terror “closer to home” in geographical and sociological scholarship, this chapter argues for more thorough engagements with the emotional geographies and generational politics of children’s exposure to and negotiation of violence in the home. It does so first, and foremost, because interpersonal violence at home affects the lives of a significant number of children, often well into adulthood. Second, the chapter demonstrates that domestic abuse of children poses a major challenge to conceptualizations of home and of the subjectivities of adults and children in western contexts whose constructions of childhood and home have been so central to the grafting of universalized understandings of children’s rights. The chapter first considers the arguments for a critical geography of home, questioning the absence of substantive engagements with the issue of child abuse. It then presents a summary of research findings from epidemiology and psychology, to give an insight into these discipline’s perspectives and research findings on the scale, intersecting types and impacts of child abuse on children and adult survivors’

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health and well-being. After consideration of the conceptual approaches that underpin this work and of alternative sociological and geographical theorization emphasizing relationality, embodied emotional geographies, and intersecting spatialities, the chapter concludes with a review of work within and outside of geography that begins to demonstrate the need for a greater focus on geographical aspects of violence against children at home. In doing so, the chapter aims to move the diverse experiences, practices, emotions, and senses of self of children and adult survivors who are living with (the consequences of) abuse more squarely into the heart of debates on the home, the family, and the private and to consider how geography might contribute to the efforts of other disciplines to contest violence against children and to respond sensitively to different needs of survivors.

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### Keywords

Children • Abuse • Maltreatment • Family • Home

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## 1 Introduction

While home as a site shaped by gendered, economic, and imperialist power relations has come under significant scrutiny in geographical and sociological scholarship of late (Blunt and Dowling 2006; Brickell 2012), the myth of the enchanted *childhood* home has received remarkably little critical attention. Brief references to children witnessing domestic violence notwithstanding (Hubbard and Holloway 2001, Valentine 2001; Hopkins 2013), the violence that many children are exposed to in the home, in western societies, has remained suspiciously absent from geographical and sociological discussion of both, childhood and the home. This absence is *constitutive*, however, as it props up understandings of home and of childhood as key sites of *longing*, i.e., for an untroubled past or future, if not *belonging* in the present, as can be seen in Jachimiak (2014) and Burger's (2011) romanticized portrayals of the childhood home:

Through contemplations of such simple childhood pleasures as a near-spiritual appreciation of colour and an acute awareness of moving within, and being attuned to, the medium that is a house, the notion that home is aligned absolutely with humanness of both our senses and our emotions are achieved. If anything, this book is an attempt to engage with a continuum of cultural geography that is home, senses, emotions. Moreover, it aims to bring about, once again, those intense childhood moments of awe and wonder ... In *Returning Home – Reconnecting with our Childhoods* (2011), Jerry M. Burger insists that the main reason why people wish to return to the homes of their childhood, 'is to establish a psychological link with their past and the person they once were' (Burger 2011: 13). Burger explains that such a desire to return is a result of a growing sense of loss or crisis in their lives, as many of his respondents verbally expressed anxieties over 'their childhoods slipping away from them', ... (Burger 2011: 13). (Jachimiak 2014: 3–4, italics in the original)

There is little recognition in these portrayals of the fact that for many children home is, at minimum, a site of discipline and control and at worst, a site of terror and traumatization to which one might not wish to return as an adult (cf. Gilbert



et al. 2009; McKie 2005; Wells and Montgomery 2014; Willis et al. 2015; Wilson 2015). As D'Andrea et al. (2012) explain, around one-third of children experience physical abuse worldwide, while one in four girls and one in five boys are estimated to experience sexual abuse (also see Pain 1997; Willis et al. 2015). In the United States, around 3.5 million cases of child abuse are reported each year, with one million cases confirmed as substantiated (see van der Kolk et al. 2005 and Katz and Barnett 2014; Gilbert et al. 2009).

The silencing of this issue and of other problematic aspects of privacy and home *for children* is deeply troubling for several reasons. Thus, it is constitutive for many ideologies that rest upon assumptions about the need for and normality of secure and nonconflictual homes, such as nationalism and patriarchal gender ideologies. In as far as these normalizations are attached to assignments of moral superiority and civilizational advancement to western societies (see Ray 2011), they have also underpinned, and continue to underpin, imperialist policies such as cross-country adoption (see Cheney and Rotabi in this volume ► Chap. 6, “Addicted to Orphans: How the Global Orphan Industrial Complex Jeopardizes Local Child Protection Systems”), and even western military humanitarianism carried out in the name of responsibilities to protect vulnerable others, in other places (Fluri 2011).

Quite apart from these conceptual concerns, however, the myths constructed around childhood and home are most devastating for abused children and survivors of abuse themselves. Idealized narratives shield the home from critical scrutiny and contribute in this way to producing and upholding conditions that place children at increased risk of interpersonal, domestic abuse. If the primary focus of adult narratives and of research rests on the home as (ideally) a place of sanctuary, shelter, peace, and care, and if violence in the home is only problematized when it concerns adults, then abused children and survivors face an uphill struggle to make their voices heard and to call for the kinds of knowledge that are required to challenge and change the sociospatial power relations that enable and are manifested in domestic violence against children. It is for this reason first and foremost that this chapter takes issue with the absence of home as a *site of child abuse* in geographical and sociological scholarship.

One of many difficulties that arise from this and to which the chapter returns in its conclusion, is where this leaves geographers and other social scientists in terms of conceptualizing home and childhood environments. Can notions of home as a nurturing space be redeemed for a critical geography of childhood? Are such constructions too essentialist and exclusionary to provide a roadmap for improving the conditions in which children grow up or are they nonetheless a desirable ideal? Notions of what a “normal,” “healthy” childhood and childhood environment ought to be also underpin by much psychological research and thinking about therapeutic interventions. One of the risks arising from this is that abused children (and perpetrators) are pathologized because of the less-than-ideal circumstances in which they have grown up (cf. D'Andrea et al. 2012).

The argument advanced in this chapter is that researchers have to walk a fine line between identifying abuse against certain criteria that enable the recognition, disclosure, and tackling of abuse, while at the same time recognizing the diversity of

experiences, the coping capacities of abused children and survivors, and steering clear of unreflective idealizations of certain environments and spatial practices. Geographers' main contribution to this may be to develop proposals for a wider range of sociospatial constellations, practices, and relations to contest violence against children and to respond sensitively to the many risks that arise from it. Trauma research has shown, for instance, that the mobility and instability which children often experience as a result of disclosure and investigation can be both necessary for their protection *and* (re)traumatizing. At the same time, (re)attachment to trustworthy adults and strong social support can help on the (long) road to (partial) recovery (Foster and Hagedorn 2014; Swanston et al. 2014). Thus, there is no either/or situation here and critical geographical scholarship can do much to contribute to more diversified, in-depth empirical, and context-specific research aimed at improving understandings of the relationship between space and well-being.

The chapter begins with a review of recent scholarship on the home, the family, and "intimate war" (Pain 2015) and a discussion of existing work on the scale, forms, impacts, and spatialities of child abuse. It first considers how conceptualizations of home, privacy, family, gender, and childhood contribute to the normalization and legitimization of generational power relations that place children at risk of maltreatment and abuse. It then draws on research in developmental psychology, anthropology, sociology, and geography to discuss different definitions of child abuse, its impacts on children and adult survivors, the question of children's resilience and the place of children, and adult survivors' accounts of abuse for understanding its spatialities. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the contributions that geographical research may make to interdisciplinary debates on the issue.

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## 2 Unhomely Homes and the Disenchantment of Childhood

As a key site of social reproduction, the home is a central space for understanding the social positioning of children in western societies and the embodied, everyday sociospatial relations through which subjectivities are forged (cf. Christensen et al. 2000; Hockey and James 1993). It has also, for some time, occupied a central place in geographical scholarship, inspired especially by humanist phenomenological and existentialist philosophies, which foregrounded its importance as a key site of human experience and senses of self (cf. Relph 1976; Tuan 1977). For many authors in this tradition, it signifies far more than simply a built structure or a household. Instead, it is the connection between material and imaginative aspects of "home" together with practices of *making* home ("dwelling") that are seen to give it its particular significance and meaning (cf. Blunt and Dowling 2006; Holloway and Hubbard 2001; Valentine 2001).

As numerous critical scholars have pointed out, however, home is far from a universal concept. Its contemporary meanings in western contexts, its material constructions, and its uses emerged and changed significantly in the course of industrialization, which led to a stronger separation between work and home and between private and public spaces. As many feminist scholars have remarked, this

was linked closely to changing conceptions of gender, especially the rise of middle-class ideals of femininity and domesticity (Rose 1993; Valentine 2001).

Despite this historical specificity, universalizing ideal notions underpin many descriptions and theorizations of home. Thus, home tends to be seen as a place that lends a “sense of comfort” and belonging (Easthorpe 2004: 136, cited in Holloway and Hubbard 2001). The privacy that home is frequently associated with and that tends to be seen as a precondition for its functioning as a site of refuge, shelter, and individuality has, however, “permitted a range of more negative experiences of home to pass often unnoticed” (Holloway and Hubbard 2001: 90). Inspired largely by feminist and postcolonial theory, critical scholars have, over the last two decades, moved towards more complex and ambiguous conceptualizations of home, challenging especially the assumed divisions between private and public space and examining the genealogies of this division, i.e., its historical specificity. This has led to calls for greater attention to home as a site of tension and contestation and for home to be understood as entangled with wider relations of power that stretch across different scales and domains (Blunt and Dowling 2006; Brickell 2012; Rose 1993; Valentine 2001). For Short (1999: x), home is thus,

where space becomes place, and where family relations and gendered and class identities are negotiated, contested, and transformed. The home is an active moment in both time and space in the creation of individual identity, social relations, and collective meaning. The home is an important site of ideological meanings, . . . a nodal point for a whole series of polarities . . . a place rife with ambiguities . . . [and] a place of paradoxes.

The relations of power and the identities that have received most attention in critical geographical work on the home have been those of class, race, gender, and sexuality, with current research shedding light particularly on the extent and impact of intimate partner violence and its connections to other forms of violence (cf. Pain 2015; Tyner 2012; Valentine 2001). Alongside numerous other feminist scholars, Valentine (2001:80) has thus criticized the ways in which privacy acts like a veil to hide abusive domestic relations. She points out that for many women, home is the context of “the most frightening violence of all” (Wilson 1983, cited in Valentine 2001: 80, also see Cream 1993; Pain 1997, 2015).

That much of this violence and abuse is already experienced in childhood has, however, received remarkably little attention in geography and sociology (cf. Willis et al. 2015). Willis et al. (2015: 2) have thus pointed out that child sexual abuse “is a ‘present absence’ in human geography” and that this absence “can be identified in the body of human geography literature.” Given the scale and serious consequences of the issue, this absence is truly startling.

Katz and Barnett (2014: 1033) point out that in the USA, approximately 3.5 million investigations or assessments are conducted every year in response to reports of suspected child maltreatment (also see van der Kolk et al. 2005; Gilbert et al. 2009), with figures being similarly high in the UK, Canada, and Australia (Lamb et al. 2011). Such figures are refracted by gender differences, with childhood abuse constituting the most frequent cause of traumatization for women (van der Kolk et al. 2005: 389):

More than twice as many women report histories of childhood sexual abuse than of (adult) rape, which occurs in approximately 10% of the general population [. . .]. In the United States, 61% of all rapes occur before victims reach age 18; 29% of forcible rapes occur before the age of 11 [. . .], usually by family members.

Disabled children are also at greatest risk of maltreatment, as explained by Gilbert et al. (2009: 71):

A record-linkage study in the USA showed a cumulative prevalence of any maltreatment in 9% of non-disabled children and in 31% of disabled children. The overall prevalence of any recorded disability was 8%, but a quarter of all maltreated children had a disability.

Yet, while childhood researchers in sociology and geography recognize the centrality of home and family as key experiential and social sites through which children in western society develop their earliest senses of self (Hockey and James 1993; Holt et al. 2013; Christensen et al. 2000; Hopkins 2013; Wilson 2015, Wilson et al. 2012), the family is rarely conceptualized in these disciplinary debates as a violent social institutions (cf. Scheper-Hughes and Sargent 1998; McKie 2005). Given that generational and gender relations are negotiated within families in ways that can and do give rise to conflict, however, the “family” and its separation from public life via its placement in the home requires much more explaining and critical scrutiny. It cannot simply be taken for granted, as Harker (2010 and this volume) and McKie (2005) have argued. Further, the extent to which modern constructions of childhood and the sanctioning of generational power relations in the name of socializing the child within family contexts contribute to the silencing, denial, and legitimization of violence against children in the home warrants much greater attention. Violence against children and its acceptance, silencing, or contestation are strongly related to changing social norms, such as those concerning the disciplining of children, and to perceptions of children as either little “angels” or “devils” (Jenks 2005). It is not just destructive, as Wells and Montgomery (2014) explain, but also constitutes a way of enrolling the violated in the social:

In other words, violence is motivated and to undo violence the place to start is not necessarily with the harm itself, important as that is, but with the motivation or intention that lies beneath acts of violence . . . , the intention of everyday violence against children is not to ‘unmake the world’ but to make it by incorporating the child into it in specific ways. (Wells and Montgomery 2014: 11)

Through violence, Wells and Montgomery argue, social recognition is conveyed and the abused child is given a position within the social. This applies most obviously to violence that is legitimized as a tool for disciplining and “reigning in” “the precocious child, the child criminal, the teenage mother” who “do not fit within the norm of the nuclear family, and “who do not conform to the ‘facts’ of childhood” (Wyness 2000: 28). The moral exclusions which such discourses of deviance, discipline, and punishment construct, set “parameters around social

relations” that rationalize and excuse the “harm inflicted on those outside the scope of justice” (Tyner 2012: 10, Opatow 2001).

Notwithstanding children’s agencies in negotiating their place within the social and their relationships with others, Wells and Montgomery’s (2014) arguments above show the need to keep in focus the particular dependencies of children and the vulnerabilities that are reinforced if not solely produced by them (also see Katz and Barnetz 2014; Wyness 2000). One of those dependencies consists of the fact that, in western societies, children who are abused in the home often have few other places to go, and perpetrators of domestic violence (against children and inmate partners) frequently use and increase this dependency by reinforcing home boundaries and isolating those they are abusing from others (including friends) and the “outside world.” As Katz and Barnetz (2014: 1038) note:

Children need their parents to survive, i.e., to receive food, shelter and cloth, even during and after abuse. Therefore, they likely know that fighting with the abusive parent or attempting to run away may place their survival at risk . . . Another explanation is that these children have no place to go or are not strong enough to resist the parent.

Stanko (2003: 10) likewise draws attention to the restrictions placed on children’s ability to alter their home environments:

Children cannot alter their environments and homes easily. Children may experience frightening abuse at home and realise that other children do not suffer the way they do. Some children clearly know that in their home violence is rife but have little understanding about how to challenge these conditions of their personal lives. It is within these environments that young people learn that there are different rules for the use of violence in different settings.

The social marginalization of children and their normative placement in the home further heighten the risks they are exposed to as, in addition to isolation in the home, their voices are rarely heard and their experiences may be doubted by others in nondomestic contexts, such as in schools, communities, or extended families, where children may turn for support and/or where the need for intervention might otherwise be spotted.

While social constructions of home, family, and childhood can contribute to the silencing and sanctioning of child abuse, at the same time, it is important to recognize that they also constitute a resource for challenging it. Thus, concerns about children’s vulnerabilities and dependencies underpin many critiques of corporal punishment and harsh disciplining. The difficulty that arises from this, however, is that discussions of children’s vulnerabilities and dependencies, while raising much needed attention to the relationship between generational power and child abuse, can unwittingly reconstruct universal images of childhood that retain little sense of the ways in which children live with and within contexts of abuse and of their diverse experiences and understandings. A similar tension between needing to name, recognize, and understand the positioning of children within family contexts and the impacts of child abuse, while steering clear from problematic

universalizations and stigmatizations that constitute violations in and of themselves, is noticeable in current epidemiological and psychological research on the developmental consequences of childhood traumatization. It is to these that the chapter now turns in order to give an insight into existing research and understanding of the impacts of domestic violence and other forms of child maltreatment in the home.

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### **3 Epidemiological and Psychological Perspectives: Researching Harm Without Adding to It**

Child abuse has to date been primarily investigated in the disciplines of public health/epidemiology and developmental psychology, where the focus has been on quantitative assessments of the scale of the issue and of the developmental, behavioral, and health impacts of traumatization in childhood (cf. D’Andrea et al. 2012; Spinazzola et al. 2014). Consensus has been reached in this literature that these impacts are “profound” (Katz and Barnett 2014: 1033). According to Katz and Barnett (2014: 1033–1034), they include short-term effects such as symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (e.g., anxiety, fears, intrusive thoughts, flashbacks, physical fighting, aggressiveness, unresponsiveness to authority, depression, low self-esteem, sleep disorders, sexualized behaviors, panic and anxiety attacks, powerlessness, and feelings of guilt about the abuse) and long-term effects such as “impaired sexual functioning; self-reports of promiscuity, which are a function of low self-esteem; vulnerability to repeated victimization; depression; guilt; self-blame; fear; substance abuse; anxiety; hostility; and delinquency [ . . . ]”

Developmental psychologists such as D’Andrea et al. (2012) and Spinazzola et al. (2014) have further emphasized the need to include psychological maltreatment (PM) in analyses of the impacts of childhood traumatization, as it can be “the most challenging and prevalent form of child abuse and neglect” (Hibbard et al. 2012, p. 372, cited in Spinazzola et al. 2014: 19) and is understood to “produce adverse developmental consequences equivalent to, or more severe than, those of other forms of abuse” (Spinazzola et al. 2014: 19). Psychological maltreatment has been defined by the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC) as “a repeated pattern of caregiver behaviour or a serious incident that transmits to the child that s/he is worthless, flawed, unloved, unwanted, endangered, or only of value in meeting another’s needs” (Myers 2002, cited in Spinazzola et al. 2014: 19):

PM represents a breach in the attachment relationship between caregiver and child through (a) a lack of emotional nurturance, attunement, and responsiveness (emotional neglect) and/or (b) overt acts of verbal or emotional abuse that (c) result in harm to the child, disruptions of psychological safety, and impediments to the normative development of essential capacities such as emotion regulation, self-acceptance and –esteem, autonomy, and self-sufficiency [ . . . ]. (Spinazzola et al. 2014: 19)

Research such as this has also found that risks of traumatization are cumulative, meaning that the consequences for health and well-being are more severe with

exposure to more types of traumatic stress, greater frequency, and longer duration (D'Andrea et al. 2012: 188).

Recognition of this complexity has, however, also sparked debates about protective factors and the conditions within which children and adult survivors may develop coping mechanisms and resilience (Wells, Scarpa and Wells et al. 2015), although many authors stress the need to place “resilience” in context and not to romanticize it. Thus, resilience is mostly described as a long-term process that is emotionally costly and fraught, as survivors of abuse frequently experience retraumatizations in the process of disclosure, investigation, reflection, and healing (Swanston et al. 2014).

Contextual aspects are highlighted particularly in work informed by transactional-ecological approaches, which emphasize the need to investigate the intersections between a range of factors, at individual and environmental levels, as Frederick and Goddard (2007: 324) explain:

This perspective combines the transactional model of development, described by Sameroff and Chandler (1975), which proposes that development results from the interaction of the individual and his or her context through time in continuous, dynamic process, and the ecological model of Bronfenbrenner (1979), where the individual's development is seen as embedded in multiple systems (Cicchetti and Toth 1998; Masten and Wright 1998; Davies 1999; Luthar et al. 2000; Fraser et al. 2004). This perspective assists understanding that individual developmental outcomes are caused by dynamic processes involving a complex range of factors at different levels that require continuing adaptation [...].

However, while transactional-ecological perspectives understand the child as relationally *situated*, they tend to rely on and reproduce strong assumptions about the scaling of childhood, the primary importance of the family, and “normal” development. Critical scholars, especially from the New Social Studies of Childhood, have taken issue with the risks of essentializations and pathologizations that they see as inherent in such approaches (cf. Hörschelmann and Colls 2009), while feminist scholars and counseling researchers have questioned the absence of survivor accounts and of theorizations starting from their perspectives. Further, from a critical geographic perspective, the theorization of children's developmental contexts as differently scaled systems, in which the family occupies center stage, can be criticized as unreflective of the historical specificity of western understandings of childhood, family, and home, and as mapping an ordered world that bears little resemblance to the complex spatialities of children's everyday lives.

Alternative conceptualizations such as those proposed by Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004), Stanko (2003), and McKie (2005) concur with transactional-ecological models on the need to consider how social norms inform family practices and influence which practices are seen as violent or not, how violence is understood and rationalized and which practices are legitimized, ignored, or problematized. However, they dispute the universal applicability of developmental models and their explanatory powers and instead place greater emphasis on understanding the historical and cultural specificity of different rationalizations of violence and of the

ways in which different forms of violence intersect. As Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004: 2) explain:

Violence itself [. . .] defies easy categorization. It can be everything and nothing; legitimate or illegitimate; visible or invisible; necessary or useless; senseless and gratuitous or utterly rational and strategic [. . .] Rather than *sui generis*, violence is in the eye of the beholder. What constitutes violence is always mediated by an expressed or implicit dichotomy between legitimate/illegitimate, permissible or sanctioned acts, as when the ‘legitimate’ violence of the militarized state is differentiated from the unruly, illicit violence of the mob or of revolutionaries (. . .).

The geographer James Tyner (2012) further argues that violence should be understood as situated in the broader context of political and structural conditions and as *taking place* as well as *producing place*. Tyner asks for more thorough analyses of the *spatialities* of interpersonal (and not just structural or political) violence, proposing to study violence as “an act to regulate people through a discipline of space” (ibid: ix), that shapes our perceptions and conceptions of particular places, with these places in turn informing our understanding of violence (ibid: 3).

Ecological models and quantitative analyses of the scale and impacts of child maltreatment only allow partial insights into these spatialities. More complex understandings emerge from the few studies that have analyzed the accounts of children and adult survivors and it is to these that the chapter now turns to consider the contributions that geographical research can make to understanding children’s experiences with domestic, interpersonal violence at home.

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## 4 Relational Geographies of Child Abuse

A useful starting point for developing more nuanced insights into the spatialities of domestic violence as it affects children are understandings of space as relational and as constituted at the intersection between differently scaled power relations, which are in turn negotiated and refracted through practices of making (and transgressing) home (Blunt and Dowling 2006; Tyner 2012). As Tyner (2012: 29) argues, “home as a place is derived through social interactions and relations.” It “produces and reproduces a plurality of overlapping identities.” Violence, as a means of ordering and controlling social relations, identities, and practices, works through the molding of space in ways that make certain relations, identities, and practices possible while suppressing others (cf. Pain 2015). This, however, extends not just to the “internal” ordering of home as a sociomaterial space but also to the regulation of who/what passes through the home, when, and how. Domestic violence produces distinct time-spaces that are *performed* through sociospatial practices of molding relationships within, and across the thresholds of, home. These time-spaces include discourses and imagined geographies as much as sensed, emotionally charged spatialities that affect senses of self in relation to the sociomaterial construction of home as well as actions



and identities beyond it. Domestic violence affects not just who one is and how one feels “at home” but also other contexts of everyday life in a variety of ways.

A critical geographic approach to home as a space of violence would thus go somewhat beyond the neatly ordered ecological model of different social systems to considering the home as a potentially porous site that is open to the world unless boundaries are drawn, through relations of power, that regulate the homes’ openness to that world. Such boundaries are not pre-given and they are rarely permanent but the result of temporary accommodations. For children, intergenerational power relations of monitoring boundaries of home and within the home can and often are a means to ensure their safety. However, these boundaries can also be drawn and enforced by other family members (parents, other relatives, siblings) or family acquaintances in ways that go significantly beyond the need to protect children’s safety and instead have the opposite effect, as oppressive and harmful acts to control the child’s actions and senses of self.

In researching the spatialities of children’s exposure to violence and abuse in the home, it is further important to consider not just momentary orderings and experiences of space but also longer term consequences. As recent work by Willis et al. (2016) and by social psychologists and counseling researchers (cf. Foster and Hagedorn 2014; Swanston et al. 2014) has begun to demonstrate, the personal geographies of survivors and the life journeys they take also warrant attention. In addition to this, while some researchers have (with considerable prior training) been able to engage children in discussions about their experiences of abuse, there are significant ethical problems that have led many to try and access these experiences through the memories of survivors. While this is methodologically problematic because of the fragility of memory and changed perspectives/rationalizations that survivors may have developed, their retrospective reflections and sense-making practices can, at the same time, be highly illuminating as well as, perhaps, becoming part of the process of healing and of caring for others by sharing stories and placing them in context.

It is important to note at this point that, for researchers themselves, the issue can also be very difficult to investigate, as the accounts of children and survivors are often deeply unsettling and may bring up difficult personal memories for interviewers and researchers. Ethical responsibilities are heightened as researchers need to ensure that interviewees do not suffer harm through retraumatization, while the relations between legal guardians and children may be difficult to manage. Safeguards such as working with support agencies and in the presence of trusted individuals from such agencies are generally necessary.

Despite these problems and the general shortage of in-depth geographical research on this topic, there are some valuable and illuminating studies in geography and other disciplines that begin to map the relational and emotional spatialities of children’s exposure to violence in the home. Wilson’s (2015) and Wilson et al.’s (2012) research on children’s emotional geographies in families with substance abusing parents draws attention to the “everyday sensory, embodied and affective dimensions of children’s and young people’s spatial experience and place making” (Wilson 2015: 52) through an analysis of children’s accounts of the sensory

geographies of their homes and of the spatial practices they adopt to get by in adverse circumstances. The authors note that parental substance misuse affects a large number of young people in the UK (ca. two million). They then identify parents' management of home space around their substance misuse and children's responses as relational practices of shaping the social spaces of home and their relationships within and beyond it. The children's responses included retreating to their personal bedrooms and/or closing themselves off by listening to music or watching television, and needing to or using options to leave the house, either spending more time in public space or finding refuge at a friend's place. Wilson (2015: 54) thus explains that children "sometimes feel uncomfortable and unsafe in one part of the house and take refuge elsewhere, often in a bedroom. Older children may seek refuge away from home." She notes that respondents' homes were often presented as places of tension and unpredictability, with children experiencing "an uncomfortable lack of control or autonomy in the home" (ibid: 57). Their feelings of exclusion and marginalization were compounded by sensory experiences, especially through noise. As one of the participants in the study explains: "all the time there is always shouting in my house . . . never stops" (Emily, 13, in Wilson 2015: 58). Noise passing through thin walls and at different times of the day and night contributed much to the children's sense of not being safe in the home. In addition, some noted that they felt disrupted by parents entering their rooms, even in the middle of the night.

Wilson emphasizes the agency of children in creating sensory environments that felt closer to their ideas of a safe space and through transgressing the boundaries of home, but she carefully avoids romanticization, as she also highlights the costs of getting by in such challenging circumstances, such as participants' senses of isolation, difficult comparisons between their own and their friends' homes, and the self-destructive behaviors of a minority:

I wouldn't want to be in the house with her (mother) you know, (I'd) just sit in my bedroom or watch TV or listen to music. And greet (cry) all the time and I was so sad . . . I was on anti-depressants at 15 year old. (Jenny, 17, mother alcohol user, Wilson 2015: 61).

These insights match Swanston et al.'s (2014) observations about children's negotiations of domestic violence. The authors focus specifically on children's (and their mothers') descriptions of the *environment* of domestic abuse, noting that children as young as eight were "able to articulate their experiences of domestic violence" (ibid: 184). They use the British Medical Association's (2007) definition of domestic violence as "a pattern of coercive behaviors (e.g. physical, verbal, sexual, emotional, psychological and/or financial) carried out by a former or current intimate partner, intended to gain or sustain control in the relationship" (ibid), which emphasizes once again that violence is not simply an act of irrationality but often pursued with the distinct aim of exerting control and ordering social space in particular, oppressive ways. Swanston et al. (2014) give a detailed insight into the many complex and overlapping issues that children have to cope with in contexts of domestic violence, where the violence may be directed to a parent, sibling, and/or

themselves. Children participating in the research are shown to have been highly aware “of many different forms of domestic violence taking place within their home” (ibid: 188), while having to cope with a pervasive sense of threat and fear as they try to “predict the unpredictable” (ibid: 189):

The child’s environment was described as one of pervasive fear concerning possible threat to either themselves or their mother and siblings . . . A number of the children appeared to be constantly thinking about what might happen to them or others in their family and what the perpetrator might do next, trying to work out his hidden intentions. It seemed the children were attempting to predict what might happen next in this fearful, threatening environment to gain some sense of control. (ibid: 189)

One participant, Claire, thus described how she,

. . . had to act like weary and stuff . . . Cos you didn’t know when he [perpetrator] was going to be drunk . . . It would depend how drunk he was really, because when he was really drunk he was horrible because he started getting abusive and angry . . . I was always thinking about what had happened, what was going to happen next. (ibid: 189)

Like several other children who participated in the study, she also described her home as one of neglect and emotional abuse, which included not being fed enough, being put down, and being told that she was not loved by anyone. Emotional geographies of abuse thus map across a much wider relational and affective terrain than an exclusive focus on acts of physical violence would reveal. A similar conclusion is drawn by Hall (1996) in her analysis of the accounts of adult lesbian survivors of child sexual abuse in the USA. In addition to the sexual abuse and sexual chaos experienced by her interviewees, Hall found that the homes they had grown up in were characterized by,

battering, unchallenged verbal abuse, scapegoating, absence of nurturance, instability of place, economic instability, developmentally inappropriate task expectations, emotional role reversal, unpredictable and unexplained events, disproportionate responses, extremes in attending, neglect of basic needs, unmonitored home boundaries, cultural void, repudiation of sensory experience, secrecy, atmosphere of mortal threat, and substance misuse (ibid: 31)

Hall also notes that several of her participants were abused by mothers, older siblings, friends of siblings, or other relatives too, while family and community members witnessing abuse rarely took action against it. Connected to this is an issue that many researchers of intimate partner violence have reported (see Pain 2015) but that is heightened by the social marginalization of children: the denial and repudiation of their sensory experiences. Swanston et al. (2014) confirm that the lack of trust in children’s ability to reflect on, and reliably report, abuse has wide ramifications, affecting even the response of services and the police. Thus, some of the children they interviewed reported that they felt as if police and service staff were not taking them seriously, which further undermined their trust in adults. To Swanston et al. (2014: 191) “an overarching message given to services by all of the children was that they have a voice, if only people would listen.”

Despite this, leaving the domestic violence context and receiving counseling support were described by Swanston et al.'s (2014) respondents as key to developing a greater sense of safety. Participants such as Kate also had numerous suggestions for ways in which children experiencing domestic violence could be helped:

Getting installed with a panic button and being able to contact other children that have been through this and getting like help off of them . . . Like kids being able to press charges and seeing that they can talk to the police and social services. Maybe being more assemblies on domestic abuse because there are many children not knowing what's going on. (Kate). (ibid: 191)

While Swanston et al.'s (2014) research focused particularly on children's experiences of the environment of domestic abuse at home, they begin to engage with the transitions that children (and, in this case, their mothers) have to navigate as a consequence of disclosure. Others, such as Frederick and Goddard (2007) emphasize a wider range of transitions and intersections between different spaces in the everyday lives of children who have witnessed domestic violence and/or have themselves been abused. They thus note the problematic transitions between home and school, including further marginalizations at or exclusions from school as well as truanting, which may be a consequence of such experiences of marginalization and/or a direct consequence of abuse. Frederick and Goddard (2007) further note the isolation and sense of estrangement from friends and family that children in violent domestic contexts frequently experience, as well as the fragmentation of their life worlds, e.g., as a result of family breakdown, leaving home early, being placed in care, loss of contact with parents, and/or the loss of trusted individuals.

Hall (1996) raises similar concerns in her reflections on school and community as environments that can both reinforce the abuse dynamics of home and "decrease negative outcomes" (ibid: 30). Considering participants' transitions between home, school, and community, Hall draws attention to the impacts of parents' high mobility leading to frequent changes of schools and loss of friends or community contacts. In addition to the problem of parents keeping children home from school, she also notes the emotional connections between the two spaces as children worried about their parents and/or siblings when they were at school. They were frequently expelled and few mentioned that they had close friends, leading Hall to conclude, that "[p]atterns of not being seen and attended to were perceptually extended into the school environment" (ibid: 42).

Neighborhood streets were also described as unsafe by many of her participants, of whom 65% had been "sexually assaulted as children by extrafamilial males in the environment near their homes" (ibid: 43). The girls were potentially more at risk from community violence as they sought opportunities to spend time away from home. While the scale of risk from strangers in public places has been questioned by many scholars (cf. Valentine 2001), it bears noting that young people growing up in areas of greater community violence are exposed to heightened risks if they seek refuge outside the home. As Meth (2003) and others have pointed out, a key aspect of the porous social geographies of domestic violence is its close connection to

homelessness, as abused children and/or those witnessing domestic abuse may opt for the street as a strategy for coping with/escaping from violence at home, or be expelled by family members.

Within their communities, Hall's participants further asked whether community members could have done more to notice their distress and to act upon it. This observation has also been made by Willis et al. (2015: 1) in their research with women who suffered sexual abuse as children. Drawing on Herman (2001) they note that "it is not just individuals but entire societies that can deny, disassociate, look the other way in relation to childhood sexual abuse." This societal disassociation, in combination with the transgression and denied control of the boundaries of their bodies as children, is shown by the authors to be impacting the personal geographies of the women long term, into adulthood. The case studies presented map three different spatial responses, including management of the visibility of one's body, coping with feelings of contamination through controlling boundaries of the self and of the domestic environment, and achieving a sense of belonging through more permanent settlement within a family and neighborhood after frequent episodes of upheaval and mobility. Parenthood is shown to be a significant turning point as the women negotiate between their own fears and spatial coping practices and the desire not to let this impact negatively on their children.

Similar observations about the importance of parenthood as a potential turning point that may prompt survivors to seek support on their complicated onward journeys through life have been made by social psychologists and counseling researchers (cf. Foster and Hagedorn 2014). This research also consistently points to the need for and helpfulness of social support. It shows that on their journeys, survivors may face new stresses that can significantly set them back in the process of recovery, emphasizing that there is no straightforward set of coping practices and/or resilience characteristics. Additional risks may not just result from personal circumstances (which may in themselves be related to childhood trauma) but also emanate from structural inequalities, such as economic insecurity and community violence (Bourgois 2001; Schepher-Hughes and Bourgois 2004). To understand the full complexity of the spatialities and temporalities of child abuse, it is thus also necessary to consider the wider continuum of violence and how its intersections are experienced and negotiated by children and adult survivors in the contexts of their everyday lives.

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## 5 Conclusion

Violence against children in the "home" is a frequent and serious issue that affects children and adult survivors to the core of their being, placing many on a long and complicated route to navigate a range of social, emotional, and often economic challenges in life. It is not only an individual issue but extends outwards, affecting abused children's and survivors' personal relationships as well as frequently necessitating support from wider society. Yet, despite its severity and scale, the issue marks a major blind spot in geographical and sociological scholarship. This absence

is both reflective and constitutive of normative constructions of home, childhood, and adulthood that are related to the dominance of adult perspectives and the marginalization of children's lives, emotions, and understandings as seemingly less relevant and revealing about key geographies and societal phenomena.

Yet, as this chapter has shown, the issue warrants attention from the two disciplines precisely because it unsettles so many assumptions about the sanctity of home, the peacefulness of modern, western childhood, and the protective, benevolent construction of intergenerational relations in western societies. It is also, and more importantly, warranted because of the contributions that the two disciplines could make to enhancing understanding of the intersecting power relations, uneven topographies and emotional geographies that surround, evolve from, sanction, make possible, or challenge child abuse. These contributions might include a closer focus on the personal geographies and everyday social relations of abused children and adult survivors, with a view to adding insight to existing research on therapeutic support and societal interventions. They might also extend to consideration of the intersections between different forms and spaces of violence and how these are negotiated by children and adult survivors. Either way, geographical research in this area would benefit greatly from attending to the stories and reflections of adult survivors and, where possible and ethically justifiable, children themselves in order to develop more diverse and nuanced understandings of the complex emotional geographies across which their experiences are mapped and through which they deal with the violence they are exposed to.

While it is important to reflect on children's agencies in such research and to ensure that their voices and the voices of adult survivors can be heard without causing further violations, the issue of child abuse also shows that "agency" needs to be conceptualized very carefully in order not to overlook the constraints imposed and reinforced through violence. Wilson's (2015) description of children's sociospatial practices as ways of getting by in challenging circumstances captures this more adequately than some assertions of children's resilience do. The issue of agency and victimhood is further complicated by the fact that children also act violently in certain circumstances and can become perpetrators of serious abuse, such as sexual violence against siblings. Although this chapter has not considered this issue in depth, as it has focused on the more pronounced issue of children's abuse by adults, it emphasizes the need for more complex conceptualizations of children's subjectivities, practices, and geographies than those that furnish myths of modern childhood, family, and home.

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## Abstract

This chapter uses families' spatial practices as a lens for exploring violence. Geographical understandings of violence and conflict often focus on international terrorism and domestic governance. This can create situations where certain contexts, often in the global South, are apprehended solely as spaces of death, destruction, and demise. Far less attention is paid to the experiential and everyday dimensions of violence or the context that coconstitutes it. This chapter uses the family as a lens for exploring violence and lived experience. While the family can be a site of gendered, generational, and patriarchal violence, this chapter argues that family relations need to be understood in more complex ways. In particular, geographical practices of family can do other kinds of work that enable people to endure and resist violence and conflict. These arguments are given substance through a detailed exploration of Palestinians living through, resisting, and enduring Israeli settler-colonial violence.

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## 1 Introduction

In the past 15 years, there has been a significant increase in the amount of geographical scholarship that has sought to understand spaces and practices of violence and conflict (e.g., Flint 2003; Gregory and Pred 2007). The temporality of this interest roughly coincides with the September 11, 2001 attacks in the USA and the subsequent US-led “war on terror” in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere. As Pain (2014: 532) has recently noted,

[G]eographers’ emphasis has been on the impacts of the threat and fear of global terrorism on international relations and domestic governance, including the state terrorism that some western governments perpetrate or support as part of their response. There is relatively little empirical attention to the experiential, emotional and everyday dimensions of global terrorism.

Pain’s work demonstrates how geographical studies of violence and conflict might learn much from engaging with longer standing feminist scholarship on other kinds of harm, such as domestic violence or the structural violence embedded in labor markets. This chapter follows her lead by asking how studying the family, a key assemblage through which many – but not all – children and young people’s lives are lived, might open up new understandings of violence and conflict. The case study of Palestine is examined, since it is an enduring site of colonial violence and conflict. As the chapter will argue, exploring family relationships and spaces amid violent conflict and colonialism foregrounds practices of endurance and resistance, which in turn move beyond understandings of families as only forms of heteropatriarchal violence (See also ► [Chap. 13, “Violent Geographies of Childhood and Home: The Child in the Closet”](#) by Kathrin Hörschelmann in this volume).

The chapter begins with a brief introduction to geographical literatures on family. To explore the relationship between families and violence, the chapter then turns to the empirical context of Palestine. Reviewing geopolitical approaches to this space, the chapter makes an argument for adopting other epistemological approaches that move beyond stereotypical representations of place. The second half of the chapter puts such an approach into practice by examining how Palestinian family practices and relations may embody colonial violence while also enabling Palestinians to endure and resist this violence.

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## 2 Geography and Family

Following Valentine’s (2008) call for geographies of families that don’t subsume family within concepts such as social reproduction and care, there have been a growing number of studies exploring how families are enmeshed in spacings of

transnational migration (e.g., Pratt 2012), home (e.g., Harker 2010; Stenning et al. 2010), the (post)colonial nation-state (e.g., Oswin 2010), and law and borders (e.g., Martin 2012), while being part of a broader array of intimate relations and spaces (e.g., Valentine et al. 2012; Sharma 2012). This work provides a much-needed corrective to the prioritization of, and focus on, individual subjects and processes of individuation that has characterized much social science scholarship in recent decades.

Valentine (2008: 2099) argues that the historical neglect of families as an object of geographical study can be tied, in part, to a feminist and queer politics of rejection of a particular type of family: “traditional patriarchal and hetero-normative models of ‘the family’.” The reasons for this rejection are clear: such normative family ideals, and the practices they promote, have had and continue to have devastating effects. For example, Oswin’s (2010, 2014) research in Singapore demonstrates how a very powerful statist production of a heteronormative nuclear family ideal, in part through the residential space of the apartment block, creates forms of exclusion that impact on a whole range of nonheteronormative, “queered” subjects (many of which might otherwise be thought about as families, for example, single parents with children, queer couples). In the context of the USA, Cowen and Gilbert (2007) have shown how a particular normative family discourse, put to work in state policy making, constructs a “national family” that is highly exclusionary of both “foreign” others and “deviants” within the national “family” (see also Martin 2012). These studies give credence to suspicions of “the family” as a politically conservative form of collective subjectivity. Consequently, critique of family often becomes a point of departure for imagining an expanded sphere of intimate relations beyond the family, which might include same-sex intimacies and personal relationships such as friendships and communities (see Valentine 2008 for further elaboration).

Geographies that critique the patriarchal, heteronormative family do important political work, exposing the means through which various forms of oppression and exclusion are rooted in and routed through the family (both as it is practiced and as a discursive construction). However, studies that only critique the family as a geographically specific heteronormative ideal overlook other political registers through which other types of families might be critically encountered. This chapter will develop this argument by examining a range of recent studies of Palestinian families, focusing mainly on those living in the occupied Palestinian territories. As will be shown later, attending to this specific context reveals a much more messy and complex array of families and family politics. However, it is first necessary to provide some background on how this context is usually understood in existing geographical literatures.

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### 3 Geopolitics of Palestine

Palestine is a site of longstanding settler-colonial violence and conflict. Settler colonization by Israel began in 1948, and continues to this day. The types of violence enacted during this period have varied, from forms of disciplinary power and

biopolitical control to periods of intensified military violence where Israeli sovereign power asserts itself (Gordon 2008). The spatiality of this violence has largely been apprehended and analyzed through a critical geopolitical frame. Geopolitical analyses of Palestine have tended to focus on two themes, the geographies of (1) territory and borders and (2) power/knowledge.

Scholarship on territory and borders has traced the shifting production of different territories and boundaries that constitute Palestine and Israel (e.g., Falah 2003; Newman 2002). Some of this work has also produced a series of statements about state formation that seek to address politicians, negotiators, and diplomats, very much in the mold of classical geopolitics (Falah 1996). More recent work on territory has been attentive to the ways in which the everyday practices (particularly those of the Israeli occupation) have produced Palestinian territories. Such work includes studies of land seizure and displacement (e.g., Falah 2003), the destruction of Palestinian cities and built environment (e.g., Falah 1996; Graham 2004), the construction of Israeli settlement colonies in the occupied territories (e.g., Weizman 2007), and the role surveillance and mobility plays in striating these territories (e.g., Zureik 2001; Weizman 2007; Harker 2009). Similar studies have been conducted in Palestinian spaces beyond the occupied territories (e.g., Ramadan 2009). This work on territories and borders has helped to explain the ways in which Palestinian spaces (national, municipal) are produced, and the constitutive role played in these productions by different Israeli actors and, depending on the context, other Arab actors too. Such work has generated more general insights about how particular states are performed and how boundaries are produced, reproduced, and disrupted.

Geopolitical work on Palestinian territories has also been instrumental in unpacking the contorted topologies of power/knowledge embodied in such spatial formations. This second thematic includes studies that have explored the discursive construction of both Palestine (e.g., Gregory 2004; Gordon 2008) and Palestinians (Ramadan 2009; Bhungalia 2010), and how these interconnected discursive constructions are entangled with a range of material practices that have devastating consequences for the spaces and bodies that they enroll and act upon (e.g., the destruction of Palestinian built environment). Such studies expand the category of “political” actors beyond statesman and militants to include architects, planners, and economists (Weizman 2007). Bhungalia (2010) also shows how the geopolitical scriptings employed by the Israeli military and politicians exclude Palestinian “terrorists” and “civilians” from the realm of politics (and political actors).

By recentering the analytic gaze from up on high to within embodied individuals, this group of studies has produced more variegated understandings of spatialized power in the occupied territories. However, politics and violence, whether military, bureaucratic, or state based, remain the common basis for geopolitical studies of Palestine. This is hardly surprising, given the intense vulnerabilities many Palestinians experience while living in (and moving between) the occupied territories, the state of Israel and the manifold spaces of Palestinian exile. It would be negligent and naïve to ignore such relations, and the analyses mentioned help to

unpack such violence. However, an unintended consequence of this relatively consistent analytical focus is that Palestine becomes envisioned and “known” as a place of politics, conflict, and violence. While many individual studies do move beyond these foci, the reiteration of particular tropes at collective level creates a stereotype.

This is an epistemological critique, but it also has ontological implications. As critical geopolitics has clearly shown, particular representations of space actively participate in sociomaterial “fabrications” that have devastating consequences (Gregory 2004). In the context of Palestine, epistemologies of politics and violence participate in the re-creation of spaces where Palestinians often have little agency (Bhungalia 2010). Weizman’s (2007) study of Israel’s occupation provides the clearest example of this problem. While the Israeli occupation is the explicit focus of his work, the spaces in which Weizman’s analysis moves are nevertheless Palestinian (too). However, the occupied are a derivative, of both the occupation and of Weizman’s analysis. Put differently, in exploring how Israel creates a land hollowed out of its Palestinian inhabitants, Weizman does much the same thing himself. His analysis of the ontology of occupation bleeds into and comes to define an epistemology of Palestinian life.

Weizman’s work demonstrates how an ontological axiom of uneven power relations between Palestinians and their various “others” (Israeli, Lebanese, Jordanian, etc.), and the multiple vulnerabilities Palestinians experience as a consequence, is translated into an epistemological axiom that dictates Palestinians can only be apprehended through politics and violence (and frequently as largely passive victims to such processes). This tacit consensus, which subsists in geography because of the sheer number of geopolitical studies of Palestine, can unintentionally reinforce inequitable power relations at a discursive level and create one-dimensional representations of Palestine and Palestinians. This is problematic not only because it leads to the production of stereotypes (Palestinian children as victim of occupation, or on the other side of the same coin, as hero of resistance) but also because it obscures a whole series of other social performances and time-spaces.

This problem extends beyond the context of Palestine too. Despite the many intricate differences in various critical geopolitical approaches, their analyses of the geographical basis of politics across a series of spatial and temporal extents are largely characterized by a focus on violence. This often leads to accounts of death, destruction, and demise and sculpts representations of place that offer little sense of forms of endurance and lives lived beyond the purview of state violence. There is nothing wrong with this at the level of individual studies. It is important to understand how such violence happens. But collectively, as a body of knowledge, this is problematic. Through the repetition of tropes of violence and politics, geopolitical scholarship collectively produces – albeit unintentionally and unknowingly – stereotypical representations of place. These stereotypes cast certain places as violent (often feeding into orientalist discourses when those places are in Southern contexts). Consequently, geopolitical studies are one of many forms of Western scholarship in which “different places come to stand in, stereotypically, for certain kinds of events or processes” (Robinson 2003: 279).

## 4 Decentring Geopolitics

How can this problem be addressed? To counteract the tendency towards stereotypical representations of place, Robinson (2003: 279) suggests that what is needed instead is a method for “learning from the complex and rich experiences and scholarship of different places.” What this means in practice is a broadening of the epistemological palette, which works at the limits of and goes beyond geopolitics. This is not a rejection of geopolitics as a mode of analysis, but rather an attempt to think about violence in different ways. This necessarily entails a more modest geopolitics, situated within an expanded field of intellectual and political endeavors concerned with power-infused spaces and spacings. Such an approach does not ignore or downplay the role of violence and particular types of political process in shaping various places and lives throughout the world. Rather, it endeavors to situate and link such processes within a broader array of geographies.

In the context of Palestine, Taraki (2006) makes a similar argument for more sustained work in the social and cultural realm that is nevertheless contextualized within the ongoing Israeli occupation.

The political reality must be the basic backdrop against which we examine the routines of life and the small dramas of daily life. (Taraki 2006: xii)

A preoccupation with Palestinian political economy and political institutions has precluded a serious study of social and cultural issues. (Ibid: xxvii)

This chapter takes up Taraki’s challenge by using the family as a theoretical frame to understand different practices of violence, resistance, and endurance. Studying family relations and practices can offer a range of important insights into social-spatial processes of violence and power relations that animate, *inter alia*, nationalisms, colonialisms, and economic change (Joseph and Rieker 2008). This remains true even as family compositions and practices in certain places have changed significantly in recent decades.

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## 5 Political Geographies of Palestinian Families

Palestinian families are a heterogeneous analytical phenomena. Johnson and Abu Nahleh (2004) argue that despite commonly held assumptions about the importance of family in Palestinian society, there is actually little scholarly research on the topic. The reasons for this, they suggest, are tied to the Palestinian condition after the Palestinian *nakba* (catastrophe) in 1948, when Mandatory Palestine was wiped off the map through the creation of the State of Israel, and an estimated 700,000 Palestinians became refugees. The enforced dispersion of Palestinian families into a variety of different contexts subsequently constituted a diversity of family practices, relations, and spacings. This increasing heterogeneity became hard to subsume under the singular analytical framework of *the* Palestinian family (Johnson and Abu Nahleh 2004). Furthermore, after 1948 there was no longer a “Palestine” (i.e., a

recognized nation-state) to anchor studies of Palestinian families. Other Arab nation-states often discouraged research on the Palestinian communities within their midst (likely because such research would expose the severe neglect of Palestinian refugees and reflect poorly on the host nation). The research that was done with Palestinian communities overwhelmingly focused on historical and political narratives as part of a broader Palestinian nationalist politics (Johnson and Abu Nahleh 2004). Nevertheless, in recent years this lack of scholarly interest has begun to be addressed, in large part by the Arab Families Working Group (Joseph and Rieker 2008). Since 2001, researchers working under the auspices of this project have traced family relations and formations across Palestinian, Lebanese, Egyptian, and transnational space. Much of this work will be drawn upon in what follows.

The Palestinian family is also an ambiguous subject because even when focusing on one spatial context, such as the West Bank, “family” is understood and practiced in a number of different, although interrelated, ways. Family relations and spaces may include *aila*, the nuclear or “small” family; *hamula*, the extended or “big” family; *qaraba*, or “closeness,” which can refer not only to kinship ties but also fictive kin articulated through class, location, religion, political affiliation (Johnson et al. 2009); and *dar/beit*, the household or home (Jean-Klein 2003). As Johnson (2006) notes, these shifting understandings of family are far from uniform within the occupied territories and also differ in spatial and political contexts beyond the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Palestinian families are also Arab families. In other words, they are partially constituted by discourses about (the importance of) the family that span the Arab world, a regional space that in turn is (re)created and modified by the mobility of families and familial discourses. Palestinian and Arab families overlap in a number of different ways, not least through the lives and family practices of Palestinians living in a number of Arab states (usually as refugees). However, Palestinian families are differentiated from other Arab families through their various ties to the Palestinian *nakba* (catastrophe) and dispossession that began in 1948. Thinking about the ways in which Palestinian families are more broadly Arab families opens up a series of intellectual resources, albeit ones that must be carefully modified to the specific context in which they are being used. For example, Joseph and Rieker (2008: 3) argue that it is vital to understand Arab families in relation to states, and particularly “the failure of Arab state-building projects and the contradictory deployment of family structures, within those processes, in the crises of modernity.” This statement holds true for Palestinian families. However, in contrast to other “Arab” families, most Palestinian families have been at the behest of state forms that are not their own, whether this is the British, Israeli, and United Nations regimes in Mandatory Palestine and the occupied Palestinian territories, or other Arab governments in spaces of exile (i.e., Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Syria). To a great extent this remains the case in the present day occupied territories, since Palestinian Authority governance has been severely limited by Israel’s continued colonial sovereignty.

Given the variety of different Palestinian family relations and spaces found in different nation-state contexts, this chapter focuses mainly on Palestinians living in the occupied territories. Within this particular context, there are three family



geographies that will be explored because of the ways in which they intersect forms of colonial violence. These geographies will be outlined through the concepts of discursive objectification, resistance, and endurance. These political geographic practices are closely interrelated and hard to separate empirically. However, the conceptual separation of these practices illustrates different ways in which Palestinian families have been politically entangled and the ways in which familial geographies constitute, resist, and/or endure heightened experiences of vulnerability due to colonization, war, and violence.

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## 6 Discursive Objectification

The politics of discursive objectification refers here to the ways in which a discursive object – the Palestinian family – is produced, reproduced, and circulates within and beyond the occupied territories. This object, characterized as patriarchal and heteronormative, encompasses both the *aila* (nuclear family) and *hamula* (big family, clan), although it is often the latter that is emphasized. Interpreted as the benign foundation for society or contrastingly, a repressive “prison house” (Joseph and Rieker 2008), this object is far from natural. Rather, it is rooted in and routed through a particular historical geographical production that spans governance, data production, law, education, media, and everyday life.

Johnson and Moors (2004) suggest that the family has been a key target for different governmental projects in Palestine, whether colonial or national. The role of the *hamula* has been particularly important in this regard. An important part of Ottoman era economic and social life in the Levant, *hamula* identification was reinforced and reinigorated between 1948 and 1967 by the Jordanian and Egyptian regimes that controlled the West Bank and Gaza Strip, respectively, as a means of suppressing Palestinian nationalism (Hilal 2006). Israel had a similar goal in mind when it intensified these practices following its invasion of what became the occupied territories in 1967. The village league system (1978–1987), which invested limited forms of power in male heads of particular *hamula*, was the most visible manifestation of this broader aim (Gordon 2008). Subsequently, when discussing family reunification as part of broader negotiations leading to the Oslo Accords in 1993, Israeli officials constructed the Palestinian family as nuclear, in contrast to a Palestinian focus on the *hamula* (Zureik 2001: 219). Following the Oslo Accords, the then newly established Palestinian Authority used the *hamula* as a means of seeking legitimacy to govern, through the establishment of a presidential office for clan affairs (Johnson and Moors 2004). However, Palestinians living in the occupied territories remained largely under the authority of Israeli occupation. During the second Palestinian intifada (uprising), Israel intensified a different form of family-focused colonial governance: home demolitions, deportations, and collective punishment all based on family relations (Joseph and Rieker 2008: 2).

Closely connected with governmental projects, statistical data, particularly census data, have been one of the key means through which the Palestinian family has been discursively constructed by colonial and other forms of governance. As Rieker

et al. (2004) note, methods of data collection have been closely tied to colonial and modernizing projects since the British Mandate. Since 1948, the Palestinian family has increasingly been framed as a threat: a demographic “time bomb.” Such data-driven discourses, which began in Israel and Jordan, were initially echoed by the head of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics when this institution was created in 1995 (Rieker et al. 2004: 189). While this discourse disappeared within the occupied territories during the second intifada, as the survival of a Palestinian national polity once again became an existential issue (Ibid), it may yet be making a resurgence following the (relative) lull in militaristic forms of violence (see Taraki 2008).

Data collection, and its roots in particular colonial and modernist epistemes, has also been partially responsible for the discursive elision of family with household. Since the Ottoman era, households rather than families have been enumerated in censuses and surveys (Rieker et al. 2004: 192–193). This practice, continued by the British, identified a male “head of household” to enumerate household members and thus reiterated and reinforced patriarchal social relations. Furthermore, the focus on household composition ensured that wider notions of family and kinship were lost in data sets. “Families” were counted, measured, profiled, and thus produced in ways disconnected from their everyday, lived realities but closely connected with a more geographically extensive modern (colonial) nuclear family ideal (Ibid: 195–196).

Law and education have also played their part. The relations between law and family in the occupied territories are complex and cannot be adequately outlined here (see Johnson and Moors 2004). However, it is worth briefly noting that Shari’a law, while not prescribing a normative nuclear family itself, does provide a strong material form to the conjugal tie, since women are entitled to a “house” (room) of their own when married (Rieker et al. 2004: 201). Education, closely intertwined with colonial, national, and modernization projects that have taken place in the occupied territories, has also played its part in the construction of the Palestinian family. For example, Ibrahim et al. (2004) note that after Israel invaded the occupied territories (Palestinian), nationalist sentiment in textbooks was quite literally translated into familial sentiment: “‘Our unity will frighten the enemy’ was replaced by ‘Our success will please our parents’” (Ibid: 77). After 1948, education became a form of highly desirable social capital, and in some contexts the family became a key enabler of education, as older siblings would work to support the education of younger siblings.

Moors (2004) notes that discursive constructions of a homogenous Palestinian family are in tension with divergent everyday practices of different family relations, forms, and practices. Nevertheless, the Palestinian family as discursive object is also coconstituted through everyday practices, including a range of symbols, appearances, and styles of dress. Such everyday performances of family have become closely connected with mass media discourses of family. This sphere of discursive production spans national, regional, and global space and is one of the ways in which ideas of the “Arab family” are circulated (El Shakry and Moors 2004). While different discourses of family may be discerned within various forms of media, El

Shakry and Moors (2004) suggest that the full complexity of these relations has yet to be fully examined.

In summary, the Palestinian family is a discursive object that has been constituted in a variety of different and often interconnected ways. While the Palestinian family as a patriarchal heterosexual norm is often interpreted through orientalist tropes of tradition, timelessness, and backwardness – all of which promote a certain kind of naturalism – it is a thoroughly contemporary production, firmly routed through and rooted in colonial violence. The family as discursive object works as a frame, or way in which a particular world is made known. Examining the production of this frame exposes the ways in which “the Palestinian family” is enmeshed in patriarchal, state, and colonial forms of power and violence and thus offers a platform for (political) opposition to such family practices and discourses as forms of violence in themselves. This is particularly important for understanding the diverse lives of Palestinian children who coconstitute these families, as the chapters by Bree Akesson and David Marshall and Cindy Sousa in this volume show. However, to only envision Palestinian families through the frame of colonialism ignores practices through which Palestinian families have enacted political resistance or provided the basis for other forms of response to colonialism and violence.

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## 7 Resistance

While the Palestinian family as a discursive object is one that has been iteratively produced by a range of colonial and modernization projects, actual family practices have often been a means of responding to prolonged crises (Sayigh 1981). In other words, family practices have enabled and enacted forms of anticolonial and antipatriarchal resistance. Particularly in relation to Israeli colonization, some commentators suggest that Palestinian families have been the central source of Palestinian survival and national identity (Johnson and Abu Nahleh 2004: 308). Since 1948, most Palestinian families have lived in nation-state contexts where they have no formal political representation. In such circumstances, the family has become a key protector and form of social authority (Giacaman and Johnson 1989). This remains the case even in the present day occupied territories, where the Palestinian Authority wields “prosthetic sovereignty” only (Weizman 2007). The Palestinian family must therefore be thought about not only as a form of oppression but also, simultaneously, a form of solidarity. This becomes most easily discernible when focusing on the two most explicitly visible moments of anticolonial resistance in the occupied territories, the two *intifadas* (uprisings).

During the first Palestinian *intifada*, a broad-based and largely nonviolent uprising that began in 1987, familial responsibilities such as nurture, defense, and assistance were extended to the entire community (Giacaman and Johnson 1989). For example, many women sought to protect young men from beatings by Israeli soldiers, through the claim “he is my son” (Ibid.: 161), regardless of kinship affiliation. This transformation involved the expansion and enlargement of existing roles and spaces – particularly women’s roles in relation to the space of

home – rather than creating new social-spatial subjects altogether. As family relations and spaces became a key platform for practices of political resistance, relations within families changed, for example, restrictions on women’s movement relaxed. Popular committees, the purportedly “new” political forms through which much of the anticolonial resistance was organized, were framed by both external and internal discourses as “democratic,” in opposition to the “traditional” (and by extension repressive) kinship sociality of the Palestinian family. However, these committees in fact emerged from, overlapped with, and often refreshed and remade existing familial relations (Jean-Klein 2003). In particular, the first *intifada* transformed intergenerational relations, as young men usurped the power of their father, and mothering as maternal sacrifice was used to demand equal rights for women (see Johnson and Abu Nahleh 2004: 313–316 for fuller discussion).

The second Palestinian *intifada*, a more militarized uprising beginning in 2000, was conducted by a small subset of the population – groups of armed young men. This second uprising created a crisis in masculinity that affected familial relations (as a new generation of young men supplanted the authority of older men who had participated in the first *intifada*) and caused various forms of stress at the level of the household and the community. However, many families were largely audience to, rather than participant in, this anticolonial struggle. Johnson et al.’s (2009) study of weddings illustrates the different roles families played in the first and second *intifadas*. They note that while marriages were simple and inexpensive during the first uprising, reflecting a broader culture of austerity that all Palestinians participated in, ceremonies during the second uprising involved much more conspicuous consumption. Reflecting the lack of popular engagement in the second *intifada*, violence was seen as an external threat to the ceremonies and “ordinary life” more generally (see also Kelly 2008). Hence in the context of the second *intifada*, particular types of familial practices, such as getting married, became a form of resistance to violence. Unlike the first *intifada*, this was not only resistance to colonial violence but also to the militarized anticolonial violence practiced in response to the Israeli occupation. Jad (2009) nevertheless notes that the rise of group weddings during the second *intifada* was a means through which the dominant Palestinian political parties in the occupied territories promoted factional politics. She also notes that group weddings (re)produced socially conservative beliefs and practices, particularly with regards to gender dynamics within families.

In addition to family as a mode of resistance during the *intifadas* in the occupied territories, it is also useful to briefly examine family as a form of resistance in spaces of exile and refuge. Kuttab (2004: 154) notes that the Palestinian diaspora is characterized by families and kinship moving and seeking refuge together (unlike migrants who tend to be individuals). While other Palestinian spaces and institutions of belonging and identity were destroyed in 1948, the family was a durable and portable relational form; hence Sayigh (1981) asserts that the Palestinian family is a response to a crisis, not a cultural remnant. The expansion of family relations, by marrying into host communities, has been a means of surviving exile (Kuttab 2004). Family relations have also enabled “return” to the spaces of Mandatory Palestine, now Israel, through marriage (Ibid) or prior to 2000, family reunification (Zureik

2001). While such processes have not necessarily challenged the heteronormative patriarchal family – Kuttab (2004) suggests that women remain the “shock absorbers” within refugee families – they have been a means through which colonialism and inhospitable state regimes have been resisted.

In each of these contexts (i.e., first *intifada*, second *intifada*, refuge), family relations and practices have been an important means through which war, colonial oppression, and exile have been resisted by Palestinians. Furthermore, in each context, families as forms of resistance have different relations with the patriarchal heteronormative family ideal. As Jean-Klein (2003) illustrates, during the first *intifada* popular committees, enabled by family relations and spaces, transformed those families by challenging some patriarchal relationships and the practices associated with them. In the contexts of refuge studied by Kuttab (2004), changing family compositions did not transform gender relations within families. In the second *intifada*, some family practices that resisted violence (re)produced socially conservative beliefs and practices with regards to gender relations within families (Jad 2009). Palestinian families are thus potent forms of political resistance in each of these three contexts, but the relationship between family and violence differs in each instance. Taken together, these family practices therefore offer an alternative frame through which Palestinian families might be known, which disrupts the discursive objectification (or framing) of the Palestinian family described earlier. The next section also explores family practices that disrupt the frame of the Palestinian family, albeit through a different means of being political.

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## 8 Endurance

Studies of getting married during the second *intifada*, which focus on one way in which Palestinians in the occupied territories have attempted to maintain an “ordinary” life amid extraordinary conditions (Kelly 2008; Johnson et al. 2009), reveal a third form of political practice that is not entirely subsumed within either discursive productions of the Palestinian family or various enactments of resistance to colonial and state power. This type of political practice is termed endurance. Endurance describes practices of persistence and adaptation through which people who experience multiple forms of violence create alternative worlds for themselves (Allen 2008; Povinelli 2011). Endurance is similar to what Bayat (2010: 19–20) terms “the quiet encroachment of the ordinary,” whereby the actions of uncoordinated actors work collectively to enact change in practical and pragmatic ways. This is not a politics of protest, targeted at a perceived external source of power, but a politics of redress that seeks to directly change things on the ground (Ibid). In the context of the occupied territories, a politics of endurance is one that currently takes place amid the Israeli occupation, but doesn’t take the occupation, or resistance to the occupation, as its start or end point (see Harker 2011).

One example of this politics in relation to families is Palestinian men who built Israeli settlement colonies during the second *intifada* (Kelly 2008). While such labor contradicted broader Palestinian nationalist politics and forms of anticolonial

resistance, these men did this work in order to feed their families. While acts such as this may be interpreted as forms of acquiescence to the colonial regime, Kelly (2008) argues that they can be understood as efforts to live an “ordinary” life in conditions of extraordinary violence and economic hardship. Slightly less ambiguous politics of endurance are evident in the practices and spaces of mobility during the second *intifada*. This includes checkpoint economies through which commerce and public space are articulated despite barriers to movement (Hammami 2004) and journeys around the West Bank that maintain familial relations (Harker 2009). Post-Oslo movement restrictions and the fragmentation of Palestinian space in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which intensified after 2000, also produced new forms of localism that in turn reinvigorated the importance of the spatially copresent family (Johnson 2006). Migration beyond the West Bank provides families with another way of enduring the occupation (Hilal 2006; Harker 2010), even as such migrant practices have historical roots stretching far beyond the Israeli occupation.

Studies conducted in and around Ramallah (Taraki 2008; Abourahme 2009; Harker 2010) have also highlighted how refiguring the family as nuclear (*aila*) enables forms of intergenerational endurance through interconnected investments in education, consumption, and transnational mobility. While this transformation is decidedly middle class, analogous processes have been reported in refugee camps, where refugees refigure the physical and symbolic spaces of the camp while maintaining the political right to return (Abourahme and Hilal 2009).

These practices of endurance, many of which are familial in motivation or method, expose another response to violence. While they do not constitute an orchestrated or organized politics of protest, they have enabled meaningful forms of change as families deal with the violence of occupation and war. Practices of endurance enable a reduction in exposure to heightened vulnerability, and in the case of the movement/migration, such political strategies are explicitly geographical. However, these political changes are often unremarkable and unremarked upon because they are “ordinary” (i.e., part of the practice of everyday life) and “quiet” (i.e., emerging from disparate and nonunified sources). Practices of endurance, like resistance, disrupt the discursive objectification (frame) of the Palestinian family.

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## 9 Conclusion

The family practices and politics described in this chapter are undoubtedly more complex, nuanced, and fragmented than can be summarized. Even the concepts used to describe them (i.e., discursive objectification, resistance, and endurance) are inadequate attempts to corral an always excessive plurality of spatial practices for the purposes of analysis. However, these concepts and the discussion they enable, illustrate the diverse ways in which Palestinian families intersect with spaces and practices of colonial violence. While the family may embody colonial violence, family relations also enable Palestinians to endure and resist this violence. Consequently studying family practices not only reveals the diverse geographies of family but also presents Palestine as more than a space of death, destruction, and demise.

Families offer the potential for a form of intellectual engagement that not only generates new understandings of violence and conflict but also richer representations of place. This argument demands that children's geographers take account of the family relations and practices that so often play a crucial role in shaping the lives of children and young people. Conversely, a focus on children and young people enables sociospatial relations within the family to be explored more fully.

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# Geographies of Palestinian Children and Families: A Critical Review of the Research and a Future Research Agenda

# 15

Bree Akesson

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## Abstract

While the field of children's geographies continues to grow, the subfield of geographies of children affected by political violence is still in its formative stages. There is even less research using a geographical approach to the experiences of Palestinian children. Although the launch of numerous studies focusing on Palestinian children promises new insights into the needs of this specific population, there are still notable gaps in the body of research. This chapter critically explores the current state of knowledge pertaining to Palestinian children organized around three areas: research methods, unit of analysis, and topical focus. After highlighting key contributions and existing gaps, the review concludes with recommendations for future research directions.

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**Keywords**Children • Palestine • Geographies • Place • Family • Research • Methodology

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## 1 Introduction

Decades of Israeli occupation have resulted in the forced displacement of Palestinians, restrictions on Palestinian movement, and ruptured Palestinian communities (Taraki 2006). This has consequences for Palestinian children; when family members are suddenly separated from one another, the family unit is undermined and children's protective environments are compromised. Moreover, many Palestinian children live in settings characterized by the threat of violence – perpetrated by both Israelis and Palestinians – in their homes, schools, and neighborhoods, compounded by abject poverty resulting from occupation.

Generally, while the field of children's geographies continues to grow, the subfield of geographies of children affected by political violence is still in its formative stages. Although the launch of numerous studies focusing on Palestinian children promises new insights into the needs of this specific population, the current body of research tends to rely on “tried and tested” research methods, focuses on older children, and emphasizes a medical model approach emphasizing trauma and its effects. It is important to understand the physical and psychological effects of political violence on Palestinian children, but this approach tends to overlook potential mediators such as social and environmental elements. Clearly, there are still notable gaps in the knowledge base. Therefore, this chapter takes a critical look at the important developments and the gaps that still exist, providing guidance for future research directions.

This chapter takes a broad socio-ecological approach to children's geographies including empirical studies ranging from children's mental health to their diverse socio-spatial contexts (e.g., family, school, community). It highlights key contributions and existing gaps in the current body of research with Palestinian children. The bulk of the chapter provides an overview of the current state of knowledge and is organized around three areas: research methods, unit of analysis, and topical focus. First, many studies tackle the occupation and its effects headfirst, diving into the topic through the use of “tried and tested” research methods. There is a heavy reliance on cross-sectional survey design, constrained by the limited definition of exposure to political violence and resulting functioning that depends primarily on negative psychosocial outcomes such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Second, individual children and the mother–child dyad tend to be the population of focus, which excludes other socio-spatial aspects that may influence children's experience (e.g., fathers, siblings, extended family, teachers, community members). Third, researchers seem content to explore whether political violence has negative psychological consequences for children, but seem hesitant to move beyond this broad premise. There is little emphasis on variations such as level and layering of exposure, potential mediators (e.g., socioeconomic contexts, social support,

political ideology), and other outcome measures such as positive mechanisms (e.g., resilience, posttraumatic growth). After discussion of these gaps in the literature, the chapter concludes with recommendations for future research directions.

Though it aims to be as comprehensive as possible, this chapter is not a systematic review or meta-analysis, nor is it an exhaustive review of the literature. The sampling of research presented in the following pages reveals trends, strengths, and gaps. There are clearly noteworthy exceptions for all of the limitations that are noted, and these (though clearly not all) are indicated in the discussion.

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## **2 Strengths and Gaps in the Current Scholarship**

### **2.1 Research Methods**

#### **2.1.1 Sampling Methods**

Because the context of Palestine is fraught with instability and uncertainty, accessing children as participants for research must be conducted carefully, perhaps even more so than with children's research in other contexts. Therefore, researchers aim to balance sensitive sampling methods with obtaining a sample that is as representative and unbiased as possible.

Nevertheless, within the current literature, few studies used random or even quasi-random sampling methods to obtain their samples. One exception comes from Arafat and Boothby (2003) who obtained a representative, stratified, random sample of children for their research on the psychosocial status of Palestinian children. Children were selected randomly by school counselors, who would enter a village, camp, or city, divide it into quarters, and go to every tenth home to determine if there was a willing child participant present who met the inclusion criteria. However, in accessing their sample, Arafat and Boothby highlight a challenge that children's geographies have acknowledged, specifically the difficulties in accessing children while also working with the gatekeepers who exert influence over the research process (van Blerk et al. 2009). Many studies use local organizations and institutions to recruit their sample, as this may be the only way to gain access to the population of interest. For example, many studies derive their samples directly from schools (see, e.g., Palosaari et al. 2013), which have the potential of homogeneity in terms of age and even socioeconomic status.

Albeit rare, the use of comparison groups is a strength in the current body of research. However, because of the nature of the political violence at the time the research may be conducted, there are some issues to consider. For example, Thabet et al. (2002) identified a group of children in the Gaza Strip, whose houses had been bombarded and demolished, and compared them to a group of children who did not have their homes destroyed, but who "may have been exposed to other traumatic events." This poses a challenge when trying to address the degree of exposure, as both groups of children may have been exposed to varying degrees of trauma. Unfortunately, the researchers did not discuss the level of exposure to determine the heterogeneity of the groups.

Inclusion of a control group (e.g., children who have never experienced political violence) is a difficult task in Palestinian research, because the occupation and political violence have affected almost every corner of Palestinian society from village to city to refugee camp. In his commentary, Haj-Yahia (2007) suggests that comparison groups be drawn from samples of Palestinian children living in Israel or Arab countries that have not been directly exposed to political violence. However, Haj-Yahia also acknowledges that these children may still have been exposed to other forms of violence and trauma, such as displacement, discrimination, and/or racism. Drawing attention to the work of Barber (1999, 2001), Haj-Yahia (2007) suggests that the larger the sample size, the more likely there will be a subgroup (albeit small) of children who have experienced different forms of political violence at varying degrees of frequency and severity or perhaps even children who have not experience political violence at all.

Many studies rely solely on child report data, giving only one perspective (see, e.g., Lavi and Solomon 2005; Thabet et al. 2002, 2009). On the other hand, gathering data from only adult sources should also be treated with caution, as parents' own experiences may affect their ability to assess their children's well-being. Furthermore, this promotes an adultist view of children's experiences, which children's geographies try to avoid. There are several studies that gather data from multiple sources, which strengthens the research by providing corroborating evidence and shedding additional light on a theme or perspective. For example, Arafat and Boothby's (2003) research used children's focus groups but also included focus groups with parents and teachers. The authors acknowledged that parent and teacher focus groups were primarily used to supplement the children's focus groups by gaining further understanding and insight into the lives of Palestinian children and by learning how parents cope when relating to their children in the current context.

### **2.1.2 Methodological Approaches**

There are methodological lessons to be learned from reviewing the current scholarship on Palestinian children. The state of research still includes a heavy reliance on quantitative research designs and, less often, the use of qualitative design. There is also a heavy reliance on cross-sectional surveys, primarily assessing both exposure to political violence and outcomes at the same point in time. Of course, there are exceptions, with a few studies utilizing a longitudinal research design (see, e.g., Punamäki et al. 2001). Although quantitative studies certainly add to the field's understanding of the experiences of children affected by political violence, qualitative methods can provide additional explanations beyond just prediction. And the field of children's geographies has certainly played a role in developing diverse research methods. Rather than relying on positivistic data gathered solely through quantitative methods, the holistic and process-oriented nature of qualitative research can enhance understandings of socio-spatial phenomena from the everyday experiences of Palestinian children and families (Haj-Yahia 2007).

Of course, qualitative studies present their own limitations. Over the past decade, human geography has faced a "crisis of representation," triggered by

traditional qualitative research methods that, like much quantitative research, only convey a limited and partial insight into research participants' experiences (van Blerk et al. 2009). Nevertheless, van Blerk et al. note that the field of children's geography has "started with a different agenda," namely, a focus on advancing children's participation in the research process, which offers "new ways to probe the human experience" (p. 3).

Multiple and mixed method approaches are becoming more common in research with Palestinian children, especially within children's geographies. This reflects the acknowledgment that knowledge is not simply transmitted from the participant to the researcher, but rather "contexts are constructed in which researcher(s) and respondent(s) actively engage in the co-production of knowledge" (van Blerk et al. 2009, p. 3). There are a few notable examples of this. In her research with Palestinian children regarding their impressions of the separation wall, Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2006) used focus group discussions, participant observation, as well as photos and written compositions from children themselves. In his research with children living in a refugee camp in the West Bank, Marshall (2013) used a combination of guided tours, photo diaries, participatory video, mental mapping, drawing, and focus groups. Akesson (2014) conducted collaborative interviews with families in their homes, using narrative, drawing, and mapmaking, as well as global positioning system (GPS) tracked walks through neighborhood communities.

## 2.2 Unit of Analysis

### 2.2.1 Age Range: Where Are the Young Children?

In their review of the achievements and challenges of children's geographies, Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson (2011) question "whether geographies of children, youth and families focuses on too narrow a section of the age spectrum" (p. 16). And this review indicates that children in Palestine tend to be defined rather narrowly, most commonly representing school-aged children, between the ages of 12 and 16 years. For example, Shalhoub-Kevorkian's (2006) study included school-aged children in 10th and 11th grades. And Veronese et al. (2012) conducted research with children aged 7–14 years old. Young Palestinian children (under the age of 8) tend to be underrepresented in the research. In general, and with a few exceptions, the body of research on Palestinian children is not consistently concerned with identifying age- or stage-related differences in how children experience political violence.

According to Akesson (2011), there are several reasons why young children have not been prioritized as an important age group for research, especially in the Palestinian context. First, many believe that young children are not affected by political violence. Second, young children's abilities may be underestimated, and research methods do not adequately address the skills that younger children may have. And third, research designs tend to consider young children inaccessible, because they cannot be theoretically separated from their parents. Methodologically,

young children may not be included as often in research because of a reliance on certain methods, such as cross-sectional surveys, which may be easier to administer at school age.

### **2.2.2 A Focus on the Parent–Child Dyad**

Another common unit of analysis in the research on Palestinian children is the parent–child dyad, often the mother. This has been a useful unit of analysis in research, because of the historical reliance on attachment theory as a means by which to explain child developmental outcomes, as well as the reciprocal influences that the parent and child engage in and as a mediator in violent contexts.

It is known that parenting in the context of political violence is associated with children's well-being and that the parent–child relationship can serve as a mediating mechanism. For example, in a multi-sample study, punitive parenting practices were also found to be associated with childhood aggression, whereas nonpunitive parenting moderates aggressive behaviors related to political violence (Qouta et al. 2008). Similarly, Thabet et al. (2009) found that supportive parenting practices were associated with lower levels of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in children. Qouta et al. (2003) concluded that Palestinian youth most vulnerable to avoidance and intrusion symptomatology were those whose mothers showed high levels of PTSD. On the other hand, Barber (1999) found that there was no association between youth functioning and parental support, parental monitoring, and parent–adolescent conflict among Palestinian male youth affected by political violence.

Past research shows that Palestinian parents model coping skills for their children during political violence, with children mirroring their parent's reactions to stress (Chemienti and Abu Nasr 1993). According to Punamäki et al. (2001), children's experience is dependent upon parents' reactions, a finding that has been confirmed in research with other populations affected by political violence. For example, studies show that a mother's level of anxiety and depression is the most important predictor of her child's mental health (Qouta et al. 2005). Similarly, Barber's (2001) research with Palestinian youth found that a nurturing parenting style protected children's developmental and emotional well-being in the context of political violence. In Punamäki et al.'s (2001) study of Palestinian children, children who had loving and non-rejecting parents were more creative and efficient in problem-solving, ultimately protecting their children's mental health despite exposure to political violence. And in Garbarino and Kostelny's (1996) research with Palestinian children and mothers, political violence was found to pose a "manageable" threat when children faced danger in the context of healthy functioning and parental well-being; however, it was a critical developmental risk in the context of family dysfunction and violence.

All of the above studies focus on the role of the parent–child relationship and parenting styles in affecting child well-being within the context of political violence. However, there are still gaps in our understanding of how the occupation and political violence affect quality of life in the Palestinian family, the structure of the

Palestinian family, and the multiple processes and dynamics of Palestinian family practices.

### **2.2.3 Family: The Importance of *a'ila* and *hamula***

Research with children cannot be disengaged from the family system. For family is integral to an understanding of children's lives and experience, especially within the field of children's geographies. Yet, despite the importance of the family in Palestine, in place-related studies of Palestine, such as those that rest under the umbrella of children's geographies, there are few studies that look at the immediate family (the *a'ila*) and the wider network of aunts, uncles, and cousins (the *hamula*) (for exceptions, see (Harker 2010)). This gap is notable considering that children's well-being in the face of political violence is associated with the response of their families.

There has been a recent emphasis on multiple perspectives, especially diverse family relationships across multiple generations. For example, in his research with Palestinian children in Jordan, Hart (2002) asserted that children define themselves as a generation in fundamentally different ways than adults. Because of Palestinians' strong sense of place identity related to geographic location (i.e., historic Palestine), which is passed down through the generations, children are drawing from multiple sources (e.g., self, caregivers, siblings, community) to develop their own sense of place. In this way, family and community spaces are given form, function, and significance by the people in and around them. Therefore, the family acts as a place for activity between the older and the younger generation. Through family practices (Harker 2010), the older generation provides solidarity and social cohesion for the younger generation, who continue to deal with ongoing crises of occupation, displacement, and violence (Ghabra 1988). Yet, the geographies of intergenerational relationships continue to be under-researched.

The gap identified in this section is not unique to the scholarship on Palestinian children. Holt (2011) and Punch (2006) both suggest that this is one of the existing strands of critique in the broader field of children's geographies as well. Within the field of children's geographies, there is a rich body of literature that examines parenting, dealing with issues such as adults raising families (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2011). But with a few exceptions including Holt's (2011) recent edited collection, sparse consideration has been given to family relationships beyond the individual child or the mother-child dyad.

With this in mind, research on Palestinian children's geographies should move beyond a focus on *either* children's *or* parents' experiences. Echoing Harker (2012), research with Palestinian children should include a geographical approach to family, which considers "multiple, contingent relations between family spacings, politics, and ethics" (p. 850). Given that family is a vital component of children's environments, future research would be well served to focus on the family as an important element in children's socio-spatial experience. All family members can be included in the research process, with narratives intertwined and told in concert, so as to uncover children and family understandings of political violence how family experiences are co-constructed.



## 2.3 Topical Focus

### 2.3.1 Trauma and Resilience: Different Sides of the Same Coin?

There is a considerable body of research that addresses the impact of war and other types of traumatic events on child development and well-being. Political violence certainly influences children emotionally, psychologically, and physiologically. Clearly mental health is an important topic for research on Palestinian children, with many researchers aiming to prove that indeed Palestinian children are suffering under occupation and political violence. And there are a number of studies that have assessed the negative consequences of political violence on children in Palestine.

Research examining the effects of political violence on children has traditionally centered on trauma and exposure (Barber and Schluterman 2008). The obvious pattern across most empirical studies of Palestinian children is focused on some form of negative functioning. Many studies that examine the effects of political violence in Palestinian children include one or more measures of problematic functioning such as externalizing behaviors (i.e., aggression, antisocial behavior, delinquency, hyperactivity) (see, e.g., Palosaari et al. 2013; Qouta et al. 2008) and internalizing behavior (i.e., anxiety, depression, disordered eating, sleep problems, withdrawal) (see, e.g., Palosaari et al. 2013). Many studies focus only on negative functioning, with a few looking at both positive and negative outcomes (for an exception, see Lavi and Solomon 2005).

A majority of studies report that children exposed to political violence experience some kind of negative effect as a result. Many studies report that children exposed to chronic stress as a result of political violence reported higher levels of psychological issues. PTSD is a common negative outcome measure, with several studies including PTSD on a list of negative psychopathology or measuring this outcome explicitly (see, e.g., Qouta et al. 2003; Thabet et al. 2009).

Of course, these studies were conducted with the best of intentions: to learn more about the state of Palestinian children under occupation and to provide the international community with evidence of the negative effects of Israeli occupation and political violence on Palestinian children. However, the prevalent focus on trauma and resulting negative psychopathology does not provide a comprehensive picture of Palestinian children's experiences. A focus on trauma follows the traditional focus on a Western, deficit-based medical model, where the pattern is reliance upon negative psychopathology. Palestinian children are commonly thought of as being traumatized, and a focus on trauma creates the impression that Palestinian children exposed to political violence are "mentally ill" and in need of treatment (Rabaia et al. 2014). As Marshall (2014) notes, entire populations are deemed traumatized by violence, which eclipses other aspects of children's experience. There may be little emphasis on variations in interpreting these experiences such as level and layering of exposure in different locations, socio-spatial mediators, and positive outcome measures. How Palestinian children have managed to persevere throughout a long history of displacement and through episodes of varying levels of violence has received markedly less interest in the scholarship. Therefore, there is

a need for research to understand the diverse experiences of children and families, rather than to generalize about their traumatization.

Research on children affected by political violence indicates that under the right circumstances, a child's cognitive and affective processes can serve as a source of strength, resilience, and perseverance amidst the negative and potentially traumatic effects of political violence (see, e.g., the edited collection by Fernando and Ferrari 2013). This is especially true when the child can count on continuous support from family, friends, and/or community members. Nevertheless, there is little research that focuses on how Palestinian children persevere in adverse circumstances (for an exception, see Nguyen-Gillham et al. 2008).

Resilience has become a recent focus in research on children affected by political violence (Fernando and Ferrari 2013; Thabet et al. 2009). Yet, in the context of Palestine, there have been a few studies that have specifically examined elements of resilience in children. One notable exception is the work of Nguyen-Gillham et al. (2008) which highlighted the resilience of young people exposed to traumatic experiences. Resilience is an important topic in the field of children's geographies, for research shows that resilience is intrinsically tied to the social environment. For example, Punamäki (1997) found that parental love and proper discipline increased Palestinian children's resilience by increasing their creativity and cognitive capacity. And, even though it was not an explicit goal of the research, Shalhoub-Kevorkian's (2006) study addresses resilience in her findings, countering traditional views of children as passive victims of political violence and moving toward children as agents of change and mobilization. Yet with the exception of these few studies, resilience is yet to be fully explored in the context of Palestinian children. As Veronese et al. (2012) noted: "To unravel its complexity, in depth-understanding of the environmental factors contributing to children's wellbeing at both social and cultural levels is required; such understanding may best be attained by working within an ecological framework" (p. 225), a framework suited to the field of children's geographies.

### **2.3.2 War Is Not the Only Trauma: Other Forms of Adversity Affecting Palestinian Children**

Harker (2011) suggests that studies, which focus one dimensionally on trauma and on Palestine as a land of occupation and political violence, "work at a *collective* level to produce – albeit unintentionally and unknowingly – a stereotypical representation of place" (p. 2). Such a conceptualization leaves out an understanding of the everyday geographies of children in Palestine, a place where babies are born, children attend school, families eat together, and parents earn a living. All of these everyday activities are important to children's understandings of and interactions with their socio-spatial contexts. In fact, political violence is not necessarily the most pressing form of adversity for children in these settings. Rather the greatest hardships may be societal and contextual factors – poverty, separation from family, loss of loved ones, weakened community and family structures, insufficient social services, and loss of control over personal space and movement – which all may be worsened by the occupation and its related violence. Several factors determine how

children are able to cope with political violence, including the type, degree, and duration of stressful life events, the child's subjective understanding of these events, and the child's stage of developmental growth (Arafat and Boothby 2003). However, the current body of literature on Palestinian children does not fully explore these elements, oversimplifying the impact of different forms of violence and the changing nature of violence.

As the previous section shows, research with Palestinian children tends to focus on the mental and physical harm to children as a result of war-related violence. Therefore, different forms of family violence – child neglect, child sexual and physical abuse, and corporal punishment – may be overlooked as elements of children's everyday geographies. Nevertheless, family violence is a serious issue in any context, but especially within the context of political violence where multiple forms of violence may accumulate (Garbarino and Kostelny 1996). Indeed, there is a link between political violence and family violence. For example, Pain (2014) connects everyday domestic violence to violence in the international arena. And Jewkes (2002) notes, when violence is an established practice in a society, it is more likely to occur at domestic levels. Additionally, Al-Krenawi et al. (2007) found that exposure to political violence is strongly associated with violence within Palestinian families.

There is some research (though little that is recent) that addresses the prevalence and type of violence experiences within Palestinian families, a gap that is reflected broadly within research with Arabic cultures (Johnson and Joseph 2009). In a cross-sectional survey of 1,185 secondary school children in east Jerusalem and the West Bank, Haj-Yahia and Abdo-Kaloti (2003) found high rates of children witnessing and experiencing different forms of family violence including father-to-mother violence (30–36%), mother-to-father violence (11–38%), and parent-to-child violence (32–52%). In a survey of 2,332 students (ages 14–17), Sehwal et al. (2005), more than 43% of respondents had siblings who were beaten by their father and 47.5% by their mother. In a cross-sectional study of 652 Palestinian undergraduate students, Haj-Yahia and Tamish (2001) found that before the age of 12, 5.7% of participants had been sexually abused by a family member, 11.6% by a relative, and 13.2% by a stranger. Clearly political violence is not the only violence facing Palestinian children, as many must also cope with the everyday violence within their homes.

As a place affected by political violence, Palestine is a landscape deeply inscribed with physical, emotional, cultural, and political scars. During her research in the West Bank, Peteet (2005) noted that “the potential for violence is always on display” (p. xi). Yet, this potential for violence is not just related to the occupation. There are also violent aspects of Palestinian society such as child abuse and family violence that are not necessarily directly related to the occupation. Clearly, these factors may be further exacerbated by factors such as unemployment, poverty, and ideology. This acknowledgment of non-occupation-related violence does not intend to diminish the occupation and its effects, but rather paints a more complete picture of Palestine as a complex society with multiple layers of violence affecting children.

### 2.3.3 The Place of Place: The Role of the Physical Environment

Political violence has important consequences for children's development and well-being because children's physical location structures their experience, worldview, and behaviors. Yet with the afore-described emphasis on occupation-related trauma and violence, there is little room to explicitly consider the socio-spatial experiences of these children. With a few recent exceptions (see, e.g., Akesson 2014; Hammad 2011; Marshall 2013), children's position in the human geography-related literature on Palestine has until this point been overlooked.

Of course, studies exist that refer to aspects of children's geographies, representing the multidisciplinary nature of the field. There are research studies on Palestinian children at borders, checkpoints, and the separation wall. For example, Shalhoub-Kevorkian's (2006) research on Palestinian children's perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes toward the separation wall's construction illuminated a feeling of being trapped by the physicality of the wall. At the same time, the children spoke about how they negotiated the wall's presence, thereby revealing an element of flexibility and resilience in the face of hardship. The physical environment was a theme in a study by Save the Children (2009), which focused on the living conditions of Palestinian families in high-risk areas, including the pressures and impacts associated with forced displacement. And using place-centered methodology, Hammad's (2011) research aimed to place meaning and resistance for children and families in the territorial struggle occurring in the West Bank town of Bil'in.

Another aspect that can increase our understanding of Palestinian children's geographies is conducting research in diverse locations. Attention to physical environment is especially relevant within the Palestinian context. Living conditions for children and families in refugee camps are considered to be very difficult due to overcrowding and lack of adequate water and sanitation services. The infrastructure of these camps has continued to grow throughout the decades, but horizontal expansion has reached its limits and families have begun to develop their homes vertically. Homes in the camps tend to be dark and humid, with mold and other environmental hazards characteristic of overcrowding and poor living conditions. The quality of life for children and families and the state of education, health, and social services are considered to be worse in refugee camps than in urban and rural areas. On the other hand, encampments, such as those where Bedouin families live, face extreme poverty, disintegrating infrastructure, and harsh environmental conditions (e.g., extremes of heat in the summer and cold in the winter). Like refugee camps in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip faces high levels of overcrowding, which has implications for the well-being of children and families who live there. However, children's experiences differ vastly between, for example, the West Bank and Gaza, while rural villages face their own distinct challenges such as the encroaching separation wall, loss of land, and settler violence.

There is clearly much diversity in the physical location where Palestinian children and families live, which differently impacts their experience. Thus far, there is much research that has been conducted among samples of children in refugee camps and cities (see, e.g., Hart 2002; Marshall 2013). There are numerous studies that focus solely on children in the Gaza Strip (Thabet et al. 2009) or

children in the West Bank (Garbarino and Kostelny 1996; Marshall 2013; Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2006). Some research, such as that from Arafat and Boothby (2003) and Barber (1999) included children from both the West Bank and Gaza. And Khamis' (2012) study included adolescents from Gaza and Lebanon. Yet samples of participants from other areas of Palestine, notably East Jerusalem and rural areas of the West Bank, are underrepresented.

Despite the impact of the physical environment, there are few examples of research that takes physical location into account. One exception is Arafat and Boothby's (2003) research whose sample was based upon Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) census data taking into account the place of residence (e.g., village, camp, or city), as well as areas of the West Bank and Gaza that had high levels of conflict and those without. By considering the social ecological framework in their study, Arafat and Boothby evaluated the role of school in children's lives, finding that school is an important social forum and a source of support for Palestinian children. However, they also determined that children found it difficult to meet with their peers in recreational, nonformal, and social gathering places. Parents in the study noted that places outside the home were unsafe and threatening to their children, and with the exception of traveling to school, children rarely left their homes. This led to frustration due to lack of mobility and freedom. Similarly, Akesson (2014) sampled families from six different administrative regions of the West Bank (areas A, B, C, H1, and H2) and East Jerusalem. Sampling from multiple sites and in various settings (refugee camp, village, city, and encampment) under a range of territorial controls (Israeli and/or Palestinian) provided diverse examples of how Palestinian children and their families interpret, understand, and navigate their everyday environments in the context of occupation and political violence.

Finally, the construct of place has not been fully explored in research on Palestinian children, representing a gap in the research (for an exception, see Hammad 2011). Any research project should recognize place as well as people as an important factor in the environment that influences a child's life and development. Understanding the impact of the physical environment (e.g., home, school, play spaces, neighborhood community) as well as the social environment (e.g., parents, siblings, peers, teachers, community leaders) on the child's well-being adds another layer of analysis. By understanding the child's experience from multiple points of view, researchers can comprehensively examine the ways in which children negotiate their daily lives.

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### **3 Conclusion: Directions for Future Research on the Geographies of Palestinian Children**

Just as studies of children's geographies can inform our understandings of the Palestinian context, so too can a geographical approach to research with Palestinian children inform our understanding of other war-affected populations. This cross-cutting research can emphasize the importance of place for those who are "out of

place” and struggle to create place. Children’s geographies’ de-emphasis on the medical model of research – especially in Palestine – could also be beneficially applied to research in other contexts by reconceptualizing the complex social, political, and geographic contexts that children and families live within. Based on the above analysis, there are three recommendations to move the future research agenda forward.

### **3.1 Recommendation #1: Include Young Children and Family as a Population of Interest**

Children of different ages, even young children, can be an important source of knowledge about their own lives and communities. Yet at the same time, their experiences are constantly shaped and influenced by those around them. Understanding young children’s experience from an ecological perspective allows for siblings, caregivers, and members of the child’s social environment who have everyday contact with young children to be involved in research. As an underrepresented population in research on Palestine, future studies should include young children, asking, for example, how is access to certain places constrained for children depending on age? How do differently aged children interact with different environments?

The family is another underrepresented aspect of the current body of research. Johnson and Joseph (2009) note that Arabic scholarship has revolved around one of two central themes: family *or* political violence. Yet the two topics have rarely been examined together in the literature. Johnson and Joseph further contend that research on Arab families tends to be “highly under-theorized and under-problematized” (p. 1). Joseph (1999) states, “. . .the centrality of family. . .has been so axiomatic that there has been relatively little problematizing of the psychodynamics of family life” (p. 9). With that being said, research should not necessarily focus on the problems facing families in Palestine. Rather, research should acknowledge that families are a vital influence on children’s lives and development.

The indications that the well-being of children is related to family points to future research focusing on family support in terms of both sampling and testing relevant domains of functioning. Research should examine aspects of family functioning to help clarify the mechanisms by which attachment and family support operate in these settings. For instance, family support would be better understood if it could be separated from other aspects of family functioning, such as parental mental health, loss or separation from close family members, parenting styles, caregiver trauma exposure, and family conflict. Future research should ask how are family practices used to create a sense of family in times of uncertainty? How do parents and children interact to negotiate children’s spatial freedom in the context of political violence? How do the internal family dynamics and family history influence children’s access to certain places? By including the family in research on Palestinian children’s geographies, one must also consider the impacts of

intergenerational power relationships between adults and children, especially in light of differing experiences related to notable time periods during the occupation (e.g., first *intifada*, second *intifada*).

### **3.2 Recommendation #2: Use Multiple Methods and Draw from Multiple Sources to Understand Children's Diverse Experiences**

The field of children's geographies calls for innovative and adapted research techniques while emphasizing children's competence. It has endeavored to introduce flexible and imaginative means by which to encourage children to articulate their experiences and concerns, suggesting creative ways to enhance communication. Visual methods, such as drawing and photography, and methods of embodiment, such as theater and drama, have become increasingly more popular and effective in research with children. These alternative means of communication encourage children to represent their experiences visually and serve as a base from which children are subsequently encouraged to verbalize. Conducting research with children should attest to children's abilities to be their own spokespersons. Methods should aim to uncover children's multiple ways of knowing and encourage children to identify risks, as well as strengths and opportunities. However, these methods have not been fully embraced in the current body of research with Palestinian children.

Children's lives are shaped by those around them. Therefore, efforts should be made to gather data from the widest variety of sources and using the widest variety of methods in order to paint the most complete picture of children's lives. Gathering data from multiple sources acknowledges the broad socio-spatial system that children engage with on a daily basis. In contrast to studies that rely on a single source of data, for example, from a parent or the individual child, future research should integrate data gathered from a variety of sources (including children, caregivers, teachers, community members) using multiple methods to suit the research question and the age of the child. Not only does this increase the reliability of the data and allow for flexibility, but it also creates a rich source of data from multiple perspectives.

Whereas typical methods of information gathering for research may focus on surveys or narrative interviews, younger children and children facing adversities such as trauma or disability may not be able to engage in the research process in this manner. Therefore, alternative participatory methods (e.g., drawing, photography, mapmaking) are ways to understand their experiences in an effective and meaningful way. Furthermore, these tools create an environment where children may be more at ease, where they feel more able to express themselves freely, and where they don't feel as much risk of giving a "wrong" answer. Children's geographies have rightly embraced these methods, yet with a few exceptions, they have yet to be fully applied to the context of Palestine.

Finally, Punch (2002) notes that methodological innovations that make research more accessible to children may also be applicable to research with adults, thereby providing an opportunity for adults (e.g., parents, older siblings, aunts, uncles, teachers, and community members) to engage in research with children. This allows research with the whole family, an important element of children's geographies. The development and use of these methods enables children and families to effectively communicate their stories (van Blerk et al. 2009). While at the same time, efforts should be made to introduce methods that minimize unequal power relationships (e.g., adultism) that may result from including adults in the research process.

### 3.3 Recommendation #3: Encourage Multidisciplinary Research to Maximize Research Application for Practice and Policy Relevance

Research on Palestinian children's geographies should move beyond simply demonstrating that children have unique and interesting geographies worthy of attention (Holloway and Valentine 2000). Research should ultimately suggest means by which to minimize the harm political violence can cause, uncover new ways of coping and perseverance, and propose creative ways to move forward. Ultimately, research must be linked to practice and policy. Examining the way that children and their families experience everyday life in Palestine can inform the way that programs are developed. There is also a pressing need for the evaluation of existing programs that cater to Palestinian children. Furthermore, future research would benefit from capitalizing on the experience of professionals from multiple disciplines already working with children and their families in Palestine, integrating their experience into ongoing research projects.

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# Decolonizing Trauma: Liberation Psychology and Childhood Trauma in Palestine

# 16

David J. Marshall and Cindy Sousa

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## Abstract

The collective nature of violence requires a reassessment of the prevailing biomedical model of individual trauma that guides conventional psychiatric responses to such events. Perspectives are needed that take into account children's embeddedness within families, communities, and historical and political narratives. This also means questioning the assumption that children are innocent victims in need of care, as opposed to political actors in their own right, as well as the assumption that children alone are vulnerable to dehumanizing violence. This chapter works through the case of Palestine to highlight emerging interdisciplinary literature about the collective and political nature of trauma and violence. Secondly, this chapter seeks to bring a critical psychology perspective to bear on the extensive literature on child psychology in conflict zones, including Palestine. Drawing from the work of Ignacio Martin-Baro, this chapter adopts a liberation psychology stance in asking what the study of childhood

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trauma looks like, not just from the perspective of children, but “from the perspective of the oppressed.” By giving attention to the *other* ways of understanding trauma and doing trauma relief, offered by Palestinian psychologists, community workers, teachers, parents, and young people, this chapter seeks to highlight and build upon nascent attempts at developing postcolonial approaches to children’s geography.

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**Keywords**

Trauma • Political violence • Liberation psychology • Postcolonial theory • Palestine

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## 1 Introduction

In July 2014, at the time of writing this chapter, the Israeli military launched “Operation Defensive Edge” in Gaza. The attack came as Palestinians were welcoming the much-anticipated arrival of a transitional unity government meant to repair the rift between rival Hamas and Fateh factions and to administer the politically and geographically fractured Palestinian polity. Israel’s stated *causus belli* was rogue rocket fire from Gaza. The rocket fire itself was retaliation for Israeli raids in the West Bank following the murder of three teenaged settlers near the city of Hebron in June and tensions over the killing of two Palestinian youths by Israeli soldiers in May. However, this intensification of violence must be seen within the context of the ongoing occupation of Palestinian territories since 1967, and the original displacement of Palestinians from their land in 1948 (the majority of residents in Gaza are registered as refugees). Although Israeli settlers and troops redeployed from Gaza to the West Bank in 2005, the Palestinian enclave has been under strict Israeli military blockade since Hamas won parliamentary elections in 2006. Since that time, Gaza has experienced regular bombardment and has endured three full-scale assaults.

This most recent attack surpassed operations Pillar of Defense (14–21 November 2012) and Cast Lead (27 December 2008–18 January 2009) in both duration and loss of life. Sixty-six Israeli soldiers were killed in combat, and rockets killed six civilians inside Israel. Meanwhile, over 2,000 Palestinians were killed (an estimated 70% of whom were civilians, including over 400 children), and more than a quarter-million Palestinians (mainly refugees) were once again displaced. Over 40,000 Palestinian homes were completely or partially destroyed by the Israeli attacks, rendering thousands of families homeless. Indeed, entire families and neighborhoods – not just individual lives and buildings – were destroyed. As many as 59 Palestinian families suffered multiple losses, with victims ranging in age from 10 days to 95 years. In one incident, 26 members of the Abu Jame family were killed in a single bombing. In addition 138 schools, 134 factories, 80 places of worship, 15 hospitals, 18 health clinics, and 29 ambulances were damaged or destroyed, along with vital civilian infrastructure including a water

treatment facility and Gaza's only power plant. The deleterious effects of these attacks were compounded by the shortages of fuel, medicine, and other vital goods due to the longstanding Israeli blockade. Taken together, the totality of violence directed against a captive population represents an assault against the people in their entirety. While individuals become direct victims of attacks, the violence they endure is a part of the overarching violence of settler colonialism directed at the Palestinian people as a whole, often targeting the home and family directly, thus seeking to undermine their means of physical and cultural survival.

Beyond the physical loss and destruction, survivors in Gaza were also left with the psychological effects of war. Upon cessation of hostilities, the UNICEF mission in Gaza estimated that some 373,000 children had suffered traumatic experiences requiring psychological support (Cumming-Bruce 2014). This new tsunami of trauma only added to what Akihiro Seita, the health program director for UNRWA, described as a "psychological trauma and PTSD epidemic," in the wake of the 2012 Israeli assault (UNRWA 2013). Commenting on the 2014 figures, the head of UNICEF in Gaza, Pernille Ironside, observed that "there isn't a single family in Gaza which hasn't been touched by direct loss" (Cumming-Bruce 2014). Even children not directly exposed to physical violence are vulnerable to traumatic stress. Studies in Palestine have shown that traumatic stress among family members impacts children's mental health (Palosaari et al. 2013; Qouta et al. 2007) Likewise, parental and familial support is vital to children's ability to cope, meaning that parental stress will negatively impact children's resilience (Altawil et al. 2008).

The 2014 attack on Gaza, and the high level of violence directed at Palestinian homes and families, underscores the collective nature of these traumas and the challenges of treating them. The collective and chronic nature of violence in Palestine requires a reassessment of the prevailing biomedical model of individual trauma that guides conventional psychiatric responses to such events. As Nguyen-Gillham et al. (2008, p. 292) contend, "suffering and endurance have to be interpreted at both an individual and collective level," rather than privileging predominantly Western understandings of psychological trauma which treat the individual as the locus of pathology and the terminus of treatment. In their study, Nguyen-Gillham et al. (2008) demonstrate that the response of the international donor community has largely relied upon Western models of psychological trauma relief while overlooking "the collective resiliency of Palestinian youth and the practices of communal support and care," thereby distorting "the social suffering of war into individual illness" (ibid.). International humanitarian efforts have only just begun to understand what Palestinian psychiatrists and psychologists have known for decades – that the collective and political nature of violence and trauma under occupation requires collective, community-based responses that acknowledge the political context of occupation (Khamis 2000; Tawil 2013).

Though empirical psychology operates under the positivist pretension of "universal validity" (Burton and Kagan 2005), trauma is not a politically neutral, "value-free" category. Underlying political commitments buttress various understandings of trauma as well as the various treatments mobilized in response. For

example, in seeking to maintain a sense of political neutrality, the mode of trauma relief deployed by international humanitarian aid agencies in Palestine during the *Aqsa Intifada* (2000–2005) largely ignored the specific *political* nature of violence under occupation (Veronese et al. 2011), thus stripping children from their social and cultural contexts and their historical and political narratives (Marshall 2014; Sousa and Marshall 2015). Mass violence damages a sense of meaning and coherence in the world (Janoff-Bulman 1992), and yet psychiatric responses to children's trauma largely discourage children from interpreting violence within a broader political or historical frame. Likewise, despite what is known about the importance of the family for well-being within political violence (Eggerman and Panter-Brick 2010; Garbarino and Kostelny 1996; Johnson and Abu Nahleh 2004; Kuttab 2004;), practice with children facing political violence tends to regard the child as the primary target of the intervention, with little focus on the family context (Peltonen and Punamäki 2010). Literature focused on children in Palestine is no different. Palestinian family life is rarely portrayed as anything but a potentially negative factor in children's mental and physical well-being, as opposed to a source of strength and resilience (Marshall 2014). In this way, trauma relief itself becomes a kind of double violence, a trauma in itself that potentially reinforces the isolating effects of violence against the Palestinian family and the national narrative.

The purpose of this chapter is not to offer definitive solutions to the chronic psychological traumas experienced by Palestinian young people and adults alike, nor to denigrate the vital efforts of psychologists, counselors, humanitarian aid workers, and other committed professionals and volunteers in Palestine. Instead, this chapter seeks, firstly, to highlight emerging interdisciplinary literature about the collective and political nature of trauma and violence, which require political, not just clinical, solutions. Secondly, following the liberation psychology approach developed by Ignacio Martin-Baro, this chapter serves as the opening of a discussion about what the study of childhood trauma looks like, not just from the perspective of children, but “from the perspective of the oppressed” (Lindorfer 2009). In so doing, this chapter follows a postcolonial impulse in giving attention to the *other* ways of understanding trauma and doing trauma relief that are offered by Palestinian psychologists, community workers, teachers, parents, and young people themselves. As such, this approach urges children's geographers and other researchers working with children in situations of political violence not to overlook but to “look *beyond*” children, as Klocker (2013) puts it. This means appreciating children's embeddedness within families, communities, and historical and political narratives, as well as questioning the assumption that children are the only victims worthy of care and attention. In exploring these connections between liberation psychology and childhood trauma in Palestine, this chapter reviews and extends a critique of trauma relief developed by the authors elsewhere (Sousa and Marshall 2015). Crucially, this chapter aims at further developing this critique by bringing together the extensive literature on childhood trauma in conflict settings with a postcolonial approach to children's geography, which remains underdeveloped at this time.

## 2 Trauma and Liberation Psychology

It is perhaps no coincidence that one of the most influential figures in the development of postcolonial theory, and anticolonial struggle, was a trained medical psychiatrist whose political awakening occurred during the Algerian uprising against French colonial rule. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon provides a psychoanalysis of colonialism. Part of this analysis includes a critique of psychiatry as a tool for colonial domination. Psychiatric hospitals, Fanon (2004 [1963], p. 181) writes, proliferated during colonization with the intent of “‘curing’ a colonized subject correctly.” Under colonialism, resistance to colonial domination was considered a form of madness in need of curing. That is, if the colonial subject could ever truly be cured. As Fanon (2004 [1963], p. 222) notes, colonial “magistrates, policemen and doctors” in Algeria “held serious dissertations on the relationship between Muslims and blood.” Today we hear similar proclamations about Arab and Muslim bloodlust and the supposed Palestinian “culture of death.” That psychiatry was used to advance and justify the colonial project required the development of a counter-psychiatry developed from the perspective of the oppressed. While Fanon believed that violent, anticolonial struggle was the only path to psychological and social liberation, one of his many theoretical protégés, the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, believed that liberation of both the oppressed and the oppressor could be achieved through critical self-examination and consciousness raising, or *concientización*.

This notion of critical consciousness raising is at the heart of both Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed, as well as an allied social and epistemological project in Latin America – that of liberation psychology. Liberation psychology has close ties to indigenous psychology (Allwood and Berry 2006), postcolonial psychology (Duran and Duran 1995), feminist psychology (Moane 2011), and other critical psychologies, which as a whole aim to “transform psychology into an emancipatory, radical, social-justice seeking, or status-quo-resisting approach that understands psychological issues as taking place in specific political-economic or cultural-historical contexts” (Teo 2012). Critical psychologies respond to the indiscriminate importation of dominant Western psychological models, and seek to advance their own understanding and ways of addressing the traumas of war. Such perspectives critique the following assumptions: (1) the causes and effects of political violence are purely medical, (2) the effects of mass trauma can be measured individually; those who are not “diagnosed” or “diagnosable” are not affected, and (3) solutions are primarily found in individual, psychological treatment, not in the realms of community or society (see Summerfield 1999, 2000).

Drawing inspiration from liberation theology, Ignacio Martín-Baró, a Jesuit Priest and psychologist living in El Salvador during the 1980s, called for no less than the creation of a new horizon for psychology to counter these presuppositions. This requires, he argued, a new epistemology and a new praxis to service the needs of the majority of the population, by which he meant the poor and oppressed (Martín-Baró 1996, p. 26). In line with the work of Freire’s notions of



*conscientization*, or the dialogical process of reflection and action that helps develop critical awareness and a sense of agency, liberation psychology, as described by Martín-Baró, requires three related projects: (1) people must be engaged in transforming their reality – a process that is accomplished through dialogue and relationship; (2) people must come to understand the “mechanisms of oppression and dehumanization” (Martín-Baró 1996, p. 40), thus building critical consciousness and fostering the potential for alternative ways of understanding the world; and (3) the new understandings that are built through these processes result in a renewed sense of self and agency. Practices of liberation psychology therefore require honoring and attempting to draw out people’s understandings of the political and historical contexts of suffering.

Adopting such a position may require practitioners to take sides in a conflict, going against a central tenant in Western humanitarian aid. However, taking sides against the oppressor or oppressors (whoever they may be) is only asking practitioners to make ethical choices, not to abandon objectivity. As Martín-Baró (1996, p. 122) contends:

The curative work of the psychologist is necessary, but if psychology’s work is limited to curing, it can become simply a palliative that contributes to prolonging a situation which generates and multiplies the very ills it strives to remedy.

What is needed, instead, are analyses of the root causes of violence, along with political means to address them. Trauma, in the form of an accident or sudden loss, is harsh, unexpected, and individual in nature. However, the trauma of political violence is often “perfectly foreseeable and, unfortunately, perhaps even foreseen and planned” (Martín-Baró 1996, p. 123). Indeed, it is this malicious intent that makes the effects of collective trauma so profoundly disturbing. According to Martín-Baró, examining the *effects* of trauma is insufficient. Rather, attention should be directed at the conditions that allow trauma to persist. These are what Martín-Baró calls “traumatogenic structures or social conditions,” such as exploitation and oppression, which come to exist as a “normal abnormality” (Martín-Baró 1996, p. 125). Thus, the urgent task of psychologists working towards emancipation is to examine these dehumanizing relations and to play a role in the collective political project of changing them.

Addressing dehumanizing relations requires challenging the notion of an individual victim who possesses no agency in the face of trauma and humiliation. Described by Kleinman (1997, p. 10), the pathologizing and individualizing of trauma often takes on a sequential character as the “trauma victim” goes from being seen as the one who “suffers political terror to one who is a victim of political violence to one who is sick, who has a disease.” Transforming the dehumanizing effects of both trauma and trauma treatment requires “de-privatizing” and resocializing the notions of suffering (Kleinman 1997). As the introduction to this chapter illustrates, political violence involves entire communities and societies as targets of trauma. As a collective experience, the effects of political violence necessitate attention to the social and political context in which the suffering occurs

(Summerfield 2000). Accordingly, the fractured narrative of a community must be restored through a collective and democratic process of recollecting the collective memories of a polity, along with a reclamation of the individual's place in the collective, including children, and the recovery of social roles (Burton and Kagan 2005, pp. 14–15). A liberation psychology approach would emphasize the democratic nature of such collectivizing of memory, a process which may play a role in reconciliation. This democratic impulse involves attending to the needs of all members of the community, including men, who too suffer trauma, humiliation, and dehumanization (Lindorfer 2009). In its practice, liberation psychology rests on aiding in the collective, political processes through which people create meaning out of overwhelming suffering (Hernández 2002; see, for instance, Lykes et al. 2007). The following section will provide a narrative of different forms of collective, political processes through which Palestinians have recovered from and resisted collective violence over the last 60 years of displacement and occupation. The purpose of this narrative is both to understand the collective forms of survival and struggle that have emerged in response to political violence, and young people's role therein, as well as to understand the current context of donor-funded trauma relief projects carried out by Palestinian NGOs today.

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### 3 From National Liberation to Personal Empowerment

The NGOs responsible for implementing child trauma relief projects in Palestine today have their roots in the voluntary associations that have sustained Palestinian civil society for the better part of a century. The earliest precursors were the charitable institutions such as clinics, orphanages, and aid societies that developed during the early part of the twentieth century, in much the same vein that voluntary societies like the Salvation Army operated in Europe and the USA during that time. Some of these organizations had their roots in *awqaf*, Islamic charitable foundations, as well as grassroots Muslim charity associations. However, many Protestant Christian organizations also carried out their “civilizing mission” in the Holy Land, an enduring example being the still active International YMCA in Jerusalem. Many similar local and internationally supported charitable organizations still exist (Jarrar 2005), with children's health and educational services continuing to be a major function of these organizations. However, these associations largely served Palestine's growing urban population. Following the *nakba* or “catastrophe” of the 1948 war and the forced displacement of over 800,000 Palestinians from their land, Palestinian refugees coming from rural areas relied on extended familial networks (*hamula*) and village associations for their material and cultural survival (Rothenburg 1990). Eventually, support from international humanitarian organizations like the American Friends Service Committee, and later the UN Relief and Works Agency, provided institutional forms of support to refugees, with refugees themselves taking a leading role in organizing and expanding this support.

It was the Israeli invasion of 1967, however, and the need to provide sustainable sources of medical and social services, that eventually led to the formulation of

activist aid networks linking together cities, villages, and refugee camps (Jarrar 2005). Compensating for the lack of services provided by the occupying authority, these voluntary societies began receiving funds from the Jordanian-Palestinian Joint Committee in 1978 (Craissati 2005). Grassroots volunteer organizing was seen as a form of active steadfastness, or *sumud muqawim*, that sustained Palestinian survival under occupation, alongside passive forms of *sumud* (steadfastness), such as the preservation of cultural traditions (Nassar and Heacock 1990; Craissati 2005). The rearticulation of grassroots volunteer activism in political terms was grounded in the direct experiences of the occupation and was given voice by a new generation of politically conscious, university-educated Palestinians who sought to challenge the “traditional, nationalistic and elitist patterns of development through the mobilization of the poor, especially in the villages” (ibid, p. 187).

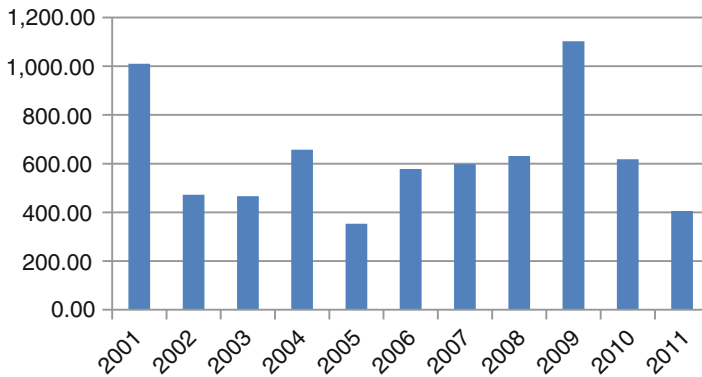
Following a brief period of popular mobilization, the newly energized volunteer base splintered into multiple factions. Leftist political groups took the lead in grassroots volunteer organizing, receiving substantial solidarity support from socialist and communist parties in Europe (Hammami 2000, p. 16). Despite political factionalism, these grassroots organizations played a crucial role in sustaining the momentum of the First Intifada, beginning in 1987 (Craissati 2005; Gordon 2008; Hammami 2000). Young people played a leading role in organizing and demonstrating as part of this popular uprising (Peteet 1991). Neighborhoods, schools, and universities were transformed into sites of political organizing, as Palestinian children and youth became highly visible symbols of resistance. This youthful resistance posed a challenge not only to the then 20-year old Israeli military occupation but also to the aging and exiled Palestinian political leadership.

The challenge that the intifada posed to the Israeli occupation as well as the authority of the Palestinian Liberation Organization led to attempts by the Israeli government and the PLO to quell the uprising. Political negotiations were initiated, eventually culminating in the 1993 Oslo Accords, and the subsequent creation of the Palestinian Authority. With the possibility of a Palestinian state in sight, civil society organizations began early preparations for an eventual shift to state-building activities, coinciding with a global neoliberal trend of private expansion into welfare service provision (Shawa 2005). As bilateral “peace funds” began rolling in from the West, replacing the leftist solidarity donations that Palestinian organizations had traditionally received, there was increasing pressure, and incentive, for NGOs to become “professionalized.” This led to increasing estrangement between professional NGO workers and the grassroots upon which they had once relied for support (Hanafi and Tabar 2005, pp. 25–26). As Jad (2007, p. 628) similarly observes, “this ‘NGOisation’ of the national agenda in Palestine” transformed “a struggle to realise self-determination and sovereign statehood into ‘projects’ for donor funding, in which donors play a vital role in choosing their local interlocutors.” However, as Hanafi and Tabar (2005) emphasize, Palestinians NGOs are not the mere pawns of international donors but play a role in shaping donor agendas and asserting a relative amount of control over the ways in which funds are distributed and utilized.

Nevertheless, many feel that the professionalization of Palestinian NGOs has led to a process of overt depoliticization of Palestinian civil society (Shawa 2005). Although many Palestinians have rejected the politics-as-usual of the dominant political factions, NGOs, fearing that an overtly political agenda would jeopardize international funding, have failed to provide the viable political alternative that some hoped they would. During the height of the Second Intifada (2000–2005), many viewed internationally funded NGOs as out of touch with the needs and opinions of the majority of Palestinians – continuing to hold workshops and trainings while Palestinian cities were being bombed (Allen 2002; Jad 2007). However, in response to this massive violence there was also a massive resurgence of grassroots voluntary organizing. Largely youth-led networks of grassroots local and international volunteers – such as the Palestinian Medical Relief Committees and the International Solidarity Movement – once again mobilized to provide emergency assistance and other social services to areas cut off by checkpoints and military closures, while also serving a political advocacy role. This coincided with a massive increase in direct international humanitarian assistance from organizations like Médecins Sans Frontières, which also played a role in political advocacy internationally (Fassin and Rechtman 2009).

However, since the death of Yasser Arafat in 2004, the electoral victory of Hamas in 2006, and the subsequent US-backed Fateh takeover of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, splitting it from the Hamas-governed Gaza Strip, international humanitarian funding has taken on two different functions. In the West Bank, international aid has once again taken on a state-building and consolidation function, whereas in Gaza aid takes the form of crisis-driven, emergency programming. As can be illustrated in the chart below measuring humanitarian aid flows to Palestinian over the past decade, aid money peaked first in 2001 in response to the violence of the Second Intifada beginning in September of 2000, and then peaked again in 2009. The peak in 2009 was not a response to the attack on Gaza in 2008, but rather represents the \$650 million of state-building assistance pledged by the international community at the Paris Donors Conference in 2008, where then Prime Minister Salam Fayyad presented his Palestinian Reform and Development Plan. At the heart of this plan was intensified cooperation between the Palestinian Authority and Israel, which allowed for loosened restrictions on travel and building within Palestinian Authority controlled areas of the West Bank, facilitating renewed state-building efforts and infrastructure repair, funded by international donors. Thus, rather than responding to a humanitarian crises, current aid flows to Palestine are intended to stave off such crises by buttressing the legitimacy and authority of the West Bank government (Fig. 1).

The influx of humanitarian aid money to the Palestinian Authority during a time of relative calm reveals the utility of aid as a technique of governance and the function of humanitarian aid in the calculus of Israeli security. In Gaza, under Israeli blockade and bombardment, humanitarian assistance has been used to prevent a full-blown humanitarian crisis that might prompt the international community to pressure Israel to end its siege and attacks. In other words, humanitarian



**Fig. 1** International humanitarian aid flows to Palestine in US\$ millions (Source: GlobalHumanitarianAssistance.org)

aid in Gaza could be said to serve as a form of biopower, keeping the besieged population alive long enough to continue to besiege it. Meanwhile, humanitarian projects in the West Bank could be viewed as serving a depoliticizing governmental function. However, the effects of these projects are indeterminate and open to reappropriation by the Palestinian community organizations that carry them out and the young people who participate in them. The following section provides a critical analysis of trauma relief projects in Palestine, followed by accounts from Palestinian community workers and young people and how they understand trauma and resiliency as it relates to resistance against occupation.

#### 4 The Traumas of Trauma Relief

As the introduction to this chapter has noted, war and occupation, as forms of systematic political violence, seek not only to inflict physical destruction on a subject people but also their means of cultural and social reproduction, including systems of meaning, truth and value, and social bonds such as community solidarity and family cohesion. As this chapter has also sought to highlight, by taking the individual as the ultimate subject of therapeutic intervention, the discursive practices of Western psychiatry may actually serve to reinforce the negative effects of trauma, by depriving survivors of the cultural and political tools necessary to make sense of and resist the violence they endure. As examples below will show, trauma relief projects targeting Palestinian children and youth often obscure the context of occupation and resistance in their programming in an attempt to maintain political neutrality, and in so doing undermine the relevance of such programs to the lives of young people. By ignoring the collective nature of violence under occupation, and by assuming antisocial forms of resistance to occupation, trauma relief projects transform the violence of occupation into individual suffering that must be overcome through personal self-empowerment, transforming the political struggle

against occupation into a personal project of self (see Marshall 2014; Sousa and Marshall forthcoming).

The length that some humanitarian projects in Palestine go to in order to obscure the context of the violence they purport to assuage is evident in an external evaluation of a project run by Save the Children USA, and funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) in 2003. The project, part of Save the Children's Community Psychosocial Support Program, sought to implement the classroom-based intervention method of trauma relief as developed by the Boston Center for Trauma Psychology. The project targeted children and adolescents, and in some cases their adult caregivers, who had been exposed to the violence of the Second Intifada. The main aim of the project was to treat traumatic stress disorders such as excessive fear, depression, and aggression, as well as to "increase children's ability to solve problems, maintain pro-social attitudes, and sustain self-esteem as well as hope for the future" (Khamis et al. 2004, p. 4), all factors which have been shown to positively counteract the effects of traumatic stress. Significantly, the project strikes a balance between promoting individual healing through self-esteem, self-reliance, and self-control, and "pro-social" outcomes such as strengthening communication with friends and family. The use of schools, community organizations, and summer camps to treat young people also emphasizes the social nature of this psychosocial support project. Likewise, the project evaluation underscores the importance of children's hope, and their "trust in a positive future," as a factor in their ability to cope with trauma (as measured by the "Children's Hope Scale"). In addition, the authors assure the readers that, although all the impact assessment tools used in the evaluation use metrics developed in Western contexts, they address "universal issues" and, where necessary, have been modified to suit the local context. Yet, despite this purportedly context sensitive, collective, and community-based approach to trauma relief, Palestinians' collective experience of occupation and resistance is not acknowledged anywhere. In the 104-page project evaluation, the word occupation is never once used and is only alluded to a few times through ambiguous phrases such as "conflict situation," "background of violence and trauma," "violence," and once as the "Israel-Palestinian conflict."

Beyond the ethical questions raised by promoting "trust in a positive future" without acknowledging the context of asymmetrical warfare and decades long occupation, the unwillingness to address the causes and context of the violence alluded to by the project potentially undermines its aims. This shortcoming was recognized by the evaluation itself. As the authors note, although younger children showed improved behavior and mood after completing the program, adolescent girls also showed increased worry about "conflict situations and potential threat events" as well as "increased hyperactivity when faced with difficult circumstances" (Khamis et al. 2004, p. 75). Perhaps the adolescent girls who participated in the project found it difficult to reconcile the focus on self-improvement and optimism during a time of widespread collective suffering, leading to a sort of cognitive dissonance. This is the conclusion that the authors draw about the adolescent males who participated in the project. The evaluation notes that young men reported that the themes addressed in the project were "immature, boring,

repetitive, and had nothing to do with their ‘real’ lives” (Khamis et al. 2004, p. 76). Further, with regard to their future outlook, the young men “strongly voiced that they want to learn about leadership, and going to university, and how to travel, and how to find employment.” In other words, they want tools for overcoming the negative effects that occupation has on their lives – including feelings of humiliation and emasculation, blocked access to education, travel restrictions, and economic de-development – rather than self-esteem improvement exercises with no apparent relation to their present circumstances. The evaluation speculated that their views in part reflect the greater autonomy and independence that young Palestinian men have relative to young women and children: “they do not have the same level of protection against witnessing or being involved in the ongoing violence as their younger counterparts” and “they are in a position to observe the debilitating impact of the current socio-economic conditions within the West Bank and Gaza on their fathers, male mentors, and leadership” (ibid). Given the critical consciousness that these young men developed through their interaction with older men, the vision of a “potentially hopeful future,” the authors note, “must have appeared incongruent” (ibid). By not addressing the actual conditions of life under occupation and tools to critique and confront it, the effectiveness of the project remained limited.

The example provided above illustrates that even projects that ascribe to a psychosocial model of community-based intervention potentially reinforce the negative circumstances of occupation when they fail to acknowledge them directly. Although the project discussed above was carried out and funded by large international organizations, the basic model is often replicated by smaller Palestinian NGOs seeking funding for locally based trauma relief projects. A study conducted from 2010 to 2012 in the northern West Bank examining trauma relief efforts in Nablus and surrounding refugee camps found similar avoidance of the language of occupation and resistance (see Marshall 2013, 2014; Sousa and Marshall 2015). For example, in donor appeals and project funding applications, euphemisms such as “past and on-going violence” or “violence and trauma” are often used instead of direct reference to the context of occupation (Marshall 2013). In addition, such projects often seek to promote “productive” forms of “self-expression” that enhance “self-confidence,” showing an emphasis on individual healing and personal development rather than collective recovery, resilience, and resistance. Such discourse de-politicizes the occupation, transforming it into a set of personal developmental hurdles to be overcome through individual introspection, rather than as a systematic violence directed at Palestinian society requiring political solutions to address it (Marshall 2014). Rather than harnessing the potential strength of communities and families to endure and resist violence, children are instead encouraged to find their own individual voice and shape their own individual futures.

Although trauma relief projects are typically vague about the source of violence threatening Palestinian children, such projects are often quite explicit about the threat that Palestinian children themselves pose should their psychological traumas go untreated. For example, an internationally funded NGO in Palestine working

with “war affected children and youth” in refugee camps seeks to provide “alternatives to violence” through providing activities that allow children to “release frustration” thus improving their “physical and mental health” (Marshall 2014). Here, it is assumed that Palestinian children are the ones that need to learn alternatives to violence, although they are themselves directly targeted by the violence of occupation and have few alternatives to avoid it. Another organization also working with children in refugee camps similarly sought to use arts and creativity to “encourage tolerance and peaceful expression” as well as to “improve the psycho-social health of marginalized Palestinian children from areas that have suffered violence,” once again conflating trauma relief and security, while confusing the directionality of violence in Palestine.

The practices of colonial psychiatry as critiqued by Fanon echo in these examples. Palestinian children are assumed to be always already traumatized by an unnamed violence that if left untreated will produce a generation of potentially unruly, Palestinian youths, capable of launching another violent uprising. The solution is to equip them with the means to govern themselves through self-expression and personal development. In this way, such programs could be said to operate within the logic of governmentality, seeking the regulation of society through the terrain of the self. For example, Cruikshank (1999) argues that civil society organizations potentially play a role in reproducing neoliberal forms of governmentality through programs which promote self-empowerment. Through such programs, she argues, “the self is made into a terrain of political action,” specifically “a terrain that carries with it new political possibilities for self-government” (Cruikshank 1999, p. 5). As Cruikshank (1999, p. 91) contends, “Building self-esteem is a technology of citizenship and self-government for evaluating and acting upon ourselves so that the police, the guards and doctors do not have to.” In the case of Palestine, NGOs could be viewed as transforming the work of policing unruly Palestinian youths, already outsourced from the Israeli military to the Palestinian Authority, into a project of self-governance.

Viewed in this way, international NGOs and civil society organizations in Palestine relieve the occupier of its burden of managing the population, allowing the occupier to focus on the acquisition and control of physical territory. However, the strategy of population management through self-care is by no means straightforward and often produces unpredictable and contradictory results. Bondi (2005) explores this duality of neoliberal governmentality in her research on psychotherapeutic volunteer-sector counseling. She argues that “As a form of governmentality, neoliberalism works by installing a concept of the human subject as an autonomous, individualised, self-directing, decision-making agent at the heart of policymaking” (p. 499). Nevertheless, such “aspects of neoliberal subjectivity hold attractions for political activists because activism depends, at least to some extent, on belief in the existence of forms of subjectivity that enable people to make choices about their lives” (ibid). Moreover, the discursive practices of psychotherapeutic counseling “elude their textual representation in important ways” (Bondi 2005 p. 502) making room for more liberating understanding of these practices than textual deconstruction allows. Similarly, although project proposals, reports, and



evaluations of trauma relief programs may present a depoliticized understanding of trauma that focuses exclusively on individual healing, many Palestinian organizations may nevertheless see this work politically, as part of improving the capacity of communities to resist occupation. Likewise, the young participants in such programs may not see any contradiction between self-improvement and being part of a collective struggle against occupation (cross reference other Springer volume here). The following section will explore these views based on interviews and participant observation research with Palestinian youth workers and young people carried out in Balata Refugee Camp in the West Bank between 2010 and 2012 (see Marshall 2013, 2014).

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## 5 Resiliency as the Capacity to Resist

Despite the depoliticized language of the trauma relief projects cited above, the Palestinian professionals and volunteers who implement such projects often see their work in a much different light. Rather than merely treating the negative individual effects of violence, many community workers see psychosocial relief as contributing to the ability of their community to endure and resist occupation. As a volunteer psychosocial counselor and board member of a Balata-based community organization put it, her goals for the organization were both “personal as well as social and national”:

On one hand, I just want to help the people of my community, my neighbours, our children – because it gives me personal satisfaction to help people. But also, I see this work as pushing our society forward, creating a place for women and youth, with the goal of creating a strong nation that can resist occupation.

Here, the work of healing the physical and psychological scars of war is not about an individual project of self-empowerment, but an individual responsibility to the community, itself part of a wider democratic project of incorporating all members of the community in collective resistance to occupation. Likewise, another volunteer at a neighborhood association and youth space in Balata Camp reflected that he saw his role as “organizing the power of the members of society so that we aren’t just surviving, but thriving.” Here again the language of empowerment is used not as a personal project of self but as a collective mode of resistance to the dehumanizing effects of occupation. Rarely, but occasionally, this language even makes it into donor proposals. For example, in the proposal for a children’s blogging program run by a Nablus-based NGO, the organization recognizes that “healing trauma” is “impossible in the current circumstances” because “the conditions causing it are ongoing.” Instead, the project aims to “embolden the resiliency” of Palestinian children and strengthen their ability to “imagine alternatives.” Indeed, many Palestinian adults who work with children and youth see their role as providing spaces for young people to imagine and create alternative ways of overcoming occupation (*Geographies of Children and Young People*).

Just as volunteers at community centers in Balata camp see their work in the context of collective solidarity and resistance to occupation, so too do children enact forms of collective resilience through various activities and projects often organized under the heading of “trauma relief.” For example, in a photo and video narrative project run in partnership between an international NGO and a community center in Balata Camp, many children used the project to produce narratives that subvert their subject position as traumatized victims in need of external support. In one group of girls, the participants, though very young during the Second Intifada, could recall experiencing the violence of occupation first hand. Many had close family members, friends, and neighbors who had been killed, injured, or imprisoned during the fighting, and most had witnessed Israeli incursions and home invasions directly. Likewise, many of the girls came from families struggling with unemployment, financial hardship, and health issues. These issues came up during the photo and video narrative writing workshops. However, rather than narrating stories of individual hardship, most stories were told as stories of collective survival and resistance. For example, Dina, age 12, wrote:

I want to talk about my home Balata. I live here and I like this place because my school is here. I live in a good way. But I don't like when the army invades the camp and scares people. When I was in my school, the army came and I was very scared. I wasn't thinking about me, but I was thinking about my mother and my brother and sister. But I should be thinking about my country. My country. I love my country and I love my family. I am so proud to be from Balata. I love the children and my friends so much. I love the people. I must help them and think about them in a good way. I must talk to them in a good way. Finally, I salute the martyrs and the prisoners. We love you and remember you. I love you, oh Balata!

Here, Dina makes direct reference to the violence of occupation in the form of camp invasions. However, hers is not a narrative of personal suffering or trauma. Instead, she constantly evokes her love of the camp, and her duty toward family and country, which help her to overcome fear. Moreover, rather than singling out children and youth as objects of suffering, they are mentioned as one group of political actors among others in Palestine. Along with the martyrs and the prisoners, “the children” are amongst the people of the camp with whom there is a strong bond of love and respect. She accords children with a political agency beyond merely their ability to visibly suffer.

While Dina's narrative points to the collective strength of the camp in overcoming violence, other children took strength in analyzing that violence within a broader political and historical framework. As part of a research project on children's everyday lives in the camp organized through a local community center, a group of boys and girls aged 10–13 decided to use digital photography and video not to express their own personal fears or experiences with violence, but instead to explore the histories of political violence embedded in the very fabric of the camp. As Omar, one of the boys working on the project, explained: “In this video, we want to show the effects of the occupation and the difficulties it causes, by showing the destroyed houses and the traces of the occupation, like bullet holes and martyr

posters.” The video also included an interview with a man whose brother was killed and whose house had been destroyed during the intifada. Omar used the process of photographing and filming the traces of violence of the camp, and interviewing survivors of violence, in order to deepen his own understanding and analysis of the occupation (cf Weizman 2010). Further, he intended the video to be a “gift” to the camp, as part of a process of memorializing past violence and struggle. In this way, rather than being used as a medium for cathartic self-expression to release personal stress and emotion, or to tell a personal survival narrative, photos and videos instead are used to illustrate the political and historical context of violence. Likewise, rather than being used to evoke sympathy and intervention from international audiences, the photos and videos are instead intended for the people of the camp themselves, in an act of solidarity and commemoration.

However, not all narratives produced by the children in this research directly addressed the occupation or resistance. Others dealt with more personal matters and ambitions of great concern to Palestinian refugee children, including academic success. For example, Aisha, age 13, wrote that hers was a story of dreams for success in school, traveling, becoming an architect, engineer, or doctor, and pleasing her mother (Identities and Subjectivities). Like many Palestinian girls of her age, Aisha is ambitious and confident, in spite of personal and familial hardship. However, her personal ambitions, themselves rooted in religious and familial duty, are also inseparable from the politics of resistance to occupation. When asked how she could achieve her dreams, Aisha did not hesitate to answer: “We need to stop the occupation [. . .] my dream is to have a free life like other countries, but how can I have that in this camp, with this occupation?” In Aisha’s opinion, ending the occupation requires power, specifically “The power of the people, the camp and the country, we can achieve this together if God wills it.” Again we see strong references to community solidarity, resistance to occupation, and deep religious faith, all values cherished by liberation psychology yet noticeably absent in mainstream trauma relief discourse.

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## 6 Conclusion

By drawing upon and applying the principles of liberation psychology to the situation of Palestinian children, this chapter does not intend to imply that Latin American theories of trauma are necessarily better suited to Palestine than dominant Western models. Instead, this chapter has first of all sought to highlight and valorize the counter-geographies of subaltern knowledge production that connect disparate sites – from Algeria, to Brazil, El Salvador, and Palestine – in struggle against the dehumanizing violence of colonial subjugation. Secondly, this chapter has sought to highlight the ways in which Palestinians themselves have already developed and practice their own forms of liberation psychology, as attested to by the longstanding community projects such as the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme (GCMHP) as well as recent critical psychology literature emerging from Palestine (Makkawi 2013; Tawil 2013).

Principles of liberation psychology have been applied to understand the effects of and responses to political violence and repression in a variety of contexts, including Columbia (Hernández 2002), Northern Ireland (Moane 2003), Puerto Rico (Varas-Díaz and Serrano-García 2003), and the USA (Duran et al. 2008). However, this literature tends to focus almost exclusively on adults. This chapter has asked what it means to decolonize ideas of trauma and recovery in thinking about how political violence affects children as well. Psychology has long understood that children develop through active engagement with their environments (Bronfenbrenner and Evans 2000). It is because of this reliance on their environments for physical and psychological development that, as Martín-Baró (1996) points out, political violence can be so damaging. This is not because of children's unique innocence or vulnerability, but because children are forced to primarily "construct their identities and develop their lives within the network of these dehumanizing relations," and often have known no other reality (Martín-Baró 1996, p. 125). In this way, children's geographers, and other interdisciplinary researchers working with children and youth from an ecological perspective, can offer real insights into how children's experiences of trauma and violence are shaped through and by their physical, social, and cultural environments, and how children in turn shape these environments.

Within a framework of liberation, we must remember that children are not the passive victims of their environments, but rather, they too have political agency and social consciousness. Though the notion that children have agency may not be revolutionary within children's geography, recognizing children's capacity for active recovery and sensemaking poses a real challenge to one of the fundamental precepts of Western Psychology (and still much of the social science literature on children), namely, vulnerability. Although our innate vulnerability to suffering may potentially serve the basis for humanistic solidarities (Butler 2009), the assumption of children's complete vulnerability in war often comes at the expense of understanding their ability to cope with and actively resist political violence (Veronese et al. 2012). Applying the notions of political consciousness towards working with children within violent contexts is rarely done. While rare, scholarship considering the relationship between political involvement and well-being among youth facing political violence has found that political engagement actually fosters well-being (Barber 2008; Berk 1998; Farwell 2001; Qouta et al. 1995), perhaps due to the ways in which political activism encourages social connection and a sense of purpose, and provides a concrete avenue for action (Berk 1998).

As it moves away from the dehumanization of violence toward communal self-actualization through empathetic political consciousness, liberation psychology also necessarily relies upon aspects of healing that highlight hope and perseverance (Hernández 2002). These elements of emotional and tactical survival can be found in communities facing almost unbearable circumstances. This underlies the important idea that hope and adaptation are normal occurrences in the face of the adversity (Barber 2013). However, this is not the blind hope that comes from ignoring the reality of the situation. Nor does adaptation mean leaving unchallenged the systematic violence that perpetuates oppressive conditions.

Instead, hope comes from collective political consciousness and struggle motivated by ideals of justice and framed within a historical narrative. What might be the role of the helper in fostering resistant forms of hope and perseverance in the context of political violence? Scholars have proposed that, in a Freirean model, “helping” encounters are shaped by a spirit of solidarity and the notion of “accompaniment,” a particular type of relating understood as “togetherness,” which holds the purpose of working alongside people “to collectively understand and transform those life conditions that they experience as the most important ones” (Hernández 2002, p. 336; for more on the process of accompaniment within liberation psychology, see Comas-Díaz et al. 1998). Researchers working from a liberation psychology perspective might seek to highlight and engage with the work of these helpers in contexts of violence, whoever they might be, and in doing so can strive to become helpers in solidarity themselves.

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## Abstract

This chapter discusses the existential relations of self and place among war children. During World War II, more than 1.6 million British and Finnish children of various ages were sent away for safety from their homes either within their country or abroad. Forced displacement changed children's familial social and physical environment and created fractures in spatial belonging. War children's oral accounts on displacement describe a sense of placelessness, irrespective of the length or physical distance of their displacement. Typically, war children's autobiographical memories of their displacement are fragmented and temporally disoriented. However, recalled memories often include emotionally and bodily vivid accounts on particular events, places, smells, sounds, and kinesthetic information. Given the ambiguousness of displacement experience,

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the concept of spatial trauma is introduced here. Spatial trauma means that forced displacement has created drastic, bodily experienced and memorized, psychophysical experiences that continue to affect people's ties, sights, and practices of belonging later in their life. Empirically, this chapter is based on oral narrative interviews and written memories. It looks at how displacement experiences and partial effacements of memories affected war children's sense of belonging. What kinds of socio-spatial coping mechanisms were deployed during the displacement? How and what do former war children tell about their experiences, and how does spatial trauma practically manifest itself in their childhood memories and their overall life course? By tracing existential spatial practices, this chapter provides new insights into postwar and post-conflict literature on the experiences and aftercare of displaced people.

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**Keywords**

Forced displacement • Spatial trauma • War child • World War II • Great Britain and Finland

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## 1 Introduction

Spatial belonging is one of the key features defining human experience. The question of one's belonging becomes ambiguous when forced displacement, due to war or conflict, occurs. Daily practices of displaced people are often in fact part of wider transcultural tactics of belonging, and for example, transnational geopolitics becomes manifested in and through the body (Carter 2005; Puumala and Pehkonen 2010). Whereas contemporary psychosocial interventions and research focus much on the handling of violence-related memories and mental health of the forcibly displaced (e.g., Reed et al. 2011), less is known about the psychological effects of war on children and youth (e.g., Gabarino and Kostelny 1996; Goldstein et al. 1997; Dybdahl 2001, p. 1214; Peltonen and Punamäki 2010) and even less about the meaning of spatial fractures in the subjective life span (Kuusisto-Arponen 2008, 2009, 2011a, b). This chapter discusses the memories of displacement among Finnish and British war children and how these fragmented emotive-spatial experiences evolved into spatial trauma. It looks at how displacement experiences and partial effacements of memories affected war children's sense of belonging. What kinds of socio-spatial coping mechanisms were deployed during the displacement? How and what do former war children tell about their experiences, and how does spatial trauma practically manifest itself in their childhood memories and their overall life course? By tracing existential spatial practices, this chapter provides new insights into postwar and post-conflict literature on the experiences and aftercare of displaced people.

Empirically, the chapter is based on 32 narrative interviews with Finnish war children, conducted by the researcher between 2005 and 2007, and on written accounts of British evacuee children's experiences. The book by Schweitzer

et al. (1990), *Goodnight children everywhere: Memories of evacuation in World War II*, includes 80 stories, of which 63 are stories by war children evacuated from London. Out of these, 61 children were evacuated within the country and two were sent abroad. Some of the children sent to the countryside traveled with their mothers, and sometimes, entire school classes were also evacuated. British overseas evacuation experiences are analysed also from the findings of Michael Fethney's (1990/2000) book "The Absurd and Brave" which is based on survey of 90 former war children. All empirical accounts have been collected several decades after the war, and therefore, it is adults or now elderly people who tell about their experiences. The Finnish research data is presented anonymously: only the war child's gender is stated in the citations. The British recollections give the name and the age of the person, as in Schweitzer et al. (1990). Narrative analysis was applied to the entire data (Wiles et al. 2005). Particular attention was paid to how these former war children describe their childhood evacuation, what they remember, what emotions and bodily memories they report, and when and where the fragmentation of memories occurred. Experiences of children evacuated within their home country were compared to the experiences of those sent abroad.

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## 2 The Evacuation of British and Finnish Children in World War II

In recent decades, a good deal of research has been conducted on memories of World War II. The focus has changed from war history to collection of oral histories and experiential narrations. This growing interest is worldwide (e.g., Young 1993; Edkins 2003; Till 2005; Till and Kuusisto-Arponen 2015). Several societal developments have led to this interest: the end of the Cold War and other geopolitical shifts in the world order, the release of classified files in several national and military archives, and the generation of the war veterans passing away. Simultaneously, the experiences of children and youth during the war have attracted more attention. In contemporary research, these former war children are not seen as silent victims of war, who should not recall their wartime experiences, but as active subjects in their own life: then and now. This was not the case in the immediate aftermath of the war, when many experiential and autobiographical memories were suppressed by official geopolitical discourses of postwar societies all over Europe. This social and political silencing equally applied to former war children, now in their 70s and 80s, who after the war were marginalized through two different practices. First, children and youngsters were rarely asked by adults how they had experienced their wartime displacement. Second, these war children often assumed that taking up these issues was not a good idea in war-torn families. Thus, it is only quite recently that nonfiction, memory anthologies, and autobiographies on children's war experiences have been published (e.g., Goodman 2005; Näre et al. 2007). In addition, peer groups and local associations for World War II children have been founded both in Great Britain and Finland during the 1990s

(Evacuee Reunion Association in Great Britain and Sotalapset-Krigsbarn in Finland).

The term war child (*kriegskind*) was established after World War I when many Austrian and German children were sent to neighboring countries due to poor living conditions and lack of food in their home regions. Also, during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), children were sent to France, Great Britain, Belgium, the Soviet Union, and Mexico (Legarreta 1984). In this chapter, *war child* refers both to British children who, mostly without their parents, were sent either to the countryside or abroad and to Finnish unaccompanied children who were sent to other Nordic countries during World War II. During the Winter War (1939–1940) and the Continuation War (1941–1944) in Finland, about 70,000–80,000 children were sent to Sweden, Norway, and Denmark (Kavén 1994/2003). These war children were relocated to foster families or children’s homes. In the United Kingdom, 1.5 million British children were sent to the countryside. In addition, the British Government established the Children’s Overseas Reception Board (CORB), which organized 2600 child evacuees to be sent to Commonwealth countries (such as New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, and Canada) and the United States. This scheme operated for only a few months during the summer and fall of 1940 and was called off because *SS City of Benares*, one of the evacuation vessels, sank when torpedoed by a U-boat (Fethney 1990/2000). After the CORB scheme was canceled, most of the British overseas evacuations were privately organized, and an estimated 17,000 British children were sent abroad (Parsons 1998, pp. 169–171).

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### 3 Self and Sense of Placelessness

In order to understand war children’s experiences of evacuation in relation to senses of place and self, it is helpful to draw on humanist approaches in geography. Humanist geographers became interested in the experiential nature of place in the early 1970s (Relph 1976; Tuan 1977). They focused on the existential relations between self and place: what constitutes spatial experience, how people are affected by place, and how place evolves in people’s socio-material relations. In 1976, the geographer Edward Relph wrote the seminal book on *Place and Placelessness*. For Relph (1976, p. 43), “the essence of place lies in the largely unselfconscious intentionality that defines places as profound centres of human existence.” He also stated that “people are their place and a place is its people” (Relph 1976, p. 34). Relph was worried about the assumed disappearance of the distinctiveness of places. He argued that the making of standardized landscapes destroys meaningful places and in the end leads to *placelessness*, i.e., *place’s inability to create senses of belonging and emotional attachment* (cf. Casey 2001: thin and thick place). Relph’s strong arguments need to be understood in the context of early critiques of globalization and its effects on localities. In contemporary geographical understandings, place is understood as processual and constantly evolving, but these qualities are not considered a threat to the existence of particularity or intimate relations of the self and the spatial (e.g., Cresswell 2004; Massey 2005).

According to Mathis Stock (2000), the essence of place is constructed in a subjective relationship between individuals and a place. "The word subjective signifies the relevance to subjects and not to the particular individual: hence the sense of place may be the same for many people" (Stock 2000, p. 616). Experiences of place are personal, but by nature, the sense of place is intersubjective (Kuusisto-Arponen 2009, p. 549). Sense of place and spatial belonging are created through several mobilities: mobility of people, geographical thought, and imaginative landscapes (Ashworth and Graham 2005). Further, Kevin Hetherington (1997) argues that places are relational and existing in similitude. They should be understood as in the process of being placed in relation to, rather than just being there (Hetherington 1997, p. 188). It is in this constant process of becoming that the sense of place is formed and lived.

Whereas there are many visually and narratively communicable aspects of sense of place, some are indeed nonrepresentational, unreflected, and intuitive. Studying relational and constantly changing places is nothing new in geography, but there is still a need to conceptualize and empirically examine the semi-unconscious and nonnarrative elements of bodily experiences of place (Kuusisto-Arponen 2011a, b). The embodied experiences of particular places are personal, but even those have intersubjective meanings that easily evolve into communal identity politics. These affective dimensions and relationships of people and places are crucial in understanding the significance of displacement experiences and the essence of diasporic spaces and practices (e.g., Brah 1996). Thus, placelessness in contemporary geographical thought is not seen as a threat to the existence of the particularity of a place, nor does it mean that a global sense of place cannot exist (on misinterpretations of Relph's book, see Seamon and Sowers 2008). Instead, placelessness is indicative of the existential fractures in the relationship of self and place (Kuusisto-Arponen 2014).

Placelessness is one dimension of experiential place. It is created in conscious and unselfconscious lived experiences of place (Relph 1976, pp. 65–67). Already Relph (1976, pp. 38–39) pointed out that people's rootedness is born out of significant places that evoke affection and care. In the case of forced displacement, this *dwelling place of being* is profoundly changed and a sense of placelessness appears (Relph 1976, p. 39). Individuals interpret these fractures in spatial belonging as rootlessness. Mindy Fullilove (2004) calls this forceful separation of people and places root shock (Fullilove 1996, 2004). Topological narrations of not belonging are, however, only one aspect of the fractured sense of place (cf. Relph 1976). It is argued here that several non-topographic phenomena and practices exist which clarify the significance of placelessness experiences in people's life course and explain the vagueness of narrated war-related memories.

War children experienced several placings (both physical and ontological) during wartime. Leaving the familial environment led to multiple personal negotiations where sites and ties of belonging were sought and newly defined. Several studies have concluded that in a traumatic situation, such as forced displacement or war, children's psychophysical defense mechanisms and coping strategies are activated (e.g., Fernando and Ferrari 2013). These affect children's abilities to

recall and to remember traumatic events and might even lead to distortion of autobiographical memories throughout their later life (Meesters et al. 2000). On these occasions, forced displacement has resulted in a *spatial trauma* (Kuusisto-Arponen 2008). It is argued here that the denial of the existential emotive-spatial relations among war children simultaneously led to losing part of their selfhood and suppressed their place identity from fully developing. This, however, occurred only partially consciously. The contextual and psychological conditions of the development of spatial trauma are discussed in the following section.

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## 4 Spatial Trauma: Multidisciplinary Approach

The fractures in the sense of belonging form the key element in understanding and analyzing the long-lasting effects of forced displacement. It has been concluded that spatial trauma sometimes develops especially in those situations where forced displacement has created drastic, often bodily experienced and memorized, psychophysical experiences (Kuusisto-Arponen 2008). Spatial trauma is considered a conceptual tool, not a clinical indicator, characterized by the prolonged sense of placelessness, difficulties in oral expressions of childhood displacement experiences, and blurred memories of traveling, but also by extremely accurate and vivid memories of specific emotional events and places. Moreover, the concept of spatial trauma should not be associated with negative connotations of persistent traumatization but as a way to elaborate altered dynamics in the existential interconnectedness of self, place, and memory due to forced displacement. Trauma in this context refers to fractures in relating self and place, which have started to define the autobiographical memories, lived experience, and attitudes toward future spatial belongings. Thus, spatial trauma as a concept enables studying of the cultural meanings, contextual nuances, and possible universal features of emotive-spatial tactics employed in the situation of forced displacement.

In Humanistic and Social Sciences, memories and mnemonic practices are often studied without connecting these to human physiology or memory systems and functions. In other words, Oral History and Memory Studies scholars seem to focus exclusively on the narrated outcome, i.e., people's verbal and written recollections of their experiences. This is characteristic of the disciplinary traditions mentioned above and their epistemologies, but it is argued here that more attention also needs to be paid to the memory structures and functions which actually define how the narrative autobiographical data is recalled and which memories become voluntarily available and which are left in silence or appear involuntarily. This chapter combines the approach of humanistic geography and memory studies with (neuro) psychological and trauma research. The purpose is to explain why some typical practices of narrating displacement memories occur and to create new and novel ideas in explaining the long-term effects of forced displacement on individuals and communities. The multidisciplinary approach enables one to simultaneously analyze how the spatial trauma develops, how it is reflected in and through

autobiographical memories, as well as how and with what consequences the coping strategies are applied.

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## 5 Displacement as Traumatic Event in Childhood

Typical for all trauma memories is that they are overgeneralized and not integrated into autobiographical memory on the same emotional level as other important events (Schönfeld et al. 2007). Traumatic memories are often narratively fragmented and mix up temporal order (e.g., Bremner 2008; Dalgleish et al. 2008). The American psychiatrist Lenore Terr has studied the traumatic memories of children and young people and especially what happens to these memories in adulthood (e.g., Terr 1994; Terr et al. 1997). Her interest has been on the mechanisms that prevent people from recalling some difficult memories of their childhood. Terr argues that children often retrieve place and, for example, clothing from the traumatic event (Terr 1994/1997, p. 72). Places are not only remembered as descriptions of physical sites but as visualized and bodily experienced sensations. Depending on the type of childhood trauma, different characteristics appear (Terr 2003, pp. 327–331). The first type of childhood trauma means single-blow traumas, the second type refers to multiple or long-standing traumas, and the third type is a crossover between the first two. In the case of war children, the crossover type of trauma occurs. Typically, these crossover trauma children have lost something permanently: for example, their parent(s), home, or health. They experience a single-blow trauma, resulting in long-standing effects in their later life or even adulthood. The type three children are exposed to prolonged sadness and pain, from which they try to escape, for example, through numbing or significant character changes. Children suffering such a traumatic event can still have full, detailed and etched-in memories, but they may be partial and fragmented, and mistiming and misperceptions may also occur. Children try to work through the memories by searching for and giving explanations to why the event happened, how it could have been reverted, etc. (Terr 2003, pp. 331–332).

It has been noted that refugee children, for instance, suffer from crossover trauma and have a high rate of depression in their adulthood (Terr 2003, p. 332, see also Yule 2002). Similarly, research on Finnish war children reports that some have high levels of depression over 60 years after World War II. Further, this traumatic experience in early childhood is associated with significant alterations in reproductive and marital traits among former war children (Pesonen et al. 2007, 2008). The research data on British war children's psychosocial well-being is more ambivalent in this matter. Some studies show that child evacuees were more likely to have insecure attachment styles than the control group (Foster et al. 2003). On the other hand, Tennant et al. (1982), as well as Birtchnell and Kennard (1984), reported no differences in mental health or no raised levels of depression. These clinical studies, however, show that long-term social and mental risk factors of childhood displacement are possible. More importantly, it has been recently acknowledged that traumatic experiences of displacement continue to affect

autobiographical memory and ways children and adults narrate their childhood experiences (Howe et al. 2004; Peltonen and Punamäki 2010, pp. 97–98).

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## 6 Self, Memory, and Socio-Material Context: Connections and Disjunctions

In order to understand spatial trauma implicated in narrative and situational sensational memories, there still are some intriguing questions to be answered. What happens to memory structures when a traumatic event is experienced in childhood? How are self, place, and memory psychologically connected? The entire twentieth century is said to be “the golden era” of (neuro)psychological memory research, even though several still unresolved questions of the functional roles between hippocampal and medial prefrontal cortex and related limbic structures exist (Moscovitch et al. 2005). Several researchers have concluded that the hippocampus (and related limbic structures) has a crucial function in the recalling of experiences (e.g., Moscovitch et al. 2005; Bremner 2008). It connects and integrates different types of memory functions. The hippocampus is the site for episodic (autobiographical) and spatial memory. Spatial memory consists of detailed spatial representations of experienced environments, topographic elements, and elements comprising the environment, such as houses, streets, trees, etc. Episodic memory includes particular autobiographical episodes and events in the individual’s life. It contains information both on the content of the experience and the spatial and temporal context (Moscovitch et al. 2005, pp. 39–40). Bremner and Narayan (1998) have concluded that extreme stress and trauma during childhood can have lasting effects on hippocampal-based learning and memory (also Bremner 2008). Studies also indicate that post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) during childhood affects mental health and memories in adulthood. Only recent brain imaging techniques have verified that both traumatic stress and PTSD change hippocampal functions and can result in the fragmentation of the episodic memories of childhood and the appearance of intrusive memories, flashbacks, and pathological emotions (Bremner 2008). This partly explains the effacement and fragmentation of the autobiographical memories of war children.

These clinical and neurological studies of traumatized children support the findings of several oral history interviews of former war children, which report similar experiences (Kuusisto-Arponen 2009, 2011b). Here the concept of spatial trauma is not a clinical indicator, nor is the aim of this chapter to make any neurological claims. However, strong evidence on psychological research verifies that experiences described by the former war children in their oral narrations actually illustrate the typical changes in recalling memories and the challenges for traumatized children’s emotive-spatial attachment. This conclusion is not enough to explain why certain coping strategies were applied and what effects the forced displacement had on children’s later life. In order to understand the wider picture of wartime forced displacement experiences, social and contextual factors need to be taken into account. Along with Nelson and Fivush (2004, p. 488), it is

argued here that “autobiographical memory depends partly on neurological developments necessary for the development of memory and, specifically, episodic memory, but that autobiographical memory emerges from interactive development across social, cognitive and communicative domains to serve the functional goals.” Thus, examination of the existential fractions in relations between self, place, and memory requires a socio-materially and historically contextual approach.

Several contextual factors created the conditions for the development of spatial trauma among British and Finnish war children. *First*, these children were sent away from their familial social and cultural environment, many traveling unaccompanied without siblings and familial peers. *Second*, the decision to be sent away was often done without hearing children’s own opinions. Even though mass evacuations of children were necessary in the bombed British cities and the war-torn Finland under the constant threat of Soviet invasion, it was the children who had to bear the reality of being forcefully uprooted several times (leaving home, adjusting to foster homes, returning back home). *Third*, the age of war children varied from about 3 to 12 years. The smaller the children, the less developed their language skills were. Experiences of forced displacement were felt bodily and psychologically, but these were not easily narrated. This partial or total lack of narrative and recalling skills, in addition to the traumatic experience of being forcibly displaced, had an enormous impact on children’s autobiographical memories. Nelson and Fivush (2004, pp. 486–489) conclude that autobiographical memory develops gradually across the preschool years. Only through autobiographical memory are times, events, and experiences connected to one another. This requires narrative comprehension and other cognitive skills that many war children did not yet possess because of their young age. The lack of narrated memories does not mean that the experiences would have disappeared, quite the contrary. Forced displacement was mainly experienced bodily and was recorded to situationally accessible memories (SAMs), which include sensory and physiological aspects of experiences (on SAM, see Brewin et al. 1996). Bodily sensations, sounds, smells, and sights are typical SAMs, but these aspects of memories are not voluntarily recalled or easily changed (Brewin et al. 1996). Thus, they often also function as cues when involuntary recalling of traumatic memories or events occurs. *Fourth*, and this applies exclusively to the Finnish case, war children were sent to other Nordic countries where the Finnish language was not spoken. Finnish children ended up in a completely new linguistic environment where they could not at first understand their caretakers and vice versa. Later, when children learned Swedish, for example, they often (partly or totally) forgot their native language. When they returned home, they again found themselves having to readjust to a different linguistic environment.

Based on the wide documentation of geographical and psychological research literature, it is safe to suggest that spatial trauma is a valid concept in analyzing the ties and sights of belonging among the war children. Spatial trauma develops through the traumatic event of being forcibly displaced. This existential event becomes implicated in varying narrative and emotive-spatial experiences. In the next section, this chapter defines three types of socio-spatial coping strategies illustrating *spatial trauma* among the Finnish and British war children. Empirical data was approached with two analytical questions: How are fragmentations of



memory, partial effacement, and involuntary recalling described? How and with what consequences do coping strategies appear in the narratives?

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## 7 Evacuated British Children on the Home Front

According to oral history data, war children can be divided into those who *reject the place*, those who *conform to the place*, and those who have a *dispersed* sense of spatiality. Interestingly, no matter which attitude and coping strategy the child developed, some sense of placelessness seemed to occur. Rather than seeing placelessness only as one chronological developmental phase in the process of losing and resettling into socio-materiality of the network of meaningful places, it is more important to follow the wider dynamics of remembering forced displacement during the childhood years and illustrate how the sense of belonging was formed in the daily life encounters during the war and the years following it.

The British children evacuated on the home front developed a sense of placelessness even though the alterations in their cultural and social environment were not nearly as formative as in the case of the British and Finnish children who were sent abroad. The home front evacuees spoke the same language as their host families, but at the beginning, the dialectal differences sometimes caused awkward or funny incidents. Several, especially younger, children traveled with their mothers, and school children were often evacuated together with some of their schoolmates or other peers. British home front evacuees sustained some sense of familial social ties not only because of such peer relations but also because the siblings were not usually separated from one another but lived in the same host family. In addition, the unaccompanied children were often placed in families with other evacuees.

Many evacuated children recall playing and socializing with other evacuees in the area. In Schweitzer et al. (1990), children from London described rare occasions when they were able to visit their homes and their parents could sometimes visit them in their evacuation families. Letters and drawings were also sent home and responses were eagerly expected. This way it was possible to maintain some sense of closeness to home. The upholding of social ties made a great difference for children's sense of self and belonging. This did not, however, prevent home front children from experiencing homesickness and placelessness.

In their written recollections, most British child evacuees framed their evacuation experience tightly against the familial environment at home. They also compared the different places they lived in during the war to one another: home was always described with a much more loving and caring attitude than the evacuation place. Directly war-related memories seem to have had a significant role among the British child evacuees on the home front. Home in the city environment turned out to be quite a different emotional and physical scene from the one before the war. Often the nightly airstrikes and air-raid sirens, bombing of the cities, seeing people dying or dead, and the constant feeling of fear became emblematic childhood experiences. Yet, the home city remained the primary site of socio-spatial belonging and center of being. Evacuation challenged the dynamics of belonging but even

the safer rural environment did not resolve children's anxiety. It changed its form: children were often worried about the well-being of their parents or other relatives left behind in the cities. Paradoxically, this had to do with the fact that social connections were sustained and information among the evacuees was exchanged.

The British children evacuated within the country can be divided into two categories that also reflect their different narrative and spatial strategies: (1) children traveling with adult family members (or another larger group of familial peers) and (2) unaccompanied child evacuees traveling alone or with a sibling or siblings. *The children in the first category who traveled* with a parent or familial peers recalled several single events of their evacuation time in a manner typical of traumatic experience, but they also narrated their life history very differently from the unaccompanied children. This has to do with the social component in the development of autobiographical memories that Nelson and Fivush (2004) also emphasize. Adult family members or peers often discussed and narrated the evacuation experiences and daily encounters together. This made it possible to connect some of the fragmented memories and experiences in a narrative form. Social ties did not just create a sense of familiarity but functioned as an essential explanatory structure for the children living in the midst of emotive-spatial confusion. Evacuated children had their own subjective experiences of being displaced, but the sense of placelessness was shared with others, which eased the coping. Thus, many children in this category became *rejectors of place*. This meant that social ties to home defined the emotive-spatial orientation to evacuation places. Whereas some emotional events and sights might have been recalled, these did not evolve into existential experiences, nor did these ease the sense of placelessness because children knew or at least intuitively assumed that the evacuation was a temporary phase in their life and returning home was possible sooner rather than later. In a way, children denied the entry of places into their selfhood in order to protect themselves and keep memories of home as their primary site for belonging.

Children rarely understood the physical distance of their travel. This is one of the intriguing features in the sense of placelessness. The relative distance between the familiar and the strange seemed infinite; even traveling with a parent did not change this existential experience of being forcibly displaced to some unfamiliar place far away. This is well described in 9-year-old Allan Burnett's recollection of traveling by train to a nearby rural town. Allan, as many other child evacuees, paints a detailed picture of the sites of leaving and arriving, but does not remember the actual journey and routes.

The journey seemed endless. It took all day, although it was only a little over hundred miles. [...] At our destination we were herded, hundreds of us, into a school. [...] St. Pancras (the train station in London where the journey had started from) seemed so distant, millennia away in time and space. (Allan Burnett, nine years old, Schweitzer et al. 1990, pp. 36–37)

The strategy to reject place becomes even more evident in the recollections of returning back home. Children describe that their homecoming to a bombed and

ruined city was simultaneously sad and happy, but they easily fitted back to the normal rhythms of life. In their later life, they felt more nostalgic than anything else toward the places they had seen and the people they had met when evacuated during the war. As one boy evacuated with his schoolmates recalls:

I was pleased to be home with my own family at last, I could never forget those I had lived with, those I had played with, the places I had seen and the things I had learned during my five long years of evacuation. (Tony Fawcett in Schweitzer et al. 1990, p. 74)

*The second category of home front evacuees* traveled alone or with a sibling or siblings. In their narratives, several typical features of traumatic experiences are notable. These children often felt lonely, unwanted, and sad at having been sent away from home. They recalled details of the houses they lived in during the evacuation and the kind of clothing they wore in particular situations. These recollections were extremely vivid and detailed, with sensational and other kinesthetic memories. Moreover, the memories of the unaccompanied children seem to include a series of single events with no explanatory or connecting narrativization. They also described in less detail lived memories of daily life. They often felt a sense of placelessness or in-betweenness and, for example, recalled denial and the suppression of emotions. As one girl traveling with her little brother explained:

[In the train station and rushing to the evacuation train] I wasn't sad or unhappy – in fact I was quite looking forward to the adventure. Someone must have done a wonderful job of brainwashing me. I didn't cry then, but now, fifty years later, I do shed tears when I cast my mind back and remember. [...] We didn't know, and neither did any of the parents, where we were going. My mother and father had drummed it into me that my brother and I must not be separated. (Anita Truman, 8 years old, Schweitzer et al. 1990, p. 230)

The quote above illustrates how the oldest child often carried the psychological weight of taking care of not just oneself but, more importantly, the younger siblings and was therefore continuously worried about failing the parents' demands that the siblings should stay in the same family. Anita managed to do this but only by grabbing her brother's arm and not letting go when the evacuees were being allocated to host families. Similar memories frequently occur in the unaccompanied children's emotive-spatial descriptions.

Unaccompanied children developed two coping strategies to tackle placelessness. Some of them rejected the place and tried to exclusively keep up the ties to and memories of home. This was much more difficult without adult support and shared narrations of other evacuees. Interestingly, some home front unaccompanied children developed a coping strategy, what is here denoted as *dispersed sense of spatiality*. This meant that they simultaneously aimed at retaining the lived memories of home and former social and spatial ties while also adjusting to the prevailing situation. This strategy often led to multiple experiences of socio-spatial confusion, which on some occasions continued to

affect war children's life in the years after the evacuation. In the following quote, Pola, 5 years old at the time of the evacuation, describes her sense of insecurity and feelings of strangeness that unexpectedly surfaced every now and then.

A certain amount of valuable ground was lost in my emotional development, as result of being evacuated, affecting my confidence and limiting my ability to interact normally with others. Many years after the war, when away from home too long, or in strange surroundings, I was still subject to strange feelings of insecurity and disorientation, as if I were in no man's land, in limbo, feeling to which I had become so accustomed. In fact, a day's outing or even a visit to friends was sometimes enough to spark off these strange feelings of unreality and confusion. (Pola Haward, 5 years old, Schweitzer et al. 1990, p. 86)

Pola's experience is an excellent example of bodily and situational memories that cannot be actively recalled but surface involuntary (Brewin et al. 1996). These kinds of intrusive and inexplicable memories of forced displacement have affected some war children's later life and orientation to other meaningful places, sites, and events – in other words spatial trauma continued to define their lived sense of belonging. In general, British home front evacuees were forced to cope with placelessness mostly during the war years, but their homecoming restored their existential sense of belonging. The duration of spatial trauma was short-lived, and the fractures between self and place did not end up as formative as in the case of the war children sent abroad.

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## 8 British and Finnish War Children Abroad

The narratives of the British and Finnish war children who were sent abroad during World War II illustrate socio-spatial confusion, fragmented autobiographical memories, embodied emotions, and sensational memories of places and events that cannot be connected to a certain time or a definite spatial context. The sense of placelessness comes across even more intensively than in the narratives of the home front evacuees. War children traveled abroad alone, and the adult caretakers on those evacuation journeys did not know the children they were escorting. Thus, the familiar social ties were left behind and often fractured right from the start. These children also landed into completely new social and cultural contexts, which radically changed their daily practices and rhythm of life. Whereas on the home front the majority of war children rejected the place and tried not to lay down roots in evacuation places, and only a small minority described a dispersed sense of spatiality, the case of war children abroad is quite different. Among these children, all three socio-spatial coping strategies were identified from their accounts. According to the empirical data of this research, a minority of war children developed opposite coping strategies in order to be able to come to terms with the vague sense of placelessness in their daily life. Along with the *rejectors of place*, a small group of children became what is here called *conformers to place*.

*The children who conformed to place* created tight and durable relationships with the new socio-spatial context. In a way, these children rejected part of their

existential spatiality because they began to deny their past ties of belonging. Conformers adjusted to or rather absorbed themselves into the host society, family, and spatial context. After the war, the conformers in particular wished to stay in their host families and countries. Even when sent back to their country of origin, several former war children returned to their countries of evacuation as adults. There are no exact statistics of the Finnish children who remained in their evacuation countries. It is estimated that 7000 to 15,000 children stayed in Sweden and about 400 in Denmark directly after the war (Korppi-Tommola 2008, p. 449; Kavén 1994/2003). About 1300 of these children were formally adopted in Sweden and 200 in Denmark, but many private foster agreements were also made and some children returned after having first been sent back to Finland (Korppi-Tommola 2008). In the empirical data of this research, a few statements on staying or returning were found. A couple of Finnish interviewees claimed that they had wished to stay in Sweden, but this was not possible. One Finnish child recalls that her host family had tried to hide her for 2 weeks after the arrival of the letter asking for all Finnish children to be returned home. After those 2 weeks, however, she and her host family jointly decided that she should travel home. In one case of two siblings, the Swedish host family adopted the brother while the biological parents wanted the younger sister to be sent back home to Finland. This meant that the siblings were separated for the rest of their childhood.

There are no statistics available about adoptions of British war children. Fethney (1990/2000, p. 263) argues that some British children never returned from overseas, and in some occasions after the war, the biological parents even moved to the Commonwealth host country in order to be with their children. In addition, several British war children returned to their host country later in their life. These decisions illustrate how effectively some war children adopted the context of their host families and societies. In the accounts of these war children, the most confusing moments were lived not during the years of evacuation but after returning to their home countries. This belated sense of placelessness resulted in plans for return and often their realization.

The great majority of overseas child evacuees tried to hold on and nurture emotional ties to home and at the same time adjust to their new environment. This *dispersed spatiality* was exercised through several practices: through language differences (dialectal differences or instances of switching back to their native language in difficult emotional situations), drawings, stories of home, playing, etc. (Kuusisto-Arponen 2011b). Past and present spatialities were mixed but neither was fully lived. This created confusion in daily encounters because children did not know what was expected of them, how much they could speak about their homesickness, and how much they could trust and emotionally invest in the relationships with the new adults and peers. Among the Finnish war children, the challenge was even greater at the beginning because the common language was lacking. Former war children recalled the occurrence of several psychological symptoms in the early weeks and months of evacuation, such as bed-wetting and muting. Gradually, when the children and adults started to understand one another, their life began to normalize and a new daily rhythm was found. Yet, the language barrier continued

to affect the life of Finnish war children: if any letters were sent or received between the host and biological family, the adults could not understand them and children's translating skills were insufficient. British overseas evacuees shared the same language and so at least had a possibility to lean on adult host parents for explanations, even if the confusion of being in a completely new environment was overwhelming.

Interestingly, most children with a dispersed sense of place claim very directly that their experiences and time spent abroad were a mainly positive period in their lives. They also insist that they coped well considering the overall social and political seriousness of the situation. These "yes, I had a happy childhood" and "everything went fine" arguments bring to mind overgeneralized memories (see Schönfeld et al. 2007). Sometimes, especially in the Finnish interview data, oral narrations and bodily reactions were not in line. For example, laughter and sarcasm were used as a coping mechanism when describing emotionally difficult moments. Thus, implicitly, war children's recollections also unveil very different tones behind gratitude discourse.

After the war was over and children returned home, many of them still continued to feel a certain sense of placelessness which was not easily put into words, but somehow started to define their lives. They missed their evacuation families but had to be loyal to their biological parents, as one of the Finnish interviewees argued. Many visited their host families during summer and school holidays, and some visited their former evacuation places when adults.

Fethney (1990/2000, p. 264) talks about divided loyalties among the war children. It is argued here that this divided loyalty is one implication of spatial trauma that continued to affect some war children's later life. These traces and fractions in spatial belonging are still witnessed even several decades after the war. As the Manchester-born Geraldine Robb argues: "I feel always that my childhood roots are in New Zealand, and always have a great longing there" (Geraldine Robb, 11 years old, Fethney 1990/2000, p. 265). In a similar manner, one Finnish war child recalls her brother's placelessness that troubled him to the end of his life.

He [brother] died in Denmark. He went back there when he was a grown-up. Well, he said that he felt that he had been abandoned twice when he was a child. For the first time when he left Finland for Denmark and had no apprehension of why it was happening. And for the second time when returning to Finland. The only place where he felt good was the journey between these two places.

It seems that the ties and sights of belonging became an extremely complicated matter for many children who tried to cope with forced displacement by dispersing their sense of place. At the time of the war, they did not have the necessary linguistic and social skills nor enough support from the adult caretakers – and they had experienced a traumatic event of being forcibly displaced. This created social, cultural, and psychological conditions for spatial trauma, and for some former war children, this trauma still continues.

## 9 Conclusions

Spatial trauma is simultaneously a transcultural, contextual, and subjective phenomenon. War childhood leaves marks on people. Oral history recollections illustrate that war children felt a sense of placelessness not only during the evacuation but sometimes also several years and decades afterward. Spatial trauma refers to drastic psychophysical experiences resulting from forced displacement which the individual tries to, but cannot quite, come to terms with. As illustrated in this chapter, several war children developed spatial trauma. The nationally contextual factors of World War II and several displacements and adjustment attempts created conditions for spatial trauma among the war children. It is concluded here that the depth and the duration of spatial trauma depended at least on four factors: (1) support from familial co-travelers and the chance to uphold some social relations, (2) the child's own abilities to develop emotive-spatial coping strategies, (3) the child's age and social and linguistic skills, and (4) possible dysfunctions in neuro-psychological memory structures due to the traumatic event of being forcibly displaced. While the latter is only indicated in the psychological literature cited in this chapter, it is credibly present in many oral accounts used in this research.

The multidisciplinary approach employed in this chapter creates new understanding of war children's fragmented and partly effaced autobiographical memories. This directs attention to long-standing effects of forced displacement among children. Utilizing the concept of trauma enabled the nuanced analysis of the dynamics of remembering, forgetting, and involuntary recalling. Further, analysis of war children's experiences clearly verifies that the existential ties between self and place do matter not only in people's personal life course but have implications on the sociocultural and communal level. It is therefore suggested here that more attention should urgently be paid to emotive-spatial memories and coping strategies used by people in contemporary forced displacement. This, however, needs to be done by acknowledging the particularities of autobiographical memories of forcibly displaced people. Rather than looking for coherent narratives, research and psychological interventions should focus on the fragments and disjunctions, which seem to be ontologically and epistemologically crucial indicators of spatial trauma.

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# War Children, Evacuations, and State Politics in Europe During WWII: A Local Case of Sick Finnish War Children in Sweden

# 18

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## Abstract

In Europe during World War II, evacuations of children without parents from war zones and war-affected areas were common. Evacuations required administration and extensive logistics, and financial resources had to be obtained. Governments and government agencies were involved but their political aims and motivations differed. The following chapter examines the evacuation of Finnish war children to Sweden during World War II. It focuses on the sick Finnish war children whose evacuation and medical care in Sweden became a concern of the Swedish state. Based on an analysis of medical records, the construction of children and the state's role in the evacuations is discussed. A

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historical perspective on evacuations of war children during WWII offers an opportunity to reflect on the current situation of unaccompanied refugee children and their arrival to European countries today.

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**Keywords**

Europe, child evacuation in • Finnish war children, evacuation of • France, child evacuation in • Germany, child evacuation in • Great Britain, child evacuation in • Soviet Union, child evacuation in • War child • Europe, evacuation in • Finnish war children • France, evacuation in • Germany, evacuation in • Great Britain, evacuation in • Soviet Union, evacuation in • World War Two • Child evacuation in Europe

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## 1 Introduction

In Europe during World War II, many thousands of children were evacuated from war zones and other areas targeted by aerial bombing. Evacuations required administration and extensive logistics, and financial resources had to be obtained. Governments and government agencies were involved in evacuations, but to varying degrees, and their political aims and motivations differed. The following chapter takes as its starting point the evacuations of Finnish war children to Sweden during World War II. It focuses on the sick Finnish war children whose evacuation and medical care in Sweden became a concern of the Swedish state. Based on an analysis of medical records, a local case of how such care was manifested is presented. The construction of children in the material is discussed in terms of what it says about evacuations and, more specifically, what it says about the state's role in such efforts.

Evacuations of children without parents from war zones to more safe places, either within the country of origin or outside, are rare in today's Europe, while the arrival of unaccompanied refugee children from war-stricken countries, seeking asylum on their own without their parents and families, is more common. In the present chapter, a historical perspective on unaccompanied refugee children is introduced, showing how the image of evacuated war children as vulnerable and exposed and in need of protection and help, which was propagated during WWII, corresponds to the present construction of unaccompanied refugee children. However, while the children evacuated in WWII were *moved by* adults, the unaccompanied refugee children of today are *on the move* themselves, challenging these long-established constructions of war children as fragile and vulnerable objects.

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## 2 Evacuation of Finnish War Children

In 1939 Finland was attacked by the Soviet Union with Helsinki and a number of other Finnish towns struck by aerial bombing. The Finnish Government turned to Sweden for military support. This request was denied by the Swedish Government,

with reference to its politics of neutrality. Immediately after the official request had been turned down, a newly established Swedish humanitarian aid movement – “for the sake of Finland” – approached the Finnish Social Democratic Minister for Social Affairs K.A. Fagerholm, with an offer to evacuate Finnish children to Sweden. After some considerations the minister accepted this offer, and a Finnish commission was established to organize and monitor the evacuation scheme (Carlquist 1971).

In December 1939, the transportation of children from Finland to Sweden by train, boat, or airplane began, and by 1945 approximately 70,000 children had been evacuated. Arriving in Sweden, most of the children were placed in foster families, whereas institutional placement was less common. The majority of children returned to Finland, both during and after the war, except for approximately 10,000 who remained in Sweden permanently (Kavén 1994/2003; 2012; Parsons 2010).

The children’s experiences of the evacuations have been documented in both research and biographies, for example, by Kavén (1994/2003), Korppi-Tommola (2008), Kuusisto-Arponen (2015), Nehlin and Söderlind (2014), Ortmark Almgren (2003), and Vastamäki (2009). A great number of children endured considerable hardships of not only long journeys, but also having to adjust to a new culture and language. Many war children suffered as a result of these evacuations. Nevertheless, others adjusted quickly to everyday life in Sweden and created important bonds with their foster families.

Finland was involved in three different wars between 1930 and 1945: the Winter War against the Soviet Union, 1939–1940; the Continuation War, also against the Soviet Union but now in a military pact with Germany, 1941–1944; and finally the Lapland War against former military partner, Germany, 1944–1945. During the different phases of Finland’s wars, the conditions for how the evacuations were carried out changed. It was not a smooth flow of Finnish children being evacuated, it was rather evacuations of a larger scale that were carried out at certain critical points, such as for instance in 1944 when the war with the Soviet intensified.

Swedish nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) were the driving force and they were heavily involved in the administration and implementation of the evacuations, with the support of public donations including the unpaid work of the families who volunteered to take care of a Finnish war child. The Swedish Government was involved indirectly, providing financial support to the NGOs. Generally, during the whole period and through the different phases of the three wars Finland was involved in, the transportation of children oscillated between being a state and private commitment. This ambiguity affected the organization and issues of responsibility regarding the Finnish war children’s stay in Sweden (Nehlin and Söderlind 2014). However, for the care and treatment of *sick* Finnish war children, the Swedish Government was clearly involved, and a financial support was guaranteed. The Swedish national health services were mobilized for the care of roughly 12,000 sick Finnish war children of all ages and doctors and nurses at Swedish hospitals and sanatoria were engaged in the treatment of the evacuated sick children (Kaven 2012; Rossi 2008).

The state authorities in both countries and the involved NGOs motivated the evacuation of Finnish war children as a humanitarian act. Finnish children were saved from the terror of war, it was argued, and the Finnish authorities requested the parents' consent to the evacuation, even though a number of factors limited their possibilities to reject the offer. The Finnish parents' role in the evacuation was complicated for a number of reasons. When Finnish men were drafted and sent to the war front, women were left with the sole responsibility for their families. Finnish women were also called to contribute on the home front (Junila 2012). In such socially and economically stressful situations, many parents had no choice but to allow the evacuation of their children.

The evacuation of Finnish war children drew on humanitarian rhetoric based on ideas that children were vulnerable and victims of their environments, and that they needed special protection. In this period, such ideas were prevalent in philanthropic child-saving organizations, with the Swedish Save the Children (Nehlin 2009) as a clear example. These ideas also influenced governmental efforts to develop social welfare and health services for all children (Andresen et al. 2011; Hendrick 1994).

The role of the Finnish Government was clear: it approved of the evacuation scheme and commissioned a special committee to oversee and administer the evacuation from the Finnish side. The role of the Swedish state was less explicit. With reference to political issues (neutrality politics), the Swedish state chose to assume a more subtle role. The NGO was the driving force behind the Swedish organization and administration of the evacuation schemes (Carlquist 1971). However, as noted above, in the case of sick Finnish war children, the role of the Swedish state was very clear: it guaranteed financial support to both the current health care services and temporary solutions specifically formed for sick Finnish war children. From this perspective, the evacuation of these children was a state matter. Before a more in-depth analysis of a local case of such state-supported medical care of evacuated sick children is presented, the Nordic experience will be situated in a broader European context. In Europe during WWII, a large number of evacuation schemes were carried out. The involvement of government and state authorities varied and a range of factors influenced how the evacuations were carried out.

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### 3 Child Evacuations in Europe During WWII

Civilian evacuation was a common measure for saving lives during WWII. In the 1920s and 1930s, politicians and civil servants of different European nationalities had planned for evacuations in the case of international military conflict and aerial bombardment. Against the backdrop of the development of new modern military technology and the experiences from WWI, it was common knowledge that civilians were high-risk victims in a war scenario. In the book *"For Their Own Good": Civilian Evacuations in Germany and France, 1939–1945* (2010), Julia Torrie highlights how such planned evacuation schemes were linked to government population politics:

In many ways, evacuations are huge social welfare programs, for governments must convince people to leave their homes, transfer them to safer areas, and look after their financial, physical, and psychological well-being. Those involved in the evacuations dislike them, because they banish unhappy city-dwellers to rural backwaters, provoke homesickness and unease, and turn one segment of the population into the unwelcome long-term “guests” of another. Most unsettlingly, evacuations divide families, sending children and mothers away to the countryside while other family members stay home to work [...]. Evacuations balance delicately on the borders between state paternalism, coercion, and public tolerance. (Torrie 2010, p. 1)

In Europe during WWII, millions of children were forced to move from one place to another, both across national borders and within nation-states, as the result either of a planned evacuation based on a perceived danger or of a direct military conflict. Children were transported on trains and boats or, more slowly, on simple carriages or by foot, either with their parents in broader civilian evacuation schemes or in special evacuations designed for children. Many unaccompanied European children, physically rescued from aerial bombardment and military combat, also underwent extreme hardships during the transports as well as when they had arrived at new places. They were pressured to adapt to unknown and sometimes harsh circumstances. Many children were lost or displaced, and families were split up (Zhara 2011).

Child evacuations in four different European countries will be presented below, with two aspects specifically highlighted: the involvement of government and state authorities in the evacuation and how the evacuation schemes reflected specific notions of children.

### 3.1 Great Britain

When the first intensive aerial bombing of London and other English cities began in September 1939, the British Government had already drawn up plans for a larger evacuation of the population. A specific plan for children had been worked out in cooperation with educational authorities. School teachers were hired to accompany school classes to the reception areas and were expected to stay in the vicinity. During WWII, hundreds of thousands of English schoolchildren were evacuated from the larger cities to the countryside. For example, in the first evacuation wave, roughly 735,000 schoolchildren and 435,000 mothers with younger children were sent to the countryside. At the end of the war, more than 1.5 million children had been evacuated from London. A total of 19,000 British children were also evacuated overseas in a scheme organized by the British Government (Parsons 1998, 2010; Welshman 1998, 2010).

In comparison to other countries in Europe, the British evacuation schemes were the most extensive. The British Government was a driving force in the planning and the logistics required a high degree of involvement by local government authorities. The issue of parents’ consent to the evacuation of their children was discussed by the involved authorities; the parents were expected to resist and it was important to

convince them of the advantages. Schoolteachers' involvement in the evacuation had to be stressed, as did the plans for schoolchildren to continue their education. The connection to the education authorities implied the involvement of School Medical Service officers, who served by performing medical examinations on the evacuated children, which were deemed important. Many of the evacuated children were from the poor areas of cities. The encounter between working-class children from the inner city and families in the countryside has been described as problematic, due to sociocultural clashes (Macnicol 1986; Parsons 2010).

The English evacuations were also evaluated by child experts trained in psychology and psychiatry. A well-known example is *The Cambridge Evacuation Survey: A Wartime Study in Social Welfare and Education* (1941) by the psychoanalyst Susan Isaacs, who together with colleagues, among others John Bowlby, studied the evacuated children's reactions to the situation and the separation from their parents. Anna Freud, together with Dorothy Burlingham, also discussed the effects of war on children's psychological health in the report *War and Children* (1941). The English child experts concluded that children were mentally better off with their parents, even in a threatening environment, than being taken away from them (Shapira 2013; Welshman 1998).

Such interest in children's psychological health and the impact of being separated from their mothers was special to the English case. The illumination of separation between parents and children, and the psychological effects on children being away from their parents (read "mothers"), was not as apparent in other countries. A nearby example is Scotland and the particular circumstances of the evacuations of Scottish children and mothers from Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Dundee (Stewart and Welshman 2006). The evacuations were planned before WWII and set into practice at its outbreak. The Scottish Government had a clear role, with the departments of both education and health involved at various stages of the planning. In September 1939, approximately 176,000 Scottish people were evacuated, among whom around 60,000 were unaccompanied schoolchildren. The Scottish experience of evacuations and the effects on the postwar organization of social welfare are similar to the English case, but the similarities stop there. In Scotland, the psychological effects on children were discussed, but the discussion was linked to the need for adequate child guidance clinics for the educational system. The disclosure of working-class children's environment, marked by material and social poverty including overcrowded schools, led to a focus on structural problems. The social problems made visible through the evacuations were discussed and followed up in official and professional contexts. In this way, the evacuations in Scotland became an integrated part of social reform work and the building of a Scottish welfare state (Stewart and Welshman 2006).

Richard Titmuss, a renowned British researcher in social welfare, argued that the evacuation led to a greater awareness of the negative influence of poverty on children's health. The experiences of child evacuations actually triggered the development of child social welfare for all children (Titmuss 1950). Titmuss's research has since then been contested by researchers calling for more complex ways of understanding the relationship between evacuation experiences and the



development of a welfare state (Stewart and Welshman 2006). But there is no doubt that the British government played a significant role in the evacuation schemes during the war; the British child evacuations were a state matter.

The evacuations drew on notions of children that were linked to a contemporary child-saving ideology. Children were defined as innocent and vulnerable and in need of special protection. Such child-saving ideology permeated the building of a welfare state, and in England, the dilemma of separating children from their mothers became a special issue, linking the children's well-being to family relations, while in Scotland the structural dimensions of child welfare came into focus.

## 3.2 France

In France, evacuations of children were carried out and shaped by the specific circumstances of being occupied by Nazi Germany. France was attacked in 1939, occupied in 1940, and was then under the rule of the Vichy Government until 1945. Like in many other European countries, the French Government had been prepared for future international conflicts, including aerial bombing. During the interwar years, the French Government had made plans for the evacuation of civilians in the case of international conflict. But when the war broke out in 1939, the French Government was faced with an unexpected situation: the German forces invaded a larger area of eastern France than the government had anticipated. When the battlefield drew closer, many civilians escaped under chaotic and very difficult circumstances. Moreover, the occupation led to the western part of France becoming the target of Allied bombings and consequently, the evacuation schemes from the 1930s were no longer applicable (Dodd 2009).

The French evacuations have not been surveyed or examined in research to the same extent as, for instance, the British evacuations have been. But it seems as if the French evacuations of children lasted short periods, and the children were usually sent to places in the proximity of family and home (Torrie 2010).

The first French child evacuations began in 1939, with thousands of children sent away from the areas attacked by German troops. In the spring of 1940, another wave of evacuations took place and subsequently "again and again" throughout the war and the German occupation. The French evacuations of children were not seen as an extraordinary situation by most French working-class families, who were more exposed to evacuations, living near the industrial targets of Allied bombings. Moreover, child evacuations as a phenomenon coincided with a French cultural and social tradition of sending working-class children to summer camps (*colonies de vacances*) (Downs 2002). Evacuations did not seem to challenge family traditions or norms regarding child-parent relations (Dodd 2009; Downs 2005).

In the French case, the state was involved, but it was a state apparatus developed under occupation of the German Nazi regime. The French local authorities' appeals to parents to send their children to safe places in the country were not always obeyed. Such resistance was not necessarily linked to a fear of sending children away from the family; objections seem rather to have been related to the chaotic

situation of war and previous negative experiences of fleeing from enemy forces (Torrie 2010).

Compared to Great Britain, French child evacuations received little attention in later historical research on France during the war, and the French welfare policy development has not been particularly influenced by the evacuation experiences. Laura Lee Downs (2005) argues that the French approach to child evacuation, and the link to the cultural tradition of sending children to camps during the summer, reflects a certain view of children: “Only by leaving home and learning to cope in the company of others, does the child become both self-sufficient and a properly social being” (Downs 2005, p. 58). A notion of children’s need of independence and autonomy is reflected in the French evacuations, including a trust in collective education as a self-evident part of child socialization.

### 3.3 Germany

The evacuation of civilians was planned for in Nazi-ruled Germany, but such plans were politically “sensitive” for the government. A call for evacuations would risk sending a message of danger to the population, which contradicted ideological images of the victorious German people. Evacuations were nonetheless carried out, but not under the auspices of the state. German children were evacuated from the areas at risk of British bombing in the early 1940s in the so-called *Kinderland-verschikung* (Stargardt 2005; Torrie 2010), in which the Nazi Government had handed over the evacuation logistics to the Hitler Youth organization. Like France, Germany had a long tradition of sending working-class children to summer camps outside the bigger cities. The evacuations drew on such experiences when German children were moved to institutions or foster families in parts of Germany that were deemed safe. Parents were pressured to send their children away, while also being informed that there was no cause for concern regarding the war front.

However, the German evacuations of children were explicitly racialized and discriminatory. In the selection of evacuee children, Jewish and Romani children, children with handicaps, and other groups which were defined as not worthy by the Nazi regime were deselected (Parsons 2010; Stargardt 2005). The *Kinderland-verschikung* were carried out as a political project: this was a means to raise loyal Nazi citizens. Many of the evacuated children were brought to institutions where they were raised under specific Nazi ideology. The notion of children in the German evacuations was as the nation’s children and in this sense the future of the nation (Torrie 2010; Stargardt 2005).

A very different kind of evacuation of children took place a few years before the outbreak of WWII, with transports of Jewish children through Germany. The *Kindertransporte* of approximately 18,000 unaccompanied Jewish children from Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Austria to England was organized to save children from the threats of the German Nazi politics (Kaplan 1998; Zhara 2011). The efforts to save Jewish children were planned and carried out by NGOs but the *Kindertransporte* was also marked by strong parent involvement. The decision to

save their children by sending them away was made against the backdrop of the ongoing limiting of Jewish people's rights as citizens. Also, an increasing number of acts of terror and destruction had been directed at Jewish communities.

Governments were involved in the negotiations of travel and residence permits, but not as a responsible actor in the planning and implementation. Children were seen as vulnerable and definitely at risk, and the transports were motivated as a way of saving them from the increasingly dangerous situation. The *Kindertransporte* was an effect of the Nazi politics and was stopped by the Nazi Government at the start of WWII.

### 3.4 The Soviet Union

In the Soviet Union of the 1930s, the industrialization of cities and the collectivization of agriculture were based on large-scale population displacements. In the book *To the Tashkent Station: Evacuation and Survival in the Soviet Union at War* (2009), Rebecca Manley describes how the population politics became increasingly severe under Stalin, for instance the forbidding of individuals to move freely within the country without official authorization. In this particular historical context, evacuation appeared as a new political term with new meanings attached to it. The term *evacuee* replaced *refugee* and Manley argues that it "reflected a radical rethinking of the premise underpinning state policy. In effect, it constituted a rejection of the very principle of choice" (Manley 2009, p. 8). The evacuation activities increased during WWII. In 1941 Soviet officials estimated that roughly ten million people had been evacuated, a number that continued to rise during the war. The administration and registration of the evacuees were poor, and the lists of people arriving at the reception areas were incomplete. Families were split up, and family members disappeared (Manley 2009).

Children accounted for approximately 40% of the evacuees and unaccompanied children and orphans were particularly exposed. The Soviet state had ambitions to provide food and clothing to orphans, but the poor material conditions and the extensive corruption hindered such measures. Many orphans remained in the meager environments of children's homes, while others set off and lived in the streets (Manley 2009).

Generally, Stalin's evacuation politics during WWII did not take children into specific consideration. When evacuees were selected, their ability to contribute to the frontline was the main criteria; only able-bodied adults remained on the frontline to defend the border and the nation. Families were split up because the "primary allegiance of Soviet citizens was owed not to their families but to the state" (Manley 2009, p. 20).

To conclude, evacuations of children in Europe during WWII were carried out under very different circumstances and were motivated differently in different settings, depending on nation-state context, political ruling, social and cultural norms, and the ongoing war. In most cases NGOs were involved, while the role of the state in the evacuations differed, as did the degree of coercion in the

implementation of evacuation plans. The rhetorical motivations were manifold, complex, and contradictory, but a recurrent underlying theme was that evacuation was defined as a humanitarian endeavor to rescue children from the effects of war and aerial bombing. And children who were evacuated were construed as vulnerable figures who needed to be saved from the dangers of war.

Against this backdrop, the evacuation of Finnish war children was carried out, defined as a voluntary humanitarian project. In Sweden the main driving force were NGOs, while in Finland the evacuation schemes were governed by the state. However, the Swedish Government was explicitly involved in the evacuation scheme of *sick* Finnish war children.

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#### 4 Sick Finnish Children: A Local Case

In November 1942 one of the main Swedish newspapers (*Dagens Nyheter*) published an article with the headline: “One million for the medical care of Finnish war children.” The article refers to the Swedish Government’s decision to contribute financially to the transport and medical care of sick Finnish war children. Two months later, in January 1943, the same newspaper contained another headline: “Finnish war children moved to Swedish hospitals.” This second article is about a Swedish pediatrician’s journey to Finland to take part in the selection process of sick child patients to be transported to Sweden for hospital care. The newspaper articles offer an example of the involvement of the Swedish Government in the organization and implementation of evacuating sick Finnish children during WWII. It was a commitment that also underpinned and strengthened the role of medical doctors (pediatricians) as child experts in the evacuation activities.

Historically, during the interwar years, Sweden had experienced an intensive development of child health care and school health services that led to an improvement of child population health and decrease of child mortality. This was part of a broader, more general development in the Nordic countries that marked the first part of the twentieth century, with the Nordic child’s health and body having become the objects of intensive medical surveillance through various health care projects (Andresen et al. 2011; Weiner 1995). The Swedish National Medical Board (Swe. *Medicinalstyrelsen*) was an important player in various political and administrative initiatives to decrease infectious diseases, like tuberculosis, and to counter further outbreaks through both direct and preventive measures such as improved nutrition and sanitary conditions for poor families with many children (Lundquist 1963). Underpinned by the political visions of the social democratic government, the goal was to combat infant mortality as well as to improve the general health of all children. Medical health services were ascribed specific importance in the political struggle to create a welfare state and social justice and were launched as an important alternative to the more stigmatized municipal social child welfare and poor relief (Berge 2007). A number of leading pediatricians had been involved with governmental authorities and influential politicians at both national and local levels,

and a strong link had been created between medical experts, state authorities, and politicians in the Swedish Government.

Thus, in the light of the success with decreasing mortality rates among newborns and improved child health more generally, Swedish medical experts had acquired an important position in the eye of both the state and the public and consequently assigned important roles in the evacuation of sick Finnish war children.

Many sick Finnish children's lives could be saved, but this came at a price. The sick war children had very little to say with regard to their situation. The analysis of the local case shows how the transport and movement of sick children were regarded as something obvious and self-evident, in line with the child health politics of the growing welfare state and its mission to save children from physical threats and bodily sickness. The children were perceived as "child objects" rather than "child subjects" (Martin 2011). The children's own agency and voices were seldom recognized, even though a close reading will demonstrate that there were exceptions.

#### 4.1 Survey and Analysis of Medical Records

The analysis of medical records of sick Finnish war children allows a more detailed discussion of how children were perceived by the experts. The medical records are drawn from a small institution, called Gerstorp, in Linköping, a town in southern Sweden. Gerstorp was established by a local humanitarian aid movement and was intended for the care of children who had been at the hospital but were not fit to return to their foster family in Sweden or to their family in Finland. The activities at Gerstorp were funded by state authorities, covering the costs of salaries, facilities, medicines, etc. The children's medical records were kept there until it closed, after which they were stored in the county archives.

The medical records were based on the traditional format used by the pediatric clinic of the nearest municipal hospital. Formally, they were meant to accompany the children as they moved between different institutions within the county and sometimes even to institutions in other counties. However, a number of records are incomplete in this respect. The Gerstorp archive consists of a total of 105 medical records, which form the basis for the following analysis.

Approaching historical sources like medical case records is ethically challenging in several ways. These records contain important information on children's lived experiences from their early years, information that is ethically sensitive since it relates to an individual's personal history and therefore his or her integrity. Many of the child patients may still be alive, and the events and situations in which they were involved can be sensitive for various reasons. In order to protect the child patients' personal identity and integrity, the material has been approached carefully, and measures have been taken according to the demands of Swedish law, specifically the *Ethical Review of Research Involving Humans* (the Ethical Review Act). The research procedure in this study has been approved by the Regional Ethical Review Board, Linköping University (Reg. no. 2012/385-31). The children's identities have

been carefully protected. All names and personal data have been removed from the material, pseudonyms have been used, and personal information that is not relevant to the analysis has been changed.

Firstly, a survey was carried out, in which the children's recorded age, gender, birth town, family situation, sickness and disease, time of arrival in Sweden, and time of departure, including the number of movements and placements at different institutions during their stay in Sweden, were noted. The records concern 68 boys and 37 girls who were transported from Finland to Sweden and back during the war and a few years after, 1944–1948. Ages vary from date of birth in 1931–1945, which means that the youngest child cared for was around 1 year old and the oldest around 12–13 years old.

All children were stricken by diseases such as tuberculosis (in different forms), diphtheria, measles, otitis, whooping cough, smallpox, etc. Many had multiple infections at the same time. A number of children were also physically disabled, in some cases due to TB infections in their limbs. The survey shows that these children were moved several times between different institutions due to their evolving history of disease. Having four to five placements, in some cases more, during their stay in Sweden was not uncommon.

In the second step of the analysis, a closer reading was carried out, focusing on the construction of children as a specific category. The records consisted generally of extensive medical information and data, with numerous descriptions of the children's bodies and the various signs of sickness and pathological conditions. Michel Foucault's account of the medical gaze and the "new turn given to the medical language" in the nineteenth century in *The Birth of the Clinic* (1973/1994, p. 169) is very apt in this context. The children's bodily symptoms and signs were reported in great detail, based on both visual and tactile examinations, with images supporting the descriptions. Aspects such as body temperature, eating patterns, and weight recur frequently, while social or emotional dimensions of the children's situation and condition are very rarely noted.

The medical gaze constructed a medical child, an image that with a few exceptions dominated the records. A second construction of children, albeit less extensive, was the "transported child." The medical child and the transported child were both positioned as a "child object." A third construction of children was present in the records but less obvious: it was an image of children as "beings" in their own right. Such instances of "child subjects" were rare, however.

## 4.2 The Medical Child

Medical data filled the main part of the records, with detailed and recurrent information about bodily signs and measurements. Visual information on the child's body – such as marks on the skin; the form of bones and the skeleton; signs of redness and swelling in the ears, nose, mouth, or throat; measured weight and height of the body; and measured temperature with careful recording of fever

peaks – was common. Visual information based on X-ray examination and pictures of the interior of the body was also very common. The results of measurements and observations, including marks on the body, were sometimes noted on a daily basis by nurses and caring staff, while comments and notes by the doctors were taken on a monthly basis.

Another recurring pattern in the records are notes on the children's daily intake of food and time spent resting as well as the amount of time spent out of bed, sometimes stressing the importance of being outside. Doctors set the medical schemes and regulations for each patient, and nurses and volunteers were responsible for seeing that these were followed. Developments or setbacks were then noted in the record. A way to account for positive change was to reference the everyday, allegedly normal status to convey the absence of disease. For instance: "Body fat and musculature ordinary," "Sinus and diaphragm no rem.," "In quite decent shape," "Gen. cond. good, beginning to gain weight again, afebrile," "Good teeth," etc. Then, after a time, depending on examinations and symptoms, a doctor in charge would issue new instructions for a further treatment plan.

The language is seemingly concise, with short sentences in passive form without a subject, only predicate and direct object. Determining the child's age or gender solely by reading the notes was difficult and even more so for a reader unfamiliar with Finnish names. "He" and "she" were rarely used, and the main subject was sickness or disease or, more correctly, detected signs and symptoms. For example, sentences like the following recurred again and again: "Currently has a large patch of eczema o l. foot," "Throat: quite large tonsils," and "X-ray: (image 4) Still a highly significant concentration in and around l. hilus. Also r. hilus concentrated." The medical language was concrete in descriptions of the children's bodily signs and symptoms. Metaphorical comparisons were common in descriptions of, for instance, enlarged glands: "*Bean-sized* adenitis on throat on r" or "Spf. lymph n: one compact, less than *hazelnut-sized* under each angulus" (author's italics). "Spanish nuts" and "peas" were other examples of metaphors used to describe the size of a visual symptom.

Another linguistic characteristic of these medical records was the amount of information based on the X-ray images and the visual signs of TB. This was referred to as "*stråkighet*," which can be translated as "densification," and the scope of these symptoms was either described or actually visualized in the records. An X-ray image of a girl's lungs, aged 7 years, was commented on as follows:

*X-ray: Sinus and diaphr. no rem. L. hilus still concentrated but is smaller than prev. images and has more dense structure. At adjacent C III under hilus pole a dense spot. The concentration in the previous image that had appeared at the upper hilus pole has greatly regenerated. Densification still remains in a penny-sized area at the upper hilus pole.*

Based on the X-ray image, detailed information were added to the record. The expressions "dense structure" and "dense spot" refer to important visible signs of TB, which were carefully examined to detect changes, a decrease being a sign of recovery. Descriptions like the above, full of abbreviations referring to the signs

and results of the medical examinations and often supplemented with reproductions of the X-ray images, appear frequently in the records. As mentioned, the language in these medical records is reminiscent of Foucault's account of a clinical language that slowly began to appear in the nineteenth-century medical literature and material. In his book *The Birth of the Clinic* (1973/1994), Foucault argues that it was a question of "opening words to a certain qualitative, ever more concrete, more individualized, more modelled refinement," including plenty of "metaphors rather than measurements," "simple operations and sensorial qualities," and "comparisons to everyday and normal," designed to introduce "language into that penumbra where the gaze is bereft of words" (p. 169).

In the Gerstorp records, the Finnish war children's *bodies* were center stage and their individual ailments and changing conditions were carefully recorded in a language of visual representations and images in ways which created the dominant construction of a medical child.

### 4.3 The Transported Child

The construction of "the transported child" is clearly present in all records through the careful notations of the movement and transportation of children back and forth between Finland and Sweden, with dutiful information about the dates of arrival and return. The transported child was not connected to medical problems. Transportation and movements were depicted as a technical matter similar to the notes on the daily intake of food and medicine and with a few exceptions rarely described as a threat to the child's health. In some cases, when the transportation concerned a return back to Finland, the transport was discouraged by the doctor, with reference to the child's poor medical condition. The transfer back to Finland was either articulated as a recommendation or rejected through suggestions to postpone it. For instance: "If the child's home environment is good, then a return is recommended" or "May return to Finland. Dispensary contr. in 4 mths." Sometimes the doctor made an issue of the return, such as in the following case of a small boy aged 4 years, who according to the doctor's notes was "*efterbliven*" (retarded). The following note can be found in the record:

7/8 -47. The boy is after all retarded. His TB is in remission. Here, one could consider return to Finland, if it is certain that the home is good, or if he can receive care at a convalescent home. The best, however, would be for him to be allowed to stay at Gerstorp.  
20/8 -47. To Finland.

Doctors do in some cases clearly reject the idea of sending the child back, due to ongoing infections or sickness, while in other cases the recommendation is conditional: "If the child's home environment is good, then a return is recommended." But often, despite the recommendation, the final notes in the records are most often the following: "Return to Finland (*date*)."



**Table 1** Timeline of different placements in Sweden

<i>Time</i>	Sep 1944	Oct 1945	Nov 1945	June 1946	July 1947	Dec 1947
<i>Place</i>	Born in Finland	Arrived in Sweden, quarantine, 2 weeks	Child sanatorium, Linköping	Åhagen, convalescent home, Linköping	Gerstorp, Linköping	Back to Finland

The construction of the “transported child” is noteworthy in the way the transports and movements are consistently presented as obvious and self-evident measures, with no hesitation or discussion about the child’s relation to, or dependence on, his or her social environment. The child’s relation to parents, families, or staff is never brought up; only the dates of leaving or arrival, and medical condition of the child in the light of returning to Finland.

As mentioned above, children were moved four to five times during their stay in Sweden, irrespective of age. The timeline below (Table 1) shows the transfers of a 3-year-old Finnish boy. This boy was born in October 1944 and was moved to Sweden a year later, arriving in October 1945. Though the war was over by then, in the case of sick Finnish war children, the activities continued until 1947, when the Swedish Government decided to withdraw budget support.

To begin with (which is not noted in the record), we can assume that he stayed in a quarantined institutional arrangement for a couple of weeks before being placed at a sanatorium for children in Linköping, which entailed various visits, including examinations at a Linköping hospital. This boy, aged 18 months, then stayed at a convalescent home for a year before being moved to the Gerstorp children’s home in July 1947, where he stayed another 6 months before being transferred back to Finland.

The decision to place a child, in this case a very young child, in the hospital because of a disease or sickness, was not unusual during this period in either Finland or Sweden. In Finland, tuberculosis among children was common, and in the fight against it, so-called cottage hospitals had been initiated for children without parents (Laurent 2012). Sending children to hospitals for longer periods of time was regarded as an important step in the fight against disease and child mortality in the Nordic countries during this period.

Against the backdrop of the Nordic state’s ongoing fight against poverty and ill health, the placement of children in institutions and hospitals was self-evident and accepted by the involved parties on a formal level. Previous research has shown that parents resisted demands to place their children in institutions, but that this was carried out as silent resistance (Areschoug 2000). The norm was to obediently follow the advice of experts, far from today’s demands on both children and adults to actively participate in their own care.

In the scientific community, articles problematizing the placement of children in institutions had begun being published. In 1946, the same year the little Finnish boy was being moved between different institutions in Sweden, American psychiatrists René Spitz and Katherine Wolf published an article in the journal *The*

*Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* (Spitz and Wolf 1946). The article described a case of so-called anaclitic depression in a hospitalized child, which was discussed in relation to the separation from parents and a familiar environment. Similar approaches to children and institutions were found in the work of child psychiatrist John Bowlby, who wrote about the situation of orphans in postwar Europe and its social and psychological consequences (Bowlby 1951).

In the Nordic context, such an approach was not present at the time of the war, and in Sweden Bowlby's argument against institutional care in the postwar years was rejected by Swedish child experts (Zetterqvist Nelson 2009). The frequent arrivals and departures of sick Finnish war children to and from Swedish hospitals and institutions for sick children were presented in a taken-for-granted way, without any kind of problematization (Foucault 1988; see also Bacchi 2012). Placing a sick child in a hospital or institution for a longer period was a taken-for-granted measure by both Finnish and Swedish medical experts at the time. In the particular case of Finnish war children, the transnational dimension of evacuation across nation-state borders did not seem to change the underlying assumption held by those involved: transport to Sweden was in the sick child's best interest. The medical discourse created a sick child object, whose bodily condition demanded medical interventions and measures, while social and relational dimensions were more or less absent in the notations and descriptions of the sick war children. However, there were some exceptions to this.

#### 4.4 An Agential Child Subject

Children's individual actions and responses to social interaction were seldom recorded in the medical documents. Commonly, the medical discourse ruled out information about children's actions, wishes, and opinions. Constructions of child agency and subjectivity, however, were not completely absent. The medical records also contained dispersed minor notations of children's actions, which can be interpreted as signs of *child agency* (Gagen 2001). Such instances created gaps and breaches in the dominant medical discourse. In most cases these notations convey an explicit problematization: "not possible to get an x-ray," "wets bed every night," and "cries a lot." Otherwise, they conveyed an indirect form of problematization, pointing out that there *had* been problems: "now calm," "this time not crying," and "now much nicer." Such short notations provided an image of children's subjective responses to the medical regimen and procedures. They protested, they asked for something else, they were probably homesick, or they were in pain and other different expressions of the patients as "child subjects" (Martin 2011). But obviously, such behavior or reactions were not deemed important in relation to the medical mission and were mostly omitted.

However, one exception to the mostly negative responses to the children's wishes, protests, or other expressions of subjectivity was found. The medical record of a girl aged 11 years contained one example of a positive response from the medical staff to the girl's individual wishes. In the final section of her record

preceding a handwritten note of transfer to the Gerstorp children's home, the doctor states:

Can only with hesitation be transferred to conv. home, but in consideration of her fairly nervous constitution and above all the wish to accompany her peers to the conv. home, she may however be transferred. She should maintain sanit. regimen and be kept under strict watch.

The way the doctor refers to the girl's "fairly nervous constitution" in combination with her "wish to accompany her peers" demonstrates an alternative approach to the dominant medical approach. In this short note, the girl is given the status of a (human) being with her own wishes and longings. The doctor also allows this consideration to overrule his medical judgment concerning her TB condition, which is not yet completely cured, and lets her continue with her friends to Gerstorp. This example is an exception but provides a hint of how the doctors and nurses also attended to other aspects of the children's lives, even though this was not normally considered worth noting in the medical records.

#### 4.5 A Local Case: Concluding Discussion

This local case study demonstrates how the medical approach to the sick Finnish war children arriving in Sweden during and right after the war was anchored in government health politics, with the National Medical Board as a driving force behind the development and medical doctors – pediatricians – as the main child experts. The medical doctors were not only involved in the evacuations of sick Finnish war children but also important agents in the planning of evacuation schemes. Medical examinations of all children arriving in Sweden presupposed a high involvement of medical expertise. For the sick children, whose reception and care was deemed an explicit concern for the Swedish state, an administrative system was available, with preadapted forms for medical records and test results, as was a structure for state-supported budget and funding national health care services. This was a system that had advanced as a result of an extensive population health politics in Sweden, which among other things meant fighting infectious diseases and high infant mortality. In the 1930s, the decade preceding the reception of sick Finnish children, the health politics had successfully reduced child mortality and fewer children were stricken by infectious diseases.

The local analysis showed that the evacuations of sick children presupposed a view of children as objects rather than subjects, even though there were exceptions, in which child agency was recognized. The vision of evacuating sick children from one nation to another was easily combined with the medical mission to treat and cure children's bodies and to save lives, or put differently, the construction of *the transported child* was built on a similar foundation as *the medical child*. Both contained a similar image of children as small plants, requiring good soil and a favorable climate. The horticultural metaphor implied seeing bodily growth and

bodily health as primary, and it was the child's material environment that was considered important, drawing on factors such as nutritious food, warm clothes, and clean and hygienic living conditions. The accurate recording of individual children's location and movements across borders and institutions was not only an administrative challenge to record children's whereabouts, it was decisive from the perspective of saving lives and to reduce child mortality as articulated within a developing national health politics.

A benevolent reading of the local case recognizes the good will and humanitarian effort to save sick Finnish children by the Swedish state and NGOs. According to standards of the time, the most prominent experts were mobilized – the pediatricians and their scientific medical knowledge and practice. And many children returned to Finland in better physical shape and cured from diseases. A more critical reading sees the powerlessness of Finnish families, both the children and their parents, who were left with no other choice than to follow the instructions and advice of those in charge – either in Finland or in Sweden. Children were not only separated from their family and siblings, they were also separated from their cultural and linguistic context and placed in and moved between hospitals and institutions with little or no influence over the situation. The Swedish and Finnish state involvement in the transportation of sick children limited the opportunities for the involved individuals to make their own decision and have a say in the matter; particularly, the children were highly exposed to circumstances beyond their own control.

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## 5 Conclusion

The Nordic evacuations of Finnish war children resembled in many ways the evacuations of war children that took place in other parts of Europe during WWII, but there were a few distinctive features. The Nordic evacuation involved two countries, Finland and Sweden, one a belligerent and the other announcing itself neutral. The Swedish Government was not explicitly involved in the larger evacuation schemes, which were organized and led by NGOs. The Swedish Government's evasion was related to war politics and more specifically the Swedish neutrality stance. The Finnish Government had a more explicit role in the evacuations, including the administration of the return to Finland. The evacuations were motivated as a humanitarian effort to save children, but political issues were present and the responsibility of the evacuations oscillated between NGOs and governments.

In a European context, large-scale evacuations of children without their parents from war zones are more or less nonexistent today. State governments and NGOs carry out extensive efforts on humanitarian grounds, aiming to save children's lives, but the conditions for such interventions have changed. Currently, French anthropologist Didier Fassin (2012) argues that humanitarianism has a double register related to geographical location:

... on a global scale it is obvious that humanitarian government displays a dual model. In poor countries it deals with large and often undifferentiated populations, for whom mass initiatives are set in place. In rich countries, it is faced with individuals, whose narratives it examines and whose bodies it scrutinizes. (Fassin 2012, p. 253)

Today, unaccompanied children are construed as particularly vulnerable and “child objects” in need of care and special protection due to separation from parents and traumatic experiences of war and flight (Martin 2011; Stretmo 2014). A construction of unaccompanied refugee children as vulnerable and exposed objects of care corresponds to the image of evacuated war children during WWII. The war children were construed as fragile objects that had to be moved away from danger to more safe zones. But there is an important difference. The evacuated war children in WWII were *moved by* adults, while the unaccompanied refugee children of today are *on the move* themselves. In this regard they are “agential child subjects” (Martin 2011) fleeing from danger in their homeland to another country to seek refuge and asylum, which challenges dominant constructions in Europe of refugee children as particularly vulnerable and exposed. Moreover, since the latter construction is significant in the children’s narratives in their process of seeking asylum on humanitarian ground, the agency of unaccompanied refugee children runs the risk of being seen as a problem or a dilemma.

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## Abstract

This chapter uses noncitizen family detention in the United States to show how border crossing magnifies children's uncertain legal status. The chapter first describes the legal precedent for family detention as an immigration enforcement practice and situates it in immigration geopolitics and children's rights literatures. Second, the chapter shows how noncitizen children are understood as "child-objects" in immigration law rather than agential, liberal subjects.

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In contrast, immigration law figures adults as criminalized migrant-subjects, rendering them undeserving of due judicial process. To demonstrate how this unfolds, the chapter shows how a federal district judge balanced “irreparable harm” to detained children, the “public interest,” and US Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s (ICE) discretion to detain noncitizens. Mobilizing “geostrategic discourses” of external threat and internal safety, the judge ruled that US family detention centers are relatively safe spaces compared to families’ countries of origin, from which most families sought asylum. This move not only used asylees’ testimonies as evidence of external insecurity but also enabled a particular fusing of US national security with the “best interests of the child.” These legal, discursive, and spatial tactics are part of a broader “geopolitics of vulnerability” in which immigration and border officials seek to displace national (in)securities onto detained families and children. By unpacking the intersections of children’s legal subjectivity and immigration law, the chapter shows how children’s and families’ paradoxical legal status becomes a venue for deeper struggles over executive power and emerging spatial practices of immigration enforcement and immigration law.

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**Keywords**

Immigration enforcement • Borders • Asylum • Family detention • Best interests of the child • Immigration law • Subjectivity

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## 1 Introduction

In April 2007, a group of lawyers sued the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) for detaining children at the T. Don Hutto Family Detention Center, a former medium- security prison in Taylor, Texas (*Bunikyte et al. v. Chertoff et al.* 2007). Citing Hutto’s prison-like conditions, the plaintiffs argued that the facility violated noncitizen children’s protections under an existing legal settlement, *Flores v. Meese* (1997), which granted minors in federal immigration custody the right to release, unrestrictive custody environments, and a range of services unavailable in adult facilities. Because US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE, the DHS agency charged with policing illegal/legal immigration) detained parents and children together at Hutto, the case revolved around the spatiality of children’s legal protections in the immigration system. Specifically, the parties to *Bunikyte et al. v. Chertoff et al.* debated whether existing law confined children’s protections to children’s bodies or included the (family) relationships and (private) spaces that constitute “home-like environments.” Immigration law endows ICE; however, with wide “discretion to detain,” noncitizens and federal courts have limited power to intervene in immigration enforcement practices (Coleman 2007; Varsanyi 2008). Litigated in federal court (Fifth Circuit Western District), *Bunikyte* became a site of struggle over the limits of both ICE’s authority to detain noncitizen children and federal courts’ authority to challenge immigration enforcement practices.

This struggle unfolded through broader narratives of American territorial sovereignty, childhood development, and immigrant criminality and shows how immigration law (re)spatializes US geopolitical orders.

Ultimately, family detention became untenable at Hutto, and adult women became the resident population there in 2009. Five years later, however, a group of legal organizations sued Immigration and Customs Enforcement over lack of due legal process at a new family detention facility, the Artesia Family Residential Center in remote Artesia, New Mexico (*M.S.P.C. v. Johnson* 2014; American Civil Liberties Union 2014). In August of 2014, ICE opened the Karnes County Family Residential Facility in Texas, closed Artesia because of its flagrant rights violations, and, in December of 2014, opened another 2,400 bed facility in Dilley County, Texas. Considering family detention's maximum capacity was previously 596 before being scaled back to 84 beds (at the Berks County Family Care Shelter in Pennsylvania), this expansion is dramatic. Much like Hutto's opening in 2006, Artesia and Karnes are meant to deter families from migrating to the United States. Implemented during a high-profile "child migrant crisis" in the summer of 2014, the expansion responded to a sharp increase in families seeking asylum in the United States. Unlike Hutto and Berks, however, the Artesia, Karnes, and Dilley facilities are part of a "detain and deport" practice where parents seeking asylum are categorically denied credible fear and access to legal council (American Civil Liberties Union 2014). Thus, while closing Artesia resolved the lawsuit there, family advocates filed another lawsuit in December, 2014. A class action lawsuit on behalf of all detained families, *R.I.L.R. v. Johnson* (2014), claimed that the Obama Administration's deterrence policy violated asylum-seekers' rights to individualized reviews for release from detention. In February, 2015, a federal judge issue a preliminary injunction against the Obama Administration's deterrence policy, finding that detaining families to deter migration did, indeed, violate their rights (American Civil Liberties Union 2015). These lawsuits were based on previous legal actions that created special protections for children, and subsequently families, in US immigration custody.

Thus, Hutto and the litigation surrounding the facility exemplify ongoing, systemic problems for families in current US immigration law. Moreover, as litigation continues to be a primary tool for challenging the practice of family detention in the United States, the case has wider implications for conceptualizing the spatiality of immigration law and its geopolitical designs. "Geostrategic thinking" (Ó Tuathail 2003) permeated the legal reasoning of both ICE and the federal judge, who used parents' asylum claims to map a world of vague external danger, and then twisted children's (essentialized) vulnerability with national security vulnerabilities and "children's best interests" with the "public interest in enforcing immigration laws." More broadly, the case elucidates the ways in which formal immigration law includes ad hoc mappings of gang-ridden Central America, and how the blurring of these formal and informal geopolitical discourses legitimates the spatial practices of detention. These mappings echo popular media representations of the 2014 child and family migrant crisis and the US government's response to it, illuminating the particular difficulties children and parents face when crossing

borders. In particular, children's specific legal figurations show how a "geopolitics of vulnerability" authorizes detention, family detention's spatiotemporal ordering, and the policing practices that channel noncitizens into detention.

The chapter proceeds as follows: first, the chapter situates family detention in recent work on immigration geopolitics, children's rights, and feminist political geography. The second section traces out how current immigration law and precedent figure a "child-object" rather than an agential child-subject. Intriguingly, the presumed innocence and vulnerability of this child-object both restricts ICE's ability to detain children and reinforces parents' status as criminalized migrant-subjects. The third section analyzes how the parties to *Bunikyte et al. v. Chertoff et al.* articulated different geopolitical visions in and through specific configurations of children's and families' legal subjectivity. Because immigration law is a polyvocal site of struggle (Chouinard 1994), family detention's legal challenges provide an opportunity for feminist engagements with the geopolitics of mobility. These geostrategic discourses spatially constitute a governmental regime that maximizes precarity for external others while minimizing it for included citizens, producing what I call a "geopolitics of vulnerability."

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## 2 Children's Legal Subjectivity

Migrating children present immigration authorities with specific legal challenges that have not been taken into account in geographical research on detention or immigration geopolitics. Children's transboundary migration is rarely interrogated in geographical analyses of children's legal subjectivity and political agency. Recent work on children's political participation has, however, contemplated the methodological difficulties associated with children's political agency and argued for a fuller conceptualization of the ways in which children actively make spaces (Aitken 2001; Katz 2004). In immigration law, children's immigration claims are solely derivative of parents' claims (Thronson 2007–2008), and for Bhabha (2003), this displacement of children's "best interests" produces a "citizenship deficit" through which children are rendered de facto stateless subjects.

Yet children's rights and feminist scholars have cautioned against fetishizing existing legal regimes as sources of children's empowerment, enfranchisement, or political participation. For example, the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) contains an expansive set of entitlements for children, but the realization of children's political agency has been limited (Stasiulis 2002). Ruddick (2007a, p. 514) argues, further, that the child-subject defined by "best interest" principles is "an impossible subject since, by liberal definition, the child cannot speak for him or herself without adult authorization." Intriguingly, some citizen children have been vocal spokespersons for their undocumented parents, a form of political theater that dramatizes the parents' displacement from what is implicitly their proper role as family representatives (Pallares 2009). While child-subjects are always already in a relation of dependence with a series of caregivers (Ruddick

2007a, b), the political agency of children is not materially confined to the child-object of immigration law or the partial subject of domestic family law.

As Katz (2004) argues, analyzing children's paradoxical legal subjectivity reveals geopolitical processes difficult to see at other scales, allowing us to ask: at the margins of the nation-state, where liberal law is suspended for noncitizens, how do we understand the relationship between children and their caregivers when immigration law considers parents aliens, not persons? How do we understand the position of the precarious child- subject in the context of an immigration regime that suspends constitutional rights for adults? How do we understand children's legal subjectivity where their immediate caregivers are not full liberal subjects either? Previous legal settlements created contractual relationships between "minors in immigration custody" and immigration officials, while adults' alien status foreclosed their own federal court protections. *Bunikyte* reveals not only how US geopolitical agendas mobilize immigration law to create wide spaces of administrative discretion over noncitizens' bodies but that specific constructions of childhood and adulthood undergird immigration law and enforcement policy. In the context of immigration geopolitics, these categorical differences are directly related to the spatialities of immigration enforcement: policing and arrests, detention center conditions and location, deportation decisions, and the embodied process of physical removal from the United States.

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### 3 Immigration Law as Foreign Policy

Beginning in 1889, the US Supreme Court issued a series of rulings that the federal government held "inherent sovereign powers" to determine political membership – and exclusion – because otherwise it would be "subject to the control of another power" (*Chae Chan Ping v. United States* 1889, 603 quoted in Varsanyi 2008, p. 884). Mobilizing "racialized narratives on the penetration of external menaces in national space through immigration" (Nagel 2002, p. 972), the Supreme Court considered noncitizens' admission an issue of sovereign territorial power, enabling the limitation of judicial authority over immigration matters and culminating in what is understood as the "plenary doctrine of immigration." *Fong Yue Ting v. United States* (1893) took the plenary doctrine one step further, ruling that the federal government retained sovereign right to deport noncitizens from the territorial US without judicial intervention (Varsanyi 2008). Making noncitizens subject to rejection and deportation, plenary power over immigration treated noncitizens as "aliens" rather than "persons" (Varsanyi 2008). Authorizing a separate immigration law regime, the plenary doctrine "works paradoxically through the law as it at once holds [constitutional] law at bay," thereby suspending constitutional protections for noncitizens (Coleman 2007, p. 62). Through this series of court decisions, federal courts made non-citizenship/citizenship a discursive, legal, and political axis in a broader "geopolitics of mobility," in which national elites used admission and exclusion policies to create specific politico-territorial orders (Nagel 2002; Tesfahuney 1998).

The plenary doctrine of immigration authorized, therefore, the suspension of noncitizens' constitutional protections – including the right to liberty – in the interests of national security. From the late 1970s to the 1990s, border state politicians framed immigration and border policy as a law-and-order issue, and immigration became increasingly understood as a problem of migrant illegality (Nevins 2002). Changes in immigration law – and in how the executive branch enforces it – have sparked a rethinking of the relationship between border and immigration enforcement, however. For example, the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) and the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA) widened immigration authorities' discretion over the detention and deportation of noncitizens. IIRIRA, in particular, recategorized noncitizens according to a new and ambiguous taxonomy of illegality, mandated detention for more noncitizens, and further limited immigration court oversight of deportation decisions.

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## 4 Criminalizing Asylum

In addition, immigration officials have approached asylum-seekers with skepticism since the 1980s, when large numbers of Cuban and Haitian migrants arrived on Florida's shores. The refugee resettlement and asylum system have long been charged with geopolitical bias (Cianciarulo 2007), and in the 1990s, immigration officials began to view asylum as an immigration strategy abused by “bogus” claimants (see also Mountz 2010). Following the 1996 immigration reforms, asylum-seekers faced indefinite detention while their claims were processed. Current immigration policy categorizes asylum-seekers declaring themselves at ports of entry as “arriving aliens” until their claims are deemed credible by immigration officials. In other words, asylum-seekers are classified as undocumented immigrants and thereby subject to mandatory detention.

Once detained, “arriving aliens” are not eligible for release on bond, unlike undocumented migrants apprehended inside the United States. The position of asylum-seekers is particularly difficult because they cannot claim asylum until they are physically in US territory and often cannot obtain valid travel documents from the countries they are fleeing. Part of a global trend preventing and/or preempting asylum claims (Hyndman and Mountz 2008), classifying asylum-seekers as aliens suspends international protections afforded them and criminalizes the act of claiming asylum. In this context, categorizing noncitizens has embodied material effects on noncitizens' pathways into and out of the US detention system (Mountz 2010).

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## 5 Geostrategic Discourse

In the context of this regime, detention operates as a spatial strategy of containment and forced mobility imposed by federal immigration officials on noncitizens. Visually containing actual noncitizen bodies and the symbolic problem of “illegal

immigration,” detention broadcasts state power in action. This is particularly important for legitimating the newly formed Department of Homeland Security’s legitimation and the federal government’s ability to secure US borders after the attacks of 11 September 2001 (Mountz 2010; Gill 2009). Thus, the spatial practices of enforcement are critically linked to broader narratives of insecurity/security (Coleman 2009). Making “explicit claims about the material national security interests of the state across a world map characterized by state competition, threats and dangers,” this geopolitical thinking bases its claims in “transcendent national interests and existential security concerns” (Ó Tuathail 2003, p. 95). In *Bunikyte*, in particular, ICE and the federal judge linked “security vulnerabilities” to children’s “special vulnerability,” and “national interests in enforcing immigration law” to “children’s best interests,” suturing child and national protection together in ways that have little to do with the material well-being of the children detained at Hutto. To flesh out how this “geopolitics of vulnerability” displaces insecurity from US territory onto asylum-seeking and migrating families, the chapter reviews how federal actors deployed abstract, universalizing, and global discourses of vulnerability, threat, and sovereign right to marginalize the cases of 26 individual noncitizen child plaintiffs.

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## 6 Child-Objects/Child-Subjects and Migrant-Subjects

To understand how *Bunikyte* unfolded, it is important to know the broader legal landscape for noncitizen families and children in immigration custody. Two previous cases set a precedent in which children’s derivative status limited local policing of immigration. In *Plyler v. Doe* (1982), the Supreme Court considered whether “Texas may deny to undocumented school-age children the free public education that it provides to children who are citizens of the United States or legally admitted aliens.” Ultimately deciding that Texas did have the right to deny services to undocumented adult migrants, the Court argued that “At the least, those who elect to enter our territory by stealth and in violation of our law should be prepared to bear the consequences, including, but not limited to, deportation.” Children, though, “are not comparably situated. . . . It is thus difficult to conceive of a rational justification for penalizing these children for their presence within the United States” (*Plyler v. Doe* 1982, p. 220). Appearing to support children’s rights to education, the case presumed a child-object, property of a household, not a “child-subject” endowed with political agency (Thronson 2002). Lacking the intentionality presumed of adult migrants, and therefore grounds for punishment, children’s dependence limited local withdrawal of services. This subordinate legal position is bound, however, to the full responsabilization of parents, to the figure of an “illegal alien” who can be punished. Thus, decisions bearing on noncitizen children elaborate an immigration geopolitics, in and through the opposition between child-objects and criminalized migrant-subjects.

“Unaccompanied minors” present a more substantial challenge to immigration officials, however, since their presence cannot be as easily explained by parental

coercion. As “minors,” rather than “children,” unaccompanied children were detained, processed, and deported through the adult system (see Women’s Commission 2002). Engaged in immigration’s adversarial legal process, even the most litigiously competent children are often unable to obtain the necessary documentation without adult assistance. Many countries require adults to request birth certificates, so that age itself becomes a barrier to making successful claims. In the asylum system, which limits claims to political and religious persecution, immigration judges routinely dismissed young people’s political activity as warranting persecution. In the words of one judge, “it is almost inconceivable that the Tontons Macoutes could be fearful of the conversations of 15-year-old children” (*Civil v. INS*, 140 F.3d 52, 55 (1st Cir. 1998) in Thronson 2002, p. 979). Thus, young people faced an immigration system that discriminated against them on the basis of their presumed apolitical nature and the age requirements of the administrative process. The boundary between childhood and adulthood is woven into the legal categories of admission and exclusion and has wider impacts on judicial decision-making, dramatically impacting children’s location in the detention system.

Seeking to ameliorate the effects of detention on children advocates settled *Flores v. Meese* in 1997, after a decade-long lawsuit against the federal immigration agency (then known as Immigration and Naturalization Service). This settlement achieved a substantial set of protections for minors navigating the immigration system alone, based on their “special vulnerability.” As a class action lawsuit, the *Flores Settlement* produced a contractual agreement between “all minors in federal immigration custody” and federal immigration authorities. Stipulating INS release preferences, administrative procedures, and conditions of custody, *Flores* endowed children with the right to be released to family members and guardians, to challenge INS/ICE detention decisions, and to access a variety of services. In short, the settlement entitled children to a series of relationships, binding children’s rights under *Flores* to particular spatial and temporal orders.

Like *Plyler*, *Flores* presumed innocent child-subjects and created a more robust legal process for children navigating the immigration system. *Flores* did not, however, reconfigure the admission or exclusion categories through which children’s immigration status is ultimately decided, limiting children’s entitlements to conditions of release and confinement. Importantly, *Flores* delineated a difference between the decision about whom to detain/release and where to detain them. The spatiality of children’s legal protections under *Flores* became particularly important in legal debates over family detention, when it became unclear whether accompanied children would be granted access to those legal protections.

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## 7 Families as Geopolitical Vulnerabilities

While unaccompanied children present immigration officials and courts with contradictions between children’s vulnerability and agency, families are privileged in immigration law and enforcement. (See Lubheid and Cantu (2005) on US

immigration law's heteronormativity.) In admission policy, "family unity" remains a stated goal of immigration law, and family sponsorship remains the primary avenue to gain legal residency in the United States (Office of Immigration Statistics 2009). Yet the category of "child" exists in a dependent relation to a "parent," as children's immigration claims are solely derivative of parents' claims (Thronson 2007–2008). Sponsorship requires accepting financial responsibility for petitioning family members, making it impossible for citizen children, for example, to sponsor their parents. However, immigration law often conflicts with legal regimes elaborated by subnational jurisdictions, especially family, children's, and custody laws premised on the "best interests of the child." Access to public services often requires (or is perceived to require) parental involvement, which has prevented citizen children of undocumented parents from receiving those services (van Hook and Balisteri 2006). In child custody decisions, there are no clear rulings on the relevance of parents' immigration status, resulting in the informal use of a parents' undocumented status to deny custody. In these cases, federal immigration law operates as de facto child custody law (Thronson 2007–2008). Conversely, granting custody to unauthorized parents can bar children from filing immigration claims, so that custody decisions often have dramatic implications on the immigration status of children (Thronson 2002; and see Ruddick 2007a). Figured as child-objects and persons by different legal regimes, immigration law's hierarchical family hinders children from receiving protections granted them by other courts (Thronson 2007–2008; Bhabha 2003).

While admission categories both limit and privilege certain forms of family unity, enforcement practices produce a more complex legal terrain for families migrating or seeking asylum in the United States. Families have traditionally been released with Notices to Appear (NTAs) before an immigration judge, but in March of 2001, the US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) contracted with Berks County, Pennsylvania, to detain families in a recently vacated elderly care facility. Housing 84 people, the Berks County facility opened as an extension of an existing juvenile detention program which was in compliance with the *Flores* agreement (Women's Commission 2007). Then INS claimed to have opened Berks to allow the agency time to establish families' identity, but for asylum-seeking families, this process sometimes dragged on for years (Women's Commission 2007). In 2003, the Office of Detention and Removal Operations (DRO) stated plans to expand its capacity to detain families and other vulnerable populations, citing its reliance on substandard and prison-like facilities as its primary impediment (US Immigration and Customs Enforcement 2003).

Following the attacks of 11 September 2001, the INS suspended all refugee resettlement, and the REAL ID Act implemented new security screenings and evidentiary requirements for both refugees and asylum-seekers (Cianciarulo 2007). All noncitizens seeking entry – humanitarian or otherwise – to the United States were viewed with suspicion, and beginning in 2003, the new Department of Homeland Security scoured immigration enforcement policies for vulnerabilities. In this context, ICE argued that releasing families represented a "loophole" that



enabled adults who would otherwise be subject to mandatory detention to be released from custody:

By expanding Expedited Removal to cover illegal alien families, DHS is closing down a loophole that has been exploited by human smugglers and helping stop future illegal immigration . . . This new facility enables us to have deterrence with dignity by allowing families to remain together, while sending the clear message that families entering the United States illegally will be returned home. Because of limited family bed space families caught at the border were often released with ‘Notices to Appear.’ Smugglers were well aware of this practice and often exploited this loophole to create the image of a family unit. In cases where families were detained, the families, including children, were detained separately. (US Department of Homeland Security 2006)

Seeking exploitable opportunities for release, DHS came to understand families’ special status – implicitly based on children’s special status – as a vulnerability in border security. Emphasizing smugglers’ criminality over the children being trafficked, ICE evoked the intentionality of adult illegal immigration, which framed family detention as both a crime prevention strategy and a corrective to family separation. More importantly, DHS collapses smuggling with “future illegal immigration,” criminalizing family migration in general and obscuring the legal grounds (such as asylum) for families’ presence in the United States. In this context, ICE opened the T. Don Hutto Correctional Facility as a “Family Residential Facility” in May of 2006. The expansion multiplied family “bed space” sixfold, from 84 to 596 beds, in an effort to hold all families of questionable immigration or asylum status.

## 7.1 Bunikyte et al. v. Chertoff et al.

Built by the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) in 1995, the T. Don Hutto Family Residential Facility operated as a medium-security prison for prisoners from Oregon, a federal pretrial detention center and a US Marshalls’ detention center. In 2006, Williamson County, Texas, and ICE entered into an Intergovernmental Service Agreement (IGSA) authorizing the detention of “alien families” at Hutto, and Williamson County subsequently changed its contract with CCA to accommodate the detainees. A common arrangement between the federal government, counties, and private correction corporations, IGSAs devolve detention operations to counties and corporations (US Immigration and Customs Enforcement 2009). Were it not for *Flores*, which created a contract between ICE and minors in their custody, there would have been no legal mechanism through which to hold ICE, Williamson County, or CCA responsible for the conditions at Hutto. As *Flores* is written, Williamson County and CCA were not parties to the settlement, and while their actions were examined in *Bunikyte*, neither party was legally bound by *Flores*.

Hutto retained the double fencing, concertina wire, automatically closing and locking doors, cell blocks, regimented daily schedules, surveillance, discipline, and

supervision of its previous life as a prison. CCA staff issued families with uniforms, prohibited them from bringing “contraband” (drawings, crayons, toys) into their cells, and offered little medical or mental health care. Muslim women were not allowed to wear their own headscarves, and the facility’s schedule often prevented daily prayers. CCA staff performed headcounts two to three times per day, in which families were required to stay in their cells until two staff members counted and recounted every detainee. This amounted to 11–12 h of confinement per day, preventing outdoor recreation and exercise, not to mention freedom of movement. The cells included a bunk bed, crib (if necessary), and open toilet. Children received 1 h of education per day, and many became ill from the food.

A cement facility with little natural light, the rooms were cold in the winter and humid in the summer, and toilets frequently backed up. Trained as correctional officers, CCA staff threatened confinement and separation as disciplinary tools and received no retraining to address the needs of asylum-seekers, migrants, children, and families (American Civil Liberties Union 2007; *Bunikyte et al. v. Chertoff et al.* Complaint for Declaratory and Injunctive Relief). Were it not for the presence of children, Hutto would have blended seamlessly into the landscape of immigrant detention, populated by “repurposed” prisons, military barracks and bases (including Guantanamo), county jails, and juvenile correctional facilities.

## 7.2 Children’s Rights as Family Rights

So far this chapter has reviewed the context of children’s and families’ legal status, the rationale for family detention policy, and the conditions of confinement families faced. While it is specific to Hutto, the text of *Bunikyte*’s litigation shows how plaintiffs’ attorneys, ICE, the federal judge, and the plaintiffs’ parents figured children’s and families’ legal status in different ways. In April of 2007, the American Civil Liberties Union, University of Texas Immigration Law Clinic, and private law firm LaBoeuf, Lamb, Greene, and MacRae LLP sued the Department of Homeland Security for noncompliance with *Flores* on behalf of 26 children detained at Hutto. Based on the conditions described above, the lawsuit charged ICE with violating its obligations under *Flores* on 17 counts and sought “to enforce the *Flores Settlement* on Saule’s behalf, to secure her release, and to ensure that she is not separated from her mother and her sister” (*Bunikyte et al. v. Chertoff et al.*, Complaint for Declaratory and Injunctive Relief, 1, 4).

In addition to guaranteeing detained children “home-like” conditions and social services, *Flores* mandated a preference for both release and family unity. A presettlement Supreme Court ruling stated, “the parties to [*Reno v. Flores*] agree that the [Immigration and Naturalization] Service must assure itself that someone will care for those minors pending resolution of their deportation proceedings. That is easily done when the juvenile’s parents have also been detained and the family can be released together” (*Reno v. Flores* 1993). Figuring the plaintiffs as both rights-bearers and relational subjects, the attorneys argued that children’s rights

included family release. In effect, they sought to create family rights in and through the dependent, rights-bearing child.

As the judge pointed out in the initial hearing, ICE could have complied with Flores by releasing the children to other family members and keeping parents in detention, a veiled threat that resulted in plaintiffs filing restraining orders to prevent separation (*Bunikyte v. Chertoff et al.*, Motion for Temporary Restraining Order to Prevent Separation from her Mother, 2–3). In response to this legal – and potentially spatial – splicing of the family, the plaintiffs asserted that children’s rights to family unity did not transfer rights from children to parents:

[H]er individual claims under the Settlement are directly affected by her ability to remain in close proximity to her mother – an outcome that is clearly favored by the general policy favoring release to a parent under Flores. (*Bunikyte v. Chertoff et al.* Plaintiff’s Reply in Support of her Motion for a Preliminary Injunction Ordering her Immediate Release from Hutto With Her Mother, 2 – 3)

Children have a right to spaces with parents in them, therefore, but parents have no legal right to the same. This configuration of child-based family rights did not technically endow noncitizen parents with their own rights, but covered families under an umbrella of children’s protections, without challenging the exclusionary immigration regimes that confine adults more broadly. The plaintiffs’ difficulties in developing even the most generous application of children’s rights to families highlight the contradictions between rights afforded the child, who is always already in relation to a series of caregivers, and the suspension of legal protections for their immediate caregivers.

### 7.3 The Right to Care

While the plaintiffs were children, the litigation revolved around parents’ testimonies of the disintegration of relations of care and psychological examinations of the detained plaintiffs. Primarily asylum-seeking families, the plaintiffs’ complaints included details of their parents’ rape, torture, and persecution. Their testimonies bore complex and contradictory tales of breakdowns and refusal, of the embodied effects of carceral detention, and of their rejection of that same criminality. Articulated through the spaces of everyday parenthood – bedrooms, bathrooms, kitchens, and schools – parents’ testimonies revolved around the interdependencies necessary for social reproduction:

In this jail, Majid and I cannot be good parents. We cannot provide Kevin with the basic things that he needs. We cannot give our sick child inhalers for his asthma or cream for his eczema or food for his health. We cannot give him a pen to write with or any books to read. We cannot teach him about the outside world or let him run around the way young boys should. We are totally helpless as parents and depend on the guards for everything. They control our every movement and activity, from the time we eat to the time we see each

other. We cannot even turn off the light at night when we want to go to sleep. (*Yourdkhani v. Chertoff et al.* Declaration of Masomeh Alibegi, 2)

Hutto's disciplinary order disrupted the energetics of care – the eating, playing, bathing, and napping – that defined their role as parents. The testimonies allude to a litany of questions from children and parents' increasing frustration at their inability to satisfy them. These narratives belied, in minute detail, ICE's claims about the "residential" character of the facility, by showing how the normal relations of care and parental authority, which implicitly define "the home," were disrupted by the guards.

The spatiality of familial care was, therefore, regulated at a bodily scale. The everyday metabolism of care, through which the plaintiffs' mothers defined their identities as mothers, was undone by the carceral ordering of space, time, and authority within Hutto.

I can't talk to anyone because I only speak Creole. I have to rely on Sherona to translate from Creole to Spanish and then whoever else is around to translate from Spanish into English if I need to ask for something. I am dependent on my daughter in a way I would not be if were not in jail and it is inappropriate for a mother to have to rely on her daughter this way, it is like making her into the mother and me into the child and she is only thirteen years old. (*Verdeiu v. Chertoff et al.*, Declaration of Sherona Verdeiu, 3)

These accounts of inverted familial authority evince a frustrated motherhood, in which care and authority are mutually constitutive. Thus, these parents understood the restrictions placed on parental authority as destruction of the family itself. Parents' dependency on guards and surveillance practices formed the basis of a counter-narrative of impotent parental authority, articulated through distorted relations of dependency between parents and children, the annihilation of private space, and emotional unease. Mothers reported anxiety, sadness, exhaustion, crying, sleeplessness, and illness, these physical weaknesses being evidence of their impotence as parents.

These testimonies narrated a relationality of parenthood and childhood and of mutual interdependence that far exceeded the legal mechanisms through which the case proceeded. It is not simply that these families viewed children's rights as linked to the narrations of care but that they demanded more spatial autonomy than "the law" could provide, in and through these relations of care. Monopolizing access to food, clothing, blankets, toys, and books, CCA staff overlaid carceral relations of authority over "the architecture of the family unit" which undermined the relations of (inter)dependence between parents and children. Thus, the normative distribution of rights and responsibilities within families is reconfigured so that CCA operated as an *in loco parentis*, infantilizing parents with respect to their children. Parents' narratives of frustrated care figured, therefore, a range of actors with variegated obligations under immigration law and a wider political economy of deferred responsibility than could be accounted for in the lawsuit's "official" legal argumentation.

## 7.4 ICE Discretionary Power: Displacing Custody

ICE's defense counsel argued, however, that *Flores* did not apply because the children were detained with their parents and that parents were their practical guardians while in detention. For ICE, the illegal status of parents displaced children's rights, confining children to the status of household property (Thronson 2002). The defense argued, therefore, that the plaintiffs' only case was "abuse of discretion," which the defense then argued was an invalid complaint since Congress has endowed the agency with the authority to detain the parents:

...it's not in the American Civil Liberties Union's discretion to determine how the government is going to operate its immigration program. It's the Court's decision, of course, of whether or not the government is abusing its discretion, and in this case, I would suggest that the government was not. (ICE attorney Victor Lawrence, *Emptage et al. v. Torres et al.* Transcript of the Injunction for Equitable Relief, 236)

ICE's legal approach attempted to displace children's rights to "home-like environments" under *Flores* on the basis of their parents' illegal status. Emphasizing the criminality of the migrant-subject, ICE sought to shift the case to discussion of territorial sovereignty and security, over which ICE had established authority and federal courts did not.

Approaching family detention in the context of enforcement-led immigration policy, ICE emphasized the agency, autonomy, and intentionality of parents, especially parents' intentional breaking of immigration law: "of course, they'd rather be free, but they did break the law. They did break the law and they came to the United States illegally, and the government has the right to detain them" (ICE attorney Victor Lawrence, *Emptage et al. v. Torres et al.* Transcript of the Injunction for Equitable Relief, 23). ICE's argument had three important effects. First, by emphasizing parents' intentionality, the defense erased children's rights under *Flores*, effectively arguing that *Flores* did not apply to children accompanied by undocumented parents. From this perspective, the only way for children to access their entitlements under *Flores* would be to separate them from their parents in ICE custody. Secondly, ICE argued that families were legally considered accompanied adults. Third, charging parents with custodial responsibility within Hutto transferred responsibility for the care/harm of children from ICE to the parents. Their argument consolidated rights in ICE's executive discretion and responsibility for the rule of law, childhood development, and everyday care in the parents, for whom there are few legal frameworks to challenge ICE's discretion.

ICE's legal arguments emphasized the plenary power over immigration law, a position that relies upon a criminalized (adult) migrant-subject. Emphasizing territorial vulnerability, ICE inscribed responsibility for border security onto each individual migrant crossing the border, regardless of the context of their individual migration. The defense's argument thereby mapped a geopolitics of vulnerability that figures the United States as the sole victim of violence. Understood exclusively in terms of their illegal entry, the parents faced a legal terrain of all-responsibility-

no-rights, and the corollary displacement of children's rights allowed them no agency and therefore no rights. This coupling of hyper-vulnerable American territory with the hyper-responsibilization of individual adult migrants prioritized universalized "public interest" over the claims of specific children.

## 7.5 Calculating Irreparable Harm

Where the plaintiffs sought to use children's rights as an umbrella over the entire family, the defense's argument telescoped any family rights into a discussion of parental illegality. The judge was unconvinced, however, by ICE's argument that the agency's discretion to detain annulled the application of Flores to the Hutto facility, but worried that the plaintiffs' arguments transferred children's rights to the parents that would eviscerate their responsibilities for legal border crossing. The judge posed an opposition, therefore, between the rights of children (to release and family unity) and ICE's discretion and by extension the plenary doctrine of immigration. Ultimately, the judge agreed that ICE retained discretion over the detention of parents, despite the Flores settlement and *Reno v. Flores*' clear preference for releasing families. The judge thereby affirmed children's subordinate position in immigration law and enforcement, reproduced the culpability and criminalization of parents, and voided the possibility of family-based legal claims in enforcement matters.

But even without granting parents rights through their children's claims to the Flores agreement, the judge had the authority to release the families. To grant preliminary injunction – in this case the immediate release of the families from Hutto – the plaintiffs needed to meet four criteria: (1) substantial likelihood that Hutto violated *Flores*, (2) substantial threat that the children would suffer irreparable injury if not released from Hutto, (3) the threatened injury to the children outweighed any damage that release would cause ICE, and (4) release would not disserve the public interest (*Bunikyte et al. v. Chertoff et al.* Order April 9, 2007, p. 11).

Because of the overwhelming evidence from parents' testimonies that Hutto violated the *Flores* Settlement, the judge readily agreed that the conditions at Hutto violated Flores' stipulations on conditions of confinement. The remaining criteria demanded, however, a calculus of harm between detained children, ICE, and a universalized "public interest" (see also Bhabha 2000). First, the judge refused to undermine ICE's discretion to detain noncitizens in violation of immigration laws. Coming to this conclusion, he argued, invalidated the plaintiffs' claims to irreparable harm because "the detentions themselves were entirely lawful" (*Bunikyte et al. v. Chertoff et al.* Order, 36). That is, "irreparable harm" could only be established by challenging the legality of ICE's discretion, which is the basis for the plenary doctrine in immigration law. Defining law and irreparable harm as mutually exclusive worked, further, to cleanse the federal court of its own responsibility for children's harm, mystifying the violence authorized in and through the law.

Second, agreeing with ICE's defense, the judge minimized the harm to the detained children by emphasizing their small number and normalizing the trauma incurred during migration. He did not dispute the fact that detention would harm children but that detention was the only harm done to them in the process of traveling to the United States:

I am not convinced that there is irreparable injury to the children. I am convinced that there could be injury psychologically to the children. These children come extremely vulnerable because of the circumstances of their being here, not being where they're secure, not being where they know where they are. . . . But I don't think there's any doubt that living in the conditions that I've heard today before the changes certainly didn't improve the psychological aspect of a young child or adolescent's life. Now, oddly enough, it may have been a lot better than they were when they – before they were captured. May have been better than it was before they got to this country. But that doesn't excuse the way we act in this country. (Emphasis added, Judge Sam Sparks, *Emptage et al. v. Torres et al.* Transcript of the Injunction for Equitable Relief 221, 238)

The harm caused by detention is not irreparable, first, because it is legal and, second, because it cannot be quantified separately from pre-detention trauma. This calculus of harm generalized parents' abuses across a dangerous "elsewhere" beyond US borders, despite the fact that ICE has detained families from over 40 countries. Framing the United States as the space of law and order, parents' asylum claims serve as proof of American "exceptional excellence" and the source of childhood trauma (Puar 2007). It is precisely this exceptionality that justifies ICE's discretionary power at the border, as these zones of illiberal rule both legitimize and maintain the presumably liberal and democratic space of the United States. This dichotomized figuration pathologizes transboundary migration, again displacing responsibility for the effects of detention onto the parents' choice to migrate.

## 7.6 Negotiating a Settlement

After the judge ruled that *Flores* did not establish the right to family release and that detention could not be proven to cause irreparable harm, the parties settled. Where early arguments in the case focused on the distribution of entitlements between family members, the settlement negotiations focused on transforming the spatio-temporal ordering at Hutto from "prison-like" to "home-like" conditions. The settlement included a litany of changes to the physical infrastructure, relationships between guards and detainees, and access to services. Further, the settlement required ICE to review parole, bond, and release decisions for each family on a monthly basis, so that families would not be detained indefinitely. Compliance with the settlement was evaluated semiannually by a federal magistrate, until June of 2009. Ironically, the "benefits" afforded to children under the settlement accrued to not just the plaintiffs but to their parents and to the families detained at Hutto thereafter. Parents could not share children's rights to release under *Flores*, but

could share their rights to “home-like facilities,” so long as they remained confined from the “legal” population. The right to certain conditions diverges from the spatiality of rights to release; like oil and water, parents’ and children’s rights can share surfaces, but cannot mix.

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## 8 Conclusion

Contrary to the more complex range of considerations taken up in children’s and family law, immigration law figures its subjects rather bluntly, as innocent child-objects and criminalized migrant-subjects. Their mobility defines their legal status, as child-objects are presumed to be apolitical, inert, and silent, while migrant-subjects are highly politicized, self-conscious actors willfully choosing to violate legal boundaries. In short, children moved passively, and adults move actively and by choice, rendering family groups unintelligible. Ruddick (2007a, p. 520) has argued that children’s “best interests” enables a ventriloquist politics of representation, in which “the child danced around the issue with a series of partners: parents who defend their liberty to raise children as they see fit; the state, which has an abiding interest in the child as futurity; and an increasingly complex array of representatives.” As the plaintiffs’ attorneys, their parents, ICE, and the judge purported to act in the plaintiffs’ “best interests,” and the children gave few testimonies, *Bunikyte* hardly broke new ground for children’s political agency. Intriguingly, however, children’s “best interests” and “special vulnerability” made the case possible, as the presumed dependence of children required the creation of legal protections. Even while the child-objects figured by *Flores* and *Plyler* were not quite persons, the protections granted them go far beyond what is available to adult “aliens.” Children’s and adults’ legal subjectivity is mutually constitutive, so that each displaces the other while neither achieves recognition as a “person” before the law.

Immigration geopolitics unfolds in and through an asymmetrical distribution of liberal norms of rights and responsibility among unaccompanied children, families, and adult migrants. It is not the case, as others have argued that the law is suspended for those in detention but that immigration law does not afford migrant-subjects a liberal balance of rights, obligations, and punishments. Weighing the “best interests” of 26 individual children against “the public interest,” “the rule of law,” and “border security,” the judge used the ambiguity of children’s rights to create an opening for judicial affirmation of the juridico-political configuration of immigration geopolitics in the United States. *Bunikyte*’s resolution did not, therefore, represent a shift in federal court rulings on children in immigration custody, but reveals the geopolitical implications of children’s legal status, and the ways in which immigration law pits children’s vulnerability against criminalized, hyper-responsibilized parents. Understanding how the legal distinctions between adults and children, accompanied and unaccompanied minors are put to work in immigration law, and enforcement is critical to understanding how geopolitical narratives create the conditions for policing, detention, and deportation practices in the



United States. Twinning children's "special vulnerability" with perceived security vulnerabilities in the immigration enforcement system, the case displaced physical vulnerability from the US nation-state onto an anonymous population of external others and produced a "geopolitics of vulnerability."

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# Fear, Vulnerability, and Death for Children and Youth at the US–México Border

# 20

Cynthia Bejarano

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## Abstract

This chapter examines the USA–México border as a case study for investigating fear and violence, violence containment measures, and vulnerability for youth living in and migrating through international border zones. It argues that globalization, "national security," and border surveillance regimes exacerbate structural violence associated with failed economic policies, "drug war(s) policies," and poverty and government corruption which negatively impact young people. Youth, who enjoy limited access to human rights protections, find themselves trapped between remaining in home countries overrun by cartel violence and ravaged by poverty and "choosing" life-threatening migration to the USA. Additionally, youth who are rooted on both sides of the border face increasingly

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narrowed options for their own survival. Cultural nationalism, racism, xenophobia, and the militarization of the border punctuate the economic crises that make membership in gangs, cartels, and the shadow world of drug and human trafficking viable “options” for some. Through an analysis of these structural conditions and global forces, this chapter additionally assesses specific examples wherein youth on both sides of the border confront state violence, economic marginalization, and myriad “deaths.” A macro-level approach combined with microlevel examples signals both the precarious existences of youth on the border and offers a modicum of hope that young people will survive a geography of uncertainty, dislocation, and fear.

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**Keywords**

USA–México border • Border violence • Violence containment • Drug wars • Migration • Undocumented youth

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## 1 Introduction

The attention that global borders have received in recent years, particularly the USA–México border, points to the geopolitical strife and deleterious impacts of globalization and poverty. More than most regions, the USA–México border area has experienced economic crises, militarization, wealth inequalities, large-scale migration and immigration, and human and drug trafficking on an unprecedented scale. These border zones are often places where sociopolitical fears coalesce with, and compound, these larger-than-life realities, and young people and children typically excluded from political and policy decision-making are made the most vulnerable. For nation-states like the USA, such conditions justify the use of intense surveillance techniques to secure the border through violence containment strategies, intensified “drug war” initiatives, anti-terrorist measures to protect “national security” under the guise of border security, and policies that criminalize migrants, especially youth. This discussion illuminates how these measures to contain myriad forms of violence further entangle and victimize children and youth.

This chapter then examines the effects of border violence, vulnerability, and death on: (1) children and youth in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, México across from El Paso, Texas, and the USA; (2) transmigrant youth struggling to cross multiple countries’ borders to the USA; and (3) youth living clandestinely in the USA without proper documentation. This chapter seeks to contribute to a growing understanding of the complexity with which violence is interpreted and understood at the USA–México border and the exposure to violence, vulnerability, and death on both sides of the USA–México border that children and youth endure. This includes the dangers children and adolescence confront en route to the USA and the children and youth who clandestinely live in the USA. Youth on either side of the border are often harassed and persecuted by US and Mexican border security forces or are demonized or targeted for removal from the USA. These critical insights into their positioning in social hierarchies and oppressive conditions are rarely explored

separately from their vulnerable communities that endure these hostilities as a whole. However, young people are particularly victimized by “violence containment” policies, militarization, and anti-immigration sentiment.

## 1.1 Placing the Border in Context

Within border zones, more and more young people are migrating alone and are left to navigate treacherous terrain for their own economic and social survival (Chaparro 2014; Patterson 2014a; Musalo and Ceriani Cernadas 2015). The *Childhood and Migration in Central and North America* report points to children “experiencing and witnessing human rights violations and discrimination on various grounds; suffering from social exclusion; and being deprived of education, employment opportunities, medical services, and even food” (Musalo and Ceriani Cernadas 2015). Root causes for children’s migration from their home countries include: extreme poverty, extreme violence, and the threat of violence that is perpetrated by organized criminal syndicates, intrafamilial and sexual violence along with the deprivation of fundamental human rights and the right to reunite with their family members located elsewhere, social exclusion and discrimination, and corruption and institutional weakness within state agencies that are unable to protect them (Musalo and Ceriani Cernadas 2015).

Local border youth are also made vulnerable by the lack of opportunities available to them. Youth at the Mexican North and US Southwest border fall prey to failing systems that foster shadow economies, offering quick-money opportunities or promises of a better life in return for working illicitly as drug couriers or traffickers, *sicarios* (assassins), or *halcones* (drug cartel lookouts). In México, these “opportunities” have been taken up by many young people despite the dangers associated with them. According to the *LA Times*, citing a study by the National Autonomous University of México in México City, roughly one million youths are considered at risk and targeted by cartels (Ellingwood and Wilkinson 2010). The Wilson Center’s México Institute claims that “unemployed and uneducated youth are also an obvious potential contributor to gang membership, as youth seek alternative sources of “belonging” during idle time and engage in petty crimes to sustain themselves and their families” (Jones 2013, p. 19). These youth have become a recruitment source for cartels and gangs because crime organizations can pay them less and they are easier to control (Moretti 2013).

Beneath the well-publicized border violence associated with the drug trade lurks more systemic forms of border violence that cause greater vulnerabilities for children and youth. Poverty, hunger, lack of education and urban infrastructure, and government policies that negatively impact communities are rarely discussed as contributing factors to border violence. The term border violence refers to the systemic manifestations of structural violence and its proliferation across regions where two or more nation-states meet, especially when those nation-states have a history of violence, competition for scarce natural or human resources, or are ravaged by neoliberal policies associated with globalization. Violence associated

with race, class, gender, sexual identity, ethnicity, and environment is compounded by the tensions associated with wealth inequalities, as well as demographic pressures resulting from migration and transnational movement. These and other factors leave border societies, economies, and people more vulnerable to structural and systematic violence more than other areas. Youth and children are especially vulnerable to these forms of violence because of a wide array of economic insecurity and instability issues that some border areas experience. Chronic lack of resources in financially strapped border areas and a lack of access to viable legal work, health care, and education for underage people are key features of the poor living conditions that surround them. The flip side is the vice industries that prey on youth with illicit work opportunities, or vulnerable youth that fall under the control of illegal enterprises (migrants or trafficked victims), and who have no way of defending themselves. Youth typically depend on adults for guidance, guardianship, and their social welfare, but when these adults and the institutions, policies, and laws they represent fail them, they are made the most vulnerable of all. Negotiating the legal, social, and child welfare systems of México and the USA along border zones can be tense and complicated for migrant youth and young unauthorized border crossers, which adds to their precarious state.

Nonetheless, popularly recognized forms of border violence are used by nation-states to justify tactics that facilitate more violence, through strategies of violence containment (Institute for Economics & Peace 2012) and border security (Andreas 2009; Dunn 2009; Bejarano et al. 2012). The Institute for Economics & Peace “defines violence containment spending as economic activity that is related to the consequences or prevention of violence where the violence is directed against people or property” (2012, p. 4). Greater violence containment justifies greater border security measures. Although scholars and activists have elaborated on them, the human costs and vulnerabilities associated with so many security measures are neglected by policy-makers (Andreas 2009; Staudt and Méndez 2015; Musalo and Ceriani Cernadas 2015).

On February 4, 2012, the painful story of a 12-year-old girl Noemí Alvarez Quillay who traveled 6,500 miles from El Tambo, Ecuador, to reunite with her parents, Jose Segundo Alvarez and Martha Violeta Quillay, who live in New York City without proper documentation, is the quintessential story of failed immigration policies and the dangers for children. Due to increased border security measures and their status as undocumented, Noemí’s parents could not return to Ecuador to bring her to the USA. Her parents had left Ecuador fifteen years earlier because of an economic crisis. Just miles from the US border, Noemí allegedly hung herself on March 7, 2014, while in a migrant shelter in Ciudad Juárez (Dyer 2014). Noemí’s death led to investigations that revealed that Juárez authorities had purposefully left out details about the girl’s autopsy. After serving as an alarming story of the travails of thousands of migrant youth traveling north in search of a better life, 42 people were indicted in México City a year after her death for their role in a transnational smuggling ring (Ortiz Uribe 2015). Her death is a by-product of the border industrial complex and failed immigration policies that create more hardship for millions. After attempting to reunite with her parents

for the second time, Noemí was detained, questioned by male authorities without supervision from a child advocate, and placed at a shelter in México. It is unclear whether, while Noemí was in custody, the standard procedures to assess her migratory condition and safety were followed. Did Mexican authorities offer to contact their counterparts from her home country, or was she offered legal assistance to contact her parents in the USA when she was apprehended? In both México and the USA, Noemí was unable to find legal remedies to reunite with her family, and she was forced to seek perilous measures of unlawful entry into the USA. Due to current US border policing measures, Noemí had no recourse to legal processes for reunification with her parents in the USA because they were undocumented. Policies like tightened US border security measures create trapped populations that are directly associated with migration and immigration policies, with dangerous consequences. Similarly, the lack of effective policies to protect the “best interest of the child” (Musalo and Ceriani Cernadas 2015) creates hardships for countless families like Noemí’s who feel forced to rely on human smuggling as the only option for family reunification.

Musalo and Cervantes (2015, p. 9) argues that “increased enforcement. . . has not deterred migration. If anything, amplified enforcement, particularly in the case of child migrants, makes children and adolescents even more vulnerable following repatriation and often leads to remigration.” This also makes youth more vulnerable to drug cartels who force migrant youth to transport drugs across the US border, to serve as *halcones* (lookouts), or to act as *sicarios* (assassins). Girls are also preyed upon for sex-slave trafficking and even killed after they have been sexually exploited (Moretti 2013). Some youth are forced to continue working for cartels once they cross the US border (Chaparro 2014; Patterson 2014a).

Rather than address deeply rooted economic and political problems, nation-states implement elaborate policing and surveillance strategies and criminalize the victims of impoverishment. Border-dwellers – especially youth – restrict their own movement out of fear of rampant violence or harassment by authorities, or they feel forced to migrate and risk the chance of death or dying. In the end, people become more vulnerable because they are policed and monitored. The “War on Drugs” has failed to stop the mass importation of narcotics into the USA, but it has created a landscape of violence for youth and children. This drug war also overlaps with privatization policies that exacerbate wealth inequalities and the related disappearance of civil society and social programs, due to meager funding and stability issues to protect youth and the poor. The post 9/11 regime of border security has conflated the alleged threat of terrorism with undocumented migrants – particularly youth – seeking economic and political refuge in the United States.

To highlight the multilayered and multifaceted forms of violence confronting youth and children in this border zone, the next sections portray “everyday life” at the border as it is perceived and imagined by various actors and entities in the USA and México. The next section argues that the regime of inspection at border crossing centers constitutes a particular form of state-sanctioned violence that violates the human rights of youth and children. The remaining sections of this chapter offer a balance of theory and empirical case study focusing on the multiple



forms of death and dying along the international boundary. Organized generally around “necropolitics” and concepts of “social death,” these sections reveal the narrowing opportunities for youth who are moving through or who are trapped within these increasingly violent border zones.

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## 2 Border Imaginaries and Everyday Living

The geo-economic confluence of prosperity and economic strain are paramount along the USA– México border, known for international trade governed by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and other transnational neoliberal accords. As Bejarano et al. (2012, pp. 32–33) have argued, “The success of neoliberalism is dependent upon the subjugation of place. . . place is more than the backdrop of social occurrences, but also intersects with oppressive systems of class, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality and in the case of migrants, their nationality and citizenship.” The abject poor are drawn to these zones in search of jobs or to cross the international boundary into the USA. Many migrants who do not succeed at crossing remain working in these zones, leading to a kind of “paralyzing border stagnation” where they are trapped in an unfamiliar place with little or no resources, or they become akin to “transferable bodies displaced and used repeatedly as they travel their migratory route from home to subjugated border region. . . . If caught, they are held or transferred yet again to deportation centers or back across the border to the subjugated region they launched from” (Bejarano et al. 2012, p. 30). The USA–México border constitutes the world’s “largest migration corridor” with 13 million international migrants from México residing in the USA (United Nations 2014, p. 20).

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## 3 Border Inspections and Rights’ Violations: A Way of Life

Nation-states constantly police the citizenship and cultural identities of border dwellers, thereby questioning their right to move freely, even within the boundaries of their own countries. Border checkpoints located several miles from the actual international boundary place additional burdens upon citizens and visitors alike. According to the American Civil Liberties Union, the US border region constitutes a “constitution-free zone,” and for individuals living in México, the Mexican military checkpoints offer a southern counterpart to the US system of surveillance. US border security policies have also influenced the development of the *Programa Frontera Sur* between México and Guatemala and Belize (Wilson and Valenzuela 2014). Parker and Vaughan-Williams remind us that, “borders are not as fixed as our animating metaphor otherwise implies, but ever more pre-emptive, risk-assessed, and designed to be as mobile as the subjects and objects in transit that they seek to control” (2012, p. 730).

At the USA–México border, the affluent middle-class or working poor Mexican people that cross the international boundary must pass through US customs

inspection stations with Mexican passports in addition to a tourist visa, worker visa, temporary visa, or a laser visa (a local border crossing card). The US Customs houses represent government spaces dedicated to the inspection of primarily people of color, where individuals are catalogued and identified into separate waiting lines at customs' offices. "Inspection stations. . . inspect, monitor, and surveil what goes in and out in the name of class, gender, race, and nation" (Lugo 2008, p. 115). Those most targeted for inspections are Mexican descent people, arguably the predominant group affected by the "colorlines" politics of this region. Additionally, the state has fomented a culture in which incarceration of suspected criminals, Indigenous peoples, Chicano/Chicana and Latino/Latina communities, and immigrants is commonplace, routine, and accepted. People in the borderlands are perceived as "cageable" by a systemic process of racism and militarization that is yet another form of border violence typically not described as such. People of color are coded simultaneously as citizen criminals, foreign threats to the nation-state, and as "illegal aliens."

Cooperation between municipal police forces normally attuned to domestic issues and national agencies oriented toward "threats at the border" has created a disciplinary field that has erased boundaries between "global terrorism," street-level crime, and undocumented immigration. These practices create convoluted classification systems and scales of meaning with severe sociocultural and political implications for all border crossers: they are categorized as aliens, terrorists, or criminals. The multitiered system of surveillance, criminalization, arrest, and incarceration creates and sustains systems and rhetoric(s) that undergird the physical barriers, policies, and surveillance technologies associated with the militarization of the border.

Border violence is experienced through this process of inspection where documents are demanded irrespective of people's background or status. At times, local authorities abuse their authority, which represents systemic manifestations of border violence. As a consequence, corruption and abuse of power are downplayed and kept from public view. Border inspection stations exemplify some of the most systematically violent and psychologically terrifying spaces within border zones that epitomize the nation-state's practices of demarcating the borderline itself. Alejandro Lugo states, "border inspections are more pervasive among the failed border crossings of the working classes, who too often experience border exclusions" (Lugo 2008, p. 117).

Border inspection stations reveal how larger border regions can be contradictory. On the one hand, they are marked by hyper-nationalized space, as the margins of any nation-state come to represent who is let in or who is forced out. On the other hand, hybrid cultures and overlapping languages, identities, citizenships, and social networks seep through the border and "unmake" the borders projected by nation-states. People's citizenship and legal status are regularly challenged at border zones by authorities, even as people simultaneously contest the notions of categorical lines of citizenship and what citizenship personifies.

The exodus of children and youth fleeing violence from Central America underscores the need to reconceptualize traditional ideas of rights, citizenship,

access, and belonging. These children and adolescents are “forced migrants,” hoping that the USA will respect their human rights to be free from violence and economic catastrophe, regardless of their origin and destination. The same arguments for human rights are true for children in their home countries.

In these border zones, human rights violations occur on a regular basis. The *transfronterizos* (border crossers) that physically reside in the USA–México border region find themselves meeting the same infringements of human rights as the transmigrants that move through these spaces. Although not always physically violent, the ritualistic confrontation, the questioning of one’s identity and legality, and the stripping away of one’s rights and dignity can arguably be more detrimental than the physical brutality that sometimes accompanies crossing borders (Bejarano 2010). At times, fleeing violence means not only enduring physical violence but also the psychological and emotional trauma that causes permanent injuries for border crossers or refugees. Instead of “containing” violence, state policies of border control and enforcement actually exacerbate preexisting tensions on the ground. Stricter policies implemented at border crossings cause financial difficulties for poor families crossing. Physical structures such as the border wall, and deployment of greater numbers of Border Patrol agents, for instance, cause individuals traveling north to become “trapped” in Mexican cities south of the boundary that are already struggling with overpopulation and crumbling infrastructure. Tightened policies at border checkpoints and international borders, as well as a declining access to citizenship, have caused millions of undocumented individuals to move “into the shadows,” where their vulnerability becomes a prominent feature of their already precarious lives.

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#### **4 Insecurity, Instability, and Violence Containment**

Children and youth are vilified and criminalized for trying to survive by working in illicit trade markets (or simply being at the wrong place at the wrong time), crossing borders as unauthorized entrants, or living in the shadows in the USA. The focus placed on demonizing these youth distracts from the global drug market that is worth more than 400 billion (Payan 2013) and the skyrocketing US drug consumption that drives the trade. Border security funding is part of the US government’s “violence containment” strategy. Spending in this area is fuelled by portrayals of the border as a zone that is “out of control” due to the influx of drugs and unauthorized migrants. As Peter Andreas states, ““successful” border management depends on successful image management, and this does not necessarily correspond with levels of actual deterrence. . .the escalation of border policing has been less about deterring than about image crafting” (2009, p. 9).

El Paso, Texas, has always been a militarized zone, and this has been reinforced through multiple border patrol and policing operations around drug interdiction, immigration enforcement, and since September 11, 2001, in response to alleged threats of terrorism. The threats of narco-violence and perceived threats of spillover violence into the USA have triggered more calls for border security, despite the

spillover effect proving to be minimally felt by US border communities or at best difficult to quantify (Payan 2013). As war rhetoric and policies grow, more youth are made vulnerable.

The Mexican side of the border also follows suit with the establishment of temporary military checkpoints during the bloodiest years of the Mexican War on Drugs (2007–2012). When former Mexican President Calderon launched an anti-drug trafficking war in 2006, roughly 67,050 people were killed in México; over 13,000 were murdered in Juárez from 2006 to 2013 (Villagran 2014). Over 420,000 people fled from Ciudad Juárez; roughly 10,000 businesses shut their doors since 2007, and at least 2,000 businesses suffered from extortions (Patterson 2010). Multiple human rights violations were documented in Ciudad Juárez during this time period as locals discussed abuses by both the military and federal police (Meyer et al. 2010; Staudt and Méndez 2015). Drug cartels vying for trafficking corridors from México into the USA have also created havoc in Mexican border cities overshadowing the everyday exigencies of life.

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## 5 “Necropolitics” in “Warlike” Border Zones

For vulnerable populations in border regions that come to resemble war zones, innocuous everyday activities can result in harm, and traveling migrants may witness violence or even death. Necropolitics becomes part of the everyday. Achille Mbembe defines necropolitics as “*death-worlds*, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*” (2003, p. 40).

Border zones that are afflicted with violence can suffer great loss of life and hardship. For example, what became known in Ciudad Juárez as *juvenicidio* (murder of youth) surfaced as a consequence of globalization. The homicide rates of youth between 15 and 29 increased from 201 in 2007 to 1,647 in 2009 (Enriquez 2011; Quintana 2011 as cited in Staudt and Méndez 2015, p. 76). Neoliberal policies stressing privatization and low taxes to court international corporations eviscerated public sector social services and agencies dedicated to the protection of women and the poor. There were few safeguards to protect children and youth, so they became victims to the drug war as innocent bystanders, as the children of people involved in the drug industry, or even as drug users or cartel assassins.

Government responses to global economic trends – seen poignantly in México’s privatization of peasant lands, which lead to northward migration to the USA after the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) – have a direct impact on youth as did the equally impactful Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) policy that displaced Central American coffee farmers unable to survive in their homelands. Similarly, the rise of marijuana and cocoa production as a response to the export-oriented and mono-crop production in the Mexican countryside has fueled a drug war that has dominated USA–México relations for several decades. As families left the countryside, youth had to survive on the streets of Mexican metropolises making them vulnerable to crimes. For instance, some news

accounts claimed that over 10,000 children were orphaned by the war on drugs in Juárez (La Jornada 2010).

Vulnerable people are left to suffer the decisions that national governments make. The people fleeing violent neighborhoods and poverty as forced migrants find themselves at the US border greeted by reinforced steel walls and surveillance cameras – whose architects demand more funding, more agent hires, and more technology to apprehend and deport migrants. Gilberto Rosas calls this border policing machine a “kind of warfare that collapses the distinctions between the police and the military, between regulating life and killing it” (2012, p. 7).

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## 6 Normalized Death: Everyday Living in Juárez and Other Possibilities

The culmination of poverty, militarization, war on drugs, neoliberal economic policies, struggling nation-states, and racism have hurt youth and children in myriad ways. The following sections examine (1) death or dying in Ciudad Juárez, (2) transmigrants’ struggling as they attempt crossing borders to the USA, and (3) youth living in the USA without proper documentation.

In recent years in Ciudad Juárez, young people can easily be victimized. Some children and youth have their movement restricted by their parents for fear of victimization. Several are growing up with vestiges of PTSD and other forms of trauma (Rivera 2012). A binational cross-sectional study that measured the psychosocial and behavioral problems among children and adolescents in Ciudad Juárez and El Paso in 2007 and 2010 points to the significant impact that exposure to collective violence has on young children and adolescents in the border area. The study demonstrated that the mental health of children and their exposure to collective violence and poverty, especially in Ciudad Juárez, had an additive effect on children’s mental health. “Chronic exposure of children to violence has been shown to trigger a panoply of serious mental health problems, often manifested by depression, anxiety, acute stress disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, sleep difficulties, somatic symptoms, complicated bereavement, substance abuse, and antisocial and suicidal behaviors, among others” (Leiner et al. 2012, p. 411). From 2007 to 2012, it was common local knowledge that going back and forth to school or to the market meant the possibility of some form of violence, so people limited their everyday movements, public outings, and evening activities. “Families in this border area face strenuous consequences resulting from the loss of family members through death, torture, and kidnapping and constant exposure to violence through television and radio reports that is detrimental to children and families” (Leiner et al. 2012, p. 414). Although revitalization efforts and the recovery of public spaces is gradually increasing, quotidian life for Ciudad Juárez society remains difficult.

There is also the other side of violence when youth fall into violent lifestyles out of hopelessness or desperation. Many youth fall prey to working as abductors, *sicarios* (assassins), *secuestradores* (kidnappers), *halcones* (falcons/lookouts for military convoys or police forces for the cartels), or as *mulas* (mules running drugs, migrants,

or weapons across borders for drug cartels) (Moretti 2013; Chaparro 2014). These lifestyles shift the meaning of what is normal and routine. Marie Leiner's (2010) study noted that children in schools in Juárez preferred playing "*narcotraficantes contra policías*" (narco-trafficker vs. police) where no one wants to play the role of the police, because the police always lose and the "bad guys" are never punished. Simultaneously, suspicion and mistrust are rife, as neighbors, government workers, law enforcement, and military agents are viewed with suspicion.

Children learn to be fearful and alert, and young people learn to be suspicious, wondering who is marked for death next. As violence is normalized, some children learn to live in fear or think of life as ephemeral, making the most of what time they have left. Helpless and hopeless, with few legitimate possibilities for work, school, or life, some youth become drug consumers. More, however, have grown defiant and refuse to succumb to this violence. The *Marcha del Coraje, Dolor, y Desagravio* (March of Courage, Pain, and Vindication) that took place in February of 2010 was a response to the *Villa Salvarcar* massacre of sixteen young people at a house party in Ciudad Juárez that January, which flourished into a social media network that grew to thousands of mainly young protestors and people standing in solidarity against such widespread community violence (Staudt and Méndez 2015). Ciudad Juárez youth used social networking to build solidarity. While there is ongoing disorder in the region, marginalized populations, including youth, remain hopeful about their futures and engage in a kind of transformative resistance, "that allow them [youth] to survive the daily infringement of their rights at the border" (Bejarano 2010, p. 392).

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## 7 Transmigrant Death: To Migrate or Die in the Homeland

While Ciudad Juárez is no longer a major hub, it is still popular for trafficking and one of numerous crossing points into the USA for transmigrants. The alleged suicide of Jocelyn Noemí Alvarez Quillay, the indigenous 12-year-old Ecuadoran girl mentioned earlier who died at a Ciudad Juárez shelter (Patterson 2014b), is another reminder of the violence youth experience. Immediate investigations claimed there was no sexual assault of the girl, but a year later, a more detailed investigation confirmed that she had been sexually abused days before her death (Ortiz Uribe 2015). She had been traveling for four months during a first failed smuggling attempt to rejoin her parents in New York City. The family paid *coyotes* (human smugglers) to bring her to the USA a second time, a desperate decision for parents without proper documentation in the USA. The US government claimed that border security measures have successfully limited transmigrants from entering the country (Flores 2014). However, these measures yield deadly outcomes when parents take desperate measures to reunite their families and protect their children from the destitute and dangerous conditions in their homelands.

Much has been written about *La Bestia* (the Beast), the train that runs from Southern México's state of Chiapas northward to border cities (Flores 2014). A significant amount has also been written about the Central American women and

children that have attempted to enter the USA through South Texas and at times have relied on *La Bestia* for their travels (Flores 2014). Others risk their lives attempting to cross the barren Sonoran or Chihuahua deserts adding to the thousands of migrants who have died since the early 1990s. The US Customs and Border Protection agency claims that during the 2013 fiscal year, the US Border Patrol apprehended 38,833 unaccompanied minors, 28,352 in Texas alone (Flores 2014). Some accounts have these migration numbers reaching as high as 52,000 children and youth in the first nine months of 2014 (Martinez 2014). Migrants trekking from Central America through México into the USA speak of horrifying atrocities, including the maiming of people by the train, thieves that prey on migrants, corrupt authorities that rob and beat them, and the rape, kidnapping, and murder of migrants by marauders. “Recent reports also indicate that Mara Salvatrucha and other gangs prey upon Central American migrants on their way to the U.S. through México through kidnapping, extortion or by providing information on the migrants to larger criminal organizations. There are also reports that Los Zetas are heavily involved in human trafficking along these routes, providing circumstantial evidence of ad hoc cooperation on these shared profit schemes” (Jones 2013, p. 9).

The Mesoamerican Migrant Movement, a civil society organization, states that 70% of the migrants entering the Mexican state of Tabasco indicate that they have experienced death threats, extortion, or the death of at least one family by gang members or by narcos in their country of origin (Patterson 2014a). This violence is also transnational in origin. The US-inspired 18th Street Gang and the Mara Salvatrucha gangs originated in part in Los Angeles, California, and proliferated in El Salvador when 4,000 gang members were deported from the USA back to El Salvador (Martinez 2014). The Salvadoran National Public Security Council further states that gangs control neighborhoods, demand extortion fees from residents and businesses, and control schools by recruiting children as young as eight (Martinez 2014). Several Central American accounts claim that gangs call this extortion a “war tax” (Musalo and Ceriani Cernadas 2015).

When transmigrant youth arrive in the USA–México border zone, they likely suffer from paralyzing border stagnation (Bejarano et al. 2012). Stranded in an unknown place, often with little money, resources, or identification, they are a perfect target for predators. In Mexican cities like Ciudad Juárez, economic refugees deported from the USA have no resources to return home. Migrant youth remain in these Northern Mexican border towns waiting to cross into the USA again. The downtrodden in border cities find themselves trapped with few resources to leave the city and can succumb to illicit work for their own survival. This happened to “Meny,” a 16-year-old Honduran who fled his homeland to avoid repeated recruitment attempts by gangs, only to be forcefully recruited to work as a lookout for the Barrio Azteca gang located in Ciudad Juárez and El Paso, Texas (Chaparro 2014).

In cities such as Monterrey, México, drug cartel representatives – narcos – also force youth to participate in some aspect of a drug operations network. Historian, Hector Aguilar Camín has argued that “the narco is part of the landscape, and having become part of the daily life in these communities is the true force of the Narco” (Wilkinson 2009, p. 2). In such situations, it is difficult for youth to resist the

temptations of cash and luxury items offered to them. Alternately, when cartel leaders threaten the family members of teenage boys, most of these youth agree to assist the cartels to protect their loved ones. As drug cartels create impossible situations for youths, the US immigration system stops migrants and refugees at the border, while it concurrently forces undocumented migrants already in the USA further into the shadows of an illegal economy. Through such policies, the USA produces what it calls “illegal aliens” within its national borders and constructs “trapped populations” inside and outside of its borders.

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## 8 Dying a “Social” Death: Children and Youth Living Clandestinely

Youth who successfully cross into the US border as economic refugees or as children fleeing violence are frequently shunned by US institutions when seeking assistance. If they are not apprehended by Department of Homeland Security (DHS) agents during their border crossing, they confront border patrol agents, immigration, customs, enforcement (ICE) agents, or local county sheriffs that often work in tangent with DHS agents within their border communities. The growth of DHS and its enforcement of both the interior and the border make it difficult for undocumented youth to live a life free from violence in their “adopted country” with so many entities harboring hostility toward them.

Immigrants have become a prime scapegoat for xenophobes and politicians. Consequently, undocumented immigrants living on the US border have a paradoxical consciousness of what constitutional and human rights are because their inalienable rights are typically challenged within this 100 mile-wide border region termed a “constitution-free zone” by the *American Civil Liberties Union* (2008). Border violence and the fear of US inspection become part of their lived experiences as they move through life being paid “under the table” at jobs that many US citizens would not do or seeking refuge in schools, community centers, or churches.

For these undocumented youth, violence and vulnerability can ultimately lead to a kind of “societal death” since they do not have the proper documentation needed to reside in the USA. Some youth live in mixed-status families that may be comprised of legal immigrants, undocumented immigrants, and naturalized citizens, whose status can change when undocumented family members legalize their status and legal immigrants are naturalized as permanent residents or citizens (Fix and Zimmermann 1999). As Lauren Martin has argued, “how immigration policy and enforcement practices have sutured racialized, sexualized, and gendered identities and normalized certain forms of belonging and citizenship over others... reveal[s] much about how familial relationships continue to be sites of contentious discursive production and governmental intervention” (2012, p.869). Legalization protocols are lengthy, expensive, and convoluted processes.

For youth in mixed-status families living in the country without documentation, they potentially risk jeopardizing the entire family’s legal status, which can lead to deportation hearings or government claims that permanent resident or US citizen



family members harbored “illegal aliens.” Consequently, these youth can even be isolated from family members living in the same country. Nuñez and Heyman (2007) describe a “process of entrapment” where “people who live inside the border zone never leave the area of crossing. . . they experience a near-permanent sense of liminality, involving nearly constant presence of fear, anxiety, and stress” (Nuñez and Heyman 2007, p.357). Some undocumented youth succumb to the stresses of these geographic spaces and their limited legal employment opportunities and work as drug mules or traffickers. The vast majority “fly below the radar” working in the service industry, agriculture, construction, or any other work making wages that will just cover remittances to the homeland and possibly be enough to “just get by.”

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## 9 Conclusion

The USA–México border is a highly policed zone where children and youth are exposed to violence, vulnerability, and “death.” It is comparable with several other border zones globally. When discussing the status of child refugees worldwide, Antonio Gutierrez, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, stated, “We see them in the Mediterranean routes through México to the U.S. . . we see them everywhere” (Patterson 2014a). At border zones, children and youth experience exceedingly complex and volatile situations ranging from unauthorized crossings to forced migration or exposure to illicit trades. The geographies of violence for children and youth along border zones are often analogized as collateral damage during nonwar times by nation-states. Conflict zones that mimic war zones are never good for youth who are made vulnerable and easily victimized by people and policies that produce border violence.

The geographies of violence and conflict plaguing children and youth in warlike border zones also come with stories of resilience, courage, and hope. Activism committed to stopping violence and promoting peace is central to safeguarding human rights and imagining nonviolent possibilities at the USA–México border.

Youth are often at the helm of activism, such as the *Marcha del Coraje, Dolor, y Desagravio* (March of Courage, Pain, and Vindication) protests organized in Ciudad Juárez denouncing the murders of citizens (Staudt and Méndez 2015). The global “No Borders” movement that in 2007 took place at the Mexicali, México–Calexico, California border, is another example of youth-led protest and “transformative resistance” (Bejarano 2010) to the border industrial complex. No Borders calls for the “abolition of nation-state imposed borders and subsequent immigration controls” (Burridge 2010, p. 401). The “No Borders” youth protestors demanded to “participate in critical debates surrounding migration, freedom of movement, human rights, and nation-state sovereignty, but also to step beyond typical frameworks and institutions, which do not address the stakes which youth have in current programs of border militarization and criminalization of migration” (Burridge 2010, p. 402). The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) youth, better known as “Dreamers,” have marched and risked deportation, while

other Dreamers have been deported or have become self-sovereign beings and fled the USA as a form of defiance to anti-humane and restrictive border policies. These youth formed the organization Los Otros Dreamers in México City that work to establish more humane immigration policies and work with families caught between nation-state borders (Anderson and Solis 2014). These forms of activism seek to rethink citizenship and repurpose human rights' frameworks and, in so doing, reshape the border itself.

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## Abstract

This chapter reviews the scholarly literature on the economic migration of families, in particular, family separation, reunification, with especial focus on the children implicated in the Filipino labor diaspora and Latin American migration to the United States. The experiences of children in families separated through economic migration occur across a range of circumstances: from those left behind in their home countries while their parents work abroad, to those born to temporary migrants and subsequently separated from their mothers when they are sent “home” to be cared for by relatives, to those who migrate to join their parents after a period of family separation. The lives of these children are adversely affected by governments’ ambivalences about the rights and citizenship entitlements both of temporary work migrants and of children. Neoliberal economic priorities and rationalities also often clash with liberal-democratic values to create contradictory and inconsistent outcomes. Despite the very real

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differences in the experiences of different groups of children – in this chapter between those migrating from the Philippines and Mexico and Central America, there are some similarities across their experiences of separation and reunification, in terms of the emotional consequences of transnational separation and reunification, and adverse effects on educational achievement. The violence considered in this chapter is the mundane, chronic, and everyday violence of poverty, social and economic marginalization, and feelings of abandonment. Children and youths are not passive in the face of these challenges, and brief attention is given to their capacity to address them.

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**Keywords**

Transnational families • Labor migrants • Filipino children • Mexican children • Deportation • Undocumented migrants

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## 1 Introduction

Arvin's mother left the Philippines to work in Saudi Arabia as a domestic worker when he was an infant. For a while she visited Arvin every 5 years for 2 to 3 weeks, but this stopped when she had troubles securing her temporary worker status: Arvin's mother then stayed in Saudi Arabia and sent money home for his care in the Philippines. Arvin's perception was that he was passed from family member to family member as he was growing up: "When my uncle got tired of me, I would go to my aunt's. I didn't experience play when I was young. I didn't experience care. That's why I became angry. Because no one was taking care of me." At the age of 14, Arvin was literally scavenging food for survival when living with his grandparents in the provinces: "I finally decided that I would just be the one to decide for myself. . . I got used to eating whatever was available. I would eat anything: coconuts, fruits. I brought these habits and skills to Manila." Unable to find stable work in Manila, at age 22 Arvin found the dangerous work of driving trucks for long hours in Saudi Arabia. Through a series of extraordinary coincidences, he reunited with his mother there, and they lived together as mother and son for 2 years. This is the longest time that he has ever lived with his mother. "That's where I felt: 'Oh, this is how things are when you have parents who will take care of you.' So I was very happy. We pretended that I'm still young, that I'm still a baby. I would point at food to eat from Jollibee [a fast food restaurant]. It's like, I want to play myself, that I'm still a baby. It was our system. 'Ok, how would you feed me, Ma, now that we are here at Jollibee?' Because I didn't experience it when I was young. . . I saw that [behaviour] in Jollibee: children, they are fed by their parents. I would say, 'Ma, how about me? Pretend I'm still a baby. How would you feed me?' Like that. Instead of taking care of someone else. . . she would show me!" Interviewed in August 2014 in Manila the week before he returned to Saudi Arabia for a second stint as an Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW), Arvin stated his ambition to save enough money to build a concrete house for himself and his mother in the province from which they came,

a house strong enough to withstand the onslaught of hurricanes and typhoons. “I’ll make sure they’re building a house that, even though I’m away and I hear about an earthquake or a typhoon, I am sure that that house is made with cement and is safe and stable. I will not worry. My parent needs a permanent home here.” “At least now that we’ve been together, I understand why she had to sacrifice everything for me. It was all just for me. As my payment – even though she didn’t succeed in putting me through college, I tell myself that if she worked really hard for me to live, I will also work very hard myself. I will not be satisfied until I finish building that house for her.” His mother, now 64, is planning to return to the Philippines in the near future. Arvin, in the meantime, has replaced his mother as the next-generation OFW, though his dream is to share the house with his mother in the Philippines sometime in the future. Asked which parts of his story he would like to be shared with others, he emphasized the joyful reunion with his mother in Saudi Arabia and his plans for the future (Pratt et al. forthcoming).

We can take from Arvin’s story as well an impression of the ways that global political economic relations reach deeply into the lives of children, to structure their family life, emotional wellbeing, and chances for the future. Arvin is one of millions of children left behind when their parents leave to work “temporarily” in another country. In an influential 2005 report, the Global Commission on International Migration concluded that, worldwide, the old paradigm of permanent immigrant settlement had given way to temporary or circular migration, and noted that almost half of these temporary workers are now women. As Leah Schmalzbauer (2004, p. 1320) put it: “In the global south, mother work increasingly mandates migration,” frequently to care for children and the elderly in the global north. Whether or not children migrate themselves, migration seeps through and structures their lives, but as Alvin’s life story also indicates, children of migrant parents often migrate as well: in 2010 UNICEF estimated that 11% of global migration to developed states consisted of children and youths under 20 (quoted in Bhabha 2014, p. 2) and in 2006 the World Bank estimated that 12–24-year-olds made up roughly one third of all international migrants (quoted in Donato and Sisk 2015, p. 60). Like Arvin, an astonishing number of youths manage this migration unaccompanied by their parents (Bhabha 2009, 2014). In 2014, the number of unaccompanied children and youths detained at the US-Mexican border for attempting to cross without legal documents rose to 68,000 (Donato and Sisk 2015), with a 117% increase in the numbers of children 12 years of age or younger apprehended that year (Krogstad et al. 2014). These numbers likely represent only a portion of unaccompanied children crossing this border and only a fraction of unaccompanied child migrants worldwide. Further, it is estimated that there are 1.8 million unauthorized children living in the United States alone (Bhabha 2009), an arbitrary artifact of immigration policy that has decisive lifelong implications for economic wellbeing.

Until recently, very little research has explicitly addressed children’s experiences of transnational labor migration from the perspectives of the children and youths whose lives are so affected by it (Constable 2014; Suzuki 2015a, b). This situation

has paralleled the inattentiveness of policy makers and migrant advocates. Jacqueline Bhabha (2014) reasons that the latter changed in the late 1990s for two reasons: the growing presence of unaccompanied youth required some policy response from developed destination states, and children began to receive increasing attention in international law after the ratification of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. Among researchers, the influences are likely more diverse, including close working relationships with community organizations concerned about the wellbeing of youths of transnational families. While parents are often explicit that their economic migration is aimed at securing a better future for their children, migration can also perpetuate lifetimes of precarity for both adults and children. Children and parents often experience the "same" migration differently, their interests are not always aligned, and the costs and benefits can be unevenly or differently distributed. Further, if researchers are silent on children's experiences, they inadvertently perpetuate the invisibility of the mundane violence associated with state policy and practice, and the tendency to view children as appendages, dependents, or possessions of their parents in ways that trivialize children's needs, rights, and agency.

The focus of this chapter is on economic migration of families, and in particular, family separation and reunification, with especial focus on the children implicated in the Filipino labor diaspora and Latin American migration to the United States. This focus emerges in the first instance from the fact that family separation due to labor migration is extensive from these two regions and there is a substantial body of research on each. It is estimated that one in ten Filipino nationals work overseas in over 190 countries, and that 85% of these workers are on temporary labor contracts (Pratt 2012). As a consequence, at least nine million children in the Philippines (or 27% of the overall youth population) are growing up with at least one parent working abroad (Parreñas 2010, p. 1827). The comparison with families from Mexico and Central America is instructive as well because although there is no singular "immigrant experience," there are resonances across different histories of migration that collectively raise broader questions about the violence of distinctive and yet similar state policies, in particular the opening of national borders for temporary labor migration and the hardening of national borders for families. These state policies are framed within contradictory neoliberal economic rationalities and liberal-democratic values, and are also expressive of fundamental ambivalences about the entitlements and basic human rights of children and temporary migrant workers. (See also within this volume: Wills, Gupta and Clayton for unaccompanied asylum seekers and Martin for migrant family incarceration and detention.) Contrary to liberal values of universality and inclusion, state protection of and investment in the child is practiced very unevenly across different groups of children. Children of migrant workers, by fiat or design, often exist outside these protections and investments. After outlining the broad contours of this argument, the experiences of children left behind, those born of migrant mothers and sent "home" to relatives, and those reunifying with migrant parents will be addressed in turn.



## 2 State Ambivalence and the Production of Family Separation and Reunification

In her expansive study of child migration and human rights, Jacqueline Bhabha notes that “it is surprising, even shocking, to learn that state policies, rather than dysfunctional or incompatible individuals, are major sources of family separation” (2014, p. 23). The state policies that structure this disruption of family life are specific to particular places. For instance, Hernández (2015) notes with respect to the heightened media and political attention given to the “crisis” of or “surge” in unaccompanied child migrants to the United States from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras in spring and summer of 2014, that these increases have been underway since at least 2009. Rather than an exceptional crisis or surge, the patterns are better understood in his view within long-term US geopolitical-economic interventions in Central America, including US support of the military coup in Honduras in 2009, neoliberal economic arrangements and free trade efforts (including NAFTA), and anti-crime and anti-drug initiatives endorsed and facilitated by the US government. Likewise, the enthusiasm of the Philippine government for exporting temporary labor as a means of securing foreign currency through remittances can only be understood in the context of the debilitating effects on the economy of a history of colonialisms and neoliberal structural adjustment policies, the latter dating from the 1970s (Guevarra 2010; Rodriguez 2010). Within the specificity of these regional histories, however, two global policy trends have exacerbated the tendency towards increased family separation and child migration: a generalized enthusiasm for temporary labor migration, encapsulated in the 2005 International Commission on Global Migration report characterization of circular labor migration as a win-win situation for sending and receiving countries, and the securitization and militarization of national borders since September 11, 2001. If the former has increased family separation because temporary work visas allow only individual family members to travel abroad to work as temporary foreign workers, it is arguable that the latter has simultaneously exacerbated family separation and pushed many families towards reunification and undocumented status in the global north.

Bhabha is able to find the effects of these two policy trends “surprising” because they run counter to other policies and values in the liberal democratic societies that deploy them. The European Court of Human Rights determined in 2008, for instance, that 2 years of separation between mother and child violates the state’s obligation to protect the best interests of the child (and thus is at odds with the commitments made by signatories to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – of which, it should be noted, the United States is not one). The International Commission of Jurists confirmed this assessment, noting that “a waiting period of three years is capable of rendering almost void the right to respect for family life, particularly in cases involving children” (cited in Bhabha (2014), p. 23).

But as Bhabha and others note, liberal democratic states can be profoundly ambivalent in the face of competing priorities, and temporary foreign workers

and children are key sites of ambivalence about citizenship entitlements and human rights. Linda Bosniak (2006), for instance, has written extensively about the contradictions between two distinctive meanings of citizenship. One meaning is tied up with the boundary or threshold question of who is rightly included or excluded from membership within a particular liberal democratic community. This is distinct from the meaning of citizenship within that community, as a bundle of entitlements and responsibilities. The two notions of citizenship exist within different regulatory and normative frameworks, one exclusionary, the other inclusive (i.e., all members are supposed to have equal entitlements and responsibilities). As Bosniak has put it, liberal citizenship is hard on the outside and soft on the inside. The two meanings of citizenship are usually kept separate: one regulates the border, and the other operates within the territory. But because temporary foreign workers patently do not share the same entitlements as citizens within the territory (for instance, capacity to vote, access social welfare provisions, the protections of employment standards, rights to mobility, etc.) in Bosniak's view they "most directly and graphically" reveal the contradictions between the two notions of citizenship (2006, p. 124).

The balance between inclusion and exclusion is mediated by competing geopolitical and economic priorities and principles. The expansion of temporary foreign worker programs has been in line with neoliberal policies that strip back social welfare entitlements and place responsibility on individual subjects to invest in themselves and take the necessary risks to optimize their potential. Anna Guevarra (2010), for instance, examines the proliferation of governmental techniques deployed by the Philippine state to produce overseas migrant workers as responsible, entrepreneurial subjects who take the initiative of seeking "greener pastures" elsewhere. So-called receiving countries in the global north are simultaneously able to shed the costs of social reproduction: for instance, the costs of educating these workers, as well as medical, childcare, and other expenses of family life. Likewise, the receiving country need not feel the obligation to protect the family life of the migrant worker if the assumption can be made that this is the responsibility of the state to which the migrant worker belongs.

What it means to be a child citizen, Bhabha (2014) argues, is another key site of ambivalence. One perspective assumes that children are included within the universal rights and obligations entailed by membership within a community. The other, which Bhabha identifies as the republican model dating back to Aristotle and Rousseau, assumes that children are unable to participate actively or fully in public deliberation and thus are not yet citizens. They are citizens in training. Both of these approaches inform law and public policy: the former is enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, while the latter tends to inform domestic family and social welfare practice. The ambivalent framework, in Bhabha's view, has "many unambiguous consequences" for children and youths, such that "no other group of citizens in the developed world today has such legally sanctioned partial access to the benefits of membership" (2014, p. 65).

### 3 Children Left Behind

If there is nothing new about transnational families (a study of immigrants to the United States in 1910, for example, found that 50% of men had left a child in their home country (cited in Dreby 2010, p. 5)), the extent of and increasing propensity for mothers to migrate to care for their children is a significant new development. Although there is no gender breakdown of transnational parents from the Philippines, the fact that at least 70% of newly hired Filipino migrant workers from 2000 to 2006 were women, suggests the prevalence of transnational mothering (Parreñas 2010, p. 1827). Of the more than 11 million Mexicans living and working in the United States, 38% of fathers and 15% of mothers have left children living in Mexico (Dreby 2010, p. 6). Parents almost without exception frame their migration decision in terms of bettering their children's lives, and remittances sent home pay for children's schooling – sometimes in private schools, and family members' medical and other expenses. In many cases, these remittances are essential rather than supplemental to household livelihood. In the Philippines, for instance, it is estimated that between 34% and 53% of the population depends on remittances for their daily subsistence (Parreñas 2010).

In line with Arvin's experience reported above, Filipino children tend to be separated from their parents, and in particular their mothers, for long periods of time. Rhacel Parreñas (2005a) calculated that overseas migrant mothers from the Philippines spent an average of 23.9 weeks with their children over the course of an average of 11.42 years away, while migrant fathers spent 74 weeks with their children over 13.79 years. Because of the high cost of airfare from many of the countries in which these mothers work, fear of losing their job (in the case of Filipina migrants, typically working as domestic or other type of care worker), and responsibility to send remittances home, many migrant mothers come home only every 3–4 years for an extended visit of a month or two so (Parreñas 2001; Pratt 2012). In the past, Mexican transnational parents in the United States have been able to visit their children much more frequently, but with the militarization of the US-Mexican border, the scarcity of legal pathways to permanent residency for undocumented residents, the expense and danger of crossing the border (especially for children and women) and new employment opportunities located further away from the border in the Midwest and Northeastern US, prolonged family separation increasingly has become the norm within Mexican transnational families as well (Dreby 2010). In her "domestic ethnography" of Mexican transnational families divided between New Jersey and Oaxaca Mexico, Joanna Dreby states that "one of the most devastating consequences of parents' decision to migrate without their children" is the fact that separation is almost always longer than anticipated (2010, p. 31). Of the 45 Mexican parents that she interviewed in New Jersey between 2003 and 2006, mothers averaged 3.5 years away from their children and fathers 8.3 (2010, p. 206).

The absence of a mother is felt to be and often is much more disruptive than that of a migrant father. In a survey of 302 school-aged Filipino children, 82.8%

indicated that they would advise their friends to “allow your parents to work abroad.” However, the breakdown of responses with respect to migrating fathers as compared to mothers was telling: 59.5% would advise friends to allow their fathers to go abroad, 19.7% would advise both parents, and only 3.6% would advise friends’ to allow their mothers to work abroad (Paz Cruz 1987, cited in Parreñas (2001)). Children left by their fathers are typically cared by their mothers, and their nuclear family remains more or less intact. When a mother leaves, the nuclear family is likely to be disrupted. Children left by mothers tend to be cared for by their female extended kin, often a maternal grandmother or aunt (Asis et al. 2004; Dreby 2010; Parreñas 2005a; Pratt 2012). Of the 30 children of migrant mothers interviewed by Parreñas in the Philippines between 2000 and 2002, only four were cared for by their fathers and in some cases their father, who remained in the Philippines, moved to another location within the country while his wife was working overseas. Siblings in larger families are sometimes separated if responsibility for their care needs to be distributed across female kin (Pratt 2012). While most children are not significantly neglected, Dreby (2010) found that children left in Oaxaca often were not supported by their caregivers to achieve their parents’ high expectations for scholarly achievement, because grandmothers were growing old and many were illiterate. When Parreñas (2005) interviewed female guardians in the Philippines, most cried during the interview as they expressed their feelings of being overextended, as grandmothers who felt too old to take on the responsibility of caring for their grandchildren or as aunts with families of their own. She notes that most extended kin are not altruistic and they view the work of caring for children left behind by migrant mothers to be a burden, which – given cultural expectations in the Philippines, they have no choice but to take on.

While – unlike Arvin – most children of migrant parents enjoy more prosperity because of the remittances sent home and most migrant mothers make great efforts to care for their children from afar through frequent telephone calls and – more recently, text messaging (Fresnoza-Flot 2009; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Madianou and Miller 2010, 2011; Parreñas 2001), many children left by mothers (less so fathers) tend to feel neglected, even abandoned. In her study of transnational migrant families in the Philippines, Parreñas reports that, “Again and again children describe the nurturing provided by migrant mothers as ‘not enough’” (2005b, p. 33). While many recognize their mother’s sacrifice for their relative material prosperity, they are not convinced that it is worth her absence.

Parreñas’s interviews were conducted between 2000 and 2002, before communication technologies such as text messaging became more widespread. By 2006, the Philippines was dubbed the text capital of the world, with approximately 42.8 million mobile phone subscribers in a population of 88.5 (Madianou and Miller 2011). Mobile phones and text messaging allow mothers living abroad to manage their households in the Philippines on a daily basis and to maintain constant communication within a large network of extended kin and friends. However, these forms of communication are not the same as the touch, smell, and sensuality of daily proximate contact and specialists classify text messaging as “phatic” communication, a type of communication in which the act of communication rather

than its content confirms the relationship (Madianou and Miller 2011). Consider the case of one domestic worker living in Vancouver Canada who left two of her children in her sister's care (another lived with her mother), made careful financial arrangements to ensure their wellbeing, text messaged with her children frequently, and spoke with them weekly on the phone. It was not until she visited the Philippines and was able to speak with her children face-to-face that she discovered that her sister had taken for herself much of the money that the domestic worker had sent home, her children were sometimes hungry, they slept on mattresses in the living room, and did not receive the gifts that she sent on special occasions (Pratt 2013). An extreme case, it nonetheless points to the limits of these forms of communication. Madianou and Miller (2011) also note a marked discrepancy between Filipino children and their mothers in feelings about mobile phones and text messaging, with children more ambivalent about the capacity these technologies afford for maintaining satisfying relations with their mothers. The researchers reason that this reflects in part asymmetrical access to the use of this technology: seven times the number of calls come into the Philippines as go out, likely reflecting the higher cost of initiating a phone call from the Philippines.

Mothers' visits home are, as noted above, sporadic and these too can be difficult. Some Filipino mothers and their children reunited in Vancouver recalled actual non-recognition at the beginning of these visits: "She didn't even recognise me. She walked past me and then I said, Mama. It's me;" "It's funny or sad because when I got home, my kids could not even recognize me;" "[I waved at my four year old, who] kind of just looked at me, like 'Okay, who are you?'" (Pratt 2012, pp. 55–56). Children described the stress of these visits: "the hardest part [of the separation] is when she comes home and leaves again. It is very distressing for us. . . We would be scared. We usually tried to avoid her in the first week" (Pratt 2012, p. 59; see also Dreby (2010) for visits home by Mexican mothers; Schmalzbauer (2004) for visits home by Honduran mothers).

The emotional impact of family separation manifests to varying extents in different ways for children of different ages (Castañeda and Buck 2011; Suárez-Orozco et al. 2011). Dreby (2010) distinguishes between younger children, who tend to manifest their resentment towards their parent as indifference, and adolescents, who often act out towards their caregivers and other authorities, and fail to deliver on their side of the "intergenerational contract" with their migrant parents by doing poorly in school, even dropping out (see also Lahaie et al. 2009). In the case of the Philippines, there is some evidence that children of migrant mothers fare less well in school; analysis of a large representative sample of 10–12-year-olds found that a lower proportion of children with mothers working abroad were on the honor roll as compared to children whose fathers work overseas and children of nonmigrant parents (Scalabrini Migration Center 2003–2004). Dreby isolates four reasons for these difficulties in school in the community in which she has worked in Oaxaca: depression, misbehavior associated with defiance of authority, lack of support from caregivers (in a school system in Oaxaca that expects high levels of parental involvement), and peer shaming. She found that even in a community in which migration is the norm, "children's individual experiences are not typically

supported by their peer groups,” and children with parents who have migrated feel shamed by other children for their “nonnormative” family arrangements (2010, p. 214).

Despite making a strong argument for the emotional impact of family separation, Dreby (2010) is careful to argue for the resilience of Mexican transnational families, claiming that the relations between family members in some sense intensify during the separation as each enters into (with varying commitment and success) their respective roles and obligations within the “migration contract”: for parents to send remittances and children to achieve success in school. The hardship of separation does not, she argues, destroy family bonds between migrant parents and their children, and children’s resentment tends to fall away as they move beyond 13 years.

It is also worth considering that dynamics beyond the family may account for the poor educational outcomes noted by Dreby in Oaxaca and that the production of the children of migrant workers as poor students may be a wider (if unintended) community project. Drawing from her ethnography of a town in which there are high levels of out migration to the United States, Susan Meyers (2014) argues that children of migrants in rural Mexico are excluded from social membership by school policy and practices even before they leave Mexico. Teachers expressed disapproval of out-migrants for depleting Mexico of human capital and cultural unity (by returning with US goods and values) and they consider migrants to be shirking their civic responsibility by leaving. Meyers argues that students in rural Mexico are effectively tracked by educators, either for ongoing education in Mexico or for migration to the United States, and those who seem likely to migrate receive less attention at school. Teachers thus unwittingly construct children of migrant parents as “nonmembers” of Mexican society. Even before they migrate, she argues, these students are constructed as undocumented migrants.

Parreñas also qualifies her analysis of the impact of family separation on Filipino families. She does not dispute that children genuinely feel abandoned by their mothers working abroad, especially in (the majority of) families in which the father does not assume caregiving responsibility, and that these perceptions of abandonment have serious personal and social effects. She is however concerned that her assessment of the impacts of family separation not further vilify migrant mothers. As Dreby also notes, “Migrant mothers bear the moral burdens of transnational parenting” (2010, p. 204) and in the Philippines the abandonment discourse is widespread and highly gendered. In 1995, as one example, President Fidel Ramos publicly called for initiatives to keep migrant mothers at home. “We are not against overseas employment of Filipino women,” he said. “We are against overseas employment at the cost of family solidarity” (quoted in Parreñas 2010, p. 1836). That is, he identified the problem to be the migration of mothers rather than the migration of women per se. Parreñas argues that children’s inability to recognize their mothers’ transnational care and the care provided by extended female kin, and their feelings of abandonment and longing for greater intimacy with their mothers working abroad are instilled by the norms of patriarchal gender relations in the heteronormative family, promulgated in the media and literally

taught in the state-regulated Values Formation curriculum at school (Parreñas 2010). She calls for an expansion of the ideology of mothering to include economic provisioning as a respected maternal role, as well as a recalibration of the gender division of the labor of social reproduction, such that fathers assume a greater caregiving role.

There are more far-reaching hesitations about negative conclusions about the fates of children in transnational families. Karen Fog Olwig (1999) argues in relation to Caribbean children whose parents work overseas that the impact of separation very much depends on the health of the extended family network and – crucially – whether their parents maintain a strong economic and social presence through remittances and periodic visits. She found that the children who felt like second-class citizens were those whose mothers had stopped sending remittances. In the Caribbean family, she argues, social and economic relations are not concentrated within the nuclear family and so it is impossible to assess the wellbeing of children without assessing a wider web of kinship relations.

So too, in a critical engagement with Parreñas' analysis, Filomeno Aguilar presents evidence from Batangas Province in the Philippines to demonstrate “that kin other than the absent parent can be effective in extending emotional care to migrants' children, who grow up without the disappointments expressed by Parreñas's informants” (Aguilar 2013, p. 347). In his view, Parreñas imposes a western frame of the nuclear family on a non-western context. He lays particular emphasis on the importance of sibblingship within the extended Filipino family (Aguilar 2013). “Unlike middle-class opinion makers based in Metro Manila,” the people in the village in which Aguilar conducted his ethnography “refrain from passing judgement on transnational families and their growing children, especially adolescents, saying a lot depends on the individual child” (2013, p. 352). So too he argues that there is no stigma attached to being a child of migrant parents, “as may be the case elsewhere” (2013, p. 352). Also writing in relation to rural Philippines, Deirdre McKay (2007) cautions that criticisms of family separation and transnational parenting potentially betray Eurocentric and middle-class norms of family and intimacy. In a rich ethnographic account of one family in Ifugao, she argues that in this region of the Philippines there is nothing particularly new or damaging about parents leaving their children in the care of kin. She also disrupts a purely economic reading of remittances, arguing that remittances, gifts, and daily text messages can thicken rather than diminish intimate relations between kin and can be an important medium through which intimacy is performed and experienced.

As Olwig (2007) notes in relation to the Caribbean family, the family is not a static social entity and different family forms and ways of relating are emerging within new migratory frameworks, mediated by new communication technologies. The family is a complex social site, sometimes of competing narratives and forms. In the Caribbean context, Olwig argues, the family as an extensive open-ended network of extended kin relations that share resources coexists with the “folk” model of the nuclear patriarchal family. So too “the” Filipino family might in some regions of the Philippines be a sedimentation of very different precolonial and colonial, religious,

and other legacies. Nonetheless it seems possible to suggest that the emotional consequences of slippages or contradictions between different narratives and modes of relating are likely most deeply felt by the least powerful and most vulnerable in the family, namely, children. There is sufficient research from enough different places to suggest that family separation can cause stress for the children who are left behind if the extended kin network is not robust enough to fill the gap left by migrant parents.

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## 4 Migrating Children and Family Reunification

Not all labor migration is temporary or “circular” and some children eventually join their parents in the country to which they have migrated. The circumstances that allow this are very different, and so in many cases are the issues involved after reunification. In Canada, the Live-in Caregiver Program (now Caregiver Program) has been almost unique globally in the opportunity it affords domestic workers who complete the program to sponsor their families legally to settle permanently in Canada (Pratt 2012). In Japan, the issue of Filipino youths born to unmarried Japanese men and Filipino women (often working in Japan on visas as entertainers), reuniting with their mothers in Japan after being raised by kin in the Philippines, has emerged since 2008, when Japan’s Supreme Court granted rights to Japanese nationality to these children if certain conditions are met. As of June 2013, 4417 children of unwed Japanese-foreign couples have been granted Japanese nationality (Suzuki 2015a). In the United States, the most significant and widely studied cases of reunification involve undocumented families from Mexico and, increasingly, Central America. In 2008–2012, it was estimated that about 4.1 million undocumented persons in the United States resided with children under 18 years of age. Sixteen percent of these undocumented persons (671000) resided with children who were non-US citizens (i.e., children who were also undocumented). (In the majority of cases, therefore, undocumented residents are living with at least one child under age 18 born in the United States; Zong and Batalova 2015). The Pew Hispanic Center estimated in 2009 that one in seven students in the state of Arizona was undocumented or a child of undocumented parents (cited in Cortez et al. 2014). Although these various groups of children and youths are migrating within (or outside of) different legal regimes and regulations and their experiences are different in many important respects, there are also unsettling similarities in the ways they are produced as the next generation of vulnerable, low-skilled workers in the countries to which they migrate. In the case of Filipino children in Canada and Japan, the scene of their inclusion produces their exclusion as the next generation of precarious labor; in the case of children of undocumented Latin American residents in the United States, the scene of their exclusion is the mechanism for the terms of their inclusion, also as precarious labor. Consider the case of each in turn, to explore a diverse spectrum of leavings and reunions.



## 4.1 Filipino Children of Domestic Workers: Reunification in Canada

Sacrifice for their children's future is a common theme among Filipino domestic workers who have come to Canada through the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP, now Caregiver Program), and most domestic workers hope that their sacrifice will be rewarded through the improved lives of their children and other family members. Highly educated (in 2009, 63% of those applying for permanent resident status had at least one university degree and further 33% had some postsecondary education; Kelly et al. 2011), the majority of Filipinas coming through the LCP experience significant downward mobility and deprofessionalization as a result of the time spent working as domestic workers (Pratt 2012; Kelly 2015). After completing 24 months as a live-in caregiver within a 48-month period, domestic workers have the capacity to apply for permanent resident status and sponsor their dependents as immigrants to Canada. Given the need to save for their families' arrival, complete the necessary paper work, and delays in processing their documents, family separation has proven to be longer than expected in many cases: a median of 8 years (Pratt 2012). Since 1995, those coming through the LCP have, however, sponsored significant numbers of family members and by 2006 roughly one family member was sponsored for every domestic worker gaining permanent resident status: 48.5% of the 6895 immigrating to Canada through the LCP were spouses or dependents (Kelly et al. 2011). The Philippines is now one of the top migrant-sending countries in Canada.

There is now substantial evidence that Filipino children reuniting with their mothers in Canada are not, by and large, fulfilling their mothers' dreams for their success. In Vancouver, children who speak Tagalog at home tend to have a relatively low likelihood of graduating from high school. Only 64% of boys speaking Tagalog at home who entered a Vancouver high school from 1995 to 2004 graduated with a degree, as compared to 80% who speak English (percentages are not as extreme for girls: 76 and 84, respectively Pratt 2012). Analyses of national data confirm this pattern. Filipinas aged 25–29 are far less likely to have a university degree than most other visible minority immigrant women of this age (with the exception of Blacks and Latin Americans), and Filipino men graduate from university at the lowest rate of any group (Kelly 2015).

These poor educational outcomes for Filipino immigrant youths, in many senses surprising given their parents' high levels of educational attainment, are at least in part an outcome of the upheaval associated with long years of family separation, in other words, of an immigration policy that mandates that domestic workers come to Canada first alone, as a type of indentured servant. Given the difficulties of maintaining intimacy with their mothers over years of long-distance separation, compounded by the loss of their primary caregivers (often a grandmother or aunt) in the Philippines when they leave to migrate to Canada, children often feel estranged from their mothers when they arrive. One mother described the intensification of feelings of distance at the moment of reunification: "It's more difficult when they arrive because your expectations of being reunited. . . It's not back in the

Philippines that [the separation] is so real. There's no division, or you cannot see any wall between you. But when they are here: it's like a tall building keeping you apart" (Pratt 2012, p. 66). Family estrangement; deskilled mothers who work two or three jobs and thus are unable to fully attend to their children's lives at school; children who feel an obligation to leave school at the earliest point possible to assist their deskilled mother with basic household expenses in Canada: this is a potent mix of factors that leads to the unskilling, not just of mothers, but also their children in Canada (Pratt 2012). Educational policy that places many newly arrived Filipino children, with accented but competent English, in English-as-a-Second-Language programs, compounds the tendency for Filipino students to get "stalled" in the Canadian school system (Farrales and Pratt 2012). Poor education outcomes and social and economic vulnerability are thus produced within (and are not incidental to) the Canadian government's compromise of the exchange of citizenship for 2 years of indentured servitude on the part of their mothers, as well as Canadian school policy and practice.

## 4.2 Japanese Filipino Children Returning to Japan

A very different constellation of government policies and circumstances have led Filipino youths to rejoin their mothers in Japan, and researchers have begun to report on their precarious lives there (Faier 2009; Suzuki 2010, 2015a, b). From the late 1970s until roughly 2006, Filipina women entered Japan in large numbers on skilled-worker entertainer visas. In most years between 1985 and 2005, well over 40,000 Philippine Nationals worked in Japan in this capacity (Faier 2009). A "guestimate" is that tens of thousands of children were born through intimate relationships between unmarried Filipino entertainers and Japanese men (Suzuki 2015a). Before 2008, unless the father declared paternity before the child's birth, the child was not recognized as a Japanese national, and in most cases the children born to Filipina entertainers were sent to the Philippines to be raised by extended kin. As Nicole Constable notes with respect to babies born to migrant mothers abroad, they are "largely invisible and often overlooked" (Constable 2014, p. 1). However, as the result of a successful legal challenge from several unmarried Filipina mothers, in 2008 the Supreme Court amended Japanese law to remove the requirement that paternity must be established at birth, creating the opportunity for children of unmarried Japanese fathers and Filipina mothers, who are recognized postpartum by their Japanese fathers, to attain Japanese nationality themselves.

Nobue Suzuki has chronicled the largely painful biographies of Japanese Filipino Children (JFC) who have reunited with their Filipina mothers and sought out their Japanese fathers in Tokyo as teenagers (they must attain and declare their Japanese citizenship by age 22; dual citizenship is not recognized by Japan) and notes that securing legal citizenship has offered no assurances of social membership in Japan. Perhaps because many of the mothers had established new families in Japan, Suzuki reports numerous cases in which mothers have taken highly instrumental approaches to their JFC child, requiring the newly nationalized JFC to contribute significantly to

household expenses and the care of step-siblings (Suzuki 2015a, b). Youths' aspirations for educational advancement and their employment ambitions are often frustrated by their poor Japanese and in some cases these youths have followed their mothers' career trajectories, working in bars and the low end of the entertainment and service sectors (Suzuki 2015a). The maternal neglect and instrumentalism reported by Suzuki are likely extreme cases. Drawing on her in-depth ethnography of Filipina hostesses in rural Japan, Lieba Faier paints a more sympathetic portrait of maternal care and argues that the children who have been able to join their mothers in Japan as young children appear to have adapted smoothly, learning Japanese quickly and enrolling in Japanese schools. Those who have come as teenagers from Manila "were not doing as well." "A few told me," she writes, "that they remained in Japan only because their mothers insisted that more opportunities for their futures would be found there. They dressed in fashions from the Philippines, listened to the Philippines pop music, and said that more than anything they wanted to return 'home'" (2009, p. 214).

### 4.3 Children Migrants from Mexico and Central America

The fates of unaccompanied children traveling from Mexico and more recently in great numbers from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador have received considerable media attention. Propelled in many cases by the violence associated with a hollowing of the state, active gang recruitment and the militarization of everyday life in their home countries, some children are being sent by family members to the perceived safety in the United States (Kennedy 2014). Others are traveling to join family members already resident in the United States, the latter in many cases living as undocumented residents who are no longer able to risk visiting home given increased border enforcement. UNHCR (2014) reports that 22%, 49%, 27%, and 47% of unaccompanied children entering the United States since 2011 from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, respectively, had at least one parent living in the United States. Analyses of survey data collected for the Mexican Migration Project and Latin American Migration Project of the numbers and family characteristics of children migrating as minors from 1977 to 2013 led Donato and Sisk (2015) to conclude that almost all Mexican children migrating to the United States have at least one parent in the United States and/or with "US experience." They extrapolate this to unaccompanied children currently traveling at great risk from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador and conclude that discussions of children's migration "should be rooted in a larger discussion about the opportunities that these minors have for family reunification and access to legal immigration" (2015, p. 73). The stakes of the "academic" argument are significant: framing children's migration with family reunification places it within the jurisdiction, and political and moral valence, of US immigration policy.

The experiences of undocumented youths have rightly garnered considerable attention (more below), but those who have reunited with parents with regularized status also resonate with the experiences of Filipino youths separated and then reunited with their parents. A large national survey of immigrants receiving legal permanent resident status (their "green card") between May and November 2003

indicated that Latin American immigrant youths tended to be older than other children in the same grade and a large proportion do not complete high school (40%). This is especially the case for children who have been separated from their parents (and in particular their mother) before migration, who migrated at 13 years or older and whose parents were undocumented before acquiring their green card, a constellation of factors that are likely interlinked (Gindling and Poggio 2012). The experience of family separation was much more common among Latin American immigrant children than it was among other immigrant groups (45% of whom had been separated, compared to 28% and 21% for those classified as “Asian” and “Others”, respectively; Gindling and Poggio 2012, p. 1162. See also Suárez-Orozco et al. 2011 for an extensive review of the sociological and clinical literature on the reunification of Central American and Mexican transnational families.)

Children of undocumented parents are especially vulnerable, even if they themselves were born in the United States and thus have US citizenship. US-born children with at least one undocumented parent are twice as likely as other children in the United States to live in poverty (Bhabha 2014, p. 71). So too, undocumented parents’ fears of being deported jeopardize their children’s access to education, that which 75% of immigrant children in the United States identify as “the most important thing in life” (Suárez-Orozco 2005). With over a thousand deportations processed daily (see Martin this volume), an estimated 11 million undocumented people in the United States live in “a constant state of anxiety” (Torres 2014). As much as actual deportation, de Genova writes of the way that *deportability* reaches into everyday life to render undocumented migrants as a highly vulnerable and thus exploitable labor force. Deportability, he argues, creates an “enforced orientation to the present” based in the “revocability of the promise of the future” (de Genova 2002, p. 427). Working with undocumented students in Salt Lake City, Utah, Cahill, Gutiérrez, and Cerecer (2015) trace the abrupt foreclosure of undocumented youths’ futures when they begin to contemplate a university education. As a result of the 1982 *Plyler* versus *Doe* Supreme Court decision, all children in the United States are entitled to state-funded public education for primary and secondary schooling regardless of their immigration status (but see Smith and Winders 2015 for the harsh realities and fear that prevent some undocumented children from exercising this entitlement). As Justice Brennan commented in that judgment, “It is difficult to understand precisely what the State hopes to achieve by promoting the creation of a perpetuation of a subclass of illiterates within our boundaries” (quoted in Bhabha 2014, p. 274). For this reason, some of the students participating in research with Caitlin Cahill and her colleagues realized that they were undocumented only when they were unable to supply a social security number at the time of applying for student aid to attend university. This “process of ‘learning to be illegal’ is experienced as an existential shock and a deep sense of betrayal” (Cahill et al. 2016, p. 132).

Many children of long-term resident undocumented parents are in a sense also already transnational: the children born in the United States are US citizens, while their parents retain the citizenship of their original country, typically Mexico or a Central American country. A child’s inability to sponsor their parents’ citizenship points to the asymmetry of adults’ and children’s citizenship entitlements, rooted in

the state's ambivalence to children as citizens. The deportation of a parent is the de facto deportation of the child. If one agrees that, "the most significant citizen-specific entitlement today is the guarantee of nondeportability," then the inability on the part of the citizen-child to initiate family reunification is an extraordinary denial of membership entitlement (Bhabha 2014, p. 67). It is within this context of establishing children's citizenship rights that arguments about children's civic competencies and responsibilities, evidenced for instance when children take on the important role of translating for non-English speaking parents when they engage with medical and other institutions, assume such importance (Aitken 2014). With the President Obama's expanded Deferred Action [i.e., deportation] on Child Arrivals (DACA) and Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA), announced in November 2014 and still in the courts at the time of writing, this is a site of intense political contestation.

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## 5 Transnationalism and New Visions of Belonging

The fact that children and youths within some transnational families are caught within the ambivalences towards migrants and children and the contradictions of neoliberal economic priorities and liberal-democratic values does not mean that they are passive in the face of this. Ambitious undocumented Mexican youths, for example, finding the university system in the United States to be unattainable, have taken the risk of returning to Mexico to enroll in university there, with the hopes that a college education will allow them to return legally to the country in which they were raised (Cortez et al. 2014). Many more are staying put in the United States and risking deportation by collectively challenging problematic and arbitrary constructions of illegality and refusing the contradiction between their juridical identities as undocumented and their subjective identities as US-raised children. They are, in other words, "coming out" as undocumented youths. Having internalized a basic tenet of liberal democracy, namely that citizens have the power to make change, undocumented youths are rearticulating the grounds for their inclusion through organizing, for instance, under the banner of being "undocumented, unafraid and unapologetic," with the understanding that silence is a more dangerous option than speaking out (Negrón-gonzales 2014). As Cahill et al. note, analyses of the "school-to-sweatshop pipeline" are powerful tools in this political process because they name and elaborate personal experiences as political and reframe "the problem of immigration" as a "civil rights problem" and a "cheap labor problem." They delineate the stark contradictions between liberal principles of inclusion and the production of radicalized youths as marginal and exploitable through immigration, education, and other state policies.

So too Filipino youths in Canada have not been passive in the face of the challenges of family separation and they have actively and critically engaged with their transnationalism to rethink their place in Canada (Pratt with FCYA/UKPC 2003, p. 58). Locating themselves as transnational has led members of the Filipino Canadian Youth Alliance (FCYA) in Vancouver, for instance, to study histories of other racialized immigrant groups in Canada and to develop a broader structural

analysis of exploitable labor and systemic racism in Canada. They have also explored different but resonating histories of indigenous dispossession from the land in Canada and the Philippines. This process of study and discussion has been one means for FCYA members to rethink their relationships to and within the Canadian nation and to find a new sense of belonging in Canada as critical and politically engaged citizens (see also Kelly 2015). More recently at the University of British Columbia, graduate students involved in the Philippine Studies Series have been preoccupied with holding their entanglements with colonialism in the Philippines together with their complicities and entanglements within settler colonialism in Canada. They are navigating the difficult conceptual and political terrain of mobilizing an idea of Filipino in Canada that exists beyond liberal categories of identity and a politics of liberal multiculturalism (of inclusion and recognition), in ways that disrupt rather than reproduce settler-colonial relations and its foundational logic of the violent erasure of indigenous peoples. The violence of transnational labor migration, in other words, is leading youths in different countries in different circumstances in different ways to ask creative and searching questions that productively disrupt “the nation” at its very foundation.

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## 6 Conclusion

In her comprehensive study of children, global migration, and human rights, Jacqueline Bhahba writes that the processes of family separation and reunification discussed in this chapter are “the most familiar and well-understood aspect of child migration” (2014, p. 9). Indeed research on children separated and reunified with their families through economic migration is expansive and although cultures and immigration experiences vary in the specifics, much of the research comes to the same conclusion: family separation causes stress on children who do not have a robust and supportive network of extended kin, processes of reunification are often troubled, and migrant children and youths are frequently produced as the next generation of low-skilled and marginal workers. Although the critical literature rightly draws attention to the multiplicity of normative family forms beyond the western nuclear family and the risk of reproducing the middle class, heteronormative patriarchal family through critiques of family separation, it is equally important not to overemphasize the resiliency of families. Families are of necessity resourceful and resilient in the face of challenging global economic conditions and punishing state policies: migration policies that open the doors to temporary workers only; closed and militarized borders, and the policing and criminalization of migrants; and education policy and programs that limit migrant children’s access to education. The state is doubly ambivalent to children as bearers of rights and entitlements: as children and as children of migrant workers, and economic rationalities and priorities are often at odds with liberal values that dictate the protection of children. These ambivalences and contradictions, it has been shown, are unambiguous in their effects.

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# Symbolic Violence and Cruel Optimism: Young Men, Un(der)employment, and the Honda Layoffs in Swindon

# 22

Esther Rootham and Linda McDowell

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## Abstract

This chapter uses the concepts of structural and symbolic violence to discuss the experience of un(der)employment of working-class men in Swindon, a southern British town, who are struggling to find secure work in the context of the post-2008 economic downturn and fiscal austerity measures. The aftermath of the economic crisis exacerbated the structural violence endured by young people resulting from the overall rise of youth un(der)employment over the past 30 years. The stories of the youth in this chapter illustrate key themes emerging from a larger study involving semi-structured interviews with 38 un(der)employed young men aged 18–25 of different ethnicities and migration histories. The young men discussed here did not experience linear transitions out of education and into work. Instead, they cycled in and out of short-term, precarious contracts and periods of unemployment over the course of the 1-year study. This chapter uses Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence to capture the cruelty

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of the judgment placed on those who fail to succeed in what are extremely difficult conditions. In addition to the widespread tendency to blame those who are unemployed for their predicament, a number of contradictory stereotypes associated with different minority ethnicities and nationalities shape the labor market experience of young men, positioning them in different ways. This chapter examines how three young men negotiate their sense of selves and their economic livelihoods in the face of a difficult labor market and in light of these contradictory stereotypes.

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**Keywords**

Class condescension • Cruel optimism • Ethnic and racial stereotypes • Honda layoffs, in Swindon • Structural violence • Swindon • Honda layoffs in • Youth un(der)employment in • Symbolic violence • Un(der)employment. *See* youth un(der)employment • Youth un(der)employment

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**1 Introduction**

This is a chapter about working-class young men looking for work in Swindon in the UK – a town hit hard by the economic downturn after 2008 and where unemployment rates among young people are high. Early in January 2013, Honda, a key source of employment in Swindon, announced that it would be cutting a quarter of its permanent workforce, in addition to the 325 temporary workers who had been let go from the company shortly before the announcement was made (Wearden 2013). It is shown that this proposal had an impact on young men in precarious employment or searching for work in a wider context of the growing problems facing working-class and often unskilled young men in the labor market.

The concepts of structural and symbolic violence are used in this analysis of the situation of working-class young men in precarious work situations. In doing so, this chapter confounds commonly held assumptions about the geographies of conflict and violence as a characteristic of life in sites such as derelict neighborhoods in large metropolitan centers or in poverty-stricken areas in the Global South. Instead, this research explores 1 year in the lives of three young men cycling in and out of employment, living in Southern England, a relatively affluent part of the UK. Swindon, a town of 209,156, is located 130 km west of London.

These three men were part of a broader study focusing on the construction of masculinities and the experience of worklessness in the context of fiscal austerity. The research was based on semi-structured qualitative interviews with 38 un(der)employed young men between the ages of 18 and 25 of different ethnicities and with varying migration histories living in Swindon. A smaller subset of participants, including the three discussed here, were reinterviewed once or twice over the course of a year (between August 2012 and August 2013). In addition, key informant interviews were carried out with employers and youth service providers. At the time fieldwork was initiated in August 2012, Swindon was identified as having a youth unemployment “hotspot,” that is to say, it contained a neighborhood

within it where the proportion of youth claiming unemployment benefit is twice that of the national average (ACEVO 2012). Data for February 2012 for Swindon revealed that 9.4% of the resident population aged 18–24 were Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) claimants, above the regional average for the South West of 6.5% and the overall proportion for Great Britain of 8.4% (ONS 2014). (It should be noted that the claimant count underestimates true underemployment rates due to the fact that many job seekers do not or cannot claim JSA because they do not qualify for benefits. Furthermore, access to benefits has been increasingly restrictive in recent years, and plans for further restrictions for young people have been announced by the coalition government (Wintour 2014).) The situation of un(der)employed young people in Swindon has not been helped by the demoralizing effects of cuts to public spending, including drastic reductions to support youth services that were implemented as part of the austerity measures of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government. The three men discussed in this chapter were selected as clear examples of young men actively seeking work and affected by the Honda downsizing. Two of the men were White and the third a man of Indian origin from the state of Goa who had moved to Swindon at the age of 11.

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## 2 Structural Violence and Youth Un(der)employment

The concept of structural violence was first developed by Johan Galtung in 1969 (Jacoby 2008). Galtung’s contribution was to interpret the “damage that occurs to individuals or groups due to differential access to social resources and which is due to the normal operation of the social system” (Jacoby 2008, p. 39) as a form of violence. It is a concept that brings light to the indirect violence of inequality in the form of denied access to economic security, well-being, and dignity, therefore calling attention to the pain inflicted on a person as a result of them not being able to live to their full potential. This way of interpreting violence shifts attention away from individual-level behavior and intentions toward the negative and conflictual effects of social structures and institutions which perpetuate inequality (Jacoby 2008). The concept of structural violence is thus helpful for placing attention on the pernicious effects of gender, racial, and class inequalities and their consequences on the lives of marginalized groups.

The negative effects of un(der)employment are, it can be argued, a form of structural violence. The un(der)employment of the young men to be discussed in this chapter is affected by the onset, in 2008, of economic recession in the UK. This downturn was the most severe shock to the economy since the Great Depression (Bell and Blanchflower 2010). Not all workers were equally affected by the downturn, and analysis of labor market data reveals that unemployment is highest among those with lower levels of education, young people, and racial minorities. Black youth were particularly hard hit. Bell and Blanchflower (2010) show that while comprising only 19.5% of the UK working age population, 74% of the decrease in employment was shouldered by those aged 16–24. More recent unemployment figures for the UK show that young men are more likely to be without

work than young women in the 16–24 age group (19.9% unemployed compared with 15.5%) (Dar 2014). Data from 2011 indicates that the situation was worse for young men of color, with Black men facing an unemployment rate of 55.9% (ONS 2012b). Research suggests that periods of unemployment have severe consequences for a young person's future labor market outcomes and can result in a scar, which negatively affects their longer-term prospects for employment and their potential future earnings (Bell and Blanchflower 2010).

While the economic downturn and its aftermath continue to negatively affect the prospects of young people, it is important to note that youth unemployment was a problem in the UK even prior to the crisis. For the 10 years before the crisis, 7–9% of young people were reaching the age of 16 and could be classified as long-term NEET, “not in employment, education or training” (ACEVO 2012). Perhaps more important, however, was the widespread phenomenon of youth un(der)employment – that is, the situation of young people who are struggling to gain a stable foothold in the labor market. Youth scholarship has shown that over the past 30 years, young people have been less and less likely to experience linear, straightforward, and certain transitions out of education and into work (MacDonald 2013). Rather, young people are often forced to settle for part-time work, or work with inconsistent hours, and are frequently employed on a short-term or as-needed basis. In other words, young people are often not, strictly speaking, fully unemployed or employed, but typically cycle in and out of short-term, precarious employment and periods of unemployment as well as into, and out of, education and training programs (Furlong et al. 2006; MacDonald 2009, 2011a, 2013; Newman 2006; Shildrick and MacDonald 2011). Furthermore, for many young people, particularly those disadvantaged by class, these precarious jobs are not serving as stepping stones to enable a person to secure a better job as they gain more experience (Shildrick and MacDonald 2011). Instead, young people are trapped in a pattern described by some scholars as “churn,” in and out of low-quality jobs. This problem of youth un(der)employment is discussed here in relation to young people in the UK; however, youth scholars are increasingly arguing that it is a challenge faced globally by young people (Jeffrey 2008; Roberts 2009).

The prospects of young people with low levels of education have long been shaped by the broader social changes in the UK including the process of deindustrialization. This is the restructuring of the labor market with the associated decline of manufacturing and the growth of the service sector.

McDowell (2009) argues that this is in part because in most British towns and cities the work available to young people is in the expanded service sector. It is often neither well paid nor secure, but rather at the bottom end of the labor market, typically in feminized, low-paid interactional service sector jobs (McDowell 2009). It is here that young people, men as well as women, without formal credentials increasingly are forced to search for work.

Young working-class men, in particular, can face acute challenges in securing service sector employment. They are often deemed not to embody the characteristics and attitudes perceived as appropriate and employable in the new interactive service sector in which deference and self-presentation are prized (McDowell 2003, 2007,

2012). Willis' (1977) classic work revealed the way in which working-class young men are socialized at school into types of male-dominated employment that rely on a particular version of masculinity that is constructed in opposition to an academically oriented middle-class masculinity. In the contemporary service-sector-dominated economy, the version of a "hard" working-class masculinity previously valued in the manufacturing sector is likely to result in young men's disqualification from service employment. In Swindon, where opportunities in manufacturing are diminishing and those that remain tend to require a degree of skill, young men who do not have high levels of education face difficulties securing work. For such young men, the performance of the social and embodied skills that are required in interactive service sector work, such as reverence, eagerness to please, and an ability to deliver "service with a smile," is a threat to their sense of themselves as masculine. Research in Britain, the USA, and elsewhere has revealed that young working-class men, particularly racialized men and/or recent in-migrants, find themselves at a particular disadvantage in economies in which service sector employment is dominant (Bourgeois 1995; McDowell 2009; Newman 1999, 2006; Nixon 2006).

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### 3 Class Condensation, Ethnic and Racial Stereotypes, and Symbolic Violence

The concept of structural violence enables a recognition of the violence that is perpetuated through, for example, inequitable social institutions and economic restructuring, both of which produce and reinforce inequality. The concept of symbolic violence sheds light on the mechanisms through which these social divisions are made to be meaningful in the cultural arena. An important body of scholarship contends that classed social divisions are relationally constructed and that cultural taste and moral judgment are significant to the process of making class matter (Bourdieu 1984; Kehily and Nayak 2014; McDowell 2007, 2008; McRobbie 2004; Sayer 2005; Skeggs 2009).

Employment is an important arena in which respectability is secured (Newman 2006; Valentine and Harris 2014). This is particularly the case for the construction of a respectable masculinity, as employment is a key arena for the construction of masculinity (Connell 2002) and as the traditional male breadwinner model continues to be influential for masculine identities (Willott and Griffin 1996). This plays out in the predicaments that young people today face: while decent work has become increasingly inaccessible for working-class youth, the problem of un(der)employment is often explained in individualized terms that tend to blame youth themselves for their lack of work (MacDonald and Marsh 2005; MacDonald et al. 2010). Paid employment is cast in a misleading way as being the result of individual agency and willpower, within the grasp of a person's capacity to "strive" for a future. Those unable to secure work are cast as "skivers" and, hence, personally at fault (Newman 2006). Popular media accounts, political discourse, and even, to an extent, youth intervention schemes intended to assist the disadvantaged tend to represent working-class youth as lacking "employability," as displaying "unwillingness to work" and as

having low levels of aspiration and ambition. Thus, for example, policies targeting young people who are “not in employment, education, and training” (referred to as NEET in the UK) tend to interpret this status as a result of deficiencies of the young people themselves, rather than as a result of the lack of available job opportunities (Furlong 2006; MacDonald 2011). Furthermore, while NEETS are the focus of youth interventions, almost no policy attention has been paid to the problem of un(der)employment and the plight of young people who are cycling in and out of low-quality work (MacDonald 2013). Thus, what is essentially a “demand-side” problem requiring the creation of decent work for young people has been construed as a “supply-side” problem requiring investment in human capital in order to upskill and train youth or, worse, in a manner that constructs unemployed youth as lacking in “skivers,” lacking in aspiration (MacDonald 2013).

The representation of the un(der)employed as “skivers” versus the deserving poor as “strivers” is part of a wider tendency to demonize the poor and hold them individually responsible for their own misfortunes (Jones 2012). Jones (2012) argues that in Britain, it has become socially acceptable to express disgust and disdain for poor people through disparaging labels such as “chav.” Jones argues that successive politicians since the Thatcher years have enacted policies which have “chavified” the masses, essentially impoverishing the poor by clawing back much needed social services and welfare systems at a time when deindustrialization and the restructuring of the labor market was devastating the opportunities of the working class. The combined effects of economic restructuring and government policies that render precarious those who are already suffering from the decline of work opportunities are downplayed in dominant representations of the working class. Instead, poor people are represented as feckless, lazy, and lacking in motivation and aspiration.

In addition to the widespread tendency to blame those who are unemployed for their predicament, a number of contradictory stereotypes associated with different minority ethnicities and nationalities shape the labor market experience of young men, positioning them in different ways. According to the 2011 census, Swindon can be broken down by ethnicity as follows: 85.6% White, 6.4% Asian, 2.1% as mixed/multiple ethnicity, 1.4% as Black African or Caribbean, and 0.4% as others (ONS 2012). Swindon is home to the second largest population of Indian migrants from the state of Goa in the UK (McDowell et al. 2016). Interviews with managers and owners of employment agencies revealed that they held localized stereotypes of the working habits of different ethnicities and nationalities, which affected their hiring practices. Indian and Goan young men were considered to be particularly employable for low-wage work as they were viewed as hardworking and amenable to discipline. They were compared favorably to both young men of color of different origins and White British young men who were often depicted as unreliable and unmotivated. Young Polish men, however, were constructed as the most sought-after employees, as one agency owner explained:

Indians and Goans just want to work, any hours and for minimum wage as long as they can work. . . . If you are looking at a Polish young male and British young male the work ethic will be with the Polish every time. They’ll turn up for work and they won’t let you down.

Their willingness to work for a low salary is completely different. (A small number of quotations used in this chapter are drawn from a journal article currently under consideration for publication in the journal *Gender, Work and Organization*.)

These hiring stereotypes served to mask the complex social relations and structural conditions which perpetuate social inequality by attributing different work ethics and competencies of workers to static, naturalized categories of nationality, “race,” ethnicity, and gender. English working-class young men in particular are constructed as “skivers,” as undeserving of employment due to a lack of willingness to work, while ethnicized stereotypes construct migrant Polish and Goan workers as “strivers.” However, these “positive” stereotypes of Goan migrants as good workers in Swindon coexisted with negative representations of South Asians as associated with delinquency and crime. The concept of multiple masculinities is useful in registering the diversity of masculinities which are constructed in relation to various femininities, but also other masculinities in any given context (Collinson and Hearn 1996). As is shown below, participants in our study often drew in ambiguous ways from the dualistic discourse of “strivers” and “skivers,” as well as from other contradictory racialized and gendered stereotypes, to construct their sense of selves.

These taken-for-granted “truths” about different categories of people are a form of symbolic violence, an “order of things” which positions dominated groups in a divisive and competitively hierarchical way. Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of “symbolic violence” refers to social relations that are not widely thought of as particularly violent (Bourdieu 1977; Lawler 2011). This is because, by definition, symbolic violence refers to the masked violence of social relations, whose unequal arrangements perpetuate inequality and, while causing injustice and indignity to dominated groups, are nonetheless legitimized as self-evident, natural, and unavoidable (Bourdieu 1977). These social relations are accepted as the natural order of things, even by those who are affected negatively by them. It is “the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 167).

Angela McRobbie (2004) develops the concept of symbolic violence to link it with the reproduction of gender and class inequality in relation to the shame inflicted on working-class women through “makeover” television programs. She illustrates how their humiliation is rendered socially acceptable in such productions. These shows present middle-class judgment and taste as obvious, attainable, and uplifting and, conversely, the lack of middle-class embodiment and poise as evidence of a mismanaged life and a poor grasp of appropriate self-presentation. These representations contribute to the “subtle practices of power directed to winning [working class women’s] consent to and approval of a more competitive, consumer-oriented, modernized, neo-liberal meritocracy” (McRobbie 2004, p. 105).

Lauren Berlant’s development of the notion of a “cruel optimistic relation” is helpful in extending the idea of symbolic violence to show how an investment in an aspiration for social mobility and middle-class respectability through employment



may undermine dominated groups under contemporary circumstances. As she defines it, “a relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing” (Berlant 2011a, p. 1). It is not only stereotypical representations but also by the effects of global forces, including the shifting geographies of manufacturing and the rise of the service sector which influences young people’s aspirations and that frame the individual stories of the quest for work that are presented below.

A small body of scholarship on youth culture and inequality is beginning to uncover the ways in which young people are relating to the stigmatization of class. Kehily and Nayak’s (2014) research focuses on the work that pejorative labels and stereotypes do. They argue that “chavs” and “teenage mothers” serve as “figures of abjection,” that is, they are used to relationally construct moral boundaries of middle-class and White respectability. Kehily and Nayak argue that young people “contest, resist and struggle to overturn representations that cast them as “filth”, “scum”, “dirty whites” and even subhuman” (p. 164). In this chapter, a contribution is made to this body of literature by examining the extent to which symbolic violence is enacted on and bought into by working-class young men in relation to securing their approval and participation in a competitive neoliberal job market that positions them at the bottom of the hierarchy of eligibility, if not completely excluding them. Here the experiences of both a racialized young man and two White men are used to illustrate the complexities and contradictions in racialized and classed stereotypes of working-class young men.

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#### **4 Young Men, Un(der)employment, and the Honda Layoffs in Swindon**

The looming Honda layoffs were felt keenly by the three men at the heart of this chapter and by the other young men who were interviewed who were looking for work in Swindon. This was evident in their perception that they faced higher competition for laboring jobs due to the influx of a supply of more experienced workers looking for work. In addition, as the narratives in this chapter reveal, the displacement of workers from the Honda plant also represented a destabilization of the webs of supportive relations that some young men relied on for their economic and emotional well-being in difficult times. This was because the Honda layoffs affected the job security of some of the young men’s parents who either worked for Honda or subsidiary companies or who faced the possibility of looming unemployment.

All three participants were at pains to construct themselves as hardworking and motivated. Sam, who identifies as White English, was 20 when first interviewed. He had recently secured a council housing flat after a living in hostels since being thrown out of his mother’s home. His story was complicated by severe family conflict and breakdown, a past problem with drug abuse, a current problem with gambling, and a minor history of run-ins with the law, although since the age of 18 he had avoided any serious offenses. Sam considered himself to have had a hard time at school, “I just fell in with the wrong crowd,” and was excluded due to an

incident involving arson, although he managed to complete his GCSEs (General Certificate of Secondary Education examinations taken at age 16) in a college program after leaving school. After surviving a serious drug overdose, he began to rebuild a new life for himself. He is now considered the most successful in terms of his employment status, among a group of three friends who all took part in the research and who had known each other since school. Yet, “success,” for him and others in our study, often meant simply securing a low-paid and insecure job.

At the time of the first interview with Sam, he had been working a series of short-term contracts through temp agencies, some of these posts lasting as little as 2 days. By the second interview, Sam had completed a 4-month stint secured through a temp agency at a subsidiary of Honda. However, hearing of the looming Honda layoffs, Sam managed to line up an assessment interview at a warehouse through another agency. He then quit his temporary job at the Honda subsidiary, in hopes that the new warehouse job would have a higher chance of becoming more secure. As he described it, it was a gamble, and he would have preferred to stay on at the production plant, but in light of the troubles facing Honda, he was concerned that as a temporary employee, he would probably be among the first to be let go:

Like, I like the job, I'd love to stay for as long as they wanted me, but I knew that temps go first, I've seen it before, they give you about an hour's notice, just before you're about to leave, I've seen the people, It's happened before, they've left, gone out the door, and the temp agency rings up and says, that's it, no job for you today. And they don't ring you for a couple of months. That's just the way it goes, so.

In the end, he was not kept on at the warehouse job and found himself once again out of work. By the final interview, Sam had recently started training for a sales job for a bank, a job that he perceived as white collar although it remained insecure and was mediated through an agency. His hope was that he could prove himself employable and for the post to become permanent.

Sam's narrative reveals how he both reproduces but also rejects the judgments inflicted on working-class young men like him. He echoes, for example, the representation of English workers by hiring agencies as lacking motivation. “English people, we sit at home on the internet and do fuck all.” He offers an especially negative representation of men: “no respect for themselves, females, and just really no respect for anyone in general.” Yet, his own employment trajectory over the course of the year in and out of precarious work suggests otherwise. He offers accounts of the efforts he put in to present himself to employers, the techniques he uses to prove himself capable and motivated on his short-term contracts, and his concerted attempts at strategizing as best as he could in light of what he knew about the labor market in Swindon. He describes himself as a “hard worker and motivated.” He went on to explain his work ethic at the production plant:

I never missed a day, I was never caught talking or slacking, I was just, I was always working. I never complained when we got overtime, like it was always just the case that I would be there from the start to the end and I was just keep working. I guess I switch my brain off when I'm over there. I turn it back on when I get home.

Sam's narrative also shows how the quality of the work available to him rarely leads him to income security. He recounts how while receiving Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) he had been obliged to carry out a work experience placement in a retail outlet, which had led to a job offer. However, the contract he was offered was a "zero-hour contract." A zero-hour contract is one which does not guarantee the worker a minimum number of hours per week (Willis 2014). Estimates based on analysis of the 2014 Labour Force Survey data suggest that there are as many 2.7 million zero-hour contracts in Britain (Willis 2014). Youth, women, and seniors are disproportionately affected, and it was found that 36% of people aged 18–24 are on such contracts (Willis 2014). Sam was forced to refuse such a contract, not out of a lack of work ethic but because it did not give him the financial stability to know that he would be able pay his rent and bills. For Sam, it was safer to remain on benefits:

I didn't sign it because I knew exactly what it was and I know that if I worked one week or not the other, or worked a dodgy amount of hours, I'd still have to sign on, try and get benefits, it can mess up everything really, getting a zero hour contract. They're the sort of contracts you want if you're living at home with your parents, you don't have any bills to pay and stuff like that.

Sam's predicament vis-à-vis the uncertainties of the labor market helps illustrate some of the mechanisms by which the proliferation of short-term work serves as a barrier rather than a stepping-stone to a more stable livelihood for working-class youth (MacDonald 2009). Longitudinal studies confirm that prospects are worsening for young people who already face class disadvantage, particularly those with low levels of educational credentials (Buchholz et al. 2009; Edwards and Weller 2010; MacDonald 2009).

Alfie's narrative also illustrates some of the quandaries that young people may face in trying to secure their economic survival and well-being in the context of the shortage of stable employment. He also identifies as White English and grew up in a small township located on the outskirts of Swindon. He was raised by his mother, a worker in the printing industry, and his stepfather who has a physical disability and is employed as a laborer by Honda. Alfie, who described himself as a quiet student who was never excluded from school (the fate of several respondents), completed his schooling at the age of 17, with a Level 2 college training in car mechanics. He explained how securing work as a car mechanic was very competitive and required you to stand out in relation to the other applicants. While he had worked hard on his CV and dropped off copies to numerous garages, he had only ever managed to secure one interview, and he did not get the job. Securing work as a car mechanic remains his long-term work-related aspiration, but he has been forced to look for alternatives in the meantime.

At the first interview with Alfie, when he was 19, he had left his family home and was renting a room in a flat. He was juggling multiple minimal hour contracts in an attempt to cobble together an income on which he could survive. He was working on a contract of 8 h a week at a hardware store. In order to boost his hours, he also attempted to secure additional work through temp agencies – this in itself was not a

straightforward task and involved printing out 20 CVs and dropping them off in person to the various agencies in town. Through this process he eventually managed to get hired on a zero-hour contract in refuse collection for the city council. He then faced the problem that Sam had sought to avoid, that of not knowing from week to week how many hours of employment he would secure. The tenuous nature of the zero-hour contract also required him to be “on call” and to, in his words, “work your socks off” in order to constantly prove himself worthy of work hours.

Five months later, Alfie’s temporary job with the council was discontinued. He explained that he considered himself lucky to have been kept on 5 months, as many others hired at the same time as him did not last that long. He was looking for another job and described in detail the numerous CVs he had dropped off, saying “desperate times, desperate measures.” He had decided not to try to find work through employment agencies, expressing frustration with the lack of security: “you can be the best person working in there but they’ll still let you go – it’s cheaper for them.” Furthermore, he had found that agencies did not have much work available as a consequence of Honda’s announcement of layoffs, coupled with the fact that a large retail store in Swindon had also recently gone bankrupt. He explained how he felt that he and his stepfather were “kinda in the same boat.” His stepfather, as an employee of Honda, was waiting to find out if he would hold on to his job and, furthermore, had already experienced redundancy three times previously and so understood Alfie’s plight.

By the third interview, after a further 5 months, Alfie had just secured a full-time job as a sales advisor in a retail outlet. He explained how he had seen the job advertised on a website, applied for it online, not heard anything back, and therefore had dropped into the shop in person to deliver his CV. He says that he normally visits a prospective employer three to four times to look for work because he believes persistence pays off.

Alfie clearly emphasizes his motivation, aspiration, and hardworking nature in his narrative. Yet, he feels he has to work hard to ensure that he is perceived as embodying these characteristics by prospective employers. He is also critical of the way he finds that he and his friends are treated by the police and shop managers around town. He explains that because they are young people, when they hang out in groups, they are considered to have a threatening vibe. In his words: “Their records could be clean, but they are victimised as being troublemakers.” Yet, he is also careful to distinguish himself as not a “Mr Big Hard Man Chav,” the kind of man that does not work, that cultivates a macho image, and that gets into problems with the police. He also describes how he and his friends avoid aggressive provocations and brawls with such men by sticking together in larger groups. In these ways, Alfie negotiates the negative representations of working-class young men like himself. He reproduces the binary of striver/skiver, by working to distinguish himself from those who he views as less deserving and respectable.

The third example is from the narrative told by Michael who moved to Swindon from Goa, India, about 10 years earlier when he was 11, and thus had undertaken his secondary schooling in the UK. His parents had moved the family to the UK in the hope of expanding the range of educational options for their two sons. His father

currently worked as a forklift driver and his mother in production for a subsidiary of Honda. At the time of the initial interview, Michael was living with his family and had been struggling to secure work after having received disappointing A-level results. (A levels are British school examinations taken at the end of secondary school, usually aged 18, and are a key route to university.) He explained how he found that he was at a disadvantage for work in the retail sector, where he thinks women are at an advantage and also, for manual labor, where he argued that older men with bigger builds win out:

I think if you want to have people at the tills, I think they'd rather hire girls for that because I think they're just more approachable and I think . . . better character for the store than like having old men or something. . . . Yes, but for more manual jobs then obviously we're men, but obviously they'll be choosing older men who are like more built I guess, so I kind of fit none of them!

By the time of the second interview 4 months later, Michael had managed to secure a job with a 6 h a week contract at a household appliances and electronics retail store. The employer had staff work 39 h, enough to not have to pay overtime, during the busy Christmas season months. With the recession, a similar chain closed down, and the employees from that business sought work at Michael's place of employment. These workers were hired as they had extensive experience in relevant areas, and so Michael lost his additional hours, partly due to the influx of the new workers but also because of the end of the Christmas season.

This low-paid, limited-hour retail job is not what Michael wants to be doing. His long-term aspiration was to work as an engineer, and he had hoped for an apprenticeship with a subsidiary of Honda. His family's financial situation has been relatively stable over the past 10 years, although his parents were anxious about the potential effects of the Honda decision. However, finding the job at the retail outlet had been a benefit for him as it made him less reliant on his parents for financial support. Thus, for Michael, this part-time job was acceptable in the short term, and while he remained aware of its precariousness, he also talked about how it allowed him to save money little by little – money that he hoped to use to buy a house one day. Being able to live with his parents was an important part of the reason why he was able to accept a minimal hour contract.

What Michael really aspired to was an engineering apprenticeship. He was anxiously waiting to find out if the apprenticeship schemes at a subsidiary of Honda, for which he had applied, were still going to be running in light of the layoffs.

I pretty much just call up every day to find out if they have got any news about the apprenticeship. They don't really know anything. I was one of the more higher achieving ones [in school], so if they are still going through with it, I should get it, but that's if it still goes through.

Yet, while Michael describes himself as “one of the high achieving ones,” he wrestles with the racialized negative associations he sees are attached to Goans in

Swindon. In a manner that resonates with Alfie's distancing and differentiation from certain forms of "hard" working-class masculinities, Michael describes how he tended to distance himself from other Goans in Swindon.

I've tried to avoid the Goan community since I've been a kid, since I've moved here to be honest. Cause they just kept themselves as a bad crowd, to be fair. They, there's always been kids that tend to get caught with the police and everything. I've never thought of myself as a Goan person- well, I am a Goan person, but as part of a Goan community, just because I always tried to avoid being friends just with Goan people when, after secondary school. . .

The example of Michael is used to illustrate the different ways in which the young working-class young men grappled with the symbolic violence of the classed, gendered, and also racialized/ethnicized constructions of their value. What might be described as "structural violence," the violence exerted by the retraction of economic opportunity and lack of the availability of decent work, intersects with the construction of working-class young men as divided into the dualistic categories of strivers or skivers or the deserving and undeserving poor. This process is complicated by contradictory processes of racialization, in which certain bodies are constructed as more docile and amenable workers suitable for "lumpen labor," as we found was the case for Indians (and Goans) in Swindon. Yet, these stereotypes coexisted with negative representations of the Goans in Swindon as associated with troublemaking and criminality.

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## 5 Conclusion

Illustrating the experience of un(der)employment through young men's life narratives, therefore, permits the highlighting of the heterogeneous ways in which stereotypes that are naturalized as "truths" in local contexts to produce differentially valued workers are both accepted and also resisted and reworked. The categories of strivers and skivers, and the associated notions of the deserving and undeserving poor, were both reproduced and resisted by these young men as they attempted to make sense of the difficulties they had in securing decent work. While certain young men experiencing difficulties, including Sam, explained their current situations in terms of their earlier involvement in delinquency and low levels of educational credentials, others, like all those discussed here, also expressed a genuine desire for a stable income and respectable employment and took steps to try and secure it. Yet others, including those who managed to get work, seemed to reflect a neoliberal individualized ideal, interpreting their (relative) success as a consequence of their perseverance, relatively high scholastic achievements, and their distinction from "harder" working-class and racialized masculinities. Yet, the work secured by most of the young men was low paid, often insecure, and largely not the kind of job they aspired to.

Whether or not individuals feel responsible for the struggles they face securing work or attaining the kind of work they aspire to, in bringing these individual

narratives together, it is clear that there are broader factors at play over which these young men have no control. The economic recession and ongoing process of deindustrialization and the shift toward a service sector economy, exemplified in concrete terms in our research through the retrenchment of work opportunities from Honda, and the ripple effects of the layoffs which took place during the course of our longitudinal study, bring into relief the limited explanatory value individual accounts of motivation and aspiration have in determining young working-class men's success in securing work. Other factors which played a role related to the location of young men within webs of family and wider social relations which could offer them leads to access to work as well as guidance (for a more detailed account of this, see Hardgrove et al. 2015; Wyn et al. 2012). This support enabled these young men to "strive" for work, a process which is revealed to involve an ability to survive relatively lengthy periods of unstable income, an extraordinary degree of confidence and perseverance in the face of rejection as they continually apply for jobs, and an incredible degree of self-control when they do achieve waged work in tolerating what are often felt as humiliating work conditions.

In the context of widespread stigmatization and blame placed on working-class youth who are held individually responsible for not being able to secure employment, Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence is particularly appropriate. It captures the cruelty of the judgment placed on those who fail to succeed in what are extremely difficult conditions:

If there is any terrorism it is in the peremptory verdicts which, in the name of taste, condemn to ridicule, indignity, shame, silence . . . men and women who simply fall short, in the eyes of their judges, of the right way of being and doing. (Bourdieu 1984 in Skeggs 1997, p. 90)

Berlant (2011b) argues that in the wake of the recent economic crisis, the "good life" has been revealed to be a phantasm of the imagination, as the transformed structural conditions have eroded the conditions necessary to secure it and even to know what steps are necessary to attain it. She refers to this situation as an "imaginary impasse" requiring people to be "living on while not knowing what to do" (p. 183). It remains to be seen whether all the young men whom we interviewed, including the three discussed here, are able to secure stable employment and attain the respectability and independence that is their long-term aim. What is clear is that in the context of austerity and recession, there were few obvious steps for them to take in order to attain a logical progression toward these goals.

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## Abstract

This chapter considers what political violence means for young people’s prospects in Nepal. It examines the meanings young Nepalis give to their education as they struggle to structure their lives amid a grim employment environment exacerbated by civil strife and political upheaval. The level of precarity in their lives may not differ much from what their parents have experienced, but they make sense of their possibilities differently. These young people see themselves as capable of moving beyond the local sphere of agricultural work and wage labor to pursue entrepreneurial and professional paths both in Nepal and abroad. Education has imbued them with the confidence to change their own lives and communities for the better.

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## Keywords

All-party mechanisms (APMs) • Constituent assembly • Drug cultivation • Economic liberalization • Educational attainment • Educational distinction • Gender discrimination • Geopolitics • Inequalities • Investment families • Labor migration • Literacy rate • Macro-politics • Madhesi movement • Maoist civil war •

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Maoists and political parties • Micro-politics • Moral guidance • National progress • National youth policy (NYP) • Nepal's postwar transition • People's movement 2 • People's movement and political instability • Political instability • Post-conflict settings • Social mobility • Social progress • Social reform • United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN)

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## 1 Introduction

In the last 20 years, Nepal's literacy rate has increased by over 30%, and the number of people earning their School Leaving Certificates has increased tenfold. Families across socioeconomic demographics have invested in their children's education, in the hope that it will yield salaried work (*jagir*), particularly in the government sector. Educational attainment is viewed as the key to a more secure life. However, the upheaval caused by a decade of civil war, violent political movements, and more recently the political stagnation and uncertainty of the postwar transition has weakened the economy and local governance and undermined educated young people's attempts at gainful employment. So what happens when young people are unable to secure stable positions? How do they make meaning of their education after they fail to realize the ends in which they initially invested? This chapter considers what political violence means for young people's prospects. It examines the meanings young Nepalis give to their education as they struggle to structure their lives amid a grim employment environment exacerbated by civil strife and political upheaval. The level of precarity in their lives may not differ much from what their parents have experienced, but they make sense of their possibilities differently. These young people see themselves as capable of moving beyond the local sphere of agricultural work and wage labor to pursue entrepreneurial and professional paths both in Nepal and abroad. Education has imbued them with the confidence to change their own lives and communities for the better.

Youth may have limited agency; nevertheless, they are embedded in webs of social relations that determine how politics operates (Kallio and Häkli 2011; Skelton 2010; Wells 2014). Thus understanding young people's perspectives is central to understanding not only their own being and becoming but also the being and becoming of the nation. In post-conflict settings, the stakes are even higher because of the transnational focus on nation-state rebuilding. Young people's views and experiences are central to understanding "locally experienced instantiations" of post-conflict, which is necessary to move beyond the normative global frames of post-conflict and the resulting politico-legal mechanisms (Shneiderman and Snellinger 2014). Studying young people's personal experiences and perspectives in post-conflict settings elucidates an important connection between micro-politics with macro-politics. What Chris Philo and Phoebe Smith (2003) saw as potentially problematic in analyzing children's political geographies – balancing the micro-politics of the personal with the macro-politics of the public sphere – is the very thing that allows us to understand "how conflict both configures and is configured into the social fabric" (Shneiderman and Snellinger *ibid.*). This chapter examines the

meanings young Nepalis give to their education as they struggle to structure their lives amid a grim employment environment in postwar Nepal. I suggest these young people's educational distinction is political because it is connected to the concerns of their families, communities, and the nation (cf. Buckingham 2000).

Post-conflict contexts engender a renegotiation of the rules of the game (Byrne and Klem 2014). The players renegotiating these rules are elite domestic and international actors who are trying to reestablish their authority in governing institutions at multiple levels. Power is a function and determinant of these negotiations (Ferguson 2006; Hagmann and Péclard 2010). Nevertheless, these elite players know this process does not occur in a vacuum but rather at the intersections of state and society and thus determines the future of state-society relations. And thus their orchestrations are in vain without public support. Nepal's conflicts have underscored that youth are a key demographic in maintaining post-conflict stability because normative interventions, like schooling, meant to cultivate nationalist subjectivities did not stem revolt at the turn of the twenty-first century. Many have documented that socioeconomic despair was a main push-pull factor for the youth who participated in the Maoist Civil War, the street protests in the Movement Against Regression, and the Madhesi Movements (De Schepper and Poudel 2010; Ghimire 2002; Kohrt et al. 2010; Snellinger 2013b). Politicians and policy makers have taken heed and made youth a priority in their post-conflict agenda (Snellinger 2013b, 2014). Interventions made by the National Youth Policy and Youth, Small Enterprise, and Self-Employment Fund (YSEF) loan scheme are intended to "harness and maximize the productivity" of young people for the nation as explained to me by the vice-chairman of the YSEF program. These lofty intentions, however, obscure "an economic liberalization agenda that links peace to capitalist development" (Koopman 2011, p. 194), an agenda that does little to fulfill the aspirations of the young people with whom I worked.

This chapter relies on ethnographic research undertaken from April 2013 through April 2014 in Kathmandu and the southern district of Parsa that borders the Indian state of Bihar, which is part of a multi-country project in North India, Sri Lanka, and Nepal entitled, "Alchemists of the Revolution?: The politics of unemployed educated youth" supported by the Economic and Social Research Council (Grant# ES/J011444/1). In Kathmandu, I researched the drafting and institution of the National Youth Policy (NYP) and the creation of the Ministry of Youth and Sports (cf. Snellinger 2014) and a Finance Ministry national loan scheme called the Youth, Small Enterprise, and Self-Employment Fund (YSEF) (cf. Snellinger 2013b). I researched the YSEF program in a top-down and bottom-up manner by focusing on the program at the national level, district level, and village development committee (VDC) level, including interviewing local loan recipients in Parsa. I used this research as an entrée to identify educated but unemployed young people in Birganj and three Parsa villages. I interviewed 75 young people about their education and employment experiences, took life histories from a quarter of these individuals, and conducted a household survey of 2800 households on education, migration, and employment in the three villages in which I conducted research in collaboration with the Centre for

the Studies of Labour and Mobility. The analysis used in this chapter is derived from the interviews, policy analysis, and survey data collected over this period.

In this chapter, I demonstrate that the level of socioeconomic precarity in these young people's lives may not differ much from what their parents have experienced, but yet they make sense of themselves and their possibilities differently. The first section provides background on how education became a tool of national development in Nepal, which structured citizens' aspirations vis-à-vis the state in particular ways. The second section outlines the historical context of civil war, political unrest, and postwar transition to establish the socioeconomic impact national turmoil has had on these young people's lives. The third section analyzes the different meanings young people give to their education and how they square it with their families' expectations. These young people see themselves as capable of moving beyond the local sphere of agricultural work and wage labor to pursue entrepreneurial and professional paths both in Nepal and abroad. Education has imbued them with the confidence to change their own lives and communities for the better. They draw distinctions between themselves and their less-educated peers, claiming that their education allows them to "speak" on behalf of others. The fourth section demonstrates how they frame their educational development within the context of the country's and their community's development. I conclude that their priority to reinvest in their families and communities through service reciprocates the initial investment that was made in them, and this ongoing exchange perpetuates the national development project.

My analysis demonstrates how individuals internalize the structural process of citizenship production in the era of mass education. The investment families make in education may not pay off in terms of anticipated employment outcomes. However, young people translate that investment into commitment to family and community, which ultimately scales up to the nation. I suggest this type of meaning making is key to maintaining stability in Nepal's postwar transition. Nevertheless, it does not address the endemic socioeconomic issues that fueled Nepal's civil war and upheaval in the first place.

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## 2 National Progress Through Education

In the last 20 years, Nepal's literacy rate has increased over 30%, and the number of people earning their School Leaving Certificates is up tenfold. This is due in part to the state sponsored development campaign (*bikās*), which has been ongoing since the 1960s with international aid support increasing every decade (Ahearn 2001; Bista 1991; Panday 1999; Pigg 1992). The government provides free education till class ten, heavily subsidized university education, and since the 1990s has supported a burgeoning private school industry (Caddell 2002, 2006; Carney and Bista 2009; Dixit 2002; Liechty 1997; Shields and Rappleye 2008; Valentin 2011). Families across socioeconomic demographics have invested in their children's education in the hopes that it will yield salaried work. Educational attainment is viewed as the key to a more secure life. This trend has increased while the government has adopted neoliberal economic policies that have reduced the number of secure, lifelong

bureaucratic jobs that were so prized by the current generation's parents. Political instability over the last decade and half has also left the private sector anemic with many factories closing down due to political extortion, unreasonable union demands, inflation, and the weakening of local currency. Thus many young people have trouble securing stable employment both in government and private sectors. What happens when young people are unable to secure stable positions? How do they make meaning of their education after they fail to reach the end in which they initially invested?

The relationship between education, employment, aspiration, and outcomes has been well established in multiple localities (Appadurai 2004; Butler and Hamnett 2011; Davidson 2011; Jeffrey et al. 2004; Mains 2007). Education's "other" – that "which remains untaught and unsaid in order that education can continue to identify itself as a project of progress and enlightenment" (MacLure 2006, p. 730) – is by now well known. Many historically marginalized communities have turned to education to uplift themselves merely to understand the complexity of their marginalization is difficult to overcome. As their world expands beyond their locality, they discover they are on the periphery of multiple power structures (Liechty 2003; Madsen and Carney 2011). The young Nepalis with whom I worked may be establishing themselves in a precarious world amid instability and uncertainty. However, they still place themselves in their social terrain wherein the ideology of modernization is a determining coordinate. They distinguish themselves both culturally and socially because of their educated status (cf. Jeffrey et al. 2004; Levinson et al. 1996).

I suggest that my young interlocutors see themselves as a particular product of development (*bikās*). *Bikās* takes a specific sociocultural form in Nepal, which has been subject to the international aid regime since the 1960s when the Panchayat Government under the Shah monarchy made development a central pillar of its nationalizing project. Stacy Pigg asserts that "Nepalis do not perceive the ideology of development as culturally foreign: They come to know it through specific social relationships" (1992, p. 496). She argues that development in Nepal weaves the fabric of local life and patterns of Nepalese national society into a specific aspiration for modernity that was constructed by traditionally elite cultural values. What we see in the way these young people perceive distinction is a pattern of social reproduction that replicates the national project by bringing "localized differences into alignment with a picture of Nepalese society as a whole, thus integrating all rural areas into a nationally shared vision of Nepalese society" (*ibid.*, p. 520).

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### 3 Political Context

When Nepal's king declared a state of emergency in 2005, the country was at a political breaking point. It was the height of an almost decade-old civil war between the royal state army (which ultimately ended with a death toll of over 16,000 lives lost) and Maoists and the ongoing Movement Against Regression (which was being carried out by eight political parties whose democratically elected government had

been dismissed by the king in 2002). Analysts both inside and outside Nepal lamented that Nepal was becoming or had become a failed state (Economist 2004; Fund for Peace 2013; Lawoti and Pahadi (2010); Jaiswal 2013; Riaz and Basu 2007. For critique of this trend, see Tamang 2012). The Maoists and the political parties finally came together after the king declared a state of emergency in 2005. In Delhi, they reached an agreement to join forces against the king and his appointed government (International Crisis Group 2005). First they boycotted the king's local elections in early 2006 and within 2 months, cadres from across the political spectrum flooded the streets of Kathmandu and urban areas demanding the overthrow of the king (International Crisis Group 2006a, b, c).

Tired of the ongoing political instability, the general public first welcomed the king's autocratic intervention; however, by the spring of 2006, the king's attempts to control the chaos were viewed as eroding civil freedoms and undermining economic and personal well-being. En masse people joined the Maoists and political parties on the streets, which caused the protests to shift from a political party movement to a mass movement, popularly known as the People's Movement 2 (*Jana Āndolan II*). This movement went further than the first People's Movement (*Jana Āndolan*) in 1990, which ended the partyless Panchayat governing system and established a multiparty democratic constitutional monarchy. The solidarity between the general public and political forces compelled the king to step down and paved the way for peace talks and Nepal to become a democratic, secular republic. In cooperation with the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN), Nepal officially embarked upon post-conflict transition, meant to ensure the stability, equality, and justice for which so many had fought. The transition followed the standardized strategy created by the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission (for details on this six-stage process, see Collier et al. 2008). It was intended to lead Nepal away from the precipice of failed state status through foreign political and economic investment to stabilize the country enough for local communities to invest in their own country and support the new government (cf. Shneiderman and Snellinger 2014).

This, however, was not necessarily a smooth transition. The success of the 2006 April uprising (The People's Movement Part Two) resulted in three buzzwords: "new Nepal," "inclusion," and "secular republic." Ten years of Maoist war were responsible for bringing these issues to the forefront of both the political and social arenas. The Maoists raised the issue of many inequalities: caste, ethnic, and gender inequality. However, they did so under the unifying rubric of class. Yet the experiences of marginalization in Nepal have been multiple; citizens living with inequality and suppression for generations have defined it through the particular historical and cultural experiences of their community. Some were not willing to flatten their experiences into the one category of class exploitation.

The Madhesi Movement of 2007 was a key example of this because it highlighted regional-based exclusion (cf. Gaige 2009; Hachhethu 2007; Jha 2014). The Madhes, the Tarai region in which Parsa district is a part, are the plains that spans Nepal's southern border. Over 50% of Nepal's population lives in the plains, and it is the agricultural breadbasket of the country. A large majority of these residents

identify as Madhesi. Culturally, they identify more closely with their southern neighbors in Bihar than their fellow hill-dwelling Nepali citizens. This is due in part because they've married across Nepal and India's open border for generations, speak Maithili, Bhojpuri, and Hindi more fluently than Nepali, and follow the same cultural religious traditions. For this reason, the Madhesi community's citizenship has historically been suspect (Jha 2014), and they have been left out of all aspects of governance, including, for many, formal citizenship. Krishna Hachhethu documents that "Madheshis constitute one third of the total population of Nepal but their share in the power structure is much lower than this, i.e., 11.2% in integrated index of governance, 17.4% in parliament, and 96.3% (100 national) in integrated human development index" (Hachhethu 2007, p. 10). The Madhesi Movement of 2007 was a 21-day uprising that forced the debate on state restructuring and inclusion to focus on regional-based ethno-nationalism. In response, the Interim government amended the Interim constitution to declare that federalism would be instituted, and the number of constituencies in the Tarai was increased (ICG 2007).

The Interim government's willingness to accommodate the Madhesi parties' demands allowed the Constituent Assembly (CA) elections to take place in 2008. The elections were declared free and fair. To the surprise of everyone, the Maoists won both the first-past-the-post and proportional election and thus held the majority of the 601 person bodies elected to rewrite the constitution and restructure the state. They forged a coalition with the Madhesi parties and smaller leftist parties as well as tried to garner all party consensuses in the spirit of the peace process as stipulated by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and Interim constitution. However, consensus proved elusive, and the first CA shifted into the type of power struggles that threatened past democratic governments (cf. Baral 2006; Snellinger 2015). The CA expired on May 27, 2012, when CA members could not reach consensus on the federal state structure, causing the Prime Minister to call for new elections after the Supreme Court refused a fifth CA extension (ICG 2012). After postponing two deadlines, the elections were finally held in November 2013 with heavy opposition from a 33-party alliance overseen by the Maoist Break-off Party, the Federal Socialist Party, and the Federal Democratic Front. These elections yielded a significant swing to the right, with the Nepali Congress securing the highest number of seats, a royalist party gaining several seats, and the CA being overall less diverse. The campaign promise of every party to promulgate a new constitution within the year was highly doubtful (Gellner 2014; Pyakurel 2014) and slipped on January 22, 2015. In response to the majority coalition trying to force a vote on the constitution instead of negotiating a consensus, the Maoists and Madhesi parties vandalized the Constituent Assembly and have returned to street protest.

Unfortunately, the political stagnation has jeopardized Nepal's postwar transition. The Constituent Assembly has become a serial process, dragging on for 8 years (5 years overdue), involving two elections and six governments run by different parties. This has also caused stagnation at the local level. Nepal has not had legitimate elections at the local level since 1997. During the king's rule from 2002 to 2008, appointed bureaucrats ran Village Development Committees and municipalities.



The king's government held local elections in 2006. However, all the parties boycotted them, and the results were never instituted because of the second People's Movement and the king's resignation 2 months after elections. In 2008, the political parties and Maoists agreed that All-Party Mechanisms (APMs) should operate and oversee local level expenditure and governance. This setup benefited the post-conflict transition because it forced all local leaders to work together for the first time in over a decade (Adhikari 2010). However, it also allowed more scope for corruption with little accountability (cf. Byrne and Thapa 2014; Sharrock 2013). Local people started revolting against APMs for pilfering public funds. In response, government bureaucrats were reappointed from the central level to oversee local level governance in 2012. These bureaucrats rarely come from the area to which they are appointed and thus have little interest or incentive to advocate for local development.

The postwar political negligence impacts everyone all the way down to the village level and seriously undermines the national and transnational aims to establish peace and stability in Nepal. It also impacts how my interlocutors' relationship with their government and the role they see it playing in their lives. One young man laid it out plainly for me by saying, "In our case, politics has spoiled everything" (*Main ta yaha politics le khaisakyo*). A young woman sitting to his left interjected saying that there are so many political parties in the country; she did not even know how many there were. She explained that they all want to be leaders but she asked rhetorically, "How can a family be run if every member wants to be the guardian?" The young man agreed that all the political parties' ideas will never converge. "They can't come together to run the country, let alone make progress. . . the nation is being run on an ad hoc basis." (Group discussion at Thakur Ram Campus, Birganj Parsa, September 23, 2013). This diatribe echoes the frustrations of many young people I met. Geopolitics has disrupted socioeconomic progress in a way that undermines education's aim to socialize good citizens, particularly in the postwar context wherein courting young people to invest in the nation in order to ensure peace and stability is central to both the government and international interests. I now shift my attention to how people articulate educational distinction in order to parse out how it is contributing to people's sense of belonging and citizenship.

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## 4 The Meaning of Education

I begin this section with this quote because it captures the majority of the themes young people addressed when I asked them what their education meant to them. An instructor at Thakur Ram Campus in Birganj explained to me during a group discussion:

Education is a medium of securing our life. It also guides us throughout our life. Education is not only meant for obtaining jobs. It provides us guidelines on how to spend our life. Education makes us committed to work for the sake of the country and it makes us aware of how to be a good citizen. Education is not meant just for jobs. If we really have sound education we can pursue life no matter wherever we go. If we are well educated, we can

perform our job on our own and we can create our own job even if we obtain no employment. This is the importance of education. Next, education not only makes us good citizens, it also helps our socialization. There is a saying that goes like this: 'Education is nothing but formation of habit'. Education can guide us on which path to follow. It develops our thinking power and we can decide right from wrong. When there were fewer people educated in the society, uneducated people would go to the educated ones to receive guidance. But this situation no longer exists; many have become educated and it allows them to make their own decisions. See, these days, people don't have to depend on others to fill out an application form. Thus, education serves as light that helps us to remove darkness. An uneducated person is like a dark room. Education serves as a lit candle. Thus, education serves as light in human life. (23-September-2013)

This quote demonstrates how education becomes associated with specific social positions or identities in the way people imagine social difference. These young people are actively quantifying educational value through their explanations. Many of them are first-generation educated; so this is a new form of cultural capital that has not been acquired by generations before them. I understand their explanations as "efforts at cultural production shaped by available symbolic resources and their structural position within society" (Jeffrey et al. 2004, p. 963). They may be experimenting with new iterations of distinction, but nonetheless, their inventions are informed by the traditional ideological resources of caste, class, as well as regional hierarchies of rural (periphery) and urban (center) and Kathmandu Valley and hinterland that have been propagated by the nationalizing project Nepal has actively undergone since the 1960s. For these young people in particular, it involves the historical marginalization of growing up in the Tarai of Madhesi or Tharu origin.

The main thing that people said their education gave them was prestige (*ijāt*); they have become known in their community for being educated. One young ethnically Tharu woman explained to me at Thakur Ram Girls Hostel in Birganj that educated people were more respected than uneducated. In fact she has noticed that her ability to command her fellow villagers' attention has increased as her educational attainment has increased. She explained that she used to be ignored but now people see her as someone who's studied her bachelors in Birganj and seek out her opinion. She is pleased because the respect she receives translates to her father's name, and this makes his investment in her worth it (29-January-2014). The articulation of earning prestige has its roots in traditional cultural values that dictate one's worth based on parameters of caste, class, gender, and community stature. However, unlike traditional assessments of prestige, which are dictated primarily by inherited relations within the caste hierarchy, educational prestige represents a seemingly more egalitarian form of social mobility that is defined by individual action.

Educational prestige is not inherent; it is cultivated. One of the acquired skills that people cited as most important was "learning to speak." Three quarters of my interviewees' mother tongue is Bhojpuri not Nepali, the national language until 2007 and still dominant in official situations. Their claim of "learning to speak" is meant both literally and metaphorically. They draw distinctions between themselves and their less-educated peers, claiming that their education allows them to "speak" on behalf of others. They can competently interact outside their local sphere, at government offices and with people from outside, including foreigners. In this

regard, their education is allowing them to navigate civil society as Amartya Sen promotes (1999). This ability allows them to be self-sufficient but also puts them in a position in which others may rely on them for their linguistic acumen. This replicates a familiar patronage dynamic of reliance. However, this iteration takes on new form in which the provider and the recipient may not necessarily map onto traditional social hierarchies.

On a metaphorical level, being able to speak is about the art of communication. As one young man who was a YSEF recipient from Bagwana explained to me, even animals have ways of communicating their needs but an educated person has the language and comportment to speak meaningfully and with confidence. He said:

What I have heard is common people can tell the matter of their heart/mind (*man*) only when then they are drunk and not in other times. At other times, people hesitate to be open. . . But me, I can speak well even when I am not drunk. I don't need to drink liquor to open up my heart/mind to you. (13-July-2013)

He explained that educated persons are more able to identify their feelings and thoughts and articulate them in effective ways. For this reason they have an unfettered confidence to speak out, which makes them more effective community members.

Sometimes my interlocutors emphasized the inferiority of uneducated people to underscore their own educational superiority. These negative distinctions were framed in a rhetoric of modernization. However, they borrowed tropes from traditional power structures. One young man said, "These days, it is even said that an uneducated person is no better than a beast" (*Napadheko manchhe pasu saraha hunchha bhanchhan aajkal*) (13-July-2013). This reference was common. Most people explained that the behavior and mind-set of educated and uneducated were different. An educated person can change if it is necessary, but uneducated people continue their traditions and habits even if they aren't useful. One young man segued from the comparison of uneducated people relying on tradition the way animals rely on instinct to the assertion that the Dalit community in his village does not recognize the importance of education and therefore does not change their lives for the better. In other words, an educated person has the ability to evolve. Another young woman explained that uneducated people are likened to animals because they need to be taken care of and looked after. Through these articulations, my interlocutors are socially indexing their educational distinction among other familiar registers, in a way that collapses new and old forms of difference and inequality, while reproducing the modernizing ideology of backwardness and progress.

Another distinction that emerged from their social indexing was an attained moral sensibility. While many of my respondents emphasized that education inculcates a sense of right and wrong, my female respondents tended to personalize the moralistic components of education. Every one of my female respondents explained that their education helped them delineate right from wrong, to be honest and responsible, and to identify the correct path in order to fulfill their duty. Others explained that education taught them humility. One young woman from Jauwaguthi village explained, "Education has taught us how to treat people. Everyone recognizes that we must respect our

seniors but what about our juniors or those who are seen as lower? Education has helped us recognize and respect them too, even if they are backwards” (18-December-2013). Her assertion demonstrates she is not only educated but also modern because she eschews caste-based discrimination. Modern democratic values and empowerment rhetoric taught in schools inculcate students with notions of social and political equality to counter “backward practices.” This young woman has affectively embraced these values in her everyday interactions in her community, which distinguishes her from both the uneducated and older generations.

There is indeed something implicit in education that infers moral guidance because a number of my male informants noted their parents invested in their education so they would not be “led astray.” Their parents view the education environment not only as a place where discipline, manners, and respect are cultivated but also one that is safe from bad influences. Udaya, a recovering drug addict, recalled the meeting he had with the president of the private college he had been attending. He was requesting permission to be reenrolled. The president was hesitant. He said to Udaya, “We wrote temple of learning on the school’s entryway because we want all students to enter pure in heart/mind (*man*). You can’t return if you defile us” (4-December-2013). All of the young men I interviewed at a Birganj rehabilitation center explained to me that studying allowed them to mask their bad habits. Their parents did not worry about them and what they did during their downtime because they were studying and maintaining their grades. Even among their communities, they were given an exception. One young man recalled that some people in his bazaar started calling him spoiled (*bigreko*) but others retorted saying not to worry because he was top of the class. Another young man said “I always maintained a good image because I am well educated even when I was a drug addict. It only faltered when I could no longer hold my job. But since then I’ve gotten chances. My image is more determined by my education than my previous bad habits” (16-December-2013).

Wrapped up in these young people’s explanations is an articulation of themselves as dignified, upstanding citizens. Their education is a social marker that they choose to emphasize because it is a sign of both personal and communal achievement. As one young man explained, “I may stray or I may not always be employed, but I will always be educated. Nobody can take that from me, not even myself” (7-December-2013). But there was also an air of inevitability to their understandings of education. Many people described education as illumination; the purpose of becoming educated is to go from darkness to light. Anyone who wants to make an impact must take this journey. As one man from Bagwana explained, “In this age, no one can dream of making progress without obtaining education” (2-September-2013).

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## 5 “The Epoch of Education”: For the Country’s Development

Stacey Pigg argues that the Nepali usage of *bikās* articulates an ideology of modernization because it represents society through an “implicit scale of social progress” (ibid., p. 500). I suggest that education is a scalar unit used to measure social

progress. In the previous section, I demonstrated that people measure themselves and others according to educational attainment. In this section, I will show how they assess their village, their region, and the country's progress based on the educated aggregate. The measurement of education in the aggregate allows people to connect their own progress with the country's progress, which currently provides people with a sense of agency in postwar Nepal when so much is beyond their control. However, foregrounding the individual and scaling up do not take into account what the government's responsibility is in enabling the progress of its citizens and if it is living up to this commitment. This is a particularly salient consideration in post-conflict Nepal wherein the government and international agencies are initiating programs and policies that encourage citizens to invest in the country to maintain peace and security.

At Thakur Ram Girls Hostel, one young woman asserted education dictates the current age (*sikshama nai chhalirahechha yo yug*); "we live in the age of knowledge," she explained, "and so education is necessary to take the country forward" (16-December-2013). Her claim places education within the realm of inevitable global progress by abstracting the individual family's project of securing their future to the national project of development. Many people asserted that their education was not merely for their own well-being but for the development of the country. There is a direct link between the individual and nation. People should invest in themselves in order to improve the society. One gentleman explained that more than for obtaining a job, education is for the development of social values because education teaches the, "art of living." He clarified, "If one masters the art of living, one will be sustainable, he explained, and that person can create opportunities for others" (31-July-2013).

The connection between the personal and the social was also articulated through people's understanding of the impact of education on the community environment too. This emerged when an elder village leader explained to me what education has done for his village of Jauwaguthi:

In fact, the village gets changed when everyone is educated. In the Madhes, there was caste discrimination and people tended to earn money by illegal means. Now these trends are in decline. By bad ways, I mean theft, smuggling, and the like. Educated people don't tend to carry a load of hashish from Nepal to India. . . People have become aware these days. . . The number of educated people is increasing day by day and the children from poor financial background have also starting attending schools. This is only a good thing. (5-February-2014)

This leader's explanation offers practical reasons why education improves communities; it provides people opportunities other than illicit work by giving people skills that allow them to be assessed as employable on something other than their caste status. What we see here is that education allows people to circumvent other categories of backwardness that create impoverished lives and reflect poorly on the community as a whole. People are very sensitive of the toll illegal activity has on their village's reputation. A common story I heard from older *dacoits* (bandits) is that they ceased their thieving after fellow villagers implored them to stop because it sullied the village's reputation, making it difficult to marry their sons and daughters.

However, what this explanation does not take into account are the reasons why illicit activities were so prevalent in the late 1990s through 2010. In 2003 when the district's government sugar mill closed down, many farmers lost their main access to cash: sugar cane. Sugar cane had been the main cash crop since the late 1960s when the sugar mill was opened for operation. Due to government mismanagement since the reinstatement of multiparty politics in the 1990s, it ran at a loss. The king's government finally closed it down in 2003. Not only did over 2000 people lose their factory jobs but farmers also lost their main source of cash. Due to the security vacuum and the open border, drug cultivation and smuggling became the new sources of cash for many households. The rhetoric of education "making people aware" does not factor in the government's role in making illicit activities the only income-generating option for many Parsa families. Drug cultivation has been greatly curtailed since 2012. However, increased education is not the main reason for the decrease. The increase in labor migration has maintained incomes in agrarian households. Lauding education for bringing awareness in this context obscures the endemic socioeconomic problems and the government's role in causing them.

I also observed how communal prestige of education can curb gender discrimination. In Biranchibarwal Dibya Girls School was opened in 2009. This school runs from grade eight to ten (age 13–16) and prepares young women for the School Leaving Certificate exam. The school was created to circumvent what one community organizer explained as a "negative tradition": pulling girls out of school around grade seven and preparing them for marriage. Before the Dibya School was established, female students who studied in grade eight and above had to travel outside the village and were vulnerable to harassment. In order to spare them this hardship and possible disgrace to the family, most families preemptively stopped their education. By establishing a school just for girls in the village, they stopped this "negative tradition" and further educated their daughters. Many explained to me that the village has become known because of the school. Girls from surrounding villages come to attend, and Biranchibarwal has become a prestigious village to marry one's daughters to or receive daughters from. One young man explained, "Other villages like to develop relations here because we are seen as forward minded. People know their daughters will be cherished here because the Dibya Girls School proves we give priority to our own daughters. Plus many young girls like to keep studying. If they get married here, they still can continue their education" (20-December-2013). Biranchibarwal residents are proud that the village has a reputation for being an "educated village."

As a community development tool, education provides social reform through the promise of social mobility. Educated people embody the modernizing project that improves their village and by default the country. This dynamic took a particular form at the Thakur Ram Girls Hostel. Over three quarters of students were studying education, a trend also reflected in villages. These young women explained to me that they chose education because of its flexibility. It was a strategic choice to keep their employment options open after marriage because a teaching schedule did not interrupt household duties. Another benefit many young women cited was that even if they did not work, they could teach the kids in their household. Education is giving

these women skills that could yield potential earning power outside the household and allows them to educate in the domestic sphere, a service that in the previous generations was purchased or bartered for. One young woman at Thakur Ram Girls Hostel explained to me, “I chose to study education because I want to contribute to the nation through teaching, even if that only means teaching the children inside my husband’s household. That is still contributing to the nation, no?” (3-February-2014). These young women have chosen their course of study to accommodate the social limitations they face, and by doing so, they have internalized the educational development rhetoric and made it a personal agenda that ensures both social mobility for their families and social reform for the nation.

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## 6 Conclusion: “To Serve the Nation”

This chapter has considered educational distinction within the context of Nepal’s postwar transition. Young people expressed their desire to serve their community in various ways that demonstrates how education has empowered them to undertake *bikās* as a personal project. Even those who were looking to leave the area because of lack of employment opportunities couched their motivation in the logic of giving back. A few young men who were considering working as accountants in Macau explained that they were frustrated because they did not find opportunities to make an impact in Nepal, and they viewed their plan as a way that they can make a difference. One said, “We want to create an environment here so that youths don’t have to go abroad to search for work. We want to provide alternatives” (31-July-2013). It is not surprising that service was a common theme in my discussions with young people about their education. Both government and private school curriculums emphasize service in secondary schooling, the message students receive in the upper levels is to “serve the nation,” “be great,” and to do so with “humility” (Carney and Madsen 2009, p. 180). This sentiment has been promoted since the Panchayat government’s nationalizing agenda from 1960 to 1990 and then has taken a more fractured form since the 1990s wherein the students learn it both in government and private school curriculums as well as from political parties encouraging students to support their ideological causes (Dixit 2002; Eck 2010; Onta 1996)

All of my interlocutors articulated this message. They conceptualize themselves as model citizens because they embody progress while seeing it as their duty as educated people to progress their community and the country. My interlocutors understood themselves to be in a particular position, mediators so to speak who could enable their families and communities to get from here – a traditional provincial way of being – to there – the horizon of *bikās*: aware, progressive, and cosmopolitan (Pigg *ibid.*, p. 516). Nonetheless, they are negotiating this process both within traditional sociocultural and geopolitical registers that often don’t align. My interlocutors’ experience of modern day schooling reflects a general experience of ambivalence; education is both “a source of hope and enrichment and a cause of bewilderment and despair” (Madsen and Carney 2011, p. 130).

While the government and international agencies are concerned about youth disillusionment in postwar Nepal, my findings demonstrate a different type of resilience. The young people I researched were dealing with the despair of unemployment by maintaining humility and focusing on “serving the nation.” Nonetheless, their pride in being an educated citizen serves as a double-edged sword. Their educational distinction replicates traditional biases that implicitly fuel caste prejudice as is in the case of an uneducated person being like a beast. Their understanding of education creating the awareness to curb illicit activity also keeps people from being critical of the government’s role in perpetuating the endemic socioeconomic issues that perpetuate their marginalization. These young people’s extrapolation of their own progress onto the country’s progression imbues them with a sense of pride that encourages them to contribute. Nevertheless, it also keeps them from holding the government accountable for failing to absorb them into the labor market. This indeed benefits the Nepali state because instead of having frustrated young people politically mobilizing, these young people are investing in their communities by either providing free labor through service (*sewa*) or migrating out and sending remittances home. And thus my interlocutors are negotiating what it means to be educated and unemployed in politically unstable Nepal by embracing the belief that “Destiny is something we can forge on our own; it is not already written” (Female micro-loan recipient in Bagwana, 4-October-2013).

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