

ALLONS-Y

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THEORY INTO ACTION

CHILDREN AND CONFLICT IN A CHANGING WORLD



THE ROMÉO
DALLAIRE



**CHILD
SOLDIERS**
INITIATIVE



DALHOUSIE
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABOUT THE DALLAIRE INITIATIVE 3

ABOUT ALLONS-Y 5

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR 7

PREFACE BY DR. SHELLY WHITMAN 9

CONFRONTING IDEOLOGY:
ISLAMOPHOBIA VS. ISLAMIST FUNDAMENTALISM 10

 Article by Nuzhat Khurshid 11

 Expert commentary by Hicham Tiflati 27

SYRIAN REFUGEE CHILDREN AND MENTAL TRAUMA:
COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACHES 32

 Article by Kathleen O'Brien 33

 Expert commentary by Dr. Rania Abuelhassan 49

CHILD SOLDIERY IN THE INFORMATION AGE 52

 Article by Ben O'Bright 53

 Expert commentary by Jon Penney 73

THE NEXT EDITION OF ALLONS-Y 77



Photo: Josh Boyter

ABOUT THE DALLAIRE INITIATIVE

The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative was established in 2007 by retired lieutenant-general the honourable Roméo Dallaire, former force commander of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR). Our mission is to progressively eradicate the use of child soldiers through a preventative security sector approach.

To achieve this important objective, the Dallaire Initiative conducts activities on three fronts:

- It conducts world-class interdisciplinary research to build—and share—knowledge, which in turn leads to new solutions;
- It engages in high-level advocacy activities to create and promote the political will to end the use of children as soldiers;
- It delivers tactical, prevention-oriented training to security sector actors, so as to promote broader security sector reform.

In every aspect of its work, the Dallaire Initiative seeks to collaborate with concerned governments, security sector actors, academics, humanitarians and civilian communities. In particular, its unique approach working with soldiers, police, prison personnel and private security operators – many of whom are the first point of contact for child soldiers outside of their armed force or armed group – is both groundbreaking and critical to the interruption of children's recruitment.



LGen Roméo Dallaire, Rwanda, 1994. Used under permission from the National Speakers Bureau.

ABOUT ALLONS-Y

In January 1994, General Dallaire, then the Force Commander of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR), sent a fax to UN headquarters in New York warning of the impending genocide. He signed the fax with the line “peux ce que veux. Allons-y” – “Where there’s a will, there’s a way. Let’s go.” At the time, there was not a will among the international community, with lethal results for nearly a million Rwandans.

Since then, General Dallaire has worked tirelessly to ensure that there is both a will and a way to prevent mass atrocities in the future. However, action must be informed by understanding for it to be effective. Each of us has the ability to stand up and contribute to prevention of these crimes and the involvement of children in committing them. Allons-y serves as a call to action for young people today to add their talent, perspectives, and experiences to this mission.

Allons-y is a series of peer-reviewed papers written by young academics and practitioners, complemented by expert commentary, designed to foster discussion and innovative thinking on issues relating to children in war, terrorism, and violence. This format seeks to leverage the unique viewpoints and contributions of young people working and studying in this field, and magnifies their impact by pairing each piece with the voice of leading experts. This combination firmly situates each piece in praxis, bridging the all-too-frequent gaps between academics and practitioners.



Syrian refugees at the Budapest Keleti railway station, 4 September 2015
(Mstyslav Oherhov photo)

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



Since the publication of the first issue of *Allons-y* in August of last year, the world has become a darker place. Rising tides of xenophobia, toxic nationalism, and violent rhetoric threaten our diverse and inclusive societies at home and abroad, while the world seems to be retreating from critical international institutions and the very democratic values that underpin peace and the rule of law. New and escalating crises threaten to cause new inter- and intra-state wars, while horrific conflicts without end in sight grind on in Syria and Iraq, South Sudan, Somalia, and elsewhere. The renewed hope of the past eight years has now been fully replaced by doubt, cynicism, and the sense of impending crisis.

As always in such times of instability and growing conflict, children are both the ones most at risk of harm during wars and refugee flows, the go-to tool for extremist recruiters, and the most important agents of change for building a brighter and more peaceful future. As ISIS loses ground in Iraq and Syria, we see them turning increasingly to recruiting children over the internet to carry out attacks, placing new challenges before our communities and governments. As millions of refugees flee brutal conflicts and repressive regimes, half or more of them are children, and are left vulnerable to exploitation and abuse as they are turned away at borders, sent back to more dangerous countries, or viewed with suspicion because of their religion or race.

Children and youth are also taking action to build a better world, engaging in politics, standing up for peaceful and inclusive societies, and working to build peace in their communities. As an international and interdependent community, we must support the efforts of children and youth to create a better world, and help protect them from use and abuse by those who pursue a malign agenda.

In order to effectively do so, we require research, analysis, and insights on the roles that children and youth play in the perpetuation of conflict and the building of peace. *Allons-y* seeks to provide a platform for this kind of work, and this issue addresses a number of the most pressing matters facing the modern world. I hope that these pieces on children and cyberwarfare, Islamophobia and Islamist fundamentalism, and the mental health of Syrian refugee children provoke thought, inform conversations, and form one small part of our work to build a world that is peaceful, prosperous, and affirms and supports the rights of all human beings.

Dustin Johnson, Editor of Allons-y
Program Officer – Research at the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative



16th January 2017
Class VI
Roll = 94
Boys = 52
Girls = 42
Boys present = 46
Girls present = 40

Photo: Dallaire Initiative



PREFACE

In the wake of unspeakable horrors that have been committed against children in Syria with chemical weapons, the growing refugee crisis globally, and the reality that we are facing cataclysmic food shortages that lead to even more instability – it is often difficult to know where to begin to make the greatest impact for change. However, what is remarkably clear is that children continue to suffer at the hands of unscrupulous adults – from those who create and conduct war, and those who fail to effectively harness efforts to address war.

The Dallaire Initiative's approach calls for a need to make children a priority on the overall peace and security agenda – a Children's Rights Upfront call to action. As a contribution to this effort, the current articles in this volume of *Allons-y* have advocated for innovative solutions and new frames of reference for some of the world's most pressing concerns from youth themselves: from understanding how cyber warfare can target children and youth and the lack of dialogue to address this lacunae in the law, to the impacts of Islamophobia that create conditions for recruitment, to the resulting effects of war on refugee children.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Paris Principles on Children in Armed Conflict. The Principles have helped to create a framework to guide the need to protect children in armed conflict. But at the 10th Anniversary conference in Paris in February 2017, the need to focus on preventing violations against children was deemed as critical for meaningful impact. If we are not prepared to create policy responses through a preventative lens then we will continually be reacting to conflicts and their implications for generations to come. It is time we see the world through the lens of children, for children and for the future of humanity.

Dr. Shelly Whitman
Executive Director of the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative



The Blue Mosque and Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, Turkey. Mosques are frequently targets of Islamophobic violence, but they are key to preventing radicalization to violence. (Photo: Daniel Burka).

CONFRONTING IDEOLOGY: ISLAMOPHOBIA VS. ISLAMIST FUNDAMENTALISM

By Nuzhat Khurshid

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ABSTRACT

The notions of tradition and modernity organize the contestation of Islamophobia, as a colonialist, capitalist venture originating in the West, as opposed to the 'traditional' forces of fundamentalism, which originate in the East. The print revolution, beginning as a product of colonialist capitalism, led to the explosion and expansion of 'modern' ideas of cultural essentialism whereas the internet revolution has played a strong role in the spread of 'traditional' ideas as defined by Islamist fundamentalism. The apparent 'clash of civilizations' (Huntington 1993) presented by the interaction between the East and the West, or tradition and modernity, will be critiqued and the dangers of these abstractions, which avoid real issues such as class struggle and geopolitical control, will be shown. Finally, some ideas will be presented on how to challenge both these ideologies in their everyday uses. Using Marx's notion of ideology, defined as a tool used by the ruling class to abstract material concepts and maintain power, we will explore the nature of Islamophobia and Islamist fundamentalism.

INTRODUCTION

As I was formulating my thoughts for this essay, I was saddened by the news of another Muslim 'extremist' who was killed in a foiled terrorist plot. Aaron Driver was shot by police in a taxi cab on August 10 after detonating a bomb. As I continued to read details about his life and views, I felt personally affected by this tragedy. How could an intelligent young man believe his religion allowed him to kill innocents as retribution for crimes committed to people on the other side of the globe? Similarly, how could he feel so alienated while living in Canada that he felt Muslims "did not belong in the West?" (CBC News 2016). It seems that two mutually contradictory ideologies are in place here – a racist and imperialist worldview that promotes the belief that Muslims are different than those living in the West and an equally ethnicized ideology and politics of Islamist fundamentalism. These ideologies are also deeply intertwined with the concepts of 'tradition' and 'modernity,' European concepts created in the course of capital's development in Europe and its expansion into the rest of the world. But how to disconnect from these flawed ideologies that threaten to divide the world, and to understand the underlying problems?

Marx's writing on the nature of ideology can offer an important and relevant lesson for this problematic. Marx's use of ideology is unique in that it is meant for 'radicals,' or those who wish to change the world, not just interpret it (Marx 1978, 145). Thus, he is interested in the ways by which ideology is used by the ruling class to legitimize power structures and take the focus away from class struggles and interests. A closer examination of Marx's works will help explain his views from a historical materialist perspective. In his preface to 'A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy,' Marx writes, "A distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be

determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic – in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out” (Marx 1978, 5). Furthermore, he recognizes that these forms of ideology can be used by the ruling class to enforce and legitimize their control, as when he says, “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas” (Marx 1978, 172). He explains, “For each new class which puts itself in the place of one ruling before it, is compelled, merely in order to carry through its aim, to represent its interest as the common interest of all the members of society, that is, expressed in ideal form: it has to give its ideas the form of universality, and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones” (Marx 1978, 174).

As Bannerji explains, these ‘ruling ideas’ manifest themselves in society in various ways: “Not only particular concepts or ideas, but the very deployment of concepts, even daily expressions in their de-materialized, de-historicized and unreflexive uses, gives rise to Ideology” (Bannerji 2011, 8). She goes on to give the binaries of tradition/modernity as an example of a current ideology which dominates world relations. She explains that, “Capitalist colonialism’s staple categories are modernity and tradition, in their active form becoming modernization and traditionalism, claimed to be resistance to modernization” (Bannerji 2011, 22). The problem of the competing ideologies of ‘modern’ imperialism and ‘traditional’ fundamentalism posed at the beginning of this paper is a strong example of how these ‘ruling ideas’ can play out negatively and deflect attention from the real, material problems behind them.

Thus the notions of tradition and modernity organize the contestation of Islamophobia, as a colonialist, capitalist venture originating in the West, as opposed to the ‘traditional’ forces of fundamentalism, which originate in the East. It is important to note that ‘tradition’ is always defined as the space in which modernity does not reside, as opposed to being a separate, identifiable concept in its own right; this is a reflection on the binary nature of these concepts. This will be important when we talk about the politics of Islamist fundamentalism as being a reaction to capitalist, colonialist encroachments, as opposed to originating naturally within Islamic thought. We will also explore how the print revolution, beginning as a product of colonialist capitalism, led to the explosion and expansion of ‘modern’ ideas of cultural essentialism whereas the internet revolution has played a strong role in the spread of ‘traditional’ ideas as defined by Islamist fundamentalism. The apparent ‘clash of civilizations’ presented by the interaction between the East and the West, or tradition and modernity, will be critiqued and the dangers of these abstractions, which avoid real issues such as class struggle and geopolitical control, will be shown. Finally, some ideas will be presented on how to challenge both these ideologies in their everyday uses. Using Marx’s notion of ideology, defined as a tool used by the ruling class to abstract material concepts and maintain power, we will explore the nature of Islamophobia and Islamist fundamentalism.

EMERGENCE OF ISLAMOPHOBIA

While Islamophobia will be shown here as having origins in Orientalism, it is important to acknowledge that the term 'Islamophobia' is a highly contested one and has been studied by various authors (See Christopher Allen, 'Islamophobia' (Allen 2010, 187-92)). Like any other kind of racism, it is a combination of behaviours, attitudes and ideologies that attempt to demean and discriminate against Muslims for the sole reason of their religion. For this paper, however, it will be helpful to focus on the ideological component of Islamophobia in order to show its resonance with past ideologies and the legacy of colonialism.

The ideologies of tradition and modernity have their origins in the age of colonialism, which is deeply intertwined with the ever-expanding needs of capitalism (Luxemburg 1951, 416-7). Needing to justify their moral superiority as colonizers, the notions of traditional peoples arose and "its organizing assumptions centre around the concept of cultural difference between the colonizing and colonized societies" (Bannerji 2011, 230). Edward Said has perhaps articulated this cultural essentialism best in his book *Orientalism*. He attempts to explain the evolving ideology of Orientalism as:

"a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts; it is an elaboration not only of a basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident) but also of a whole series of 'interests' which... it not only creates but also maintains" (author's emphases) (Said 1979, 12).

Thus we see that Said defines Orientalism as a kind of cultural essentialism accompanied by socio-economic power structures and dictated by the ruling ideas. These implied differences between the Orient and the Occident, or the East and the West, come to take on the guise of truth largely due to the impact of capitalist colonial ventures and the far-reaching influence of the printing press. Said explains that "[there] was a growing systematic knowledge in Europe about the Orient, knowledge reinforced by the colonial encounter as well as by the widespread interest in the alien and unusual, exploited by the developing sciences of ethnology, comparative anatomy, philology and history" (Said 1979, 39-40) In fact, the emergence of capitalist colonialism and the global spread of the printing press starting in the 16th century are closely related. Anderson reiterates the connection between "capitalism's restless search for markets" and the success of the European publishing press (Anderson 1983, 38).

It will be shown that notions of the 'traditional' Easterners were vastly facilitated by colonial capitalist ventures and the dissemination of a special construction of cultural knowledge of the East by the West. Said defined this cultural currency as Orientalism while Samir Amin calls it Eurocentrism. This current gained influence through imperialist policies and knowledge production, and by the 19th century, "an assumption had been made [by the West] that the



The Rhodes Colossus, a cartoon of Cecil Rhodes representing British colonialism and the Scramble for Africa. (Drawing: Edward Linley Sambourne)

Orient and everything in it was, if not patently inferior to, then in need of corrective study by the West” (Said 1979, 41). The West became the harbinger of modernity, or European capitalism, and all its benefits, while the East was viewed as backwards and in need of European beneficence. The expansion of Orientalist knowledge, often funded directly by European governments and academic institutions, created a binary that strengthened itself and came to be accepted as truth.

Said pinpoints this dilemma as follows: “When one uses categories like Oriental and Western as both the starting and the end points of analysis, research, public policy... the result is usually to polarize the distinction – the Oriental becomes more Oriental, the Westerner more Western – and limit the human encounter between different cultures, traditions, and societies” (Said 1979, 46). To see how this mindset has been nurtured through successive encounters between the East and West, one need look no further than Samuel Huntington’s ‘Clash of Civilizations’ thesis, first published in 1993.

In his much-acclaimed article, he posits that ‘civilizations’ will be the determinants of conflict in the future: “The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future” (Huntington 1993, 22). Although he differentiates civilizations from ideology and culture, he does not explain how exactly he plans on dividing up people into these abstract groups. Civilizations are “the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of that which distinguishes humans from other species” (Huntington 1993, 24). Huntington further qualifies his use of ‘civilization,’ defining it “both by common objective elements, such as language, history, religion, customs, institutions, and by the subjective self-identification of people” (Huntington 1993, 23). This further complicates the task of discovering a concise definition of the word, because the categories he lists are not only too vague and large, but closely related and overlapping. Moreover, the average American or European is still more likely to identify him/herself based on gender, nationality, religion or occupation, than on a vague conception of ‘civilization’ such as ‘Western.’

Complex and intertwining identities cannot be reduced to monolithic categories. By placing the full weight of his theory on the assumption of abstract civilizational identity, Huntington debilitates its credibility. The ‘clash’ of which Huntington speaks of so deterministically, can actually be explained far more convincingly by a historical materialist perspective of history, in which class, economic, and political factors play the larger role in and through forms of social relations and consciousness which we may call ‘culture.’ Constructing international conflicts as based on cultural lines further reiterates the colonial binary of the West and the rest, where the Other is inherently inferior and must be ruled for their own good.



While it is true that most Muslim countries in contemporary times are suffering from poverty and political instability, to use this as proof of the Other’s lack is to be blind to the West’s own complicity in the creation of this inequality.

Furthermore, Huntington’s categorization of ‘Islam’ as a civilization is not consistent with his treatment of other religions (Huntington 1993, 25). Why is Islam handpicked for prominence among civilizations while the other great world religions (aside from Hinduism) are subverted

by other, 'broader' entities? Surely a Christian or Jew feels just as strongly about his/her faith and legitimizes and encourages intolerance. Said's Orientalism is indeed alive and well in Huntington's formulation. Instead of encouraging open communication and understanding between the 'civilizations,' Huntington portrays a future where the noble 'West' must swoop down and rescue the other barbarian culture from self-destruction. "Islam has bloody borders" (Huntington 1993, 34) he writes in one place, describing how Muslims in the Middle East and Africa have spilled the blood of all their surrounding neighbours, with no mention of any reciprocal conflict or history of European violence. Huntington's parochialism and partiality are revealed through his unconditional support for the West and its imperialistic tendencies, justified by its superiority in all respects: "It is clearly in the interest of the West to limit the expansion of the military strength of Islamic states; to exploit differences and conflicts and to strengthen international institutions that reflect and legitimate Western interests and values" (Huntington 1993, 49).

September 11th, 2001 served as a benchmark for the latent Orientalism that had existed since the 1500's (or earlier) to come to the surface in the form of 'Islamophobia.' "The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends" (Toronto Star 2001) said George W. Bush shortly after the attacks. But hate crimes against the Muslim population in the U.S. increased by 1,700 percent in the remainder of that year alone (Human Rights Watch 2002). The discrepancy between official jargon and actual practice can be attributed to a rising suspicion of Muslims in the West as being 'extremists' living among the innocent. "The carefully planned and horrendous, pathologically motivated suicide attack and mass slaughter by a small group of deranged militants has been turned into proof of Huntington's thesis," writes Said (Said 2001). Even the well-established British weekly, *The Economist*, in the issue immediately following the attacks, praised Huntington for his "cruel and sweeping, but nonetheless acute" (*The Economist* 2001) observation about the West-Islam divide. Was this the beginning of a new era of suspicion and paranoia between the two 'civilizations'? Looking back in hindsight, the answer appears to be in the affirmative.

To summarize the ideology of Islamophobia and the history leading up to it, what started as imperial justification of colonialism in the 1500's evolved, through direct intervention and the subconscious reiteration of ideas into the paradigm of Orientalism, which defined the East and West as diametrically different entities, with the West being superior in all respects. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, it seems the mostly latent ideology of Orientalism, or Eurocentrism, has evolved into a political ideology better understood as 'Islamophobia,' that has far-reaching effects on public policy and media portrayal of Muslims. I argue that the print revolution played a major role in spreading these ideas throughout the world.

The ideology of Islamophobia is thus an abstraction that homogenizes Muslims and fails to acknowledge the diversity within Islam. Thus the actions of one extremist are easily applied as a representation of all Muslims within media, which ultimately has a detrimental effect on the rights of Muslims living in the West. From bills that allow the indefinite detention of suspected 'terrorists' to regular attacks on Muslim women's apparel, it seems that the Orientalist gaze is now the norm. Razack confirms, "Race thinking, the denial of a common bond of humanity between people of European descent and those who are not, remains a defining feature of the world order" (Razack 2008, 6). For Muslims living in the West, they are told that they must choose between their Muslim and Western identities. Thus the ideology of what is now known as 'Islamophobia' diverts attention from the real issues and class struggles of Muslims in the West, most of who are children of immigrants. We can challenge this ideology by educating others not to accept media portrayals of 'others' at face value. As students and future educators, those in academic fields can work to question the status quo and use methodologies, such as that of Marx, to focus on real, existing problems rather than abstract theories, however popular they may be.

EMERGENCE OF ISLAMIST FUNDAMENTALISM

Now that we have discussed the origins of Islamophobia and its relationship to the 'modern' notions of imperialist capitalism, let us turn to the equally 'racist' political ideology of Islamist fundamentalism, and try to understand it as a representation of 'tradition.' As Bannerji explains, the notion of tradition has come to be understood in hindsight, in relationship to its counterpart, modernity:

"If contemporary Europe were to be modern, non-Europe was perforce to be traditional. Defined economically as pre- or non-capitalist, culturally bound by iron rules of religion, ritual and hierarchy, politically under despots and warlords, locked in isolated village communities, resisting urbanization and reveling in particularist consciousness – a grand discourse expanding into a paradigmatic discourse of the East or traditional society became hegemonic" (Bannerji 2011, 234-5).

As we can see, the East is ideologically constructed as the non-West, and the traditional. In this binary, Islamic representations, or "ideal types" (Weber 1992, 33) represent what is worst in the East: "The... ideal types in the complex of the orient are the fanatic Islamic fighters – coming down to us from the days of the crusades... Then there are the Islamic assassins and villains,... the Muslim priest, [and the passive Muslim] women" (Bannerji 2011, 251). In the modern day, these representations take on different forms, from stereotypes about the suicide bomber, the jihadi and the 'terrorist,' a word which comes with its own contradictions (Bannerji 2011, 251-2).



The ‘Islamist terrorist’ of today seems to fit perfectly within the image of the violent, irrational Orient from centuries ago. Is it then a coincidence that Islamist extremists are choosing to combat what they see as immoral imperialism with this ideology?

I believe there is more to the picture than meets the eye. As Bannerji explains, “Tradition and modernity are cultural and not social or historical. In fact they are value categories, categories of moral/cultural/aesthetic judgment. This is what implicates them... into relations of ruling, of capital, class, colonialism and imperialism. Depending on the political standpoint, ‘tradition’ or ‘modernity’ becomes the value of choice” (Bannerji 2011, 251-2). Thus if modernity has aligned itself with capitalism, imperialism and the promotion of Western values over Oriental, ‘Islamic’ ones, it is not a coincidence that fundamentalists would choose to take refuge in traditional values, the most extreme of which is the Wahabbi fundamentalist interpretation of Islam which is rejected by most Muslims. It seems both sides agree that one extreme ideology must be combatted with another equally extreme and xenophobic ideology. These ideological binaries also seek to homogenize both sides and do not show their intermingling, where ‘Islamist fundamentalists’ may also very immersed in Western culture and Western ‘imperialists’ may actually be sympathetic to Muslims.

Moreover, almost all of the ‘religious’ extremism that we see today in the Muslim world has its roots in reactions to political grievances incurred by the West, through capitalist imperialism and political aggression. We will also see that, just as the print revolution strengthened the spread of Orientalist ideas, the internet revolution is the main method through which extremists have been able to promote their interests and reach a wider audience. Modes generated by capitalism itself are thus being used to fight back against the hegemony of capital. All of this is symptomatic of the hazards of ideology, in which real, everyday issues are occluded by abstract ideologies which vilify the ‘other’ and justify violence.

If we use the Marxist method of starting with particulars as opposed to the general, I want to take the argument back where it started, to the case of Aaron Driver. When asked how he became radicalized after converting to Islam, he attributed it to the atrocities he had read about on the internet occurring in the Middle East at the hands of the West: “Seeing some of the things that happened in Syria, it infuriates you and it breaks your heart at the same time. And I think that if you know what’s going on, you have to do something. Even if you’re just speaking about it” (CBC News 2016). This is a compelling statement because it speaks to the nature of ideology as something grounded in the practical and political as opposed to the theoretical, as well as the complicity of the internet in spreading these ideologies.



ISIS child soldiers training as depicted in an ISIS propaganda video

Even major fundamentalist leaders will ground their rationale in the injustices committed against Muslims by the West, rather than religious justification to kill non-Muslims. After the attacks in Paris last year, a French Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) militant incited other French Muslims to attack civilians as retribution for France's air strikes in Syria in the following words: "Jihad is the path of Allah. You strengthen their economy and pay taxes which they use to fight us, and kill our sisters, our women and our children" (Times of Malta 2015). In 2010, even Osama Bin Laden justified Al-Qaeda's violence by asking the West, "How is it right for you to occupy our countries and kill our women and children and expect to live in peace and security?" (Davis 2011). It is evident that however much the conflicts of the world are couched in grand ideologies, their *raison d'être* remains grounded in the everyday lives and security of people, and a long history of cultural and practical domination by the West. In the words of Neumann, "Without grievance, ideology does not resonate, while without ideology, grievances are not acted upon" (Neumann 2011).

Currently, ISIS is the face of global Islamist fundamentalism, replacing Osama bin Laden and the Taliban, or at least the one currently receiving the most news coverage. The formation of this extremist group is directly linked to the fallout and instability created by George W. Bush's war on Iraq in 2003 under the pretense of finding 'weapons of mass destruction.' The war destabilized the region and fueled the rage felt by extremists at yet another aggression against a Muslim population. This resentment, "formed along contemporary fault lines of power and patronage, drove a widespread Sunni resistance, a mix of non-ideologues enraged by losing jobs, status and dignity, and others, like the jihadis, who believed the war had been preordained in Islamic prophecies" (Chulov 2015). The latter group eventually formed the Iraqi branch of ISIS, and gained followers from the disillusioned masses who had been affected by the war. Thus ISIS was formed not as an organic evolution within Iraqi and Syrian

politics, but as a direct consequence of Western imperialism in these Muslim-majority lands, as well as divide-and-rule policies covertly initiated in these countries to create strife between different sects and sub-groups.

Moreover, ISIS would not have been able to gain the influence it has without modern technology, especially the internet. Using almost every social 'app' available, from Facebook to WhatsApp, ISIS has been able to win most of its wars in the virtual arena. "ISIS has truly disrupted the very notion of war. We don't need tanks and guns to destroy this enemy as much as we need technology and data" (Bilton 2016). Most of the foreign followers of ISIS, who are likely to carry out attacks in the West, are inspired by ISIS propaganda on the internet. Recently the Canadian government issued a report citing that the terror threat in the country had not significantly increased, and the main threat remained those who were inspired by online extremist content to attack (Boutilier 2016). When ISIS began their beheading campaign of foreign journalists, they publicized their attacks through videos posted on the internet. When ISIS claims responsibility for an attack, they use their Twitter account, with followers re-tweeting its messages. ISIS retains a hugely popular social media presence, with rapidly growing numbers of followers. In fact, this is one of the reasons anti-terrorist experts are unable to verify the strength of ISIS, since it is hard to ascertain the number of followers through their Twitter handles alone (Bilton 2016). Just as the spread of modern Orientalist ideas was greatly strengthened by the rapid increase in the publication of books, the Islamist fundamentalists of today are using 'traditional' values of extremist Islam (as had been defined by Orientalist perceptions of the savage Muslim) mixed with capitalist modes of communication, mainly the internet, to strengthen their global presence. It can be argued that ISIS would have very few followers if it were not for its strong online presence and manipulation of social media for its own interests. We find the forces standing for 'tradition' are using modes of capitalism, as well as the social relations of capital, to fight the forces of what they perceive as the immoral West, or modernity, which has its roots in capitalist imperialism. Perhaps this is evidence of the limitations of capitalism, which Weber saw as an 'iron cage' that would become a liability for the global economic order. Or perhaps we can see that modes of communication are the only means by which to spread ideology, and these modes are usually in the hands of the wealthy who control them. It also shows that the categories of the 'West' and 'Islamist fundamentalism' are not as diametrically opposed as they are made to seem and both groups may actually borrow from the others' ideas and tools.

CONCLUSION

It has been shown that Islamist fundamentalism, as a current representation of 'tradition,' is trying to battle the forces of Western imperialism, or 'modernity.' Just as the ideology of Islamophobia homogenizes all Muslims as being violent and irrational, Islamist fundamentalists portray all those who live in the West as amoral aggressors.



Both groups see ‘culture’ as a fixed, static phenomenon and are guided by the notion of cultural ‘purity’ and not fluidity. Since these extremists are reacting to ‘modern’ forces of imperialism, as well as to Orientalist stereotypes, eliminating fundamentalism will involve eliminating both these causes.

In the absence of this, those who are drawn to fundamentalism within the Muslim world would do well to heed Frantz Fanon’s advice to re-direct their anger into productive social and political means instead of violence which defeats their purpose and only reinforces their negative stereotypes.

Here, we can discuss how Muslims, who do not represent any territorial dimension, can come to be defined as a ‘nation’ and thus benefit from Fanon’s prescription for the liberation of oppressed ‘nations.’ I will argue that Islam is unique in that its membership is based on the knowledge of the Arabic language. The first English translation of the Qur’an came into existence more than 1000 years after the book was revealed (historyofislam.com). Even though there are translations in every language readily available now, the original language is still revered and learned by Muslim children across the globe. Benedict Anderson shows that language is primordial and can create ‘nations’ even without territorial borders: “Much the most important thing about language is its capacity for generating imagined communities, building in effect particular solidarities... Languages thus appear rooted beyond almost anything else in contemporary societies” (Anderson 1983, 133-45). Through the careful preservation of the Arabic language, in print as well as in basic social etiquette, it is possible to create a global Muslim community with shared values.

If we agree that Muslims may view themselves as a nation, what would Fanon say about how Muslims today can challenge extremism? In ‘Wretched of the Earth,’ he outlines a way by which the oppressed nation, which is justifiably angry, can channel that anger in productive ways for the achievement of a common good. “We shall see that for a man who is in the thick of the fight it is an urgent matter to decide on the means and the tactics to employ: that is to say, how to conduct and organize the movement. If this coherence is not present there is only a blind will toward freedom, with the terribly reactionary risks which it entails” (Fanon 1963, 59). Although Fanon does give an important role to violence, it is as a last resort and in self-defence. This is timely advice for those Muslim fundamentalists who feel that violence is the only way to be seen and heard. In order to form this coherence, Fanon believes we need to decolonize our minds from the seeds of both ideologies – Orientalist stereotypes about the about the violent Muslim, as well as the fundamentalist views that would justify violence – in order to use their anger in practical and political ways to enact change in struggling Muslim countries. In fact, using Islam as a means to combat Islamist extremism may be among the



NO ISLAMOPHOBIA
NO FEAR
POLITICS

Photo from a Bill C-51 protest (Photo: Flickr/JMacPherson)

best strategies as study after study has shown that religious observance and radicalization are not causative and in fact, work against each other (Hellyer 2016).

To summarize, Marx's notion of ideology can be used to understand the current conflict between Islamophobia, which has its roots in a colonial, capitalist version of modernity in the West, and the traditional fundamentalism of the East. Moreover, Orientalist views were spread in large part due to the print revolution, while fundamentalist views are being promoted largely through the internet revolution. The hazards of both these ideologies are the abstractions which deflect attention from real, material issues. As Bannerji says, "We need to tackle this issue epistemologically – as a particular mode of production of knowledge, which inevitably produces a degrounded, a dehistoricizing set of concepts, categories and meanings which erase, occlude, reify, distance or displace the historical and the social" (Bannerji 2011, 236). We must challenge these ideologies which threaten to destroy peace and the natural affinity between peoples. It is only then that Muslims such as Aaron Driver will be able to recognize the false ideology of Islamophobia which alienated him socially, as well as the false ideology of fundamentalism, which took his life unnecessarily.

Nuzhat Khurshid is an M.A. candidate at York University. She is interested in the way that mainstream International Relations problematizes certain identities by relying on notions of Western cultural imperialism that essentialize the Other. She wants to explore how subject formation and order co-constitute each other, depending on Othering processes that suffocate rather than open up space to think and recognize others as legitimate leaders and decision-makers of the global order. Using critical approaches to IR, such as postcolonial theory and narrative, she hopes to understand how we can step outside of contemporary fault lines around polarized identities and create a more ethical political world.

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Photo: David McEachan

COMMENTARY: CONFRONTING IDEOLOGY: ISLAMOPHOBIA VS. ISLAMIST FUNDAMENTALISM

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On January 29th, 2017, Alexandre Bissonnette, a 27-year-old far-right anti-immigrant and anti-Islam Quebecois, entered into a mosque, killed six Muslims and injured dozens as they prayed at the Centre Culturel Islamique de Quebec. While the incident shocked the Quebecois and Canadian public, it was a proof that Islamophobes are as prone to killing innocent civilians as are militant Islamists.

In her article, “confronting Ideology: Islamophobia vs. Islamist Fundamentalism,” Nuzhat Khurshid discusses Islamophobia and Islamist fundamentalism. In doing so, she examines the two ideologies in an historical context in light of the relationship between the West and the East. She categorizes both ideologies as equally racist, supremacist, and conflicting to one another. Looking at Islamophobia in historical perspectives, the author sees the “tradition-modernity” dichotomy as originating from traditional colonialism, and manifesting today by the “ever-expanding needs of capitalism.” While the author traces Islamophobia back to the times of Orientalism, I would argue that anti-Mohammedanism dates back to the times of the crusades. Mohammedans were seen as these barbaric and anti-Christ Easterners.

The author also suggests that the ‘West’ and ‘Islamist fundamentalism’ are borrowing one another’s ideas and tools. Islamophobia might be a reaction to Islamism and, Islamism and Muslims’ radicalization might be a reaction to Islamophobia. I call this dichotomy the “co-radicalization process” through which both camps (militant Islamists and far-right Islamophobes) are radicalizing one another (Shepherd, 2017). The importance of understanding this co-radicalization process is key to understanding how the two (Islamists and Islamophobes) feed into one another’s radical views. In other words, one’s continuity is dependent on the other’s existence. One group feeds on the grievances done to the Muslims, and the other on the fear of the threat of these Muslims. Thus, we should give equal attention to both sides. Nonetheless, with the rise of Trump and the European far right parties, Islamophobia is being normalized and institutionalized. It is fair to suggest that Islamophobes, unlike Islamic fundamentalists, enjoy the support of the media and certain politicians.

Notwithstanding their heterogeneous nature regarding their looks, beliefs, and practices, Western Muslims are otherized and ‘orientalized’ by Western governments, media, and institutions. The author repeatedly emphasized the heterogeneous status of Muslims, which is a reality that Islamophobes seem to ignore. The latter homogenize all Muslims as being barbaric, misogynistic, and a violent pre-modern nation. For instance, Canadian Muslims comprise of Africans, North Africans, Asians, Middle Easterners, European-born Muslims as well as converts (Spalek & Lambert, 2008, p. 264). Their involvement as active citizens is being increasingly framed by positive civic engagement, collaboration with authorities, and counter-radicalization measures. Likewise, communities are gradually seen as important allies for addressing social problems such as violence, youth disengagement, and radicalization, either

through establishing community institutions that host and embrace their youth, or through collaborating with the government in similar initiatives (Tiflati, 2017).

Furthermore, Muslims, particularly visible Muslims, often experience prejudices as a result of exclusionary practices and discourses on identity, values, belongingness to the nation, and secularism. For instance, in Canada, Arabo-Muslims are the group hardest hit by various forms of discrimination and marginalization (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008, p. 234). Islamophobia and anti-Muslim bigotry have also increased during the times of the Parti Québécois's Charter of Values in 2013. This Islamophobia emerged through the concept of race when Muslims were perceived negatively by virtue of assumed biological, cultural, and social qualities (i.e. skin colour, country of origin, name). This form of Islamophobia also affects Christian Arabs (e.g. Lebanese) who are mistaken for being Muslims (Oueslati, Labelle & Antonius, 2006, p. 54) based on their names, skin colour, and countries of origin. It is a form of ethnicization and racialization of Islamic identity and of Muslimness. Muslims also experience uneasiness and discrimination when they are called onto speaking for their "religion" and their "people." Their names and skin color play a major role in their 'otherization' and therefore their exclusion.

The author ends her article by emphasizing the role that Islam, as a religion, can play in countering extremism. Amid discussions of religious identity and radical violent action, the role of Islamic ideology in terrorism occupies counter-terrorism research. Through contextualizing radical ideas in scripture, Islamic education can be employed to combat behavioral radicalization (Tiflati, 2016). Opinions are often divided between those who believe that Islam itself is part of the problem and those who believe that it is only a vehicle through which radicalization occurs (Bartlett & Miller, 2012, p. 9). Certain Muslims believe that religious education, despite containing aspects of radical talk and thought, is effective in avoiding the rhetoric of radical actions. In other words, by promoting religious pride along with national pride, reaching out to other communities, and building a shared identity, these schools can promote social coexistence.

Hicham Tiflati is a senior research associate at Georgia State University, and a fellow at the German Institute for Radicalization and Deradicalization Studies (GIRDS). His research focuses on Islamic schooling and identity formation in Canada, postcolonial identities, Islamophobia, radicalization, and disengagement from violent extremism. Follow him on Twitter @HTiflati.

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A Syrian woman and child on the street of the Zaatari Refugee Camp in Jordan
(Russell Watkins/Department for International Development)

SYRIAN REFUGEE CHILDREN AND MENTAL HEALTH TRAUMA

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INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) named Syria as the most dangerous place on earth to be a child (UNICEF, 2). Since the onset of civil war in 2011, nearly 4.8 million Syrians are refugees outside of Syria and approximately 6 million are internally displaced (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2016). While some refugees have successfully resettled in North American and European nations, many remain in limbo in refugee camps. What is most staggering about the population of affected persons is that nearly half, approximately 6 million, are children (UNICEF, 2016). Nearly all of these children have been subjected to trauma that has manifested in a variety of ways. They have often been subjected to or witnessed violence and have experienced the loss of one or more of their caregivers. Refugees face difficulty accessing psychological and health services and are met with the stigma surrounding mental health in countries including Lebanon and Turkey, regions that many refugee children have fled to. In the absence of these supports, the mental trauma a child is experience can impact learning and development and have disastrous impacts on their future.

Upon examination of these challenges, it is evident that the impact of war and subsequent trauma on children requires a unique approach. This paper will critically analyze the current approaches to the mental wellbeing of Syrian refugee children and the barriers that exist to conventional approaches to trauma amongst Syrian children. As the conflict in Syria rages on, immediate attention is given to the safety and security of civilians affected. Mental healthcare is often an afterthought, administered on an ad hoc basis by charities operating in refugee camps. The sparse nature of the care, as well as the ongoing war, has meant that there is little academic research on care provided to children suffering from mental health illness as a result of the conflict. As a result, this paper will argue that there are multiple factors which negate both the possibility and effectiveness of conventional approaches to mental trauma in refugee camps amongst Syrian children. It will rely on examples of interventions used with youth affected by other conflicts, including former child soldiers in Uganda and survivors of the Rwandan genocide, and will examine both established and ad hoc refugee camps within several neighboring countries. It will highlight that there will be repercussions for the next generation and the future of the Syrian conflict if the mental health needs of these children are not made a priority. Further, it will explain that culturally sensitive community-based interventions are most effective in ensuring that the mental health needs of children are cared for.

IMPORTANCE OF CARE

Prior to an understanding of available and practical mental health interventions for Syrian refugee children, it is important to understand why their mental health is of utmost importance.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (2014), mental health is “defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stress of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.” For those affected by the Syrian conflict, both their experiences in Syria and the subsequent resettlement process will undoubtedly have negative impacts on all aspects of mental health. While those who relocate to refugee camps or communities may be able to contribute to the community, their trauma would impede their potential to lead productive lives, finding employment and hinder their ability to cope with stress.

There is not comprehensive, readily available data on the number of refugees that are suffering from psychological trauma. However, a 2015 study by the German Federal Chamber of Psychotherapists revealed that nearly half of all refugees in the country were suffering from mental health issues (Rubin, 2016). Only four percent of those suffering from illness are receiving treatment. At a refugee centre in Munich, Prof. Peter Henningsen examined approximately 100 Syrian children and adolescents up to 14 years old. Of these, 22% had a diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Technical University of Munich, 2015). The Berlin Centre for Torture Victims (BZFO) is an organization that provides free trauma care to refugees, through both short-term interventions and long term counseling. However, even BZFO is only able to reach an estimated 20% of refugees in need of assistance. Germany has become home to more than one million asylum seekers in less than two years (Rubin, 2016). The refugees who do not manage to acquire assistance through organizations such as BZFO are forced to seek assistance through the public healthcare system – an arduous and bureaucratic task.



For refugees that do not make it to countries like Germany, the United Kingdom or Canada, accessing mental healthcare is often a much greater challenge.

In the aforementioned nations, the stigma surrounding mental health is not as severe as compared to many of the other nations that are now home to Syrian refugees. Access to care is not only difficult due to an overwhelming of the system, but also due to the cultural norms that exist in the country. Rayan and Jaradat (2016) argue that Arabic cultural norms have a large influence on this stigma. According to the authors, mental illness in the Arabic culture is viewed as “an illness of the soul and not of the body or mind” (p.12). Mental illness is deemed to be a very personal and private matter and since breaking family privacy is not acceptable, most individuals seek “social support from family members and relatives or friends rather than seeking professional psychological help” (p.12). When children are separated from their parents and family as a result of conflict, their trauma can be further exacerbated as they lack a critical support system.



A Syrian refugee boy at the Zaatari Refugee Camp in Jordan (UN Photo/Brian Sokol).

In 2013, children's rights organization *Save the Children*, conducted a survey amongst Syrian teenagers living in Lebanon and found that nearly half had contemplated suicide (Shaheen, 2016). Refugee children have borne witness to unspeakable acts of violence. Some have lost one or both of their caregivers and face additional stress if separated from their families. Rogers and Rogers-Sirin (2015) argue that refugee children "tend to have higher levels of behavioral or emotional problems, including aggression and other affective disorders" (p.11). The mental health of Syrian refugee children is imperative to not only their own wellbeing, but also that of the Syrian nation. Children with mental health problems are more likely to require more assistance learning and face more difficulty finding work in adulthood. As Brent and Silverstein (2013) state, "these mental health problems yield a high cost for society" (p.11). The generation that is afflicted by the conflict will also be the generation of Syrians to whom the responsibility to rebuild is left; a duty reserved for those who choose to return to Syria. If mental trauma is not addressed, it will continue to worsen and ultimately hinder the education and employment capacities of an entire generation. As they become adults, these individuals will have difficulty maintaining employment, thus hampering Syrian recovery efforts (Brent and Silverstein, 2013). There is a greater risk than is realized by the majority of aid groups and organizations operating in the region. It is imperative that mental health is framed as an integral part of the rebuilding process of Syria. However, mental health concerns should be addressed immediately, particularly given that there is no end in sight to the conflict. The reality is that many of the children displaced by the conflict will be raised away from Syria, either in camps or as refugees throughout North America and Europe. As a result, it is important to not delay addressing the mental health issues that they may have developed as a result of their experiences. For those children who face a future home that is not Syria, it is important that they are provided with immediate and appropriate care so as to thrive wherever they shall call home.

IMPEDIMENTS TO WESTERN MENTAL HEALTH CARE

It is well established that there are many children suffering from mental health trauma as a result of their exposure to and involvement in the Syrian conflict. Treatment is required to ensure these individuals can lead fulfilling and productive lives. However, the context of the situation is pivotal. Non-profit International Medical Corps revealed that in Lebanon, home to thousands of refugees, basic counseling for individuals or families is not available. The same report indicated that in Syria, there is no available psychological support in education, no in-patient mental health care and no research to support mental health and psychosocial supports (Hijazi, and Weissbecker 2015, 7). In the absence of existing health infrastructure, such as hospitals or clinics, within both Syria and the camps in which refugees reside indefinitely, there is a need for community-based approaches to alleviate mental health concerns amongst children. Beyond the lack of professional supports within Syria and refugee camps in Lebanon, there exist a variety of factors that limit conventional approaches to mental health care. Prior to any discussion of suitable approaches, there must be a thorough understanding of these factors and their significance within the Syrian context.

In Jordan¹, the Zaatari refugee camp is home to a population of 80,000 Syrian refugees and has evolved into a metropolis with addresses, neighborhoods and a travel agency (Kimmelman, 2014). While many refugees long to return to Syria, they have adjusted to the inevitability that the camp will remain their home for the foreseeable future. Amongst the growing business and attempts to normalize the experience is a dire shortage of health professionals within the Zaatari camp. Wael Samara is the only psychiatrist based permanently at Zaatari with the International Medical Corps (Shaheen, 2016).



There are far too many refugees in need of services but simply not enough professionals.

For refugees residing in Turkey and Lebanon, language barriers between care providers contribute to a limited ability to access either the public system or national organizations that provide care.

Cultural differences and sensitivities are also an incredibly important factor when addressing mental health within Syria and other Middle Eastern nations in which refugees reside. In Syria, concepts such as psychological wellbeing or mental health are often misunderstood and

¹ The neighboring nations of Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey are now home to hundreds of thousands of refugees. Not all of these refugees have settled in refugee camps, but they often face the same barriers to care that will be examined in this paper.

carry negative connotations. In these regions, emotional suffering is regarded as “an inherent aspect of life...instead, it is the explicit labeling of distress as ‘psychological’ or ‘psychiatric’ that constitutes a source of shame” (Hassan et al. 2015, 22). Therefore, the decision to either seek out or participate in treatment is a complex process and must be treated as such.

Perhaps the largest impediment is the severe lack of available funding for mental health care. There is a prioritization of physical health over mental health. An inherent bias towards mental health – one that is also prevalent in the west – is that the illness itself is invisible and therefore more difficult to treat or to gauge the results of treatment. When refugees have limbs amputated as the result of bombing raids or are suffering from disease spread through dirty, crowded camps, their needs are more visible and immediate. Therefore, the response from the international community will be one that focuses on urgent health needs rather than investment in long-term mental healthcare.

While there is difficulty in using anecdotal evidence as a means to justify donor spending on an initiative, there is value in using the stories of individual success stories in the absence of widespread academic literature on the subject. However, this logic is often lost on donors who want to see their money go to tangible provisions such as food or shelter. Such provisions are also in short supply and despite a high effectiveness of mental health interventions like the ones listed above, they are a low priority.

PAST EXPERIENCES

Syria is not the only nation in recent years to undergo a catastrophic conflict that has led to the displacement, both internally and externally, of millions of citizens. Additionally, there have been conflicts in the last decade that have disproportionately targeted children in ways so unique that it will take decades before an approach to the issues has been refined. However, there are similarities across several of these conflicts that are worth examining in order to better understand what approaches can be taken towards the psychological trauma thousands of Syrian refugee children are experiencing. There will also be an examination of the similarities that exist between the experiences of Syrian refugee children and those of children who are victims of or have borne witness to conflict and genocide.

Rwanda

In the aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, it is estimated that there are only four studies that have thoroughly examined PTSD and its impact on Rwandan civilians (Neugebauer et al., 2009). The dearth of academic literature on mental trauma stemming from the 1994 genocide is just one of the many similarities that exist between Rwanda and Syria. Approximately 75,000 children were left orphaned during the 100-day slaughter, many having witnessed the deaths of their caregivers at the hands of people who were once neighbors and friends. For



The Zaatari Refugee Camp in Jordan (UN Photo/Brian Sokol).

those old enough to remember such events, the trauma would undoubtedly be staggering. A 1995 National Trauma Survey interviewed 1547 Rwandan children between the ages of 8 and 19 and found that 54% to 62% exhibited signs of PTSD (Favila, 2009, p.2). There is no refuting the presence of PTSD and other mental illness amongst civilians following the Rwandan genocide. The issue was not whether it was present, but rather how to address it in a post-conflict society that lacked the appropriate infrastructure – a nearly identical problem facing Syrian refugees. However, the difference is that many of the responses to mental trauma following the Rwandan genocide took place within the country and therefore many of the victims were able to remain at home while they attempted to address the psychological trauma that they were experiencing.

Following the conflict, UNICEF created the Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances Program (CEDC) in conjunction with the Rwandan Ministry of Health in order to “address the needs of war traumatized children and their caretakers by using a community based approach” (Favila, 2009, p.4). It was from this effort that the National Trauma Centre (NTC) was created, through which UNICEF would direct much of their efforts to provide psychological and trauma intervention. NTC focused on capacity building, such as training teachers, caretakers and health and social workers on the lasting impacts of trauma experienced during the genocide and on sensitivity training so that communities might better understand the implications (Chauvin et al., 1998). An examination by Chauvin et al (1998) found that the training, which was only over a two-day period, was not sufficient and that more emphasis on counselling was required. Between 1995 and 1998, only 1% of the target population was reached and the NTC was unable to meet the needs of genocide survivors, in part due to the lack of participation by qualified health professionals who had all fled the country in 1994 (Favila, 2009). As of 2008, there were only three psychiatrists operating in the whole of Rwanda; an incredibly problematic statistic given that many young children who experienced traumatic events are now adults who have received little to no assistance coping with the trauma.

At the time, many of those affected were raised in a nation that had just emerged from a crippling genocide and as they entered adulthood, they had no access to supports that would assist with the mental health trauma they were experiencing. As Favila (2009) shows, these solutions failed to create a long term solution to the mental health needs of Rwandans following the genocide. Many nonprofits operating in the country have focused both their efforts and resources on more immediate issues such as HIV treatment.



Many similarities exist between the situation in Syria and Rwanda, particularly the emphasis on community-based approaches to trauma experienced by children.

Unfortunately, another similarity is the withdrawal of support from NGOs and donors who choose to focus their efforts on more tangible and immediate health concerns. More than two decades after the conflict Rwanda is still struggling to find appropriate solutions to the mental trauma experienced by so many of its citizens.

Uganda

Uganda is of significant importance in this study due to the use of child soldiers by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the subsequent attempts to reintegrate the youth into the community and help them learn to cope with their trauma. It is estimated that nearly 38,000 soldiers were kidnapped and forced to fight (Storr, 2014). There is a heavy psychological impact from being a child soldier, who are raised in "an environment of severe violence, experience it, and subsequently often commit cruelties and atrocities of the worst kind" (Schauer and Elbert, 2010, p.311). While the overwhelming majority of Syrian children under examination in this analysis are refugees, there is great value to understanding the traumatic experience of a child soldier for one particular reason: children who are struggling and feel marginalized are vulnerable targets for radicalization (Sirin and Rogers-Sirin, 2015). Therefore, an analysis of what approaches have been undertaken to address the psychological trauma endured by Ugandan child soldiers is valuable to the Syrian case.

Much like Syrian and Rwandan children, many children who were abducted and forced to fight for the LRA witnessed the death of their parents or were forced to carry out the act themselves. If they were fortunate enough to survive the conflict they were forced into, they return to communities as reminders of terrible violence and suffering. A study conducted by Vinck and colleagues (2007) revealed that in Northern Uganda, 82% of children who had been abducted presented symptoms of PTSD. A variety of different initiatives have been employed in Uganda as a means of trying to assist former child soldiers in their mental health recovery, including school based initiatives, NGO programs and traditional processes. One of these traditional methods is used by the Acholi people of northern Uganda and is called Mato Oput

(Singh, 2015). It is a traditional atonement process during which the participants discuss the atrocities they committed in the hopes that they will “reconcile their guilt and return to civilian life” (Singh, 2015). Martin (2004) argues that Mato Oput is significant because it allows for a public recognition of wrongdoing, which is an incredibly important acknowledgement given societies inability to forget the atrocities committed. While such a unique process cannot necessarily be applied to the mental health issues facing Syrian refugee children, it is worth noting that when such strong cultural norms dictate the manner in which mental health is perceived, there are often culturally-sensitive options.

In Uganda, the non-profit organization Vivo provides mental health services to former child soldiers. The most common therapy employed by the organization is Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET). The therapy involves a discussion of both the traumatic experiences and the acts perpetrated in order to help the former child soldiers find closure (Vivo, 2016). Group sessions are also used so that individuals can learn how to support each other as they transition into their new lives as civilians. Vivo has reported seeing positive results in the months following individuals’ participation in NET as well as successful reintegration into civilian life. The use of NET is a possible alternative for Syrian refugee children when infrastructure is limited and aid personnel may be the only available resource.

PRACTICAL APPROACHES TO SYRIAN REFUGEE CHILDREN

It is difficult to ascertain the most appropriate methods for addressing psychological trauma in Syrian refugee children. Some of the methods that are currently employed by organizations in the camps, such as the International Medical Corps and Souriyat Across Borders, have demonstrated anecdotal evidence of the alleviation of mental health concerns amongst children they have treated, but they operate on a small scale and do not have the capacity or resources to make a significant impact on the afflicted population. There is a dearth of field research on the experiences of Syrian refugee children and the tools being employed to mitigate their trauma. The few studies that do exist have the ability to aid our understanding of what children require and what the available options are. In 2012, the first field-based study of Syrian children in Turkish refugee camps was conducted with Bahcesehir University. The study explored the mental health needs of Syrian children and how they expressed themselves through art (Rogers and Rogers-Sirin, 2015). Data was drawn from 311 children during 2012 and 2013 who completed both surveys and drawings as requested by the researchers. According to Rogers and Rogers-Sirin (2015), “previous research suggests drawing may be a better method for understanding the emotional burdens of war on children” (p.12). The results of the survey were staggering, with 79% of the children having witnessed someone in their family dying and 60% having witnessed violence (Rogers and Rogers-Sirin, 2015). The drawings also revealed startling indicators of mental trauma. When asked to draw a person, nearly a third of the children instinctively address blood, guns or tears (Rogers and



*Syrian refugee children in a school at the Zaatari Refugee Camp in Jordan
(UN Photo/Mark Garten)*

Rogers-Sirin, 2015). The study demonstrated that the Syrian conflicts toll on the psychological well-being of children has been incredibly heavy.

Given the magnitude of the Syrian refugee crisis, it is imperative to keep suggested approaches to mental health interventions as realistic as possible. In Lebanon, a UNICEF-supported Child Friendly Initiative attempts to provide psychosocial supports to Syrian refugee children. The initiative proves a place for Syrian children to get back to a relatively normal routine of playing, socializing and studying in a safe environment (Alameddine, 2012). The program is a relatively simple initiative but it helps to mitigate the symptoms of distress in refugee children. It is not designed to be a permanent, long-term solution to the trauma but rather “serves as an entry point to work with parents and communities on children’s issues, to identify children with special vulnerabilities and refer them to the services they need.” (Alameddine, 2012). This approach is similar to the one employed by the International Medical Corps and Souriyat Across Borders, which attempt to create interventions and safe spaces in which families can come together with their children to work together and heal in a community-based environment. Outcomes from these interventions include a reduction of domestic violence towards children and the education of the child on their rights.

Symptoms exhibited amongst children affected by the conflict in Syria range from depression and self-imposed isolation to violent outburst or behavioral disorders (Shaheen, 2016).

The interventions, counseling and treatments that have been tried have showed great success amongst children (Shaheen, 2016). The International Medical Corps established a centre in

the Zaatari camp for children who need mental health treatment and offers group therapy and counseling sessions. Shaheen (2016) used anecdotal evidence of her work with a 17-year-old refugee with children who was abusing her young daughter as a means of communicating some of the success that has come from such interventions. The young woman eventually ceased the abuse once she had completed therapy and counseling sessions. This focus on both establishing and healing secure familial relationships is central to work on trauma.

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Razan Obeid runs a social development centre for the Jordanian Red Crescent and emphasizes that “we need to keep finding solutions” (Shaheen, 2016). At a facility operated by the Red Crescent in the city of Amman, Syrian children are brought together to socialize with other children and learn about the rights that they have as children. Parents are also welcome to join and to engage with each other, an initiative that has shown positive results in the form of reduced domestic abuse aimed at children by unemployed fathers (Shaheen, 2016). Souriyat Across Borders is a British-based nonprofit in Jordan working with Syrian refugees. The group runs a centre in Jordan to help treat and rehabilitate refugees who have suffered both physical and psychological wounds as the result of the conflict. Staff speak of the improvements such children have made after treatment and counseling, including a young teenager who was tortured by government agents in Syria and now works to assist local staff hold therapy sessions for children (Shaheen, 2016). In the absence of professional supports, including trained mental health professionals, clinics and hospitals, approaches that encourage children to engage with one another and focus on establishing secure familial relationships will be the most effective way to immediately address mental health concerns amongst the affected population.

CONCLUSION

The impact of war on any human being is a traumatizing event that has long-term mental health implications. The impact it has on a child is profound and often incredibly damaging. Children who have fled Syria in hopes of safety and security have witnessed unspeakable acts of terror, have been subjected to violence and have often lost members of their families, including their caregivers. In nations and refugee camps that are overwhelmed by the arrival

of refugees, attempts at mental health interventions seem futile as the demand for help greatly outweighs available resources. In many of the nations that refugee children are now residing, mental health remains a heavily stigmatized and taboo subject. Cultural norms prevent the discussion of private family matters with outside individuals, which prevents the few organizations that are capable of providing mental health services from conducting their work. Coupled with a detrimental lack of available and relevant academic research, the situation for those seeking to provide mental health services to Syrian refugees is unstable. They have little experience to build on and few mistakes to learn from. Therefore, the process of providing care will be one of trial and error.

Providing community-based supports that incorporate the entire family unit – if possible – as well as place an emphasis on the socialization of children with their peers in safe spaces have proven to be the most successful approach to addressing mental trauma in Syrian refugee children. The learned experiences from Rwanda and Uganda show that the timeline for establishing stable, long-term mental health services for children affected by conflict will span decades. After more than two decades, Rwanda continues to face difficulties implementing successful mental health interventions and in Uganda, the lack of infrastructure and poverty in the country have impeded traditional approaches to mental health. The most appropriate approaches to the mental health of Syrian refugee children will be decided after many years of research and experience. However, it is evident that the starting point is a culturally-sensitive, community-focused approach that emphasizes the socialization of children with their peers and family. As the conflict in Syria rages on, the number of children requiring treatment for psychological trauma will only increase. It is therefore imperative to ensure such opportunities are available for children until more stable, long-term supports can be established.

Kathleen O'Brien is a Women in Defence and Security Scholar and MA Candidate in the Department of Political Science at Dalhousie University. Her Masters thesis examined the administration of mental health care to armed forces in Canada, the U.S. and the U.K. Her research interests include an intersection of health and social sciences to better understand the development of mental health programs for communities adversely impacted by conflict, as well as the role of non-profit organizations in the provision of mental health care in conflict zones. Kathleen is currently employed as a Policy Advisor at the Government of the Northwest Territories. This article reflects her views alone and not those of the Government of the Northwest Territories.

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Syrian children at the Zaatari Refugee Camp in Jordan (Photo: Mustafa Bader)

COMMENTARY: SYRIAN REFUGEE CHILDREN AND MENTAL HEALTH TRAUMA

By Dr. Rania Abuelhassan

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The Syrian crisis is entering its seventh year, and civilians continue to suffer and bear intolerable unique social consequences resulted of the most aggressive violent phenomena after the Second World War. The Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) for 2017 estimates that 6.3 million people are displaced within Syria and more than 6 million are outside the country. The assumptions of the humanitarian response have concluded a total number of 13.5 million people require humanitarian assistance and protection (UN OCHA, 2016).

General conditions for Syrians are varied according to their physical location and availability of humanitarian support through national actors. Sanctions and fuel shortages, combined with unemployment, price rises, and inflation have adversely impacted the purchasing power of the communities. Within Syria, access to health care services is a discussable issue according to location. In some areas, health care facilities have become military targets and people are afraid to seek health care. At least 1 in 4 public hospitals in the country is not functional, and those in still in service are overwhelmed with patients. The dysfunction of health services is compounded by shortages of medical supplies, equipment, and medications throughout the country. A number of Syrian medical staff have mobilized to set-up informal health care facilities to provide life-saving surgeries, stabilization, first aid treatment, and primary health care services for those unable to access other health services. However, the majority of senior and most qualified medical staff have fled the country due to the crisis, while those staffing informal health facilities are in dangerous environments near active conflict and are frequently targeted.

The humanitarian actors have done serious efforts to enable streamlined gender and protection principles in field assessments and program designs of health, NFI, protection, WASH and nutrition sector activities. To inform interventions, actors were keen to design interventions which assessed single-sex and mixed groups and interviewed caregivers to identify protection concerns of boys and girls of various ages. Meeting the needs of vulnerable groups is integrated into training on psychosocial support, and GBV. Actors who work with camp management and relief committees have reported their abilities to identify vulnerable groups including the elderly and people with disabilities to create links to complementary services. Nevertheless, interventions and programs related to mental health disorders, traumas, and psychological affection have not been reported frequently.

The operational definition of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) is a composite term used to describe any type of support that aims to protect or promote psychosocial well-being and/or prevent or treat mental distress. Interventions towards achieving that target include psychological first aid and linking survivors with other services, psychosocial interventions (such as groups activities), and, where indicated, specialist mental health care. It also includes engaging the broader community support to potentially play a role in protecting the dignity, promoting psychosocial wellbeing and preventing mental health problems associated with gender-based violence and the stigmatization/isolation of the survivor. Not all survivors have the same psychological and social needs following SGBV incidents.

Not all survivors of Gender-based violence will need or want emotional support, counseling or help, nevertheless, access to psychosocial support should always be available. The cornerstone of social work is trust. Like for health care services providers, trust is required to disclose such sensitive issues, and as medical care, social work is to be considered a specialized treatment as well. Consequently, as for medical profession, social workers are also bound by a professional obligation to client/patient confidentiality.

Situations of health care and protection support is different for the those outside Syria where we are looking at a number of more than 6 million refugees who are scattered between different types of accommodations in five countries: Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and Egypt.

Mental health needs, as well as protection and other types of needs, have differed and changed frequently between locations. A number of factors are affecting the humanitarian response plans to meet the gaps in service provision to survivors of mental health illnesses like hosting country stand on the refugee status of Syrians in their countries, existing health system capacities and integration/acceptance by the citizens of those countries for Syrian refugees.

The paper Syrian Refugee Children and Mental Health Trauma by Kathleen O'Brien has reflected a very specific perfect drawing of the mental health status of children in Zaatari refugee camp in comparison to other countries where refugees have extended to reach specifically in Canada. A well-researched paper with good references, and based on an excellent analysis and review of available pieces of literature on Syria crisis.

Dr. Alahmer is a senior reproductive health and Gender Based violence professional, a member of the international association of facilitators having experience of more than 16 years, and a certified trainer of trainers for Reproductive health, GBV, HIV, Obstetric emergencies, monitoring and evaluation, Project cycle management, epidemiology, clinical Management of Rape survivors, EMOC, MISP, HIV peer leadership and PEP Provision and Counseling, PSEA, case management and psychosocial counselling. Holding two medical specialties, Dr. Alahmer is an obstetrician/gynecologist and public health professional, in addition to her International Diploma of Humanitarian Assistance from Fordham University in New York, USA. She started her humanitarian career at the time of the crisis in Darfur, where she worked as a medical coordinator for a Sudanese Medical NGO between 2004 and 2005. She moved to MSF where she served as Medical Activity Manager in 2007. In 2008 she joined UNFPA as Officer in Charge (OIC), RH and GBV officer for Zalingie sub office., One year later she joined the United Nations Mission in Sudan, where she served as trainer of trainers and counselor for the HIV/AIDS advisory. Early in 2011 with the escalation of Libya revolution, Dr. Alahmer joined the International Medical Corps Organization (IMC) Libya team as GBV program manager and moved on to Turkey with the same responsibilities serving the Syrian refugees for another one year. Since 2014 she has been a GBV Program specialist in Damascus dealing on daily bases with the Syria crisis from within the country.

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Photo: Luis Llerena

CHILD SOLDIERY IN THE INFORMATION AGE

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INTRODUCTION

In 2007, Estonia was the victim of a significant, coordinated cyberattack, which crippled government communications, newspaper websites, banks and other connected entities in Europe's most Internet-saturated country. At the time, leading theories suggested that Russia, or at the very least elements of its intelligence community, might be somehow involved, spurred by the physical symbolism of Estonia removing Soviet-era monuments from city squares and public spaces (Davis, 2007). Indeed, in an attempt to visibly remove its history of engagement as part of the Soviet Union, Estonian authorities and political figures had become determined to demolish and destroy remaining statues erected pre-1990. Two years after the cyberattack, an event that Wired Magazine colloquially termed "Web War One," further details of the unexpected perpetrators would begin to emerge. According to reports by the Financial Times and Reuters, Nashi, a pro-Kremlin youth group with an estimated membership of 150,000, claimed responsibility for the digital assault against Estonia; they described to authorities a strategy of repeated denial-of-service (DoS) attacks, (Clover, 2009; Lowe, 2009). Nashi members, based on different sources, range between the ages of 17 and 25 (Knight, 2007).

According to international law, and in particular the *Paris Principles on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups* and the *Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict* affixed to the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, a child soldier is "any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys, and girls used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or who has taken a direct part in hostilities" (UNICEF, 2007, 7; UNOHC, 2000). While the world continues to work towards the goal of ending the use of thousands of remaining children engaged by state military forces, the rise of non-conventional armed conflict, both in terms of actors and spaces, has created a unique challenge largely unanticipated by the drafters of those Conventions, Principles and Protocols noted above: how to define, characterize, and understand a child soldier in the context of contemporary 'battlefields'?

Thanks in part to former U.S. President George Bush's global *War on Terror*, and our current knowledge of child use by emerging extremist organizations including Daesh and Boko Haram, the academic community has begun to place research and evaluative emphasis on exploring the "armed group" affiliation, rather than armed force, component of a contemporary child soldier's existence. But for the large part, these agents remain operative in a physical space, causing physical harm to a physically present opposing force: a child hidden in the underbrush with an AK-47; a girl abused after capture by an insurgent group; or, boy told to martyr himself for a cause. In removing these physical characteristics and

replacing them with the digital, however, are we, or should we, still (be) discussing child soldiery? This paper will endeavour to explore the definitional conundrum facing academics and policymakers regarding the participation of exceptionally connected and digitally literate children and young people in state-backed and non-state instances of cyber attacks or cyber warfare. Indeed, against the backdrop of endemic difficulties in delimiting a threshold in international law beyond which cyber attacks merit hard power responses by states, and the public policy dilemma of appropriate response to young person-led black hat groups, this paper will attempt to begin a conversation deemed by this author as critically necessary for the answering of the questions identified above: what is a child soldier in the digital age?

To begin, this paper will explore the challenge of warfare in our connected, cyber-society, including the difficulties of delineating the beginning and end points of such conflict outside a physical space. Second, the paper will briefly overview and subsequently consider three distinct categories of conflict-actors in the digital age, and how their existence should prompt the academic and policymaker communities to reengage with existing definitions of child soldiers: state-sponsored agents; black hat and ‘hacker’ groups; and, lone wolves. Finally, the paper will conclude with a proposed series of definitional categories for digital child soldiers and outline future directions for research. As noted, the purpose of this paper is not to provide a final verdict on the applicability of child soldier or related group “types” international law tenets to scenarios of cyber war, but to offer route markers, in the form of conundrums and questions at the end of each case discussion section, for initiating a robust conversation in this regard.

CHILDREN AND WAR IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Generally, war throughout contemporary history has been governed by the collective international *Law of Armed Conflict*, a combination of dozens of treaties from the United Nations Charter and the Geneva Conventions, to the specific banning of chemical weapons and cluster munitions, among others. The challenge, however, has arisen with the emergence of digital and telecommunications technologies in the 20th and 21st centuries: do these agreements and their respective core principles require adjustment or replacement? The academic debate in this regard has been robust. Some, including Lewis suggest that if we approach cyberwarfare as simply involving the application of new technology to gain an advantage over an opposing force, then existing regimes may well continue to be appropriate with adjustments to terminological definitions of combatants, force, and sovereignty (Lewis, 2010, 1). Schmitt, echoing Lewis, proposes that any cyber operation that amounts to an attack, as defined by existing international humanitarian law can qualify as “armed” conflict, by virtue of the former’s very real ability to cause meaningful, physical harm outside the digital sphere (2012, 250-252).



*The patch of the United States Cyber Command (Department of Defense
Photo/Marvin Lynchard)*

Additionally, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)¹ argues that cyber activities which disable a designated object, regardless of consequential physical damage or harm equally constitute an armed attack, although Schmitt suggests that a minimal threshold should be designated, for the shut down of a single computer that performs non-essential functions may not qualify (Schmitt, 2012, 252).

In practical application, organizations including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the U.S. Department of Defense have moved to apply their own criteria to war in the digital age. The Wall Street Journal reported in 2011 that the Pentagon had drafted a strategic directive indicating that computer-related or computer-driven acts of maleficence and sabotage derived from another state-entity could constitute an act of war, the response to which would be driven by notions of equivalency and proportionality guided by the existing *Law of Armed Conflict* (Gorman and Barnes, 2011). This approach is based on a reported assumption by officials at the time that the most sophisticated attacks on American digital infrastructures and computer systems would require the resource backing of a government (Gorman and Barnes, 2011).

¹ *In cyberwarfare, the differential between jus in bello and jus ad bellum remains vague and ill-defined, despite heroic efforts by some researchers to fit the rapid and often unanticipated developments in new information technology into existing international law parameters. In the case of ICRC definitions of armed attack in the context of conflict, challenges continue in the fundamental definition of what an armed conflict as such actually entails in the context of the cyber. For our purposes here, quoted material is used simply to reflect the continuing issues related to applying traditional understandings of child soldiery in the digital sphere.*

The most prominent of these state-driven definitional framing efforts has been the *Tallinn Manual on the International Law Applicable to Cyber Warfare*, published by the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CCDCE) in 2013. Reflective of the on-going debate regarding cyberwarfare in the international law of armed conflict, the Tallinn Manual not only defines for NATO members the acceptable criteria for both *jus ad bello* and *jus in bello* components for armed conflict, but it provides the first meaningful references to the use of children in this regard. In regarding the Manual, we find indirect linkages to the proposed three form categorization of the manner by which children participate as “soldiers” in cyber warfare: as state-sponsored agents; as formal or informal groups of associated participants, colloquially referred to as black hats or hacker groups; and as lone wolf actors.

STATE-SPONSORED AGENTS

Unanswered queries readily and immediately form the basis of academic scholarship in any discipline. They are not something to be feared but to be embraced. As graduate students, we are taught that being unable to answer a posed question provides us with almost as much value for research as responding to a defined hypothesis. Taking this one step further, I would argue that the investigation to discover those questions, those hypotheses, is of equal merit for scholarly activity. As such, each of the following sections below will work to enable future research avenues by beginning to broach the applicability of international law and definitional characterizations of child soldiers in a contemporary age.

The Tallinn Manual’s expert drafting committee suggests that current international law, including the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* Article 38, and Articles 1, 2, and 4 the *Convention’s Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict* provides a basis for strongly prohibiting the enlistment by state military organizations of children for the purposes of cyber warfare (Schmitt, 2013, 179). Beginning with the UNCRC Optional Protocol, its drafters mandated that, as in other laws related to armed conflict, state parties make all feasible efforts to ensure that members of an armed force do not take part in direct hostilities until reaching 18 years of age (childrenandarmedconflict.un.org, 2000). In cyberwarfare research, the challenge of defining the notion of direct hostilities in particular has yet to be remedied. Delerue argues that cyberspace offers the opportunity for civilians to easily access a fluid cast of digital “weapons” (from blogs to malicious worms) and participate in armed conflict without ever having set foot in the territory of belligerent parties (2014, 1, 14). Digital warfare also invokes the challenge of online collaboration without a clear understanding of a possible end result (as was demonstrated in 2014 with Reddit and the Boston bombing), as well as “weapons” being slaved by outside parties for the purposes of an attack or conflict contribution (Delerue, 2014, 15). Turns adds that notions of direct participation in hostilities as applied to cyberwarfare are equally hampered by a continuing belief by applicants, that so long as cyber-elements of conflict perpetrated by civilians do not cause direct physical damage

to a person or object, as was the case referenced in this paper's introduction in Estonia, they fail to meet the threshold needed for constituting direct participation (? 2012, 287). Indeed, the Tallinn Manual process contributed to expanding the above question by leaving open several caveats to their recommendation on the prevention of "child soldiers" in digital conflict. The authors note that contributing experts were unable to agree as to whether international law had evolved to the point at which there is consensus on 18 years of age as the basement threshold for appropriate military recruitment, as defined by the UNCRC's Optional Protocol (Schmitt, 2013, 179). The threshold in this regard becomes critical for future discussion for we know from previous research that both in physical and digital armed conflict², those able to wield a weapon of war are found under both proposed benchmarks of 15 and 18 years of age.

Additionally, according to the *International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia* (ICTY) and subsequent analysis thereof, there are several approaches by which actions by private individuals can become linked to the authority of the state. First, related to the ICTY case of *Prosecutor v. Tadic*, it was determined that "private individuals acting within the framework of, or in connection with, armed forces, or in collusion with State authorities may be regarded as de facto State organs." (Schmitt, 2012, 253). Second, cyber attacks carried out by individuals whose actions are facilitated by existing law, albeit not as a direct agent of the state, may also be enough to be considered as if launched by state organs themselves (Schmitt, 2012, 252-253). Third, if a state endorses and encourages the perpetuation of cyber attacks from its territory onto others, by formal or informal groups, Schmitt suggests that such activity meets the criterion of state-sponsored armed cyber conflict and a group can be considered a state organ (2012, 253). Under the logic above, tenets of international law on child soldiers do become muddled. With the latter case, there are numerous examples of digital hacking groups which have the de facto support of government entities, including the Syrian Electronic Army (SEA), Iran's Tarh Andishan, APT28, Unit 61398, and Axiom, among others. If any one of these organizations uses the participation of children under the age of 18 or 15, the subsequent causal chain could suggest state-support for child soldiers, if all other definitions on the latter hold true. But, for example, if a young person under the age of 15 retweets messages from the SEA and pledges their electronic support for the organization's objectives despite not being a formal member, is that individual a "child soldier" following the logic above? If "state-sponsorship" in the case of a child soldier in the digital sphere is

² According to reports by the United Kingdom's National Crime Agency, the average age for perpetrators of "cyber crime" had dropped below 17 years old as of 2015. Reports of those 15 years of age or younger conducting similar activities elsewhere in the world are equally prevalent. See National Crime Agency, "Campaign Target's UK's Youngest Cyber Criminals," Government of the United Kingdom 8 Dec 2015 <<http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/news/765-campaign-targets-uk-s-youngest-cyber-criminals>>, and Emil Protalinski, "15-Year-Old Arrested for Hacking 259 Companies," Zdnet.com 17 Apr 2012 <<http://www.zdnet.com/article/15-year-old-arrested-for-hacking-259-companies/>>.



A Ukrainian D-30 howitzer. An app used by Ukrainian forces to aid in aiming them is suspected to have been hacked by Russian-backed agents to help separatist forces target them. (DTRA photo).

interpreted as loosely as the proscriptions of the Paris Principles (i.e. the use of a child directly or indirectly), the use of a child directly or indirectly, then nearly all young people indirectly contributing to the ‘conflict’ objectives of a state-sanctioned, state-sponsored, or state-supported hacking group could well fall into this definition. Recalling the *Paris Principles* view of a child ‘soldier’ as being any person below the age of 18 who has been or is recruited and/or used by an armed force or group, directly or indirectly as part of hostilities, we return to the paper’s original question: can existing understandings of international law be used without fundamental changes to core ideas in order to negotiate this particular case of state-sponsored agents within the changing landscape of armed conflict in the digital age? As with the academic discussion of direct participation in hostilities in regards to cyberwarfare, so long as applicants of international law are comfortable with the broad interpretation of some definitions and the tailoring of others within the context of child soldiers, I suggest that existing legal templates may remain effective. To do so, there should be a recognition that weapons or arms in the digital sphere can be any implement that has either a kinetic or non-kinetic force impact on a designated target.



A cyber ‘attack’ by a person under the age of 15 does not need to blow up a pipeline to have a measurable effect on a conflict.

Indeed, the definition of a weapon wielded by a child soldier must be redefined for the digital age so as to avoid states using its hard-and-fast physical representations as a workaround for their providing direct and indirect support to digital conflict groups.

The above, however, does not preclude a host of remaining questions, issues, and areas requiring troubleshooting. As was expected, the broaching of child soldier definitions and protections within cyber environments will require the response to a number of lingering issues:

1. What constitutes direct and indirect participation in hostilities pertinent to the use of children in armed conflict?
2. How should state *sponsorship* and state *recruitment* be delineated for discussions on cyber child soldiers?
3. Upon definition, does indirect cyber participation, both knowingly and unknowingly, in an armed conflict by military members under the age of 18 constitute a breach of the UNCRC and its Optional Protocol on Child Soldiers?
4. Does state sponsorship of an independent cyber warfare group or unit constitute a breach of international law related to the use of child soldiers, if the former employs them directly or indirectly in their activities?
5. Does digital warfare and the participation in it by children and young people under state-sponsorship require an adjustment to the minimal age of armed conflict participation as defined by the UNCRC, and if so, what might that age be?

INDEPENDENT HACKER GROUPS

Black hat or independent hacker groups have repeatedly made headlines in recent years, their organizational names becoming synonymous in the public environment with online criminality and cyber armed conflict. Some, like those referenced above, are believed to be in some way sponsored by governments or state entities. But others, including Anonamous, LulzSec, and the Lizard Squad, have typically avoided at any meaningful, mutually supportive relationship with national authorities, operating instead based on their own objectives and external to state apparatuses.

Article 4 of the *UNCRC Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict* highlights that states must take all feasible measures to prevent the “recruitment” or use of children under the age of 18 in armed groups distinct from officially designated armed forces (childrenandarmedconflict.un.org, 2000). This same position is reflected in the Tallinn Manual’s language as it limits prevention of recruitment recommendations to state-sponsored entities or any other “organized armed group.” According to Margulies, Additional Protocol II of the 1949 Geneva Conventions defined an organized armed group narrowly as characterized by control under a responsible command, exercising control over part of a territory enabling

them to carry out sustained military operations (2013, 55). Precedent setting case law, including *Prosecutor v Limaj* argues that without a headquarters, unified chain of command, and a military police(-like) unit to arrest malefactors, a group is simply a criminal band or assemblage of individuals engaged in the perpetration of unrest (Margulies, 2013, 60-61). Other cases, including *Abella v. Argentina* argue that groups must only demonstrate a “relative” level of organization, although perpetrated acts must be more than riots, banditry and unorganized or short-lived rebellion (Margulies, 2013, 63). In contrast, the *International Committee of the Red Cross’s Interpretative Guidance on the Notion of Direct Participation in Hostilities under International Humanitarian Law* affords “organized armed groups” a distinctive third categorization beyond civilians and state-militaries: individuals in these groups provide a continuous combat, rather than support function, the latter of whom remain civilians (Watkins, 2009, 643).

Therefore, with the above in mind, we must first ask whether hacker groups do indeed recruit individuals under the age of 18 for the purposes of ‘armed conflict’? The short and simple answer is most likely, a supposition based on limited after-the-fact police reporting. In 2015, the United Kingdom arrested several members of the Lizard Squad, who had been targeting online gaming platforms with distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks in order to collapse by overload the company servers (Good, 2015). According to the report by Polygon, all those taken into custody were between 15 and 18 years of age (Good, 2015; Turton, 2015). In Canada, a 12-year-old Anonymous affiliate conducted similar DDoS attacks, as well as illicit entry of government and police services and webpage vandalism in Quebec, Chile and elsewhere (Cline, 2013). This small sample above does indicate that members below the age of 18 are indeed recruited and used by independent black hat organizations for the purposes of cyber conflict on corporations and government.

That said, however, are these young people participating in the child soldier-related international law definitions of an “armed group”?



This question returns to my ponderings above as to whether young people in this regard are considered armed; can computers and related black hat tools be considered weapons of war?

According to Farwell and Rohozinski, the use of the Stuxnet virus against Iranian nuclear facilities and botnet attacks on Georgian government systems during the 2007 conflict with Russia both effectively represent why computers should be considered weapons of war when use thereof can cause physical, real-world damage or injury to another party (2011, 30). Babbín, for his part, is unequivocal in his determination that whether used by one state party against another, or by an



armed group against a national entity, computers should be considered weapons of war based on a yet-to-be-determined definition of proportionality beyond the colloquially expounded idea that when a young person sends a virus in an email, the author says, that is not an act of war (2011, 24). The *Paris Principles* and the *UNCRC Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict* make the case that an armed group is distinct from the military of a nation-state. Therefore, provided that these broad interpretations are held true, then a hacker group independent of state-sponsorship could be perceived as an armed group, in that they do occasionally target entities of economic, commercial, and political consequence via computers used as weapons of war.

Additionally, armed groups (according to strict readings of definitions in international law) should demonstrate a form of organization. Traditionally, and in parallel to segmented organizational structures of terrorist organizations, hacker groups have often been perceived in public narratives as headless, anarchic and decentralized organisms that grow and evolve without forms of centralized control needed to be defined as an armed group. Haaster, Gevers, and Sprengers contend, however, that this understanding is fundamentally untrue – hacker groups are instead hierarchically organized around knowledge, skills, and expertise, with those harbouring the most of each forming the leadership nucleus of a given entity (2016, 11). Bussolati terms this a “double-layered” structure, with the nucleus acting as administrators for a given organizational platform, and affiliates both demonstrating varying degrees of loyalty and ceding operational command to the administrators (2015, 112). This hypothesis is tentatively confirmed by a Guardian investigation in 2010 which identified a core-periphery hierarchy present in Anonymous, organized and defined around knowledge and expertise of users (Halliday and Arthur, 2010).

As such, it would appear that at least in principle, existing international law on the involvement of children in armed conflict could be definitionally expanded to comfortably account for young people involved in independent hacker groups. Continuing this logic chain, if hacker groups are to be considered armed groups, then international law would provide that government must take all feasible measures to prevent the recruitment of children as either willing or unwilling “soldiers” of a hacker group. That said, the digital age provides an interesting third categorization beyond these latter two soldier types: the unknowing participant in armed conflict. In October 2016, the world witnessed one of the largest cyber-attacks ever recorded, one which caused a host of popular internet websites, including Twitter and Paypal, to be inaccessible. Subsequent analysis revealed that hackers had slaved thousands of pieces of the Internet-of-Things (online connected devices, from webcams to digital video recorders) as part of a weaponised botnet to initiate a potent DDoS attack, all unbeknownst to everyday users (Blumenthal and Weise, 2016; Thielman and Hunt, 2016). Many of these articles and items would have been owned and operated by individuals under the age of 18 years old. Thus, a question for future research, among others, is whether these persons would be considered as part of a third category of cyber child soldiers: the unknowing participant?

As with state-sponsored hacker groups, this investigation of independent black hat organizations leaves us with a number of critical questions that should be answered as research continues this conversation regarding child soldiery in the digital age:

1. Can independent hacker groups truly wage “armed conflict” on a government using only non-kinetic tools and weapons (i.e. computers)? Or is what they are performing simply an extension of criminality?
2. Can computers and computer-technology be appropriately classified as “weapons of war”? What are the repercussions of this reclassification?
3. Do hacker groups, independent of state support, fall under the mandate of existing humanitarian law and the treatment of enemy combatants, or are they to be considered mercenaries? How do these differential label applications affect the protection of young people as cyber child soldiers?
4. Could hacker groups be considered *levée en masse*, as per international humanitarian law, and does this require a certain threshold of participant numbers in order to apply?
5. Is the double-layered structure found in independent hacker groups enough to be considered an organized armed group as per provisions of international law?
6. What feasible measures must a government pursue to prevent all three approaches to digital child soldier recruitment: voluntary, involuntary, unknowing participant?

LONE WOLVES

Thus far, existing international law on armed conflict and on the involvement of children in such a scenario appears to be worded broadly enough to allow for a digital evolution of sorts, in which young people are drawn into conflict directly and indirectly via information and communications technology, provided that certain provisions noted above are reworked and remaining queries answered. That said, the connected nature of human existence which defines our world today brings with it the interesting category of lone wolves.

Contemporary legal approaches to child soldiers refer to them in the context of their recruitment and participation in a military or non-state actor armed group, inside (internal) or outside (external) of a country in question. The Tallinn Manual, however, does make reference to lone wolves, albeit only in regards to the state's responsibility in the prevention of children being involved in "hostilities"; another semantic challenge for cyber conflict scholars (Schmitt, 2013, 179-180). Indeed, it is a rare case in which a child soldier is referenced as an individual entity, one without affiliation to an organized, hierarchical group. One of the reasons for this is the inability for a child soldier thus far to wield enough destructive force to cause wide-ranging damage to a country's critical infrastructure, economic and commercial systems, or political institutions relative to an armed group. Until the moment arises when an individual or a singular actor is able to match the kinetic impact potential of a collective, the terms 'child soldier' and 'armed group' will likely remain synonymous.

But the digital world, including the advent of hyperconnectivity through pervasive telecommunications technology and a rapid diffusion of technical knowledge throws a wrench into this linkage between individual and group, because it does allow for lone wolves to match the potential non-kinetic impact of an armed group. For example, in 2014, a 14-year-old British teen was arrested for conducting effective cyber-attacks on a number of government agencies and servers, including the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Thai Department of Agriculture and the Chinese Ministry of Security, as well as various corporate entities (Evans, 2016). In 2015, three independent young hackers were able to penetrate the email account of CIA Director John Brennan (Zetter, 2015). Finally, in 2016, a report surfaced that a teen hacker was able to access hundreds of sensitive data file-transfer protocol servers operated by the U.S. government, collecting from them millions of social security numbers (Parrish, 2016).

As is the challenge in negotiating levee en masse with regards to thousands of indirect participants in conflict unbounded by geopolitical borders, I would argue that it is time for a revitalization of child soldier definitions in recognition that one may not need to be recruited and used by either an armed group or military to act, and perhaps more importantly, impact like an (un)armed child combatant in conflict.



Photo: Thomas Kvisthoft

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But does a young person conducting these types of cyber-attacks, independent of a group, warrant the classic label of child soldier or criminal?

As it often does, I would argue that context plays an important role in this regard. To perpetrate a cyber-attack outside the confines (non-geographical confines due to the transborder nature of the Internet) of an armed conflict, I believe, would warrant the label of ‘crime.’ Although the UNCRC’s Optional Protocol and the Paris Principles do not define armed conflict within the context of children’s rights specifically, the International Committee of the Red Cross feels that two definitions exist: international armed conflict between two or more states; and, non-international armed conflicts between a state and an armed group, or two or more armed groups on a designated territory (2008, 5). I would suggest that a designation of ‘conflict’ as such can be applied by any one participating or observing party.

Inside the context of an armed conflict, however, young people unaligned with either combative actor, but participating under their own right and for the achievement of their own self-designated objectives (whether such objectives align to a combative party or not) should be afforded the same protections as any other child soldier would under the parameters of international law. There should be a disaggregation of the implied condition that a young person as child soldier has become a conflict participant for one organized side or another. In the digital age, a child combatant can engage in an armed conflict and affect change on their own accord, to perhaps the same degree as an organized group. As such, I propose that the academic and practitioner communities begin to consider a series alternative definitional categories for the “digital child soldier.” A combatant may be affiliated or unaffiliated with an organized armed group or party to a conflict. Additionally, and as noted, thanks to the global nature of modern telecommunications, a child participant may be internal or external to the territory upon which physical conflict is occurring.

Four such broad categories, based on the information above, can be proposed, with the expectation that they will be substantially changed as research progresses. First is the *Affiliated Digital Child Soldier*, or a young person, as defined by the UNCRC and Paris Principles, operating under the purview, voluntarily or forcibly, of a state party, military, or state-affiliated armed group engaged or preparing to engage in kinetic or non-kinetic armed conflict. Second is the *Unaffiliated Digital Child Soldier*, or a young person, as defined by the UNCRC and Paris Principles, operating outside the purview of participant actors in a kinetic or non-kinetic armed conflict, for self-defined objectives that may or may not align to those of the conflict's actor groups. Third, I propose a category termed the *Internal Digital Child Soldier*, a young person, as defined by the UNCRC and Paris Principles, involved directly or indirectly with an existing armed conflict from within the designated physical territory upon which or about which a conflict pertains. Finally, in contrast to the third, there is the *External Digital Child Soldier*, a young person, as defined by the UNCRC and Paris Principles, involved directly or indirectly with an existing armed conflict from without (outside) the designated physical territory upon which or about which a conflict pertains.

It is encouraged that future research explore the various combinations of the above definitions, from External Affiliated Digital Child Soldiers, to Internal Unaffiliated Digital Child Soldiers. As well, this work could add additional characterization categories to the above, refining and narrowing existing definitions so as to adequately reflect the changing nature of child participation in conflict whilst preventing the “digital” from weakening or blurring the protections afforded to young people trapped within the confines of war. Indeed, this should include a focused effort at preventative measures in regards to the radicalization of young people prior to recruitment by an armed group.

CONCLUSION

Humans are not infallible deliverers of anticipatory policymaking, especially at the international level. To expect those drafters of original laws of armed conflict and the involvement of children in such to have effectively authored text to encompass the monumental changes arising from the digital age is likely too much. Instead, as a society, we must be willing to adjust, as appropriate and when needed, the core documentation and common principles that underline our regulatory environment when they can no longer adequately encompass contemporary challenges.

In this paper, I hoped to begin a conversation in this regard, advocating for the emergence of a digital child soldiery definition in some unprecedented cases. First, I investigated the applicability of existing international law to state-sponsored child agents of cyber warfare, concluding that with minor expansion, both the UNCRC and the Paris Principles, as well as leading armed conflict manuals, are well equipped to broach this new category of actor.

Similar conclusions were reached in the exploration of independent hacking groups, with the caveat that a number of remaining queries must be addressed. Finally, I proposed that real definitional change in international law must come so as to negotiate the emergence of lone wolf actors, each of whom may have their own objectives and can potentially wield as much non-kinetic force as an armed group or military. In this section, I offered a two-columned definitional nexus to guide future efforts in approaching lone wolf digital child soldiery, one I hope other researchers can continue to add to, expand upon, or narrow.

Barring an unexpected cataclysmic event, digital child soldiery will only continue to grow in strength, potential and complexity. As such, it is critical we begin this conversation now, for fear of being unable to effectively direct this trend in the near future. Especially as digital connectivity increases each year in every corner of the globe, including the developing world which has seen some of the highest levels of ICT diffusion and adoption, it would be naïve to assume those legal proscriptions authored for a young person with an AK-47 would be adequately equipped to face the threat of cyberwarfare. I can only hope that others will take this call to heart; let us begin to collectively interrogate the notions of child soldiery in the digital age.

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Photo: Tookapic

COMMENTARY: CHILDREN AND CYBERWAR: VICTIMIZATION THROUGH PROTECTION?

By Jon Penney

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Mr. O’Bright has offered an important essay on the many complex issues and questions raised by child soldiers in the information age. With an aim to supplementing his helpful discussion, this brief comment examines state obligations to prevent children from becoming involved in hostilities as I believe it raises challenges unique to cyberwarfare, while also highlighting the importance of Mr. O’Bright’s central question— which international legal norms can be applied to cyberwar, and which require fundamental changes or rethinking.

International law not only prohibits enlistment of children into conflict, but also imposes positive obligations on states as well. These obligations, as O’Bright notes, most likely apply to cyberwar as well. The *Tallinn Manual* committee, and Articles in the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the *Convention’s Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict* arguably combine to not only prohibit such enlistment, but take positive steps to prevent such enlistment and recruitment, with Article 1 of the *UNCRC Optional Protocol* obliging state parties to make “all feasible measures” to ensure armed forces members do not take part in “direct hostilities” before 18 years of age, Article 2 prohibiting compulsory recruitment before age 18, and Article 6 mandating that states “shall take all necessary legal, administrative and other measures” to implement these obligations. While these obligations are well meaning attempts to protect children, when implemented in the context of digital war, these measures may well victimize children rather than protect them.

For example, if states must take “all feasible measures” to prevent online recruitment of children into cyberwar operations, those measures will inevitably include extensive online surveillance of children themselves. That is, in order to track, trace, monitor, and investigate any efforts to recruit child soldiers into cyberwarfare, states will have to track, trace, and monitor, perhaps on an ongoing basis, a lot of children online, as well as their activities. While such surveillance may be carried out here with good intentions and in a good faith attempt to protect the children themselves, this may nevertheless have a significant chilling effect on the children’s online activities, with potentially long term negative psychological harms. Indeed, there is some evidence that younger internet users, more so than older ones, are more affected by chilling effects associated with online surveillance (Penney, 2017). Here, children are being victimized and impacted even where they are not even recruited as child soldiers.

Cyberwar’s unique complexities may also lead states to unintentionally victimize or harm children in other ways as well. Given the wide availability of digital tools and means for belligerents to remain anonymous, cloak their location, and prevent tracking, tracing, and attribution, states aiming to comply with international requirements will likely take steps to render such age and location information more easy to track or collect. This may involve legal measures requiring disclosure of personal information like age and location or efforts to force public/private sector intermediaries and online service providers to collect, retain, and share

with government, such data from users. Inevitably, such measures— again aiming to protect children—may ultimately expose children to other harms, like privacy threats, reputational damage, identity theft, and, if their physical location is exposed publicly, to a whole host of personal physical threats as well.

Child soldiers are best understood as both victims and potential victimizers (Boothby, 2006). Their involvement in war and conflict mean they may victimize others; but their status as child soldiers also means they cannot lead normal lives as children— a reality often with long lasting negative psychological and physical impact (Boothby, 2009). Cyberwar is no different— but as I have argued here, there is an additional challenge whereby measures taken by states to prevent children’s participation in digital conflict may harm or victimize children in other ways too. Clearly, there is still far more work to be done on this and a range of issues on child soldiery in the information age, but Mr. O’Bright’s excellent essay has certainly laid a thoughtful foundation for future research, and we would do well to pursue the essential questions he has raised.

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THE NEXT EDITION OF ALLONS-Y

After this edition of Allons-y we will be reformatting the publication to be the proceedings of an annual conference for students and young practitioners on children and armed conflict. Keep an eye on www.childsoldiers.org/allonsy and our social media for more information.



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