



شبكة المعلومات الجامعية
التوثيق الإلكتروني والميكروفيلم

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم



MONA MAGHRABY



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Children Under Fire: Witnessing and Narrating Wars in

Selected Children's Diaries

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**Introduction: Children and War: Through the Eyes of
the Innocent**

Diaries provide an immediate experience of events before the benefits of hindsight or tricks of memory can distort or influence an account . . . While they are not written to be historical records, the diaries end up being exactly that, in a powerful, personal, and human way. (*Zlata's Diary* xiii)

Nowadays the world is witnessing a paradigm shift in the international outlook towards the events in the Palestinian occupied territories. Stories that children post on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other digital storytelling media provide counter-hegemonic narratives that go viral and shake the balance of power in the world. People worldwide experience these stories of war children and empathize with them in a manner that may change future events. This phenomenon of war children narrating their trauma and pain is not new. It started with children narrators testifying and getting their diaries published, then there was a gradual shift to digital forms. This thesis examines four diaries: two in printed form and the other two started in digital forms via

blogging and Twitter, then they were published. The future certainly is for digital storytelling which has a far reach and immediate effects. Michel Foucault points out that there are two forms of power “the power of knowledge of the truth and the power to disseminate this knowledge” (34). Since there is no absolute truth so what a powerful group or authority imposes or propagate through their censored outlets will be the truth. Accordingly, discourse is power. States and authoritarian regimes produce hegemonic¹ narratives and control different means of self-expression and communication to possess the discourse. Mainstream media “are often apparatuses not of democracy, but of hegemony” (Groshek and Han 1523). Thus, colonizers and oppressors censor mainstream media to propagate their colonializing ideas and silence their subordinates to gain power and supremacy.

¹ Hegemony is “the supremacy of one group or class over other classes or groups; it is established by means other than reliance on violence or coercion” (Howson & Smith, 2012).

Digital storytelling enables the active child to be at the center of the discourse testifying, documenting, and sharing media with the international world once it takes place. The children narrators challenge the mainstream hegemonic narrative censored by colonizers and authoritarian regimes creating a counter-discourse to war and colonization.

In addition, testifying has a healing power since trauma and war are intertwined. People who experience war often become traumatized by its effects. War survivors have to live with their memories for the rest of their lives, memories about torture, deaths, massacres, starvation, and exile. Civilians who experienced war are helpless; they are not trained to carrying guns or to kill, they are not prepared for the atrocities of war. Children are often unable to forget the horrible experiences of war and they do not always find the chance and the support to heal. According to Nigel C. Hunt, "Children who experience war trauma have their beliefs shattered before those beliefs have even been fully formed. That can affect the rest of their lives" (12). In order to overcome trauma, survivors

need to tell their stories and to read stories of each other to heal. Sharing traumatic experiences helps the survivor to overcome their trauma and realizes they are not alone. Through the voices of these children, the reluctant witnesses, we learn about courage, struggle, hope, and survival.

The only way to understand the impacts of war on children is to listen to their interpretation of what is happening and how they feel. Some children tend to distance themselves in order to cope, so they need help to re-examine and explore their stressful experiences to be assimilated. Thus, this thesis focuses specifically on studying children's diaries and analyzing their traumatic experiences.

Trauma and War Children

In the time of war, as sanctioned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, everyone in authority should make sure that children are not harmed and that the rights provided to them by the force of this convention should be applied. This is not the case in reality; children are injured physically and

psychologically. The impact of war and armed conflicts is very devastating to children, it destroys their bodies and spirits. According to a report entitled "Stop the War on Children", 420 million children are living in war zones, which means one-fifth of children worldwide, with an increase of 30 million from 2016 (Graham 9). This atmosphere of violence and destruction has a direct negative effect on both the physical and mental health of children. Thousands die or become permanently disabled because of injuries of firearms or mines during wars. Horrors of war are more battering for children than adults as shown in the report. "The harm that is done to children in armed conflict is not only often more severe than that done to adults, it has longer-lasting implications – for children themselves and for their societies" (Graham 9). Therefore, it would not be easy to heal the damage on children resulting from war and conflicts.

Every war is considered a war against children. Amidst the war, children are deprived of their basic rights secured to them by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

They are exposed to physical as well as psychological violence. Thirty years have passed since the birth of the convention, and yet children's safety is still an issue that cannot be secured to children in war zones. Although the idea of having a convention to secure children started after World War I and executed after World War II, children are still threatened by war horrors and are often unable to escape to have a new start.

Edward Goldson in his article "The Effect of War on Children" reveals that war has both direct and indirect effects on society especially children and cannot lead to "the achievement of the child's greatest potential" (817). He adds that children who suffer "have the greatest morbidity and mortality, their schooling is terminated, their parents may be dead, and their prospects for a meaningful life become compromised" (817). Finally, he poses a crucial question "Is it acceptable to let the world's children and most valuable resource continue to suffer as they do because of war?" (818).

Children's Diaries

Children's diaries are chosen for this study because they manifest the voices of war children. They are means by which the child commemorates his/her horrible war experience and lost childhood. Children's narrative is filling in gaps in a history that is partial or distorted/ In other words, their narrative is correcting falsified history. Diaries, as a form of testimonial narrative, are different from any kind of literature as explained by Katherine Wilson "It is these texts that bear witness to collective memories of atrocity" (33). Diaries allow children's voices to be heard and move them from the margin to the center. Reading about children's traumatic experiences from their perspectives and listening to what they have gone through in their expressions are more authentic than reading or hearing stories about them. Diaries allow them to document their traumatic lives amid war and testify before the world in their own creative way.

Diaries present children growing up in a war-torn country and the trauma inflicted on them by the conflicts. The diaries under