

CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN  
ARMED CONFLICT

# SOCIOLOGICAL STUDIES OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Series Editor: David A. Kinney (from 1999)

Series Editors: David A. Kinney and Katherine Brown  
Rosier (2004–2010)

Series Editors: David A. Kinney and Loretta E. Bass  
(from 2011)

Outgoing Series Editor: Loretta E. Bass (from 2012)

Incoming Series Editor: Ingrid E. Castro (from 2024)

## Previous Volumes:

- Volume 22: 2016 Loretta E. Bass, Series Editor; Ingrid E. Castro, Melissa Swauger and Brent Harger, Guest Editors
- Volume 23: 2017 Loretta E. Bass, Series Editor; Patricia Neff Claster and Sampson Lee Blair, Guest Editors
- Volume 24: 2019 Loretta E. Bass, Series Editor; Magali Reis and Marcelo Isidório, Guest Editors
- Volume 25: 2019 Loretta E. Bass, Series Editor; Doris Bühler-Niederberger and Lars Alberth, Guest Editors
- Volume 26: 2020 Loretta E. Bass, Series Editor; Anuppiriya Sriskandarajah, Guest Editor
- Volume 27: 2020 Loretta E. Bass, Series Editor; Sam Frankel and Sally McNamee, Guest Editors
- Volume 28: 2022 Loretta E. Bass, Series Editor; Agnes Lux and Brian Gran, Guest Editors
- Volume 29: 2022 Loretta E. Bass, Series Editor; Adrienne Lee Atterberry, Derrace Garfield McCallum, Siqi Tu and Amy Lutz, Guest Editors
- Volume 30: 2022 Loretta E. Bass, Series Editor; Sabina Schutter and Dana Harring, Guest Editors
- Volume 31: 2023 Loretta E. Bass, Series Editor; Marcelo S. Isidório, Guest Editor
- Volume 32: 2023 Loretta E. Bass, Series Editor; Rachel Berman, Patrizia Albanese and Xiaobei Chen, Guest Editors
- Volume 33: 2023 Loretta E. Bass, Series Editor; Katie Wright and Julie McLeod, Guest Editors
- Volume 34: 2024 Loretta E. Bass (outgoing) and Ingrid E. Castro (incoming), Series Editors; Tamanna M. Shah, Guest Editor

# EDITORIAL BOARD

Lars Alberth  
*Leuphana University Lüneburg,  
Germany*

Sampson Lee Blair  
*The State University of New York,  
USA*

Ingrid E. Castro  
*Massachusetts College of Liberal  
Arts, USA*

Patricia Neff Cluster  
*Edinboro University, USA*

Tobia (Toby) Fattore  
*Macquarie University, Australia*

Sam Frankel  
*King's University College at Western  
University, Canada*

David Kinney  
*Central Michigan University, USA*

Valeria Llobet  
*Universidad de Buenos Aires,  
Argentina*

Sandi Nenga  
*Southwestern University, USA*

Doris Bühler-Niederberger  
*Universität Wuppertal, Germany*

Kate Tilleczek  
*York University, Canada*

Yvonne M. Vissing  
*Salem State University, USA*

Nicole Warehime  
*University of Central Oklahoma,  
USA*

Katie Wright  
*La Trobe University, Australia*

*This page intentionally left blank*

SOCIOLOGICAL STUDIES OF CHILDREN  
AND YOUTH VOLUME 35

**CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN  
ARMED CONFLICT: RESPONSES,  
RESISTANCE, AND PORTRAYAL  
IN MEDIA**

EDITED BY

**TAMANNA M. SHAH**

*Ohio University, USA*

OUTGOING SERIES EDITOR

**LORETTA E. BASS**

*The University of Oklahoma, USA*

INCOMING SERIES EDITOR

**INGRID E. CASTRO**

*Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, USA*



United Kingdom – North America – Japan  
India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited  
Emerald Publishing, Floor 5, Northspring, 21–23 Wellington Street, Leeds LS1 4DL.

First edition 2025

Editorial matter and selection © 2025 Tamanna M. Shah.  
Individual chapters © 2025 The authors.  
Published under exclusive licence by Emerald Publishing Limited.



Chapter 2, “Children of the Balkan Wars”: Responses and Resistance to War-Related Media Content in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia, copyright © 2025 Eva Tamara Asboth and Michaela Griesbeck, is Open Access with copyright assigned to respective chapter authors. Published by Emerald Publishing Limited. This work is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this work (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this licence may be seen at <http://creativecommons.org/licences/by/4.0/legalcode>

#### **Reprints and permissions service**

Contact: [www.copyright.com](http://www.copyright.com)

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without either the prior written permission of the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying issued in the UK by The Copyright Licensing Agency and in the USA by The Copyright Clearance Center. Any opinions expressed in the chapters are those of the authors. Whilst Emerald makes every effort to ensure the quality and accuracy of its content, Emerald makes no representation implied or otherwise, as to the chapters’ suitability and application and disclaims any warranties, express or implied, to their use.

#### **British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-83549-703-6 (Print)  
ISBN: 978-1-83549-702-9 (Online)  
ISBN: 978-1-83549-704-3 (Epub)

ISSN: 1537-4661 (Series)



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*To my son, Qais  
and  
To the children who are our future*

*This page intentionally left blank*

# CONTENTS

<i>List of Figures, Tables, and Appendices</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>About the Editor</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<i>About the Contributors</i>	<i>xv</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>xxi</i>
<b>Children and Youth in Armed Conflict: Responses, Resistance, and Portrayal in Media</b> <i>Tamanna M. Shah</i>	<i>1</i>

## PART I CHILDREN AND YOUTH RESPONSES AND RESISTANCE IN MEDIA

<b>Chapter 1 Between Hope and Death: <i>Shaheed</i> as Equipment for Living Amid Palestine’s Youth</b> <i>Sophia Koleno</i>	<i>13</i>
<b>Chapter 2 “Children of the Balkan Wars”: Responses and Resistance to War-related Media Content in Bosnia–Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia</b> <i>Eva Tamara Asboth and Michaela Griesbeck</i>	<i>25</i>
<b>Chapter 3 Diaries of War: Children’s Narratives and Agency in Ukraine and Syria</b> <i>Iuliia Hoban and Denise R. Muro</i>	<i>39</i>
<b>Chapter 4 Children and Youth Art as a Form of Resistance in Conflict Zones</b> <i>Raghu Yadav and Rose Williamson</i>	<i>55</i>

**PART II  
MEDIA PORTRAYAL OF NARRATIVES AND  
LIVED EXPERIENCES**

- Chapter 5 Media Intervention for Young Children During Mass Trauma Experiences: Promoting Theory of Mind and Resilience**  
*Erin L. Ryan* 83
- Chapter 6 Children Throwing Stones as a Metaphor of Counter-Hegemony**  
*Kazım Tolga Gürel* 101
- Chapter 7 Beginning of Life, End of Life: Examining Online Memorials of Children in Sites of Armed Conflict**  
*Aya Diab and Danielle L. Johnson* 115
- Chapter 8 Capturing Resistance: Unveiling Visual Narratives of Youth Activism in the Israel–Palestine 2023 Conflict through Media Posted on Instagram**  
*Sonali Jha and Mary-Magdalene N. Chumbow* 131
- Chapter 9 The Evolving Family and the Lyrical Child**  
*Haoyue Zhang* 157
- Chapter 10 Loss of Naivety and Innocence: War Childhood in the Nineties Balkans**  
*Julija Ovsec* 173
- Chapter 11 Children as Participants in Terrorism: Uche Aguh’s *Sambisa* (2016) as a Paradigm**  
*Stephen Ogheneruro Okpadah and Damilare Ogunmekan* 189
- Chapter 12 Resistance in Youth Literature**  
*Omama Al-Lawati* 201

**PART III  
EMOTIONS AND TECHNOLOGY**

- Chapter 13 Healing Through Empathy: Machine Learning for Adaptive Therapy for Children and Youth in Armed Conflict**  
*Javed M. Shah and Tamanna M. Shah* 227

# LIST OF FIGURES, TABLES, AND APPENDICES

## Figures

Fig. 4.1.	Handala.	56
Fig. 13.1.	Tracking In-Session Anxiety Triggers.	234
Fig. 13.2.	Emotional State Changes in Sample Therapy Session.	235
Fig. 13.3.	Algorithm 1: Training EmoGenPath Using A2C.	240
Fig. 13.4.	Sample EmoGenPath State-Action-Reward.	244
Fig. 13.5.	EmoGenPath Trial Episode Run.	246

## Tables

Table 2.1.	Sub-categories of the Categories “Sender” and “Receiver.”	32
Table 2.2.	Sub-categories of the Category “Media Content.”	32
Table 8.1.	Workbook Showing Data Collection and Analysis.	142
Table 8.2.	Color Coding Scheme Used to Analyze Captions.	143
Table 8.3.	Scheme of Coded Captions.	144
Table 8.4.	Color Coding Scheme Used to Analyze Visual Content.	145
Table 12.1.	<i>The Hen of the House that Departs.</i>	208
Table 12.2.	<i>The Dragon of Bethlehem.</i>	210
Table 12.3.	<i>The Tale of the Secret Oil.</i>	213
Table 12.4.	<i>Lady of All.</i>	215
Table 12.5.	<i>Thunderbird.</i>	217

## Appendix

Fig. A7.1.	Most Prevalent Topics in Memorials on r/SyrianCivilWar.	128
Fig. A7.2.	Prevalence Scaling of Individual Words.	129
Table A12.1.	Arabic Language Publications Targeted at Youth and Children.	222
Table A12.2.	Novels Analyzed for the Study.	223

*This page intentionally left blank*

## ABOUT THE EDITOR

**Tamanna M. Shah** is an Assistant Professor of Instruction in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Ohio University, USA. She serves as an Experiential Learning Community-of-Practice Fellow at Ohio University and is the Book Reviews Editor for *Sociological Research Online (SRO)* and earned her PhD in Sociology from the University of Utah and holds a Master's degree in Sociology from Kansas State University and a Bachelor's degree in Economics. She has conducted field research in Kashmir, India, and East Timor. Her interests include comparative political sociology, gender and race, social change, and inequality. She has authored several publications, including "Adjustment to Divorce (Spouses)" for the *Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Family Studies* and "Chaos and Fear: Creativity and Hope in an Uncertain World" in *International Sociology*. She is currently editing a book on *Gendered Identities in the Media* for Vernon Press. She has collaborated with the Asian Development Bank on water and sanitation policy papers (ORCID: 0000-0001-9609-0191).

*This page intentionally left blank*

## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

**Omama Al-Lawati**, formerly an academic specializing in mass communication, has previously held roles as a Quality Assurance and Academic Accreditation Officer at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman. Holding a PhD in Communication and Media Studies from the Université de La Manouba, Tunisia (2021), and a Master's degree in Communication and Public Relations from the University of Westminster, London (2001), she possesses diverse interests, including writing and photography, with a particular focus on children's literature. She has authored around 15 storybooks with Arab publishers and contributed to short stories and articles. Her research primarily centers on children's literature and cultural issues, with numerous scholarly contributions. In 2016, she received the Omani Cultural Association Award in Children's Literature. Her children's book "A Man from China" made the long list for the Sheikh Zayed Book Award in 2019. Additionally, "Sandrani" was shortlisted for the Etisalat Award in 2022, and it was also a finalist for the Arab Forum Prize for Children's Books in 2023.

**Eva Tamara Asboth** is a Historian and a Communication Scientist. She works as a Postdoc Researcher at the Institute for Comparative Media and Communication Studies at the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna. She is a Lecturer in the Department of Media and Communications at the University of Klagenfurt and teaches Historical Anthropology at Sigmund Freud University Vienna. Her research areas are historical communication and memory studies as well as transnational and oral history.

**Mary-Magdalene N. Chumbow** is a dedicated Communicator committed to tackling social disparities through storytelling. With extensive academic credentials and over a decade in communications, she focuses on global issues like health, gender-based violence, and community engagement. Her PhD in Media Arts and Studies from Ohio University, specializing in Health Communication and Communication for Social Change, anchors her work. Her dissertation, "Breaking the Silence," sheds light on survivors of female genital cutting in Kenya, reflecting her commitment to marginalized communities. She holds a Master's in Communication and Development, supplemented by a Graduate Certificate in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, all from Ohio University, shaping her expertise in Communication for Social Change and Development. Beyond academia, she actively advocates for underrepresented communities, evident in her roles with organizations like the Association of Cameroonians in Colorado. Her leadership in student unions underscores her dedication to inclusive communities. Her blend of academic rigor and practical experience positions her as a catalyst for positive change, amplifying marginalized voices and striving for lasting societal impact.

**Aya Diab** is a Doctoral Student studying political communication. She received her BA and MA from USF. While she is interested in political communication broadly, she is most interested in political communication as it intersects with Middle Eastern contexts. Her current research utilizes orientalist frameworks to investigate how elite structures portray and discuss the Middle East.

**Michaela Griesbeck** is a Semiotician and a Communication Scientist. She is currently employed as a Postdoc Researcher at the JKU in Linz, Austria, in the Department of Sociology, with a focus on Innovation and Digitalization. Her research deals with the topics of young people (adolescents and young adults), mediatization, and digitalization. Between 2016 and 2020, she worked on intercultural research projects with young adults in Southeast Europe.

**Kazım Tolga Gürel** was born in Istanbul in 1978. His first doctoral thesis, “Magazineisation in Turkey during the Economic Crisis,” was not accepted by some universities in Turkey for political reasons. His second doctoral thesis, “LGBT+ Representation in Turkish Mainstream Newspapers,” was accepted at a freer university, where he received his PhD. He has written 10 books, 1 of which he edited, which can be included in politics, communication, culture, and other studies. He produced around 40 articles. His subjects of interest are gender, communication, migration, and political issues. He writes in Turkey and lectures and conferences at universities, political parties, and associations.

**Iuliia Hoban** is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Emergency, Disaster and Global Security Studies, College of Arts & Sciences at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University-Worldwide holds PhD in Global Affairs from Rutgers University. Her research centers on the politics of childhood and youth in conflict and peacebuilding, gendered responses to conflict, and the interplay between law and war. Her research has been published in such journals as *Cooperation and Conflict*, the *International Journal of Human Rights*, and the *Nordic Journal of Human Rights*. She has also contributed her scholarly expertise to book chapters and edited volumes. Prior to her role at Embry-Riddle, she held academic positions at Radford University and the College of New Jersey. She also applied her research skills in NGOs and think tanks such as Watchlist for Children and Armed Conflict (New York, NY), the Institute of World Policy (Kyiv, Ukraine), and the Laboratory to Combat Human Trafficking (Denver, CO) where her major responsibilities focused on analysis and research of multidimensional factors and aspects of human rights.

**Sonali Jha** is a PhD Student in the School of Media Arts and Studies at Ohio University. She holds a Bachelor’s and a Master’s degree in English Literature. She has two years of experience in the marketing industry working as a Content Writer. She focuses on unraveling media and social media usage inequalities, examining how it could help in creating an impact in society such as Human Trafficking. She explores the subjective nature of people’s tech relationships, along with the significance of comedy in raising awareness. She is passionate about interpersonal communication, media’s impact on daily life, digital inequalities, and international media.

**Danielle L. Johnson** (M.A. Coastal Carolina University) is a Doctoral Student at the University of South Florida researching interpersonal communication, computational communication science, fandom studies, and health. Broadly, she is interested in examining how computer-mediated communication is entwined with fandom. Specifically, she explores computer-mediated interpersonal communication among fans, and between fans and the person(s)/organization they are interested in. Her interest in health centers around how computer-mediated communication influences fans' understandings of and reactions to illness and end-of-life topics. Currently, her research focuses on how Korean popular music (K-pop) fans and artists curate parasocial intimacy during fan calls and to what degree of intimacy these calls reach. Her previous research looks at online reactions to the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, COVID-19 disclosures by K-pop management companies, and social exchange theory in the Disney fandom during merchandise releases.

**Sophia Koleno**, Ohio University, United States, is a Muslim Doctoral Student within the Communication Studies program, specializing in rhetoric and cultural studies. She utilizes Islamic concepts, terms, and ideas to interpret both contemporary and classical rhetorical artifacts.

**Denise R. Muro** has over 10 years of experience working, advocating, and conducting research with immigrant and refugee communities in Colorado, Wyoming, Germany, and Massachusetts. Her research focuses on immigrant and refugee experiences, narratives, and community-building, centering their agency and voices. She also has a background in nonprofit and higher education settings, working on gender and racial justice, equity, and restorative justice. She has worked in various roles, supporting and creating opportunities for immigrant and refugee communities, women of color, first-generation students, and other historically marginalized and underrepresented groups. She is a first-generation student and holds a PhD from the Department of Conflict Resolution, Human Security, and Global Governance at the University of Massachusetts Boston's McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies.

**Damilare Ogunmekan** holds a Master's degree in Theatre Arts from the Department of the Creative Arts, University of Lagos, Lagos State Nigeria, and a BA (Hons) degree in Performing Arts from the University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. Apart from being a Filmmaker, his areas of research include theater directing, playwriting, dramatic criticism, and eco-theater.

**Stephen Ogheneruro Okpadah** is a Chancellor International PhD Scholar at the University of Warwick, Coventry, UK. He is currently researching participatory theater and climate justice in the context of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. His project draws on theater for development in creating community-based performances that advocate for climate justice. He won the 2021 Janusz Korczak/ UNESCO Prize for Global South in emerging scholar category, and he is also Director of research at the Theatre Emissary International, Nigeria. He is a

Non-resident Research Associate at the Centre for Socially Engaged Theatre, University of Regina, Canada.

**Julija Ovsec** graduated with her Master's thesis on children's war literature from the University of Ljubljana. She is continuing her education as a PhD Candidate at Charles University in Prague, where she is writing a PhD thesis on female writers of the Second World War. She is working as a Literary Researcher at the Laboratory for Literature and Sociology at the Institute for Czech Literature at the Czech Academy of Sciences. Her research focuses mainly on two main groups – literature written by women and literature for children and youth. One of her most visible works in the ex-yu region is monitoring literary criticism. A group of feminist literary scholars called *Pobunjene čitateljke*, based in Belgrade, has been monitoring literary criticism in five countries (Slovenia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia). They also organized workshops and podcasts on literary criticism.

**Erin L. Ryan** is Professor and Head of the Department of Communication at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. Her research focuses on children, adolescents, and the electronic media: the content and quality of children's media, how they use or are impacted by media, why they use media, advertising directed at the child/adolescent market, parental involvement and mediation, the regulation of children's media, and media literacy. Much of her current research revolves around preschool-aged children and how they use electronic media technology to learn new skills. She holds a BA in Psychology from the University of Georgia, a BS in Communication from Kennesaw State University, an MA in Mass Communication from Georgia State University, and a PhD in Mass Communication from the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia.

**Javed M. Shah**, University of Illinois, Chicago, USA, has over 20 years of experience in building software products for startups. He is currently pursuing a Master of Science in Computer Science from the University of Illinois, Chicago. He holds a BS in Computer Engineering from the University of Pune and an MBA from the University of California, Berkeley. He is passionate about research in permissionless systems, incentive design, computational science, and machine learning. His work on the multifaceted role of agency in shaping political landscapes has been published in the *International Political Science Abstracts*. He is a versatile technologist and researcher with deep empathy for building socially responsible innovation.

**Rose Williamson** holds a Master's degree in experimental psychology from Ohio University and is currently finishing her Doctorate in the same field. Her work primarily focuses on emotional responses to making decisions, as well as how socioeconomic status influences self-perception, particularly regarding goal attainment. She also has many years of experience creating, as well as academic knowledge of, both poetry and art.

**Raghu Yadav** is a Doctoral Student of Experimental Psychology at Ohio University. His general research interest is human cognition with a core focus on attention, emotion, concept formation, and categorization. At present, he is working on a project on relational similarity assessment. He also has an engineering background and passionately engages in poetry, art, and philosophy.

**Haoyue Zhang** is a film producer and scholar who specializes in the production and research of children's films, or the films about children and for children. Haoyue finished her master degree on Children's Literature in China, and pursued her doctoral degree of Film Studies in Southern Illinois University in the United States. Her dissertation was the first thorough theorization of the representations of childhood in the Fifth Generation filmmakers in China's New Wave in the 1980s. Her experiences interwove between theoretical exploration of childhood and children's film in China, and diverse industrial expertise spanning from film production to distribution. Her latest production was a co-produced children's film between China and Holland, the first achievement since the two countries signed the co-production treaty in 2015. (IMDB link: [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm7491644/?ref\\_=fn\\_al\\_nm\\_2](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm7491644/?ref_=fn_al_nm_2)).

*This page intentionally left blank*

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This volume is curated to serve as a resource for scholars and practitioners dedicated to advancing policies for the rights of children and youth. I want to applaud the authors and the reviewers for their unwavering commitment to bringing the narratives and experiences of children to the forefront. A heartfelt thank you goes to the contributors who painstakingly documented and analyzed the stories of children and youth embroiled in conflict. While it brings us joy to share this volume with the world, it was no small feat. As we wrote the chapters, we lived through the adversities faced by these young individuals. I am also grateful for the support and encouragement from the Editorial Staff at Emerald Publishing, particularly Katy Mathers and Lauren Kammerdiener, whose guidance was invaluable throughout this project. A special note of thanks to Professor Loretta Bass from the University of Oklahoma, the Series Editor of *Sociological Studies of Children and Youth (SSCY)*.

As the editor, I am inspired by a collective sense of hope and dedication to advocating for children's experiences.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge all those who helped me assemble this volume which gives voice to the struggles of millions of children worldwide. I extend my sincere appreciation to our reviewers, whose thorough and timely feedback significantly enhanced the quality of our chapters.

Dr. Holly Ningard, Ohio University (Special thanks for your support and encouragement)

Sonali Jha, Ohio University

Dr. S. A. Welch, Professor Emerita University of Wisconsin-Whitewater

Dr. Jodie Jones, Salt Lake Community College

Nikhil Reddy, Ohio University

Cameron Graham, University of Tennessee-Knoxville

*This page intentionally left blank*

# CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN ARMED CONFLICT: RESPONSES, RESISTANCE, AND PORTRAYAL IN MEDIA

Tamanna M. Shah

*Ohio University, USA*

## ABSTRACT

*This volume explores the intersection of youth agency, media representation, and conflict, urging a reevaluation of the roles of youth in contemporary socio-political contexts. Media serves as a tool for and a site of resistance. Chapters in this volume highlight ways in which children and youth leverage digital platforms to reshape narratives around conflict and peace. The compilation draws from a wide range of contexts, from the Balkan Wars to the current conflicts in Syria and Ukraine, offering in-depth analyses of the transformative potential of the (re)imagining of youth experiences, thus shifting from passive subjects to active narrators. This reorientation emphasizes the role of new technologies, including digital media and artificial intelligence, in supporting these endeavors, especially in enhancing mental health and psychological resilience among children affected by conflict.*

**Keywords:** Media portrayals; everyday resistance; peacebuilding; digital narratives; youth agency; social activism

## INTRODUCTION

While Volume I of the book, *Children and Youth as 'Sites of Resistance' in Armed Conflict*, informed us about celebrating the agency and the stories of survival,

---

Children and Youth in Armed Conflict: Responses, Resistance, and Portrayal in Media  
Sociological Studies of Children and Youth, Volume 35, 1–9

Copyright © 2025 by Tamanna M. Shah

Published under exclusive licence by Emerald Publishing Limited

ISSN: 1537-4661/doi:[10.1108/S1537-46612024000035001](https://doi.org/10.1108/S1537-46612024000035001)

resistance, and spirit of children and youth, this volume shifts focus to the outward projections of these lived experiences. It aims to bridge the gap between individual experiences and societal perceptions by examining how these narratives are portrayed and perceived in the media. Simultaneously, it seeks to capture the “responses, resistance, and portrayal” of the narratives in the media. This volume examines how media shapes public perception of conflict and resilience by analyzing its portrayal and reception across various platforms. As part of the *Sociological Studies of Children and Youth*, this compilation critically explores the complex interplay between media representation and youth agency in armed conflict. The chapters gathered here provide critical insights into how children and youth endure conflict and how their stories are told and retold in the public sphere, influencing advocacy, policymaking, and community responses worldwide.

Historically, the integration of new technologies has opened unparalleled opportunities for shaping the discourse of marginalized groups and facilitating decentralized communication during crises. Digital technologies have played a critical role in escalating tensions, exposing the brutality of authoritarian regimes, and strengthening calls for international support during times of war. These dynamics are particularly pronounced in a global political landscape marked by nationalism, racism, and neoliberalism, which influence the daily lives of young people. Media not only consumes the attention of children and youth but also shapes the portrayal of their experiences and narratives. This volume delves into how digital media provides avenues for young people to navigate and contest their experiences of social injustice (Shah, 2019), turning media platforms into spaces of active resistance (e.g., Curwood & Gibbons, 2010; Price-Dennis, 2016; Shah, 2021).

Scholars have extensively researched how young individuals produce digital media within community settings and family environments to articulate their identities and undertake social action (e.g., Ellison & Kirkland, 2014; Shah, 2020). Another body of work focuses on how the youth utilize media platforms to participate in political activities (Jenkins et al., 2016; Kahne et al., 2016). The chapters in this volume seek to redirect attention to how young people actively reshape their narratives, countering the usual marginalization or silencing of their voices (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016). This act of *restorying* empowers youth to utilize digital tools to manifest their lived experiences and challenge dominant narratives (Stornaiuolo & Thomas, 2018). These acts of cultural production help young people voice their perspectives and display a potential to impact the broader discourse on peacebuilding, infusing it with a deeper sense of structural equity.

The compilation investigates deep-seated issues such as trauma and online memorialization, examining their implications for human rights in these challenging environments (Shah, 2013). It scrutinizes the role of social media in youth activism within India and Israel–Palestine, including how poetry serves as a medium to express trauma. An in-depth analysis of the impact of Boko Haram on girls, portrayed through media, and social media narratives in the Israel–Palestine conflict underscores the resilience and coping mechanisms that young individuals develop in response to traumatic events. Furthermore, the exploration of Yugoslavian literature through feminist lenses, and the study of children’s art and poetry that arise from conflict, serves to amplify the voices of affected

youths. This nuanced exploration aims to inform policies and shape programs that prioritize the well-being and rights of children and youth post-conflict, offering insights into their roles as agents of change within their communities. As we reflect on these varied and intricate roles, it is imperative to recognize the necessity for further research that listens to and prioritizes these young voices in policy-making and community engagements.

## (RE)MAKING THE *SELF* AND IDENTITY

Identity and the *self* are concepts that have been used – and perhaps abused – across various contexts and for numerous purposes. The notions of *self* and what it means to possess an *identity* are often contested in spaces where collective claims of belonging are made. In these dominant political narratives, the *self* can become obscured as assumptions about identity prevail, dictating how it should be understood or defined. This often leads to the uniqueness of an individual's identity being overshadowed, or individuals facing the arduous task of validating their identity (Shah, 2023, 2024b). Similarly, there is a struggle in how one envisions oneself within the broader discourse of a national identity promoted by the state.

Our identity is something uniquely our own; it is what distinguishes us from others. Yet, identity also implies a connection to a broader collective or social group. Discussing national identity, cultural identity, or gender identity, for instance, suggests that our identity is partly defined by what we share with others. In this context, identity is about aligning with others who we believe are similar to us – at least in significant ways.

An assertion of identity by the youth, particularly from subordinate social groups, is often constructed as a “social problem,” “at risk,” or “naïve” to be peacebuilding agents. This legitimizes state-driven narratives pushing the experiences of children and youth as deficient to make any significant contributions (Shah, 2024a). On the contrary, through the power of their stories and art, children and youth echo Walter Benjamin's (1986) idea that violence should neither be exercised nor be naively tolerated in our everyday lives. Yet, the reality of postwar recovery across various nations often reveals a “violence continuum” that spans a spectrum of aggressive behaviors, including domestic violence, sexual offenses, and more severe crimes like armed theft and abduction, as well as systemic injustices (Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois, 2004; Whitehead, 2007).

Youth, significantly impacted by these harsh realities, find themselves bearing the burden, with families and societal institutions increasingly leaving them to devise their own coping mechanisms. The contributors of this volume highlight how narratives from young individuals in conflict settings reveal their interpretations of conflict within their everyday experiences and how they relate their stories to broader, adult-centric narratives prevalent in mainstream media. Restorying or reimagining narratives assert one's existence and experiences in a space that frequently silences subaltern voices (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016).

## YOUTH CONFLICT NARRATIVES AND THE MEDIA

In contemporary societies, access to diverse mass media fosters new ways of imagining the communities and the broader world (Appadurai, 1996). Media, therefore, enables the construction or the imagining of a self while the outside world is co-constructed. This process of imagination is identified as “a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 3) that acts as a “form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 31). However, the transmission and reception of mass media messages are complex and not merely passive (Spitulnik, 1993, p. 296). Denov (2012) argues that media is akin to an “ideological tool” that molds our perceptions and values, often echoing the dominant worldviews that media entities aim to propagate (Kellner, 2011). The portrayal of youth and children in media is frequently simplified and sensationalized (Booker, 2007). Such simplistic portrayals marginalize their experiences and obscure their active participation in shaping their environments.

The humanist approach to media representation often unintentionally evokes pity rather than empathy for conflict victims, casting them solely as passive sufferers (Bleiker & Kay, 2007). In contrast, pluralist approaches allow individuals to document their own stories through media, validating diverse local knowledge and practices and challenging established power hierarchies often perpetuated by mainstream Western media (Bleiker & Kay, 2007, p. 151). Participatory media empowers individuals to actively engage in the construction of social meanings (Debrix, 2003, p. ix; Bleiker & Kay, 2007, p. 151), fostering a broader spectrum of voices and enriching our understanding of conflict scenarios (Gregory, 2006). As Appadurai (1996) argues, engagement with mass media can spark resistance and open up new possibilities for agency.

By engaging with participatory media, young people can break through constraints, reasserting their agency and altering perceptions of their role in society. In participatory media environments, children and youth are consumers and creators of content that reflects their unique perspectives and experiences. This shift from invisibility to visible agents of change allows them to challenge the narratives that have traditionally defined them. Their stories, once made visible, reveal a resilience that contests and transcends the reductive portrayals often found in conventional media (Denov, 2012). Narratives are expressed by youth and children in different forms: action, expression, rational, or moral tales. Through digital platforms, blogs, social media, and other forms of participatory media, they articulate their struggles and triumphs, contributing actively to the discourse on conflict and resistance. Art, poetry, and songs serve as powerful platforms for resistance, transcending mere esthetic appeal to act as formidable tools for social and political change (Shah, 2012). These forms of cultural expression provide marginalized voices a canvas to articulate their grievances and aspirations, often challenging oppressive systems and advocating for transformative shifts in society. This participation enriches the media landscape and empowers them, offering a counter-narrative that emphasizes their strength and resilience as potent forces in the pursuit of peace and justice.

## SCOPE OF CONTRIBUTIONS

This volume is structured into three distinct parts. The first section presents youth voices of resistance as they interact with various forms of media. Here, young individuals articulate their everyday realities and desires for how their traumatic experiences should be understood by others. The second section shifts focus to how the media interprets and portrays the experiences of children and youth, examining the narratives that are constructed around them. The final part of the volume looks forward, to exploring the potential for hope and healing through the application of artificial intelligence for children and youth impacted by the traumas of war and conflict.

In Part I, Sophia Koleno starts us off with *Between Hope and Death: Shaheed as Equipment for Living Amid Palestine's Youth*, which critically examines the complex meanings associated with the concept of *shaheed* (martyrdom) among Palestinian youth. By integrating the Islamic concept of *ayah* with Kenneth Burke's notion of narratives as "equipment for living," Koleno reframes *shaheed* not as a glorification of death but as a deep source of resilience and a means to navigate the challenging realities of conflict. This analysis reveals how youth in Gaza utilize *shaheed* as a form of resistance, countering the negative stereotypes often perpetuated in Western media to reposition it within a broader existential and spiritual context.

In Chapter 2, Eva Tamara Asboth and Michaela Griesbeck analyze "*Children of the Balkan Wars*": *Responses and Resistance to War-related Media Content in Bosnia–Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia*, where they explore the intricate relationship between post-war generations in Bosnia–Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia and the media content related to the conflicts experienced during childhood. They highlight how young lives engage with media as a form of everyday resistance, opting to sidestep traditional media narratives that often perpetuate nationalistic and ethnopolitical ideologies. Instead, the youth actively seek out and distribute alternative narratives and historical facts through digital platforms, thus redefining their roles from passive recipients to active shapers of media discourse. Such narratives underscore their role in challenging and reshaping the collective memory and national narratives prevalent in their respective societies.

Chapter 3 is a journey into the civil war in Syria and the full-scale war in Ukraine. Iuliia Hoban and Denise R. Muro, in a heart-wrenching comparison, provide first-hand accounts of Ukrainian and Syrian children, utilizing diaries as a medium to explore their experiences of conflict and resistance. By focusing on the children's written words, the chapter illustrates how these young individuals document their lives amid the chaos and actively engage in the narrative construction and resistance against the militarization of their everyday lives. Their stories underscore the children's agency in shaping the discourse around their experiences, challenging dominant narratives, and offering nuanced insights into the complexities of life in war-torn regions. The last chapter in this section examines the role of creative expression and the use of art and poetry by children and youth as coping mechanisms and forms of resistance (Chapter 4). Raghu Yadav

and Rose Williamson present an intersection of trauma, resilience, and creative expression. They emphasize the transformative power of art, highlighting how the genuine and raw outputs from young individuals facilitate personal healing and function as powerful tools for social change and resistance.

In Part II of the volume, Dr. Erin L. Ryan draws attention to the media portrayal of young children during mass trauma experiences. This analysis contributes uniquely to the themes of “responses, resistance, and portrayal in media” by emphasizing how strategic media use can foster resilience and a theory of mind in children amidst conflicts (Chapter 5). Dr. Erin L. Ryan explores the delicate balance of exposure and protection that media offers, presenting media as a dual force that can either exacerbate trauma or aid in healing and resilience. Through an in-depth examination of how media shapes the experiences and perceptions of young children during wartime, this chapter highlights the potential vulnerabilities and the powerful agency of children in conflict zones. Dr. Erin L. Ryan’s emphasis on using media strategically to support children’s development and well-being offers a hopeful perspective on intervention strategies that can be utilized in conflict and post-conflict settings.

After a unique take on media, we are presented with the metaphor of children throwing stones, analyzed as symbols of counter-hegemony, reflecting the complex interaction between local struggles and global media narratives by Dr. Kazım Tolga Gürel (Chapter 6). This analysis presents how Kurdish children, represented through their resistance in stone-throwing, are often portrayed in the media under frameworks that serve state or corporate interests, overshadowing their agency and the socio-political context of their actions. On a related note, it also explores the role of state policies in perpetuating certain narratives while silencing others, thereby contributing to a broader discourse on the intersection of media portrayal, youth activism, and resistance in conflict settings.

In Chapter 7, Aya Diab and Danielle L. Johnson focus on how children trapped in armed conflict are memorialized in online spaces, using the Syrian Civil War as a context. This analysis unveils a dual theme of visibility and blame within these digital memorials. Children, although central to the narratives of war and conflict, often remain underrepresented in memorials, highlighting a concerning trend of their absence in discussions where they should be prominently featured. This omission underscores a broader issue of their marginalization in conflict narratives and as overlooked agents within media portrayals. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the allocation of blame for the children’s deaths, demonstrating how online platforms serve as arenas for both grief and political expression.

Sonali Jha and Mary-Magdalene N. Chumbow explore the complex interplay between social media and youth activism in the context of the 2023 Israel–Palestine conflict, particularly focusing on Instagram’s role as a crucial platform for resistance and dissemination of unfiltered frontline perspectives (Chapter 8). Their analysis through the Textual–Visual Thematic Analysis of Instagram content reveals how youth leverage digital platforms to document events and rally international support, shaping public discourse and contributing to the narrative of resistance. This goes to show that youth not only experience conflict but actively engage in shaping perceptions and responses through media portrayal.

The youth demonstrate their roles as significant agents in contemporary forms of activism and resistance.

Continuing with an exploration of media portrayals, Haoyue Zhang showcases the interplay between cinema and the shifting perceptions of childhood within the context of China's dramatic socio-economic transformations over the decades (Chapter 9). Zhang's analysis focuses on two seminal films by director Chen Kaige, *Yellow Earth* and *Together*, which reflect the evolution of family structures from a collective, state-oriented system to a more individualistic and neoliberal framework. The films portray children as central figures whose experiences and voices challenge and resist the imposed narratives of authority and tradition. Through the lens of these narratives, Zhang articulates how the children's roles evolve from passive participants to active agents who both question and redefine their identities within the changing landscapes of family and society.

Julija Ovsec's chapter in the volume delves into the harsh realities faced by children during the Balkan wars of the 1990s (Chapter 10). Ovsec's work is grounded in the analysis of literary portrayals, particularly focusing on novels like *Ukulele Jam* by Alen Mešković and *Hotel Zagorje* by Ivana Simić Bodrožić. These narratives offer insights into how war accelerates the coming of age for its youngest participants, casting light on their rapid loss of innocence and the intense, often violent upheavals that redefine their identities and social roles. By examining how these young characters navigate contentious spaces, Ovsec highlights their resilience and the transformative potential of their stories, aligning closely with the broader themes of resistance and identity reshaping within the context of armed conflict.

Uche Aguh's *Sambisa* (2016) serves as a poignant case study illustrating the complex roles of children in the mechanisms of terrorism within Nigeria, particularly under the influence of Boko Haram (Chapter 11). Stephen Ogheneruro Okpadah and Damilare Ogunmekan discuss the psychological impact and the instrumentalization of children within these violent networks, emphasizing the critical role children play and challenging the traditional narratives of victimhood by highlighting their agency in situations of armed conflict and terrorism. In Chapter 12, Omama Al-Lawati reflects on the resistance literature by the Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani. This genre depicts experiences of resistance and resilience amidst colonization, often investigating the personal struggles of writers within contexts of injustice and oppression. When created for children and youth, the literature of resistance diverges from that intended for adults for many reasons. Mustafa employs a dual analytical approach to offer a comprehensive understanding of how resistance is conveyed in the chosen narratives and the extent to which these stories fulfill their intended objectives.

The final chapter of the volume brings together ideas and solutions to encourage the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the detection of emotions (Chapter 13). Javed M. Shah and Tamanna M. Shah introduce the *EmoGenPath* model – an AI-driven approach designed to offer adaptive therapy tailored to children and youth impacted by war. *EmoGenPath* utilizes advanced machine-learning techniques to provide a personalized therapeutic experience that respects the cultural and emotional diversity of its users. The innovative use of AI in therapy underscores a progressive step in leveraging technology to address the complex

psychological needs of young survivors in conflict zones, emphasizing the importance of ethical implementation and culturally sensitive interventions to foster resilience and recovery.

## **BEYOND SURVIVAL: ENACTING TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE**

The inspiration behind this volume was to bring to the fore the adversities young people face in war zones and to spotlight their capacity for resistance. While exploring their trauma, hardships, and resilience and how these experiences shape the self was crucial, an equally important focus was the portrayal and influence of these narratives in the media. Several chapters challenge the dominant narrative that portrays children and youth as victims or passive bystanders, highlighting instead their active participation in shaping their circumstances and engaging in resistance, whether through direct action or cultural and digital expressions.

Scholars contributing to this volume critically assessed how young people's struggles and resilience are depicted across various media platforms, acknowledging the empowering aspects of media that allow youth to voice their stories and the potential for misrepresentations or oversimplifications. Another important theme is the use of new technologies, including artificial intelligence and digital platforms, to support children's mental health and well-being affected by conflict. This includes developing adaptive therapies sensitive to the users' cultural and emotional contexts, highlighting a forward-thinking approach to humanitarian aid. There is a strong emphasis on ethical considerations when deploying technologies in sensitive environments, advocating for culturally appropriate approaches that prioritize young individuals' safety and privacy.

By focusing on the active roles of children and youth in conflict and peace processes, this volume contributes to a broader understanding of them as critical political and social actors, rather than passive entities. Through these chapters, which span diverse conflict contexts, we bridge sociology, political science, psychology, and media studies to offer a comprehensive view of the challenges and potential of studying youth in conflict zones. There are valuable lessons for everyone in this volume. The in-depth analyses of various case studies and technological interventions provide actionable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and NGOs to address children's rights, mental health, and conflict resolution issues. Overall, the book positions children and youth not merely as survivors of conflict but as essential and influential contributors to societal change and peacebuilding, urging a reevaluation of their roles in international discussions about war, peace, and recovery.

## **REFERENCES**

- Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Benjamin, W. (1986). *Critique of violence*. In P. Demetz (Ed.), *Walter Benjamin: essays, aphorisms, autobiographical writings* (pp. 277–300). Schocken.
- Bleiker, R., & Kay, A. (2007). Representing HIV-AIDS in Africa: Pluralist photography and local empowerment. *International Studies Quarterly*, 51, 139–163.