The Right to Play Versus the Right to War? Vulnerable Childhood in Lebanon's NGOization

Estella Carpi, Chiara Diana

▶ To cite this version:

Estella Carpi, Chiara Diana. The Right to Play Versus the Right to War? Vulnerable Childhood in Lebanon's NGOization. Palgrave; Cheney K.; Sinervo A. Children as objects of humanitarian intervention: NGO commodification of disadvantaged childhoods, Springer International Publishing; Springer International Publishing, pp.135-156, 2019, Palgrave Studies on Children and Development, 978-3-030-01623-4. 10.1007/978-3-030-01623-4_6 . hal-02091416

HAL Id: hal-02091416
https://hal.science/hal-02091416

Submitted on 19 Mar 2020

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

CHAPTER 6

The Right to Play *Versus* the Right to War? Vulnerable Childhood in Lebanon's NGOization

Estella Carpi and Chiara Diana

Introduction

With the recent outbreak of the 2011 Syrian crisis and the massive flows of forced migrants across the Middle Eastern region, INGO interventions addressing childhood have been growing. In this chapter, we critically examine the intervention of the Canadian-founded NGO Right to Play (RtP) on local and refugee children residents of the Tripoli governorate (northern Lebanon). Drawing on interviews conducted in Spring 2015, Summer 2016, and Autumn 2016 with three INGO workers and nine child players and their parents, we primarily focus on INGO play activities aimed at reshaping child subjectivity in contexts where political

E. Carpi (✉)
University College London, London, UK
e-mail: e.carpi@ucl.ac.uk

C. Diana
Université Libre de Bruxelles, Brussels, Belgium
e-mail: Chiara.Diana@ulb.ac.be

© The Author(s) 2019

K. Cheney and A. Sinervo (eds.), *Disadvantaged Childhoods and Humanitarian Intervention*, Palgrave Studies on Children and Development, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-01623-4_6

violence is widespread and longstanding.[1] We analyze INGO discourses and practices in a bid to critically examine the humanitarian and developmental attempts to provide politically neutral spaces to refugee and local children. More specifically, our study intends to deconstruct the INGO discourse about children's vulnerability and standardized international strategies for social cohesion and stability, given that, while increasingly cooperating with local partners, they are formulated according to universalized conceptions of childhood. Both humanitarian and developmental NGOs have increasingly targeted both refugee and local vulnerable children by defining vulnerability as a social condition of children who have grown up in environments characterized by long-standing political violence. We observe that their efforts to rescue child victims in need of protection in the "Global South" (Butt 2002), and the Middle East specifically, mechanically correlates child protection to parenthood—in particular motherhood. This construction conceals a more concerning point: the refusal to recognize children as independent sociopolitical agents. In this context, we note—following Duffield's (2008) security and development nexus—that humanitarian and developmental strategies deflect their questionable purpose of depoliticizing young local generations to foster domestic social cohesion and peaceful coexistence (Chahine et al. 2014) in a bid to further higher global security standards.

We base our argument on a threefold analysis focusing on the dehistoricization of political violence in the Arab Levant, the employment of the "Sport for Development" formula as a way toward social cohesion, and the weak cultural literacy of INGOs in regards to contextual adult–child relations. The threefold analysis thus questions INGOs' tendency to resort to sport and play activities in order to pre-fabricate passive humanitarian victim children, illusively distant from politics and political violence. Against this backdrop, we argue that INGOs, rather than engaging with the depoliticization of vulnerable children, should strive to provide alternative avenues for political engagement in order to counter war recruitment. Indeed, international humanitarian assistance traditionally focuses its efforts on changing subjectivities (Pupavac 2005) and engendering social cohesion rather than acting on circumstances and material infrastructures.

RtP has been working with Palestinian refugee children in Lebanon since 2006, and on the impact of the Syrian war on war-stricken children and local host communities since 2013. This INGO currently coordinates play and sport activities for Lebanese and Syrian children in

the Tripoli governorate. RtP's aim is to encourage children and young people to mingle with their peers, to be socially engaged, and to refrain from joining armed groups or any other form of political violence. Youth politicization is generally depicted in terms of "deviance," or subculture and class-based resistance (Bucholtz 2002). RtP's practices and discourse embrace a standardized approach to childhood, increasingly proposing play and sport programs. We will therefore outline how this standardized approach manufactures child vulnerability while neglecting the underlying sociopolitical factors that determine crises. Standardization leads to the depoliticization, deindividualization, and the dehistoricization of vulnerable subjects. Through these processes of dehistoricization and depoliticization, INGO attempts are aimed at transforming child identity and child vulnerability into humanitarian and developmental tools, namely prepackaged objects of economic and moral value *in need of* international (humanitarian and developmental) labor. The present humanitarian and developmental approach to social assistance indeed dehistoricizes local specificities, in which children's political socialization results from the interaction with their *milieu*, that is to say, social groups and institutions (family, peers, schools, and regional and national environments). While our findings indicate that children's development takes place through a process of personal identification with the groups to which they officially belong or those they have chosen themselves, the INGO misrepresentation of childhood tends to neglect individual child identifications, therefore deindividualizing its objects of concern.

Universal conceptualizations of childhood are generally founded on a view of children as inherently different from adults, as passive recipients of adults' decisions rather than fully fledged social actors (Seymour 2014, 165). From this perspective, children should be confined to their dedicated spaces or homes (Holloway and Valentine 2000). We rather intend to approach childhood as a socially constructed category, being neither a natural nor a universal social group. This approach dictates the need to think of many and different *childhoods* rather than a single and universal *childhood* (James et al. 1998). Indeed, understandings of childhood change across space and time in accordance with the needs and interests of the dominating adult society (Qvortrup 1987). Challenging a priori child innocence and vulnerability, we align ourselves with those scholars who have argued that political socialization takes place in the early stages of life (Dupoirier and Percheron 1975; Easton and Dennis 1969; Greenstein 1965; Hess and Torney 1967; Maynard 1985). As INGO

beneficiaries, children are depleted of their political motivation, being aprioristically defensible since they are supposed to never have views, thus becoming the easiest vessels for humanitarian sympathy and generosity (Enloe 1990; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2009; Rieff 2002). Recent protracted refugee crises have further shed light on the limitations of such a philanthropic approach to child vulnerability.

Child recruitment in war undoubtedly feeds the regional war economy, while it challenges the INGO apparatus' standardization,[2] which tends to universalize Western age standards.[3] INGOs generally address 15–18-year-old youth and children in order to generate future suitable conditions of stability. Childhood is therefore not approached as a relative process that varies according to culture and context, but rather as a fixed age range (Honwana and De Boeck 2005) or a "Straight 18" definition of childhood as being from infancy to the age of eighteen (Rosen 2005). Our 2015–2016 field research with RtP and its child beneficiaries similarly points to a current process of decontextualization that goes beyond NGOs' actions. While humanitarian and developmental implementations are reproduced in multiple geographical locations (Ferguson and Lohmann 1994; Mosse 2006), the local childhood model that historically stems from the long-standing predicament of a child's family and ancestors often goes unheeded. The under-recognition of the child's active citizenship and engaged civic participation, however, are certainly not to be blamed on the INGO action per se, but rather on the state neglect of the northern Lebanese region, the lack of essential services and infrastructures, the influx of Syrian migrant workers historically exposed to exploitation, and the widespread use of political violence to pursue political goals and elitist privileges. However, it remains problematic that INGOs tend to view corrupted governance systems and violence as inherent to the Global South, ignoring territorial political issues and the way they are connected to the whole neighboring region (Ferguson and Lohmann 1994).

In this scenario, humanitarianism goes beyond its normative definition of alleviator of suffering and actor in global politics. It presents itself with similar moral and practical features in different territories of intervention. Many scholars (Belloni 2005; Fassin and Rechtman 2009; Pandolfi 2008; Pupavac 2004) have already unearthed how some INGO practices standardize and therapeuticize crisis-stricken subjects, especially children. In this vein, this chapter aims to unfold such prepacked INGO

strategies in the framework of an abundantly discussed yet predominantly unilateral North–South act of legitimizing, shaping, and guiding southern childhood.

The Syrian Refugee Crisis and the Manufacturing of Child Vulnerability

Lebanon, a country with a population of over four million, hosts the highest per capita number of Syrian refugees in the region, with almost 1.1 million registered Syrian refugees. According to UNICEF, there are 376,316 registered school-aged refugee children in Lebanon, of whom 155,153 are enrolled in formal education, 27,003 in non-formal education, and nearly 48% are out of school. In 2014, over 72% of children born to Syrian refugees in Lebanon did not own an official birth certificate as a result of the illegal status of their parents' residency. The initial registration with the UNHCR does not, in fact, guarantee the parents' ability to renew their documents in Lebanon in compliance with chronically changing migration policies.

Throughout the popular Arab Spring uprisings in the Middle Eastern region, international media coverage addressed the role of children. Cases of children participating in anti-government protests, with the consequential exposure to violence, were reported in Libya, Egypt, Syria, and Bahrain (Amusan 2013; Diana 2014; Jeong 2013; Natour 2013; Saleh 2013). Despite children's victimization and suffering, addressing the instability of revolutionary contexts is often considered to be the only possible way of dealing with children's issues in the region. Contrarily, their involvement as citizens in democratic processes and social movements, and their political socialization, have hardly been objects of interest. For example, the uprising in Egypt has galvanized children's imaginary, creativity, and spirit of initiative, in addition to expanding their awareness about issues such as political corruption, social justice, human rights, educational equity, and inequality. It is also said to have strengthened children's sense of their own Egyptian citizenship and sense of community (Diana 2014). Conversely, the Syrian revolution in the media has been named "the children's revolution"[4] insofar as children have been depicted as victims of the armed conflict, making up an extremely large number of civilian casualties, but never as active revolutionaries in the uprising.

Against such a backdrop, children easily become vectors of innocence (Ticktin 2015) and therefore unopinionated vectors of global security. The child-focused agenda of INGOs presently working in Syria's neighbor, Lebanon, has increasingly incorporated activities for Lebanese children, considering the protracted co-existence of Syrian and Lebanese social groups. Moreover, this recent multiethnic agenda considers that, in times of conflict, war recruitment in this political setting happens with youth and children from both nationalities, and not only among the Syrian displaced. In this regard, we will tackle how the desire to generate social cohesion and stability clashes with the empirical impossibility of implementing interethnic agendas on the ground.

The Dehistoricization of Political Violence in Lebanon and Syria

The most vulnerable of all working children are known to be those involved in armed conflict, sexual exploitation, and illicit activities, such as organized begging and child trafficking (UNHCR 2013, 53). Child labor, however, is under-reported, despite the ILO Convention 182 Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor and the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Children displaced from Syria and relocated to Lebanon are also exposed to war recruitment and used by armed forces and groups. While the recruitment of refugee children in countries neighboring Syria has been partially documented (UNHCR 2013), it is very difficult to gather reliable information about their recruitment once inside Syria. Most child war recruitments, since the beginning of the Syrian conflict in 2011, are attributed to the Islamic State (IS) and the ex-Nusra Front, now rebaptized *Ha'iyat Tahrir ash-Sham*, with remaining cases attributed to the regular Syrian Army and other Syrian political opposition-affiliated armed groups. Although the Syrian government criminalized the recruitment of children by armed forces and groups in 2013, legal protection continues to be disregarded by armed groups on all warring sides. Fifty-six percent of recruited children are between 10 and 15 years old, even though cases of 7-year-old children being recruited are also common (UN Secretary General 2015).

It has often been observed that, for all age groups, employment and education may be the most effective dissuasive factor to avoid war

recruitment (Save the Children and UNICEF 2015) because they offer material benefits as well as a sense of identity and purpose (Haines 2014, 182). However, Syrian nationals in neighboring countries are unlikely to obtain work permits. Without work permits, employment is limited to the informal sector, where work is often seasonal, irregular, and underpaid, thus exposing workers to a high risk of exploitation. Indeed, those working illegally risk being imprisoned, fined, or even deported back to Syria. A livelihoods assessment conducted by Save the Children (2015) in North-East Syria found that families are struggling to meet their basic needs and feel that they have no other alternative than to put their children out to work, marry off their daughters, and allow their children to join armed groups.

In most cases, children are armed or used in combat roles, including assisting the wounded or video-recording battles for propaganda purposes. Other children work as guards and at checkpoints, or are employed as suicide bombers, for a monthly salary, which can be as much as US$400 (UN Secretary General 2015, 32). Others, conversely, participate without pay in an effort to join family members or friends, or because they have personally suffered at the hands of one of the warring parties and they desire to take revenge. Some children inside Syria live in areas without functioning schools, which have mostly been bombed by President Bashar al-Asad's forces, and therefore joining an armed group remains one of the few options open to them (Human Rights Watch 2014, 2).

Information about children's willingness to join and serve armed groups is also very scant. It has generally been noted that many male children and adolescents are abducted and conscripted at an early stage, later turning into loyal fighters (Depuy and Peters 2010, 67). For instance, young people recruited by the Syrian government or paramilitary forces, the *shabbiha*, are often told they are protecting their families and homes against "terrorists" who are opposed to the government, as Khaldoun, a 17-year-old teenager from Tartous (central Syria), recounted.[5] Considering that the Alawite Asad family that rules Syria depicts itself as the representative *par excellence* of religious minorities in need of protection in the Middle East, the individual need for protection effectively functions as a recruitment strategy. In this case, indoctrination in governmental armed groups is the continuation of state propaganda.

In this framework, most of the Lebanese and Syrian families and youth we interviewed were perplexed about the way foreign researchers

conduct studies on war recruitment. Mohammed, otherwise known as 'Abdallah or Walid,[6] mentioned the massive presence of INGOs that seek to implement their cultural views and activities in Tripoli in a bid to prevent the local and refugee youth from joining armed groups in Syria. Mohammed argued that "INGOs lack direct access to local communities and end up addressing families that would never send their kids to fight in Syria or that have not been oppressed from a political viewpoint. How can they imagine having tangible results? Children develop the same culture as their parents."[7] He also highlighted how even the causes of violence that INGOs point to do not seem to reflect what currently occurs: "It's not just about a lack of schooling or employment. They don't want to see that it's mainly political oppression and religious identity threats that induce people to fight [...]. The Asads used the Alawites[8] as weapons, and no NGO deals with this!"

The actual sociopolitical context in which Syrian and Lebanese nationals are being recruited remains unaddressed by INGO practices. The latter operates in what can be defined as a "social void," in which armament and recruitment are thought to be merely motivated by the ongoing conflict in Syria and not in relation to long-standing social rifts, community frictions, and outdated unresolved political issues. Starting with the intention of addressing child refugees from Syria, INGOs therefore tend to ignore local politics, while they mark unemployment, religious culture, and poverty as the primary causes of radicalization. These factors largely informed local discontent in regards to INGO practices addressing refugee and local children and youth.

Right to Play program implementers particularly highlighted the discrepancies between global agendas and contextual specificities. Mentioning that Lebanon is home to refugees from several neighboring countries, which creates a strain on communities and their resources,[9] the RtP official discourse seems to blame social vulnerabilities on external factors while addressing chronically vulnerable settings only in the wake of forced migration influxes. The RtP local staff—the only NGO workers that are deployed in the field—indeed acknowledged the need to gradually change society in order to uproot the very reasons behind child war recruitment in the region.[10]

Most international organizations who currently work with Syrian refugee children used to operate during the July 2006 war between Lebanon and Israel (Haines 2014) in Beirut's southern suburbs. In the July war, international humanitarian agencies approached children only

as apolitical subjects and therefore as victims of Israeli oppression and destruction, but not as responsible for war. However, some local NGOs and the Lebanese party Hezbollah's relief sections would view children as a constitutive part of future social justice, and, as such, as a resource for the new thread of "Islamic Resistance" (Carpi 2013). In this vein, the political afflatus of this age group among the affected population was intentionally preserved and encouraged. During the current Syrian conflict, some Syrian-established centers providing assistance to child refugees have relied on children's political capacities and regard them as the pioneers of a hopeful future for Syria, which is certainly *also* political. INGO sport and play activities, in a nutshell, do not speak to local and refugee expectations by "divorcing children from the political struggles that brought them to the camp" (Gatter 2017, 10).

Our 2015–2016 fieldwork in the Tripoli governorate revealed how INGO practices risk reifying and therefore determining an *a priori* child vulnerability. A quick look at Lebanese sociolinguistics already shows, for instance, that "vulnerable" people are referred to as *mustad'afun* ("the weakened people"), pointing to how need is conceived of and locally addressed. The individual is not thought of as weak per se, but he/she has been *weakened by* a historical process—a substantial detail that unravels political nuances. The terminology used, therefore, is already able to highlight the mismatch between how global humanitarianism and local communities think of child vulnerability. The official declaration and management of emergency crises make INGOs more prone to addressing child beneficiaries since they are imagined as unable to defend themselves and deliberately take choices, which is a conceptual point of departure that provides an unquestionable reason to intervene and "save" children (Cheney 2010, 6).

A final example of dehistoricization is provided by several Lebanon-based INGOs addressing teenagers who dropped out of school and offering vocational trainings to dissuade them from joining armed factions that recruit their combatants in the North: "If the youth have education and professional skills, they won't fear for their income and they won't feel hopeless. That's how they end up warring or even becoming suicide bombers," an RtP worker affirmed.[11] As became clear, this perspective contradicts the local accounts we collected, which rather tend to identify social tensions and war recruitment in unaddressed political history, such as the neglect by the central state and the lack of international interest in rebuilding Tripoli and gentrifying northern Lebanon after the

end of the Lebanese civil war (1975–1990). This dehistoricization process happens through the provision of sport and play activities, which situate children within a deindividualized category of vulnerability and inscribe them with passive humanitarian victimhood. We will now turn to sport and play as ways of objectifying children as vessels of "pure humanity" (Malkki 1995, 11).

"Sport for Development" and Social Cohesion

In the wake of the Syrian refugee influx into Lebanon, the majority of the activities that INGOs, such as RtP, organized to address vulnerable children relate to play, and especially sport. Indeed, sport and play programs are widely standardized across Lebanon, addressing different nationalities and drawing on local coaches who train children in the field.[12] Some INGOs champion a theory called "Sport-for-Development" (S4D) as a strategic vehicle for positive social, health, and economic change. Globally legitimized after the creation of the United Nations Office for Sport Development and Peace in 2001, S4D has been defined as "the use of sport to exert a positive influence on public health, the socialization of children, youths and adults, the social inclusion of the disadvantaged, the economic development of regions and states, and on fostering intercultural exchange and conflict resolution" (Lyras and Welty Peachey 2011, 311).

According to our interviews, similar to many other Western-funded organizations, RtP works with war-affected communities to create opportunities for positive interaction and integration of at-risk young people with other community members. In Lebanon, most humanitarian youth organizations presently work to promote "social cohesion" among Syrian, Palestinian, and Lebanese children[13] in an effort to redesign childhood within an innocent and passive 'humanitarian condition' (Gatter 2017, 2). However, because Palestinian and Syrian refugees in Lebanon are not merely "camp-dwellers" but mainly live in cities and informal gatherings and housing, the space of displacement is connected to the surrounding social environment. INGOs' neglect of the societal factors underlying forced displacement, such as inter- or intra-community relationships, and how these have changed over time, therefore makes social cohesion practices unsuccessful, as INGOs intervene as though these national groups had never met before on the same playground.

Local and international NGOs have developed programs where sport is adopted as a tool to achieve development objectives and make public spaces safer.[14] Aside from the common belief that play is developmentally appropriate for children, across-culture play can be seen as a way of sharing humor, and understanding conflict and violence. International aid workers, therefore, believe that children "express their right to play and have fun as *essential* to experiencing childhood,"[15] while play acquires a purely therapeutic character. During play and sport activities, child participants generally imitate and recreate the images of war and violence, eliciting the greatest fear to then be overcome.[16] Indeed, on the one hand, play activities carry the growing humanitarian and development purpose of transforming societies rather than alleviating suffering. On the other hand, our findings showed that play is simply one among several ways of encouraging the improvement of local infrastructures and the construction of alternative spaces.

Nowadays, S4D importantly shapes national definitions of the social self at young ages. In northern Lebanon, where mixed Lebanese-Syrian relationships and marriages are common, at the beginning of the refugee influx in 2011, humanitarian NGOs would provide services on an ethnic basis. Syrian refugees were therefore the only social group addressed by providers. The NGO "nationalization" of needs overlooked the long-standing state neglect and poverty of this Lebanese region, thus triggering societal frictions between the Lebanese and the Syrians, which, from local people's perspectives, were not present prior to humanitarian assistance provision (Carpi 2014). As such, play activities, which originally emerged as ethnocentric to later become inclusive in an effort to trigger social cohesion and stability, contribute to shaping children's social subjectivity as primarily based on one's own nationality rather than around a political and social cause. Because they were originally configured along nationality lines, today's play activities can only become interethnic at an ideal level.

Indeed, in the interviews we conducted with RtP, we observed a divide between the official NGO agenda, the individual perspectives of the INGO workers, and child beneficiaries. According to RtP's official agenda, play should alleviate tensions and make society more cohesive and secure. Nevertheless, the social groups involved (mostly Lebanese and Syrian children and youth) affirmed that they had actually never played together,[17] as they mostly form soccer teams on a national basis. Moreover, the local RtP workers expressed their perplexity about play

transforming society while historical and political issues are not directly dealt with first.[18] More significantly, play would be approached as an opportunity to build sports facilities and provide a proper space for sport activities and gatherings, which is rather unlikely in Lebanon's cities. The historical lack of proper urban planning in Lebanon (Fawaz 2016) and a chronically contested politics of space, shaped by decades of infrastructural commodification (Becherer 2005), have left little room for spaces dedicated to play and sport. Even though they do not concretize social cohesion and integration, sport and play programs can positively impact on children's everyday lives and their communities. In other words, in light of the present failure of sport as an effective social cohesion tool, S4D becomes an unplanned strategy for infrastructural development.

In this setting, local staff is considered a valuable resource in that they can more easily face the likely consequences of conflicting dynamics (Anderson 1999; Mercer and Green 2013) related to armed groups in Lebanon and Syria, as well as in local disputes raised by sport and play competition. In such circumstances, the INGO's—although indirect—goal of preventing children and youth from joining armed groups and engaging with political violence addresses the category of "children in need," initially associated with war and displacement but gradually embracing broader understandings and categories of disadvantaged youth.

NGOs' Cultural Literacy of Child–Adult Relations

During our fieldwork, we identified a mismatch between the areas where most child- and youth-focused NGOs operate and the places where the children who are at actual risk of war recruitment are living. According to the local and refugee children and parents we interviewed in the Tripoli governorate, the families of the children who engage with INGO activities are generally well-to-do or are somehow plugged into international networks, holding a privileged social status (see also Compretta, this volume).[19] The parents who collaborate with INGOs were deemed to be generally unwilling to send their kids off to fight, not being themselves prone to political violence. In this sense, the child vulnerability that eventually gets addressed is the one manufactured in the form of ideal innocence. To show efficaciousness and consistency with their principles, INGOs intervene in the areas where they enjoy easier access to local populations, such as Mount Lebanon, where the tendency to join

armed groups is less frequent than in the North.[20] Nevertheless, this choice of the NGOs can also point to the awareness that they would have no impact in a political environment which morally justifies—and sometimes encourages—youth to join armed groups, contradicting the organizational purpose of shaping social values and childhood models. From a local perspective, these NGOs therefore have no impact at a community level as they address families that are already removed from violent revenge-guided reactions to longstanding political and economic oppression. The fact of targeting less relevant areas further points to the need to interrogate the cultural framing of INGOs' strategies.

Some interviewed local families who engaged with political violence in the Tripoli area highlighted how their children were "certainly not manipulated"[21] to undertake violence for their own causes, instead contending that child agency is an integral part of the parental effort to implement local social justice.[22] A closer look at local perceptions revealed that INGOs preventing children from joining armed groups were considered to misconceive children as merely molded by adult culture—one of the so-called "muted groups" (Hardman 1973, 85)—and unlikely to be agents of their socialization and primary politicization processes, despite being constantly exposed to politics in their everyday lives. As the father of a child soccer player argued, "NGOs have picked on us because we have relatives in Syria in the opposition majority areas where everyone somehow has something to do with Islamic extremism [...], but I'm happy for my child. He can now become a soccer player if he wants to, and this is what matters."[23]

On the one hand, a child's actions are hardly ever viewed as expressions of local culture. For instance, Western-funded humanitarian and development agencies tend to see school dropouts as lacking resilience, even if this is done to economically support the child's siblings. Contrarily, the community views continuing school during family hardships as an act of extreme selfishness (Kendall 2010, 34). On the other hand, abusive and corrupt adult violence is seen as innate to the cultural pattern of reference. Despite the 2000 Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict,[24] war recruitment is seen in Tripoli as a continuation of a social justice project, whose possibility has been rendered tangible by the ongoing Syrian turmoil and the subsequent governmental repression that also hit Lebanon's economy and independent politics over decades.[25]

In dealing with families, INGOs describe tolerance of violence as "cultural." The tendency to recruit children in war has often been associated with the toughness of disciplinary measures in family settings. Such measures implemented by parents are homogeneously seen as *typical of* the Middle Eastern region. Parents, in turn, are seen as abusively implementing their own rights through their children's actions by relying on their children to promote or be actively involved in the causes they support, as the majority of the interviewees pointed out.[26] With this approach, INGOs leave adolescents and adults to their tendency to violence and armed groups by under-estimating the dire material conditions these social groups live in *vis-à-vis* the need for social cohesion. When some parents put their children's lives at risk in return for political gain by enforcing coercive mechanisms (Jeong 2013, 57), political agency in fact risks turning into a practice of coercion rather than a pedagogical way of transmitting individual awareness. In the framework of INGOs placing cultural blame on local polities, parents and children are thus supposed to lack communication and mutual understanding.[27] The Middle Eastern family model, in a nutshell, is monolithically taken as a negative example.

OECD has shown that most INGOs explicitly aim to achieve parental involvement with children, open communication, and reasonable disciplinary measures,[28] as though they aim to shape the Arab family cultural pattern. According to a local RtP worker,[29] some INGOs are convinced that community infrastructure should be built in such a way as to provide responsibilities for children and let them contribute to the community (see also Walsh Lang, this volume). Such local accounts indicate that children's previous engagement within their polity is therefore either neglected or undercut by many international interventions. An ethnocentric human rights culture—now also increasingly typical of humanitarianism (Duffield 2001)—consequently considers cultural norms *to be changed* in order to end a culture which is "tolerable to violence."[30]

The recruitment of youth and children in armed groups, across Lebanon as elsewhere, is a product of complex social and structural factors that cannot merely be associated with "evil adult recruiters" (see also Lahti, this volume).[31] International law wants to see local community adults as vectors of an inherently and unchangeably "violent culture," whereas it aprioristically pardons children who undertake violence (Rosen 2010, 50), children being viewed as unconscious perpetrators and easy objects of manipulation, and therefore detachable from the

cultural and social habitus (Bourdieu 2000) in which they have grown up. Similarly, among INGOs, there is a firm belief that some institutional and cultural environments structurally enable or protect against armed violence. The fact that weapons and other violent means come to represent someone's status or protection, and that arms are integrated into the political and social fabric of a community, does not make violence inherent to—or actively accepted by—a specific place or culture.

Conclusion

In politically sensitive contexts such as the Lebanese governorate of Tripoli, programs like RtP aim to provide politically neutral settings that, from a developmental and humanitarian perspective, allow for the design and management of sport-based society-aimed projects (Sugden 1991). RtP's activities have thus emphasized the importance of the abovementioned S4D strategies, which have gradually grown within the UN system. By this token, sport nurtures society by fostering equality, mutual respect, and the acceptance of rules. As such, it is idealized as an important vector of social cohesion and is not sufficiently valued in its positive side implications, such as the aforementioned betterment of local infrastructures. In this sense, our study aligns with scholars illustrating how there has often been an over-estimation of what play and sport can actually do, as they can simply provide a further social opportunity that can be grasped or not (Schulenkorf 2016).

In this framework, INGO humanitarian and developmental agendas in Lebanon are locally perceived as promoting a homogenous "Western" model of childhood, in which children *naturally* and *universally* desire to play and which finds its ideal type in apolitical subjects. Human rights protectors and humanitarian actors have paid considerable attention to politically engaged and aware children in order to make sure that they do not get exposed to war recruitment and do not represent any threat within host societies. In contrast, humanitarian protection has barely been provided to children exposed to terrorist attacks at school and in public spaces. This clearly points to the close correlation between child recruitment prevention and the concerns of the international security apparatus, as well as to the rift between the way of thinking of global humanitarianism and that of local polities *vis-à-vis* childhood and children's services. What should rather concern the international assistance community is guaranteeing spaces and ways of political engagement *other*

than war recruitment. Thus far, the desire to create or preserve such spaces is instead captured by the anti-historical attempt at neutralizing and infantilizing local and refugee childhood in crisis-stricken settings. The major focus is therefore placed on subjectivities rather than on circumstances and infrastructures.

On the one hand, worldwide evidence suggests that out-of-school and un- or underemployed crisis-stricken youth are effectively at greater risk of becoming perpetrators and victims of violence and crime, along with youth who suffer from economic and social deprivation and marginalization (McLean Hilker and Fraser 2009). On the other hand, INGOs such as RtP move on contested ground, where they prioritize training, cultural activities, and education to shape secure societies rather than furthering social change by firstly recognizing underlying causes. A historical and contextual approach to vulnerable childhood—and, in a step further back, to the heterogeneous definitions of vulnerability and childhood—is needed to inform children-targeted programs and enhance sports infrastructure in the best way possible.

In conclusion, INGOs should accept their highly complex position across humanitarian and political spheres. First, they should consider that play and sport activities cannot engender social cohesion and stability if their plans are not based on actual social memberships, which, at times, do not follow the religious and ethnic definitions that still underlie developmental and humanitarian assistance regimes. Moreover, to achieve this goal, INGOs presently lack the cultural literacy to transform the Lebanese host society, despite their increasing efforts and desires. Second, INGOs need to simultaneously realize that, even though increasingly aimed at social transformation, sport and play activities may *do nothing* but pre-package childhood vulnerabilities to create new professional figures, such as soccer coaches, and therefore provide new labor or leisure markets, especially for local "hosts." By this token, sport can emerge as one among several avenues to cultivate civic and political subjectivities, but not necessarily a security efficient bridge between migrant and local lifeworlds.

Acknowledgements This research was partially funded. The Institut de Recherche et Etudes sur le Monde Arabe et Musulman (IREMAM-CNRS, Aix-en-Provence, France) financially supported Diana's fieldwork in Lebanon in Autumn 2016. Carpi's fieldwork in Spring 2015 was funded by Trends Research and Advisory, Abu Dhabi. We are grateful to these funding institutions

and to the Institut Français du Proche-Orient (IFPO, Beirut, Lebanon), which logistically supported Diana's fieldwork. Finally, we are also indebted to Right to Play's workers and child soccer players: without them this research would never have been possible.

Notes

1. While humanitarianism here interestingly overlaps with development's purposes, in this chapter we will not tackle their interspace.
2. The projects carried out by these INGOs to prevent youth and adults from joining armed groups are usually called disarmament—demobilization—reintegration programs (DDR). United Nations Peacekeeping's website: http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/issues/ddr.shtml.
3. Paradoxically, according to the UN, a 15-year-old individual is to be considered as a child, a teenager, an adolescent, and a youth at the same time (Depuy and Peters 2010, 12).
4. See: https://syriastories.net/a-childs-revolution/.
5. Interviewed in October 2016, Beirut.
6. Interviewed in May 2015, Tripoli.
7. Interviewed in May 2015, Tripoli.
8. The ruling family in Syria is Alawite. Thus, for complex historical and political reasons that are not summarizable here, large segments of Alawites tend to support the regime. 4.7% of the northern Lebanese population are Alawite, living in 12 villages in Akkar. The Alawite community is also living in the Tripoli neighborhood of Jabal Mohsen, in chronic conflict with the Sunni-majority district of Bab at-Tabbaneh. The two districts are ironically divided by Syria Street.
9. Right to Play's website: http://www.righttoplay.com/Pages/default.aspx.
10. This raises further questions regarding the extent to which the official agendas of INGOs differ from the ideology and operating practices of their local staff. This, however, is not the object of research in the chapter.
11. Interviewed in July 2016, Tripoli.
12. Interview with the RtP country director in July 2016, Beirut.
13. Interview with RtP country director in July 2016, Beirut.
14. In this regard, the local NGO Himaya implements the Prevention Program, which mainly entails sport and play activities to prevent mental disorders and social deviance among resident youths and children. Safe Parks is one of these initiatives. See: https://www.himaya.org/content/prevention-program.
15. Interview with international aid workers in July 2016, Tripoli.
16. Interview with aid worker in July 2016, Tripoli governorate.
17. Research conducted in Lebanon also confirms that children and youth seldom play together. Also see: Chahine, Ali et al. *Situation*

Analysis of Youth in Lebanon Affected by the Syrian Crisis, UNFPA, UNESCO, UNHCR, UNICEF, and Save the Children Report, 2014. Available online at: http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=6571.

18. Interviewed in July 2016, Tripoli.
19. Interview conducted in May 2015, in al-Qobbe, Tripoli governorate.
20. Interview with local aid worker in July 2016, Tripoli.
21. Interview conducted in July 2016, in al-Qobbe, Tripoli governorate.
22. In this case, social justice means the departure of the Asad regime in Syria and the long craved prosperity of the northern Lebanese region, deprived of its own resources due to longstanding repression and neglect.
23. Interview with Syrian refugee man and father of a child beneficiary of RtP. Tripoli, July 2016.
24. This Convention prohibits mandatory war recruitment of individuals below 18 years of age and makes voluntary recruitment of 15–18-year-olds illegal (Article 2 and Article 3). Rebel groups never sign up to these conventions, but the latter are nonetheless considered universal. Available online at: http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/OPACCRC.aspx.
25. We here refer to both the 1976–2005 *Pax Syriana* in Lebanon, allegedly aimed at preserving the country's ephemeral stability, and the still ongoing interference of the Syrian regime into Lebanese domestic affairs.
26. Interview conducted with a male breadwinner in May 2015, Tripoli.
27. Interview conducted with a male breadwinner in May 2015, Tripoli.
28. See OECD Report (2011, 19). Available online at: http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/doingbetterforfamilies.htm.
29. Interview conducted in May 2015, Tripoli.
30. See OECD Report (2011, 19). Available online at: http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/doingbetterforfamilies.htm.
31. Interview with aid worker in July 2017, Tripoli.

References

Amusan, Lere. 2013. "Libya's Implosion and Its Impacts on Children." *International Journal of Women's Studies* 5 (14): 66–79.

Anderson, Mary B. 1999. *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace—Or War.* Boulder, CO: Lynne Reinner.

Becherer, Richard. 2005. "A Matter of Life and Debt: The Untold Costs of Rafiq Hariri's New Beirut." *The Journal of Architecture* 10 (1): 1–42.

Belloni, Roberto. 2005. *Is Humanitarianism Part of the Problem? Nine Theses.* BCSIA Discussion Paper 2005–03, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, April.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 2000. *Esquisse d'une Théorie de la Pratique*. Paris: Editions du Seuil.

Bucholtz, Mary. 2002. "Youth and Cultural Practice." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31: 525–52.

Butt, Leslie. 2002. "The Suffering Stranger: Medical Anthropology and International Morality." *Medical Anthropology* 21 (1): 1–24.

Carpi, Estella. 2013. "Islamic 'Resistance' in the Southern Suburbs of Beirut." *OpenDemocracy*, January 13. https://www.opendemocracy.net/opensecurity/estella-carpi/islamic-resistance-in-southern-suburbs-of-beirut.

Carpi, Estella. 2014. *The Everyday Experience of Humanitarianism in the Akkar Villages*. Beirut: Civil Society Knowledge Center.

Chahine, Ali, Muzna Al-Masri, Souad Abi Samra, and Zeina Abla. 2014. *Situation Analysis of Youth in Lebanon Affected by the Syrian Crisis*. New York: UNFPA, UNESCO, UNHCR, UNICEF, and Save the Children. http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=6571.

Cheney, Kristen E. 2010. "Deconstructing Childhood Vulnerability." *Childhood in Africa* 1 (2): 4–7.

Depuy, Kendra E., and Krijn Peters. 2010. *War and Children: A Reference Handbook*. Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Publishing Group.

Diana, Chiara. 2014. "Children's Citizenship: Revolutions and the Seeds of an Alternative Future." In *Wired Citizenship: Youth Learning and Activism in the Middle East*, edited by Linda Herrera with Rehab Sakr, 60–75. New York: Routledge.

Duffield, Mark. 2001. *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security*. London: Zed Books.

Duffield, Mark. 2008. "Global Civil War: The Non-insured, International Containment and Post-interventionary Society." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21 (2): 145–65.

Dupoirier, Elisabeth, and Annick Percheron. 1975. "Choix idéologique, attitudes politiques des préadolescents et contexte politique." *Revue Française de Science Politique* 25 (5): 870–900.

Easton, David, and Jack Dennis. 1969. *Children in the Political System: Origins of Political Legitimacy*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Enloe, Cynthia. 1990. "Women and Children: Making Feminist Sense of the Persian Gulf Crisis." *The Village Voice*, September 25.

Fassin, Didier, and Richard Rechtman. 2009. *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Fawaz, Mona. 2016. "Planning and the Refugee Crisis: Informality as a Framework of Analysis and Reflection." *Planning Theory* 16 (1): 99–115.

Ferguson, James, and Larry Lohmann. 1994. "The Anti-politics Machine: 'Development' and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho." *The Ecologist* 24 (5): 176–81.

Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Elena. 2009. "Representing Sahrawi Refugees' 'Educational Displacement' to Cuba: Self-Sufficient Agents or Manipulated Victims in Conflict?" *Journal of Refugee Studies* 22 (3): 323–50.

Gatter, Melissa N. 2017. "Restoring Childhood: Humanitarianism and Growing Up Syrian in Za'tari Refugee Camp." *Contemporary Levant* 2 (2): 1–14.

Greenstein, Fred I. 1965. *Children and Politics*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Haines, Deborah. 2014. "How Conflict and Violence Impact Upon Children and Their Education? Experiences and Learning from the Humanitarian Field." In *Childhood, Youth and Violence in Global Contexts. Research and Practice in Dialogue*, edited by Karen Wells, Erica Burman, Heather Montgomery, and Alison Watson, 173–98. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hardman, Charlotte. 1973. "Can There Be an Anthropology of Children?" *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford* 4 (2): 85–99.

Hess, Robert D., and Judith V. Torney. 1967. *The Development of Political Attitudes in Children*. Chicago: Aldine.

Holloway, Sarah L., and Gill Valentine, eds. 2000. *Children's Geographies: Playing, Living, Learning*. New York: Routledge.

Honwana, Alcinda, and Filip De Boeck, eds. 2005. *Makers and Breakers: Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa*. Oxford, UK: James Currey Ltd.

Human Rights Watch. 2014. *Maybe We Live, and Maybe We Die: Recruitment and Use of Children by Armed Groups in Syria*. https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/06/22/maybe-we-live-and-maybe-we-die/recruitment-and-use-children-armed-groups-syria.

James, Allison, Chris Jenks, and Alan Prout, eds. 1998. *Theorizing Childhood*. Oxford, UK: Polity Press.

Jeong, Hae Won. 2013. "Lessons Gleaned from the Political Participation of Children in Bahrain Uprising." *International Journal of Women's Studies* 5 (14): 50–65.

Kendall, Nancy. 2010. "Gendered Moral Dimensions of Childhood Vulnerability." *Childhood in Africa* 1 (2): 26–37.

Lyras, Alexis, and Jon Welty Peachey. 2011. "Integrating Sport-for-Development Theory and Praxis." *Sport Management Review* 14 (4): 311–26.

Malkki, Liisa H. 1995. *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Maynard, Douglas W. 1985. "On the Functions of Social Conflict Among Children." *American Sociological Review* 50 (2): 207–23.

McLean Hilker, Lyndsay, and Erika Fraser. 2009. *Youth Exclusion, Violence, Conflict and Fragile States*. London: Social Development Direct. http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/con66.pdf.

Mercer, Claire, and Maia Green. 2013. "Making Civil Society Work: Contracting, Cosmopolitanism, and Community Development in Tanzania." *Geoforum* 45: 106–15.

Mosse, David. 2006. "Anti-social Anthropology? Objectivity, Objection, and the Ethnography of Public Policy and Professional Communities." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 12: 935–56.

Natour, Manal. 2013. "Nation, Gender and Identity: Children in the Syrian Revolution 2011." *International Journal of Women's Studies* 5 (14): 28–49.

OECD. 2011. *Doing Better for Families.* Report: 17–53. http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/doingbetterforfamilies.htm.

Pandolfi, Mariella. 2008. "Laboratory of Intervention: The Humanitarian Governance of the Postcommunist Balkan Territories." In *Postcolonial Disorders*, edited by Mary-Jo DelVecchio-Good, Sandra Teresa Hyde, Sarah Pinto, and Byron J. Good, 157–86. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Pupavac, Vanessa. 2004. "War on the Couch: The Emotionology of the New International Security Paradigm." *European Journal of Social Theory* 7 (2): 149–70.

Pupavac, Vanessa. 2005. "Human Security and the Rise of Global Therapeutic Governance." *Conflict, Security and Development* 5 (2): 161–81.

Qvortrup, Jens. 1987. "Introduction." *International Journal of Sociology* 79 (3): 3–37.

Rieff, David. 2002. *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis: With an Afterword on Iraq.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

Rosen, David M. 2005. *Armies of the Young: Child Soldiers in War and Terrorism.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Rosen, David M. 2010. "Social Change and the Legal Construction of Child Soldier Recruitment in the Special Court for Sierra Leone." *Childhood in Africa* 1 (2): 48–57.

Saleh, Layla. 2013. "We Thought We Were Playing: Children's Participation in the Syrian Revolution." *International Journal of Women's Studies* 5 (14): 80–95.

Save the Children. 2015. *Child Protection Assessment, North-Eastern Syria.*

Save the Children, and UNICEF. 2015. *Small Hands, Heavy Burden. How the Syrian Conflict Is Driving More Children into the Workforce*, July 2. http://childrenofsyria.info/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/CHILD-LABOUR.pdf.

Schulenkorf, Nico. 2016. "Managing Sport-for-Development: Reflections and Outlook." *Sport Management Review* 20 (3): 1–9.

Seymour, Claudia. 2014. "Everyday Violence and War in the Kivus, DRC". In *Childhood, Youth and Violence in Global Contexts: Research and Practice in Dialogue*, edited by Karen Wells, Erica Burman, Heather Montgomery, and Alison Watson, 153–72. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Sugden, John P. 1991. "Belfast United: Encouraging Cross-Community Relations Through Sport in Northern Ireland." *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 15 (1): 59–80.

Ticktin, Miriam. 2015. "The Problem with Humanitarian Borders: Toward a New Framework of Justice." *Public Seminar Blog*, September 18. http://www.publicseminar.org/2015/09/the-problem-with-humanitarian-borders/#.WaaiWtMjHox.

UN Secretary General. 2015. *Report on Children and Armed Conflict*, A/69/926; S/2015/409.

UNHCR. 2013. *Future of Syria: Refugee Children in Crisis*. www.refworld.org/pdfid/529c3b4d4.pdf.