Deborah Ellis's Children in War

by

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Abstract

This Master's thesis considers Deborah Ellis's *Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli children speak* and *The Breadwinner* series, works that have stirred lively debate about childhood, children's literature, and censorship. These two works are the product of Ellis's travels to Afghanistan, Israel and Palestine before and after September 11, 2001 and the experiential research she conducted by talking to women and children in those countries. Her literary work has been inspired by her activism and feminism. An engaged reading of these two works results in an in-depth analysis of children's and youth literature set in the Middle Eastern context written by a Canadian author.

The focal point of this thesis is the analysis of the representation of children growing up and living in war-stricken countries: Afghanistan, Palestine and Israel. The analysis is conducted in the context of relevant theoretical approaches: theories of childhood, critical literacy theory, critical race theory and intersectionality. The complexity of identities and inequalities depicted in both *Three Wishes* and *The Breadwinner* series proposes an integrated look into categories of gender, class, race, ethnicity. The investigation of these categories is relevant for the analysis of identity formation and leads to interesting conclusions.

In the course of this thesis (the myth of) childhood innocence will be reworked and reframed in the context of heterogenous childhood experience presented in Ellis's texts and the concepts of globalized child and universal childhood will be brought into question. Because Ellis's figurations of the child problematize not only race and culture but gender as well, a large part of this thesis will focus on issues around gender, especially in relation to *The Breadwinner*

series. The issue of burqa and other types of veiling is mentioned in relation to the Western refusal of accepting veiling practices as voluntary and subversive. The narrative given by the Western governments and media which represents women as victims of brown men who need to be saved by white men is deconstructed in this thesis in relation to gender.

When it comes to *Three Wishes* it will be important to consider how the children's voice is posited within this work, and re-posited outside of it, in a wider political context—are these children perceived as the "Other," or as universal? Suicide bombing tampers in this work with presumed and expected children's innocence and makes us question our empathy.

The comparison of the two works, one fiction, and one non-fiction proves fruitful in the analysis of issues described above. This preliminary work reveals there is much to be done in reading the figure of the child in war and in future investigations of Deborah Ellis's important and understudied body of work.

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1. Introduction

This thesis will focus on the representation of children in war-stricken countries in the works of award-winning Canadian children's and young adult writer Deborah Ellis. I want to provide the first concentrated study of Ellis's work in the context of related critical and theoretical writing. This project aims at providing an analysis of impact of war on children and their families, as well as a commentary of political events in the Middle East. In order to focus my thesis project on children in war, I will study Ellis's *Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak* (nonfiction), and *The Breadwinner* tetralogy (fiction) as my central literary texts – both set in the Middle East and Greater Middle East. I will trace childhood, politics, race, gender and ethnicity in an attempt to provide an in-depth analysis of children's and youth literature set in non-Western context written by a Western author.

The examination of myths of childhood innocence and the apolitical child will be of central importance to my thesis: I will draw from works that centre on the child as innocent but also from works that argue that children are active participants in the political lives of their communities. Drawing from critical race theory, critical literacy theory, critical readings of "the child," and the concept of intersectionality, I want to explore issues of race, gender and class as they relate specifically to the problems raised in and by Ellis's texts. Some of the themes developed include the intersectional representation of the child; the child in war (the child in Canada's war on terror, globalism, the globalised child); and the Canadian context for the critical reception of the works. Considering that I will be focusing on works written by a Western author for a mainly

Western readership, I will investigate whether Ellis's work is related to ideological prejudices and stereotypes that surround mainstream post-9/11 culture.

In this introduction I will provide Ellis's brief biography, contexts for the two texts, and the political framework—that is, how politics influenced the making of these books and their reception.

1.1. Author

Deborah Ellis is a highly regarded best-selling writer in a relatively marginalized area of literary production–children's literature. Ellis's books for children and young adults have been translated into as many as seventeen languages so far. Ellis is considered one of the most popular writers for young adults today, and her books are recommended to children and young adults around the world, even by the likes of Malala Yousafzai. In Malala's opinion, "Ellis beautifully captures childhood in war-torn Afghanistan and Pakistan…[and] reminds us how courageous and strong women are" (PajamaPress par. 3).

A feminist and peace activist who established Women for Women in Afghanistan when the Taliban took over Kabul in 1996[1], and donates most of her proceeds (more than one million dollars from *The Breadwinner* alone) to Afghan organizations that fund schools, clinics and women's centres, she is also a mental health worker at a women's shelter in Ontario, where she

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[1] The Taliban is "a predominantly Pashtun, Islamic fundamentalist group that ruled Afghanistan from 1996 until 2001, when a U.S.-led invasion toppled the regime for providing refuge to <u>al-Qaeda</u> and Osama bin Laden." Originally, the Taliban was " formed in the early 1990s by an Afghan faction of mujahideen, Islamic fighters who had resisted the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan (1979–89) with the covert backing of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency and its Pakistani counterpart, the <u>Inter-Services Intelligence</u> directorate (ISI). They were joined by younger Pashtun tribesmen who studied in Pakistani madrassas, or seminaries; *taliban* is Pashto for "students" ((Laub par.1-3). Today, in 2016, the insurgency remains formidable.

lives. Her activism began in high school when she joined the Peace Movement's anti nuclear weapon campaign and, later on, the Women's movement. Her political engagement took her around the world, "to Pakistan to help at an Afghan Refugee Camp; ... Israel and Gaza Strip to talk with Israeli and Palestinian children; and ...to Malawi and Tanzania to spend time with children orphaned by AIDS" (BookBrowse par.1). Her books reflect the experiential research she carried out in these countries: they have been inspired by these travels and the people she met in refugee camps and in various war zones and occupied territories. She says that her books "reflect the heroism of people around the world who are struggling for decent lives. It has been a real privilege for me to sit with people in many parts of the world and learn how their lives have been drastically altered by war or disease" (BookBrowse par. 9). Ellis first became interested in Afghanistan when the Taliban took over in 1996:

> I heard about what was happening to women and I wanted to do something to support those folks. I thought if I went over and gathered together people's stories of how they had survived and what they'd been through, who they were, we [the Canadian women] would have a better sense of how we could be useful. (Williams par. 6)

The interviews she conducted with women in refugee camps were published as an adult nonfiction book, *Women of the Afghan War*. When she heard the stories of children she decided to write *The Breadwinner*. Ellis had not originally wanted to write a children's book about Afghanistan but she was inspired by one mother telling her about her daughter who had cut her hair and had pretended to be a boy so she could go out of the house and support her family. Prior to writing *Three Wishes*, Ellis had never visited the Middle East and had not paid much attention to what was going on there, but anti-war activism inspired her to

lead people on this journey from the fairly normal everyday life that is disrupted by war, deeper and deeper into the consequences of the war, like the Israeli children who had lost their friends to a gunman, or the Palestinian boy who has his legs shot up, or the sister of a suicide bomber. (O'Brien par. 5)

1.2. *Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak*

Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak, was published in 2004 by Groundwood Books (further in text GB). This is Deborah Ellis's first nonfiction book for children, "written at a request from [Ellis's] publisher" and GB founder and editor, Patsy Aldana (O'Brien par. 9). Since the publishing house politics is established by its editor, I will provide Aldana's short biography in order to explain why she would commission the writing of a children's book about this geopolitical area.

Founded in 1978, GB, once a small independent children's books publishing house, now part of House of Anansi Press, publishes "voices of people who are marginalized—Black, Native, Hispanic, or less well known international voices" (Smith par. 17). GB specializes in "Canadian authored books (with a special interest in books by First Nations authors), bilingual books in English and Spanish, translations from around the world, and a nonfiction line aimed at young adults. Their catalogue features a long list of award-winning titles that reflect individual experiences and are of universal interest (PaperTigers Blog par. 1). Originally from Guatemala, Aldana moved to Canada in 1971 and obtained Canadian citizenship in 1978 (the same year she founded GB). Her Guatemalan background enables her to "see the world through the eyes of the marginal" (PaperTigers Blog par.5) which is why she established of a publishing house that represents marginal voices. Among other accomplishments, Aldana is "a former president of the Inter-

national Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) and the current president of its foundation"
(Williams par. 4). Aldana's international work through IBBY

> has focused on bringing children and books together, especially in countries which have
> not had a reading tradition. She was a leader in establishing the IBBY Fund for Children
> in Crisis, which is running projects in Lebanon, Gaza, and Colombia for children who
> have suffered extreme trauma due to war and civil disruption. (Smith par. 7)

Among other recognitions for her accomplishments in publishing, Aldana was named to
the Order of Canada in 2011, and in 2013 she was awarded The Writers' Union of Canada's an-
nual <u>Freedom to Read Award</u>, "in recognition of her 'courageous work' in publishing books for
young readers including Deborah Ellis's *Three Wishes* " (Toyne par. 3). As GB's editor, Aldana
chose books that are to be published. The editor's job is to "find out what public wants, [have] it
made, and sell it to them" (Lane 36). Lane argues that editors often see themselves as "endowed
with a duty that one can only describe as educational, social, or more broadly, cultural" (37).
Both educational and social dimensions are important for Aldana. The books that GB publishes
fulfill both those roles by presenting marginalized voices. Commissioning books is a safer option
for both the editor and the publisher because in that case they have "a clear idea not only of the
subject of the book that is to be written, but also of its general tone and orientation" (Lane 40).
Editors can get away with not being neutral in their work, because they cannot escape their per-
sonality or preferences, just as authors cannot.

It is therefore not surprising that Patsy Aldana would commission the writing of a book
that would represent voices of children in Israel and Palestine. Ellis travelled to Israel and Pales-
tine in 2002, during the second Intifada, and interviewed kids on both sides. The book was listed
in the Silver Birch category for readers in grades four, five and six. Silver Birch Award is a part

of Ontario's Silver Birch Reading Program in which students in grades four, five and six read at least five fiction and/or nonfiction books from a recommended list and then vote for their favorite book.

In *Three Wishes* Deborah Ellis juxtaposes twenty first-hand testimonies: ten by Palestinian children and ten by Israeli children—"presenting both sides of the conflict, Israeli and Palestinian children talk openly about the conflict" (Aasi par. 3). Each testimony contains prefatory remarks written by Ellis in which she explains specific issues a child mentions or touches upon in his or her testimony. For example, an Israeli girl, Danielle, talks about how "bombs scare [her] more than anything else" (*TW* 44). Ellis foreshadows her testimony by explaining in the preface to the testimony that

> Even very young children feel the impact of the war, on both sides of the conflict. A study prepared by the University of Tel Aviv's School of Social Work says all Palestinian and Israeli children show some signs of mental and emotional distress. Many have full-blown post traumatic stress disorder. (42)

Interviews contain images, for example of Jerusalem City Centre or a roadblock of wrecked cars in Ramallah, also added by Ellis. In the Introduction, Ellis explains that she collected these testimonies when she visited Israel and Palestine in 2002 by talking to any child she met during her stay there: "Some of the children I talked with by chance, such as when I stopped in at a McDonald's for a cup of coffee" (10). After the Introduction Ellis lists 429 names of all children under the age of eighteen killed since the beginning of the war in the Middle East. We do not know which child is Israeli or Palestinian, all we know is that they are dead because of the ongoing conflict. Aasi writes that "*Three Wishes* is a hard and uncomfortable read not due to the book's writing, but [because] of the unflinching, honest, and often times bleak accounts of how

war takes toll on the lives of young people" (par. 3). Additionally, Moughrabi argues that "Ellis provides a framework and a context that enables the reader to situate the interviews with the children. She briefly explains the history of the conflict and provides the arguments as seen by Israelis and Palestinians. Both narratives are therefore provided" (par. 2).

However, the Canadian Jewish Congress Centre (CJC) thought otherwise and argued that the representation of Israelis was one-sided and biased. In 2006, the CJC demanded that *Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak* be removed from Silver Birch program, school libraries and reading lists for children in grades four to six because, it claimed, children at this age cannot tolerate the contents of texts about war. The CJC

> said that Ellis had provided a flawed historical introduction to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict…[and] that some children in the book portrayed Israeli soldiers as brutal, expressed ethnic hatred and glorified suicide bombing. The effect on young student readers, the CJC said was "toxic." (Freedom to Read par. 2)

This controversial campaign led to the book's removal from the Silver Birch Program, withdrawal from elementary school libraries, restrictions of access to students in grade seven or higher. These facts provide additional justification for an engaged reading of this body of writing in a geopolitical context and with an understanding of the censorship of other Canadian writers in elementary and young adult education. Ellis herself concedes that "[s]ome folks and organizations were upset and believed that a book about this topic was too graphic and too complicated for young people to read. It caused quite a debate in newspapers and other media, and caused a couple of school boards to pull the book from their library shelves" (Wishful Thinking par. 6). PEN Canada and the Writers' Union of Canada "raised its voice with sector partners in opposition to recent actions taken by the Boards of Education of York Region, Toronto, and Essex, at

the behest of the Canadian Jewish Congress to restrict access" (Skrypuch par. 1) to *Three Wishes*.

Writers' Union statement explained that it had to protest because it believes that "children deserve the highest possible quality in the texts and art created for them…[and] that children want and need to know the truth about the world they live in " (Skrypuch par.20-21). Children who wanted to read the book raised their voices in protest as well. In 2007,

> A Burlington Grade 5 student has become the first child to receive the Writer's Union of Canada's Freedom to Read Award. Eevie Freedman, is being honored for her spirited defence last year of the controversial book, *Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak*" (Kalinowski par. 1-2).

Ellis's children in *Three Wishes* talk about

> mundane activities that make them happy, like being with family or listening to music as they face the usual childhood/young adult issues ranging from squabbles with siblings and friends to angst and hope about their future. Many of their wishes resonate with the desire for peace and security, freedom from fear and uncertainty…The candid and passionate voices in these narratives may be used to awaken interest and encourage discussion among young readers. (Golke par. 12)

Hopes and dreams, fears and uncertainty, are certainly something children in the West experience too, and giving unlimited access to any books they wanted to, might mean they would become more open to different ideas and people and more appreciative of local differences on global level. *Three Wishes* can be used for critical examination of representation of Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the West, and can be used as a tool for teaching principles of discussion. However, it has to be acknowledged that "no book about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is ever going

to satisfy everyone. The issues are so fraught with hatred, resentment, prior assumptions, and group loyalties that complete balance is probably impossible to achieve" (Sanychuk par. 48).

1.3. *The Breadwinner* series

The international bestseller *The Breadwinner* tetralogy, also published by Groundwood Books, came about as a direct result of Ellis's anti-war activism and experiential research conducted in refugee camps for Afghanistani people. This "enormously popular…[series] recount[s] the experiences of children [and women] living in Afghanistan" (Aasi par. 2). *The Breadwinner* series is recommended reading for children and young adults in grades five to nine in numerous schools throughout North America and Europe.

The tetralogy follows the life of Parvana, its main character, in Taliban and post-Taliban Afghanistan. The first book of the series, *The Breadwinner*, was published in 2001, *Parvana's Journey* in 2002, *Mud City* in 2003, and the last, *My Name is Parvana,* in 2012. In *The Breadwinner* we are introduced to Parvana and her life in Afghanistan under the Taliban. In this book we learn she has to dress as a boy and provide for her family. Her father is arrested, leaving her and her family fend for themselves. In the second book, *Parvana's Journey*, Parvana's father dies during a voyage across the country in the attempt to reunite with the rest of her family—her mother, two sisters and a younger brother. The third book *Mud City* is told from the point of view of Parvana's best friend Shauzia, who is also forced to dress as a boy and earn money for her family. We follow Shauzia on the way from Kabul to a refugee camp in Afghanistan, to Peshawar, and the to a refugee camp again. In *My Name is Parvana* Parvana is a teenager and is captured by the American soldiers. She is eventually rescued by Mrs. Weera, her elementary school teacher, and her mother's friend, and reunited with Shauzia. The characters in the series

"are made up, but they are based on many of the people and many of the stories [Ellis] heard in Afghanistan" (Marco par. 6). The series has been translated into twenty-five languages and has been in print continuously for fifteen years, with more than two million copies sold worldwide. It was important for Ellis to write sequels for *The Breadwinner* because she "was curious about what would happen to [Parvana and Shauzia] after they went their own separate ways" (Marco par. 8). Ellis shifted viewpoint from Parvana to Shauzia in *The Mud City* because she "really liked her character—[Shauzia] had a rougher time than Parvana, in some ways, because her family was hostile to her. She is a combination of a dreamer and a realist, someone [Ellis] thinks [she] would like very much if [she] met her in real life" (Marco par. 16). Similar to *Three Wishes*, in *The Breadwinner* series we can find "map[s], glossary and author's note [which] provide young readers with background and context" (49th Shelf par. 5).

The Breadwinner series "earned Ellis international peace awards and a special standing in the literary world for her determination to find and convey stories not typically shared with children about their peers" (Raab Associates par. 1). Among other literary prizes, the series won the Peter Pan Prize[2] in 2003 and the Middle East Book Award[3] in 2002.

In the summer of 2015 *Variety* wrote that Angelina Jolie-Pitt will produce an animated movie *The Breadwinner* based on Deborah Ellis's books, which is another testament to the immense popularity of the series. Jolie-Pitt said that "[m]illions of young girls like Parvana are

2 Awarded annually by IBBY Sweden "to a foreign child or youth book with both literary and subject quality, satisfying one or more of the following criteria: by author previously unpublished or little known in Sweden; from a country, language group, or culture with limited representation in Sweden; with content concerning children or young adults in less familiar countries and cultures less familiar to Swedish readers" (IBBY Sweden par. 15).
3 Established by the Middle East Outreach Council to "recognize books for children and young adults that contribute meaningfully to understanding the Middle East. Books that are nominated for awards are judged on the authenticity of their portrayal of a Middle Eastern subject, as well as on their plot, characterization, and appeal for the intended audience" (MEOC par. 3).

growing up today under oppression or conflict, and helping their families to survive in those conditions. This story is a reminder of the immense value of their contribution" (Kroll par. 3). The cartoon has moved into production in the spring of 2016 and is supposed to come out sometime in 2017.

2. (Critical) Reception

The focus on two bodies of works—one a body of work of fiction (*The Breadwinner* series*)* and the other a work of nonfiction (*Three Wishes)*—provides an opportunity to compare: two very different book receptions, critical and popular; two very different ways of reading; two different ways of thinking about what are adult approved insights for children and young adults; and, two different (but also in some ways very similar) geopolitical spaces.

2.1. Fiction vs. Nonfiction

We "read fiction while suspending reality in an effort to be entertained, to enter far away places, or to escape. Non-fiction, on the other hand, informs us about events, people, statistics and facts, and we assume that it is correct and believable" (Baer 285). In general, "'non-fiction' is understood to be about something that exists or existed in the real world, and which can be subject to verification" (Rak 52). Thus, if *Three Wishes* is labelled as non-fiction, children's voices must be authentic and readers can believe what they hear. This book can be read as a "witness narrative in which ordinary people are witness to atrocities" (Rak 154)—only in this case it is not people, it is children, which makes it so much worse.

This might explain why *Three Wishes* was challenged by the Canadian Jewish Centre (CJC): if it presents facts truthfully it should not be accessible to children because truth is too

harsh, something I will talk more about in Chapter 1 of this thesis. Ellis claims there was no authorial intervention in *Three Wishes*, thus the reader should not doubt the truthfulness of the interviews. Moreover, Steffler writes that

> Deborah Ellis removes herself, to a great extent, as an intermediary or filter when she offers the actual voices of children in *Three Wishes*…thus eliminating the paternalism that can result from authorial constructions of implied relationships between characters and readers. (119)

Minimizing the authorial presence and interpretation in this book "connects rather than separates children from larger group, and renders this book, the one that caused all the commotion, among the least problematic and controversial of Deborah Ellis's work" (Steffler 121). Even though *Three Wishes* seemingly presents truthful and authentic children's voices "the book cannot deny the adult and cultural mediation it employs" (Hasan 6). The book opens with a map of the area, and each interview is foreshadowed with an informational preface in which the author teaches us about Israel or Palestine. Translation can also prove problematic as translator is always a mediator of ideas and something always gets lost in translation.

Nonetheless, Ellis's nonfiction work does indeed provide "a space for those voices, ideas, and actions that tend to be colonized and treated with assumptions and paternalism in Canadian 'multicultural' and 'globalized' fiction, including her own" (Steffler 120). By not changing children's words, or embellishing them or adding to them, Ellis lets these voices be authentic. The geopolitical segment that follows in this chapter will look more closely in the issues of marginalization of "other" voices, but definitely so Chapter 1 of this thesis.

Although *The Breadwinner* series is labelled and read as fiction, it has a basis in real life: the main character Parvana is based "on a real character, [but] Deborah has never actually en-

countered her," admitting that she "just met the mother" (Jenkinson par. 16) at an Afghani refugee camp. Ellis also argues that

> each of the principal episodes in *The Breadwinner* [series] came from "people telling me that they had witnessed it or they had done it themselves" [girls disguising themselves as boys, harvesting organs from kids, kidnappings of refugee children, etc.]. The only thing that came from another source was the bone digging in the graveyard which [Ellis] got from *Time* magazine. [Ellis] hadn't actually met anybody who had done that. (Jenkinson par. 17)

Its popularity in classrooms and among young readers points to the fact that interest is still high when it comes to the Middle East and the lives of the "Other." Ellis interweaves some true historical segments (e.g. different forces that invaded Afghanistan throughout its history[4]) in the fictional narrative. In this way she educates the Western reader about history without being too patronizing and does not shy away from presenting complex political backgrounds to children.

2.2. Writing after 9/11

Classrooms, curricula and teaching have changed in response to 9/11, which might explain the popularity of *The Breadwinner* series: the first book of the series was originally published in the spring of 2001 but became widely read and used in schools only after 9/11. Ellis herself is aware of this fact: "that tragic event [9/11] did have some publishing impact. For example, England bumped up the date of publication, and they turned it around in like three weeks.

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4 For example: invasions by the UK during the First Anglo-Afghan War (1838-1842) and the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878-1880); invasion by the Soviet Union in 1979; invasion by the US and its allies in 2001.

And then it just flew off the shelves almost before it got on the shelves" (Jenkins par. 18), and it has not stopped since then. Canadian Women for Women of Afghanistan write that

> After the events of 9/11, teachers and parents needed resources that would help North American children understand what their peers were facing in the Middle East and *The Breadwinner* was catapulted into the spotlight. Subsequently, *The Breadwinner* has been made available to young readers in countries around the world. (par. 5)

Talking about pros and cons of using war stories in classrooms in countries in which there is no war or which have not experienced war directly, one teacher says that

> Contrary to school texts, children's war stories are written [or in told in *Three Wishes*] from a perspective of a child, making it easier for students to relate to the characters. The child characters in these stories share their reactions and experiences of war with readers in an engaging, non-analytic manner. (Carter par. 8).

2.3. Geopolitical spaces: Canada & Israel, Palestine, Afghanistan

In order to investigate the contexts in which these books appeared, I must now turn to Canadian foreign policy towards Israel and Palestine, and Afghanistan. The political moment in Canada at the time of publishing these books is of relevance in respect to their reception and significance.

2.3.1. Geopolitics of Israel-Palestine

Canada has been involved in Israel-Palestine conflict pretty much from the beginning, since after World War II, through its peacekeeping missions and its participation in the United Nations. Canada was at that time considered a mediator that could play an unbiased role in the

conflict resolvement, and in "the early years of the conflict it proved to be an effective mediator

and balanced the interests of both sides reasonably well" (Mackay 4). Canadian leaders

> have taken an active role in international security institutions, [but] they have also always
>
> maintained a stridently independent policy in international affairs. Lester Pearson won a
>
> Nobel for his role in mediating the Suez crisis, Pierre Trudeau was unapologetic about
>
> Canada's warm relations with Cuba, and Jean Chrétien stridently refused to countenance
>
> a Canadian role in the moral disaster which was the Iraq War (Hussain par. 2).

However, with time, starting with former Liberal prime minister Paul Martin, Canada be-

came biased, preferring to stand with Israel and turning into one of its closest allies, which was

especially obvious during the Stephen Harper era. In an attempt to win over Jewish Canadian

votes and to appeal to Canadian Evangelical Christian voters, who empathize deeply with Israeli

issues, Harper demonstrated strong one-sided support for Israel during his reign. Jewish Canadi-

ans have historically

> gravitated towards the centrist Liberals and even the left-of-centre New Democratic
>
> Party. But by 2011, when Harper finally won his majority, his victory was helped by
>
> longtime Liberal ridings with significant numbers of Jewish voters who went Conserva-
>
> tive. (Zerbisias par. 21)

Stephen Harper voiced his support for Israeli cause on numerous occasions and even

"drew parallels between Canada and Israel and their enemies, saying that global threats to free-

dom and democracy may begin by targeting Israel but spread around the world" and also referred

to "'an overwhelming trend' in the world to single out Israel 'in the most extreme and bizarre

ways that it is so out of proportion with any reality. Well, friends, we are never going along with

that. It is just wrong'" (Montreal Gazette par. 1-4). Murtaza Hussain wrote about Harper's government initial response to Israel-Palestine conflict:

> On the issue of Israel-Palestine, the Harper government has demonstrated its commitment to completely shedding Canada's image as an impartial and honest mediator. Mr. Harper's identification not just with Israel but with the Israeli far-right has been complete. Between supporting Israeli military offensives against the Gaza Strip and Lebanon (even when <u>Canadian peacekeepers have been killed</u> in the crossfire), fighting the Palestinian campaign for international recognition of its nascent state, and implicitly recognizing <u>Israeli control over East Jerusalem</u>, Mr. Harper has made an unequivocal point that Canada is in fact *not* an impartial mediator to this conflict (Hussain par.7).

It was during Harper's reign and in this political environment that *Three Wishes* was banned. In the above described context it was not surprising that the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) could have had such an influence over schools and libraries, most likely counting on Harper's support. In 2006, two years after its publication, but simultaneously with putting the book on the Silver Birch list, CJC said that "Ellis had provided a flawed historical introduction to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and that some of the children in the book portrayed Israeli soldiers as brutal, expressed ethnic hatred and glorified suicide bombing" (Aasi par. 5), and asked the school boards to deny children access to the book, which resulted in it being pulled from library shelves and restricted or no access to children in some Ontario schools and libraries. PEN Canada and the Writer's Union saw this as an act of censorship and asked librarians and teachers to stand up to it.

Earlier the Jewish organization B'nai Brith called for the removal of a Groundwood book because of its content—the award-winning *The Shepherd's Granddaughter* (2008) by Anne

Laurel Carter, a book about a Palestinian girl whose family and flock of sheep are threatened by

the arrival of Jews in their country. The organization called the book "'anti-Israeli propaganda'

and 'a one-sided work of fiction which demonizes the Jewish State'" (Kanns01 par. 2). In both

cases it was "interesting that only one group presented in the book raised objections" (Aasi par.

13). That both books were banned in a short time span reflects the Canadian government's re-

striction of Palestinian rights. For example, the Conservative government voting against granting

Palestine non-member observer State status at the United Nations, together with the United

States and six others—Palestine was eventually granted this status by 138 votes.[5] Mahmoud

Abbas[6] had said that "while largely symbolic, the status change would provide 'a birth certificate

to the reality of the State of Palestine'" (Raj par. 3), and both Canada and Israel "saw this as a

"'shortcut' to Palestinian statehood that would impede negotiations between Jerusalem and Ra-

mallah[7]" (Raj par. 3), which is why Canada voted against. Nabeel Shaath[8] wrote for *The Globe*

and Mail that the Harper government "ha[d] done everything possible in order to undermine

Palestine's international status and stand in the way of our right to self-determination" (par. 2).

There is an Arab minority in Canada but they are not as organized and thus not as influential as

the Jewish community. On numerous occasions pro-Palestinian rallies were held in Canada to ad-

dress Harper's one-sided approach. Mackay writes that "[a] strong argument can be made that

Canada's biased approach to this issue has led to a loss of influence in the international arena,"

thus making it more difficult for itself to "play a constructive role in the peace process with its

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5 And the Harper Conservative government eliminated support for the Palestinian refugee aid or-
ganisation United Nations Relief and Work Agency as part of its initiative to eliminate support
for organizations in aid of Palestine.
6 The President of the State of Palestine and Palestinian National Authority.
7 Palestinian city in the central West Bank, located 10 km north of Jerusalem.
8 A senior member of Fatah, the Palestinian National Liberation Movement.

current stance" (37) – a development Palestinian supporters often cited as a critique or Canadian foreign policy and policy toward its minorities.

Last year (2015) Liberals won the election and hopes were up that the new government would ease up on its pro-Israeli stance; however, although Justin Trudeau's government is still pretty fresh[9], some media suggest that it will keep the same friendly attitude towards Israel, at a moment in history when there is widespread criticism of Netanyahu's extremism. A resolution proposed by Canadian Green Party leader Elizabeth May provoked controversy by calling for the revocation of the charitable status of the Canadian Jewish National Fund for "<u>discrimination against</u> non-Jews in Israel through its bylaws which prohibit the lease or sale of its lands to non-Jews" (Engler par. 2, emphasis in original).

Racist rhetoric can be heard in Netanyahu's speeches. For example, in February 2016 he called Palestinians "wild beasts." Before that, in January 2016 he said that one-state solution cannot be achieved because

> one people, the Jewish people, is "completely Israeli," isn't affected with terrorism and feels bone-deep loyal to the state. The other people, the Arab Israelis — or, more accurately, Israeli Muslims — lives in lawless enclaves, hoards weapons and engages in Islamic incitement and in terror. (Haaretz Editorial par. 1)

Furthemore, Netanyahu's promotion of ultra rightists, such as the new defense minister Avigdor Lieberman, and justice minister Ayelet Shaked, lead to the creation of the most far-right government in Israel's recent history. Avigdor Lieberman is an ultranationalist who calls for

> the death penalty for terrorists — although only for Palestinians who kill Israelis, not Israelis who kill Palestinians. He has proposed a solution to the conflict that would strip

---

9 The Liberal Party, led by Justin Trudeau, won the federal election on 19 October 2015. Trudeau and his Cabinet were sworn in on 4 November 2015.

some of Israel's Arab population of their long-standing citizenship, a program dubbed

"transfer" because citizens would be like undesirable pawns transferred to areas under the

control of the Palestinian Authority…He has continued to question the loyalty of Pales-

tinian citizens of Israel…and has campaigned to make them sign a loyalty pledge or have

their citizenship revoked. (Prusher par. 6-7)

Shaked, the justice minister, is also known for her ultranationalist views:

During Israel's summer 2014 attacks on Gaza, … Shaked essentially called for the geno-

cide of Palestinians. In a Facebook post on July 1st—a day before Israeli extremists kid-

napped Palestinian teenager Muhammad Abu Khdeir and burned him alive—the law-

maker asserted that "the entire Palestinian people is the enemy" and called for its destruc-

tion, "including its elderly and its women, its cities and villages, its property and its infra-

structure." (Norton par. 2)

Justin Trudeau met with Netanyahu for the first time in November 2015 and at that point

said that "Canada and Israel have superb relations. There's a foundation to make these relations

even stronger" (Trudeau meets with Netanyahu par. 2). So far Trudeau's rhetoric has been very

similar to Harper's: when he gave talks in Canadian synagogues before the general election in

2015, he said that Canada "will have Israel's back because it is the only democracy in the Middle

East, sharing the very values and ideals that define Canada: values of openness, respect, compas-

sion, that seek for justice, search for peace" (Zerbisias par. 13). The new Foreign Affairs Minis-

ter, Stephane Dion, who was speaking "after the Trudeau government's first cabinet meeting"

(Thompson par. 5), on 04 November 2015, said that "Israel is a friend, it is an ally," but "for

[Canada] to be an effective ally we need also to strengthen our relationship with the other legiti-

mate partners in the region" (Zerbisias par. 24). It remains to be seen how the relationship be-

tween Canada and other countries in the region Dion mentioned in his talk develops in the future

and how this affects Canada's foreign policy towards Israel and Palestine.

2.3.2. Geopolitics of Afghanistan

When it comes to Afghanistan, it is safe to say that Canada applies the same "terrorist"

narrative Israel applies to Palestine: the West is going to Afghanistan to civilize it and liberate

women, and in the same manner, Israeli Jews will enlighten the Indigenous Palestinians. Yasmin

Jiwani writes that "protection scenario" was used to justify the war in Afghanistan and to frame

Afghanistan in the mainstream media coverage of the war: "In this scenario, the hero protects the

helpless victim and fights against the villain. The United States has thus been cast, or has cast it-

self, in the role of chivalrous warrior out to rescue helpless maidens. Canada has followed suit"

(732).

The Government of Canada indicates on its website that "Canada's ultimate goal is to

help Afghans rebuild Afghanistan into a viable country that is better governed, more stable and

secure, and never again a safe haven for terrorists" (Armed Forces par. 6). The Canadian Armed

Forces military and training missions operated in Afghanistan for more than twelve years, for-

mally ending their involvement in March 2014 (the United States pulled out in December 2014).

During this time one hundred and fifty-eight soldiers were killed, and the cost of this war is esti-

mated around $15 billion. It is questionable whether the West has actually accomplished any-

thing in Afghanistan:

> The truth is that, though Afghanistan is better off today than it was in 2001, with schools
>
> where there were none and some security where there was little, violence has also soared
>
> to levels unseen since the Taliban fell, the Taliban have returned in force to large parts of

the country, the economy is still a basket case, and the government is often corrupt and incompetent. (Globe Editorial par. 2)

Not even a year after the Western forces left Afghanistan, in September 2015, the Taliban took over Kunduz[10] unopposed, and are slowly taking over the rest of the province. In response, Barack Obama has decided to keep almost ten thousand soldiers that in Afghanistan in place until 2017. The Taliban decided to leave Kunduz after "15 days, long enough to terrify and murder enough citizens to make an indelible impression" (Jones par. 16). The local army and police trained by the US and Canadian forces "for that staggering price of at least $65 billion dollars (such costs have now been 'classified'), is not exactly the stunning force that's been advertised" (Jones par. 19); the West has overestimated the size of Afghani police and army, a lot of their soldiers or police officers get killed or wounded in relentless Taliban attacks, and they still need the support of US troops. The proposed development is still not happening; "the new Afghan 'democracy' is run by Washington's hand picked warlords" (Jones par. 22); the gap between the rich and the poor is ever wider; and young men and women are forced to go to Iran or Pakistan in search of a better life. It remains to be seen how the U.S. will handle Afghanistan after the election. Canada will probably not go back to Afghanistan, but at that time considered it a brave and humane thing to do.

2.4. Conclusion

The creation of these two books in these political conditions and in this country at this moment in history demonstrates that it was necessary to be a voice of disagreement, a counter-discourse to the mainstream government rhetoric. It could be argued that these Canadian books

10 The capital of the province of Kunduz in northern Afghanistan, with a population of about 270,000.

were necessary in order to educate children and young adults about what their peers in extremely violent circumstances elsewhere go through.

Deborah Ellis's books allow the young readers to put themselves in their shoes. If we want our youth to be sympathetic to struggles of others we need to have books that will show how others live. These two books tap into foreign policy, human rights issues, children's rights, and education and it is important for the Western children to be aware of differences in the globalized world and see what their peers are facing.

3. Case study: child, childhood and critical literacy theory

The study of the child in literature and culture has become a remarkably active area of scholarship over the last few decades. My work will be enhanced by the reframing of the child in, for instance, Wafaa Hasan's commentary about the need to complicate the stereotypic category of innocence in order to "heterogenize childhood experience" (1). In all her works Deborah Ellis foregrounds children's individual experiences in order to demonstrate the similarities and differences between children living in the East and those living in the West. This provides contrasting portraits of the "child" in the context of globalization.

3.1. Who is a child? What is childhood?

The question of who is considered a child is still widely debated but there are many definitions that all revolve around the same idea of certain age limits which denote the beginning and the end of childhood. According to the 1989 *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC), signing of which "was a pivotal event, not only in the development of policies

for children but also in terms of scholarship" (Bluebond-Langner and Korbin 241), and other

similar international laws that deal with children's rights, a child is any human between zero and

eighteen years of age. These age boundaries are highly porous, arbitrary, and tend to vary. For

example, majority is sometimes attained before or after eighteen years of age depending on na-

tional laws of individual countries, and the debates surrounding the question of when a child is

recognized as a child–at the moment of its conception or after its birth–are still very much

present. Furthermore, according to Montgomery, "[t]he boundaries between child, fetus, and em-

bryo are extremely blurred, often representing the distinction between person and nonperson, and

in some cases between life and nonlife. Ideas concerning these boundaries are problematic, cul-

turally specific, and deeply contested" (80). Thus,

> a child may be recognized as fully human from the moment of conception (the position of
>
> the modern Catholic Church), or it may be seen as becoming a person more gradually
>
> and, in some cases, not recognized as a full human being until several days or months af-
>
> ter its birth. (Montgomery 80)

Since the upper limit is prescribed not only by international laws, but national laws and

regulations as well it is obvious that childhood is a profoundly political category, rather than be-

ing a natural one. Different societies, cultures, or nations define different boundaries referring to

when childhood begins and ends according to their accepted rites of passage which can be cultur-

ally, religiously, or otherwise defined. Wells argues that "these different social and cultural con-

ceptions of what childhood is and should be are manifested in laws, policies, and a range of age-

based social divisions and institutions that contextualize the everyday lives of children in any so-

ciety" (169). In Israel for example, bar/bat mitzvah[11] signifies a time when a child becomes ac-

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11 A girl becomes a bat mitzvah at the age of twelve, and boys become bar mitzvah at the age of
thirteen.

countable for his/her actions in the Jewish community. Also, in Israel conscription is obligatory

for boys and for girls when they turn 18, which signifies an acceptable age for young people to

get involved in adult issues, such as war. Several legal provisions, such as the already mentioned

UNCRC and the 1997 additional protocol to the Geneva Convention "establish the age of fifteen

as the threshold that separates a child from and adult" (Knight and McCoy 289). When it comes

to the recruitment of child soldiers, age boundaries shift depending on legislation. According to

Knight and McCoy

> Article 77 of the Additions Protocol to Geneva Conventions (1997) states, "The parties to
>
> the conflict shall take all feasible measures in order that children who have not attained
>
> the age of 15 years do not take a direct part in hostilities, and, in particular, they shall re-
>
> frain from recruiting them into armed forces." (289)

> However, in 2000 "Article 4 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of

the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict expressly banned…recruiting or using

persons under the age of eighteen in hostilities," known as the "straight-eighteen" standard

(Knight and McCoy 289), in accordance with the UNCRC which defines a child as any person

between zero and eighteen years of age. But, some "observers...have questioned the usefulness of

a universalized age limit on child soldiery" (Knight and Mccoy 297) by arguing that

> there is a wealth of sociological and anthropological literature that aims to denaturalise
>
> the idea of childhood and posits that there are a multitude of childhoods across cultures,
>
> throughout history and across geographical spaces. Thus the age at which childhood is
>
> thought to end, the presumed character and competencies of children, and the beliefs,
>
> customs and norms about what is appropriate for children to do are highly contingent
>
> rather than universal. (Park 332)

Palestinian laws set legal age at eighteen years of age, as well as laws in Afghanistan, with the difference that Afghanistan also sets the minimum age for marriage at sixteen for girls and at eighteen for boys. When it comes to differences between individual countries, Montgomery argues that

> The stages of a Western child's life tend now to be demarcated by bureaucracy (what age a child starts school, or when he or she has certain legal rights), but these change over time and depend on social context, so that, for example children may start school at five in the UK, or at seven in Scandinavia. Other societies differentiate between children much more explicitly so that childhood is a series of age-related stages which a child must pass on the way to adulthood. Passage through these stages occurs with the gradual assumption of responsibilities rather than when a set chronological age is reached. (53)

Criminal cases are another proof of porousness and arbitrariness of the definition of child and childhood. In criminal cases that involve young people the definition of who is considered a child changes from case to case depending on what the judge deems appropriate in each particular case, and depending on the perceived severity of the crime that was committed. In court cases these age limits also change and shift depending on the severity of the committed crime, because, Linde writes, "[c]hild offenders who commit the most egregious crimes are the least sympathetic children in society, in part because their behavior belies their age" (1). Thus, it is desirable to protect children who pose no threat to the established order, but not those who are a threat to society.

Various scholarly disciplines have been trying to tackle the issues of describing and defining the categories of child and childhood. Wallace writes that "[t]he idea of childhood was firmly consolidated by the middle of the nineteenth century as evidenced by a raising discourse

of child management and discipline, together with a series of legislative reforms focusing on

child welfare" (291). As explained by Hendrick, the progress made in various disciplines, such as

medicine, psychology, statistics, sociology, meant that people could be observed and studied in a

completely new way:

> Throughout the nineteenth century, for example, the influences of Romanticism and
>
> Evangelicalism, the social and economic impact of the industrial revolution, and the com-
>
> bined effects of urban growth, class politics, the "rediscovery" of poverty, imperialism,
>
> and the "revolution" in the social sciences, all made necessary new understandings and
>
> new practices. As these changes were involved with the building of an industrial state
>
> and, later on, a liberal industrial democracy, no part of the societal fabric was left unat-
>
> tended, or unreconstructed, not least those areas most relevant to this essay: family, rela-
>
> tionships, concept of health, welfare and education, and the value of children as invest-
>
> ments for the future. Similarly twentieth-century influences such as popular democracy,
>
> world wars, psychoanalysis and the "Welfare State", have profoundly altered the ways in
>
> which 'childhood' has been put together. (30)

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, "[t]he scientific study of populations,

observations of children, and categorization through assessments produced 'new' types of 'ad-

vanced' and 'progressive' knowledge about childhood, the family and schooling" (Bloch,

Kennedy, Lightfoot and Weyenberg 8). The rise of educational systems meant that more children

could be taken out of adult society by being put in schools rather than in labor positions, thus ef-

fectively distinguishing childhood from adulthood. School, argues Wallace, was supposed to

bring a child into "being" (291) by molding her according to standards set by adults. Similarly,

Bloch, Kennedy, Lightfoot, and Weyberg argue that, "[i]n the early twentieth century, scholars

became convinced that it was possible to construct standards that would apply to all and that it would be possible to test and evaluate standards and procedures for normal learning, high quality schooling, teaching, and parenting" (8). Thus, this period brought a lot of changes in the way children were regarded and treated and led to numerous conceptualizations of childhood. In the more recent history, developmental psychology has described phases of person's life and what is considered normal when it comes to what should be achieved developmentally (physically and mentally) by what age. In developmental psychology, Jean Piaget[12] came up in 1936 with an evolutionary model of development (from simple to more complex thought, from irrational to rational behaviour, from child to adult). As explained by James and Prout, "[i]n Piaget's account, child development has a particular structure, consisting of a series of predetermined stages, which lead towards the eventual achievement of logical competence. This is the mark of adult rationality" (9). This model is still widely applied and taken its influence is still very much powerful. Furthermore, sociology has worked out the notion of socially constructed character of childhood which has led to "the recognition that children's own experiences of childhood…vary historically and culturally" (James 168). Anthropology has worked to show that "the idea of a universal child is an impossible fiction and that children's lives are influenced as strongly by their culture and their biology" (Montgomery 1).

During the past sixty years or so, there has been a significant increase in the body of literature on childhood. In his very influential and somewhat controversial book, *Centuries of Childhood: a Social History of Family Life*, first published in English in 1962, Philippe Ariès[13] argued

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12 Jean Piaget (1896-1980) was a clinical psychologist who was the first to "make a systematic study of cognitive development. His contributions include a theory of child cognitive development, detailed observational studies of cognition in children, and a series of simple but ingenious tests to reveal different cognitive abilities" (McLeod par. 5).

13 The French "historical demographer and pioneering historian of collective mentalities Philippe Ariès [1914-1984] is best known for his *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Ré-*

that in the fifteenth century it was believed that, after "children left the dependent state of early

childhood there was no concept of children as a separate category of people requiring special or

distinctive treatment from adults" (Wells 5), and that childhood is a modern invention. In the

Middle Ages, Ariès claims, children were treated as small adults and were not given any special

protection after the initial dependent phase. Although sometimes disputed because of his "selec-

tive and uncritical use of evidence (Wells 7), Aries's central thesis was that "the attitudes, sensi-

bilities and experiences that we now think of as immanent to childhood are an invention of the

modern period," an idea that is still "widely accepted by historians and social scientists" (Wells

6).

Among the critiques of Ariès' work, Karen Wells' 2009 analysis reworked his notion of

childhood as a modern invention by studying historiographies of childhood on four continents;

she set out to disprove his thesis, as well as those of other thinkers in the field of childhood soci-

ology, anthropology, cultural studies, and literature. This work led to her discovery that "in each

of these diverse regions societies recognized childhood as a distinct phase in the life cycle, and

children as different kinds of people" (12). If this is so, then childhood must be a universal cate-

gory that covers any person under the age of 18 anywhere in the world, and it must be a category

separate from adulthood. However, Stearns warns, even though "[t]he history of childhood is a

rich subject, it has not been evenly explored across the world; a pronounced Western dispropor-

tion continues to affect the field. Comparative, much less global, opportunities have rarely been

addressed" (845). Much criticism childhood theory is directed at the fact that research is mostly

done in and about the Western countries. The theory that comes out this kind of research is not

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gime (1960, published in English in 1962 as *Centuries of Childhood*), the seminal study that
launched historical scholarship on childhood and family life in the Western world" (Hutton par.
1).

applicable everywhere in the world. This kind of research assumes that because children share

some characteristics they all fit one and the same category–the category of childhood. But, this is

oversimplifying the richness of potential research and potential results that could be obtained by

comparing and studying childhood on a broader comparative level.

The general assumptions about the child and childhood "mean that groups of children are

seen as single-minded and single-bodied rather than as being made up of specific and distinct in-

dividuals" (Steffler 113). This is how international charters and laws came about: children were

seen as one united group that should enjoy the same rights everywhere because age is what mat-

ters and the West has already prescribed what childhood is and what it should look like. Further-

more, Steffler writes, "assumptions about the existence of a common 'childhood' obviously in-

volve the imposition of contemporary Western values as the basis for the ideal and standard of

what should be saved and protected" (117).

That childhood is not universal as we might think we can see in our own backyard here in

Canada. Residential schools are the prime example of the fact that childhood is not as universal

as the Western thinkers like to argue. Over one hundred and fifty years, thousands of Indigenous

children were torn away from their families, mistreated, and their culture was eliminated in the

attempt to "un-indigenize" them and make them "fit" the white society. Established in the 1840,

> before Confederation, Canada's Indian Residential schools were consolidated by the pas-
>
> sage of the *Indian Act* in 1876. Schools were funded by the Federal Government of
>
> Canada and administered by Christian churches—The Roman Catholic Church, The An-
>
> glican Church of Canada, and The United Church of Canada in particular. Conditions sur-
>
> rounding and inside residential schools did significant harm to Aboriginal children who
>
> attended them and the damage done to individuals, families, and communities—and cul-

ture(s)—is irreparable. Children were often forcibly removed from their families and communities, prohibited from practicing their culture and speaking their languages. The routinized practices of abuse (sexual, physical, emotional) regularly exposed children to harm… (Young 67)

Canada's residential school system officially began in 1892, because many "government officials and church leaders argued that assimilation of Indigenous peoples needed to start with children" (Neeganagwedgin 33). Attendance of residential schools was mandatory for all children up to fifteen years of age. Parents were forced to allow the removal of their children "under the threat of legal action" (Neeganagwedgin 33). Furthermore, as Neeganagwedgin writes, "under the *Indian Act*, Indigenous peoples could not hire lawyers to help contest government actions, so reinforcing Canada's paternalistic policies and the systemic marginalization of Indigenous peoples" (33). Once in residential schools, siblings were separated, their hair was cut, and they were punished for speaking in their own language (English and/or French were imposed upon them). They were also starved "as a part of an ill-conceived experiment, their health was neglected, and they were subjected to such indignities as a home-made electric chair as entertainment for staff" (Neeganagwedgin 33). According to Neeganagwedgin, it is estimated that thousands of children died in residential schools (34). The residential school system was one of "the most damaging colonial practices in the lives of Indigenous peoples" (Neeganagwedgin 34).

The residential school system continued until the 1970s, and even though residential schools are closed now (in 2016), the trauma of separation and the lived experience of residential schools survivors still remains a major concern. In Canada, "[o]ver 130 residential schools were located across the country, and the last school closed in 1996" (TRC About Us par.1). In 1998 the Canadian government led by Prime Minister Jean Chrétien released "'a statement of reconcil-

iation' to First Nations," accompanied by a "$350 million 'Healing Fund'" (MacDonald 1002),

however this was just the first step in the long recovery of Indigenous peoples. Litigations or

class actions are used nowadays by Indigenous peoples to achieve some justice for what was

done to them: "Over the last two decades, the Canadian legal system has been more actively en-

gaged in attempting to remedy the many wrongs committed in the schools" (Moran and Roach

481). During the time residential school system was used, nobody seemed to care about the fact

that children were being used and abused with the goal of eradicating Indigenous cultures, lan-

guages, and families. That childhood should be universal, and that childhood is a sacred space

that should be protected, did not matter much to either government official who introduced this

system or religious communities that ensured the system runs according to set goals. In 2008 the

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was established with a mandate to

> learn the truth about what happened in the residential schools and to inform all Canadians

> about what happened in the schools. The Commission [documented] the truth of what

> happened by relying on records held by those who operated and funded the schools, testi-

> mony from officials of the institutions that operated the schools, and experiences reported

> by the survivors, their families, communities and anyone personally affected by the resi-

> dential school experience and its subsequent impacts. (TRC About Us par. 5)

This Commission was specific because it was "[c]onstituted and created by the Indian

Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, which settled the class action" (Honouring the Truth

v). The TRC's mandate was completed in December 2015. In those seven years, the members of

the Commission travelled "to all parts of Canada to hear from [more than six thousand] Aborigi-

nal people who had been taken from their families as children, forcibly if necessary, and placed

for much of their childhood in residential schools" (Honouring the Truth v). The Commission's

findings have been presented in various publications and suggest that "virtually all aspects of Canadian society may need to be reconsidered" (Honouring the Truth vi) to come to reconciliation. Unfortunately, more detailed discussion of the Commission's findings exceeds the limits of this thesis.

The first international educational policy in Canada "was the policy that excluded education equity for indigenous people and the First Nations of the land that became Canada" (Shultz 110). According to Shultz, historically Canada did not have national educational policies in place, thus leaving "education within the jurisdiction of provinces" (110). This "decentralized model of education was part of the early agreement of the colonial powers that formed the country called Canada and wrote its Constitution, the British North America Act (BNA) in 1867" (Shultz 110). However, this model applied only to immigrants—when it came to Indigenous peoples, their education was to be handled by the federal government. While

> European settlers...were seen to be capable and trustworthy enough to make their own educational decisions, the indigenous people were viewed as both deficient and dangerous and therefore,were to be controlled through education provided by the Government of England. (Shultz 110-1)

If you are a white child in Canada, historically, your innocence has been assumed and it is expected your childhood should be happy and safe, but if you are a child of color you still face racism and inequality on everyday basis in 2016. The question of universal childhood is in Canada visible even in classrooms nowadays, with more and more immigrants coming into Canada. Although "[a]nti-racist, or anti-racism, education, as a philosophy, a concept, and an approach, started to take shape in Canada, borrowing from the British example, in the early 1980s" (Carr 9), racism is still present in schools even when it is not overt. Additionally,

"Canada has an official pluralist identity and is the only nation in the world with its multicul-
tural ideas formally enshrined in its constitution in a variety of government policies" (Lund
206), however does this work in reality? According to McCue, a survey in 2014 showed that
"81 percent of British Columbians of Chinese and South Asian descent report they have experi-
enced some type of discrimination as a result of their ethnicity" (par. 20). In British Columbia,
"violent clashes broke out [in 2014] between white and South Asian students" (CRRF par. 10), a
testament to racism in high-school children in the "developed" West. It is not easy being Black
or Native in Canada either. Sandy Hudson, co-founder of Black Lives Matter Toronto, says that

> In Canada there is this myth of this country being this place where people can run away
> to be free and it's this haven. Maybe there's some problems in this community but just
> work hard and you'll be fine. People need to understand that history, in that way, is a
> myth. This multi-cultural haven is non-existent and the effects of colonization on indige-
> nous and black people across the Americas and beyond has affected all black people in a
> negative way. (CBCNews, Black Activism par. 14-15)

International laws assume that all people, especially children, should have the same
rights, but those rights are assumed on principles and notions of modern, developed West that
secures the well-being of children and strives to protect children in any way possible, through
laws, through education, through developed social system, and so on. However, various exam-
ples show that international (and national, federal, provincial, and so on) laws do not apply to
everyone. Prime example in Canada was the case of Toronto-born Canadian Omar Khadr, who
was captured after a firefight in Afghanistan in 2002, at the age of fifteen. He was charged with
"throwing a hand grenade that fatally wounded Sgt Christopher Speer, a Delta force strategic
forces soldier and medic" (Timeline xv) and was imprisoned in Guantánamo Bay. Canada did

"not secure… the release from Guantánamo of one of its nationals" (Timeline xvii) until 2011.

He was finally released in 2015, after thirteen years of imprisonment, during which he was exposed to various kinds of torture. Being designated an unlawful/enemy combatant, Khadr could not enjoy the protection of any rights, human or children's. As an unlawful/enemy combatant – a category invented during the George Bush post 9/11 era, he was not entitled to the status of a prisoner of war or any rights associated with this status. Khadr was born in Canada, has Canadian citizenship and lived in Canada prior to going to Afghanistan with his family. Canada's lack of action when it came to helping Khadr effectively rendered him Canada's "banished citizen" (Introduction: The Story so Far 9) who was left to fend for himself. Even though, according to Rosen, international laws serve to "protect from the severest punishments of law captured children who are unlawful combatants or have committed war crimes" (300), this did not happen in Khadr's case. After 9/11 Muslim men were labelled as enemies and terrorists. Young men especially were seen as a threat. Omar Khadr, being young Muslim who had supposedly killed an American hero, was simply not deemed worth saving. Zine argues that

> The deep-seated Western fears about "radicalized Muslim" youth are epitomized by
> Omar: a "homegrown" Canadian who has abandoned the privilege of Western values,
> norms, and sensibilities in favour of the irrational, backward, religiously inspired terror of
> al-Queda. (391)

The same rhetoric is applied when it comes to legitimizing the differences in the application of international laws. When it comes to countries that are considered less developed, "backward" or "stuck in religious discourse," the same rights cannot be applied if, for nothing else, for the fact that their economic status is usually much lower than the Western and these nations cannot uphold these international laws without significant help from the West. This is an-

other vicious circle: the West will try to bring in its standards of what it thinks is right and disregard local differences. Race thinking "underscored by orientalist notions" (Zine 394) is also ever-present in the context of modern enlightenment processes conducted by the West. Religion and race remain the most important dimensions in constructing a nation's identity.

Racial thinking is a prominent issue in *Three Wishes.* Although I will analyze race in the following chapter of this thesis, I will briefly mention it here as well. As evidenced by children's testimonies in *Three Wishes*, adults themselves are often infantilized in war time, especially if they are persons of colour. In colonialist and war rhetoric adults who are to be conquered are often referred to and described in terms of children's development: they need to be educated; they need to be civilized; they need to be taught democracy and democratic values; they need to be taught proper behaviour. Wafaa Hasan argues that "childhood cannot exist within a marginalized people because the marginalized adult (like the colonized or racialized) is often infantilized him or herself" (7). Even though this adult is infantilized, she does not enjoy any additional rights that might stem from children's rights; the adult has no rights other than those the conqueror prescribes and allows.

Laws in *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC) are supposed to be in effect for every child everywhere in the world; however, one of the criticisms "frequently cited is that the [UN]CRC, like all other treaties dealing with children's rights, relies on the idea of 'the best interests of the child'" (Makman 290). It is hard to define those laws on a global level, considering the significant discrepancies between the modern (Western) and "premodern" (Second or Third World) countries. The same interests cannot apply for different children because they are not the same everywhere, if we take into consideration local specificities. The discourse of universal children's rights is often criticized for its "blindness to cultural

specificity…universalism fails to acknowledge cultural differences in meanings given to child-

hood, meanings that necessarily determine children's rights" (Makman 293). Thus, the best inter-

ests of a child in Canada might not be the best interests of a child in Palestine. Furthermore,

> The vision of childhood enshrined in the UNCRC is one where childhood is a separate
>
> space, protected from adulthood, in which children are entitled to special protection, pro-
>
> vision, and rights of participation. The UNCRC emphasizes that the proper place for chil-
>
> dren is at school or at home with their families. (Montgomery 6)

Not all children everywhere in the world have access to education or can be home with

their families, something the becomes clear among those children Deborah Ellis has interviewed

or heard about during the time she spent in Israel, Palestine or Afghanistan. Wars have destroyed

their countries, economy, education and their families. Many fathers have been arrested for dif-

ferent reasons; mothers are not encouraged to get involved in the local communities; children

and adults die every day. If we take into consideration what the West prescribes as the best inter-

est of the child, we can notice that, in this discourse, childhood is the direct opposite of adult-

hood, and children are stripped of all the agency they had possessed. The idea "of children as a

knowable and passive entity has roots in dominant Western discourse on childhood" (Hasan 3).

For example, John Locke[14] argued in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, published in

1689, that children are born as tabula rasas, or blank slates: they have to be molded, and adults

have to guide them through life; how well they do in life depends on the amount of time an adult

spends filling that white board. Wallace writes that our thinking about childhood is still very

much affected by Locke's theory, and that the "category of the 'child' is [even nowadays] largely

unchanged" (295). Quite different from Locke's theory, Allison James and Alan Prout argue that

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14 John Locke (1632-1704).

"[c]hildren are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own so-cial lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live. Children are not just the passive subjects of social structures and processes" (7).

In countries like Israel, Palestine or Afghanistan where children are more actively in-volved in the plights of their local communities, as evidenced in Ellis's works. For example, In *The Breadwinner* series, children, in most cases, girls, exemplified by Parvana and Shauzia, end up, one way or another, working for or helping women's organizations by taking some sort of ac-tion to help build better lives for other girls or children.

In *Three Wishes*, some children whose voices are heard talk about their activities. Pales-tinian children throw rocks at soldiers because that's all they can do for their community. They do not want to feel powerless and this is the only way they know might make a difference: "I fight the soldiers a lot. It feels good to throw stones at them. They should not be in my town, so I throw stones to make them go away. They do bad things," says one boy (95). Israeli children or-ganize clubs where other children can come and be safe. It is mostly older children, aged 16-18, who participate in the work of various organizations that help their peers or people in their com-munity— "I am very involved in politics, in activities to draw attention to the injustice that is go-ing on, and hopefully make things better," says an Israeli eighteen year old (119).

Afghani children take care of their families by finding jobs and making money. During the Taliban, as described in *The Breadwinner*, first book of the series, there were many boys and girls dressed as boys working in the streets of Kabul—"As a boy, you'll be able to move in and out of the market, buy what we need, and no one will stop you," says Parvana's mother at the be-ginning of the series (63). This is the case in *The Mud City* as well, as witnessed by Shauzia when she roams the streets of Peshawar in search of a job. Shauzia begins dressing as a boy in

Kabul, but soon learns that she has more freedom as a boy and she sticks to her boy identity

through the entirety of the series, with the exception of a few episodes in which she allows her-

self to be a girl, for example in the widow's compound at a refugee camp. Shauzia accepts all

and any job just to survive. She does not shy away from digging through garbage and selling it in

order to make money, buy food and survive. In the West, child labor is frowned upon and many

global actions have been put in place to fight it. As I mentioned in the first segment of this para-

graph, this is culturally specific:

> In the second half of the twentieth century, an international consensus developed on the
>
> elimination of the practice based upon the desire to protect children and favour their men-
>
> tal and cognitive development. Echoing this consensus, in 1973, the International Labor
>
> Organization (ILO) designed a convention establishing at fifteen years the minimum age
>
> for admission to employment. (Dessy and Pallage 68)

> However, children in so called developing countries are sometimes forced by their par-
>
> ents or other circumstances to look for employment. The types of jobs those children acquire
>
> mostly include manual labor, but also prostitution, pornographic industry, underground mining—
>
> basically jobs that Dessy and Pallage call "the worst forms of child labor" (69). Child labor is
>
> considered one of the biggest issues globally, which is why

> Consumers, human rights groups, child rights activists, religious organisations, politi-
>
> cians, governments, international organisations (such as ILO with its international pro-
>
> gramme on the elimination of child labour (IPEC), and UNICEF) are joining the world
>
> campaign to stop the abuse of exploited children. (Remington 3354)

> There are arguments in favor of child labour, and Remington names some: if children do

not work, they will starve; if they are banned from working, they will resort to sex industry; the

fact that children have always worked in developing countries (3354). He explains that the third argument is not in itself correct because "children were part of the labour force in artisanal and agricultural economies but it was within their families and the workload allowed time to play and interact with other children," whereas today, "children are being moved far away from their families to toil in illegal factories" (3354). Circumstances in Afghanistan, and those described in *The Breadwinner* series—war, occupation by the Taliban, restrictions on women's rights during the Taliban, death or arrests of male members of families, being forced to flee from their own homes and live in refugee camps, lack of parental/adult control, the possibility of disguising as someone else—allow for the child labour. This kind of child labour is not sanctioned, and in *The Breadwinner* series it is presented as an adventure, as something that brings a certain freedom. While Parvana and Shauzia find work liberating and do not shy away from any type of job, Nooria, Parvana's sister in *Parvana's Journey* carries out the labor of educating and raising new generations of Afghani girls and boys. They all carry out their tasks proudly and responsibly because they know others depend on them. Child labour described in this work also brings the sense of fulfillment for the children because they can take care of themselves and their families.

In the West, children are sometimes active participants in their communities as volunteers in their local organizations, but they will also attempt to get a side job, just as a way of earning some pocket money. I do not wish to generalize here and say that it is the same for every child in the West, because it is definitely not. But many children in North America will get jobs alongside their education and be able to do both at the same time, and will in most cases be allowed to spend their money on whatever they wish. Although some children end up falling through social system's cracks and have to engage in all sorts of employments, including escort or sex industry, just to survive, most employers in North America will only employ children who

are at least fifteen years of age, although Alberta is a throwback to an earlier agricultural era and allows children as young as twelve to work in paid labour.

In Ellis's works numerical age does not matter for obtaining a job, education, or anything else pretty much. I argue that Ellis works towards the destabilization of defining (children's) age by numbers. She does this by positing children's identities as fluid, in that they cannot be pinned down by a number, but by their experiences. She uses the traditional numerical age in her books to give the readers an idea of what they might expect to hear from particular speakers, and per-haps, to explore the relationship between the numerical and experiential age based on these chil-dren's accounts. In the beginning of each interview in *Three Wishes*, the readers are given the name and the numerical age of the child speaking, possibly because the shock effect—children as young as eight talk about wanting to kill soldiers or become martyrs—is an effective way to pro-voke thought and to provoke the West into taking action and making it possible for these children to have a "proper childhood." When we are given these children's numerical age, we project our expectations on that child according to what we, as Western readers, experientially know they might have experienced. We are shocked when a Palestinian twelve-year-old says "I don't think it would hurt if I blew myself up" (117). If childhood is a sacred space defined by numerical age, how then can a child who is twelve think about blowing herself up? One does not expect that children that age could reason about this in a critical and methodical way. However, this child's lived experience—her sister blowing herself up and being celebrated as a martyr, and her and her friends being hurt by the Israeli soldiers on daily basis—makes her more prone to analyze the sit-uation in terms of suicide. Powerless to act affirmatively, this is her only way to help her commu-nity.

The sense of shared responsibility to do something for her people makes her sound like an adult. Had we not been told her numerical age, would we have been able to guess just by hearing her voice? I argue we would not, because we would expect an adult to be voicing such opinions and determination. How can a child of twelve be saying these things? Hasan argues that Ellis's books "leave distinct and numerical age boundaries fruitless" (3) because they both show that their age is just a number and it should not restrict a person in any way. Age for Ellis's children in war is nothing but a number. Wafa, a twelve-year-old Palestinian girl, says "I'm no longer a child" (104), because of everything she has experiences so far. For example, she says: "Killing an Israeli will make me feel glad. It will make me feel strong. I am tired of them making me feel small and weak. I want to feel strong and proud" (106). When we read this, we hear an experienced adult, who has lived their entire life under oppression and in constant fear.

If the reader was not informed of the numerical age of the child at the beginning of each interview, it would be hard to estimate exactly how old they are, precisely because of our own prejudices and expectations of experiences a person should or should not have at certain numeri-cal age. Ellis obviously thought it important to let us know how old these children are. Maybe she did this so the child reading can compare his or her own experience to the child s/he is read-ing about, or because adults will be surprised by some of the things that young children say. In Ellis's books it is the experience of war and everything children went or are going through that makes those children seem older than they are. Their experiences lead to them not considering themselves regular children who have the right to behave like any other child does because of the circumstances they and their families live in. Mona and Mahmood, eleven-year-old Palestinians, say that "[i]t's hard to have a normal life because we are always holding our breath to see who will be shot next, who will be arrested next, when the next curfew will be" (53). Ellis's children

living in war are more responsible and acutely aware of the injustices that surround them. In *Three Wishes*, numerically youngest child who speaks is eight and the oldest is eighteen, but, when they talk, one does not see a big difference in experiential age when it comes to what each of them says. While younger children can only take small actions, such as throwing rocks at soldiers, the older children participate in their local communities and are trying to contribute in a useful way. For example, Mai, an eighteen year old Israeli says that "[t]he war has affected me very much. I am very involved in politics, in activities to draw attention to the injustice that is going on, and hopefully make things better" (119), while a younger child, twelve-year old Palestinian girl says that she "will turn this hate into action in the future. I will fight the Israelis with weapons" (105). These are very concrete actions, and children, guided by their experience, are thus made seem older than their numerical age.

Ellis is trying to paint these children as not being contained by age numbers, but she does not fully escape the Western narrative of a traditional child and childhood: in her writing, younger children do not understand the complex issues that led to this war even though they have lived it their entire lives, but those who are older are shown to be capable of understanding the politics behind events in their countries so they can take more significant action. The age limits in these books thus still somewhat follow the standardized age limits normalized in the West. Eighteen is the cut-off point for the age of majority—when a person is not a child anymore but has all the rights and responsibilities of an adult. The explanation for the absence of children younger than eight years of age in the book is not explicitly given, but it might have something to do with problems of obtaining permission from parents or other caregivers. Using children as informants and publishing their testimonies is not unproblematic. Children in *Three Wishes* were singled out, their parents or other caregivers were asked to give their consent (in orphanages,

dorms, or schools). It is not stated whether children were asked for consents or how they were approached: were they singled out by their teacher because they're eloquent and smart, and because they'll shock the reader the most? However, Ellis's children in *Three Wishes* are highly politicized through their experiences of the war and the testimonies they produce as a result. According to Emberley, "[t]he testimony of children who experience the trauma of military violence is constitutive of the contemporary politicization of the child and ... childhood" (A Child 378). Research with children has its own problems. Bluebond-Langner and Korbin sum them up:

> in using quotations from children we have to be cognizant of all of the following: the selectivity of representation, uncritical quoting, polyphony of voices, whose point is being made (the [researcher's] or the children being quoted), and whose agenda is being served (e.g., the human rights community or the people of the community in which the child lives. (243)

Ellis uses whole chunks of text to represent children. However, in *Three Wishes*, children represent themselves. Although both Ellis's books invoke humanitarian narrative, they do point out that there is a polyphony of voices and a polyphony of experiences in childhood. When it comes to traditional categories of child and childhood, as defined and imagined in the Western discourse, Hasan argues that *Three Wishes*

> problematizes childhood as a biological or developmental category, and instead, defines it as a discursive classification contingent upon power structures. Childhood in *Three Wishes* is linked, not with a state of brain or corporeal development (i.e. biological maturity, but with a subject position characterized by powerlessness. The child presented in this book becomes a fluid subject position that can be applied to many ages. (6)

I agree with Hasan and I want to add that many children Ellis interviewed for this book do not see themselves as children; they do not use the word "child" to describe who they are, and neither do Parvana, Shauzia, or any of other children in *The Breadwinner* series. These children believe their actions, choices they make on everyday basis, their surroundings, lack of education, and the struggle to survive, make them older than they are. Numerical, chronological age is thus rendered unstable and fluid.

In the *Breadwinner* series Parvana and Shauzia are eleven at the beginning, but is around fourteen or fifteen (it is not explicitly said in the last book) by the time we come to the last book. We know this purely from the way Ellis describes Parvana's body changes: her hair grows; she sounds more mature. Also, there is a picture of a young girl on the cover of the first book of the series, and her picture is again used for the last book of the series, and her growing up is thus visually represented, even though her age is not explicitly given. Parvana's older sister Nooria is old enough to be married in *The Breadwinner*, and is old enough to go to university by the time Ellis finishes the series in *My Name is Parvana*. Other children's age does not matter. All of the children Shauzia and Parvana meet throughout the series are around their age. Their physical descriptions point to that fact, but nowhere do they explicitly talk about their chronological age. Both *The Breadwinner* series and *Three Wishes* challenge "many of the taken-for-granted assumptions about what children do or think" (Bluebond-Langner, and Korbin 245), but the fact is that the West is deeply invested in the myth of childhood innocence.

I argue that this kind of thinking is not unusual or even shocking for adults living in the same countries as the children depicted in these books, but it is shocking for the Western readers who live in safe countries where they may believe war cannot touch them. Western readers would not expect persons that young to understand injustices and political problems as well as

children in these two books do. Ellis's children are the "children of experience"; they are "knowing children" ("Can the Child" 162), and we do hear this point made in every interview we read, in every book Ellis wrote. However, we still empathize with these children, solely because some of them are numerically very young. We continue to believe they are not responsible for anything that is happening to them and that we should protect them, especially those who are numerically eight years old or younger because our own expectations are so deeply imbedded in numerical age. Instead, we should look at these children's experience and avoid making them fit into a box we want them to fit based on their numerical age. Children of experience, knowing children, take action when necessary and take responsibility for their actions and decisions. Ellis's children are forced to make sacrifices for their families, for their friends, and for themselves, thus making them grow up sooner rather than later, but they do not see this as something negative. Reading these two works, we can hear the optimism in children's voices. For example, a fifteen-year-old Palestinian boy says that "[i]t's important to protect people, protect the Palestinians, I mean. I want to be a moral voice in the army, to keep other soldiers from abusing Palestinians" (109). They want to bring about a change, and do good for everyone around them in any way they can, be that suicide bombing, or becoming politically active.

3.2. Globalized child

In all her works Deborah Ellis foregrounds children's individual experiences in order to demonstrate the similarities and differences between children living in the East and those living in the West. This provides contrasting portraits of the child in the context of globalization. A Palestinian child refers to these contrasts:

I know about children in other countries. The children in Iraq are like me. They are afraid of bombs and of being attacked. Every kid there feels the way I feel here. The kids in Europe and in the United States live in good conditions, have fun, go to school and have no curfew, but we kids in Palestine and Iraq are always afraid. (*Three Wishes* 105)

In the process of globalization, we encounter "the legacies of colonialism playing out in … social, political, and economical relations" (Shultz 109). These legacies make sure particular countries and nations "stay in their place," while others assume domination over them. Deborah Ellis is trying to deconstruct these relations by empowering children through voicing their own experiences. Globalization and the appearance of international laws on children assume that childhood is a universal and global phenomenon and that global norms should be in place to ensure childhood is a specially protected space. In this regard, Margaret Steffler writes that "Ellis's work promotes the ideal of the globalized child, based on the problematic assumptions surrounding the supposed existence of the universal child" (111). A universal child should share all the same rights, all the same opinions, and attitudes across all categories or locations. These books (*Three Wishes* and *The Breadwinner* series), Ellis hopes, will encourage children and youth in the safe, sheltered West to relate to children in Israel, Palestine or Afghanistan who live in the war, solely on the account of belonging in the same universal category of children. I argue that Ellis's children in war, despite their different experiences, all belong in one category: the category of a suffering child who needs to be rescued by the Western child and whose childhood needs to be restored in order to fit the narrative of universal childhood. Globalization enables us to learn more about countries and people far away from us. Childhood as global and universal category is recognized everywhere in the world as a space separate from adulthood that requires special regulations. Childhood is "the symbolic common denominator underlying global divisions" (Mak-

man 296): it exists everywhere in the world and universalizing it means childhood everywhere

shares common characteristics and similar expectations are employed when it comes to children.

Steffler argues that international laws on the rights of children, such as the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, assume the existence of "the universal 'globalized' child who becomes a potentially powerful challenger of political borders, due to her perceived universal qualities and unformed identities" (Steffler 113). Children in Ellis's books cross borders in that their stories reach Western audiences who will then be angered at what is happening to children in those countries, because children in West know what they are entitled to and what is not right. This knowing is "adult" since children are aware of their rights and duties and often ask that those are respected. Being aware of one's rights leads one to them wanting to take action regarding children in other parts of the world. Their own experience will guide them in wanting to take action. Adults and children alike will understand that a child in a less developed country should have everything a child in his/her developed country has, because children's needs are the same on the global level (the need for love, protection, safety, education, and so on).

Children's needs, which are usually reflected in national and international regulations, are highly contested in the sense that adults and not children define them, and in the sense that childhood is deemed good or not according to the fulfillment of these needs. On the other hand, "[c]onceptualizing childhood in terms of 'needs' reflects the distinctive status accorded to young humanity in twentieth century western societies. It is widely regarded as a progressive and enlightened framework for working with children" (Woodhead 54). The child can thus cross any border in that, if childhood is seen as a universal category, it is easy to relate to it in any part of the world, and because we know, from our own experience and expectations, and also abundant literature on child, childhood, sociology, psychology, and so on, what children need: peace, love,

family, safety, education, and so on. Furthermore, "'[c]hildren's needs' have been constructed as

a part of a standardized model in which childhood is a period of dependency, defined by protec-

tionist adult-child relationships in which adults are dominant providers and children are passive

consumers" (Woodhead 57). Thus, Ellis's children cross (political) borders when they enter

Canadian classrooms and families and invite children (and their parents) to take pity on Israeli,

Palestinian, or Afghani children, because they were not lucky enough to be born in the West, and

to do something about their plight, to fight for the right for their needs to be met. Modern war is

often described as "an 'adult' enterprise that exploits archetypically vulnerable, weak, and irra-

tional children" (Rosen 298); however, Ellis's children prove that they are active participants. Al-

though not directly engaged in war, as in being in the battlefield, they do small things that they

think will make a difference. One of the boys in *Three Wishes* says, "I fight the soldiers a lot. It

feels good to throw stones at them. They should not be in my town, so I throw stones to make

them go away" (95). These children are neither innocent nor weak. But, we, people in the West,

might tend to read them as such because of our own prejudices. Some things children in Ellis's

books say—the wish to kill soldiers, the wish to engage in suicide bombing, living under the op-

pression— makes us believe these children are robbed of their childhood, and that their inno-

cence has been corrupted. Humanitarian literature amplifies "the helplessness of children by con-

trasting their supposed irrationality with an excessively idealized version of adult autonomy, in-

dependence, and maturity" (Rosen 299). But Ellis's children in war are nothing like this. On the

contrary, they are more independent and more mature than their parents in some cases.

　　However, one aspect of humanitarian literature includes provoking readers into empathy

and inviting them to take action. This kind of humanitarianism is still "constituted against the

Other 'in need' somewhere" (Jefferess 4). It is considered that because they are children too,

children in the West will know that what is happening to these children is not right and that something should be done in order to bring about change to secure an alternative happy and safe childhood. Sometimes children in the West are inspired to take action after reading books like these; however, this approach strongly relies on the figure of the Western child as a savior and the "other" child as victimized and seeking help – a point I develop later in a discussion of "critical literacy theory."

Furthermore, Steffler argues that "[l]iterature about and for the globalized child aims to inspire empowerment, solidarity, and voice" (118). Ellis's books and her opinions in general point to the fact that her books are written so they would empower children who are perceived as the "other" by letting their voices be heard. They also empower the children who are reading the books to take action and raise their voices for other less fortunate children, and bring about solidarity across the globe so that all the children can have the same rights that are not held universally.

Jefferess terms this kind of racial thinking "post-racialism," in which it is not about skin color any more but about "categories of the 'modern,' the 'not yet modern'(to be saved) and the 'anti-modern' (to be defeated)" (6). According to this theorization, societies are excluded from the global map if they are labelled as "not yet modern" or "anti-modern," and they can be "helped" by the modern West. These two books position children as being in charge of their lives to some extent; however, by publishing these books in the West and appealing to a wider Canadian public, they are framed within the humanitarian literature narrative.

Reading about these children does encourage adults and children to raise funds for helping those in need, as demonstrated by the ME to WE organization. ME to WE is "an innovative social enterprise that provides products that make an impact, empowering people to change the

world with their everyday consumer choices" (About Us). ME to WE is "a for profit social enter-

prise founded in 2008 by Canadian brothers Craig and Marc Kielburger that provides socially re-

sponsible products and services and donates half of its net profits to non-profit partner Free the

Children" (Wikipedia). People are encouraged to donate by buying accessories, bags, clothes and

so on. The organization encourages people to travel with them and visit their camps in develop-

ing countries. ME to WE aims to "empower communities to lift themselves out of poverty

through our holistic, sustainable international development model" (About Us). They do this by

building schools and creating curricula, cleaning water so that adults in these communities could

"run sustainable farms and send their girls to schools," offering medical supplies and running

clinics, providing agricultural training, and by helping mothers to "create new economic opportu-

nities through leadership sessions" (About Us).

The analysis of this specific organization is out of the scope of this thesis, so I cannot

delve too deeply into issues surrounding it; however, the narrative used to describe their aims

supports the narrative of "post-racialism."[15] Girls and women are still the main victims that need

to be rescued because of pre-modern men that are stuck in their religious narratives. We need to

become more aware of all the global economic forces that play a big role and start looking into

how they shape women's and children's position instead of blaming men and religion. Interna-

tional laws cannot help much here as they reflect major global powers and interactions to which

countries without strong economy cannot contribute.

Montgomery argues that by "setting universal standards for all children, and defining

childhood so definitively as the period of life between birth and the age of 18, the UNCRC takes

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15 See: Kaplan, Roy H. *The Myth of Post-Racial America: Searching for Equality in The Age of Material-ism.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2011. Print.; Vickerman, Milton. *Problem of Post-Racialism.* Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. Print; Squires, Catherine R. *The Post-Racial Mystique: Media and Race in The Twenty-First Century.* New York: New York University Press, 2014. Print.

little account of cultural relativity" (8), and that, as such, it is "fundamentally flawed and based on a Western ideal of an autonomous rights-bearing citizen that has limited applicability outside the industrialized West" (8). Children in both of Ellis's works discussed here are acutely aware that "ideas associated with childhood, such as play, innocence, friendship, and love, are not givens, but the privileges of others whose lives are not curtailed and limited by military occupation" ("Can the Child" 162). Many children in Ellis's books hint at knowing that in other countries children have happier and safer lives, but they are painfully aware that much works needs to be done for them to be able to have the same rights and similar lives. However, local specificities are not taken into account. For example, Palestine and Afghanistan have to rely on international aid if they want to rehabilitate the educational system, however international assistance brings with it Western values and approach to teaching.

Education is "[o]ne of the primary mechanisms of globalization" (Christina 16); school systems are becoming "increasingly homogeneous and internationalized, to the point of constituting a world educational system with standards of design, structure and practice which are relatively uniform across economic and political subsystems" (Christina 21). Thus, not only international laws but also international aid are forcing the move towards the Westernization of children all over the world by trying to make various local governments comply with these laws and approaches based on Western principles. People are controlled through education and molded into proper ("Western") citizens, and in this way education is becoming "a part of global colonial matrix of power" (Shultz 114). Education's "wider goals, for example, citizenship, society building, enlightenment, social justice, and creating knowledge for society, are destabilized in the new discourse of an urgent need to be part of a global knowledge economy" (Shultz 113). Not only that, Shultz argues that,

Given the colonial history of our current global market systems, education is enrolled to perpetuate the violent histories and legacies of European colonialism that divided the world into two categories: civilized and *knowing* or *savage* and knowledgeless. The oppression of violence of this system enters into the neocolonial relations of the global knowledge economy and is evident in how education actors are positioned in the global action net. (115)

It is hard to comply with international laws on local level when you live in a country such as Palestine that has been governed by various countries for hundreds of years, or in a country such as Afghanistan that was destroyed by years and years of wars, and where corruption is a big problem and is a key obstacle for development and democracy. For example, Transparency International writes that

With no independent oversight body, the judiciary is heavily influenced by the politicians and elites. Even in the rare cases where the corrupt are convicted and sentenced, punishments are not always upheld in practice...Members of parliament have physically assaulted officers without any serious repercussions, and there are allegations of parliamentarians voting in support of ministers facing votes of no-confidence in return for money of favours. (par. 7-9)

Furthermore, the problem of corruption in "the education sector in Afghanistan appears to be significant" (Hall 3). There are two types of corruption in the education system:

teachers having to pay bribes to their superiors to receive salaries and the phenomenon of 'ghost teachers'...who do not come to work but nonetheless receive a salary or those who are double-registered and thus receive two salaries for a single day's work. (Hall 3)

Other than these, there are other ways in which corruption in education works, and Hall names some of those: inadequate salaries, bribes for grades, lack of teacher competency; in higher education, students can buy their way into universities, and so on (3). But despite all these problems, Hall writes, after the overthrow of the Taliban, "[t]he number of students in Afghan schools has increased to approximately six million [from one million under the Taliban] since 2001" (3). Almost all children in these two bodies of work by Ellis complain about the educational system, and feel that they are missing out on not being able to go to school. However, in *Parvana's Journey* and *My Name is Parvana* we find out that girls (Parvana and her sisters), led by their mother, opened and ran a school for children in the refugee camp. They take their destiny into their hands and do what they think will be the best for them. Their ideas of proper education are often connected to the Western style of education; for example, in *The Breadwinner*, Parvana's older sister, Nooria, gets to leave Afghanistan because she was accepted to a university in the US. Steffler argues that "including fictional children in the postmodern phenomenon of migrant wanderers renders them regular members of the globalized community" (121). Thus, in *The Breadwinner* series, at least one girl, Nooria, becomes a member of the globalized community by being able to move to the US. Education is what enables children in these books to become migrant wanderers and become a part of the global community. At one point in *The Mud City* Shauzia almost becomes part of a Western family, but she is quickly expelled from their "haven." Shauzia is brought to the Americans' house after the father rescues her from prison after being arrested for theft. The mother tells Shauzia: "Our families thought we were nuts to come, especially with the children, but we like a bit of adventure. We're from Toledo, in the United States. There's not much adventure there" (*The Mud City* 379). Shauzia is welcomed until she starts showing odd behaviour: hiding food, letting strangers in the house, giving away the fam-

ily's clothes, toys, food. Obviously, she cannot be helped into the Western narrative of proper

and obedient children and is consequently taken back to the refugee camp. Her different behavior

does not fit the Western narrative of innocent child who does what it is told. At the same time,

this situation directs Ellis's criticism towards those activists and humanists who only want to be

involved in helping others until it suits them. However, thanks to Nooria, the reader feels satis-

fied because at least one character is saved, and saved by the West.

According to Steffler, two strategies are used in literature of and for the globalized child:

privileging difference to encourage tolerance and minimizing difference to promote empathy and

identification. However, both strategies depend on emphasizing "the unexpectedness of a univer-

sality that emerges despite the huge contrast and gap between privilege and oppression—be-

tween Canadian reader and Afghan subject in Ellis's *Breadwinner* [series] (115-6). I argue that

Ellis's works function on both levels. They want to encourage tolerance by presenting opposing

views of children on two warring sides: maybe if they read about each other they will grow more

tolerant; maybe if Western children read these accounts, they will understand the global migrant

crisis going on in the world right now and tolerate the arrival of immigrants into their countries.

The works minimize differences to promote empathy and identification by labelling these voices

as children's voices: if childhood is universal empathy and identification will come about be-

cause maybe a child reading these books will be able to put herself in these children's shoes.

They are all children, after all. The unexpectedness that comes out of both strategies is the uni-

versality of Canadian, Afghan, Israeli and Palestinian children: they have similar wishes, similar

problems, similar goals in life. Hearing these directly from children, one can see that on a global

level their aspirations are the same. They want to get proper education; they want to live in

peace, spend time with their friends and family, spend time in nature, play games, and so on. The

universality is unexpected because, in the current discourse surrounding Muslims, for some read-ers in the West it might still be hard to believe that children in the Middle East could be anything like their children. An average Westerner learns about the children "here" and the children "there" from the mainstream media, thus making him/her see huge discrepancies and differences between the two parts of the world. From engaging with these books, we can learn that children are different and have different lived experiences, thus we cannot claim that childhood is univer-sal. The concept is universal and global, but what these books show is that experiences that shape us, that shape children are different everywhere, and the expectations of what childhood should be are different everywhere in the world. We cannot expect children growing up in war to have a childhood we want them to simply because we think we know what it is they need.

Some children do not fit into the mainstream Western definition of childhood, such as children who are outside of the expected childhood frame—street children, child soldiers, child refugees, or child prostitutes. These "[a]nomalies in the globalized notions of childhood" (Mont-gomery 6) have "challenged universal notions of the child implicit in the UNCRC and pro-foundly complicated understandings of concepts and categorizations such as childhood or youth" (Montgomery 7). However, Ellis's books do not do anything of the sort. Even though children growing up in war are to some extent anomalies because their life experiences do not conform to the expected norms of childhood, Ellis's books do not position them as such. Yes, they do live outside the expected childhood frame: their families are separated, people around them day on daily basis. But they can still fit the childhood norms because we can take pity on them. Ellis's children are not at fault for the war; rather, they were born into it, and thus being a part of the war was not their choice. Her children do not complicate the mainstream Western definition of childhood in any way. Even though *Three Wishes* "exposes a wide variety of children's experi-

ences and manifests their heterogeneity" because "no testimony is valorized over another" (Hasan 4), this heterogeneity is still a part of the discourse of global and universal childhood. Ellis's children do not seem so different from a child in West: the only difference between them and children in West is that children in her books live in war-stricken countries. But, other than that, they can fit the Western narrative perfectly despite their individual differences acquired because of different experiences.

The question then, that has to be asked in relation to *Three Wishes*, but that is also relevant for *The Breadwinner* series, is "what sort of transnational links between Canada and the Middle East can be forged in the circulation in the Canadian public domain of Palestinian and Israeli children's testimony" ("A Child" 381). The reception of this book was highly controversial, with cultural politics censoring and making the texts invisible along with general criticisms that the book was inappropriate for young children. Rummanah Aasi writes:

> The objection to *Three Wishes* is clearly politically motivated. It's interesting that only one group presented in the book raised objections to the book. Yes, Israeli soldiers were depicted at times to be brutal, but how would you describe someone who demolished your house, and kicked you out on the streets? The Palestinian people were also depicted as suicide bombers and terrorist, but there is no objection to this particular part of the book. (par. 15)

Older children, argued CJC at that time, are more capable of understanding complex political issues and are therefore more able to forge connections with children they read about, whereas it would be complicated for younger children to make their own judgements over the events described in the books. However Hasan provides a counter argument to the CJC

Childhood is a state of development including an age boundary in which complex politics and issues of violence and death cannot and should not be engaged with. It is once children pass the twelve year mark that they suddenly become critically aware and can thus peruse the contents of war texts. (3)

I have talked about the critical reception of both *The Breadwinner* series and *Three Wishes* in the introduction to this thesis and there I argued that Canadian foreign and domestic policies were reflected in the critical reception of both of these books. Ellis's child in war is "a figure of transcultural mobility" ("Can the Child" 162): children and adults anywhere in the world, belonging to any culture, should be able to relate to these children's problems because they might be their problems. Additionally, they might relate because they will be happy those are not their problems.

Increasing globalization will draw children across the world even closer, especially with the current migrant crisis, as a child will be the figure that will draw the most sympathy because West will continue to feel the need to protect her as the most vulnerable member of the society. Censorship "comes from the wish to shield children from what is considered to be adult experiences" (Peterson and Swartz 171). And in some instances to privilege a particular political analysis. The CJC felt the need to protect the children in West by restricting access to *Three Wishes* in schools and libraries, but did not mention the need to protect children affected by war in Israel or Palestine. Better organized and with more cultural capital and political influence than Muslim people in Canada, the CJC has a stronger voice and gleaned a more sympathetic hearing.

3.3. (The Myth of) Childhood Innocence

Adults believe that children are innocent and that childhood is a sacred space that needs to be protected at any cost. Henry Jenkins writes in the "Introduction" to *The Children's Cultural Reader* that

> Too often our culture imagines childhood as a utopian space, separate from adult cares and worries, free from sexualtiy, outside social divisions, closer to nature and the primitive world, more fluid in its identity and its access to the realms of imagination, beyond historical change, more just, pure, and innocent, and in the end, waiting to be corrupted or protected by adults. (3-4)

The myth of childhood innocence has long been present in Western discourse and is a vital part of the Western theory of childhood. According to Jenkins, "our modern conception of the innocent child presumes its universality across historical periods and across widely divergent cultures" (15). In her book *Picturing Childhood*, Patricia Holland writes:

> The concept of childhood as a time of innocence developed during the nineteenth century in parallel with the notion of domesticity and the creation of the "home" as a centre of privacy, order, morality and security. Childhood came to be seen as a stage of life with special needs and values, and the space within which those values could best be secured seemed to be the domestic environment—ultimately one exclusive to a two generation, structured nuclear family, as reflected in the key image. (57)

In a similar manner, in accordance with Rose, in the Introduction to *The Children's Cultural Reader*, Henry Jenkins writes on childhood innocence that

> The myth of childhood innocence, as James Kincaid notes, "empties" the child of its own political agency, so that it may more perfectly fulfill the symbolic demands we make

upon it. The innocent child wants nothing, desires nothing, and demands nothing–except, perhaps its own innocence. Kincaid critiques the idea that childhood innocence is something preexisting–an "eternal" condition–that must be "protected." Rather, childhood innocence is a cultural myth that must be "inculcated and enforced" upon children. (2)

Thus, the child is an empty vessel that needs to be filled as adults deem fit. Adults have to mould this child, give it guidance and make all the decisions about its life until they are shaped into law-abiding citizens. Even though, as I explained in the first section of this chapter, the child was not considered a special category needing special (legal) protection before the late nineteenth century, Jenkins writes that "[o]ur modern conception of the innocent child presumes its universality across historical periods and across widely divergent cultures" (15). Before the late nineteenth century, children did not enjoy many rights and did not get any—or very little—special protection guaranteed by the law. However, the early twentieth century was dubbed by educational reformers and thinkers, such as Ellen Key,[16] the "century of the child" because they assumed the new century would bring "radical changes in the ways that children were conceptualized and treated, and that during the century children's welfare would become social and political priority" (Montgomery 1), as it very well did: "[c]hildren's rights have become increasingly politically important and, within academia, children and childhood have become significant areas of study" (Montgomery 1). By the end of the twentieth century "a predominantly Western idea of childhood—characterized by the age parametres of birth (or conception) to 18—had become a globalized norm" (Linde 3). Because we are now so deeply imbedded in this narrative, we simply assume any child is innocent and should be protected. If a child does something wrong, commits a crime, or does not behave the way we think is normal and accepted, we automatically

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16 Ellen Key (1849-1926) was a Swedish writer, feminist, and pedagogue.

blame the parent. The child is emptied of any kind of responsibility and her innocence is to be preserved at any cost.

I argue that both *The Breadwinner* series and *Three Wishes*, being written and published in the Western market, perpetuate the notion of the childhood innocence. Ellis lets children from "other" countries speak from themselves; however, creating these books in the Western context results in a need in this geopolitical space to protect childhood as a special space. By writing books about children in war-stricken countries, Ellis wants us to learn about harsh conditions some children are growing up in and to do something to improve conditions they live in. Because they were born into the war and have to live in it, rather than being active participants, these children should still be entitled to proper childhood. Loss of childhood is perceived as something irreparable and needs to be restored in the countries that are affected by war. It is necessary to undo this by excluding our own oriental reading of these children as the "other." It is of vital importance to write about children in war in order to deconstruct these. The West needs to get off its high horse, and Western readers have to decolonize our own gaze. We need to stop looking at these children as objects onto which we project our own desires and actually look at what it is they are telling us. Louise Saldanha argues that "[t]here is the notion about childhood being an age of innocence, that children shouldn't be told about the realities of life, but our children are already living them" (169). This study of Ellis's works positions itself in relation to her allowing the children's voices to be heard. The implications of the Western discourse on childhood into which the author is deeply embedded cannot be ignored. But in the analysis of these two works, the author's own prejudices and expectations needed to be excluded in order to analyze only what can be heard directly from the voices while avoiding "over-reading" or projecting too much into what is being said.

In the West, adults want to protect children from the "harsh" reality of the world, and to keep them outside of politics as long as possible. Childhood innocence assumes that a child is simply above or outside real life and is not expected to try to understand or get involved in any way. Childhood is the time when children should play, have fun, and not think about problems that are encountered in adult life. Hasan argues that "the rhetoric of developmental psychology and science, in general, reinforce these myths of childhood innocence and malleability" (3). According to Jenkins, Western culture imagines childhood as a sacred space that adults have to protect because children are incapable of taking care of themselves; childhood is imagined

> as a utopian space, separate from adult cares and worries, free from sexuality, outside social divisions, closer to nature and the primitive world, more fluid in its identity and its access to the realms of imagination, beyond historical change, more just, pure, and innocent, and in the end, waiting to be corrupted or protected by adults. (3-4)

The child is thus effectively, in Western thought, rendered as "apolitical, non-critical and pre-agential" (Hasan 3), a figure who becomes corrupted or protected by adults in the process of growing up. Thus it is up to the adult to do her best job so that the child becomes a good adult. Jenkins adds that, "[i]n our culture, the most persistent image of the innocent child is that of a white, blond-haired, blue-eyed boy ... and the markers of middle-classness, whiteness, and masculinity are read as standing for all children" (13).

So how do we read the children in Ellis's books? They are far from being blond, blue-eyed or middle-class, but Ellis still wants us to secure a childhood for them. Jenkins argues that "[t]he universalized conception of the innocent child effaces gender, class, and racial differences" (15), but is this really so?. In books like those in *The Breadwinner* series or *Three Wishes*, we empathize with children regardless of their race, gender, or class, because they are living in a

war they did not make; they were born into it and have to live with the consequences of what the adults created. Thus, these books also position the child as innocent, despite claims to children's self-proclaimed independence. The children whose voices Ellis presents might indeed be independent and active in their own communities, but Ellis still wants to offer protection and restore their innocence. Within the Western rhetoric on childhood, "conflict is not and should not be part of childhood" (Hasan 3). Both books position the child as innocent in the sense that Westerners want to believe it is not their fault that they were born where they were born, and so anything they do is justified. There are no adults to protect them, and there should be, in regular conditions, meaning in countries in which there is no war and which are progressive and economically developed. Their innocence is tainted but that does not mean we cannot continue to believe in the myth of their innocence. It is what makes us want to offer them protection.

Although Ellis wants us to offer protection to her children in war when she presents their lives in Western context, her works that are focal points of this thesis reveal that in war-stricken countries, children in themselves are not innocent. There is an ambivalence present here: do we read her children as innocent because they are born into a war and are deserving of a better life or do we read them as not being innocent because of their experiences? However much we want them to be innocent and to be able to fit into the narrative of universal childhood, Ellis's children are children of experience. Ellis works out the notion of children as "agents of their own salvation" (Makman 299). In both *Three Wishes* and *The Breadwinner* series children are agents: they take their lives in their hands and get involved in everyday little actions they believe will contribute to and help their communities and country. They talk about wanting to kill people or wanting to become martyrs; they talk about racial injustice they are exposed to, the lack of proper education, lack of food, and other harsh conditions of life that are expected in war-stricken countries.

In these representations of non-Western war-torn lives, the child's everyday experience tampers with and destroys the innocence we expect to see in a happy, safe childhood. Children are too aware of what goes on around them and often have to be active participants in the war itself as is the case with child-combatants. Parvana and Shauzia are far from being innocent: they dress as boys, work in the market or on the street, walk around Afghanistan or Pakistan alone, Parvana sees her father die right in front of her, helps start a school, teaches children in that school, and helps other children into safety. Shauzia roams the streets of Peshawar still dressed as boy in an attempt to find a job, make money, and survive on her own. She eventually joins a women's organization that helps other girls and women in trouble, of which we find out only in the last book of the series, *My Name is Parvana*, and includes Parvana in this too. Children in *Three Wishes* are involved in politics through their participation in youth organisations. They throw stones at soldiers and are generally more aware of what is going on around them in their country: they know soldiers are a part of their lives; they know that peace will be hard to achieve. Palestinian children feel racial injustices every day when they try to cross checkpoints. Israeli children know a lot about the history of their country and why it is important to have a place to call its own. Afghani children know about the harsh conditions the Taliban had in place for women. Children have been orphaned and wounded by war; their friends have been killed or injured by landmines or beaten by soldiers. Some express the wish to join the army or become suicide bombers in order to contribute to their country's goals. Others wish to do volunteer work instead of joining the army in order to help traumatised children. In Ellis's two books, the biggest insult to a child is when an adult calls them a child after everything they have been through. Children as young as ten describe themselves as no longer being children and do not wish to be treated as such. While in the West there seems to be a huge desire to protect children and let them

freely enjoy their childhood without being aware of what is going on around them, these two works show that children in hard situations, war specifically, tend to be more involved in politics through youth groups or women's organizations.

3.4. Suicide bombers

Ellis's *Three Wishes* was, among other reasons (not being age appropriate, presenting the Israeli in a bad light), banned because it does not fit the myth of childhood innocence narrative. This myth assumes that children should not be involved in anything that does not fit a "normal" childhood, let alone suicide bombing. The children in this book, argues Emberley, are "projected through a narrow lens of such contemporary Orientalist tropes as the Palestinian suicide bomber and the desire for martyrdom" ("A Child 381).

I do not agree with Emberly as I elaborate below because I argue that talking about suicide bombing is what empowers these children. They espouse "situational ethics"[17]—under ordinary circumstances we find the idea of children discussing suicide bombing repulsive, but in the circumstances described in *Three Wishes* or *The Breadwinner* we understand it, although we might not support it. These children's choices might seem repugnant from the outside, but they are a result of the circumstances they live in. Salam (12) talks about her sister who killed one and injured a dozen people in a suicide attack. As a suicide bomber she was very popular and was celebrated as a martyr in Palestine. Salam wants to be like her sister: "Aayat's picture is everywhere, on walls and in newspapers. She is very famous. She is a martyr and she is now in paradise … I would like to join her there. I would have to become a martyr like her, to be able to be

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17 "Situation ethics, as conservatively interpreted, takes a somewhat middle ground by accepting general principles as a rule of thumb guides without the binding force of the law." (Tickemyer 48); Rules and norms are accepted as general guidelines, but our ethical choices will depend on the situation.

in paradise with her" (*Three Wishes* 117). Another child says that "there are women martyrs now who do the suicide bombings. They are very brave" (81). Yet another says that he " understand[s] the suicide bombers. They do what they do because of the Israeli occupation of their land" (110). Palestinian children can "understand suicide bombers. When you've lost everyone, when you have no one left to rely on, and no hope that things will get better, why stay alive?" (69). Suicide bombing is something they hear about on everyday basis, and that is why they think and know about it. They see that acts of suicide bombing kill or injure their enemies. Even though there are consequences, mostly in the form of home demolitions, they see suicide bombing as the one thing they can do to contribute to their country's well-being. They think it makes a big impact and it can change things—or, if not that, at least they themselves will die and will not have to live in war anymore. They will be celebrated and will live forever in memories of their fellow nationals.

The idea of "violence empowering women" (Bloom 97) recently spread through the Middle East. Although various armies and insurgent forces, such as Al-Quaeda, would not let women join their troops, nowadays it is not uncommon to have women participate in acts of war. According to Bloom, "terrorist groups may also find women useful as suicide bombers because of the widespread assumption that women are inherently nonviolent" (100). It is easier for them to go through checkpoints, and it is generally expected that suicide bomber is male. Burqas and other types of veiling, of which I will talk more in the following chapter of this thesis, were and are seen as a threat because women could smuggle anything and everything. A conservative idea of a perceived threat of dangerous alterity in women in veils is still alive—one is never too sure who is hiding in there, a man or a woman. Ellis does not engage in a wider discussion of the burqa in this sense, but only criticizes the Taliban imposing it on women in Afghanistan.

In Palestine,

The involvement of Palestinian women in suicide bombings has also had an extreme im-

pact on the cultural norms of Palestinian society: Palestinians have long had a set of rules

that describe and limit gender roles … These rules have dictated the separation of the

sexes and restricted women to the private sphere … Through violence, women have

placed themselves on the frontlines, in public, alongside men. (Bloom 99)

If it is supposedly that easy for women to get away with less checks and less control, it

would be much easier for a child to smuggle bombs and kill people they see as their enemies.

That children in this book are even willing to consider doing something like this or that they see

becoming a suicide bomber as something positive is a problem for the CJC and Western readers.

Literature for children has proven an especially contested area when it comes to representation of

war and children in war.

3.5. Literature v. Other media

It is argued by Sherene Razack, among others, that the same criteria are not applied to

different media: books are more carefully scrutinized than the movies or shows children or

young adults watch nowadays. Makman writes that "television and electronic media more gener-

ally 'erode' the division between child and adult because of what [Postman] calls their 'undiffer-

entiated accessibility'" (300). Even though movies and shows contain warnings and age labels,

they are still easily accessible on the internet, and any child or adult who is somewhat tech savvy

will have no problems in finding this content. Parental control is available for setup on televi-

sions and computers, but nowadays young people are more informed about technology than

adults around them and can easily work around these limitations. For many children and young

people, "media provide the only contact with ethnically diverse people and … media-based rep-

resentations shape our consciousness about social groups" (Sensoy 131). Simply by watching the

news on the Western TV networks, one can easily notice the "us vs. them" narrative. The same

thing is noticeable in Hollywood movies (e.g. *American Sniper*[18]) and popular shows (e.g.

Homeland[19]). Hollywood has used "repetition as a teaching tool" (Sensoy 131): both *American*

Sniper and *Homeland* work on the narrative of bad Muslims who are a threat to the West and

need to be eliminated. Bad Muslims are always lurking and they need to be surveilled just in

case. Both of these works had very high viewing and the ratings were above average. If we only

watch movies and shows like this it would be hard to form any other kind of opinion of Muslims

and Middle East other than the one given in these productions.

The problem the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) had with *Three Wishes* is that for CJC

"childhood is a state of development including an age boundary in which complex politics and

issues of violence and death cannot and should not be dealt with" (Hasan 3). In neither *Three*

Wishes nor in *The Breadwinner* series are children depicted as "helpless victims" in the context

of war and occupation (Hasan 4). Some of the children interviewed for the book openly say they

refuse to be victims and even participate in resistance movements against the occupation and war

- thus these books demonstrate that "children are clearly not extraneous to political processes"

(Hasan 4). The criticisms by CJC directed at *Three Wishes* are steeped into implications of child-

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18 A 2014 American biographical war drama directed by Clint Eastwood and written by Jason Hall. It is loosely based on the memoir *American Sniper: The Autobiography of the Most Lethal Sniper in U.S. Military History* (2012) by Chris Kyle. (Wikipedia)
19 *Homeland* (2011-) is an American political thriller television series developed by Howard Gordon and Alex Gansa. The series stars Claire Danes as Carrie Mathison, a Central Intelligence Agency officer with bipolar disorder, and Damian Lewis as Nicholas Brody, a U.S. Marine Corps Scout Sniper. Mathison had come to believe that Brody, who was held captive by al-Qaeda as a prisoner of war, was "turned" by the enemy and poses a threat to the United States. (Wikipedia)

hood innocence - school children under the age of 12 are not capable of understanding broader historical and political implications of the text and the background that led to the creation of such a book. With movies, television, and other media, nowadays children tend to be technologically more advanced than their parents while easily accessing the "forbidden" contents. Movies and shows on TV and in theatres are labelled according to age, however, at home children often have open access to whatever content if their parents are not savvy enough to restrict it. Their peers can help them get their hands on any movie or show, and there are many ways to access them on the internet.

When it comes to books, things are a little different. Whether a child goes to the library or a bookstore there is always someone there to make sure that a book they are getting is age appropriate. Some "observers frequently argue that because of developments in technology and the media, children find out too much too fast, and as result they effectively cease to be children" (Makman 291). Children and young adult literature are scrutinized in different ways than adult books or other forms of media because adults have to make sure their content is appropriate as I explore in section IV.

3.6. Children and young adult literature

The study of the child in literature and culture has become a remarkably active area of scholarship over the last few decades. One of the most cited works when it comes to children's literature is Jacqueline Rose's "The Case of Peter Pan: The Impossibility of Children's Fiction" in which she discusses the rupture between those who write books (adults) and those they are written for (children):

Children's fiction sets up a world in which the adult comes first (author, maker, giver) and the child comes after (reader, product, receiver), but where neither of them enter the space in between. To say the child is inside the book - children's books are after all as often as not *about* [emphasis in original] children - is to fall straight into the trap. It is to confuse the adult's intention to get at the child with the child it portrays. If children's fiction builds an image of the child inside the book, it does so in order to secure the child who is outside the book, the one who does not come so easily within its grasp. (58)

According to her, children's literature is not impossible to write, it can be done, and it is done, but what is impossible is the relation between adult and child, as can be seen in the above citation. She argues that "no body of literature ... rests so openly on an acknowledged difference, a rupture almost, between writer and addressee. Children's fiction sets up the child as an outsider to its own process, and then aims unashamedly, to take the child *in* [emphasis in original]" (59). Furthermore, Jenkins argues, in agreement with Rose, that

Children's fiction, after all, is written by adults, illustrated by adults, edited by adults, marketed by adults, and often read by adults, to children. As Rose's analysis suggests, children's writers have a wide array of motives, some illicit, some benign, for their desire to 'get close' to the child and to shape the child's thoughts and fantasies. The examination of children's fiction, then, starts by stripping away the fantasy child reader, or even the fantasy of 'children of all ages,' in order to locate and interpret the adult goals and desires that shape cultural production. (23)

The knowledge presented in children's books is the knowledge an adult wants them to have, thus limiting their access to knowledge - children can only acquire the "'adult' knowledge hidden in books gradually, as they become more advanced readers" (Makman 300). Children's

literature, according to Hasan, "does not generally produce what the 'known' child wants; it tends to iterate what the adult desires (4). Furthermore, Hasan argues that "'[g]ood' children's literature guarantees a particular reception, [and] often promotes adult hegemonic values" (4). Steffler argues that the use of the child in Canadian children's literature to model national identity was used to promote the official policy of multiculturalism.

The figure of the child "as a site through which to mediate across national boundaries is not a new phenomenon in English literature" ("Can the Child" 162). Emberley explains that the adventure novels that appeared in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries "laid the groundwork for representational mechanisms that could cross the divide between the empire and the colonies" ("Can the Child" 162). In the formation of English literature the figure of the child "occupied a central position as an object of study in the context of genre studies such as children's literature" ("Can the Child" 162). Writing about using the figure of child and childhood in general to raise awareness, Steffler argues that

> The promotion of childhood as a 'universal' category and the child as the most universal of human figures is seized upon and used, not only in the literary field, but also in various political and cultural movements that work to erase national borders in order to teach and promote equality and social justice. (113)

Since 9/11 "narratives produced for children and young adults that feature Muslim girls in distress have increasingly been marketed to and consumed by an audience of teachers, librarians and parents" (Sensoy, and Marshall 295). Writing about or for children and young adults has to be in a tone that does not traumatise children. In *Three Wishes* Ellis empowers Israeli and Palestinian children by letting their voices sound in the West, however "the juxtaposition of the

fairy tale motif 'three wishes' and the testimonial speech acts of Palestinian and Israeli children

seems somewhat incongruous" ("A Child" 381).

Three Wishes is structured in a telling way: at the end of each interview Deborah Ellis

asks children to make three wishes. And each interview is prefaced with a brief introduction into

specific topics that tap into what a specific child will talk about in their interview. There are also

images that in some way relate to the content of what a child is saying. We do not have to rely

only on what we hear from each individual child — there is confirmation that what children are

saying is true. The images and prefatory remarks provided for the readers contribute to a sense of

authenticity and truthfulness.

Using the fairytale "three wishes" as the guiding theme and the title of the book suggests

that these children might still not be as traumatised with the war as one might expect. It implies

there is some innocence still in them because they are young enough to think that wishes come

true. And that making wishes might make a difference. It also makes the reader want to make

those wishes come true—a trajectory that leads to colonial discourse once again. Emberley ar-

gues that by asking children specific questions -- say something about your experience of grow-

ing up in these countries; describe what you see every day; describe what you think or know is

going on in your country; and describe what they would wish for if their wishes were able to

come true – this limits children's "authorial agency" and reproduces "neo-liberal and postcolo-

nial regime of representation" (A Child 381) rather than challenging them. However, as Rak ar-

gues, "Western readers are meant to see themselves in [these children's] place because much of

what she says and does is meant to be familiar, even if the context is not. This strategy is meant

to disrupt the circuit of estrangement and othering" (169). By putting ourselves in their shoes, we

have to disregard racial differences and work towards destabilizing our own expectations we learn growing up in the West.

The structure of *The Breadwinner* series reminds the reader of an adventure story in which a child must overcome many obstacles in order to finally arrive to the goal and to have a happy ending—which is exactly what happens in this series. The series suddenly makes a break and shifts perspectives in the third book of the series, *The Mud City*, and we follow Shauzia's adventures, which are as eventful as Parvana's, if not more. There are many obstacles in Parvana's and her friend's Shauzia ways, but they both manage to overcome them on their own, with minimal help from adults. *The Breadwinner* series is, taken as a whole, an "empowerment narrative" (Missionary Girl Power 301) in which girls and women are allowed to fight for themselves to try to make lives better for them and other girls and women. The narrative allows Parvana and Shauzia to roam around Afghanistan or Pakistan without having to come into direct contact with the Taliban or mean adults. On the way, they both meet many child helpers. For example, Parvana meets Asif, the one-legged boy she finds hiding in a cave, or a little girl who lives with her grandma who gives her shelter and food in *Parvana's Journey*. There are antagonists, who are mostly men who do not support girls' right to education, or who force girls into marriages, or beat them, or kill them because they dared to do something they do not approve of. There are some mentors in the story, like Mrs. Weera, who run women's organizations and help the protagonist accomplish her goals by enabling her. Mrs. Weera is the only constant character in all four books of the series and goes from being a gym teacher in a school in Kabul in the first book of the series to a high positioned politician in the last book of the series—a testament to women empowerment in this series. Even though girls and women in the series are empowered to tackle all obstacles that come into their way, taking this book into Canadian classroom depends on a Third

World Girl being rescued by her white First World sister. On the one hand, the girl in the West reads about girls who need to be saved, and, on the other hand, the victimized girl looks to her Western sisters for help. Sensoy and Marshall argue that in *The Breadwinner* series "Ellis relies on colonial discourses to represent girls and women in the East as poor, uneducated, constrained, and in need of rescue from those in the West" (295-6). The white girl fantasizes about rescuing this little brown girl while sitting in her own cozy room, because she is a well-off child in a Western country, protected by her parents and getting all the education she possibly can. At the same time, there are some moments in the book when Parvana fantasizes about being saved by the supposed Canadian social workers who are choosing people to take to Canada: "Two days ago there was a rumor that someone was in the camp to choose people to go to Canada" (290). Shauzia fantasizes about living forever with the American family and she fantasizes about them taking her to the land of her dreams, France. However, the Canadians are not seen or heard by Parvana and the Americans do not rescue Shauzia; they only exist as a possibility. Though, later in the series Parvana does actually get some help from Canadians: "Parvana and the other girls had begun to receive instruction in first-aid and basic nursing from a Canadian army nurse" (76), thus making their presence helpful. This makes us, the Western readers, feel better because there is an actual person there that is making a difference. We feel better, because someone from our country is there and is helping. The Canadians' presence goes from pure conjecture to a very material appearance.

In both *Three Wishes* and *The Breadwinner* series, the line between reality and fantasy is often brought up: in *Three Wishes*, Israeli children often talk about the fear of this unknown Palestinian/Arab/brown terrorist who is out to get them. Their fear is "fuelled by a terrifying phantasm, where a virtual 'suicide bomber' may emerge anywhere and at any time to set off a

real bomb" ("A child" 386). For example, an Israeli child says there are "guards at our school to keep the Palestinians from blowing us up" (45). On the other hand, as I have mentioned before, Palestinian children fantasize about becoming martyrs. In Afghanistan, the phantom of the mean Taliban that is out to get them, either to find out they are girls pretending to be boys, or to make them join the Taliban if they are a boy, haunts children throughout the entire series. Thus, argues Emberley,

> Ellis's text produces and unsettles a line between fantasy and reality, creating conditions within which the reader must make sense of the phantoms of terror in the paranoid fantasies of everyday life in Israel and the mystification of martyrdom and the desire for death in the occupied Palestinian territories. ("A Child" 386)

The CJC objected to *Three Wishes*, along with other problems I already mentioned, because "the content appear[ed] intimidating in the face of the conventional 'security' of children's texts" (Hasan 5). Hearing authentic children's voices is not very common in children's literature. There is a problem with acquiring permission from guardians, which might be why Ellis did not publish more interviews with Israeli and Palestinian children. She returned to Israel and Palestine in 2014 to interview more Israeli and Palestinian children. These interviews can be read on her blog.

Three Wishes belongs in the field of testimonial narratives, therefore it "endows the child with the role of bearing witness to traumatic events" ("A Child" 380). By positioning the child as the witness, the child is empowered "to produce historical truth and authentic, realistic, representations of events" ("A Child" 380). But how can we, Emberly asks, distinguish between "whether a child is testifying to a real event or just playing, in the sense of investing people, places, and things with fears, fantasies, desires" ("A Child" 380)? As I have mentioned before, the prefatorial

textual information and images Ellis provides for each interview confirm the authenticity of children's voices. Furthermore, "the subtitle of the book [*Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak*] creates an interpretive frame for the story that lifts it out of its political context and focuses attention on the child herself, while it simultaneously forecloses the possibility that there is more to the story" (Rak 165). Because the subtitle explicitly says that children speak, the reader feels that s/he is being let into a secret world and is being revealed a big mystery, thus we think that there is more to this story. Children in general are considered to have no filter, and thus say whatever comes to their mind. Adults and children are curious to hear what Israeli and Palestinian children will reveal precisely because it is believed that children will always say what they really think and feel.

> Deborah Ellis believes that
>
> kids are really hungry to learn about what's going on in the world. The fact that they would read a book like this on their own [*Three Wishes*], not necessarily prompted by teachers, and they write to me on their own, without being prompted by teachers and parents, has raised my respect level for them tremendously. They are capable of understanding very complex things that are happening in the world and they are hungry for it as well. (O'Brien par. 3)
>
> When asked if she has a particular audience in mind when she writes, Deborah Ellis says

that

> The publisher and editor sort out the age readership of the book. While I'm writing, I don't think about it. If the main character is a child, then what the character goes through is determined, in part, by what a child would reasonably do, see, and understand in that situation. (Scala par. 16)

It is important here to reflect on the fact that both books were written by an adult white middle-class Canadian feminist and so the question of her knowing what a child does or sees in war-stricken country might arise. In *Three Wishes* we do not question her authority as a writer because she lets children speak. In *The Breadwinner* we assume everything she writes about is true because the story is based on real people and real events as described by people she met in refugee camps in Afghanistan. We receive and read these books as if it was an actual child who wrote or testifies in these books. We empathize and are moved because the stories are told by children. Rak argues that "Americans read stories about trauma emphatically, and understand stories about 'the East' as ways to exercise empathy, rather than receiving them in some other register" (163). Both fictional and nonfictional narratives about the children who have been victims in any way are supposed to translate into some sort of activism. Canadian children who have been brought up and schooled in multicultural Canada grow up "in the profile of the Canadian people as 'tolerant' of diversity and the nation as a peacemaker," but have been exposed to images of "suffering children in media and literature," (Steffler 116) so they can find quick ways to respond to them. In Ellis's novel, for example, as I have mentioned before, Canadians appear a number of times to come to the rescue when the situation is bad (Canadian nurses work in refugee camps and educate girls to become nurses; some Canadians show up in the refugee camp and select people to take to Canada). Steffler argues these people "provide hope for the Afghan families in the refugee camp and also and inspiration and pride for the Canadian reader" (117). Even though she hears rumors of some Canadians being in the camp, Parvana never actually sees them and goes about doing her chores in the camp. Reading Ellis carefully "reveals criticism and complacency surrounding Canada's reputation for humanitarianism" (116). Both the reader and the fictional child are disappointed that humanitarian, peacekeeping Canada has not fulfilled its

task, however the fact that books were published in the West for the West means we might still

be able to help.

5. Critical literacy theory

Through the scope of critical literacy, I can examine both *Three Wishes* and *The Bread-winner* series and investigate pedagogical and political issues that arose from or around them. Choosing these books to be used in schools or extra-curricular reading has deep political implications regarding the content they both present. Since, as Sensoy argues, "most canonized knowledge" about the Middle East is "transmitted formally in school curricula" (112), it is important to consider how these two works by Ellis contribute to or work around that knowledge. In the current "global context and preoccupation with learning about Islam framed as 'understanding religious diversity,' we see a particularly clear example of how knowledge is constructed to reinscribe mainstream ideologies of race and gender" (Sensoy and DiAngelo par. 6). The question then is whether Ellis's works reinscribe or deconstruct those ideologies?

Pedagogy in Canada is based on multiculturalism, as are the espoused domestic politics of having open arms for people of all colors and nations. For example, just in the recent months, the Trudeau government accepted Syrian refugees (though mostly women and children, not single men) with open arms and gave them citizenship. The Government of Canada "resettled 25,000 Syrian refugees between November 2015 and February 29, 2016" (#WelcomeRefugees par.1). The meaning and effects of multiculturalism in Canada are too expansive a subject for this thesis. But the fact is there are many children from the Middle East in Canadian classrooms, and the issue of how they react to the mainstream media representation of their (or their parents') countries of origin should be something their teachers take into consideration when choosing

books they use. An argument that is often heard in regards to multicultural pedagogy is that more ethnic books should be in the curriculum, so all children can relate to diverse characters. Sensoy and Marshall write that, "although fictional, *The Breadwinner* often provides a springboard to teach about the 'real' lives and experiences of Muslim girls and women, the histories, geographies, and political conditions of the Middle East and Central Asia" (Missionary Girl Power 297).

Both *The Breadwinner* series and *Three Wishes* are anti-war works that are aimed at raising awareness of the existence of different childhoods and different conditions people live in. Tara Brabazon writes that "the 'War on Terrorism' that provides a framework for our educational system and students requires translation, context, and interpretation" (7) and Ellis's books provide this framework for students in Canadian classrooms. In the period immediately after 9/11 there was a lack of books for children explaining the situation in Afghanistan, so *The Breadwinner* (series) became (and still is) a hot commodity. Julia Emberley, reflecting on the CJC's complaints about *Three Wishes*, writes,

> The controversy over *Three Wishes* raises several important questions relevant to pedagogical issues and social policy about the kind of role educational institutions, political lobby groups, community and religious organizations, and book sellers should play, if any, in the regulation of extra-curricular reading practices for Ontario elementary school children. ("A Child" 380)

The Breadwinner series is a recommended reading for children aged twelve and up, and it is widely used in classrooms all over the world. *Three Wishes* was recommended for children in grades four to six, but was relabelled for older children after CJC demanded that it be withdrawn

from the school libraries and the Silver Birch program. Younger students can get the book from the libraries, but only with parental permission and supervision.

Why does this division occur? Why are children older than twelve considered more capable of understanding complex issues that for example ten-year-olds? James and Prout argue that, "through the explicit structure of the school system, age classes operate to regulate the times for and of infancy, childhood and adolescence through setting the ages of entry into and exit from different parts of the school system: nursery, primary and secondary schools" (209). Age is used to define which class a child belongs to, if s/he is doing worse or better than average, or s/he is considered aberrant. Age groups are used to group the children of same biological, numerical age in one group that corresponds to Piaget's developmental concept. However maybe a different approach to teaching should be thought of altogether and critical thinking should be developed and encouraged instead of insisting on division based on chronological age. Critical literacy can be useful in developing critical thinking.

The concept of critical literacy comes from the work of Paulo Freire, a Brazilian pedagogue, thinker, philosopher, and activist who made it his goal to work with illiterate, poor Brazilians in order to empower them by educating them. In the introduction to the second edition of Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Macedo rephrased what Freire fought for in education, and argued that, "[i]f students are not able to transform their lived experiences into knowledge and to use the already acquired knowledge as a process to unveil new knowledge, they will never be able to participate rigorously in a dialogue as a process of learning and knowing" (Freire 15). Freire distinguished between "the banking concept of education" in which knowledge is "a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing" (72) and "problem-posing" or "liberating" (79) education through which students

"develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (emphasis in original 83). This is what critical literacy is about: critical perception of the world and its transformation. There is no one definition of critical literacy theory, but Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys reviewed various definitions of critical literacy that appeared in scholarly literature over the last three decades and synthesized those in what they see as four dimension of critical literacy. According to them critical literacy does the following:

(1) disrupts the commonplace (seeing the everyday situations through new lenses),

(2) interrogates the multiple viewpoints (standing in the shoes of others),

(3) focuses on sociopolitical issues (understanding sociopolitical system, the relationship between language and power, the politics of everyday life), and

(4) takes action and promotes social justice (transforming the world, questioning practices of privilege and injustice, changing social discourses, challenging and redefining social borders). (382-3)

If we begin from the first dimension, which is disrupting the commonplace, I argue that, in the Western context, both works do position situations we have heard about in media (media representations of war in Afghanistan, or relations between Israel and Palestine) in a different way: *Three Wishes* and *The Breadwinner* series were both met with controversy after they first came out, for different reasons. Before *Three Wishes* was published, Israeli and Palestinian children had not been heard speaking so openly in their own words about what they go through every day, and their thoughts were not presented in such a direct way. This was partially a new perspective for the West, reflected in the fact that the CJC demanded it not be available to children younger than twelve. The first book of the series, *The Breadwinner*, on the other hand was criti-

cally acclaimed and introduced in the curricula specifically because it did offer a different per-

spective: the occupation of Afghanistan by the Taliban and the arrival of foreign, American and

Canadian troops, through the eyes of a child. The sequels that followed after the initial success of

The Breadwinner quickly gained popularity and are widely read. This series provided an entirely

new perspective because it gave an insight into what was happening during that time in

Afghanistan through the eyes of children.[20] The interest in that geopolitical area soared after

9/11. It was a new perspective because Ellis based her characters on real people, real children,

and real families she met in a refugee camp in Afghanistan; she took their stories and moulded

them into one. In these books we, the Western readers, get to see the everyday lives of children in

those countries, and it is through a new lens because we are not used to such representations. The

lens here is new insofar as these two works are trying to deconstruct both the Western notion of

childhood as a sacred space that has to be protected and the myth of a child as a passive agent

who cannot be in charge of her own life. Even though I have argued these two books perpetuate

the myth of the innocent child by positing these children as agents (ones we should take pity on),

in the self-contained world of these books they are active agents in the making and building of

their future. But, not everything is so positive when it comes to the outcomes of reading or en-

gaging in another way with these books. Insofar as "the West and Western cultural norms

guide ... student's reference point while they simultaneously remain unmarked. These norms are

the lenses through which she evaluates what is natural and preferred" (Sensoy and DiAngelo par.

24). Even though the commonplace is disrupted in the books, the child (or adult) reading these

books will most likely be unaware of his or her own perspective s/he brings when engaging with

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20 The occupation of Afghanistan by the Taliban, restrictions of women's rights, lack of educa-
tion, arrests of male members of families because of their education and worldviews, and so on.

these books. We must become aware of our own already-made perceptions and work towards destabilizing them if they restrict our critical thinking.

As far as the second dimension, interrogating multiple viewpoints goes, Deborah Ellis's works explore diversities "contained by nothing more than the circular boundary of the globe" (Steffler 113). Steffler argues we cannot assume that the intended Western audience will "identify and empathize with the child who lives in less-affluent and often desperate conditions," and that, even if the said child did identify and empathize, she is "not given the agency to act because she is 'simply' a child" reading a book (113). Additionally, some readers might feel lucky and thankful that they are not in the same situation and choose to simply put the book down; thus, instead of promoting tolerance, identification, and action, "the story can promote complacency and insularity" (113). Cases in which young people were moved to take action after reading a book (or watching a documentary or some other kind of input) are very few. Thus, even though readers will agree that what is happening to children depicted in these books is wrong, they will in most cases close the books and continue living their life. Furthermore, Steffler writes that "an active response can place the child reader in the dangerous position of saviour of the child character, while a more passive response can simply use the text as a therapeutic reading to alleviate guilt" (115). The colonialist narrative of saving the indigenous people from themselves is repeated all over again in this case. The West, as more affluent, with more resources and more developed industry, has to help those that the West labels as being "stuck in pre-modernity." The Western child is relied on, as it is assumed (in the Western pedagogy) that by reading books children learn about the world, and that by reading about people in situations different than theirs they will be inspired to change the world.

Both books focus on sociopolitical issues, *Three Wishes*, more so because the numerical age ranges of the children make it possible for a varied response to the issues they see and experience every day: this book shows that the older the children are, the more access they have to political participation. Sociopolitical issues presented in this book of interviews bring to the fore everyday problems people have to face in contemporary Israel and the occupied territories, Palestine. These include checkpoints, a poor economy and a lack of jobs in Palestinian areas versus more modern and booming illegal Israeli settlements, and curfews and check-up points at the entrance at McDonald's.

In *The Breadwinner* and *Parvana's Journey* Parvana's knowledge of sociopolitical issues is somewhat limited. Shauzia fares a bit better in *The Mud City* because she is around Mrs. Weera and works for her and thus gets information on relevant issues in the country. Ellis takes Parvana on a journey across Afghanistan in search of her mother, and she finds herself in very rural areas where there are no people and the people she does end up meeting are either other children or refugees like herself. Shauzia, on the other hand, moves around in urban spaces, with access to media. Parvana's source of knowledge about world politics, history, geography, and literature is her father, a teacher, who was educated in the West. To be more specific, he went to school in England, an education that led to his arrest by the Taliban.

Here we can read Ellis's criticism of the Taliban who did in fact arrest people due to their "Western" outlook. Without adults around her, and no sources like TV or radio normally available to children in the "developed" world, Parvana does not know much about what is going on in Afghanistan. We hear from her father about the history of Afghanistan, which is Ellis's way of trying to educate the Western reader about the geopolitical history of this region. Ellis interweaves real facts with Afghani traditional stories and myths from Afghani folklore. From time to

time Parvana does come across adults and then hears rumours about the events in the capital or in the country but they are not confirmed. Actually, a lot of what she hears are rumours that are not confirmed and more often than not turn out not to be true. However, the areas she goes through and the people she meets on the way from Kabul to refugee centre tell the story of sociopolitical problems in Afghanistan, including vast areas of land made uninhabitable due to nature (rough desert and mountain areas), poor economy, or migration of its inhabitants due to wars. Ellis severely criticizes the Taliban and their rule, focusing a lot on the position of women and education of girls during the Taliban rule.

The fourth dimension of critical literacy, promoting activism and social justice, is much harder to achieve than the others. How does one measure the impact these books have on readers? *The Breadwinner* series' popularity suggests it might act as an impetus for social change, but, in all reality, is this actually so? *Three Wishes* was at the centre of attention when banned for young children, but even for those children that read it, did it change anything in the way they perceive their peers? When it comes to using literature as a means of dispelling prejudices and learning about the world we live in, in this case learning about Islam, women in the East, children in the East, children in war, Al-Hazzá and Bucher argue that

> Introducing high quality literature is an excellent way to correct these misperceptions and inaccuracies. Students need to see a balanced view of the lives of peoples of the Middle East to counteract the often sensationalized headlines in the media which depict Middle Easterners as fanatics and terrorists. Once students can perceive and can understand that these people have the same types of daily struggles and dreams, they will be able to dissolve the preconceived cultural misconceptions they hold about the people of the Middle East. (131)

Furthermore, Sensoy too stresses the need "to develop critical media literacy in our students at all ages and grade levels" (131). Children live in this world and they are here to stay, which is why they should be taught and encouraged to critically engage in discussions about issues they find interesting or challenging. They should be empowered to think critically and take action when they see injustice in their own local communities first but maybe later on a global level. They should not simply be vessels into which knowledge and experience is pored over by adults but active participants of society. The application of critical literacy theory is a good first step in developing this kind of thinking but should be applied not just to literature but to other media as well, especially social media that is now so easily available. Problem-posing education, as Freire describes it, will turn young people into beings who can think for themselves and critically evaluate situations they find themselves in.

4. Case study: intersectionality, critical race theory

The intersectional theoretical approach to the complexity of identities and inequalities proposes an integrated look into gender/sex, class, race, ethnicity, and other categories. Life experiences are shaped by all of these categories interacting and intersecting differently in different parts of the world. They are seemingly universal, but have "specific local, national, and regional inflections" (Tomlinson 254), which is especially obvious when reading literature on or about other places and people who live in different conditions. Gender "intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities" (Butler 3). An intersectional paradigm shows how these factors converge in Ellis's work to not only destabilize the

notion of the innocent child but to allow us to understand how identity politics shift and re-establish themselves in radically different cultural contexts.

The racialized child in Deborah Ellis's works manifests specific cultural values. These are revealed when, for instance, familial structures are destabilized due to war and the child has to shift from the protected one to the protector of whole families. By analyzing these intersectional categories I argue that Ellis provides a counter-narrative to the status quo. Critical race theory and intersectionality help us to understand the formation of children's identity in Ellis's work and to investigate how the children's voice is posited. In Western readers' eyes, her child protagonists are perceived as the "Other." We know from the work of Sherene Razack that, especially post 9/11, Muslims are "evicted" from law and politics in the West. Critical race theory allows us to re-position the voice of the "Other" and makes us challenge stereotypical representations of the "Other" by letting us hear their voices.

4.1. Intersectionality

Intersectionality as a concept and theory arose out of

the pioneering work of black feminists in the United States and Great Britain on the hierarchical interlocking of relations of dominance (race/gender/class), [and] intersectionality has become the preferred term in Anglophone academic and activist circles to designate the complex intertwining of multiple identities/inequalities (Recent Feminist Outlooks 59).

According to Sirma Bilge, one of the first thinkers and theorists of intersectionality, Intersectionality reflects a transdisciplinary theory aimed at apprehending the complexity of social identities and inequalities through an *integrated approach*. It refutes the compart-

mentalization and hierarchization of the great axes of social differentiation through cate-

gories of gender/sex, class, race, ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation. The intersec-

tional approach goes beyond simple recognition of the multiplicity of the systems of op-

pression functioning out of these categories and postulates their interplay in the produc-

tion and reproduction of social inequalities. (Recent 58, emphasis in original)

In this paper, the concept of intersectionality will be especially useful in the analysis of

the identity construction of Ellis's children in war, otherwise constructed as "Other" in the West-

ern discourse. Intersectional theory and framework will reveal whether and how these categories

(gender, class, race, religion, ethnicity...) are used to "exclude or marginalize those who are dif-

ferent" (Crenshaw 1242) from "us." I will look at each of these categories individually in this

chapter, but will also make references as to how they interact and why it is important to consider

them together. In the context of these two books, gender and race will be the two most important

categories, and I will analyze how they converge to shape Ellis's children's (and women's) expe-

riences of living in war. Race is an important issue in both works as children represented in them

are children of color. That race plays an important role in their lives is especially prominent when

Israeli children talk about their Palestinian peers in negative terms in *Three Wishes,* and thereby

reproduce the dominant narrative of Palestinians as "dirty Arabs," "terrorists," "dangerous."

Gender will be of importance in *The Breadwinner* series in which girls are forced to dress as

boys to act as heads of families, and in which women issues are in the fore. Class plays a role in

both as children in both works talk about the lack of food, lack of employment, their parents not

being able to be to play their traditional parental roles due to Israeli restrictions. Twenty seven

per cent of adult Palestinians and fifty six per cent of Afghans are unemployed due to poor econ-

omy, religious or political reasons, the unavailability of (well-paid) jobs in their country (due to

checkpoints, Israel's attempts to displace Palestinians, and Western forces destroying local economy). European Training Foundation (ETF) claims that in Palestine

> The labour market suffers numerous structural issues including lack of social security for those outside the public sector, poor work conditions, low female labour force participation, work-related gender bias against females, weak unions, low union participation and the absence of a national provision of medical care and occupational safety. (4)

These are some of the reasons why children are forced to work and earn for their family, as described in Ellis's books. The unemployment in Palestine is high—the adult "labour participation force...has remained stable at around 40% over the past decade" (ETF 5), meaning that around sixty per cent do not work. When adults cannot work because they are not guaranteed any rights and are restricted when it comes to work opportunities, their children take over. For example, the children interviewed in *Three Wishes*, as well as the children in *The Breadwinner* series, often say they know their parents or other adults in their families or around them cannot do anything to protect them or are not able to care for them; they understand that adults around them "have no more social agency or institutional power" than they do (Hasan 6). Despite children working, officially "unemployment among young people (aged 15-24) in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is very high" (ETF 6).

When parents cannot work and support their families, and children take on the responsibilities of earning and providing for their families, the family structure and family roles are "destabilized" (Hasan 6). Families in Israel, Palestine, and Afghanistan are often separated due to displacement, checkpoints, roadblocks, arrests, and war in general. Family roles are inverted, as parents cannot work due to curfews (Palestine) or religion (women in Afghanistan under Taliban rule); children cannot go to school but have to get jobs instead or take care of their younger sib-

lings or older members of their family, effectively taking over the role of the adult. Thus, "there

is no prerogative or authority in (Palestinian) adulthood," and "there is no evidence of security

provided by a community of adults or any social power they might summon up" (Hasan 7).

The concept of a traditional family can no longer function as such, as is illustrated in

both *The Breadwinner* series and *Three Wishes.* The definition of traditional family says the fol-

lowing:

> Formed through a combination of marital and blood ties, ideal families consist of hetero-
>
> sexual couples that produce their own biological children. Such families have a specific
>
> authority structure; namely, a father-head earning an adequate family wage, a stay-at-
>
> home wife, and children. (Hill Collins 62)

Parvana's father is arrested, and is not the head of the family anymore. Asif's parents are

dead or missing, his uncle abused him. Shauzia's father is arrested and mother has to live with

her in-laws who want to marry off Shauzia. Closing down of schools and other services meant

that these men could not make an adequate family wage either. Traditional gender roles are in

war times not as stable as one would stereotypically expect in "pre-modern societies," such as

Afghanistan or Palestine are claimed to be by more conservative Western thinkers. Women tend

to become the breadwinners, with men in war injured or dead. Some men cannot handle the

atrocities of war, or may feel inadequate to protect their families, which is why women take over

the care of the family. In *Three Wishes* and *The Breadwinner* series these roles are reversed even

more, as children take over the responsibilities of their parents and in fact have to take care of

them.

Both in *The Breadwinner* series and *Three Wishes* children more often rely on their

peers, other children around them or children's organizations led by children. I argue that Ellis's

positions children counter the dominant theories of childhood and empower their own voices in opposition to the Western ideals.

Intersectionality does not refer to "a unitary framework but a range of positions" and is a "heuristic device for understanding boundaries and hierarchies of social life" (Anthias 4). For example, according to Anthias, gender is inflected by race, class and other categories (4) and cannot be compartmentalized and singled out as a sole category that determines a person's place in the world. In the context of this thesis, intersectionality will be used to look into how all these categories work together and produce and reproduce hierarchy and boundaries in women's and children's lives in this specific case. Gender, race, and class are "discursive means in the exercise of power" (Anthias 8), and this is especially true in the context of Ellis's books, as these categories in these books all work together to go against the dominant power structures that posit Middle Eastern values as complete opposites to the West. When reading books about the Middle East we have to be aware of the fact that these categories "exist within spatial and temporal contexts and are emergent rather than given and unchangeable, located in the operations of power" (Anthias 8). We have to work through our own prejudices and expectations to decolonize our gaze and become aware of (political and economical) power structures that define these individual categories in these two cultures. Intersectionality is particularly useful when studying inequalities on a global scale, as is the focus of this thesis. It is important to analyze all these different categories interacting and intersecting because

> you cannot invoke only gender processes to understand gendered practices or outcomes, you cannot invoke only 'race' and racialisation to understand racist practices and outcomes and you cannot invoke only class processes to understand classed outcomes. (Anthias 12)

These have to be studied and analyzed together in order to deal with our own colonial

practices, and in order to deconstruct these as binaries (male/female, us/them, East/West, pre-

modern/modern, etc.) in our own minds and maybe on a global level further down the road by

educating and re-educating people around us. But in this process, we also have to be aware of

"the operations of inequality and violence through the state and other institutional frameworks in

which power and economic interest are exercised, and not just at the categories and practices of

gender, race and so on" (Anthias 13). In countries such as Afghanistan or Palestine that must rely

on external funding due to their ruined internal economies (e.g. Americans funding sports in

Afghanistan), we can observe how state power and economic interests work to turn citizens of

different countries into global consumers and participants in global economy.

4.2. Gender

4.2.1. Women in post 9/11 literature

Trends in post 9/11 literature show that "books written by or about the plight of Muslim

women and girls in South-East Asia and the Middle East have appeared in increasing numbers in

the West since 11 September 2001" as a "mass-marketed commodity readily available for con-

sumption in North America" (Sensoy and Marshall 295). The interest in this geopolitical area

peaked after the wars were waged by America (and Canada, as well as some European countries)

in the Middle East. Stories are "more likely to be told if they are considered to be relevant,

timely, or unusual, and if they pertain to a conflict" (Jiwani 731) and, at that time, stories about

life under the Taliban (for example, *My Forbidden Face: Growing Up Under the Taliban: A*

Young Woman's Story[21]), life in the war zones, life under a burqa or chador (for example, *Behind the Burqa: Our Life in Afghanistan and How We Escaped to Freedom*)[22], and the fight to liberate women and/or children were especially timely and popular. They still are in 2016, and there is still a significant amount of books being published and read about women from the Middle East. The lives of women and children are especially appealing to Western audience because they offer a "truthful" and authentic peek into their lives as they are often written by people (mostly women) who were or are insiders. Especially popular are stories in which women talk about overcoming the restrictions in their communities and the violence which they are faced with in case they are found out. How and which stories "about violence against women are covered depends not only on the status and race of women, but also cumulative knowledge that exists about particular groups of women" (Jiwani 731). The West's attempts at liberating women from the yokes of patriarchy they are supposedly confined by under Middle Eastern men, and the attempts to provide proper education, and a safe childhood free of worries work into these stories, as we all want a happy ending for both of these groups. *The Breadwinner* series' final book *My name is Parvana* gives us a happy ending in which Parvana, Shauzia and other girls continue to find more girls, women, and children who need help, either because they were orphaned by the war, or sold into marriage by their families, while Parvana's sister Nooria gets to go to a university in the United States. In *Three Wishes* one cannot see a happy ending but does get a good view of what children and their families go through, Especially useful are insights into the lives of Palestinian children and women, as they are often racially profiled by the Israeli soldiers who restrict

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21 Hachemi, Chékéba Latifa. *My Forbidden Face: Growing Up Under the Taliban: A Young Woman's Story.* New York: Hyperion, 2001. Print.
22 Yasgur, Batya Swift, Amy Zalman, Sarah F. Gold, Mark Rotella, Lynn Andriani, Emily Chenoweth, Michael Scharf, and Jeff Zaleski. *Behind the Burqa: Our Life in Afghanistan and How We Escaped to Freedom.* Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley, 2003. Print.

their everyday movements. Ellis talked to women in Afghan camps where she volunteered and drew from their personal experience to come up with not only *The Breadwinner* series. She also wrote a nonfiction book on women in Afghan war, *Women of the Afghan War*, out of which the idea for *The Breadwinner* arose. Thus, she had "insider allies" whose stories we perceive as "expert testimonies" (Beyond 15). The same thing goes for *Three Wishes* in which we do not hear directly from women, but we hear about their plights from their children. All of their contributions, "uttered from the authoritative standpoint of insiders, have been central to making gender paradigmatic of the 'civilisational' gap between the West and the rest" (Beyond 16). However, these two books work against the dominant narrative in which women are completely suppressed and not able to act on their own. Both children (especially girls) and women in these books show proactivity, they defy norms, and they keep going despite all the obstacles that come their way.

A common figure and a "recurrent theme" in books about Middle East that appeared after September 11 is that of the "heroic Afghan woman" (Jiwani 737). Their stories "stress their resilience, agency, and their resistance to the Taliban, … challenges they have faced, the individual risks they have undertaken, and their fearlessness in the face of death threats, beatings, executions" (737). *The Breadwinner* series is all about this; it contains all these topics and works around them to depict the lives of women and children in Afghanistan under the Taliban. Parvana's mother, after the initial sadness and depression caused by their poor living conditions and the arrest of her husband, at first started a secret magazine for women that will be smuggled out of the country, then she started a secret school for girls in their apartment, together with Parvana's ex-teacher, Mrs. Weera, who later becomes an important female political figure. Later in the story, in *Parvana's Journey,* Parvana's mother started a proper school at a refugee camp area, and in *The Mud City* Mrs. Weera created widows' compound and made sure women and children

were protected. Even with threats coming from men in the camp, who did not approve of girls' education, Parvana's mother's school was initially a success, but she was eventually beaten and killed for daring to educate girls and thus take them away from their household chores or marriage. Of course, she was killed by the Taliban. The school was in the end destroyed when the Americans bombed the area. Mrs. Weera is another strong female character in *The Breadwinner* series. She had been in the Afghan Women's Union" (*The Breadwinner* 58) with Parvana's mother, and was Parvana's teacher. Women's groups play(ed) an important role during the Taliban in helping women to reach safe havens or to smuggle articles and magazines out to the world. In the refugee centre Mrs. Weera's organization "ran secret schools, clinics and a magazine" (*The Breadwinner* 308). Nooria, Parvana's older sister, is another character that is strong and vocal. She is what one would label "a typical girl" - she has long beautiful hair, she is a teacher, she helps out with the younger children. Parvana, and her friend Shauzia, are the ones who pretended to be boys and they are both strong girls who have been through a lot and continued to help children and girls they met on their way to and from different places in Afghanistan. In *Three Wishes* women's organizations again clearly have an important role as some schools in Palestinian territories are run by Palestinian women's organizations. Children often mention their mothers as being strong and supportive: for example, Yanal, a fourteen-year-old Palestinian, says, "There are a lot of strong Palestinian women, and my mother is one of them" (*Three Wishes* 66).

Another common topic and figure in books about the Middle East is that of a woman refugee whose story of hard life and distress make for a compelling and interesting read. There are about four million Palestinian refugees, with around one million people in refugee camps in surrounding countries. *Three Wishes* does not deal with this problem directly. Children talk about

the existence of camps, but do not refer explicitly to inhumane conditions of living in such spaces. Parvana and her family are refugees who run away from the Taliban rule and find refuge in camps. Parvana's journey through Afghanistan depicts her journey from Kabul to the refugee camp. Although she was not displaced by the war per se, she is a refugee. Her journey resembles an adventure story in which she has to overcome obstacles to find her mother. Her mother's arrival at the camp and how she got there are not described in detail. A major figure in the refugee camp is Mrs. Weera who runs a widow's compound: "not only was the office for the Widows' Compound, the section of the refugee camp where widows and their children lived. It was also the office for a secret woman's organization that operated on the other side of the Pakistan border in Afghanistan" (*The Mud City* 308). The widow's compound is problematic in the eyes of the man who are situated in the refugee camp: "half a dozen men tried to get over the walls, yelling that the women inside were immoral and should not be allowed to live together without men to watch over them" (*The Mud City* 425), thus drawing a greater division between victimized women and traditional, patriarchal Muslim men.

4.2.2. Women, Children, Men

Women's (and children's) rights were cited by American, Canadian, and European governments as one of the main reasons for getting involved in wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere. The interest in the lives of women and children in these countries points to the fact that we, the Westerners, are aware that "women [and children] of color are differently situated in the economic, social, and political world" (Crenshaw 1250). However, "[w]hen reform efforts undertaken on behalf of women neglect this fact, women of color are less likely to have their needs met that women who are racially privileged" (Crenshaw 1250). In the War on Terror

Three allegorical figures have come to dominate the social landscape of the 'war on terror' and its ideological underpinning of a clash of civilizations: the dangerous Muslim man, the imperilled Muslim woman, and the civilized European, the latter a figure who is seldom explicitly named but who nevertheless anchors the first two figures. (Razack 5)

In *The Breadwinner* series we encounter all three of these. Women and girls are imperilled, threatened by the existence of the Taliban and, specifically, by dangerous Muslim men. The civilized European shows up in the form of the Western reader and activists who want to bring about a change. In *Three Wishes*, men are dangerous, and they appear in the form of soldiers (for Palestinian children) and in the form of terrorists (for Israeli children). Western feminism has been "complicit in the Orientalist constitution of the non-Western woman as inherently victimized and in need of help, [and] it has also constructed a Western feminist subject position in contrast to it" (Ansari 51). It is important to look at the gender issue through the colonizing/decolonizing framework. Colonial narrative is still present in our own construction of the world and colonial projects are still being carried out through globalization of economy, education, and more. When it comes to gender, "Western feminists have often historically been complicit in this [colonialist and imperialist] project by seeing themselves as 'white helpers' that champion the non-Western woman's cause, but actually work within the bounds of imperial agendas" (Ansari 59). Many thinkers, such as Razack, have written about how

Western women achieve their own subject status through claims that they are the same as, but culturally different from, Muslim women, women who have to be rescued. Gender, unmoored from class, race, and culture, facilitates this imperialist move, as does culture that is equally removed from history and context. (104)

A Muslim woman "is not seen as subordinated by economic inequality and war, but rather as centrally affected by Islamist patriarchy" (Ansari 57). By not taking into consideration other categories that factor into gender, such as inequality, patriarchy, class, and race, we tend to ascribe the differences between Western women and women in the Middle East simply to gender and religion. Because they live in the Middle East live in a pre-modern world, men and women there should behave according to deeply set gender characteristics. They are subordinated by men and under constant threat of being beaten or killed if they do something outside of what is considered acceptable for their gender. Through rescue missions, empowering women through education, empowering women through involvement in the local community or politics on local level (presumably funded by the American government), Afghan women "demonstrate initiative and, in their embracing of Western ways, they prove their deservedness as victims worthy of saving and, in line with that, as potential consumers for Western goods" (Jiwani 737).

Because Ellis's figurations of the child problematize not only race and culture but gender, the innovative theoretical concept of "queering the child" is especially productive. The implications of cross-dressing and gender dis-identification in the representation of the Afghan child have particular cultural relevance. Queering the child here, in the West, and there, in the East, has different implications. In the conditions depicted in the book, where families are destabilized, it was and still is common for girls to dress up as boys in order to work, make money and buy food for the family. Parvana describes how she goes out every day to the market where there are other boys running around with their trays, or digging up bones. One day while she is working, she runs into Shauzia, her best friend from school, who is also disguised as a boy, and at that point they realize that they are not the only ones doing this. Although, according to Butler, gender is a "masquerade" for everyone (Butler 46), in this case it can be applied specifically to those girls in

The Breadwinner series who masquerade as boys in order to move fluidly between the two genders: "They were going to turn [Parvana] into a boy. 'As a boy, you'll be able to move in and out of the market, buy what we need, and no one will stop you,' Mother said" (63).

Parvana, the main character of *The Breadwinner* series, and Shauzia, the main protagonist of *The Mud City* are forced by their mothers and, in Parvana's case, her former teacher, Mrs. Weera, to cut her hair and wear boy clothes so they could provide for the family. Parvana describes the situation using these words: "They were going to turn her into a boy" (63). The decision was out of her hands. It was made for her by her mother, her older sister (who is already a teenager, already developed and looks like a girl), and Mrs. Weera. At first Parvana expected people to point at her on streets; however, when this did not happen, she realized she could pass as a boy, which made her confident and in a way free because she could move around and do what she wanted instead of being confined in a small space with her family. Out in the streets,

> Parvana wasn't sure if she would be considered a woman. On the one hand, if she behaved like one and stood outside the shop and called in her order, she could get in trouble for not wearing a burqa. On the other hand, if she went into a shop, she could get in trouble for not acting like a woman! (*TB* 55)

This quote shows that there is a specific way a woman is supposed to act and behave in order to be recognized and acknowledged as a woman, in this context as in most others. Any person "becomes intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility" (Butler 16). Gender intelligibility in Afghanistan prescribes specific codes of behaviour for women, children, and men.

The body is always problematic when it comes to gender. In this specific case, the problem is that, as Parvana, or any other girl who disguises as a boy, grows older her body will

change and could possibly betray her: "She could not pass as a boy forever. She was already thir-teen" (*The Breadwinner* 159). The body is dangerous. Shauzia, Parvana's best friend, comments on how her "shape is changing. If it changes too much," she says, "I'll turn back into a girl" (*TB* 114). At different moments throughout the series both Parvana and Shauzia go between being a girl and then a boy and then a girl again. The changes depend on where they are. The streets are a place where it is acceptable to be a boy. However, as soon as they leave the streets and enter more formal institutions, such as school, or even a refugee camp, they turn back into girls. They feel like they do not fit there because they are confined. Being a boy allows them more autonomy and freedom, but they cannot stay boys forever. Another problem when it comes to gender is us-ing the bathroom. Considering those children work in streets, the bathroom is a big problem, es-pecially for girls. In that case they either have to go home and not make any money or, "another choice was to go to the bathroom outside the [market] doorway, where people might see her and figure out she was a girl" (101). When Shauzia ends up in prison in Peshawar, her first thought is: "There would not be private showers. She could not expose herself as a girl to all these boys"(*The Mud City* 374). There are too many ways in this world to expose one as being female.

Because the decision to "turn her into" a boy was not Parvana's, she at first resisted the idea. The symbol of her femininity, her hair, went first, and then her clothes. Long hair is per-ceived as a symbol of femininity, while short hair could let her pass as a boy. Afterwards, she "looked at the hair in her mother's hand. While it was on her head, it had seemed important. It didn't seem important anymore" (*The Breadwinner* 66). Her older sister's hair is long and straight, the most beautiful in the world—and functions a symbol of femininity. Later in the se-ries (*My name is Parvana)*, we find out that her younger sister's hair is also very beautiful, thus designating her as a proper feminine girl. Parvana is the only one with wiry, strandy hair, making

her not fit into a "proper girly girl" narrative. She can pass as a boy because this marker of femininity (hair) refuses to be recognized as such in her case.

Her older sister argues that, if she is a boy outside their house, she has to be a boy inside as well because of the possibility of Taliban barging in for more searches or arrests. The boy clothes she wears are traditional Afghan clothes. To make it even more complicated and problematic, the boy clothes that are given to her by her mother once belonged to her older brother who was killed by a landmine. In the West it is acceptable for girls to be tomboys, just as long as they "turn back" into girls, becoming feminine and fitting the gender role assigned to them better. Talking about tomboyism in the West, Halberstam argues that

> Tomboyism usually describes an extended childhood period of female masculinity. If we are to believe general accounts of childhood behavior, some degree of tomboy behavior is quite common for girls and does not give rise to parental fears. Because comparable cross-identification behaviors in boys do often give rise to quite hysterical responses, we tend to believe that female gender deviance is much more tolerated than male gender deviance. (193)

However, being a boy is not safe either. At one point, Parvana sees soldiers in the distance and thinks, "if they found her and thought she was a boy, they might force her into the army. If they found her and discover she was a girl… That was too horrible to think about" (*Parvana's Journey* 177). Neither option is safe enough in times of war.

Armies were known to use children as soldiers and many cases (Somalia, Uganda, Afghanistan) prove this is so. In Israel, being a boy or a girl does not a big difference when it comes to conscription: both have to join the army. Some of the children feel it is their national duty to protect and serve their country. One of the girls in *Three Wishes* says that "it's very im-

portant to do this, even for girls. It's part of my duty as an Israeli" (32). It has nothing to do with gender in this case. Palestinian kids have a similar attitude and one of the girls cites her aunt in saying that "we shouldn't let boys tell us we can't do things just because we're girls. She says that Palestinian girls and women are strong and brave, and we can fight the Israelis just as well as the boys can" (*Three Wishes* 81).

Sensoy and Marshall argue that "Ellis constructs Muslim girls and women as vulnerable, naïve, ignorant, uncivilised and in need of rescue from the efforts, good will, and knowledge of educated, modern, civilised and benevolent subjects located in the (civilised) West" (Missionary Girl Power 298). I do not agree entirely with them because women (and girls) depicted in these books are active in their communities; they are the ones carrying out activities for the wellbeing of children and other women in the refugee camps; they are the ones who organize hospitals and start schools. However, despite the agency assigned to these women and girls, in the colonialist project, Paravana is imagined as an active agent "who must contribute to her own salvation through ideas about Western girlhood as free and unconstrained" (Missionary Girl Power 299). Sensoy and Marshall also argue that, in the text about girlhood in Afghanistan, Ellis recreates colonialist and imperialist discourses within which First World (white) girls come to the rescue of Third World (brown or Muslim) girls, and they define this "ongoing imperial project" as "missionary girl power": "the newly emergent discursive strategies that construct first world girls as the saviours of their 'Third World' sisters" (Missionary Girl Power 296). Therefore, when reading this book, we must decolonize our own gaze by not falling into the trap of the saviour discourse. Yes, we should help people in need if we can, but we do not have to act patronizing. We have to listen to these people's needs and try to change things on institutional levels by putting pressure on governments, human rights activists, children rights activists, and other people and

organizations in power. Any little thing we do without engaging "saviour narrative" will mean or gaze is becoming decolonized. We must stop believing people in developing countries are powerless because they do not conform to our standards of technological or economical development. We must take into consideration local histories, local traditions, and local differences and not make everyone and everything fit our own (Western) levels of expectations. On a personal level, our attitudes need to change by avoiding feeling sorry for people who we think are worse off, we have to accept that they might not be as miserable or as restricted as we think. If one could travel around the world and get to know locals and places first hand and not just through media representations, life would be so much easier. But until then, we must rely on books, movies, reports, media, documentaries, and so on and critically analyze what it is we hear or see in them.

When it comes to women in the Middle East and how we perceive them, it is most probable we will engage our own prejudices and imagine a stereotypical Muslim woman who is confined in her house because her husband will not let her out or let her obtain a job. We will imagine a woman wearing some sort of head cover, silent, and silenced. In this book Ellis does somewhat tap into this problem. When Parvana first started working at the market, she brought her father's pens and papers to read and write for the illiterate people of Kabul and make money doing that. She used to sit under a window of a house. There was a woman in there who would throw small presents for Parvana through her window. In the course of the book we never get to find out who she is, but it is assumed she was locked in there by her mad husband and is not allowed to leave the house; window being her only way to communicate with the world.

Furthermore, because women are expected to take care of the children and family in the traditional binary gender roles framework, Parvana can not just leave the baby boy she finds abandoned on the floor of a house in one of the villages destroyed by the Taliban or the boy with-

out a leg she finds hiding in a cave in the mountains of the inland Afghanistan. That would go against her role as a benefactor for all the other children and girls and would even further shake our expectations of responsible children. Before the Taliban, her family was a well-off, educated family, with parental roles strictly divided between her mother and father. Her mother was a journalist, but at the same time, she cooked and cleaned, and took care of children. During the Taliban, and while her father was in prison, Parvana's mother and older sister Nooria cooked and cared for the younger children in the family, the whole time preparing Nooria for her upcoming marriage. Nooria was rescued by a scholarship given to her by New York University allowing her at the same time to escape an arranged marriage (which she did not explicitly oppose because her husband was supposed to be a nice person who at the time of the arrangement lived in one of the cities that had at that point not yet been taken over by the Taliban) and the country. As a person educated in the West, she might escape the traditional roles that are ascribed to women in the Middle East; she will escape having to veil herself; and she will be educated and progressive, according to Western standards. Her "exodus from oppression and the bestowal of the scholarship [feed] directly into the American myths of progress according to which education provides the means for the committed individual to overcome class, ethnic, gendered, and racial oppressions" (Schaffer and Smith 64). However, there is a critique of this kind of rescue: "Mother and I applied. And I got accepted because of how I suffered in the war" (91). Nooria used Parvana's experience to appeal to the university's sensitivity to plights of women in the Middle East. Such stories point to the suffering of women and girls and make people want to do something to help them, which is what the university in this story did. In *The Breadwinner*, the story of Malali, a young Afghani girl who led armies to victory, is a source of inspiration and courage for Parvana. According to Douglas, "Afghanistan's history includes women warriors and powerful queens"

(10), and Ellis makes her children almost sound like these warriors when they talk about everything they go through and how they survive.

None of the men in *The Breadwinner* series, except for Parvana's father, are good: they are all out to subdue women, force them to wear burqa, stop them from going to school, etc. In *Three Wishes* the figure of the terrorist is a man: even though some of the children talk about female or child suicide bombers, the prevalent image of a suicide bomber is a man. The books thus perpetuate "longstanding stereotypes about Muslim men—that they are violent and intolerant and thus require some degree of monitoring and caution" (Sensoy 120). Furthermore, "[t]his popular narrative about Muslim men goes hand in hand with the narrative of oppressed women" (Sensoy 120). The construction of a man's identity in both of these books is "virtually interchangeable with the construction of shared group identifications, as is most evident in the almost exclusive use" (Sensoy 126) of the words "terrorist" or "Taliban." Through these "ideologically consistent messages, the inherent incompatibility of Muslims and the West is reinforced" (Sensoy 131). In *The Breadwinner* there is a scene in which Parvana witnesses a Taliban soldier crying. At the same time, he does not know how to read or write; he is illiterate and backward. The Taliban are, even in this book "an undifferentiated mass, a force that can be countered only with the enlightened force of the West" (Jiwani 735). The men in *Three Wishes* are either terrorists who convey the threat of suicide bombing in the eyes of Israeli children, or are brutal soldiers who do not allow them to go to school or to play outside and who tear down their houses, in the eyes of Palestinian children. Unfortunately, the "images and stereotypes we fear are readily available and frequently deployed in ways that do not generate sensitive understanding of the nature of … violence" (Crenshaw 1262). The soldiers in *Three Wishes* described by Palestinian children are not good men either. Maryam, eleven, talks about how Israeli soldiers "stare at me

and say nasty, rude things to me and my friends. They say things to my aunt that are disrespect-ful, things that men should not say to women" (78). Talking about soldiers at checkpoints, an-other Palestinian girl says that "the Israeli soldiers treat us like we are dogs. They make us stand and wait for no good reason, just because they can" (105). None of them define whether those soldiers are male or female, but presumably they are men, or we, readers, imagine them as such because we expect men to be more crude and violent than women. Palestinian children can be heard saying that "he soldiers don't see me as a child. They see me as an enemy" (51). In that case gender, race or class is not important; everyone is an enemy.

The women and children Ellis focuses on are commonly constructed as the "other" in the Western narrative of "them" and/versus "us." However, they are worthy of rescue, Jiwani argues, "by virtue of the construction of the Taliban as an ultra-patriarchal force representative of Islam" (735). Furthermore, Cooke argues that the "imperial logic genders and separates subject peoples so that men are Other and women are civilizable" (468). International laws on women and chil-dren rights "tends to conflate women and children into a single category, a grouping that impedes a recognition of women's independent agency. Children's agency is likewise ignored in this con-flation, as scholars fail to recognize the "variety of political spheres that exist—public and pri-vate— and the intersection that takes place between them" (Linde 18). The problem arises when "conceptions of the 'other' define 'brown women' as helpless victims and 'brown men' as their barbaric predators exercising the authority given them by traditional culture" because it positions men as not worthy of saving, or as not being modern, or educated, or open to change (Arat-Koc 58). Reflecting on this matter, Sherene Razack writes that "women's bodies have long been the ground on which national difference is constructed" (86) and that

The body of the Muslim woman, a body fixed in the Western imaginary as confined, mutilated, and sometimes murdered in the name of culture, serves to reinforce the threat that the Muslim man is said to pose to the West, and is used to justify the extraordinary measures of violence and surveillance required to discipline him and Muslim communities. (107)

Women in Palestine who have to go through checkpoints on an everyday basis are often exposed to humiliation, as mentioned by children in *Three Wishes*. The bathroom is one of the problems named in both books as something that sets women apart from men, especially in situations when they are forced to wait for long periods of time at checkpoints: "It is very hard for women at the checkpoints. They have no place to go when, you know, they have to go to the toilet" (*Three Wishes* 67).

4.2.3. The burqa

The burqa and other forms of veiling have become "iconic symbols of women's oppression under Islam" (Jiwani 731). *The Breadwinner* series seems to be very critical of the burqa; there are many instances in which women and children complain about having to wear it or about not being able to recognize their mothers in a crowd of women. In *The Mud City* Shauzia " saw a shop that sold nothing but burqas, lined up on the walls, hanging like blue ghosts" (328). None of the girls or women in *The Breadwinner* series like having to wear the burqa. The burqa is in many cases seen as highly undesirable, even by Muslim women; it is definitely seen in this way in the West. Numerous examples in our surroundings, prove that the burqa or any type of veiling practices are not welcome and will not be tolerated in the "multicultural" West. For example, in 2015 "Europe's leading human rights court upheld the France's ban on Islamic headscarves," af-

ter earlier in 2004 France "banned face coverings of all kinds, including masks, niqabs, and…

burqa, in public spaces" (Akbar par. 1-7).

As a feminist activist, Deborah Ellis often repeats that it was what she saw happening to

women in the Middle East that made her want to go to Afghanistan and help women and girls

there. The burqa and other veiling practices are the most often cited "proof" of women's subordi-

nation to Arab men. Western feminists argue very loudly that there is a need to liberate Muslim

women from having to wear burqa and other types of hair and/or body covers. In many situations

in this book, both children and women comment on the drawbacks of wearing a burqa and their

relief when they can take it off. In the Western media, we have been able to witness the taking off

of burqa by women from the Middle East and their joy in doing it; an example is the unveiling of

women on the Oprah Show. A representative of Revolutionary Association of the Women of

Afghanistan (RAWA), Zoya, gave a speech on the conditions for women and children in

Afghanistan and then proceeded to take off her burqa with Oprah's help. Sherene Razack writes

that "the body of the Oriental woman, a body that must be consistently unveiled and modernized,

confirms the Western subject as a person of knowledge and reason" (109). Deborah Ellis, coming

from a modern country where women have all the rights and where multiculturalism "strives,"

definitely seems to fall into this trap in this book.

In spite of many testimonies by Muslim women in the West who describe traditional

clothing as a sign of religious devotion and autonomy, such as Monia Mazigh's memoir *Hope*

and Despair: My Struggle to Free My Husband, Maher Arar[23], the burqa is portrayed exclusively

as the ultimate enemy of modernity, a point which is repeated several times throughout the se-

ries: women fall because they cannot see where they are going and children cannot recognize

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23 Mazigh, Monia. *Hope and Despair: My Struggle to Free My Husband, Maher Arar.* Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2008. Print.

their mothers in a crowd because women all look the same. Western soldiers cannot talk to veiled women because they cannot see their faces and thus render them unreadable and beyond communication. "The elision of other socioeconomic issues in favour of depicting the burqa is clearly present" (Ansari 59).

Narratives surrounding various forms of veiling usually consist of these formative elements:

The Muslim woman, long under the oppression of the backward Arab/ Muslim male, has had to endure the primitive practice of veiling, which results in the unequivocal limiting of her physical and psychological rights and freedoms. If she refuses to veil, she will be subjected to various degrees of humiliation, punishment, torture, and possibly death. All Arab/Muslim women are mistreated by violent Arab/Muslim men, and women in the Arab and Muslim world are in general being abused. (Shaheen, 2001)

This narrative, with minor variations, "has been a dominant element of Western knowledge about the status of Muslim women since the 18th century" (Kahf 47). According to Steet, "[p]arallel to this story of mistreatment and abuse is the story of hyper-sexuality and eroticism associated with Arab and Muslim women" (12). In Ellis's books, the veil is simply a symbol of oppression. Nothing positive is associated with veiling practices in Ellis's works. It is depicted as extremely negative and extremely undesirable by both Eastern and Western women. Sensoy and DiAngelo argue that "markers that potentially counter the narrow story [of veiled woman] do not override the power of the veil as a sign of oppression. This myopia functions to protect Western women from acknowledging ambiguities that could destabilize their own position in raced and gendered hierarchies" (par. 55). Sirma Bilge argues that,

Despite significant ethnographic works revealing the complexity of contemporary head-scarf/veil cultures, a dichotomous frame prevails in the literature and, not insignificantly, in feminist scholarship: the veil as a *symbol of submission* of women to men, and the veil as a *symbol of resistance* against Western hegemony, commodification of women's bodies and post-9/11 Islamophobia. This dichotomous framing of the Muslim veil either as a symbol of oppression or of resistance has its historical roots in the colonial subjugation where the "woman question", caught between colonial domination and anti-colonialist national resistance, has been instrumentalized in both. (Beyond 14, emphasis in original)

Furthermore, Bilge argues that by positioning women in the Western narrative as coerced into wearing the veil or into developing a "false consciousness," women are "devoid of agency" (Beyond 14); however, because the veil is associated with dangerous Muslims and is politically tied to Islam, veiled women are, at the same time, turned into "dangerous agents of Islam *qua* diasporic political force threatening Western *Weltanschauung*" (15). In *The Breadwinner* series, women are forced to wear the burqa because of the Taliban. If they are not accompanied by men, they have to have a note from their husbands who grant them permission to be outside unaccompanied. Parvana's mother is not happy with this and says that she "will not walk around [her] own city with a note pinned to my burqa as if [she] were a kindergarten child": "I have a university degree!" she exclaims (43). The casting of

> veiled women as *unconscious agents* of their own manipulation at the (male) hands of Muslim fundamentalism was reinforced by recurrent references to fundamentalist regimes, such as Afghanistan under the Taliban or Iran after the revolution where veiling has been violently forced upon women. (Beyond 17, emphasis in original)

Women in *The Breadwinner* series are not unconscious agents of their own manipulation; rather, they are positioned as knowing of the situation they are in and they comply for the sake of their families. Burqa-clad women in *The Breadwinner* series are not without agency. Their actions point to the importance of women's organizations. In this book, the women are the carriers of progress and enlightenment. They use the burqa as a device for smuggling books, magazines, and other goods. What this book does not acknowledge; however, in any way is women's conscious and voluntary choice to wear the burqa. *The Breadwinner* claims women are eager to tear off their veils at any moment: "as soon as I get out of Taliban territory, I'm going to throw off my burqa and tear it into a million pieces" (*TB* 125). Thus, this whole series reinforces the notion that

> Ultimately, the veil has become an over-determined cultural signifier predominantly disqualifying its wearer as a free-willed agentic subject, since one cannot voluntarily choose to wear such a symbol of female submission, while at the same time making her a dangerous agent, a civilisational threat to Western modernity. (Beyond 18)

Postcolonial theorists have worked out a new frame for veiling practices:

> By considering in-group (Muslim) patriarchy inside *the matrix of domination* between Western states and their Muslim minorities, which is what an intersectional analysis is about, postcolonial feminists accomplish an important task of decolonising representations of gender relations ascribed to Muslims and reveal how, in the current discursive environment which makes women's rights and gay rights a key civilisational marker of the West, veiled Muslim women living in Western societies find themselves at the intersection of race and gender domination. (Beyond 19, emphasis in original)

However, Bilge argues this definition of veil as an act of resistance is deficient because it reduces agency only to resistance, "whether against Western imperialism, global capitalism, commodification of women's bodies or post-9/11 Islamophobia" (20), and obscures "religious agency" (21).

Ellis's "totalizing comments about how the burqas on the … street obscure these women's identities also serve to construct all burqa-clad women as unidentifiable, as lacking any individual subjectivity" (Ansari 55). Children can only distinguish between women if they have a distinctive physical characteristics: even though there are various reasons and motivations for wearing some kind of veil, be it hijab, burqa, or a headscarf, they are mostly denied and sub-sumed under the label of oppression: "the denial of the potential for the veil to signify agency is related to Orientalist tropes that posit Islam as paradigmatic of patriarchy, and thus Muslim women as being the most utterly oppressed" (Ansari 58). Wearing hijab, niqaab or any other kind of veil is more and more perceived not as a symbol of oppression but as a symbol of aggression against the Western values.

4.3. Critical race

Critical race theory helps us to understand the formation of children's identity in Ellis's work and to investigate how the children's voice is posited. In Western readers' eyes, her child protagonists are perceived as the "Other." Critical race theory allows us to hear the voices of this "other," which is especially the case in *Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak,* a series of interviews in which, according to the author, there was no embellishment or authorial censorship of the original material.

Racist theories posit races other than white as "inferior." People with "non-white" skin color are labelled as being "childlike" (Young-Bruehl 32) and immature. They need to be educated and helped into modernity; they have to rely on "adults," preferably white Westerners, for progress. This belief reflects early (and modern) colonialist ideologies and narratives that relied on this kind of rhetoric to conquer and rule. Racial ideologies that "portray people of color as intellectually underdeveloped, uncivilized children require parallel ideas that construct Whites as intellectually mature, civilized adults" (Hill Collins 65). The liberation of women in Afghanistan relied on the rhetoric of women's subordination to men, and on the restrictions of their rights by men.

Jews have in the world history suffered (and still do) a lot of discrimination. Antisemitism led to the murder of six million Jews in the concentration camps along with the deaths of other Nazi enemies including two to three million Soviet POWs, two million non-Jewish Poles, and hundreds of thousands of Serbs, disabled, Romani, Freemasons, Slovenes, Homosexuals, Jehovah Witnesses, and Spanish Republicans during the Holocaust (1941-1945). This eventually led to the creation of a Jewish country on Palestinian territory.

Israeli children seem to know a lot about this history. They are aware that living in Israel is not safe either: "It isn't safe to be Jewish here, but it has never been safe to be Jewish anywhere. At least we can protect ourselves here, because this is our country" (*Three Wishes* 29). The protection of their country means that Arabs in Palestine suffer daily at the hands of Israelis through home demolitions, restrictions of movement, lack of food, and lack of employment. Racial discrimination is a big part of their lives. Razack argues, "that Jews and other Europeans face a common enemy in the Muslim pre-modern Other is established through an appeal to a more widespread resentment of the foreigner. A shared Europeanness is made possible princi-

pally through gender" (94). Gender and race are thus both used as reasons for occupation and domination of Palestinian territory. In the same way, the occupation of Afghanistan by the Western forces used the same categories to justify their presence. An Israeli child says that Israelis and Palestinians are "separate people" (*Three Wishes* 22). He does not offer explanations, but it is safe to assume that race and racial discourse play a role. Another Israeli boy, who admits to not knowing any Palestinian children, thinks "they are dangerous and will shoot me if they get the chance" (75-6). Because all Palestinians are considered a threat, and are constructed as possible terrorists in the Israeli narrative, children adopt this discourse and form their opinions accordingly. A Palestinian girl says that Israelis "think we are animals who don't know how to read or do anything that takes brains" (65), which is what justifies the Israeli control over the Palestinian territory and people: being of a different race and religion, they must have lower intellectual capacities, so they need to be helped out and brought into modernity.

The question of race is not dealt with in any obvious way in *The Breadwinner* series. The last book of the series does address this question when Parvana is arrested by American troops. An American soldier tells Parvana, "we want to show respect for your culture while we are guests in your country, but I find it awfully hard to talk to someone when I can't see their face" (29). Again, the burqa pops up as an obstacle for normal human communication. But the language here also points to a familiar binary of "our culture" and "your culture," which might be Ellis's subtle criticism of the assimilationist American project of helping these people to become more like Westerners.

4.4. Book covers

When engaging with books dealing with Middle East, we have to be aware of our own Western colonial position that privileges Judeo-Christian patriarchal whiteness. When we first pick up *The Breadwinner* in a bookstore or in a library, we immediately see a scarf on the child's head. The head cover/scarf functions here as "the primary marker being used to tell this story" (Sensoy, and DiAngelo par. 32). The scarf is

> the single marker that most consistently invokes these elements of the Muslim woman's story: the uniformity of her thought and dress, her inherent sorrow about the conditions of her life, the religious fervor of Islam, her forced submission, the barren landscape in which she subsists, and the subservient stance she must hold constant. (Sensoy, and Di-Angelo par. 41)

There must be a reason why children in *The Breadwinner* series cover images are wearing a scarf—be it because they are forced by imposed rules, be it because they choose so for reasons only they know. We are forced to make guesses as to why he or she would be wearing a scarf; we are made to wonder why the gender is so ambiguous, and whether the child is scared (big wide open eyes). When we look at images on *The Breadwinner* series covers we can assume the children in the images are from somewhere exotic and far away, from somewhere scarves are worn on daily basis, not from "here." In the covers for *The Breadwinner* series we are not able to say with certainty whether the gaze we meet belongs to a boy or a girl, which implies a certain ambiguity that can only be resolved by reading the book. Only the cover of the last book of the series, *My Name is Parvana*, unambiguously presents a girl. We have to use other contextual evidence to situate the narrative in the Middle East: the buildings behind the child, a woman wearing a burqa, walking behind a man wearing traditional clothes of that area, the color of the

child's skin, the yellow and pink flowers that usually appear on books from or about the Middle East. Sensoy and DiAngelo argue that "the marker 'scarf' sets into motion a story chain—[if it is a girl] she is young, forced to wear the scarf, married, has children, and can't flirt with men" (par. 32).

The girl drawn, and later photographed, for the cover of *The Breadwinner* does not wear a burqa, but a headscarf nonetheless covers her hair. This "'half-covering' signifies her status as an insider who is also positioned in a way the Western audience can identify with" (Ansari, 57). In the rest of the series covers, the child's face is partially covered. Sensoy and Marshall argue that

> The way the girl's mouth are covered reinforces existing ideas about their silence and suggests that we in the West (conceptualized as "free" and "liberated") need to help un-veil and "give" them voice. The images also invite ideas about girlhood innocence and vulnerability, and invite Western readers to protect, save, and speak for these oppressed girls. (Save the Muslim Girl 122)

In the covers used for *The Breadwinner* series, "the child appears not in the estranging costume of the veil, but in a version of it *already familiar* to American readers from other books on the Middle East" (Rak 166, emphasis in original).
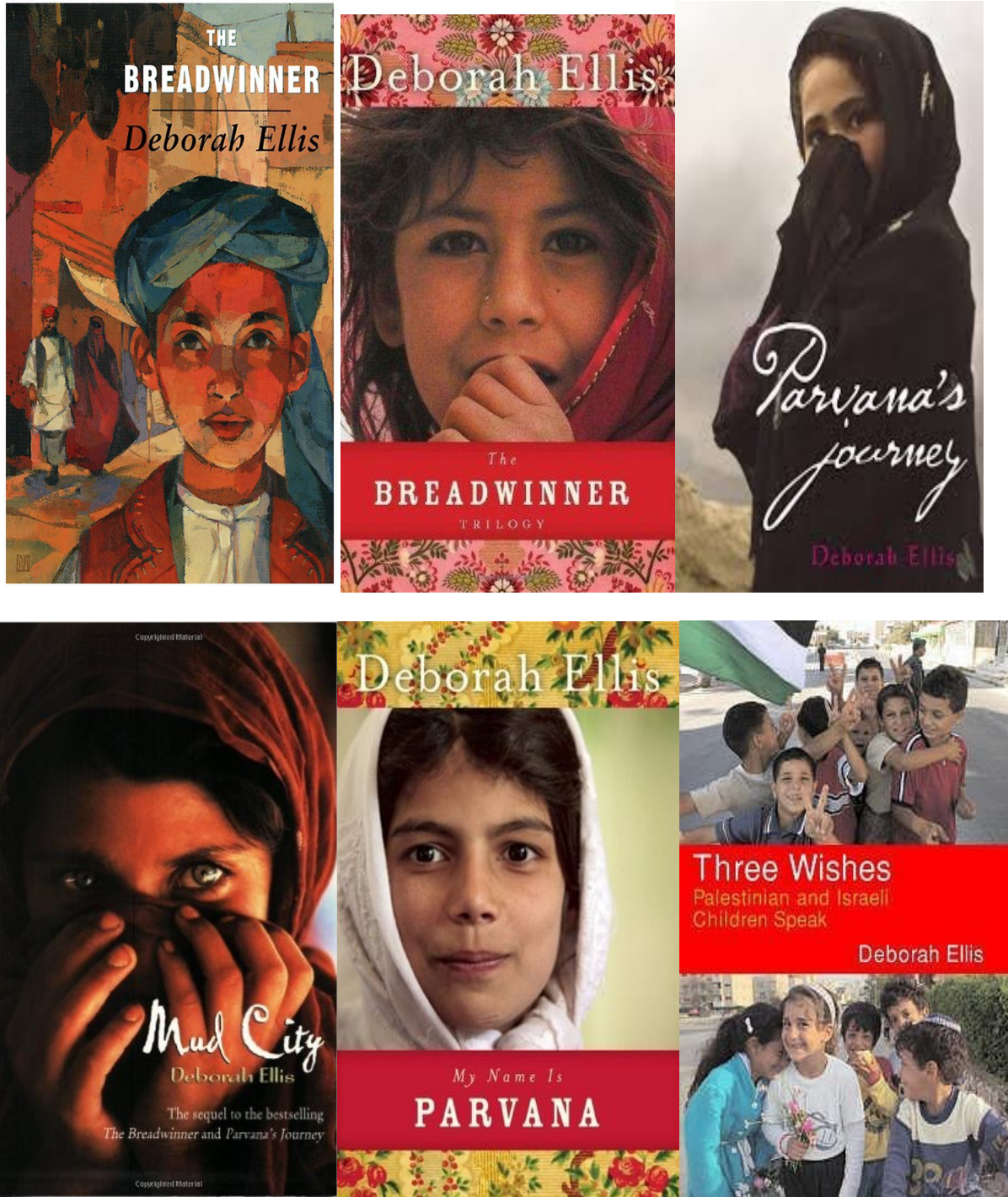
What is immediately noticeable, when looking at different covers of *The Breadwinner* series, is the progress from cartoon like drawings to photographs of real children. Different editions

of the books in the series all show the same progress—from drawings to photographs. This change implies a documentary style and implies that the story in the series is not fictional, although it is labelled as such. The concretization of images used suggests that the girls in the photograph are real-life girls whose name are Parvana and Shauzia and who are telling their stories in the form of a confession. In the case of *The Mud City* cover, Sensoy and Marshall argue that this edition "reproduces a photo of Sharbat Gula[24] on its front cover," (Save the Muslim Girl 122). The "repeated image" (Save the Muslim Girls 122) reinforces the Western ideas about girlhood in Afghanistan and raises our expectations when it comes to the content of the story. The girl whose photograph was used for the reproduction for this cover is not named. Neither is the girl whose picture is used for the rest of the books in *The Breadwinner* series. In the case of *The Breadwinner* and *My Name is Parvana* we have to assume that it is one and the same girl on both covers, and we can assume from looking at these images that the author has followed this girl's life over a period of time and stayed in touch with her long enough to know what happened to her. However, from many interviews Ellis is given over the years, we know that Parvana is not only one child she met, but a composite of different stories Ellis heard in refugee camps.

The cover for *Three Wishes* is split into two halves. The top half shows a picture of a group of young boys on the street. Their skin tone suggests they might be Palestinian. The lower half shows a picture of a group of boys and girls chatting happily on a street, playing together. One of the boys is wearing a yarmulke, which suggests that he is Jewish, thus Israeli. The two images are divided by a red stripe that serves as a background on which the title is printed. This red stripe reminds us of the border between Israel and Palestine and the separation between the two groups of children. Another thing that suggests that in the picture above there are Palestinian

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24 Sharbat Gula is an Afghan girl who was photographed by journalist Steve McCurry in 1984 and whose photograph appeared on National Geographic cover in June 1985.

children and in the bottom one Israeli children is the subtitle of the book: *Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak*. Photographs of real children point to this book's non-fiction genre and factual credibility. The dialogue between the two separated photographs suggests that division between these two groups cannot be overcome. This actually reflects the divide children feel between one another when they repeat that they are two separate nations. Even though some of them want to work towards achieving peace in the long term, most of them are still pretty adamant about the division. The interviews in the book are not represented as dialogues between the two sides either. They do interchange, with one Palestinian child speaking, and then an Israeli child speaking; however they each show the one-sidedness of their opinions, experiences, and wishes.

4.5. Class

Ellis writes in *The Breadwinner* about how well-off Parvana's family used to be before the Taliban took over. Both her mother and father were educated people with good jobs. We learn about this family from Ellis: "Both of Parvana's parents had come from old respected Afghan families. With their education, they had earned high salaries. They had a big house with courtyard, a couple of servants, a television, a refrigerator, a car" (*The Breadwinner* 21). After the Taliban took over Kabul, the family was forced to downsize, from a large family home in which every child had her own room to a small apartment in which the whole family slept on mattresses in the living room.

It is important for Ellis to name their belongings so the Western reader can see people in the Middle East are not as backward as popular imagery would have them. Ellis plays into our own prejudices of life in the Middle East and makes a point of writing that they are in fact more similar to Westerners than most think. Parvana's mother was a journalist before the Taliban took

over, and her father was a teacher who received his education in England. Her father owned books in English that he kept hidden from the Taliban as they were forbidden. His Western education is what got him arrested. The family consisted of two parents and five children. One child, the eldest son, was killed by a landmine, and later in the second book of the series, the youngest son died in a refugee camp. Three daughters remained, one of which, the eldest, received a scholarship for an American university in the last book of the series. Parvana's family lived in Kabul, meaning they were an urban, progressive family. Her parents "believed in education for everyone, even girls" (*The Breadwinner* 19).

Ellis describes pre-Taliban Kabul: "Kabul had once been beautiful. Nooria remembered whole sidewalks, traffic lights that changed color, evening trips to restaurants and cinemas, browsing in fine shops for clothes and books" (*TB* 24). When described like that, it looks like any city in the West. The insistence on similarities between the East and the West makes the reader empathize more because she can understand what is lost when a city is destroyed by war. Kabul was most badly hit when it comes to prohibitions for women introduced by the Taliban. Numerous sources point this out when analyzing America's role in the Middle East (liberating women): women in rural areas were not as badly hurt with this newly introduced veiling policies. For example, Yasmin Jiwani argues that

> What was largely elided in the media coverage that followed in the immediate aftermath of September 11 was that the Taliban's strictures were imposed largely on urban women (in Kabul, for instance), and that women's oppression was scarcely less prior to the Taliban takeover. (732)

In *Parvana's Journey*, some areas of Afghanistan are mentioned as not being under the Taliban, but these are mostly rural areas. Thanks to her family's connections with people in other

parts of Afghanistan, Nooria was to marry her mother's friend's son, and she looked forward to it because it meant moving away from Kabul. She says, "at least in Mazar I can go to school, walk the streets without having to wear a burqa, and get a job when I've completed school" (122). However, Mazar is eventually taken over by the Taliban and Nooria and her family end up in a refugee camp. By forbidding women to get education and seek employment, the Taliban, and later the Western forces, destroyed the Afghan economy, and thus made significant changes in the makeup of classes. The lack of double income, either because women could not work, or because men were killed, injured, or in the war, meant that families could in many cases not afford basic necessities. Many families that were well-off, or middle class, were forced to sell their belongings to make sure they had food on their table. Parvana often talks about how girls become commodities their families sell so they can survive. Parvana's friend Shauzia overhears her grandparents' conversation in which they say she will "fetch a good bride-price, and they will have lots of money to live on" (*TB* 140). By positioning these girls as commodities for sale, Ellis takes part in the stereotypical representation of evil Muslims who sell their young daughters for profit. In this novel, Ellis wanted to, on the one hand, draw our attention to conditions that make people take such drastic measures, and on the other hand, criticize these "pre-modern" arrangements. I believe she does both successfully because she is not overly patronizing when it comes to those girls and she gives them agency, be it in form of escaping from home, escaping from the men who bought them, or joining schools.

In *Three Wishes* Palestinian children talk about how advanced and well-off Israel and its settlements are, while their economy is not doing well and there is a severe lack of jobs. Opportunities for education are almost nonexistent without foreign help, and, particularly, funding from America. Adult Palestinians are forced to look for jobs in Israel and undergo daily checks on

checkpoints, sometimes even being denied passage, making them late for work, or not being able to come to work at all. An eleven-year old Palestinian says about checkpoints: "If I get to the checkpoint any later in the morning, I have to wait in an even longer queue, as there are lots of Palestinians trying to get through to their jobs. There are not enough jobs in Palestine, so [Palestinians] have to go to Israel to work" (50). According to Sawafta, "around 36,000 Palestinians work in settlements in the occupied West Bank, many in construction" (par. 4). Palestinians are a cheap labor force for Israelis, which drives Palestinian economy even further down. Even though biased, this opinion very likely sums up various opinions on this conflict: "the fighting is between the innocent Palestinians who have nothing, and the Israelis, who have everything" (*Three Wishes* 52). Palestine and refugee camps in which Palestinians live were often affected by Israeli restrictions of food and other resources necessary for living. Between 2007 and 2010 "the Israeli military made precise calculations of Gaza's daily calorie needs to avoid malnutrition during a blockade imposed on the Palestinian territory" (The Guardian par.1), and in the meantime residents had to rely on international food aid. A boy whose legs were shot multiple times after throwing rocks at Israeli soldiers sums this up pretty accurately: "They blow up people's houses. They make us go hungry" (*Three Wishes* 95). One child describes his experience of going to school and going through checkpoints every day: "If I get to the checkpoint any later in the morning, I have to wait in an even longer queue, as there are lots of Palestinians trying to get through to their jobs. There are not enough jobs in Palestine, so they have to go to Israel to work" (50). An Israeli child shows more empathy for the struggles of Palestinians whose homes are demolished. She says:

> Sometimes the army goes into Palestinian cities like Hebron or Bethlehem. They take
>
> Palestinians out of their homes, then bulldoze the homes so there is nothing left. They do

that in case there's a bomb inside the house. The soldiers might have to be rough to get

the Palestinians out of their house, because they don't want to leave. It's their home, and

they want to stay there. (59)

House demolitions are used as a punishment tool for Palestinians. They are often caused

by suicide bombing or other type of attacks carried out by Palestinians in Israel. Sometimes

houses are demolished because the Israeli government needs that specific land for its own pur-

poses or because houses are built without proper permits. According to the Israeli Committee

against House Demolitions, "[t]he Israeli government has demolished 28,000 Palestinian struc-

tures since the Occupation of the West Bank and Gaza began in 1967, resulting in the homeless-

ness and suffering of untold numbers of people" (Hardigan). The homelessness, displacement,

and unemployment create a huge mass of people who cannot participate in economy because

they do not have the means. In this way children are deprived of food, education, and home.

5. Conclusion

My conclusion extends outwards to extra-textual matters, including the role of women's

organizations as a site of resistance in Deborah Ellis's works and in her life as an activist writer.

This will allow me to make an analytic framework to draw together some of my earlier ideas pre-

sented in the previous chapters.

5.1. Activism: in and outside of these books

As I have mentioned in my previous chapters, Deborah Ellis is a Canadian author, femi-

nist and anti-war activist who donates most of her royalty income to various organizations, such

as Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan, Street Kids International, the Children in Crisis

fund of the International Board on Books for Young People, and UNICEF. Western women's or-

ganizations take on the role of a national mother who needs to raise and protect children of their

country in order to rehabilitate and build a better future for everyone. They take on themselves

the task of bringing progress to these women and children through "improving" their education

and health care systems. However, I cannot argue that they are not doing any good. Certainly,

their efforts have brought changes and improved access to education, and public areas, despite

the fact that these efforts operate on the notion of the need to educate and bring these "backward

people" into modernity. On the other hand, women's organizations mentioned in *The Breadwin-*

ner series and *Three Wishes* are mostly secret, undercover organizations. Their tasks include run-

ning secret schools and hospitals, smuggling undercover magazines and articles out of the coun-

try, rescuing women and children, and men sometimes, helping people with food and other ne-

cessities. For example, in *The Breadwinner* series, Mrs. Weera's organization "rescue[s] girls

from bad husbands and bad fathers and get[s] them to shelters or other safe places" (186). In

Three Wishes women's organizations run schools for Christians and Muslims in Palestinian terri-

tory. Thus, women's organizations are in these books sites of resistance. They are also keepers of

prospects of a better future for their fellow citizens.

Another sort of activism that arises out of these books is children's activism. Sensoy and

Marshall argue that "humanitarian organisations increasingly target 'Third World girls' to

rescue" (300). Ellis's children are "Third World children." Humanitarian representation of girl-

hood in developing countries relies (as do *The Breadwinner* and *Three Wishes*) on the "mono-

lithic representation of a 'Third World girl' who is constrained, uneducated, and poor" (Sensoy,

and Marshall 300). This representation serves as a basis for our own humanitarian and activist

desires. Sensoy and Marshall argue that

Through the purchase of the book, the consumer is helping to build schools for girls. El-

lis's Women for Women, and its offshoot for girls, Little Women for Little Women partic-

ipate in charity events, lectures, "Breaking Bread" potlucks, and other fundraising

projects, many of which happen in churches all over Canada and the USA. Schools and

teachers are encouraged to participate in these fundraising opportunities in order to help

less fortunate girls in Afghanistan. In this way, Western girls (now cast as little feminists)

perform as "good girls" who participate in the patriarchal salvation of non-White op-

pressed women/girls (often oppressed by men in the East, not by Western masculinities or

patriarchal policies of the West). (302)

I talked about gender and the perception of women in the Middle East in the previous

chapters, but stressing it once more at the end of this thesis is necessary in order to investigate

how these books function in the Western market. Sensoy and Marshall sum it up effectively in

the above quotation. Patriarchy is involved in Western activism and in the notion that children

should save children, an idea that "entrenches the dependent and colonial roles of donor and re-

cipient, saviour and victim, in those seen by society as carrying the most potential and bearing

the most suffering" (Steffler 119).

Ellis's books, and *The Breadwinner* especially, appeal specifically to girls by positing the

main character as female. Parvana's struggle appeals to girls' sensitivities and emotions in order

for them to become involved in some sort of activism. Sensoy and Marshall argue that

At least two levels of paternalistic care operate in The Breadwinner. First, the reader is

positioned to view Parvana as the impoverished, uneducated girl in need of care from

Western readers with resources and freedom, as well from the fictional Western care

workers located in the refugee camps of the story. Second, people who buy the book par-

ticipate in a literal care project, as royalties from their purchase of the book go to Women

for Women in Afghanistan, a Canadian charity organisation established by Deborah Ellis.

(Sensoy, and Marshall 299)

Thus, through engaging children in saviour activism, colonialist narrative is repeated. The

narrative "of paternalistic care is recycled to appeal to *Western* notions of girl power–to appeal to

the adult Western women and other 'feminists' to do the right thing by contributing their charity

to help the non-Western girl" (Sensoy and Marshall 301, emphasis in original). The concept of

children helping (and saving) children "is viewed as special, if not sacred. By taking on role of

donor and saviour, the Canadian reader, like the activist, challenges and emerges from her own

colonization by adults, as she colonizes the fictional child into a dependence on herself as

reader" (Steffler 118). The Western child is encouraged by adults to empathize and feel for "the

other" children. The Western child is then allowed by the same adults to take some sort of action

adults deem appropriate and acceptable, thus again tapping into the myth of childhood inno-

cence. Not only that, but, "when aid is carried by the 'generous' child to the 'needy' child, the

donor receives recognition for actions that are deemed remarkable because they are uncharacter-

istically mature" (Steffler 119). Any child that actually does something to help "the other" is

characterized as very mature, empathetic and responsible beyond her (numerical) age.

5.2. Towards a conclusion

Even though both of these books rely on notions of "us vs. them," these books *do* bring

about an improved sense of the kinds of lives people have in different countries. By providing lit-

tle snippets of history in both *The Breadwinner* series and *Three Wishes*, Ellis educates the West-

ern reader. Maps in the beginning of every book position the reader in relation to this country in

a different part of this world. Providing maps does make sense for adults and children who are not very familiar with geography and might encourage them to do their own research. For children who only learn about other countries through Western media and are never provided geographical guidance, maps in these books serve as an indication of vastness of our planet. Despite this vastness and the West and East being so far away from each other, the globalization of education and economy brings us together, in that we are all alike. The notion of global and universal childhood plays into our concepts and expectations of what every child is entitled to. There are many references in Ellis's books to Western shows, books, and other cultural texts that provide a reference frame for the Western reader. Though circumscribed by Western humanitarian politics, Ellis's books bring an understanding of differences across the world, however short-lived.

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