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Children express: war and peace themes in the drawings of Iraqi refugee children in Jordan

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ABSTRACT

The current study focuses on data collected from Iraqi refugee children in Jordan who fled the Islamic State Group (IS) after capturing the city of Qaraqosh overnight in 2014. 16 children, 9 males and 7 females between the ages of (4–12) participated in the study. Two major themes were identified from the qualitative analysis of children's peace drawings and their verbal statements: 'peace as religion, contentment and serenity' and peace as a negative space, while two other common themes were identified in the children's war drawings: 'war as activity and conflict; and death, as, a result, of war'. Findings indicate that developmental differences between children were evident via their drawings and their knowledge of peace and war, confirming that children's understanding of war precedes their understanding of peace.

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Introduction

War, conflict, political uprisings and other hardships displace countless families each year. More than half of the world's estimated 19 million refugees are children (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2007). Some children grow up in refugee camps and start their own families before even moving into their actual homes (UNHCR, 2006; Washington, 2011). Some of these children have missed formal schooling for years during the transitional period due to mainly financial reasons where parents cannot afford to send their children to school; As, a result, the children are impacted by the new schooling systems in the resettlement country, and the linguistic and cultural changes in the classroom accompanied by emotional hurdles that pose a threat to their well-being (Wellman & Bey, 2015).

Literature review

The refugee experience

The immigration experience to the country of resettlement is a profound life transition for many immigrants. The resettlement process is defined as a 'secondary trauma' for children and their families due to the various challenges they must face such as a new school system, job market, accommodation and

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learning a new language (McArdle & Spina, 2007). Other stressors involved in post transition period include loss of family, home, country, economic and social challenges as well as behavioral and emotional distress. Some immigrant children, and, as, a result of, the horrific experiences they have encountered, show symptoms of PTSD as involuntary departure from their home countries and separation or loss of family (Coll & Magnuson, 2005). Among post migration stressors, communication in the language of the adopted country poses a great challenge for the refugees. In the United States, any degree of limited English proficiency in the classroom setting can be a challenging risk factor (Eubanks, 2002). This becomes traumatic for immigrant children who manifest feelings of anxiety, confusion and fail to show an appropriate response or plan of action due to characteristically concrete, superficial and unimaginative thinking processes (Van de Ven, Post, & De Witte, 2005).

It is with no doubt that being displaced and transitioning to a new environment can result in behavioral and psychological problems for the refugee children; according to, Rutter and Hyder (1998) many refugee children arrive feeling traumatized and isolated which impacts their ability to cope and build their lives. For example, Brunick (1999) claims that young people between 9 and 15 years of age will have formed identity problems as they also deal with normal period of adolescence, and the feeling of guilt for leaving family and friends behind in the conflict; whereas children between 3 and 10 years old will arrive to the United States with memories of what they have survived. Levenson and Sharma (1999) claim that children's understanding of a language exceeds their ability to express; however, in the case of refugees it could take up to two years to reach that of their indigenous peers. Dennis (2002) states that schools is the ideal place for refugees to rebuild their lives and include both children and parents in the community and the society.

Children's understanding of peace and war

Recognizing what children understand about the concept of war is the first stepping stone in helping them cope with war and any feelings associated with that; professionals need to be aware of how children conceptualize war, in order, to help them identify positive, non-violent actions towards war (Walker, Myers-Bowman, & Myers-Walls, 2003). Children as young as 6-year-old possess a limited understanding of war; however, by the age of 8, their understanding of war is somewhat complete. Their understanding of war generally includes a concrete description of objects which are used in war, including soldiers, weapons, fighting, shooting, killing and death (Covell, Rose-Krasnor, & Fletcher, 1994; Hakvoort & Hagglund, 2001; Hakvoort & Oppenheimer, 1993; Hall, 1993; McLernon & Cairns, 2001). Older children, on the other hand, add abstract ideas to their definition of war that are absent in younger children such as explaining the consequences of war, the reasons why people join war, and the negative feelings/emotions pertaining to war.

In Addition, researchers have compared when children first understand war with when they initially understand peace. Findings indicate that children tend to understand the meaning of war before their understanding of peace. Findings also confirm that in regards to peace, children move from concrete to abstract descriptions. Hakvoort and Hagglund (2001) suggest that children's understanding of peace, starts at an early age and continues as they get older and by adding more abstract elements. For example, most children, no matter their age, define peace as *negative peace*, meaning the absence of fighting, the absence of war, stillness, and interpersonal interactions (Covell et al., 1994; Hakvoort, 1996).

Previous studies related to children's perception of drawings

In Walker et al. (2003) study, 56 children (31 females and 25 males) from American, Yugoslavian and Greek families after the Yugoslavian-NATO conflict ended participated in the study to compare peace and war drawings. Findings based on the analysis of the drawings, revealed that children associated peace to negative space, while 5 themes were identified for war, respectively: war as activity, was as group conflict, death as, a consequence of, war and negative emotions related to war. In another study by McLernon and Cairns (2009), primary school children from Northern Ireland, where there is high

and low political and sectarian violence were compared to primary school children from an area in England with no violence. In the study, these children were asked to draw pictures of war and peace as they understood it. Findings revealed the following, respectively: Northern Irish children exposed to Violence, emphasized the concept of peace as 'absence of war'; the children described concrete aspects of war such as weapons, soldiers, and war activities and confirmed that boys more than girls showed greater knowledge of war.

A study by Maagerø and Sunde (2016) conducted on 48 children from two different environments: Palestinians from a Lebanese Refugee Camp and Norwegian children. The children were asked to describe the meaning of 'happiness' and 'fear' via drawing. Findings show that all children, Palestinians and Norwegians indicated that 'happy' for them is flowers, tress, a bright sun, family, and friends. Within the group of Palestinian children, 17 of the 29 children drew a house for 'happiness'; 6 children drew toys and 11 drew grass and trees. An interesting finding was that six children drew dark houses and dark windows associating them to fear, while two Palestinian children made representations of war, stating that they were scared, of war:

Question: What makes you scared?

Child: I drew men on horses. They run and are on their way to war. I'm afraid of war.

Question: What makes you happy?

Child: A girl that has a house, flowers, sun, birds and clouds.

A study conducted by Rousseau, Drapeau, Lacroix, Bagilishya, and Heusch (2005) assesses the effect of a 12 weeks creative expression program on 138 immigrant and refugee children, between the ages of 7 and 13 years old attending multiethnic schools in Quebec, Canada. The objective of the program is to prevent emotional and behavioral problems encountered by these children and to enhance their self-esteem. The creative expression workshops were specifically designed to help immigrant and refugee children bridge the gap between home and school, past and present. These workshops were developed over a five year period and conducted in Montreal's two main school boards by the Transcultural Psychiatry Unit of the Montreal Children's Hospital. The activities vary from drawing a picture to working with myths combining both verbal and non-verbal means of expression. Results indicate that the creative expression workshop had a positive effect on immigrant and refugee children's self-esteem and may decrease their emotional and behavioral symptoms provided we overcome the challenges of diversity of ethnic communities and the complexity of the school system. The workshop also helped in the reconstruction of a meaningful personal world while at the same time strengthening the link of the child to the group.

In another study conducted by Rowe et al. (2017) an art therapy program serving children and adults from Burma residing in refugee camps is evaluated on their mental health and behavioral issues. B ATP is effective for traumatized individuals based on the theory that trauma is stored in the memory as imagery and art-making is an effective tool for processing these images (Appleton & Spokane, 2001). Thus, the purpose of the ARP is to develop the refugees' strengths, overcome negative symptoms associated with the refugee experience such as depression and anxiety; attain therapeutic goals such as feeling safe, personal identity, connection with others, acculturation, resilience, hope and goals for the future. 30 refugees between the ages of 11 and 20, in which 20 were males and 18 were females, participated in the B ATP over a course of 6 months, 16 sessions of 50 min throughout the 2013–2014 school year. The results indicated that the ATI have experience significant trauma and show high depressive symptoms as well as school and social difficulties. Anxiety was reduced, depressive symptoms increased slightly but were not statistically significant. This is however, considered common during the initial stages of art therapy for depressive symptoms to temporarily increase as refugees open -up and explore their trauma.

Nilay et al. (2016) examine art therapy as an effective intervention to reduce post-traumatic stress, depression and anxiety symptoms among 64 Syrian refugee children between the ages of 7–12 residing in a refugee camp in Istanbul, of which 29 are girls and 34 are boys. Various tools were used to assess stress and depression symptoms among the sample as a preliminary assessment phase; The Stressful Life Events (SLE) questionnaire used to measure stressful and traumatic experiences of the refugees;

The Child Depression Inventory (CDI) to measure depression symptoms of children; State-Trait Anxiety Scale to measure the severity of current symptoms of anxiety; and UCLA post-traumatic stress disorder screened for traumatic exposure. The Art Therapy Intervention Program provided the refugees with music, movement and drawing sessions, and skills to promote psychological recovery. The results of the art therapy intervention indicated that the means of both the pre-assessment traumatic symptoms and pre-assessment depression symptoms were statistically greater than that of the means of both of post-assessment after the art therapy workshops, which indicates that art therapy is an effective method in reducing trauma, depression and anxiety among refugees. Results also indicate that art therapy helped children become more self-confident, increased their self-esteem, allowed them to become aware of cultural differences and school materials, their feelings, sense of control, socially supported and safe.

Why art therapy/art classes

Arts and other intervention programmes could prevent problems from occurring in the long run as arts can help refugee children build constructive platforms to develop the confidence and life skills they need in and out of school (Brunick, 1999). The American Art Therapy Association defines 'Art Therapy' as the therapeutic use of art making, within a professional relationship, by people who experience illness, trauma, or challenges in living, and by people who seek personal development (Betts, 2009). It is an expressive psychotherapy, a form of art-making that helps to improve the social, mental and emotional functioning of adults and children. Art therapy increases the feeling of well-being and is considered a process of healing through non-verbal communication, exploration of feelings, self-discovery and catharsis (Malchiodi, 2011). The ARTA Report (2005) focuses on the connections between a child's emotional state, their ability to concentrate and their behavior in school. The report stresses on the importance of arts on children which allows for the transfer of skills that will help in improving behavior, increasing motivation and self-esteem especially in front of peers.

Arts functions as a source of spirituality that provides aesthetic pleasure; it is considered a no-linguistic form in which people who are unable to speak about their events or articulate them, good and bad ones, are given the opportunity to do so through expressive arts (Kollontai, 2010). Some practitioners and scholars in the field state that arts can be used as a peacebuilding tool to recreate, and rebuild aspects of their lives that have been demolished as well as the lives of other such as the physical, psychological and spiritual (Kollontai, 2010).

Traumatized refugee children, who are embarrassed from their refugee status and situation, are highly resistant and who do not possess the necessary language skills to talk about their traumatic experiences, utilize art therapy to talk about their traumatic experiences which they find less threatening than talking (Rousseau, Lacroix, Bagilishya, & Heusch, 2003). Other clinicians have found that art therapy and art creations provide refugees with a sense of structure, a sense of control, a way to reassert their identities that they have lost through emotional expression (Fitzpatrick, 2002). Others believe that creative therapy techniques such as storytelling could be very useful in cultures that have a strong tradition of storytelling (Rydberg, 2002). Studies conducted by Gussak (2004–2005) state that art therapy helps improve mood, socialization, problem solving, behavior, and attitude. It has been found to be an effective intervention in reducing symptoms of depression, anxiety, emotional and relational problems as well as increasing the well-being of children (Ager et al., 2011). For example, it helped in reducing depression in adult male inmates in prison whom after exposed to an art therapy intervention, become more willing to talk about their personal lives and become more in touch with their feelings (Moosa & Koorankot, 2017).

Art therapy has been found to be useful in enhancing community resilience. It enables the retrieval and processing of traumatic events that are usually in the form of images rather than words. Arts are considered a natural way of creating resilience by forming a connection between cognition, emotion and the senses that in turn help with effective problem solving (Huss, 2012b) Art therapy takes on two different levels: Individual and social. The former states that images are a deep and universal

psycho-neurological construct through which individuals process disturbing experiences and memories even before the images are articulated verbally (Conway, 2009; Holmes & Mathews, 2010; Huss, 2012a). Since the images have a multi-sensory character, it allows for constant re-interpretation by the individual whom finds himself/herself evolving in the context of traumatic experiences and thus forms a positive interpretation of the experience. This interpretation allows the individual to adapt in a changing world or a new environment and to fulfill objectives effectively, in light, of stressful events (Hass-Cohen & Carr, 2008; Nelson & Fivush, 2004). It is crucial to mention that arts allow for the reconstructing of a mental map that was once shattered due to war and conflict and which in turn becomes a guide for future behavior and decision-making in the phase of community rehabilitation. The latter, the social level of rehabilitation, considers arts as a culturally contextualized method, enhancing communication, teamwork, problem solving, cultural understanding and decision-making; Images are the most persuasive and pervasive tools for influencing people and changing behavior skills (Baggerly & Exum, 2007; Bresler, 2007; Iwai, 2002; Rosal, 2001; Rubin, 2001).

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate Iraqi refugee children's understanding of peace and war by examining their drawings

The importance of the study

Although art therapists understand the importance of drawings in reflecting the perceptions of the experiences of children, only a few social scientists have used drawings as a research tool. Some researchers have used children's drawings to study emotional and cognitive development (Gardner, 1980; Goodnow, 1977; Kellogg, 1969; Lowenfeld, 1957; Silver, 1978). Others have examined children's drawings to explore self-concept, gender roles, and attitudes towards work (Stiles, Gibbons, & De Silva, 1996; Stiles, Gibbons, & Peters, 1993). McLernon and Cairns (2001) are among the very few who have used children's drawings to understand children's perception of war and peace.

Thus, the current study is important because it examines how refugee children find ways to respond to the effects of aftermath of war in terms of their sense of resilience and morality and how they can become young peacemakers by using creativity and expression through arts.

Since refugee children are at risk of developing psychological problems, it is crucial to provide effective interventions (Chemtob, Nakashima, & Carlson, 2002; Pfefferbaum, 1997). These early interventions will help in reducing the severity of the psychological problems and act as a buffer (Husain et al., 1998). The study is a collection of empirical research carried out internationally and in the MENA region, with emphasis on the 2011 Syrian Crisis, which was an eye-opener for the need of effective interventions for human sustainability.

Objective of the study

The objective of the study is:

- (1) To determine the extent to which interest in and knowledge of the war is being reflected in the refugee children's drawings.
- (2) To understand children's understanding of peace and war by examining their drawings.

Limitations

- (1) The number of Iraqi refugee children was limited. Only 16 children participated in the study; this can be attributed to the fact that most of the families enrolled et al. Hadaf organization have already left Jordan to resettle in Australia.
- (2) This study is limited to refugees who have the same sociocultural background. It is unclear if children in other environments will give the same meaning to peace and war.

Method

Research questions

- (1) How do Iraqi refugee children view their country's violent past and conflict through war drawings?
- (2) How do Iraqi refugee children view their country's peaceful present and future through peace drawings?
- (3) Does maturity reflected in age difference, affect the nature of the pictures drawn? (developmental progression)

The methodology is a qualitative descriptive research based on a case study; this is because the sample consisted of 16 children only registered et al. Hadaf Organization. The focal point of analysis is the Iraqi children's drawings and their verbal statements about the drawings in which the researchers developed a working analytical framework. Each drawing was labeled (a code) that was interpreted as important including incidents, elements and emotions. The labels were then compared to agree on a set of codes to be applied to all subsequent drawings and were then grouped together; each code was assigned an abbreviation for easy identification; a spreadsheet was used to generate a matrix and the data were charted into the matrix; a separate notebook was used to note down verbal statements by the children including impressions, ideas and early interpretations of the data. . The artwork was made by various techniques; the researchers chose painting using watercolors, drawing using pencil colors, and crayons only, due to, their limited expertise in arts.

Participants

The Iraqi refugee Children were recruited through Al Hadaf and whose parents gave consent through forms. AlHadaf For Training is a registered Nonprofit Organization under the Ministry of Industry and Trade in the Kingdom of Jordan whose mission is to inspire children placed in the Kingdom of Jordan and their families affected by the world's injustice to achieve positive changes in their lives. 16 children participated in the study and their ages ranged from (4 to 12) years. There were 9 males and 7 females. The researchers visited the children and their families in their homes in Fuheis¹ to participate in the study for convenience purposes. All the children were invited to draw peace and war drawings, however, 9 children (56%) were more comfortable with completing peace drawings, while 7 children only (44%) agreed to participating in war drawings. This was expressed verbally by the 10 children who stated that they were not ready to express their encounters and talk about their experiences but were ready for the next stage in their lives portrayed through their drawings. The inclusion criteria are limited to:

- Subjects who are in the age group of (4–12) years old only.
- Subjects who have a refugee status and are in Jordan awaiting resettlement to Australia.
- Subjects who are all Iraqi Christians, who fled The Islamic State Group (IS) after capturing the city of Qaraqosh overnight after the withdrawal of Kurdish forces in 2014.

Procedure

The researchers were initially introduced to the children et al. Hadaf Organization catering Iraqi refugees only. Due, to the fact, that one of the researchers had previously conducted a study there, it was easy to obtain permission from the director and the parents who usually visit the center twice a week to learn English and a skill that would help them when they resettle in Australia. It was then more practical and convenient for both parties to conduct the interviews with the children in their homes. The researchers provided the kids with Faber-Castell drawing paper, Faber-Castell crayons and pencils; the face to face interview duration was 60 min including drawing and verbal statements provided by the kids. The

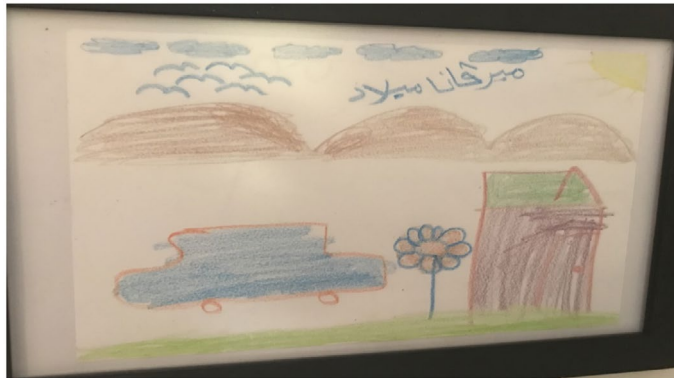


Figure 1. Peace by 11-year-old girl: A house, a new car, a new garden and mountains.



Figure 2. Peace by 13-year-old boy: house, garden, swimming pool, friends, slides and family.

researchers were interested in knowing how the children pictured peace and war via their drawings, thus the questions were: 'How do you see war and peace through your eyes?' Most of the children used pencils and erasers at first to draw the figures and erase if they scribble, after that they used color pencils for shades. After the children were done drawing, the researchers asked the children to describe their drawings verbally. Some children also gathered around us to share their experiences; even mothers were interested in showing us pictures of their destroyed houses where Isis had been (Figure 1).

Analysis

The qualitative data analyses were conducted, according, to guidelines by Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid, and Redwood (2013). The researchers examined the children's drawings and looked for recurring themes among them along with narrative comments from the children themselves (Figure 2). For example, drawings involving weapons, Isis soldiers, planes, tanks were coded as categories for one theme titled 'war as activity'; drawings involving dead people and blood were coded as categories for another theme titled 'death, as, a result, of war', whereas the negative absence of war was coded as a category of peace, the first theme titled 'peace as religion' involving church figures, Jesus, cross, mountains where Jesus was crucified and resurrected, and the second theme titled 'peace as a negative space' meaning the absence of war and conflict, the end of Isis, the absence of death and destruction in which the children drew figures of houses, cars, and trees. The study combined the following sub-themes derived from the main themes:



Figure 3. Peace by -12-year old boy: A new house in Australia, with a nice garden and a waterfall surrounding the house, there is no Isis.



Figure 4. Peace by- 9-year-old boy: peace is crucifixion of Jesus on the mountains.

- (1) *Instruments of war*, such as weapons, soldiers, planes, tanks, rockets and bombs;
- (2) *war activities*, such as shooting, hitting, fighting, throwing bombs, etc.;
- (3) *Negative consequences of war*, such as death, injury, and houses and church on fire or in ruins;
- (4) *Positive elements of peace: such as:*
 - *Nature*, including flowers, the sun, water, green fields;
 - *Close social network*, that is family and friends;
 - *Positive actions/activities*, such as playing, swimming, or having fun;
 - *Negation of war*, which would include images of tranquility or quietness, and images of the child's new home in resettlement.

Color analysis is attributed to determining a child's emotional state. For example, black and red in a drawing is an indication of depression, or feeling hopeless or restricted; red indicates anger; blues and greens indicate calmness, yellows and oranges indicate cheerfulness and too light and faint colors indicate that the child is trying to hide his/her real experiences and emotions. In the current study, these colors were presented in the children's drawings. Although peace drawings had cheerful colors such as blue and green, indicating happiness and calmness, they also, at the same time, had dark colors such as faint red for a house (Figure 3) which indicates that the child is angry yet trying to be as calm as possible; another child in a peace drawing had a lot of red in it, indicating intense anger (Figure 4) (Chermet-Carroy, 2008; Laguna & Lachowska, 2003).



Figure 5. Peace by -11-year-old girl: a church with three crosses and a colorful garden, safety, protection and spirituality.



Figure 6. Peace by-11-year-old boy: church in a beautiful garden.

Results

Peace drawings

The first theme identified in the children's peace drawings was peace as religion, contentment and serenity: attending church, loving Jesus, resurrection and crucifixion. A 9-year-old boy drew three mountains with three crosses on each mountain and said, 'We make peace by thinking of the crucifixion of Jesus on the mountains' (Figure 4); another 11-year-old girl described the figure in her picture of peace as: a church with three crosses and a colorful garden to show that peace is safety, protection and spirituality' (Figure 5); one 11-year-old-boy drew peace as a church in a beautiful garden, 'I picture myself riding a bicycle around the church like the old times in my home country Qarqosh' (Figure 6). The second theme identified in the children's peace drawings was peace as a negative space. These children described peace as the absence of war and conflict, the end of Isis, the absence of death and destruction. All the children drew inactive figures of houses, cars, and trees and they described peace as a new future and a new place. For example, an 11-year-old-boy described his drawing as a peaceful environment after they resettle in Australia 'this is the new house in Australia, with a nice garden and a waterfall surrounding the house, there is no Isis' (Figure 3); An 11-year-old-girl described peace as



Figure 7. Peace by -11- year-old-girl: love and religion.



Figure 8. Peace by- 8-year-old boy: Trees in Australia, sun, blue skies, night.

love and religion, 'this is love, there is no war, no people fighting, no Isis, just love and harmony, where there is religion, there is love' (Figure 7–8).

War drawings

Two common themes were identified in the children's war drawings: war as activity and conflict; and death, as, a result, of war that were evident in all the drawings pertaining to war. In the drawing of a 12-year-old boy a lot of things are happening accompanied by words. For example, for this boy war is 'the burning of churches and homes, the death of innocent families and blood, in my drawing, buildings, a house and a church are being burnt, 2 Isis fighters are happy and are saying victory for us, on one of the houses there was graffiti on the wall that reads fight Christians, a tank that had Isis's black flag (الله جليلنا الى الله), another Isis flag in the background and a story we heard of a mother and her two children who were killed by Isis ... they are covered with blood' (Figure 9). Another 8-year-old boy described war as shooting and fighting, he identified good and bad fighters on each side of the drawing paper by also emphasizing on the flags of each group 'I drew a fighting tank that belongs to Isis bombing our house, Isis fighters shooting at our house, an Isis plane in the sky, dead people and blood everywhere, the Iraqi flag, and Isis flag on the other side, there is a conflict going on, on one side Isis fighters are



Figure 9. War by 12-year-old-boy: burning of churches and homes, the death of innocent families and blood.



Figure 10. War by -8- year-old-boy: shooting and fighting.

shooting at Iraqi military soldiers on the other side (Figure 10). Death was prevalent in many of the war drawings; children drew dead people soaked in blood or showed how people were being shot by Isis. A 4-year-old-girl describes her picture which was uncomprehensive to the researchers. However, with the help of the mother, the girl, was able, to describe her drawing as “a woman who is dead, lying on the floor with her dead children, there is blood everywhere (Figure 11).

Findings regarding developmental differences

In addition to the Peace and War themes identified in the children’s drawing, the researchers found developmental differences based on the age of the children. For example, the youngest child in the study, a 4-year-old-girl, is considered, according, to Lowenfeld (1957), to be in the latter part of the scribbling stage or already in the pre-schematic stage of artistic development in which children begin to name their scribbles. The child, was, able to, draw one scribbled figure relating to war in her drawing, because children 3–5 years old are more likely than older children to draw only a picture of war; also, when asked to draw peace, the child was unable to because of her lack of understanding of the concept of peace. In the child’s verbal narrative, the scribble was a dead mother and her dead children (Figure 11). A 5-yr-old-boy described the scribbles in his war drawing as a bad animal trying to hurt people:

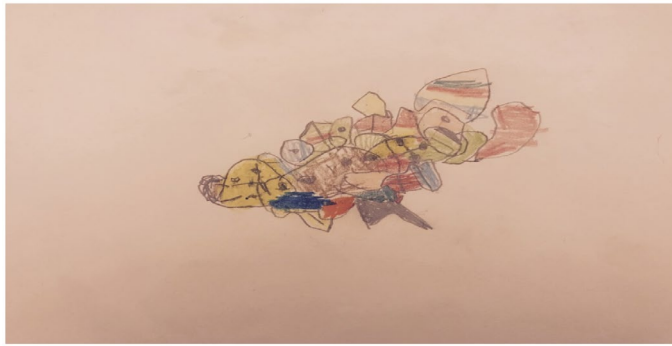


Figure 11. War by 4-year-old-girl: a woman who is dead, lying on the floor with her dead children, there is blood everywhere.



Figure 12. War by 5-year-old-boy: animal.

'this is an animal, a very bad one, and these are hurt people, this is war'. This confirms that children at this stage lack an understanding of war and peace, respectively (Figure 12).

Children between the ages of 6 and 10-year-old are in the schematic stage of artistic development (Lowenfeld, 1957). Children in this stage use graphic symbols and more details. This was evident in our study in which children between the ages of 6 and 10 included representations of war, abstract ideas, and instruments of war such as weapons, fighting and dying. Also, verbal narratives or descriptions accompanied the drawings emphasizing on the concepts of peace and war. For example, a 10-year-old-girl described peace as a new house, blue skies, green fields and mountains (Figure 13). Another 9-year-old-boy described peace as religion-Jesus and the location in which he was crucified (Figure 4). The artistic development went beyond the Schematic Stage to what is called the drawing realism and transitional stage (Anderson, 1994) (Figure 14). These children in the study were in the age group of 11 and 12-year-old, in which their drawings included more details and more action but same content. For example, an 11-year-old-girl described a booby-trapped car, which is considered an advanced cognitive stage; 'This person died because of this booby-trapped car, it went off all, of a, sudden' (Figure 15). Another 12-year-old-boy included many details in his drawing including objects and figures: a church on fire, a house on fire, fighting tanks, dead civilians, Isis soldiers, and flags' (Figure 9).

Discussion

In this study, Iraqi refugee children's drawings represented different themes pertaining to peace and war (Figure 16). In their drawings of peace, the children associated peace with two themes 'peace as



Figure 13. Peace by -10-year-old girl: A new home, tree, garden and a mountain.



Figure 14. Peace by 8-year-old boy: Jesus reflecting peace and contentment.

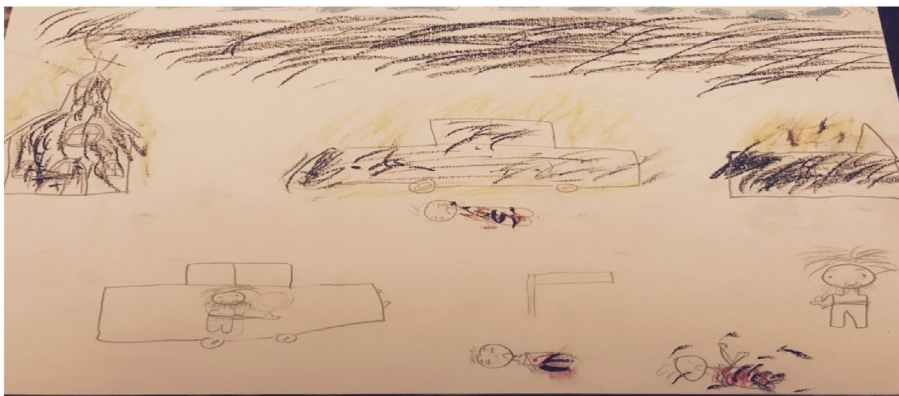


Figure 15. War by 11-year-old girl: church and house on fire, an Isis fighter is killing innocent children, booby-trapped car, dead man, an Isis fighter, a tank, black sky, smoke, sad.

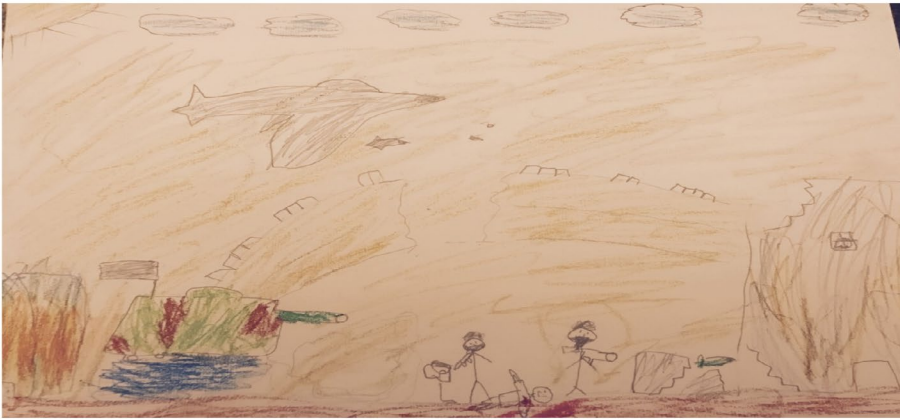


Figure 16. War by 10-year-old-boy: planes and rockets, skeleton buildings, Isis fighters, tank with the black Isis flag, a plane, destroyed bridge.

religion, contentment and serenity' (e.g. attending church, loving Jesus, resurrection, crucifixion, and being at peace with yourself); and 'peace as a negative space' (e.g. the absence of war and conflict, the end of Isis, the absence of death and destruction). In their drawing of war, two common themes were also identified: 'war as activity and conflict' (e.g. the burning of houses, churches, as, a result of, conflict); some children also described war using instruments of war (e.g. weapons, guns, tanks, planes) while others used action words (e.g. fighting, shooting, and killing). These findings were similar, to, previous studies, such as Walker, Myers-Bowman, and Myers-Walls (2017), in which peace was associated to negative space; McLernon and Cairns (2009) study on Northern Irish children and English Children from two different environments; and Norwegian children's definition of 'happiness' and 'fear' depicted through their drawings.

Despite the fact, that, our study was, similar, to, Western studies conducted on the drawings of children -Peace as religion, contentment and serenity- was identified in our study, which was not evident in the other studies. This can be attributed to the fact that the children in the study are Christians from Qaraqosh, where religion and their love for Jesus made them feel at peace with themselves. These children when describing peace, drew pictures of church they attended back home, the cross, and the mountains where Jesus is said to have been crucified. When asked about their peace drawings pertaining to religions, they stated that they visiting church gives them feelings of hope, serenity, and protection.

The developmental progression of children coincides with previous studies (Covell et al., 1994; Hakvoort, 1996; Hall, 1993). It is also confirmed in our study that children's understanding of war precedes their understanding of peace. Younger children between the ages of 3 and 5 are more likely than older children to lack an understanding of peace or fail to understand what peace is. For example, in our study, a 4-year-old-girl in the scribbling or pre-schematic stage (Lowenfeld, 1957) was unable to draw peace. This can be attributed to the fact that children between the ages of 3 and 10 will have arrived to the host country or resettlement country with memories of what they have survived, thus making it difficult for a 4-year-old to comprehend what peace looks like at the next stage. Also, a 5-year-old-boy described the scribbles in his war drawing as a bad animal trying to hurt people, this illustrates that children at this stage lack an understanding of war and peace and reflect the changes in their cognitive abilities stated by Piaget (1952).

According, to Piaget (1952), as children explore their environments, they must adapt to new information by incorporating it into previous understanding or by reorganizing their understanding to include the new information. When looking at the drawings and age variations in the sample, the researchers concur that children's structure of thinking changes, according, to the environment they are placed in experiencing discrepancies between what they already know and their new environment, in which

they have to adjust accordingly. For example, the Iraqi children, from their previous environment, understand that peace is religion is peace, it is visiting church, a safe house, a garden, going to school, and family and friends; however, they are now forced to be in a completely new environment, where they cannot visit their old church, go to school, play with their friends, and yet they have to adapt to the new environment.

Implications for research

In this study, the researchers have sought to respond to, a number, of research questions related to understanding Iraqi children's drawings of peace and war. We have asked in particular how the children view their violent past and conflict through drawings, and their peaceful present and future through peace. The children's drawings in this study, provides a substantive way of understanding how children give meaning to peace and war. The children's verbal statements during analysis were extremely helpful in clarifying the content and giving more meaning to it from the children's standpoint. For example, children expressed their frustration and sad feelings verbally, which was not presented visually but rather through objects of war and death of figures. The children's verbal statements provided our research with more credibility without making assumptions to things that might have not been accurate.

Future research in this area is also needed to understand how educators and therapists can help traumatized children cope with their drawings and verbal statements, after the assessment phase, taking into consideration that being familiar with other cultures and traditions is an important factor in interpreting the drawings. Therefore, a thorough investigation is needed before conducting studies of non-Western cultures especially involving vulnerable populations as children and mothers. Despite the limitations of the study, the results were eye-opening as to how children view peace and war.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it was evident from our study that children as young as 4-years-old understand the concept of war, even if the drawing is not detailed and shows one image only. Many of the children in the study have not witnessed the death of a family and friends directly but were still able to give an accurate depiction of war in their drawing along with its consequences. Peace, on the other hand, depends on the environment of the child, in Piaget's assimilation phase, as children tend to define peace differently, according, to their cultures and experiences. The Iraqi refugee children, will have a lot to share with their peers when they resettle, defining new meanings to peace and becoming peacebuilders in Piaget's accommodation phase. The drawings, now, and later, will help them cope with the traumatic events they have been through, and preserve their identities that have been shattered out of their control.

Note

1. A town in the Jordanian governorate of Balqa, 20 km Northwest of Amman. The town has 20,000 residents, and is majority Christian.

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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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