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## CHAPTER NINE

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# War and Conflict

MISCHA HONECK AND AARON WILLIAM MOORE

Modern war drew together the lives of young people in unexpected and historically novel ways. The worlds of youth and armed conflict have intersected since ancient times, and the lives of millions of young people continue to be devastated by war. A key era for understanding the shock of the “modern” in modern warfare, however, is the Second World War (1937–1945)—a war in which the state transformed and made use of young people on an unprecedented scale. Those efforts represented the culmination of processes that began in the nineteenth century, including public education, military conscription, organized state labor, and youth life-writing. The lives of three such young people, Anne, Theodore, and Konstantin, offer a vantage point for seeing how these processes were becoming increasingly globalized.

All three were caught up in wartime state mechanisms of mass organization and mobilization, which resulted in the production and preservation of their personal records, now publicly available. Anne Frank, a German Jewish girl who perished in the concentration camp of Bergen-Belsen in the final months of the Second World War, ranks among the most famous war youths of her generation. Her diary, which Anne wrote while she and her family were in hiding in Nazi-occupied Amsterdam, has been translated and published in more than sixty languages. No such fate loomed for Theodore Petzold, a Boy Scout from New York who fervently supported his nation’s war effort after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. Collecting scrap metal and salvaging old rubber, however, failed to satisfy the American teenager, who sated his thirst for heroic adventure reading about the exploits of young Konstantin Grigoyevich Konstantinov in a US scouting magazine. An underage

Cossack soldier fighting on the Eastern Front, Konstantin had become the darling of the Soviet press. He had been wounded four times and allegedly killed more than seventy German soldiers (*Boy's Life* 1943: 13; Frank 1952; Honeck 2019: 137–40).

Three fundamental challenges await the historian charged with the task of analyzing the documents left behind by Anne, Theodore, Konstantin, and countless other young people around the world who grew up in similar environments of violence. The first entails the very act of recovery: what does it mean to search these records for children's voices from the past, and how does that pursuit change how we frame and understand these pasts? Until recently, historians have been hesitant (and some still are) to conceptualize young people as serious historical actors in their own right. One reason is that minors tend to produce fewer sources than adults. Fewer still wind up in archival collections that are traditionally the domain of powerful men, not to mention the countless documents, images, and objects that vanished in the chaos of war. The second obstacle is less methodological than epistemological in nature: what difference does it make to focus on young people? How can accessing the experiences of twentieth- and early twentieth-first-century war youths advance our knowledge of modern war? These questions are not new, but neither have they been fully answered. For skeptics in the wider historical profession, young people remain of scant scholarly import, fixed in the dual roles of passive bystander and pitiful victim with little or no means of altering their status. Third, examining a particular period, such as the Second World War, must always involve the question of what makes that period specific, because war has upended young people's lives throughout history.

As arduous as this journey may be, there are rewards to be reaped from revisiting modern war and political conflict through the lens of youth. Those laboring in the field can turn to a fast-growing historical scholarship for guidance. The literature spans numerous shelves: some works focus on particular wars, nations, and regions while others have a transnational or decidedly global scope (Honeck and Marten 2019; Kucherenko 2011; Maksudyan, 2019; Stargardt 2007). Theoretical reflections on the place of children and young people in history in general, which revolve mainly around questions of representation, identity, and agency, provide further orientation (Alexander 2012; Gleason 2016). Less common are discussions dealing with the empirical foundations of our topic—the diverse and still largely untapped source material available to historians who wish to better understand how youths were mobilized and mobilized themselves in an age of increasingly “total” wars. This, then, is the approach our chapter takes.

We argue that critically re-evaluating the sources left behind by young people in wars since the early 1900s, as well as by those with a special interest in them, can impart meaningful lessons *first* about what it meant to be young in

a century marred by mass, organized violence, and *second* how discourses and practices of youth impacted modern ways of war. The twentieth century was a period in which the totalization of warfare coincided with the rise of modern youth cultures fostered by new forms of youthful consumption and expression. Life-writing by youth was enabled by technological advances in paper making, the production of cheap writing implements, and rapidly rising literacies—not just in the West, but in the Soviet Union, China, and Japan as well. A plethora of personal documents and artifacts—diaries, letters, drawings, toys, pieces of clothing, postwar oral history, and memoirs—demonstrate a range of self-descriptions of what it meant to be young during mobilization and war, even as these accounts varied according to region, technology, age, class, gender, and the intensity of armed conflict.

The rapid growth of material made *by youth*, to be sure, was matched by the increase in adult-generated sources *on youth*, above all in the realms of expanding state and media infrastructures. Contrary to earlier periods, adolescents and children growing up in Eric Hobsbawm's "Age of Extremes" tended to experience war within highly organized settings. Despite differences in ideology and culture, adult-led youth formations such as the Boy Scouts, the Girl Guides, the Hitler Youth, the Three Isms Youth Corps in China, the Greater Japan Youth Party, or the Soviet Komsomol all facilitated the social management and patriotic mobilization of young people in combatant nations.

Ideally, distinguishing between sources generated by young people and those created about young people—in other words, the difference between youth-as-project and youth-as-actor—can raise awareness of the conflicts and contradictions between adult-generated normative identities of childhood and youth, on the one hand, and the articulations of subjectivity by young people, on the other. These two formulations of "youth" are both constructions, exercising mutual influence on each other—adults solicited life-writing from youth to learn from them, and articulations by youth often materialized in response to the efforts of adult authorities to steer youth into "proper" directions. Thus, the motivations of youth and adult actors are not intrinsically at odds with one another, as Susan Miller stated, but move along a historically shifting continuum "from opposition to assent" (Miller 2016). The boons of an intertextual reading of these sources lie elsewhere: to make palpable youthful activities and agency in intergenerational contact zones, regardless of whether war youths socialized in different settings acted in accordance with their own ideals, with those of their elders, or both.

In keeping with the youth-as-project versus the youth-as-actors distinction, the following analysis cascades downward from sources generated in the context of adult-led youth movements to personal records left behind by individual youths. Our examples are taken from various parts of the modern world, with a particular emphasis on Europe, North America, and East Asia. While

this chapter is in no way comprehensive, we hope that the mosaic of voices and experiences presented here invites reflections on regional particularities and transnational connections, especially with regard to the efforts of young people to document their own histories in times of war. Youth and war became more global in the twentieth century, even as the ways in which young people experienced wars and remembered them later differed from place to place.

## ORGANIZING YOUTH FOR WAR

Entertainment, fashion, music, sex, and non-conformity are common keywords used to describe the global evolution of modern youth cultures in the course of the twentieth century (Jobs and Pomfret 2015a). But focusing on movie theaters or dance halls tells only half the story at best. The “century of youth” (Mrozek 2017) was as much an outgrowth of uniforms, flags, and oaths, recited by millions of adolescents who spent a considerable part of their extracurricular time in adult-supervised organizations. Although many twentieth-century uniformed youth movements had peacetime roots, their techniques of disciplining young minds and bodies gained traction across borders while serving the wartime needs of different imperialist or nationalist regimes. Conceptualizing these organizations as collaborative rather than purely hierarchical networks, however, does not mean to portray them merely as extensions of modern state apparatuses that intervened in the lives of young people for the purpose of turning them into healthy and loyal citizens. The extent to which these organizations prompted youths to communicate their own visions of citizenship, service, and sacrifice in times of war, even as these visions were highly contingent upon when and where they were forged, deserves equal consideration.

There are two reasons why scholars should draw on sources from the domains of organized youth when examining young people’s engagement with armed conflict in the age of the two world wars and beyond. The first one is the phenomenon’s globality. Already by the 1920s, some of the earliest initiatives—boy scouting and girl guiding in particular—had transcended the confines of Western imperial powers and started taking root in Latin America, Africa, and Asia (Alexander 2017; Honeck 2018; Parsons 2004). Communist and fascist youth ventures, too, traveled across borders, planting their respective flags in places outside Europe (Mishler 1999; Mulready-Stone 2015). The fact that scouting and its ideological variations gained support in old empires, liberal democracies, revolutionary Russia, the new nationalist regimes of Europe, Asia, and Latin America as well as in anti-colonial movements invites global-comparative analysis. In nearly every major case, the creation of semi-military mass organizations geared to children and adolescents, whether run by state or civic actors, preceded the efforts of nation-states to marshal ever more material

and human resources, including their young, in geopolitical competitions over territory and influence.

Second, their proximity to the state made it possible for youth organizations to expand into gigantic repositories for documenting all sorts of youthful behavior and activity. In war this involved patriotic service ranging from home-front chores such as collecting scrap metals or supporting loan drives to premilitary training or actual soldiering. But the manuals, directives, and pamphlets filed in the records of these organizations are also strikingly concerned with monitoring and policing wayward youth, an idiom that has enjoyed a remarkable transnational career of its own. Anti-delinquency work became a wartime *raison d'être* for organization leaders—and the armies of educators and social workers affiliated with them—in distinct geographical and ideological contexts. Boy Scout authorities in the United States and Hitler Youth officials in Germany both sought to expand their mechanisms of social control by labeling unaccompanied youths with working mothers and absent fathers as leaning toward idleness, or worse, lawlessness. “At this time of unrest,” asserted the US Scout executive James E. West in January 1942 in a pamphlet circulated nationally, “youth needs the stabilizing influence of the Scout law” (Boy Scouts 1942). Similarly, one local commentator in Munich hoped in 1944 that the party faithful would form “a dam against vagabonding youngsters” who were roaming the city streets in growing numbers stealing food and running black markets (Kalb 2016: 20).

In addition to establishing hierarchies between “normal” and “abnormal,” “responsible” and “dangerous” youth, adult policies of recruiting youth into webs of discipline and service negotiated broader questions of which kind of young people were considered worthy auxiliaries, and which were not. State authorities never regimented all youths equally, and many were excluded or even persecuted based on their gender, nationality, class, religion, and race. Youth organizations left their mark on all these categories, but perhaps their most decisive intervention consisted of defining age-appropriate responsibilities for war youth, thus contributing to a longer historical process of arranging populations into distinct age groups. Age segmentation addressed competing urgencies—to shield young people from harm while at the same time calling on them to do their bit in ensuring the survival of their communities in times of crisis.

To be sure, the boundaries drawn and redrawn between childhood, youth, and adulthood in the wake of war could vary dramatically. At its lower echelons, youth was commonly separated from childhood by declaring the children—one’s own children, to be sure, and not the offspring of enemy nations—worthy of special protection. British evacuation schemes in anticipation of bombing raids after September 1939, which involved schoolchildren in urban areas up

to the age of fourteen, emphasized this distinction. Reports released by the British government, for example, glossed over the traumatic experience of family separations. Instead, they brandished images of laughing children and older Scouts and Guides providing logistical assistance (Gärtner 2012: 56–7). At youth's upper strata, full military service usually marked the rite of passage to maturity and manhood, yet not necessarily to full citizenship. In the United States, it was not until the protests of young soldiers returning from Vietnam and students equipped with the slogan "Old Enough to Fight, Old Enough to Vote" gained momentum in the late 1960s that the Congress proposed and the states ratified the Twenty-Sixth Amendment in 1971, which lowered the voting age nationally from twenty-one to eighteen years (de Schweinitz 2015).

Modern constructs of adolescence as a liminal developmental stage served to justify teenagers' status as semi-essential actors in the war effort but also helped to maintain the semblance of normalcy and order in a world thrown into disarray. The Boy Scouts of America was just one among many youth organizations that codified this in-betweenness in a memorandum issued on the eve of the US entry into the Second World War. Service opportunities, the memo instructed, should be assigned according to "age and ability," and "strenuous and responsible jobs" including first aid and rescue work should be limited to "Scouts 15 and older" (Boy Scouts 1940). Most societies espoused a gendered division of the kind of "defense training" suitable for boys and girls, whereas the question of when children were old enough to begin premilitary training could trigger intense controversy, even in neutral countries like Sweden (Larsson 2019). Age- and gender-appropriate mobilization upheld the veneer of civilization, which tended to dissolve more quickly in societies that suffered high military and civilian casualties and had to endure widespread destruction. The relative luxury of not having to fight a war in one's own backyard, rather than ideological posturing, could make all the difference in how, and to what degree, young people were mobilized.

The deployment of underage soldiers is a case in point. Young people have fought and died on battlefields throughout history, yet it was not until the twentieth century—in part due to the spread of humanitarian advocacy—that attitudes toward child soldiers underwent a seismic normative shift (Rosen 2005). Still reeling from the carnage of the First World War, League of Nations delegates issued the Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1924, which stated that children "must be the first to receive relief in times of distress" and "be protected against every form of exploitation" (*Geneva Declaration* 1924). Expanded versions of this declaration were passed by the United Nations in 1959 and again in 1989, in part because various combatants have violated the declaration's spirit repeatedly.

Adult organizers were often complicit in offering up their charges as last-ditch weapons in their regimes' struggle for survival. During the Battle of





FIGURE 9.1 Red Army boy soldier on crutches in the company of his adult comrade, 1942. Courtesy of Getty Images.

Okinawa in 1945, local teenagers were drafted into front-line service in the hope of averting certain defeat. Of the approximately two thousand high school students—boys enlisted in the Blood and Iron Student Corps (*Tekketsu kinnōtai*) and girls as nurse-aides in the Himeyuri Student Corps—not more than half of them returned from the inferno alive (Ealey 2006: 1–3). Underage soldiering persists to this day, but so does the myth that this is largely a non-Western problem. This perception certainly owes much to the widespread use of child soldiers in the wars of decolonization and in asymmetrical conflicts marked by irregular warfare, guerrilla tactics, and the diminished importance of traditional interstate wars (Vautravers 2008). At the same time, recent estimates suggest that some three thousand adolescent boys took up arms in the Balkan Wars from 1991 to 1995, and UNICEF is currently investigating allegations that both sides in the conflict in eastern Ukraine are actively trying to involve minors in the fighting (Child Soldiers 2001; Shevchenko 2014).

The militarization of young people, to be sure, was by no means limited to hot wars. During the Cold War, youth organizers on both sides of the Iron Curtain staged civil defense drills that they found suitable for teenage boys or girls respectively. In Britain, Canada, and even more so in the United States,



FIGURE 9.2 Boys playing war on a military field in Los Angeles, January 1950. Courtesy of Getty Images.

Scouts simulated mock atomic strikes, rescuing people, administering first aid, and posing as casualties. Their Komsomol counterparts in the Eastern bloc went further still, many of whom were subject to mandatory premilitary training that included target shooting exercises and throwing replica grenades (Davis 2007; Peacock 2014). The prominence of “militainment” in modern consumer societies raises another set of questions about the viability of confining the historical study of war and youth to periods of actual warfare. From Chinese students playfully executing US “war criminals” in the 1950s to twenty-first-century teenagers chasing high scores in ego-shooter computer games, military play and toys have figured prominently in peacetime leisure activities, sometimes as part of conscious efforts of state authorities to foster a martial spirit in their young (Boretti 2019; Martino 2015).

From a conventional standpoint, the strengths and weaknesses of adult-generated sources on wartime youth seem obvious. Perusing official documents related to the dealings of state and non-state institutions can illuminate the contours of historically specific constructions of youth. It can highlight adult expectations imposed on young people, and it can draw attention to the responsibilities societies owe to their young in war. The dual character of war youth as a social body to be controlled and an allegory to be harnessed becomes palpable in modern wartime propaganda, which is replete with images of brutalized youngsters that sparked moral outrage and justified retributive violence. Such top-down accounts have met stronger criticism in recent years as historians of youth and childhood have more forcefully rejected the idea that adult claims to owning the concept of youth are somehow superior to what young people claim for themselves (Honeck 2018: 13–14). But before dismissing these sources as inimical to doing a bottom-up history of modern youth and war, there is a case to be made for reading them against the grain, that is looking for the fingerprints that actual youths, unwittingly or wittingly, left on the narratives crafted and disseminated by authorities for the purpose of official mobilization and social control.

Two constellations come to mind. Few things are more appalling to our modern sensibilities than underage soldiering, yet history is filled with children and adolescents answering their nation’s calls to arms. Motivated by the wish to escape material paucity, to leave behind the confines of a cramped childhood, or to experience adventure in faraway places, young people looked for opportunities to join the ranks of their country’s fighting forces with a zest that adults often found hard to understand, and sometimes even harder to contain. *The Bridge*, a West German anti-war movie of the late 1950s directed by the Austrian filmmaker Bernhard Wicki, is a powerful testament to the juvenile rush to war: its innocent fanaticism and deadly obliviousness to danger. The movie tells the story of a group of German high school students who are drafted into a local army unit in the closing days of the Second World War and ordered

to defend a strategically insignificant bridge against advancing US forces. Their misguided sense of heroism drives the students into battle with a superior enemy—even as their officers recognize the futility of further resistance—and ultimately to their death. The movie only echoed the experiences of a small segment of young males who perished in the furnace of total war. It also merely gestures at the multiple forms of manipulation, intimidation, and coercion exercised by state and military leaders that turned young people into killers. Nonetheless, the film is a forceful reminder of the self-propelling incentives that reside within underage peer cultures whose violent practices in war cannot be fully explained with reference to essentialist and ahistorical notions of youthful impressionability.

The capacity of young people to assert some degree of autonomy within adult-led movements persisted through the difficult transition from war to peace. If the symbolic equation of youth with patriotism seemed to make the former essential to the war effort, the fact that many cultures placed children and adolescents at the forefront of postwar narratives of peace and reconciliation seemed to give young people even greater leeway. Historians



FIGURE 9.3 US Private guarding a group of adolescent German POWs, April 1945. Courtesy of Getty Images.



have not failed to explore how representations of childhood suffering have fueled the rise of modern humanitarianism, starting with the antislavery and peace movements of the nineteenth century (Salvatici 2019). Another body of historical scholarship demonstrates how children and adolescents acted as “little diplomats” in the arena of twentieth-century international relations, from forging long-distance relationships with other youths through pen pal programs to engaging in conflict resolution scenarios in workshops organized by the United Nations (Helgren 2017).

Emboldened by his role as peacemaker, Charles Bartlett, a Boy Scout from North Carolina who attended an international Scout gathering in France in 1947, imagined a world not only without war but also without any religious or racial bigotry. “Why can’t it be that way everywhere?” Bartlett confided to his diary after mingling with youngsters from different parts of the globe. “There are not many places on earth where a white boy and a colored boy can look at the same songbook together and sing out in praise of God. It is a wonderful sight – more like a dream” (Bartlett 1947: 6). Teenagers like Bartlett may have acted in accordance with adult expectations, but they also used their position as junior partners in the remaking of global relations to envision a future that could go well beyond the reconstruction designs licensed by their leaders.

## RECORDING YOUTH: THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ARCHIVE

Despite some historians’ lamentation that young people did not record their history, in fact they left behind a significant record of their lives for us to analyze; this is partly because adults frequently asked them to do so. In addition to the local traditions of life-writing, at different times in each context from the late nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century, adult authorities in Russia, China, Japan, and Britain encouraged, cajoled, and even forced young people to write diaries, essays, memoirs, and autobiographies as part of their education and socialization, because educators believed that self-motivation was essential for success in modern life (Greenhalgh 2014; Holmes 1991; Moore 2016; Piel, 2019; Saari 1990). The Chinese Scouts encouraged life-writing as a form of self-discipline, describing uses for pocket diaries and providing example diaries for emulation (Zhongguo Guomindang tongzijun 1929: 22; Zhang and Zhou 1933). Russian Komsomol youth wrote articles, diaries, letters, and later memoirs to inscribe their feelings of liberation, agency, and disillusionment with the Soviet system (Gorsuch 2000: 41–79). Chinese schools used their bulletins to publish young people’s self-narratives, and in some cases the local and mass media published exemplary accounts (Guo Hui 1932: introduction, 29/9/1931). While adults often encouraged life-writing as

a form of capturing the “childlike child” in all of their innocence (Frühstück 2017; Jones 2010), it did create the space in which young people could express themselves and have their views preserved in the historical record.

Teachers and parents functionalized life-writing in all countries engaged in total war mobilization. Japanese teachers used diaries, both in school time and during holidays, to help students practice and perfect composition skills. In Mochida Hidenori’s personal diary each page merely featured the seal of the teacher, Mr. Fujioka, indicating that it had been read, sometimes including the stamp “reviewed” (*etsu*), but occasionally also marks of “good” (*ryō*) or “superior” (*yū*; Mochida 1941: 10/4/1941). Still, teachers typically did not dictate this process directly; diaries were largely extracurricular tasks aimed at self-cultivation (Umano 1988: 7/11/1944). Tokyo 5th grader Kikukawa Takehiko described primary school evacuees gathered under a warm blanket (*kotatsu*) at the end of the day in January 1945, writing their personal diaries together without their teacher or dormitory mother (Kikukawa 1990: 6). In all of these contexts, adults endeavored to write model diaries for children and youth, sometimes posing as young people, other times using model entries from famous authors (Yu Dafu 1931: introduction; Zhang and Zhou 1933: introduction; Xu Xuewen 1932, 1933). The justification for composing these texts was sometimes political, but nearly invariably moral (for instance, in China, teaching juvenile subjects to avoid “evil” and “reach for the good”; Xiantou-shi 1936: introduction). One of the major inspirations for ersatz self-writing was Enrico Bottini’s Italian nationalist *Cuore* (*Heart* 1886), an imitation of a youth’s personal record, which emerged during the turbulent years of Italian unification. Cheng Zheng’s later adaptation, *Xin ai de jiaoyu*, declared that he, as a boy, “opened the diary and began writing with war-like fever, writing as seriously as when I take an exam.” Life-writing in modern China encouraged an awareness of global events and leaders, but most of all the need for daily self-cultivation through writing (Cheng Zheng 1949: 16/8/1948). Because children were encouraged to imitate this style, differentiating the accounts of youth and those of adults mimicking “ideal” youth in published sources can be difficult; nevertheless, the consequence of teachers’ desire to capture childhood and youth in textual form is an invaluable archive of the language they developed to discuss wartime experiences.

Modern schools around the world also emphasized life-writing as composition exercise, to improve and expand a child’s literary skills; in many countries, this was conducted in religious schools (Foung 1937). Guided self-narrative quickly became a formalized component of education in the modern world, usually drawing on early modern precedents, aiming to encourage broad, inter-class, and cross-gender participation in social movements as well as political and moral values (Zhang and Zhou 1933; Kitakami Peace Museum 1925).

We still have a poor understanding of the transnational dynamics behind the phenomenon of life-writing among modern youth. Nevertheless, a runaway train of transnational connections is not too difficult to construct, for example: schoolteachers in Japan conducted “diary inspections” (*nikki kensa*) in the 1940s, which emerged in part from peer-reviewed military “field diaries” from the nineteenth century, which influenced Chinese Nationalist diary-writing practices in the 1920s, which in turn inspired Chinese education in the 1930s, which itself collided with Western religious schools’ use of confessional texts as a form of life-writing in treaty-port China, just as the political content of Russian schoolchildren’s writings was shaped by the Soviet system of political education, which also happened to be part of the Chinese military training system. Thus, the diaries of Soviet youth such as Mikhail Grigoyevich Rosanov not only influenced the writings of Russian youth but, in translation, Chinese as well.<sup>1</sup> Examples of youth life-writing were published, translated, re-translated, swapped, sold, and circulated in libraries. Library cards still tucked in the back of regional Chinese libraries show that Russians were reading Chinese youth accounts into the postwar period. As Helen Roche described, school exchanges meant that students were constantly engaging with their peers in other countries, even between countries that were imminently going to war with each other like Nazi Germany and Great Britain; student exchange added to the cross-fertilization of pedagogical practice developed and executed by teaching staff (Roche 2013). Consequently, once life-writing became a part of the educational curriculum, it circulated vigorously throughout modern education systems up to and including the Second World War, producing a rich record of childhood and youth.

## LIFE-WRITING AS SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Young people used their personal accounts to make sense of the adult world that they were preparing to join. One immediate impact of war on youth was to thrust upon them, in a dramatic fashion, an awareness of the machinations of this world. Although adolescence brought with it, in every national context, a curiosity about national governments, foreign armies, and global economic transformations, the combined phenomena of labor/military conscription, social mobilization, and attacks by enemy forces made the growth of social consciousness more rapid and acute than it might have otherwise been. Teachers encouraged these thoughts: teenagers like Chinese student Zhao Jinhua reflected on world leaders’ examples for their personal development including ideological opponents such as Stalin, Roosevelt, Hitler, Mussolini, and Gandhi (Zhao Jinhua 1940: 31/3/1939). Little children and teenagers had different perspectives on what the “world” was during the Second World War.

For children, a central preoccupation was food; while this might not be surprising during a time of rationing and privation, children wrote more about food than did teenagers or adults. Gender also did not affect this focus, even though the subject of food acquisition and preparation would later be gendered among adolescents. Even boys who did not generally write about food, like eleven-year-old London evacuee Ken Muers, still slipped in an occasional note in his war diary: “I ate a lot of pancakes and I nearly bust” (Muers 1941: 25/2/1941). Japanese primary schoolboy Kikukawa Takehiko kept a strict record of what he ate during his evacuation from Tokyo’s Toshima Ward to rural Nagano Prefecture during the transition from 4th to 5th grade. Kikukawa’s diary shows the reliance on miso-based soups, local produce, and preserved (pickled) vegetables that characterized the grim “bamboo shoot lifestyle” (*take no ko seikatsu*) remembered by adults in postwar Japan. A typical day in early 1945 for Kikukawa, as recorded in his diary, looked like this:

Vegetables, daikon miso soup, bok-choy, pickled vegetables, *furikake* ... Lunch is boiled pumpkin, with bok-choy, and pickled vegetables ... We all gathered around the *kotatsu* [heated table cover] and wrote letters when [we] got to have some beans and bread from Hiroshi’s mom. While we wrote, we also got some snacks (bread). Then we went to the hot springs, had dinner, which was vegetable and daikon miso soup, pickled bok-choy, and roasted soybean flour [*kinako*].

(Kikukawa 1990: 9)

Young girls, like boys in the same age cohort, initially recorded their daily diet because it was within the limited number of topics on which they could write. Li Dongsheng, a refugee from China’s eastern seaboard to inland Sichuan Province, described how her mother nagged her not to eat unhygienic foods such as pig’s feet and fried shrimp, or other sorts of snack food fried in oil (Li Dongsheng 1944: 6/10/1942). Trapped in Leningrad during the siege, but before mass starvation began, Nina Stotnik frequently wrote about food, rationing, bartering, and the small victories they could bring:

Dad went again with the neighbors to a nearby village to trade, but there is nothing to trade and he’ll surely come back empty-handed. Yes, they have nothing, being so close to the front. Before, dad got one liter of butter and some matches, nothing more ... Yesterday I got some sausages. Oh, how happy we all were! Today we cut some and served it with cheese and tea for breakfast in the morning, but at night we’ll have tea without any bread. Oh well, I’m satisfied.

(Stotnik 2002: 25/11/1941)



The war brought many such “treats” that children celebrated in their personal accounts. Li Dongsheng was effusively happy when her mother brought home cookies, biscuits, and other goodies from the market, Patricia Donald took the time to record treats such as cakes and blackberries, and Umano Yōko noted how special even a boiled egg could be: “We had a boiled egg [each] for a side-dish. It had been such a long time that no one ate it, instead saving it to put on our bowl of rice for dinner” (Umano 1988: 8/9/1944). A blackberry pie, a nice cheese, or sweet rice mochi were not only immediate pleasures at a time of wartime scarcity, but also descriptive objects well within the linguistic capabilities of a young author.

Teenagers used personal accounts to locate themselves within a global context, particularly at a time when war was spreading quickly from one far-off place to another. In addition to recapitulating tales of famous anti-Japanese military mobilization efforts like the “Eight Hundred Warriors” (*8-bai zhuangshi*) who faced Shanghai’s invasion in 1937, Cheng Zheng’s diary reproduced putative tales of suffering and resistance meant to inspire Nationalist China’s youth:

In Shanghai, our people have suffered all kinds of indignities. They’re not allowed to raise the flag, and any form of patriotic expression is considered to be anti-Japanese. “Anti-Japanese Element” is an epithet that carries the death penalty ... watching the flag fly high is like watching a loving mother raise her hands in prayer.

(Cheng Zheng 1949: 27/8/1948)

Young people in places as far-flung as Scotland’s Orkney Islands consumed news reports and personally identified with distant struggles; fifteen-year-old Bessie Skea wrote down what she deemed to be important news drawn from word-of-mouth reports, radio broadcasts, and broadsheets, and then thought through these titbits of information: “Finland is losing now. What on earth will happen when Russia wins? Will she attack Sweden?” (Skea 1939: 2/10/1939). When Osaka schoolgirl Mikawa Michiko was sent by her parents to relatives in the countryside in April 1945, she learned of the German surrender, and wrote her thoughts on this into a diary:

... I think Japan surely will have to endure a much more excruciating trial. The war situation may become grave on 8 June [1945]. I thought: no matter what happens, we (*ware*) must have confidence in the final victory, and each person shall acquit himself according to his duty (*kakuji no honbun wo hatasō*).

(Mikawa 2002: 8)

Teenagers in all of the societies mentioned in this study took an interest in international affairs, making the war personal in their diaries and letters. “Germany has made a peace-offer to Britain—an insult—but Britain is not looking for peace on her terms,” fifteen-year-old Bessie Skea wrote in October 1939. “We will fight until Poland is restored. It will be a long, tough struggle, I’m afraid” (Skea 1939: 2/10/1939 and 22/3/1938). As a global consciousness took root in the imagination of teenagers, a hatred for unseen foreigners came to the level of explicit articulation: “We all secretly thought that we had a fatherland with a shining history,” wrote fifteen-year-old Chinese schoolgirl Guo Hui, “but I looked at the picture in our classroom that says, ‘Great China’ (*Da Zhongguo*) and in the end the condition of the world before me was too much. We all prayed for the return of [the historical Chinese general] Xue Rengui, but ... I also wished that the gods would cause earthquakes that would destroy Osaka and Tokyo” (Guo Hui 1932: 30/9/1931).

In comparison with young children, adolescents developed a more complex understanding of how the adult world worked, and, regardless of its accuracy, their view inspired biting critiques in personal accounts. Even at a time of “total war” and “national unity,” teenagers were still disobedient, challenging, and acerbic. As Lena Mukhina put it in Leningrad:

How many have made declarations, so many loud words and speeches there were: Kiev and Leningrad are impregnable fortresses! The fascists will never set foot in the beautiful capital of Ukraine, or the northern pearl of our country, Leningrad. And well, today, on the radio these same people report: after many fierce battles, our troops have withdrawn from Kiev! What does this mean? Nobody understands.

(Mukhina 2011: 22/9/1941)

While young children might also write passages about “devilish” or “evil” enemy forces—or indeed “strict” or “cruel” adults in their own community—they rarely seemed to reflect much on these foes, and rather spent their energies describing food, friends, and games. In contrast, for teenagers a personal record was, among other things, a space to describe their relationship to the larger social world, which exposed contradictions and dangers into which that adult authorities forced them.

One area in which children and youth shared concerns during periods of warfare was the displacement they endured as evacuees and refugees. Contemporary observers noted that young people were forcibly removed from the systems that sustained them including those that supported their education. Removing children from home and school required adults to take responsibility for the conflicts that they had initiated—and this forced adults to make difficult

choices as a form of “help” and “care,” such as in 1939 when young Ethiopian refugees were employed as laborers in Kenya (Sequeira 1939). Adult interventions for children fleeing violence were often callous: eleven-year-old Albert Shaw was left abandoned in a Lancaster school after his evacuation from Salford because he failed to appear on a roster; it was only when a passer-by heard him crying in the locked building that the police were summoned (Welshman 2010: 55–6). There should have been little surprise about the inevitability of displacement for young people, because they usually witnessed refugees directly before they joined their ranks, as this schoolgirl’s diary entry on the refugees in Anhui reveals:

Oh my countrymen in flight, you have come to Huizhou through a forest of rifles and a storm of bullets. You seek survival and to preserve your spirit, running ragged day and night, crying due to your hungry stomachs. You say that you are fleeing for your lives, and tears fall from your eyes. Oh weeping refugees, the night is even more lonesome; it makes my heart ache and tears me up inside.

(Peng Zheng 2005: 22/11/1937)

From 1943 in Japan, the government removed young men from their education in order to sustain the armed forces, sometimes causing angst among family members and friends. University student Hirai Kiyoshi was constantly harangued by his mother to switch from humanities to a program that would keep him out of the army. “She’s getting increasingly insistent,” he wrote in his 1944 diary, “because I’m her only son whom she raised up and she doesn’t want my life thrown away on the battlefield ...” Before he died in the air raids over Sendai, he added:

... she is just earnestly crying and begging me. She argued with me back and forth, looking at the issue from every possible angle, in her effort to persuade. At first she invited me to consider my future after university, and her ideas only concerned the benefits [of such a degree], but now her instincts are telling her that the war is after her son’s blood. Surely, she’s foreseeing “death” in my future ... In her heart she’s weeping and praying, but on the surface she just smiles patiently, and I have to face my mother’s sad face and plaintive cries ... Mother, I know how you feel. But this era and what we have been taught cannot permit me to heed your words. Please forgive me, I am a bad son.

(Hirai 2002: 25)

Countless youth across the world were forced by adults to become soldiers, evacuees, refugees, and orphans. Despite the rise of discourses that celebrate

young people as precious or invaluable for the future, adults' efforts to secure their safety were woefully inadequate. Even as the Second World War drew to a close, Jewish families, including young children, awaiting safe harbors, could expect to confront "insuperable difficulties" in their escape due to dangerous conflicts and ineffective parliamentary procedures to secure their immigration (Dijour 1944–1945). Famously, Anne Frank was denied a visa for the United States that could have saved her just as millions of other young conscripts and refugees were trapped in war zones that imperiled their lives.

### THE YOUNG PERSON'S WAR IN MEMORY

Memoirists of youth in wartime writing in the postwar period were forced to engage with the rapidly shifting terrain of public memorialization and collective memory. Discourses of the long postwar (from 1945 into the 1960s) in places like the People's Republic of China, the German Democratic Republic, and the Soviet Union were categorically different from those in Italy, West Germany, and Japan, because of the ongoing narratives of struggle against foreign imperialism; similarly, postcolonial countries like the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Republic of Korea, the Republic of China in Taiwan, the Philippines, and Indonesia, all had to contend with the long history of foreign occupation as well as the collective memorialization of war trauma and heroic resistance. For people who went through the war years, like Sumitani Kichitarō, communicating his childhood experience to Japanese children in the postwar era was almost impossible. He was wounded during an air raid on Tsuchizaki, in Japan's northeast, and received visits from school groups wishing to listen to his war stories; when asked about these visits, Sumitani explained, "When I tell them about the shrapnel I took, or this or that, they're not that attentive. They're too little. So, I teach about it, but they just say, 'Oh, OK'" (Sumitani 2011: 21). The incommensurability of experience is compounded by historical shifts in discourse, the receptivity of the audience, and ever-changing narratives about the past. While it is almost impossible to speak generically of a "youth experience" across all of these contexts, within each context there are even more significant divisions.

As indicated above, people who endured war as children saw the world very differently than those who had already entered adolescence. Consequently, primary school evacuees and those who went off to war are more divided than, for example, the conscripted youth of Russia, Germany, Britain, and China, who at least shared an experience of capture by the state, deployment abroad, combat, and conflicted homecomings. To begin with, those who were in the

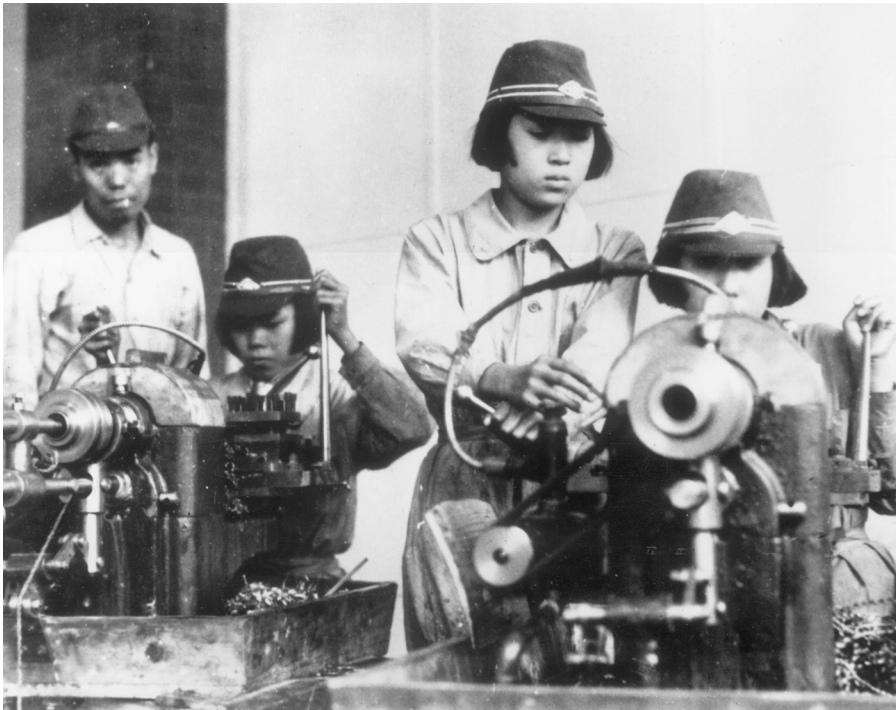


FIGURE 9.4 Japanese girls working in a factory to help with the war effort, *c.* 1945. Courtesy of Getty Images.

countryside as evacuees might enjoy some pleasant times, despite the rest of the country being firebombed and suffering severe food shortages. In a roundtable published in 1995 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war, three Tokyo evacuees reflected on their experiences:

We were 6th graders at the Sotode Primary School [in Sumida Ward, Tokyo], and we returned home to the city just one week before the [1945] firebombing of Tokyo began, which we witnessed. So, in one night at the student dormitory, we lost a lot of classmates. [Leaving in 1944] we of course missed our homes but, perhaps it was a sense of duty in our childlike hearts, we thought the adults were fighting the war so this was what needed to be done... Our memory of the war was that it was terrible, but we also had many fond memories of our evacuation to the countryside. Although it had millet in it, we still had rice to eat, and at bath time the farmers might even bring us sweet potatoes. We had sweets and toothpaste, had bug races in the sun, and thinking about it now, everyone is quite nostalgic.

These three memoirists returned to Tokyo when they were twelve years old, and spent the remainder of the war fleeing firebombing with their parents. Despite witnessing the destruction, dead bodies, and suffering all around them, they “never doubted, right until the end, that Japan would win the war” (Ishigura, Fujihara, and Sekiguchi 1995: 52–3).

In Britain, the division between those who went to the countryside, especially as private evacuations, and those who remained in the city, was also very sharp. Iris Miller reflected fondly on her days as a young evacuee:

Mrs. Henry was very kind to us. In her beautiful garden she had a large comfortable summerhouse known as “the dugout,” and there she would accommodate our family when they needed a respite from the war ... We had a wonderful holiday with marvellous weather; it is a memory I treasure because I didn’t see my father again as he died the following April.

(Brown 2005: 41)

Refugees in China and the Soviet Union, facing invasion by hostile land armies, were much more vulnerable, but even in these contexts memoirs featured happy memories of life in the countryside, escape from dirty cities, and reunions with family and friends in a safer environment (Barsobin et al. 1985; Kikukawa 1990; Levine 2006: 428–32; Li 1944).

In contrast, the youth who were mobilized by the state were thrust into the front lines, but they remembered the war years in some very similar ways across national borders. Japanese teenagers who were mobilized en masse, including as “kamikaze” pilots, and then abandoned in the early postwar period, spoke bitterly of their “lost youth.” In China, as well, volunteers for the Nationalist Party’s Youth Army (Qingnianjun) felt cast aside by a postwar government that was quickly collapsing under pressure from Mao Zedong’s Communist Party:

For the mobilisation of youth into the armed forces, we went without regret into the barracks and were trained to embrace personal sacrifice and study, enthusiastically joining the ranks! In the army, we received vigorous and strict military discipline so that we could strengthen the resistance against Japan and complete our revolutionary destiny to build a better China. After the Japanese surrender, we left the ranks quickly, each seeking his own path ... Many of us in the Youth Army are men with great ambition and will ... After demobilisation, do we carry on with our education? Should we seek employment? We must all decide right now!

(Liu Huanzhang and Zhang Zuojie 1946)



British youth were mistreated by the government during the war, especially if they were conscientious objectors or merely mobilized as coal miners out of a general draft lottery. One woman, who recalled bringing the “Bevin Boys” scraps of meat in bombed out Coventry, wrote that it

was very wrong of [the government] to pick out those boys’ names because some of them were training ... they were just snatched out and put into the mines. They told that they were being just as much good in the mines as they would be fighting. They probably wouldn’t get hurt so much. They didn’t have much time off, they had to keep going.

(Ault n.d.)

Given that the labor conscripts in Britain were not recognized as part of the war effort until 1995, for most of their lives they felt as abandoned as their counterparts in Japan and China. For young people who harbored greater ambitions than temporary service in the armed forces or a coal mine, the war years were greatly different than those who merely endured it as evacuees in a rural hinterland. In this sense, age determined the memory of the war as much as or more than national identity, culture, class, or gender.



FIGURE 9.5 Two boys play and re-enact war games in Benghazi, Libya, 2011. Courtesy of Getty Images.

## CONCLUSION

While superficially, the experiences of wartime youth are divided sharply by national culture, on closer inspection the articulation of personal histories from this period was formed by very similar, and global, historical processes. First, the mass organization of youth was a transnational phenomenon, whether by direct influence, such as the global growth of scouting movements, or by unintentional convergence, such as the fact that Japanese premodern youth groups (*wakagumi*) evolved independently into youth corps (*seinendan*) that combined localized public service with paramilitary exercises—just as the Scouts had in Britain and the United States or the Pioneers had in the Soviet Union. Second, while notions of “childhood” and “youth” were culturally constructed, the pressures of societies preparing for modern warfare produced similar outcomes, including for example youth labor mobilization. Third, the redefinition of “childhood” and “youth,” combined with the governmentality of “total war” regimes, meant that one unintended outcome of the state and social organization engagement with youth was a mass production of primary source documents by young people; in short, the “discovery” of childhood and youth opened up a new narrative terrain of being young, written by the young people themselves. Because the postwar public accepted the First and Second World Wars as significant events, they became centers of gravity for the preservation of historical documents, meaning that in many instances there is more information on being young in the Second World War than there is for the 1920s or the 1960s.

The era of total war, then—if we wish to call it that—accelerated pre-existing mechanisms for teaching young people how to capture their experience in handwritten texts, and these mechanisms went into a period of slow decline after 1945, perishing in the age of television and computing. Our continued fascination with the era, and the fact that many postwar governments stake their legitimacy on the war’s collective memory, mean that the youth of this era is unusually well documented. Only now, with the emergence of the internet and social media, has there been a comparable phenomenon of young people recording their life experiences on a mass scale, but the differences in media, dissemination, feedback, and genre require an entirely new methodology. Whether subsequent generations will feel that the documented experiences of young people who write blogs and Facebook posts are worth preserving for future historians of childhood and youth has yet to be determined. There is reason to assume, however, that the twenty-first-century heirs of Anne, Theodore, and Konstantin will leave at least as many digital footprints as physical ones.