Sounds of War: 'Fifteen Thousand'

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This is an exerpt from *Sounds of War: Aesthetics, Emotions and Chechnya* – an E-IR open access book by Susanna Hast.

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Fifteen Thousand struck me like lighting, in a similar manner to *Pit*. I was watching the documentary film *Children of Beslan* (2005) after seeing a theatre play on the school attack in Beslan (Hast 2017). A boy wearing a green shirt explains: “Moscow sent us money. They have given me 15, 000 roubles. A footballer came to the hospital and gave each child 15,000 roubles. An adult who had lost someone got 20,000.” He yawns. “I don’t understand how they can measure lives with money.” I saw this young boy telling about financial compensation for the victims. I noticed I was tensing my face. I wondered if I was beginning to show signs of aging because of my anger. But in the middle of the horror story we know as the Beslan hostage crisis, there is a girl who tries to return to the collapsed school to rescue her mother. After three days as a hostage – thirsty, hungry, scared – a little girl would try to get back to the building to rescue her mother. At the same time, the children of Beslan would know how much life is worth in money. Their lives would be deeply militarised. I made a music video for this song. I tried to reconstruct the idea of a child hiding and running away from danger. I took my six year old to a nearby botanic garden, which would represent ‘scary woods.’ I chased him with the camera in my hand. It was all very spontaneous and I realised that the Finnish summer night does not really allow darkness to envelop the scenes. Neither is the botanic garden a particularly scary place. But funniest of all was my son who was smiling, laughing and playing. He was not a convincing actor, but I might have had a poor plot too. I filmed, and when I was editing, I thought that I failed to represent the song. But the song is not a representation, and neither is the film. In fact, the filming revealed to me how far our lives at that moment were from those who witnessed the school siege in Beslan. The film was, in fact, a visualisation of that distance, and the safe childhood my son was lucky to have so far.

“Fifteen Thousand”

I have an angry face all day,
can feel the wrinkles forming on my forehead

I have an angry face all day
I need to testify, testify to your pain

Fifteen thousand roubles for a life unlived
Fifteen thousand roubles for a life unlived
Fifteen thousand roubles for a life unlived
That’s how much you’re worth

Need to breathe not to freeze
Need to run not to fall

Need to keep moving on

Fifteen thousand roubles for a life unlived
Fifteen thousand roubles for a life unlived
Fifteen thousand roubles for a life unlived
That's how much you're worth

I have an angry face all day,
can feel the wrinkles forming on my forehead

I have an angry face all day
I need to testify, testify to your pain

Children and Emotions

The reason why, in the first part of this chapter, I write about Beslan, which is not located in Chechnya, but in a city close to the border of Ingushetia, is that the school siege was one of the many attacks conducted by Chechen fighters within Russia and was, thus, part of the war. It targeted children, and families with young children who played no role in the wars. The second part of this chapter discusses Pirjo Honkasalo's film *The 3 Rooms of Melancholia* (2004), a film likewise focused on children touched by war. The purpose of this chapter is to locate children at the centre of the war stage to discuss, through aesthetics, their agency, courage, imagination, emotions and vulnerability. Honkasalo's film excites the visual field, while *Children of Beslan* tries to give voice to the children, yet may fail to do so by imposing a narrative through them. Both documentaries show children, not as passive observers or future protagonists, but acting there and then in their daily lives as lived bodies.

Children are seen as particularly vulnerable because of their incapacities, innocence and powerlessness. But as before, I do not adhere to such a conception of vulnerability. I envision courage as inherent in vulnerability. I sought long and hard to find a word to describe what I want to explore about children in war. It is the capacity to act in the world and to touch the lives of others. Sometimes this means simply being present. For example, children give comfort to mourning adults in the film *Barzakh*. They influence their environment by being there. Agency is one way to speak about children in war, and agency does empower, but it can also disempower the individual, putting her in a worse situation than she was in before (Sylvester 2015). Yet, I do not mean to discuss empowerment, not least because the purpose here is not to construct an image of heroic children. Rather, agency here refers to the children's own conceptions of their agency and their survival stories (linguistic and corporeal). The purpose is to show that children are to be seen and heard, and that they have their own stories to tell. The stories told here have been mediated through adults and cameras. I do not know what the children feel, I can only observe them from the outside.

When children witness war, their emotional experiences are a result of the "nature and nurture" that is their biology and their previous experiences together. Every child experiences differently, just like every adult, but it is the developing brain that makes a child's experience differ from an adult's. The younger the child, the less accumulated knowledge, experiences and cultural norms there are to influence the experience, and the less developed are the brain structures that deal with feelings of emotions. I will first offer some remarks based on developmental psychology and trauma-related studies to help situate children's experiences of their agency and embodied emotions.

First, it has to be said that childhood is an ambiguous political concept (Brocklehurst 2006). Adults are considered agents with responsibility whereas the younger the child, the less capable and responsible, and the more innocent, the child is considered to be. Childhood is sometimes represented as feminine with physical and emotional weakness, which Brocklehurst (2006: 12) coins as the "feminization of childhood," referring to Cynthia Enloe's (2014a) term "womenandchildren" – the association of women with children in war. Moreover, representations of

children's innocence and vulnerability are produced in the aesthetics of images depicting physical qualities, and again especially feminine qualities. For Brocklehurst (2006) the dichotomy of child and adult is also at the root of the notion of the political, even if childhood studies is slowly beginning to recognise children's agency – their ability to participate in and inform social practices.

Moving beyond the representation of children in war through feminisation, weakness and emotionality, I am interested in a child as someone with a maturing brain and body experiencing and witnessing war in her own right; not as an extension of the mother's body but a unique and insightful individual who deals with a traumatic or dramatic experience. The difference between the child and the adult is, thus, not constructed upon a feminised, romanticised and depoliticised image of the child. Instead, I argue, children influence their environments, and they shape and change the world around them, corporeally.

An infant's emotional development starts with feelings of pain and pleasure, and by the age of two, children can display the entire spectrum of emotional reactions (Berger 2008). But when we observe children's emotions, we should acknowledge that they are less nuanced, less distinguishable from one another and less controlled than adults'. The way an adult feels and expresses an emotion is not necessarily the way a child does. This makes it hard to interpret what a child is feeling. Moreover, even when a child is given the opportunity to tell something in her own words, the interpretations of an event and related feelings could be already influenced by adults.

Damasio, separating emotion and feeling of emotion, refers to emoting as the non-conscious body process, while the expression of emotion is controllable and educable (2010). Children have less control over their feelings of emotions – the conscious and linguistic – as the brain is maturing. Between the ages of two and six the brain specialises, the cortex matures and memory improves, leading to the development of emotional self-regulation (Berger 2008). Temperament affects the development of emotional self-regulation and so do early childhood experiences and social contacts. Thus, expressing emotions is a learning process, and it is culturally influenced. Emotions are contagious, but especially to a child whose brain is maturing. Emotional control is learned during the play years, as the brain matures and as the child interacts with others. In puberty and early adolescence, emotions are influenced by hormonal changes, and vice versa, while the adolescent brain keeps maturing and emotional regulation further develops.

Hietanen et al. (2016) have been researching the bodily sensations related to emotions in children. The participants in the study coloured on a drawing of the human body, the area in which they felt a certain emotion emerging strongly or quickly. In the second, they could colour the part of the body in which an emotion was felt weakly or slowly. The researchers found distinct distributions of body areas related to specific emotions in different age groups. In comparison to the results on children, adults have more discrete bodily sensations. Interestingly, in this research conducted in Finland, the different age groups from six-year-olds to adults all show activation of the entire body in the case of happiness. Sadness and disgust, on the contrary, differed significantly which suggests that the accuracy with which children can identify emotion-related bodily sensations depends also on the development of emotional categorisation. They also argue that the development of bodily sensation patterns related to emotions parallel the way children begin to use words to express feelings and emotions. This means that awareness of the bodily sensations of emotions shapes the way children perceive and interpret their environments. That is the enactive *mind in body*, a body making sense of the conceptual world. This is the body knowing, the flesh-word connection.

Trauma, mistreatment and stress affect children and their emotional development. Normal development can be hindered and can even result in "trauma-induced developmental pathways" (Coch et al. 2007, xv). PTSD symptoms in children include reliving the event in dreams or play, avoidance of thoughts, feelings, and activities and emotional numbing (Salmon and Bryant 2002). Both adults and children react to trauma physiologically, and are often unable to create a narrative of the traumatic event (Van der Kolk 2014). Their bodies re-experience the emotions of their past experiences, but it can be impossible to articulate the experience. As Bessel Van der Kolk (2014) explains, trauma by nature cuts the individual off from language-based experience, but it does not mean people do not talk about their experiences. Rather than being able to address their inner experiences, traumatised individuals sometimes make up a cover story, which offers some explanation – this is what Welland (2015) describes as performative compassion. To investigate war experience, then, is to be interested also in the pre-discursive, the non-articulable, the corporeal.

War experience affects the child's development in an embodied sense. The behaviour of a child does not clearly reflect her emotional experience, and the extent to which it does is culturally conditioned. Visible reactions can be very much controlled or constrained, and the developmental phase of the particular child, together with social learning, affects the ways in which a child emotes, feels the emotion and how she expresses them. The purpose of this chapter is not to discover the mimetic of children's emotions in war, but to challenge the stilling of the child's experience into an image of a feminised victim. This chapter wants to challenge assumptions about the vulnerability of a child as merely weakness which robs the child of her agency and identity. The following analysis of *Children of Beslan* (2005) proceeds from the question of how children's agency comes forth in a documentary film which lets children narrate and express their experiences of political violence.

School Number One, Beslan

On September 1, 2004, Beslan School Number One, in North-Ossetia, Russia, was attacked by a somewhat disorganised group of about thirty-two Chechen and Ingush insurgents. It was the traditional *Day of Knowledge* celebrated in the school by the students with their families and relatives. From infants to elderly people, families had gathered to celebrate at the school. But the celebration would change into a siege that would last three days, take many lives and leave scars and traumas for life.

The siege was planned by the Chechen rebel commander Shamil Basayev, who Khassan Baiev operated on in 2000, amputating part of his leg. Baiev would leave Chechnya soon after, hunted by both Russian military and Chechen rebels. Basayev, who died in 2006, had claimed responsibility for not only the attack in Beslan but other attacks such as the Dubrovka theatre hostage crisis in 2002, and the murder of the Chechen president Ahmad Kadyrov in 2004.

Over 1100 people, mostly schoolchildren, were held hostage and the result was the deaths of over 330 people, of which 186 were children (see Scrimin et al. 2006; Moscardino et al. 2007; Ò Tuathail 2009). Hundreds were injured in the siege which ended with the detonation of one of the bombs wired around the gym where people were being held, bringing down the roof and causing a fire. Hunger and heat caused additional suffering for the hostages. The rescue operation was chaotic as the school was being shelled and the building was on fire. Escaping the school in a weak and confused state was difficult (Burleigh 2008). The reasons for the siege are unclear and Ò Tuathail (2009) explains how there were different interpretations among the people in the region. Some accepted the Kremlin's rhetoric blaming international terrorism while others saw the historical ethnic conflicts between Ingush and Ossetians as being behind the attack. Less accepted was the explanation of the Chechen cause, even if Basayev took responsibility for the siege and the group made demands for ending the war in Chechnya.

The BBC/HBO documentary *Children of Beslan* (2005*),* directed by Ewa Ewart and Leslie Woodhead, was released in 2005. Ewart interviewed some 140 child survivors in Beslan only two months after the siege. The narrators of the documentary are children, with occasional black screens with text discussing the passing of the events. In addition, clips filmed during the siege are shown: videos by the attackers, Russian tanks rolling in, villagers waiting and crying outside the school, and views of the aftermath.

The film begins with a young boy leading the way. "Here, here" he says, and the camera follows. They are in the school, or rather the ruins of it. A new school has been built, which the children attend. The boy guides the crew through the ruins explaining what happened at each location. His name is Alex and he is seven years old. He seems to remember all the details. He is like a documentarist; it is as if it was not him, but someone else who had been a hostage. He explains where they ran and hid with his father, and how one terrorist found them and sent them to the gym with a thousand others, threatening to kill them if they did not obey.

The children in the documentary describe the morning of the festivities at the school, the moment when the terrorists took them hostage, the passing of the three days, the end of the siege and, finally, the aftermath. When one girl begins to tell about the day, the colourful balloons and the cheerful moods of everyone, she has a smile on her face. She could still remember the happy moments.

The children share their survival stories, details of the violence they experienced, the friends and family they lost, the thirst they experienced and the anger afterwards. But the way the children talk is serious. Their faces are serious, and when an older sibling is talking, the younger one sits still and quiet next to her or him. The narration is factual, not only in terms of the spoken language but the body language as well. A girl says she was really scared when she saw the terrorists with pistols. And she tells it very casually, as a matter of fact. Whereas Van der Kolk (2014: 43) argues that all trauma is preverbal, and mentions how children often refuse to, or are unable to, talk about their traumatic experiences, the children in the film do talk and explain with accuracy. Perhaps the children that are unable to, or unwilling to, linguistically express themselves have been left out of the film. The result is the viewer is presented with an image of a narrator-child – a composed and calm victim of violence.

Early in the film, it is shown that what the children witnessed that day is beyond imagination. A boy explains how a terrorist threatened to kill a man unless people kept quiet, and they could not keep quiet, so the terrorist shot the man in the head and he started bleeding from his mouth. Another boy, who looks like he is even younger, stares and has his mouth open while the other boy talks. A little girl, who looks like she might be around six years old, explains how a girl got shot because her mobile phone rang. Her eyes are moist, but she too keeps it together while speaking. Her nose is running and her voice trembles when she says that it's all she remembers.

The attackers installed bombs which hung in the air on wires, and had to hold a foot at the detonator to keep the bombs from exploding. Death loomed above them constantly. Alex remembers the details of where the bombs were hanging. Explaining, pointing with his hands, as he leads the way to the ruins of the gym, in which sun now shines brightly because there is no roof anymore. The basketball hoop is still there as are the wall bars on which children would climb during gym classes.

The children describe how the siege ended: there was an explosion when a detonator was triggered. Then gunfire. Again they have to witness horrific violence. A boy in a green shirt tells how a bullet hit a grenade and one terrorist exploded so that his brain flew into his face. He says it was fatty and slippery; it was horrible. "We were thrown into a pile of bodies," says one boy. People were dying around them, and they tell it as matter of fact. People were melting, one boy describes. He uses his body to describe how people moved on fire, demonstrating squirming. He shows with his own body what living burning bodies looked like. A girl explains how she was looking at children drinking from a fountain; she wanted to run there to drink until a grenade was thrown at the children and they were blown to bits. One girl had found a little cross on the floor and kept it with her. "It helped me survive," she says as she shows the cross she now wears as a necklace.

Survival Stories

Children's agency comes forth in two main ways: their survival stories and their acts of courage. Survival stories (Mollica 2009) and the experience of having escaped (Van der Kolk 2014), are important for healing from a traumatic event. In the very beginning of the film, a girl says she did not believe anyone could save her. She trusted only her own strength, she could rely on herself only. A boy says with a blank face that he knew they would kill them. All he wanted was to see his mother and then die. These stories are not 'stills' of children being carried in the hands of a rescuing adult. They are stories of moving children, children who had and have their own minds, determination, reflections of the event and the choices they could make.

The children were not helpless, even though some might have been hopeless. Some children tell how they tried to save others. A boy tells how he tried to give five roubles to a terrorist to let his mother go. He was trying to buy her mother out. There is a girl who describes how her mom was left behind. She could not find her, and she jumped out of the window. She was lying on the ground with a woman. The woman tried to take her along but she tried to climb back to find her mother. Photo-images are shown, filmed during the siege, where the girl looks skinny and dehydrated. It is hard to imagine with what strength she is moving. She goes back in the gym and another bomb explodes.

Based on the documentary, one coping mechanism for the children was their use of imagination. A boy explains how during the siege, he was hoping Harry Potter would come to rescue him with his invisibility cloak. Another boy was

dreaming how a Special Force man or Terminator would arrive and rescue them. The same boy who dreamt of Harry Potter was told by his mother to imagine a water fountain pouring on him. He smiles when he says that, as if going back to a sweet memory.

Everyone in the gym was suffering from physical exhaustion and thirst from being deprived of water for three days. Captive in the gymnasium, they were constrained by the commands of the terrorists. The children explain how they were asked to keep silent and still for three long days. A boy explains that he could live with thirst and hunger but what he wanted most was to talk. It was difficult to keep quiet because he likes to talk so much. They are in a gym which has bombs wired above their heads and it's hot, crowded, and they cannot move or chat. There are pools of blood on the floor. Being unable to move hurts, not being able to touch, or laugh or speak also hurts. Boredom hurts.

The children in the film do not talk very much about their emotions. Thus, in order to learn something about the emotions of the children, I need to focus on the moving of the lived body. One observation is that the children tell about the events without tears. Their factual style of storytelling can be a way of dealing with the trauma (also Hast 2017). Perhaps this is the way they embody trauma. It may look like the children do not feel (consciously), as if they are emotionally distanced or numb, which is a typical PTSD symptom. The older the child in the film, the more verbal they are about their emotions and the ways they deal with trauma. The children are seated when interviewed for the camera; with the exception of Alex who is showing the ruins of the school, they are reserved and do not express much with their bodies. The only visible corporeal-emotional reaction is pausing when talking about something personal or sensitive. The interviewed children could be nervous because of the camera, but even so they are almost unnaturally still. The children had to sit still in the gym too. To my eyes, the children's bodies seated and still are reflections of the physicality of the siege.

The stories become more vivid towards the end when the children are shown in their element, playing or speaking with their bodies. I feel a sense of relief, because the seated children feel wrong. The children, in fact, seem more engaged with their emotions when they are not seated and still(ed). There is likely much more the children experience in their bodyminds than what they are unable to vocalise or demonstrate for the camera, and the sitting takes much bodily expression away from them. There is also a contrast between the children who narrate factually and the adults in tears, shaking and screaming. I cannot help but think how much this contrast is produced by the filmmakers through cuts, the set-up of the interviews and the choice of what interviews were filmed and included in the end.

While it is clear that experiencing a violent siege, and witnessing killing, injury, fear and distress, results in severe trauma and psychological symptoms in both children and adults, as Moscardino et al. (2007) state in their study on caregivers' resilience after the Beslan siege, there can also be cultural and social differences. They write, "In North Ossetia, children are socialized from an early age to restrain their emotional expressions in the presence of adults, to be obedient and respectful, to be sincere, and to be modest" (Moscardino et al. 2007: 1779). Thus, the interviewed children have tried to restrain their emotions in front of the camera. Or maybe they have become serious.

The children tell how the town has changed, how it is in mourning. The children have changed too. A girl in a white shirt says she used to be happy and playful and now she does not want to do anything. The boy who imagined Harry Potter during the siege says they are not the same happy kids anymore. They have become serious and grown-up. Even little boys became adults, he continues. Finally, he concludes that "kids understand everything." Moscardino et al. (2007: 1781) made similar findings when one caregiver reported, ''Before they were two very happy boys, but now they have changed radically: S. has become more adult, while A. looks much older. Something inside him has broken." Thus, they found that the caregivers noticed a change in the children towards seriousness and adulthood.

The way children deal with their experiences is associated with imagination and creativity. This creativity is part of their agency. One child recites a poem about the siege, another sings. Another girl draws the terrorists, and then burns the pictures. She explains that by burning the drawing, "I express the anger I feel inside." She says she still cannot show her anger. Burning her drawings is her way of vengeance, and she explains that her need to do harm increases every time she burns a picture.

Children's creativity is a means to structure and express the experience which does not translate into a coherent

narrative. To see children's art is to validate their war experiences. Van der Kolk (2014) shares a story of a five-year-old boy who witnessed the planes crashing into the twin towers in New York and managed to escape unharmed. He made a drawing later of the event he witnessed, but had placed a trampoline in the picture, and explained that next time people jumping from the buildings would be safe. He used his imagination to deal with what he had witnessed. He had the advantage of a safe home environment, and he did not experience loss of life in his family. The bodily alarm system which was activated when he witnessed violence was shut down when he was back home because he experienced an escape.

He could thus make sense of what had happened and imagine a creative alternative – the trampoline saving lives – in the drawing he made. In contrast, Van der Kolk (2014) writes, traumatised individuals get stuck, unable to imagine new experiences. The body keeps re-experiencing the danger. What happens in the body is that the production of stress hormones spikes, and it takes longer than usual for the hormones to dissolve. The five-year old boy managed to escape and take an active role in the disaster, that is, he was an agent in his own rescue. As Van der Kolk explains, this sense of agency and managing to escape is critical for the after-effects. The children in Beslan were trapped, but some of the children could experience escape and survival, which might have helped them to heal from the trauma. Moreover, some children explain how they used their imaginations during and after as a coping mechanism. This attests to the self-healing capacities of some children.

Militarisation After the Siege

The children are shown in the classroom of the new school, and they look like normal, happy, healthy kids. They don't *look* traumatised. But it is one thing to look, and another to see. Armed guards are shown, watching over the school. A mother is shown sitting in the classroom watching over her child. Adults are reacting protectively. Children are playing ball happily outside while the guards with guns stand next to them. The armed guards are a sign of the militarisation of the school environment, but so are the children's testimonials. Violent solutions have suddenly become *the everyday*.

The reason why I want to take up militarisation here, in the chapter on children, is that children are at risk of becoming militarised at an early age when they witness war and its aftermath. Children are at risk of becoming militarised everywhere, due to the militarised ideologies and practices of states and societies, and the extensive media coverage of war accessible to children. They become militarised psychologically and physically through daily lived experience. Militarisation means, to quote Enloe, a "step-by-step process by which something becomes *controlled by*, *dependent on*, or *derives its value* from the military as an institution or militaristic criteria" (2000: 291, emphasis in original). In other words, militarisation facilitates the prioritisation of violent solutions to insecurity, and military values and ideas being normalised (Basham 2011). But militarisation does not mean passively absorbing militarised ideologies and ideas. Children make sense of war actively.

Militarisation permeates societies so that children and youth who have experienced war are at risk of becoming militarised. They can begin to see military solutions as heroic and admire that very same militarised masculinity of which they are victims. Like Macmillan (2011) argues, in a broader definition, militarisation not only refers to state policies but to all combatants and non-combatants involved in preparation for war or affected by militarist ideologies. Militarisation is a seductive process which feeds on masculinist values (Enloe: 2000; 2004). Militarised masculinity does not concern soldiers, men, or adults only. It concerns everyone, and becomes a heritage passed on from one generation to the next. In a study on Chechen suicide terrorism, Speckhard and Akhmedova (2006b) found that traumatic experiences and a sense of duty for revenge made individuals more vulnerable to become recruited and self-recruited into radicalism. Both perpetrators and targets of violence can have a similar background of exposure to extreme violence and trauma. This is the breeding ground for cycles of violence which can originate in childhood. Baiev (et al. 2003: 2) explains how war is an ever present legacy in Chechnya, "Even today, mothers rock little boys to sleep with lullabies urging them to be brave warriors." According to Baiev, young Chechen males are trained in fighting skills, and physical strength is encouraged.

The children in the documentary report that the siege has affected their lives and the community. A girl wearing a yellow shirt explains how her neighbourhood used to be lively but now there is hardly anyone there; and the ones who

are, wear black clothes and cry. It is important to acknowledge that in Beslan, the impact of the siege – the impact of terror and the military solution to it – affected the entire community. The attack severed communal ties and customs on a large scale. One such effect has been militarisation in the form of idealisation of military solutions. In the film, an older boy, maybe in early teenage years, tells how after the attack he would walk the street with his rifle and check family members' bags for bombs. He builds a model of the school with missiles on the roof. Every house should have missiles, he says.

Children understand militarisation through their lived experiences. They have become familiar with the concept of terrorism through their lived experiences. Whatever they are told and taught about terrorism, they have also lived through the siege, and thus formed their own corporeal relationship to the category of a terrorist. A girl explains she did not know before what terrorists were, but now she knows: they are people who blow things up. The children wonder why they had to suffer this fate. Why were people killed like this? Yet, the interviewed children do not lump all terrorists together. They had encounters with them, and found some kinder than others. One boy tells how a female terrorist tried to offer water and a male terrorist blew her bomb belt up. The female terrorist became a victim too.

Militarisation feeds on masculine values like heroism. Heroism was detected by Moscardino et al. (2007) as an important cultural value in Beslan, affecting local reactions to the siege. For the men of this region in particular, showing vulnerability and emotion is not desirable; thus, the heroic male (adult or child) shows strength. Heroism has a violent side to it too. Many of the interviewed children speak of revenge. Alex shows the room where his father was killed. He walks in firmly, not hesitating, almost excitedly. He shows how his father's body was thrown out of the window. After that, Alex is shown walking quietly, thinking, emoting, as if finally taking the moment to feel. But in the latter part of the film we learn what he is contemplating: revenge. Behind that calmness is anger. Alex wants to go to Chechnya and kill all the terrorists and avenge his father. Alex is not the only one. A girl who lost family and friends says she is angry with the terrorists and could tear them to pieces. A boy is shown boxing – he says he has felt pain and rage and wants revenge. He wants to cut terrorists' throats open. He dreams of being the president of galaxies and fighting terrorists. A sniper would shoot the terrorists down. He does not believe in God, but in Russia and its armed forces.

The children of Beslan have first-hand experiences of brutal violence, terrorism and military force, and they have been shown life's value in money. From those lived experiences they also form conceptual ideas about the world. These conceptions are minded bodily perceptions formed before, during and after the siege. Such experiences change the children and affect their development. As one child says, "We have grown up, we have become serious." Their participation in the world of the political is tangible. The pressing issue is how these children, and their children, grow and will grow into a culture of violence through these experiences, through witnessing war in their own bodies. The children of Beslan are not necessarily militarised because of the siege; rather, the experience of the siege intensifies the militarisation of their lives and creates a turning point in which their interest in and knowledge of organised violence increases dramatically. Thus, seeds of violence are planted deep. The siege is a horrible example of how war spreads and extends, and the daily presence of armed forces guarding the school after the attack is just one example of how war continues to be lived.

The way war continues to be lived is through the traumatised body, as well as the potentially militarised bodymind. In Moscardino et al.'s study (2007: 1779), the psychological reactions reported by the interviewed caregivers of the children included "behavioural problems, including increased irritability, aggression, sleep disorders, lack of appetite, separation anxiety, and regressive behaviours." Many of those interviewed also discussed physical symptoms such as headaches, stomach-aches, and ear pain. One girl in the film tells about her own bodily trauma – being frightened hearing loud noises. Responses to a traumatic event depend not only on individual coping strategies, but also on the socio-cultural context (such as values, and religious beliefs), the caregivers' reactions and explanations, and the availability of therapy or other forms of activity. Parental responses are particularly important for the children's ability to cope (Moscardino et al. 2007). As van de Kolk (2014: 52) explains, children take cues from their parents, and responsive adults can help to prevent serious psychological scars.

When Ewart (2009) interviewed some of the same children five years later, she found the children were still suffering from trauma symptoms such as memory and concentration problems, aggression and behavioural problems, and

health problems. Ewart (2009) writes:

But what struck me most while talking to children today was how their initial fury and hate towards the terrorists have been gradually replaced and directed elsewhere. Many, like Laima, blame the Russian government for not having done enough to prevent the attack and for mishandling the stand-off with the terrorists after they had seized the school. 'If the government had satisfied their demands they might not have blown up the gym,' she said. But with only one terrorist in jail and not a single official found responsible for the attack, some of the children now search for their own answers about what happened and why. Atzamas was ten when, on the last day of the siege, the force of the bomb blast knocked him out. He woke up trapped under a pile of bodies. He says he has tried to understand things from the attackers' point of view. 'They can't be the only ones to blame. I have studied their lives, their school of Islam and I thought hard about the war in Chechnya. If they were attacked by Russian troops, they were fighting to be free. And then they would want revenge on Russia – after all Russia had been killing their children too,' he said.

From the perspective of children's agency and compassion, it is interesting that Ewart (2009) here shows how some children have been trying to understand and find reasons for the violence they experienced. They have become more critical about Russian officials, and perhaps some more understanding towards the Chechen cause. Atzamas' reflection on the violence in Chechnya as an explanation to what they had to go through is an attempt to understand structures of violence, rather than regarding the terrorists as simply evil. The roles of victim and perpetrator become more complex, and there is a possibility that instead of militarisation and dreams of revenge, something different is underway of becoming. One of the children wants to become a doctor and one a president.

The documentary questions the assumption of children in war as merely powerless, feminised, over-emotional, weak and less rational victims. The risk to children's agency after children have witnessed violence is further militarisation; that is, children can begin to prefer and normalise violent solutions. Regardless of the extensive loss and trauma caused to the community and all the affected individuals in Beslan, within the same bodymind which imagines revenge and missiles resides also the capacity to heal. This capacity can be supported by different forms of therapy, familial and communal support. Moscardino et al. (2007) discovered resilience and healing strategies among the affected families, such as the reaffirmation of shared cultural values, affection among children and their parents, laughter and simply being together. These healing strategies are extremely important to study and discuss just as are the causes of violence and the means to end violence.

Children's agency in war raises questions about the brain-body mechanisms after witnessing violence in childhood. It is hard to imagine that the witnessing of violence during the siege would not affect children and adults by causing strong emotions and/or numbness and emotional distancing which reinforces or inhibits the brain-body process of simulating others' body states. The interesting question is, then: How does trauma affect the capacity to emote and feel compassion? Gaensbauer (2011) has reviewed literature on early childhood trauma, and namely re-enactment of a traumatic event in action or play (preverbal). Gaensbauer (2011: 97) suggests that childhood re-enactment of trauma has something to do with the process of mapping one's body state with another's, and the simulation of motor action:

In its most basic form, reenactment behaviour can be considered as a product of an unmediated 'match to target,' reflecting how the human brain is uniquely programmed, without intentional awareness, to automatically translate the perception of an external event into an internal representation of that event within areas of the brain that organize the motor actions and somatosensory/emotional pathways corresponding to those being perceived.

Thus, what is perceived translates into an internal schema, a simulation, which becomes motor activation. A child learns by mimicking not only behaviour but the embodiment of emotions. That is, learning how with certain movement comes certain emotion, and how with certain emotion comes certain motor activation. Gaensbauer suggests that intergenerational cycles of abuse can be born in this process. Children identify with the maltreating caretaker and re-enact an abusive pattern. The body remembers, and the memories of violence are thus embodied. Militaristic behaviour can become one outlet for living out violent body memories. Gaensbauer further suggests that an abused child does not only internalise the behaviour of the abuser, but the abuser's emotions and motives as well. Some of the children in Beslan dreamt of violent revenge, yet, in the interviews five years later, Ewart (2009) found out some

children now tried to understand the motives of the terrorists. Thus, hopefully, rather than re-enacting the violence they witnessed and experienced in childhood, they can also find ways to heal and help others to heal.

Based on the documentary, it is not possible to draw any definitive conclus- ions about the experiences of the children of Beslan. I have presented merely observations of the object body, and attempted to produce some insight into children's agency visualised in the documentary. The documentary film here is not a representation of reality, and an aesthetic analysis does not aim for the authentic. The film shows a small sample of children, narrating their experiences to the camera only a few months after the siege. It does not allow for evaluation of their traumatisation. Rather, it raises questions about the accessibility of children's insights and experiences, and the ethics of asking children to share their experiences like this for public consumption.

I have been asked how it is that we can say the children really have a voice in the film. The stories these children have heard, the explanations they have been given, the reactions of others they have witnessed, are all a part of their experience as much as their own perceptions and sensations. There is no boundary between the sensual experience of an event, what preceded it, and what follows from it. There is no boundary between the bodies which communicate events to each other. Children have their voices and others' voices simultaneously. You have a private body and you embody the movements of people around you. Agency is not the same as originality, or an existence outside the constrains and conditioning of the environment. While embedded in their surroundings, children make their own conclusions, and structure their experiences.

The film's contribution – or fabulation – is, that it does not feminise children, even though it produces them as "documentarists" of their own experiences by privileging linguistic over corporeal expression.

Melancholia in Images and Sounds

Pirjo Honkasalo secretly took a tiny camera with her to Grozny, the capital of Chechnya, where she shot part of the documentary *The 3 Rooms of Melancholia* (2004). Grozny is shown at its worst, destruction underlined by black and white imagery. At the same time, the film also visualises the everyday struggles in and around war that are linked to different locations and political, economic and social problems. Through three rooms, Honkasalo portrays children in a Russian military academy, children who are taken from their mother from the ruins of the city, and children living in exile in a make- shift orphanage. I am reminded by the metaphor of a puzzle in which images, sounds and mundane details form the story of war, mimicking the fractured and messy nature of war and life. A lot is left open for the viewer to interpret. I analyse the film in two rounds: I watch it, but I also listen to it from the beginning to the end without watching. This way I can focus on the soundscape separately.

The body of the film is a non-narrator, and the film relies on the power of images. It is not only the visuals that are haunting – sounds of footsteps and the sounds of military training at the boy's military academy are equally important. The absence of certain sounds is significant as well. The voices of mothers and fathers are absent. In room number one, Kronstadt in St. Petersburg, Russia at a boy's Cadet Academy on the fortress island, the voices of parents are replaced by military officers.

In the film, the children are asleep and woken up by military commands. The young boys stand in line in military uniforms as their clothes are being inspected. Their lives are deeply militarised – they live in a military institution and are trained intensively. I realise that what I thought was a drill, based on the sound only, is a gym class where boys are running in rhythm: *raz, dva, tri*. Honkasalo introduces some of the children by name and shares what she has learned about them. Kolja is 11 and was living on the street. He writes poems. Misha is ten years old, his grandfather sent him to the Academy. Dmitri is ten years, his mother is an alcoholic and his father is a mercenary and veteran of war in Afghanistan. Popov's parents are alcoholic, he is 11. He was living on the street after his home burnt down and his mother died falling from a balcony. Tolmachev is 12 and his mother is a Tatar fighting in Chechnya in the Russian Military.

Sergei is 14 and from Grozny. His father was Russian and died in the bombing of Grozny. He is discriminated against at the school because he is considered to be Chechen. He says he saw his father's body being dug up from a mass

grave. He became lonely and closed-up. Sergei says that the war ruined everything in Grozny. He continues, “I am going to be a soldier. I know what war is. Still, I am not afraid to kill bad people.” Sergei’s militarisation embodies being both a victim of war and a future soldier. Sergei, based on his behaviour in the film, seems to be a kind young man. He goes to meet his grandmother, asking about her health and if she is cold.

The boys march in the yard, the sound of their feet softened by the snow. They get wild before going to bed. Their faces are filmed with long shots, showing details such as yawning. It seems there is an attempt to keep an intense focus on the children so that the viewer can have a long look and has enough time to contemplate. The information given by Honkasalo is that these children have suffered, but what they are experiencing in their institutionalised military training is left to the viewer to figure out through the images only. The children’s faces are still and motionless in some of the close-shots, as if their minds are wandering far away and they are unaware of the camera.

The children do not seem unhappy in their military training. They are so young, and maybe they find safety in a structured and strict way of life, away from abusive parents or the streets. They learn to shoot, and they stare with awe, mouths open, at a close-fight exercise. Yet, the boys still lack the caretaker’s bodily touch and care. These boys can experience social physicality through their training, and it is likely that muscular bonding, a corporeally felt sense of being part of a group (see MacNeill 1995) becomes part of their experience of compassion. I wonder how much the filming has affected the way children are treated, and how they behave, because it looks like none of the children have behavioural problems. Like in the film on the children of Beslan, the camera transmits an image of children who are serious, like they had to grow up. Aesthetically, the choreography of children’s agency, even inside the military institution, is an active one. ‘Things’ have happened to the children, yet they are not passive by-standers. They occupy the centre of the stage, they tell through their movements and stillness.

Room number two is called breathing. It is Grozny in black and white with piles of rubble and destroyed buildings forming a devastating sight accom- panied by the music of string instruments. Everything looks dead and abandoned. At first, only stray dogs are there looking malnourished. Some people are coming and going from a building which has taken numerous hits and does not look liveable. The military is patrolling the streets. Suddenly, the streets are busy and people are selling vegetables at a market. Others are standing with photographs of their lost loved ones in their hands.

In the ruins of Grozny, I can hear children playing. They play war, shooting. When listened to they sound like ordinary children, but when seen, their environment is not the playground where my children play. Children playing war is a natural and unnatural sight at the same time. What else could they play but war which is around them? They are so excited, except for one small boy who stands looking serious. An older boy takes the small one and begins carrying him while he keeps shooting at the other kids. The small boy has been given a gun too at some point, but he still remains outside of the play. The children are moving and playing – they are active. War’s complexity is portrayed in a child’s body, simultaneously a victim of war and a beacon of hope – the suffering child who is still and serious, and the playful child who is enjoying what there is to enjoy.

Emoting with Three Girls from Grozny

There is a knock on the door. It is Hadijat knocking. She is the famous ‘Angel of Grozny’ (Seierstad 2007), the woman who saves children from the ruins of war. Hadijat enters an apartment to take three young girls from their mother to her orphanage in Ingushetia. The mother has worked at oil mills, has fallen ill and is unable to take care of the children. The building is filled with rubble and is partly destroyed. It does not seem like a building someone could live in. The beautiful girls, with their hair cut short, have to leave the mother behind. When Hadijat takes the papers out, the crying begins. At first it is restricted sobbing. The girls are trying to hold back the tears but by the time they have to leave with Hadijat, the crying is loud. These sounds are hard to tolerate.

The scene encapsulates so much of the everyday of war: the break-up of families, the loss of children, siblings, parents and spouses, people becoming combatants, people being kidnapped, killed, abandoned, hurt, removed, displaced. Hadijat’s actions – the collecting of children from the ruins – from the aesthetic perspective contributes to the separation of family members. Yet, she enters the process at a phase where others have abandoned the mother

and her children, and in which there are no support networks left in the society other than those created and maintained by individuals. She does not remove the children from the mother's care, but from a mother who can no longer care for the children, and the mother is losing the one thing which makes sense when she has lost everything else. The girls are rescued yet everyone is heartbroken.

I will discuss Hadijat's role here because seeing her helps to see into the adult-child relationship which underpins this chapter. It took corporeal engagement, songwriting and two years, to come to these following conclusions. My interpretation was that Hadijat enters the building as an embodiment of compassion. She takes a personal risk trying to rescue children. But when I showed the clip in my class, my students were angry at her because she left the mother behind. They did not assign compassionate agency to Hadijat. I had to return to the film, and then I noticed how Hadijat was in a position of power. She enters the building with papers for the mother to sign as the sick mother lies on the bed with the children beside her. Hadijat has power while the mother and children have none – this is the aesthetics of the scene. While Hadijat embodies agency, the mother is helpless, lying on her bed alone after the children are gone. The children do not want to leave their mother, and of course the mother is in tears too. Some of my students asked why Hadijat could not take the mother with her. That was the tormenting part. That was what made Hadijat look uncaring. Did she really have to take the children? And what happened to the mother? Hadijat looks so determined and calm removing the children from their mother's arms while the mother and children shiver with tears in their eyes, embracing each other. It is a particularly violent scene.

With a more careful look, the viewer is shown how Hadijat takes the children to her lap, wipes off their tears and tries to comfort them. She has tears in her eyes too. Yet, this can remain outside the radar of perception because the scene's dominant sensual experience centres around the suffering of the mother and her children, and the position of power assigned to Hadijat. In fact, the viewer's own compassion towards the mother and the children can prevent the viewer from seeing Hadijat as compassionate. Hadijat's actions in that scene cause so much pain to the children that it can be difficult to envision what it takes from her to do it. Thus, she does not appear to be acting out of compassion. The scene demonstrates the difficulty of determining what constitutes compassion in action. The solution I offer in order to overcome possible bias is an active engagement with emotions through an enhanced awareness of corporeality.

Even if we fail to read the signs of the cultural body (culturally conditioned ways of expressing or suppressing emotions), if we think about the body's capacity to map the body state of another person, the 'as-if' state I explored in Chapter two, sensing corporeally is a means available for the analysis. When the scene begins, Hadijat fills the visual field. It is easy to focus on her body entering the apartment, cautiously but resolutely. It is *her* choreography. A position of power is easily attached to her corporeality. She is in charge. But soon the visual and auditory field receives strong messages from the children and the mother, and their touching interaction, and the focus shifts to feel 'as if' in the children's or mother's bodies. Now Hadijat, the choreographer, has stepped to the side of the stage, while the quasi-bodies to connect kinaesthetically and emotionally with, are the mother and her children.

Feeling strongly with the crying children and mother, leads easily to ignoring the emotions of Hadijat. Perception is selective. Irrelevant stimuli remain out of our consciousness to leave space for the processing of important stimuli. Crying is just such stimuli. Yet the unattended stimuli are also processed by the brain. This is a type of 'blindness;' that is, the eyes see but the mind does not. We feel for that which we attend to, and we might fail to notice an unexpected object in the visual field, or a change in the object or its placement (See Eysenck 2012). The scene can contribute to the stilling of Hadijat as emotionless and cold in her actions because of her position which forces her to restrict her own emotional reactions. The scene aestheticises the mother and children as victims without agency, but at the same time the scene portrays how compassion in war does not manifest in a straightforward manner.

Through the camera we can see from new perspectives and broader angles; we can repeat scenes and focus on different parts and details of the frame. In a real life situation, events happen around us and inside of us quickly, and we have limited capacity to follow everything. I can only speculate here on how the physical and psychological environments of war affect perception and thus compassion. Yet a film analysis enables repeating a scene and forming a relationship with the quasi-bodies on screen and the film-body in order to find the aesthetic insight the film can provide. And what films like *The 3 Rooms of Melancholia* offer to the viewer are the aspects of everyday which

escape the news headlines, including the emotional world transmitted through bodily movements, narrations and choreographies. In the case of Hadijat and the aesthetics of the break-up of the family, we can see civilians trapped in poverty and sickness in war, women's role in war, war's effects on families, the need for individual heroes, or family ties, because there is no official agency providing help. We can see many different ways children enact, how they become part of the war machinery, how they find ways to play together, how they want to take care of their parents and siblings. When Chechens say they were abandoned by the world, they have, like these children and their mother, experienced and witnessed that abandonment at a carnal level. The mother with her children has been abandoned by her husband's family after he died in war. "Shame on them," Hadijat murmurs. It is not some abstract abandonment by the international society, it is the everyday losses that Hadijat sees too many of. The children fall asleep in the car taking them to Ingushetia, and Hadijat promises them ice cream.

Seeing Children

Room number three is called remembering. There are sheep on the fields and soft greenness – a contrast to the grey-coloured Grozny. In Ingushetia, four kilometres from the border of Chechnya, the soundscape of war becomes the sounds of nature and animals, of crickets, sheep, cow bells, roosters, horses, water and wind. These are sounds of peace, yet the absence of sounds of war does not mean the absence of war. The sound of a helicopter is a reminder of war. When the helicopter comes close, a little girl begins crying. She stops crying when the helicopter is gone, and she is caressed by an older girl who might be her sister. I try to identify the children, but with their short hair, the girls look so similar. There are several children in Hadijat's care. There are some six boys looking at that same news clip from the attack on the Dubrovka theatre, which the Cadet Academy boys were watching too. Female bombers are dead on the theatre seats. They watch the same news, which portrays the horror of terrorism, applauding the Russian special forces, not mentioning the chemical gas that was pumped into the ventilation system killing many of the hostages. Reading from Rancière (2009), spectators are not passively waiting to be educated. The children watching the news, at the cadet academy and in the orphanage, make sense of war in their own ways.

Pirjo Honkasalo continues providing the names of the children. I hope this does not harm them in the future. Publishing the names and faces of victims of violence is not to be taken lightly. Aslan is 11 years old. He was found in a cardboard box one night, sexually abused by Russian soldiers. Hadijat thinks he is Russian, but he himself identifies as Chechen and Muslim. Adam is 12. His father was murdered in the first Chechen war. His mother could not handle the bombings, became mentally ill and tried to push Adam from a balcony.

There is a very long waking-up scene, these children are not in a hurry like the boys at the Kronstedt Cadet Academy. When the children are so reluctant to open their eyes, there is time for the viewer to reflect. Why does it take so long for them? Are they tired? Are they being woken up too early? Or is it because of their trauma? The scene underlines how little one can know of what children experience. Again, when the boys are caring for the farm animals, I wonder what they are thinking about – Adam in particular. What are the children thinking when they stare into the world so mindfully? As in Kronstedt, trauma seems invisible in Ingushetia; the children do not display behavioural problems in the film.

The film continues with a ritual in which a lamb is slaughtered and its blood is used to draw marks on the foreheads of newcomers. The women, gathered around the sheep with the men, look away as the animal's throat is cut open with a knife. After a long shot of two skinny horses standing in the mist, the villagers are shown attending a *zikr.* Men and boys are going around in a circle chanting like they were hypnotised, living the rhythm and muscular bonding. After a while they stop moving around and start clapping their hands and feet. The women and girls sit and watch. Hadijat's eyes look sad and she sighs. The men go back to running in the circle, and then back to clapping.

We go back to yet another long scene of the children waking up. This time it is the boys, who have an equally hard time getting up. Adam keeps falling back to bed. Did he sleep badly? Did he see nightmares? The boys watch the sky where something, maybe a fighter plane, is flying overhead. There are explosions and Adam swallows continuing to stare at the sky.

The way to find out how war is lived is to look into the everyday rather than be satisfied with generalisations and

statistics. The face-shots in *The 3 Rooms of Melancholia* help to show the children, providing an opportunity for the viewing audience to let the mind wonder and begin to notice children's roles and agency in war. But the close-ups also mean that when the face alone is filmed, much of the body and its surroundings are left outside the frame. There is a danger of putting lives at risk by publishing their faces, stories and names. There is likewise some danger of stilling the face into a calm sadness, a melancholia if you like, which is only part of the story. The film shows children in detail, but it does not portray children's coping mechanisms as much as *Children of Beslan* does. At the same time, *Children of Beslan* goes to an even more ethically problematic terrain than *The 3 Rooms of Melancholia* by asking the victims to share their stories, to relive their experiences in front of the camera. Of course, the viewer does not know what happened off-screen in Honkasalo's film or if the children were interviewed or not.

Perhaps coping mechanisms are simply not expressed in *The 3 Rooms of Melancholia* because the children are not interviewed. This makes the children look powerless. But they are not powerless. In the orphanage, the older boys take part in caring for the animals, which can be one way to cope and heal. Moreover, children are shown supporting and caring for each other in all the three rooms. It is one of the many roles children play in war – they comfort and care for each other and the people around them. Care and compassion are not only parts of adults' agency in war, but are parts of children's agency too.

The Three Rooms of Melancholia displays how compassion is manifold and difficult to still. It begs (but does not answer) the question, how does militarisation affect the children, their emotions, their life worlds and their choices in all three rooms? Will the cadet academy offer the boys the safety they need, and will they end up killing in the name of the state? Will they not only gain the skills to take life but the willingness to do so also? How deeply militarised are the lives of the orphans and children rescued from the ruins? How about their compassion: Will they seek revenge for the fate of their parents and their own suffering?

The collective emotion regarding children in both documentaries relates to the loss of innocence and safety and the abandonment and breaking-up of families in war. This abandonment is constitutive of war and politics in the region. While some of the boys in the cadet academy have been abandoned or forcefully separated from their families, they have found a new group to bond with. In the orphanage, the collective loss experienced by the children and adults present also creates an environment which enables communality manifested in collective rituals. Loss and abandonment, hope and the touch of another body, are thus intertwined. It is not only the loss the children experience, but also a discovery of new meanings in their lives.

Hadijat has made herself vulnerable by being shown in this film and sharing her life for the book*The Angel of Grozny* (Seierstad 2007). It is rarely that we think such vulnerability could in fact be equal to compassion. It does not mean she is an angel who never makes mistakes, but that her activism (and that of others alike) needs to be taken seriously as constitutive of politics. The ones who share their stories in the context of war, who refuse to abandon a sense of common humanity, will have enemies because they prove human capacity for resistance and compassion since emotions are shared states that move between bodies. As Swati Parashar (2015: 76) observes, "Angry women challenge gender norms and disrupt the image of the submissive/ domicile woman." The women who manifest agency – be it through anger, compassion or both – are inspirations to some and threats to others.

Hadijat's agency eventually mobilised Lithuanian prosecutors and secret service in 2008 to seek the imprisonment of her and her husband on charges which were later overturned after they had served ten months in prison and fled to Finland (OSCE 2010). The Gatayev family received asylum in Finland in 2012. The human rights activist Natalia Estemirova and Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya, because they embodied compassion, courage and vulnerability are now dead. Perhaps the persistence of women makes powerful men insecure, and perhaps adults begin to look weak if children appear strong and capable. It can thus be easier to ignore the women, and ignore the children, and portray them as people to whom war happens.

War does not just happen to women and children. When news from Beslan travelled to Chechnya, Chechens were shocked and sad. Milana Terloeva (2006) takes the tragedy of Beslan personally because many of the attackers were Chechen. She was studying in France at the time, but her mother tells her how women and children in Grozny went out on the streets with banderols saying: "Let us take their place" (Terloeva 2006).

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