Thaer Tayeh Tayeh 1

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**Exploratory Project**

In this paper I discuss three issues pertaining to social justice- girl child soldiers,

Arab Spring, and Detroit water shutoff. Girl child soldiers is the abduction and

forced recruitment of young girls in military organizations and militias in

developing countries. I stumbled upon this issue as I was searching for sources on

another social justice issue. The more I read the more I became sympathetic to

these girls who are sexually assaulted and turned into battle hardened killers. Arab

Springs were a spread of protests in the Middle East that began in late 2010 and

ended in October of 2013 which brought about the removal of four Arab dictators.

I choose to include this in my paper because being an Arab American this issue

has personal significance to me and I remember following the events of it on TV,

in newspapers and on social media. My third social justice issue deals with the

Detroit water shutoffs. The shutoffs left many residents of Detroit without water

causing protests and reaching out to Detroit officials to stop violating human

rights. I felt the denial of water to human beings was unjust and the policies to be

illegal and so I felt the issue was deserving of being discussed in the paper.

Throughout history and in many parts of the world, children have been involved

in military campaigns. Countries torn apart by civil war and armed conflict have

made it difficult for parents to protect their young from being abducted and

recruited into various militias and military organizations. Moreover a large

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numbers of these children are young girls usually under the age of 18. Young girls

make up as much as 40%, 120,000, of the child soldiers worldwide. (Mellis, 2014)

This issue is rarely brought to light as international attention has largely

focused on boy soldiers rather than the thousands of young girls who compromise

the “shadow armies” of conflicts around the world. (Morales, 2008)

***Girl Child Soldiers: The Other Face of Sexual Exploitation and Gender***

***Violence***, a journal entry by **Dr. Waltraud Q. Morales, enters the world of the female**

**soldier and touches on the underlying causes and challenges of their exploitation. Areas**

**tainted by** political and social instability and violence which include Colombia, East

Timor, Pakistan, Uganda, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, the Democratic Republic of the

Congo, and western and northern Africa are the most commonly associated with forced

child recruitment into armed forces. In these organizations almost half of the girl soldiers

described their roles as fighters while other roles included cooking, kitchen hands,

cleaning and other menial tasks, as mentioned in the ***Girl Child Soldiers*** written by Craig

Mellis. In some regions such as Sri Lanka and the Philippines girls choose to join armed

groups of their own free will in order to “escape domestic servitude, forced marriages and

other forms of gender-based discrimination.” (Morales, 2008)

 Girl soldiers are often sexually abused, they are routinely raped and many are

forced to become sex slaves to commanding officers as well as forced into marriages.

Mellis mentions the dangers these acts expose the girls too. He states they are at risk of

“sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy, genital tract injury, and lifelong

psychological scarring”, and suggests that healthcare professionals from high income

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countries can contribute to prevention and rehabilitation of girl soldiers. (Mellis, 2014)

It’s alarming and saddening to discover such a large portion of an already

unfortunate global occurrence, the abduction and requirement of children into soldiers,

are young girls. The popular image of the child soldier generally steers more in the

direction of the boy, as had always been my assumption. Reading more into Morale’s

journal, I gather that these girls are likely targeted because they are generally the most

vulnerable and powerless in developing countries. Through torture and brutality these

girls are stripped of their innocence and the once potential of being “the future mothers,

caregivers, and familial anchors within these societies” (Morales, 2008) now lost.

 Moving on to my second topic I explore the events that came to be known as the

Arab Spring. In an article written in the daily newspaper, the *Pakistan Observer,*

journalist Shahid M Amin defines what the Arab Spring was and why it came to be. The

Arab Spring was a series of uprisings and armed rebellions that spread across the Middle

East in early 2011. The term “Arab Spring” was popularized by the Western news media.

It is in reference to the uprisings in Eastern Europe where Communist regimes “began

falling down under pressure of mass protests, and were replaced by liberal, democratic

governments.” (Amin, 2015) It all began in 2010 in Tunisia when a local protest turned

into a mass movement against then dictator, Ben Ali. This set off a chain of protests that

spread throughout the Middle East in retaliation against a decades old system of Arab

dictatorships. At its core the protests were an expression of deep seated resentment

against the brutality, unemployment, rising of prices, and corruption under these

dictatorial regimes.

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In the article, ***What Is The Arab Spring?***, author Primoz Manfreda questions the

success of the Arab Spring. The feeling of unity among the Arab nations quickly faded

once the oppressors were removed. The next step was unclear as Manfreda states, “there

was no consensus on the political and economic model that existing systems should be

replaced with.” Though four dictators -Ben Ali, Mubarak, Gaddafi and Saleh fell, only

Tunisia has achieved a stable democracy. Egypt has become a military run dictatorship,

Libya faces instability, tribal warfare and militia rule and Syria is in the midst of a civil

War. In terms of whether or not the Arab Spring was a failure Manfreda states it is a

failure “only if one expected that decades of authoritarian regimes could be easily

reversed and replaced with stable democratic systems across the region. ”

The readings on the Arab Spring have given me an understanding that the mere

removal of an oppressive government is not enough to bring a nation into a

democracy. There is no magic wand that can be waved to make all the troubles

disappear. In order to achieve democracy a clearly defined political and economic

model must be set in place. Without one, a nation runs the very real risk of

returning to a dictatorial system.

 The final issue I will discuss is the Detroit water shut offs. The NAACP’s legal

defense and educational fund website discusses the issue the residents of Detroit have

been dealing with. The article explains that the Detroit Water and Sewage Department

(DWSD) began dispatching private contractors to begin shutting off water service to

residents who are more than 60 days behind in paying their bill, or owe more than $150.

The shut off began without a plan to help those who cannot pay, despite the fact that “38

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percent of the population lives below the poverty line”. Citizens began marching down

the streets of Detroit in protest carrying signs and banners reading “water is a human

right” and demanding their water be turned back on. The NAACP LDF and ACLU even

wrote a letter to Detroit officials explaining that “it is illegal under international and

American laws to deny poor people access to vital resources.” The NAACP also argues

that a poorly implemented DWSD shut off policy violates the rights of residents because

it often fails to provide them with an adequate notice.

A newspaper article titled, ***Wringing Detroit Dry***, by John Nichols echoes the

issues of the water shutoffs mentioned in the NAACP article but also includes some

victories achieved by the residents who rallied against the denial of water. In

response to the rallies the DWSD put into effect a 15 day suspension of the shutoff. This

was followed a week later by the decision to hand more control over the

water utility to the city’s elected mayor. The City also began the process of reviving a

financial assistance program, the Detroit Residential Water Assistance Program.

Though merely small victories I’m sure these changes matter a great deal for the

families in Detroit. Water is a vital resource and to deny access to water is to deny life.

When making policies officials must take into account how, as Nichols puts it, “cuts hurt

human beings, they hurt communities.” (Nichols, 2014)

 After evaluating each of my topics and all of my sources I’ve decided girl child

soldiers as the topic to explore further in the upcoming issue paper. The reason being is

that I feel girl soldiers do not receive nearly the international recognition that boy

soldiers receive. It’s also a subject I feel is not largely touched upon in school papers and

that I would enjoy learning more of this world of these shadow soldiers. My main

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concern with picking this issue is running into limited sources to rely on as even finding

two reliable sources on the matter proved to be a challenge. However it would not be fair

to say this without confessing to not giving myself a decent amount of time to skim

through sources and when doing the issue paper I will be sure to allow myself ample time

to scourge the web and the library for a necessary amount of information on the topic.

**Work Cited**

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