

The Text

Rushkoff observes that as “in any society in crisis, it is the children who first learn to incorporate the worst of threats into the most basic forms of play” (8). Children are the first to adapt – to create their own livable world out of a threatening environment through the mediation of play.

Rosa Sirota recalls that “[t]he point was you couldn’t be a child. You had to grow up overnight and to think as a very responsible adult – while you behaved as a child!” (Marks 20). And Carla Lessing concurs: “[c]learly to act like a child was a luxury I could not afford” (Marks 226). At first they learned that they would have to change in order to survive. But, “[c]hildren consolidate all their learnings in their play” (Caplan 81); thus, their playing became the way for them to learn the lessons of survival. Their poems are evidence of the element of play that was brought into the learning that was necessary for them to acquire in order to survive. And their heroism, their bravery are eulogized in songs and poems like the one that says:

Over the wall, through holes, and past the guards,
Through the wires, ruins and fences,
Plucky, hungry, and determined,
I sneak through, dart like a cat.

Purely a testament to their prowess and their cunning, these poems captured the sense of creativity and adaptability that

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was so smoothly integrated into their imaginative creativity. It is easy to imagine a child pretending to be a cat, climbing in and through what no one else can fit into. The children of the war were no different in their imagination or in their make-believing, except that this play was utilized to achieve a higher purpose. They were learning to adapt to a world in which they were unlikely to survive. They had need of every resource available in order to fight the battle. By enacting the terrible scenes that they saw take place among the adults in their world, they knew just how to respond. Caplan states that “young children come to understand themselves and the world through their dramatic play” (117). For those whose parents went into hiding and were resourceful, the children too learned how to be resourceful and to take care of themselves. And even this they acted out. For every game that they played, they were one step closer to freedom because their actions gave them strength, their playing gave them the will to live and the combination was the recipe for survival.