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Gender and Age in the Construction of Male Youth in the European Migration "Crisis"

A three-year-old Syrian boy of Kurdish descent, Alan Kurdi, drowned in early September 2015 while his family was trying to reach Greece.[1] His immediate family aimed to eventually settle with their extended family in Canada. After Kurdi's tiny body washed ashore in Turkey, a photo was taken that initially appeared in Turkish media. It quickly went viral, spreading around the world. The photo evoked mixed reactions and led to a great deal of pressure for someone to do something to help refugees fleeing the Syrian conflict.

The wider impacts of that photo have been linked to immigration policy changes in both Europe and Canada. For example, prior to the image going viral, Canadian policies made it nearly impossible for Kurdi's immediate family to migrate there, but following the media attention, the then-Conservative Canadian government removed some of these legal obstacles. The election of the new Liberal government shortly thereafter led to a pledge to take in twenty-five thousand Syrian refugees, with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau meeting the first group at the airport to welcome them personally (Kingsley and Timur 2015).

However, an antimigration backlash also followed. Even this image—which had been a catalyst for such swift, decisive responses—became fodder for a discourse rejecting or at least criticizing the notion that migrants, especially young men, can ever be part of or contribute positively to European society. For example, following media reporting of numerous sexual assault incidents in Cologne, Germany, during New Year's Eve celebrations, many purportedly perpetrated by migrants, French magazine *Charlie Hebdo* featured a cartoon depicting Alan Kurdi as an adult who had become such an

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[1] Kurdi's first name is sometimes reported as Aylan.

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attacker (Meade 2016). This scenario clearly demonstrates that, at times, media and public understandings of refugees and asylum seekers may be interpreted through lenses that are both racialized and gendered while also differing significantly based on age. Whereas Kurdi the toddler originally inspired compassion in many who saw children in his position as deserving protection, this later construction aimed to highlight a growing view that eventually boys become inherently dangerous, violent men and thus society needs protection from them. In this article, we aim to explore this construction and theorize its implications.

Displacement is clearly gendered (Gururaja 2000). Age also has a strong influence on the outcomes and experiences for the displaced, including a significant impact on how they are understood and treated by the public and policy makers. Research conducted in Indonesia, for example, suggests that young, unaccompanied asylum seekers face a disadvantage, as they often receive less financial support from official agencies and it may at times be harder for them to gain favorable immigration decisions from authorities (Missbach and Tanu 2016). We connect these points with broader understandings of children and youth in relation to how they are understood within contexts of conflict and insecurity and how they navigate their lives in these contexts, especially when seeking peaceful outcomes.

This article brings feminist critiques of gender, conflict, and migration together with literature on the role and representation of children and youth in conflict and migration. While scholarship on children and youth has been underway for decades, it is only more recently that it has been brought into considered conversation with peace and conflict studies and feminist international relations.[2] We draw on this literature and broader feminist engagements with gender and migration to argue that reaching a fuller account and understanding of gender in the current European migration context also requires taking seriously its intersections with age.

To that end, we engage with the current increase in European migration as a potential watershed moment in understandings of children and youth as refugees. We contend that when considering scholarship, policy, and practice in relation to migration and displacement, it is critical to apply a lens that accounts for both gender and age. In particular, we highlight how public representations of young people in this context can be deeply influenced by stereotypes and assumptions around gender and age that may—intentionally or inadvertently—lead to greater insecurity for people of diverse genders and ages.

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[2] See, e.g., Brocklehurst (2006), Watson (2008), Lee-Koo (2011), Berents and McEvoy-Levy (2015), and Huynh, D'Costa, and Lee-Koo (2015).

After a brief description of the so-called European migration crisis, this article delineates a feminist perspective on gender, conflict, and migration.[3] It then discusses the literature on children and youth in contexts of conflict and humanitarian crisis, noting the ways in which youth are commonly constructed dichotomously as either victims or perpetrators and the ways in which this is both gendered and oversimplified. Here we are particularly interested in the ways in which childhood is constructed as a time of victimhood, and often feminized, while youth—assumed and read as masculine—are seen as a threat. Through this we explore how media framings exacerbate this dichotomy. We also critique youth bulge theory, which classifies young men as predisposed to violence, and instead draw on feminist work on masculinities to argue that particular constructions of masculinity lead to assumptions about youth in these contexts. In working to unpack these framings, we seek to account for the more complex ways young people negotiate their circumstances. In the second half of the article we engage in an analysis of public constructions of young men and boys in the setting of the recent European migration crisis. Here we use the events of the New Year's Eve assaults on women in Cologne to explore how all young men become constructed as a threat. We complicate this discussion by introducing the idea of vulnerability, explored both through discourses of unaccompanied children and through the experiences of young male migrants, who are constructed as a threat but face significant vulnerabilities in accessing services and transitioning to adulthood in unfamiliar environments. Through these detailed analyses, we argue that considering young people in the context of humanitarian crisis and migration requires further consideration with a lens that brings together both gender and age.

The European migration crisis

The ongoing conflicts in Syria and other parts of the Middle East have seen increasing numbers of people fleeing dire circumstances in their respective countries of origin and seeking refuge within Europe. The resulting large-scale movement of people has commonly been referred to as the European migration crisis or refugee crisis (see, e.g., AFP 2016; Barber 2016; BBC 2016).

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[3] The term "(European) migration crisis" has often been used by politicians and the media to refer to the large-scale movement of people to Europe in recent years. It is not a neutral term; both the slippage of references between "refugee" and "migrant," and defining an event such as this as a "crisis" have political and social implications, whether by exacerbating tensions or making appeals to the necessity of aid or intervention. The critique of the term "crisis" is discussed further in the following section. In this article, while we use the term throughout without the use of quotation marks, we recognize that it is complicated and problematic and invoke it within the context of critique.

In much of the discourse on contemporary migration, debates about migrant numbers have become highly politicized. European border and coast guard agency Frontex, for example, often cited by the media for its data on migration, not only collates and publishes data on migration but is also responsible for border management within the Schengen area.[4] By highlighting the potential conflict of interest inherent in such a dual role, some observers question both the neutrality of the presentation of migration data and the extent to which the reported increase of those seeking asylum across Europe can be considered a crisis at all (Sigona 2015, 2016).

Keeping this in mind, to better understand the context of this movement of people, we look to data compiled by Eurostat, which collates figures on asylum applicants within the twenty-eight (at the time of writing) EU member states.[5] As Eurostat highlights, the figures for first-time asylum applicants more accurately reflect the numbers of newly arrived applicants within the relevant member state (as opposed to the total number of asylum seekers, which includes repeat claimants). The number of first-time asylum applicants within the European Union in 2015 more than doubled from 563,000 in 2014 to 1.26 million in 2015. Eurostat attributes this significant increase to higher numbers of applicants from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq (and to a lesser extent from Albania, Kosovo, and Pakistan).

Regarding asylum seekers' age and gender demographics, Eurostat (2016) states that the largest share of applicants across the member states in 2015 was in the 18–34 age bracket, with the exception of applicants hoping to settle in Poland, where the largest group (42 percent) was in the under-14 category. Across the European Union, the gender distribution of first-time applicants was overwhelmingly male, especially in the younger age categories: in the

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[4] At the time of writing, the Schengen area is defined by those twenty-six European nations (including EU and some non-EU states) that have abolished passport controls at their borders, effectively acting as a common visa area and allowing for greater freedom of movement. At times of crisis, some Schengen states have proposed suspending the agreement. Other states (e.g., the United Kingdom) have opted out of becoming signatories.

[5] This is based on the asylum statistics available on Eurostat's website in July 2016; updated statistics are available at http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum_statistics. Although these are significant, important figures from a respected intergovernmental agency, we acknowledge that there are limits to accessing or producing accurate quantitative data for any particular period of the ongoing increase in European migration. Thus, any data gathered and reported may quickly become outdated. Nevertheless, providing available information is useful in contextualizing our analysis of how certain constructions of young men migrating in times of conflict have been produced and reproduced.

14–17 and 18–34 years categories, approximately 80 percent of the applicants were young men. This decreased for the age group 35–64, for which around two-thirds of applicants were male, whereas for the group aged 65 and over, female applicants outnumbered their male counterparts. In February 2016, about a third of migrants were children (UNICEF 2016), and in March 2016 the UN High Commissioner for Refugees stated that "nearly two-thirds are women and children, up from last year's 41 per cent" (Grandi 2016).

Through 2015, as noted above, men and boys made up a disproportionate share of those arriving. Although motivation for arrival can be difficult to ascertain, those seeking asylum often cited persecution and violence as reasons for leaving their home country, including threat of recruitment to armed groups or security concerns for themselves and their families (see European Migration Network 2015). Syrian asylum seekers who have traveled from host countries such as Jordan and Lebanon cite lack of job opportunities, lack of access to services, the impossibility of return due to the duration of the conflict, growing discrimination against refugee populations (Achilli 2016, 9–14), and food insecurity as reasons to leave.[6] Thus, changes in refugee and migrant flows into Europe reflect changes in the factors that prompt different groups of people to travel.

A feminist view of gender, conflict, and migration

Our exploration sits at the intersection of feminist theories of peace and security and theories and analyses that apply an age-based lens to questions of peace and security. Migration scholars have long argued for the need to refocus the lens on the gendered experiences of migration (Al-Ali 2002), even going so far as to portray research on migration as being gender blind (Brah 1996).

Likewise, we employ a feminist international relations approach in order to highlight gendered differences and inequalities when it comes to conflict-related migration. Specifically, we follow a constructivist, critical feminist international relations approach in understanding gender to be, "first, fundamentally social; second, an expression of power; and third, an organizing principle for war specifically, and politics and political thought more generally" (Sjoberg 2013, 47). We see the social construction of gender as intimately tied to the ways conflict is understood and practiced. Gendered analysis of violence is needed to accurately understand the roles men and women, as well as girls and boys, may play in terms of peace and security. These efforts will require ensuring that notions of femininity and masculinity that are linked to violence are critiqued and reimagined during the return to daily life following conflict (Schäfer 2009).

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[6] World Food Programme, "Jordan Fact Sheet, Syrian Crisis Response," March 2016. http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/communications/wfp264172.pdf.

While age has been little considered in recent feminist work, the notion that age matters alongside gender in enacting feminist politics is not new. For instance, in the 1980s, Audre Lorde asked, "Can anyone here still afford to believe that the pursuit of liberation can be the sole and particular province of any one particular race, or sex, or age, or religion, or sexuality, or class?" ([1984] 2007, 140). Here we break new ground by theorizing the intersection of gender and age in relation to recent discourses around conflict-related migration. By engaging in such inquiry, we follow Lorde's dictum that "change is the immediate responsibility of each of us, wherever and however we are standing, in whatever area we choose" (141). For us it is critical that feminist scholars addressing issues of peace and conflict work to understand the ways gender is produced and enacted differently across the life course and that, in this case, this has dangerous implications for young men now and in the future.

When it comes to thinking about young men and boys, this necessarily means critically engaging with dominant masculinities associated with conflict. Local understandings of gender norms may often impede peace or fuel conflict by discouraging women and girls from involvement in peace building and by pushing men and boys to take part in violence (Pruitt 2013, 2015). At the same time, such gendered norms may also cause harm by preventing young men from seeking peaceful resettlement in cases where their homes have been affected or consumed by conflict because they are deemed an inherent risk to potential host countries.

Understanding gendered youth in a context of increasing global migration

Young people's experiences of violence, conflict, and humanitarian crisis are deeply gendered, as gender influences whether and how youth will get involved in both violent actions and in responses to violence and conflict (Pruitt 2015). Common gendered assumptions can significantly influence the ways young men and boys experience their environment, what opportunities they have, and whether and how they might either engage in conflict or in peaceful pursuits, including the pursuit of resettlement. Thus, we argue that paying attention not only to gender but also to age in these spaces strengthens an analysis. This section explores this contention by first outlining an understanding of youth, exploring the dichotomized framings of children and young people as victims, and exploring the representation of youth—particularly young men—as potential threats. We particularly explore and critique the notion of youth bulge theory, which has had disproportionate influence in shaping understandings of youth from the global South as a risk, before offering an alternative means of understanding young men's activities in conflict and crisis.

"Youth," whether in its global, regional, or local context, is a heterogeneous category (Burgess 2005), in terms not only of age but also of class, ethnicity, gender, and access to political or economic advantages. Young people occupy a range of positions including as students, street children, combatants, activists, business people, orphans, and caregivers, and they may occupy multiple positions simultaneously. The United Nations defines "youth" as those who are between 15 and 24 years of age, a category that overlaps with its definition of child (up to 18 years of age).[7]

The process of transition from "youth" to "adult" is also not fixed but rather is fluid and contingent. Indeed, in some parts of the world the transition from childhood into "youthhood" or adulthood is culturally defined and does not conform to universalized understandings of fixed age-based definitions of childhood, which stem from historically Western views of childhood. Suzanne Shanahan (2007, 408) notes that the broad adoption of 18 as the age of majority reveals "the socially (and legally, politically, or historically) constructed nature of childhood" and such a configuration erases understandings of childhood and youthhood in the global South. For instance, Rwandan young people face a period of extended youthhood as a result of economic crisis and conflict that make them unable to establish themselves as adults (Sommers 2012). Social and cultural practices—such as constructing a house, getting married, and providing for a family—that mark the transition to adulthood in some parts of the world do not necessarily occur at a specific age (Utas 2005; Sommers 2012). These lived realities of youth in parts of the global South are not evident in the discourse on youth that originates in Europe and other parts of the global North. Thus, these complexities are often discursively erased in policy and media reporting.

Despite this clear heterogeneity, discussion of young people and children frequently falls into stereotyped descriptions. Research on children and youth in relation to peace and security similarly tends to create a dichotomy that depicts young people as either victims or perpetrators. More broadly, youth are seen as in flux, as “becomings” on a teleological developmental path toward full adult “being” and societal participation (Qvortrup 1994, 4). The consequence of this view is that young people are seen as innocent, dependent, and potentially at risk and in need of protection. Such a conception both informs international children’s rights law (Pupavac 2001) and influences the way young people in the global South are seen by policy makers and academics in the global North. If young people are innocent and in need of guidance and protection, then when they transgress this mold—for instance by traveling from their home country to seek asylum—they can only be conceived of as being “out of place” (Connolly and Ennew 1996) and thus either at risk or a risk to society.

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[7] United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 44/25, "Convention on the Rights of the Child," November 20, 1989, http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx.

These dichotomized characterizations are often based on stereotypes and are also frequently gendered. The typical assumption is that “good girls need to be saved, but bad boys need to be contained” (Burman 1994, 245). When a young person is described as a vulnerable, passive victim, childlike characteristics are emphasized, and these childlike attributes are often coded as feminine. However, when young people exhibit risky behavior, the term “youth” takes on a masculinized connotation of dangerous “bad boys” (see Burman 1994, 244–45). In the current context, these assignments appear to be influenced by gendered and racialized protection logics. As Sara Ahmed (2017) suggests, “it is a white female body that is assumed to be vulnerable and in need of protection from others” (34) whereas “being poor, being black, being of color puts your life at risk” in a variety of settings (238).

Even though children affected by conflict often show they can enact change—for example, by taking on caregiver and provider roles in their families or communities (Lowicki and Emry 2005), or involving themselves in postconflict peace-building processes (McEvoy-Levy 2006; Pruitt 2013; Mollica 2017)—their actual or potential status as victims is often invoked in ways that deny their political capabilities (Brocklehurst 2006; Lee-Koo 2013). Cynthia Enloe (1990, 29) argues that the homogenizing category of “womenandchildren” relegates both women and children to the private sphere, a sphere that requires protection. Such a category exists in opposition to an active, worldly category of “men and boys.” Moreover, the category of “victim” is strongly associated with passivity and innocence, and it most often relates to younger people—“children” rather than “youth.” Activism and humanitarian work around children in situations of conflict and displacement emphasize the victimization of children and their lack of capacity to affect change.

We focus on media because, as Roland Bleiker and his colleagues compellingly argue, “all knowledge of political issues is unavoidably and inherently mediated” (2013, 399). As noted earlier, in numerical terms, the heightened media visibility of young men in earlier stages of the current migration crisis appears significant when compared to previous conflict-related migration. It is interesting, for example, to compare the saturation of media images from the more recent 2015–16 migration, which predominantly focused on large crowds of young, healthy-looking young males, with the dominant media images of male refugees from an earlier conflict, that in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In recent media coverage, for example, male refugees are often caricatured as either an Islamist terrorist threat (Reid 2015), as abandoners of their families (Malm 2015), or as welfare parasites (Robinson, Brown, and Drury 2016). This represents a shift, contrasting sharply with earlier media images of conflict-affected young men, who, during the 1992–95 conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina were granted asylum following media coverage of the existence of concentration camps (Vulliamy 2012). Those images of emaciated and suffering (mainly Muslim) young men in Bosnia eventually prompted belated action by some states, which offered refuge to some former camp inmates. It is possible that the geographical proximity of European Muslim refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina to EU borders, when compared with the physically more distant nature of the conflicts in parts of the Middle East, has contributed to the othering of non-European Muslim males within the discourse.

But at the same time, the images of young Bosnian men in the earlier conflict are a world away from how contemporary media, especially right-wing outlets, depict "hordes" of young asylum-seeking males, not focusing on any potential vulnerability but emphasizing the threat posed by offering these men refuge. This is significant in light of Bleiker and his colleagues' work in Australia, which has argued that media images of asylum seekers that fail to depict individuals with recognizable facial features lead to the visual dehumanization of refugees, causing them to be seen not as a humanitarian consideration but as a threat to security and sovereignty (Bleiker et al. 2013).

The presence of large numbers of young men, constructed as persons to be feared, is seen and treated as a threat to moral and social order. Such fears are linked to youth bulge theory and the policies and public discourse it has inspired. Emerging in the 1990s, particularly through the work of Gary Fuller (1995) and Jack A. Goldstone (1991), youth bulge theory argues that the presence of large populations of youth, specifically young men, predisposes a country to civil conflict. In a well-known articulation of this position, Robert D. Kaplan referred to young men in urban parts of West Africa as "loose molecules in an unstable social fluid that threatened to ignite" (1994, 16). His approach in predicting such fearful futures inspired many other commentators and proved "remarkably influential with policymakers," largely because it was enshrined in US foreign policy (Sommers 2011, 295). In this way, "the relationship between 'too many youth' and violent instability has been buttressed" argues Marc Sommers (2011, 296), in part by assertions within the literature that young men are more prone to violence (see illustratively Cincotta, Engelman, and Anastasion 2003, 44).

While biological determinist approaches have become increasingly rare in feminist international relations work, with focus shifting to addressing gender norms that support violence or war, even some self-described feminist international relations scholars have supported and perpetuated these youth bulge theories. Valerie M. Hudson and her colleagues, for example, argue that "youth bulges and an excess of males from skewed sex ratios lead to migration, crime, revolution, and even war" (Hudson et al. 2012, 4). Moreover, Hudson and Andrea Den Boer write, "there is only one short-term strategy for dealing with [this] problem: Reduce their numbers. There are several traditional ways to do so: Fight them, encourage their self-destruction, or export them" (Hudson and Den Boer 2002, 26). Such work fails to account for the fact that a meta-analysis of existing research shows that while differences exist in adult behavior between men and women, these differences are typically very small (Nelson 2012, 5). Moreover, as Sommers argues, these youth bulge theories have been formulated and applied without consultation with the young African males to whom they often refer, leaving theories underdeveloped and failing to note that mere correlation in demographic terms offers little in terms of explanatory power while painting a distorted and partial picture of wider realities (Sommers 2011, 295; see also Urdal 2004, 2). Youth bulge theories have also been challenged by biological researchers (e.g., Rowe et al. 2004). Plus, a substantial majority of African countries with populations reflecting a youth bulge have not recently been sites of civil conflict (Sommers 2011, 296).

While youth bulge approaches are popular, they must be subject to critique as they marginalize attention to other ways in which youth, particularly young men, may participate during or following conflicts (Schwartz 2010). Overall, as Sommers points out, "conjuring male youth as dangerous and overlooking female youth doesn't square with realities in which young people, among many other things, resist engagement in violence, develop remarkable talents, and experience inclusion within excluded worlds" (2015, xii).

Of course, many feminist scholars from a range of disciplines agree that gender is not something natural or inherent but is instead something that takes place and must be made to occur through specific performances (see, e.g., Butler 1999; Connell 2002). For example, as David Duriesmith notes, "Desensitisation of boys is a powerful structure of masculinity that begins from a young age, when boys are *trained* to suppress most emotion and hide signs of weakness" (2017, 34). Raewyn Connell suggests that such practiced expectations rely on a "gender order" that teaches boys to be tough, dominant, hard, and competitive (2002, 14). Feminist scholars have also emphasized that this ordering is hierarchical, with feminist international relations scholars in particular demonstrating how masculine characteristics have been valued more than feminine attributes (Tickner 2001).

In contrast to theories that understand too many young men and boys as a recipe for violence that must be avoided by fighting or exporting them, we suggest the need to better understand and theorize the ways young men are constructed as and socialized as violent rather than being so naturally. Hence rather than suggest that simply the presence of young men leads to violence, we advocate for the need to think about *how* particular constructions of masculinity lead to violence and how such constructions might be altered, unmade, or resisted. Indeed, following Duriesmith's argument that "during war there is a potential for change in the gender order, with old hierarchies being altered, reformed and possibly even dismantled" (2017, 126), we suggest the need to think strategically about these possibilities rather than following Hudson and her coauthors' argument for finding ways to remove—or in the case of migration, exclude—conflict-affected young men (2012). We should ask instead, how might young men be supported as they create and recreate new approaches to nonviolent masculinity in their countries of origin and their host countries in settings of conflict-related displacement?

We need further quality research involving young people, and feminist scholarship needs to incorporate work theorizing youth to contribute to new visions that go beyond seeing young men as perpetrators. At the same time, focusing on young men in particular or young people in general as wholly or mostly victims can lead to their exclusion from participation in pursuing peaceful societies and indeed their exclusion from opportunities to live in peaceful contexts. Young people are able to and indeed do engage actively in pursuing peace, just as they can disrupt peace when their needs are ignored. Thus, when aiming to build peace, acknowledging the knowledge and agency of children and youth is crucial (Watson 2008).

The construction of young men and boys as inherently dangerous in the so-called migration crisis

The construction of young men as inherently violent is not novel and has been documented by a number of feminist scholars and reflected in both policy and in the media. However, its manifestation in the recent European context has significant impacts on the experiences of all migrants, but particularly young men. Here we contextualize the construction of young men and boys as inherently dangerous within the both the European context and current broader global context.

In the United States, for example, when it comes to foreign policy, military-age males are as a matter of principle excluded from civilian death counts, as Laura Sjoberg (2013) has highlighted. Despite such clearly gendered delineations of young people's roles in conflict, scholarship and policy documents dealing with youth in peace and conflict typically do not consider gender, often using terms like "young people" and "youth" to refer to young men and boys, as noted in explaining youth bulge theory. Moreover, in discussions of children and armed conflict, advocacy groups see child soldiers as the most prominent issue, and the problem is most often represented by an image of an African boy. This construction of child soldiers excludes those who fall outside that stereotypical image, such as girls (Lee-Koo 2011).

With specific reference to the so-called European migration crisis, young men have repeatedly been constructed as inherently dangerous. For example, several media reports deployed the 2016 New Year's Eve assaults on women in Cologne and other German cities to legitimize and heighten the perceived threat of migrant men. The incident was widely reported as being organized and carried out, according to the Cologne police chief, by people who "from appearance were largely from the North African or Arab world" (Huggler 2016), with other German officials echoing this phrasing (ABC News 2016). As a result, headlines focused on these early descriptions to link to the migrants; for example, Reuters' "Cologne Attacks Show Germany Unprepared for Migrant Challenge" (M. Martin 2016) or the *Wall Street Journal*'s "Reports of New Year's Eve Sexual Assaults Feed into German Debate over Migrant Crisis" (Bender 2016). The emphasis in these and other stories was on the reported appearance of the men, and the term "migrant" was used predominantly. The panic created around this incident fed into, and was informed by, discourses of othering.

We acknowledge the real violence and trauma of the attacks and support victims' rights to justice. This does not preclude critically interrogating the manner in which the characteristics of those perpetrating the violence came to be portrayed as an inherent feature of all migrants and asylum seekers from the global South, prompting attacks on immigrants and refugees in Germany in the days afterward (Rothwell 2016). While we focus on the recent European migration context, these media framings are not unique to Europe. Both before and following the 9/11 attacks in the United States, reporting on Muslims often has been stereotypical, featuring limited portrayals and often including inaccuracies about Islam as a religion and culture (see, e.g., Saeed 2007; Morey and Yaqin 2011). It is important to develop understandings that can account for both the particularity of the European case and the ways in which it may reflect or constitute broader global discourse.

While the framing of young men as inherently dangerous is not new, we suggest that it has become uniquely prominent in the current migration context, in which migrant young men in particular are constructed as actors to be feared, controlled, expelled, or legislated against. Such discourses are not limited to Europe in recent times either. Indeed, narratives similar to those that circulated after the New Year's Eve assaults also appear in some US public media analyses and mainstream political rhetoric. For example, on November 16, 2015, Fox News ran a headline quoting Lt. Col. Allen West: "West on Syrian Refugees: 'No Military-Age Males Should Be Allowed In.'" More specifically, West added, "Anyone from about 16 to 40 years of age, single males, should not be allowed to come in. That's a Trojan horse" (Fox News 2015).

Such discourses raise questions about who is or is not legitimately innocent or justifiably seeking asylum and clearly delineate them by gender and age. R. Charli Carpenter (2016) highlights how the norm that women and children are understood as innocent civilians has developed and been promoted by humanitarian groups. Such a norm not only limits our understanding of women's and children's experiences of conflict and displacement but also relies on an unquestioned assumption, evident in West's comment above, that young and adult men are inherently a danger, even when they are actually fleeing conflict.

Politicians outside Europe have used similar arguments to buttress their cases for limiting migration. Such statements have become further popularized, entering mainstream political discourse in the United States through key political actors, including President Donald Trump. While Trump made sweeping antimigration statements on a number of occasions, one of the most relevant was his response to a widely publicized terrorist attack in June 2016, which involved a young American man, born to migrant parents, who entered a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida, and opened fire. In his speech following the attack, Trump (2016) said, "the killer, whose name I will not use, or ever say, was born in Afghan [*sic*], of Afghan parents, who immigrated to the United States. . . . The bottom line is that the only reason the killer was in America in the first place, was because we allowed his family to come here." Continuing, he added, "when I'm elected I will suspend immigration from areas of the world where there's a proven history of terrorism against the United States, Europe, or our allies until we fully understand how to end these threats."

Linking earlier attacks to what he sees as an overly open immigration system and the dangers he sees in granting asylum, Trump (2016) further stated that "the Boston bombers came here through political asylum." Through these statements he draws on and contributes to a logic that constructs young male Muslim migrants or migrants' young male offspring as an inevitable threat that must be feared and controlled. As such, he used the Orlando shootings as an opportunity to reiterate his call for a temporary ban on Muslim migration to the United States (J. Martin 2016). The figure of a potentially threatening young male migrant is invoked in Trump's rhetoric as an object of fear, a risk.

In short, this politicized response is occurring not only in Europe but also in other parts of the globe, drawing on gender and age to spark division. These constructions encourage fearful responses to young men in a migration context, as they are constructed as inherently dangerous.

Bringing gender *and* age into focus: Gendered vulnerabilities

There is a plethora of examples within popular discourse, especially mainstream media, of migrant children being framed as innocent while young men are constructed as a security threat as they transition to adulthood. Consideration of vulnerabilities, of young women and children but also of young men, is a crucial dimension to add to discussions of gender and age in the European migration crisis.

While we focus on the portrayal of young men here, we also believe it is important to look at portrayals of young women. The construction of girls and women as victims and men and youth (coded masculine) as a threat is reinforced through gendered reporting about conflict and migration. Maura Conway's recent work on the subject is instructive regarding youth and gender in a security context. In preliminary findings presented at the International Studies Association annual convention in a paper titled "'At Risk' or 'a Risk': The Portrayal of 'Jihadi Brides' in the UK Press," Conway (2016) noted that only 8 percent of media reports framed young women as a risk, with 49 percent offering neutral/factual reports, and 43 percent representing them as victims. These findings differ sharply with common portrayals of young men as dangerous.[8]

The specter of the dangerous young male is not the only construction of youth or children in the recent major migration movements into and across Europe. The trope of young people as innocent victims in need of protection has also been visible. This discourse, in contrast to that of the dangerous male youth, focuses on young children, who are often presented without reference to their gender. In early 2016, news articles reported a warning from Europol that "at least 10,000" unaccompanied child refugees had disappeared since registering with authorities in European countries (Townsend 2016). In contrast to the stories about the New Year's Eve assaults, these stories' focus was on "the plight" of children (Townsend 2016) and fears that they were being targeted by criminal gangs. While these reports are undeniably concerning, lack of data around unaccompanied minors entering Europe limits the analyses that can be conducted about their experience and outcomes. Rachel Humphris and Nando Sigona (2016), for example, argue that many of these missing children have chosen to leave the system in order to move onward to other European destinations or have chosen to present themselves as older in order to seek opportunities to bring family to Europe, among other reasons.

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[8] For more on the dangers of simplistic representations of age and gender, see Burman (1994), Pupavac (2001), Berents (2016), and Carpenter (2016).

However, the language used in these media constructions occludes these more complex stories, narratives, and experiences. In these stories, it was more common to see the term "refugee" rather than "migrant," such as the *Guardian*'s "10,000 Refugee Children Are Missing, Says Europol" (Townsend 2016), or the *New York Times*' (2016) "10,000 Child Refugees Missing." As we note above, Eurostat compiles records based on asylum applications, and according to these records, 91 percent of unaccompanied minors in 2015 were boys (Eurostat 2015). Though the overall number of arrivals decreased in 2016, the percentage of boys was largely consistent with past years, at 89 percent (Eurostat 2016). However, in news reports of children identified as "missing," gender was rarely if ever mentioned. Rather, we see a focus on refugee children as degendered and infantilized. It is evident that "refugee" is more likely to be used to refer to those seen as innocent victims (children), without reference to gender, while "migrant" is more commonly used with those deemed a risk (young men). Future research could explore the ways in which these polarized approaches relate and diverge and the extent to which both are mediated by dominant understandings of gender and age. There is also a need for studies that focus not only on the vulnerability of young people seeking refuge but also on the strength and resilience exhibited by so many who have faced trauma and are rebuilding their lives (Sleijpen et al. 2013).

Nonetheless, vulnerabilities still merit consideration. Minors, especially if unaccompanied, will, in most states that have a functioning welfare system, fall under the care of the state. For those who lack a support network broader than their statutory caregivers or guardians, the clock is ticking to become self-sufficient by the time they turn 18 years old, as welfare support in many European countries ends at this age (European Migration Network 2015, 33–36; Humphris and Sigona 2016). More attention is thus needed to show

how young migrants experience transitions to adulthood. For one thing, access to resources matters: support systems designed to aid the resettlement process in European destination countries make a clear demarcation between services available to those aged under and over age 18. Such delineation between “child” and “adult” may be unfamiliar to the would-be recipient of any services depending on cultural norms in the country of origin.

The young male migrant approaching adulthood—by European definitions—faces a potential intersection of vulnerabilities: he morphs from a (perceived) victim shrouded by childhood into a (perceived) public threat at the same time that he may be losing any previously granted welfare support. He is also less likely, given his gender and age, to be able to access further support services. For instance, statutory homelessness-support providers often operate with long waiting lists and allocate accommodation according to priority need. Within this framework, unless he can show evidence of other vulnerabilities such as physical or mental health support needs, a young, single adult male is unlikely to make it to the top of the priority list, which is populated by families and young single females (Poole 2015).

Further vulnerability may arise when the young migrant is undocumented or has an irregular migration status. Some young migrants, especially if they have experienced unrestricted access to the education system as minors, may not even know that they are undocumented or about the implications of such a status until the time comes for them to enter into mainstream aspects of adult life where access and entitlement to statutory services require the production of identity documents (Bloch, Sigona, and Zetter 2014). In such cases, the young migrant approaching adulthood is surrounded by threats to his or her own personal security, which can increase vulnerability to exploitation. The combination of (young) age and insecure immigration status is an attractive mix for those who would seek to capitalize on such vulnerability. Indeed, there is evidence of such potential exploitation in the ways in which traffickers have been reported to be targeting refugees and camps across Europe during 2015 and 2016 (European Commission 2016).

Conclusion

There is a danger in simplistic representations of young men when considering the significant recent increase in migration to Europe, and these dangers have broader implications for understanding the experiences of and challenges facing young male refugees and migrants in other global contexts. This article has shown that while gender is often invoked directly in public constructions of young men, age often goes unstated, although it has a significant impact on the shaping of narratives around these populations. Feminist analysis can open spaces to critically examine these simplistic representations and their consequences.

The construction of young, military-aged males as posing an inherent risk has real lived and policy implications. As we have explored, these often racialized stereotypes limit our ability to consider these young men's lives in a nuanced way and instead instill fear and stoke anti-immigration sentiments in Europe and in other parts of the world. In the midst of such social and political upheaval, scholars have the opportunity to develop a more nuanced understanding that will lead to the development of more gender- and age-sensitive policies and support services, which ultimately are more likely to promote effective responses to ensuring peace and security for all.

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