CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD SOLDIERING

Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled **"Causes and Consequences of Child Soldiering"** submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.

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CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The child soldier phenomenon, which currently envelops most armed conflicts, has evoked a number of debatable issues regarding the genesis and the intensity of this crisis. Some of the important issues raised are: who should be considered a child, highlighting cultural relativism as far as the notions of childhood, adolescence and adulthood are concerned; whether the recruitment of children and youth in conflict is voluntary or coercive; and whether children are mere victims and passive observers or they do have certain agency. The debatable nature of these questions calls for further research and in-depth analysis of this phenomenon. Therefore, this study will attempt to explore the above issues concerning the participation of children and youth in combat.

One of the main objectives of this research is to analyse whether the involvement of children and youth in combat can simply be attributed to culture and tradition or there exist certain socio-economic and political factors which are common to all these geographically, socially and culturally diverse regions. For this purpose, it seeks to explore the child soldier problem in culturally, socially, religiously and politically diverse regions of the world, spanning from Asia to Europe.

Child Soldiering is not a New Phenomenon

Children are active participants in most on-going armed conflicts across the globe. They are engaged in direct combat activities, are deployed in landmines and suicide missions and also work as spies, servants, messengers for armed factions. In a number of conflicts, young girls too perform all these tasks and are often reduced to sex slaves. Child soldiering, however, is not a new phenomenon. There is a large body of literature which suggests that young people were actively involved in warfare in the past. But the question of the degree and nature of their participation in combat in the past is debatable. On one hand, authors such as David M. Rosen argue that in preindustrial societies, there is no single, fixed chronological age at which young people enter into the actions, dramas, and rituals of war. He points out that anthropologists have frequently cited cases of children

at war in these societies (Rosen 2005: 4). Applying modern humanitarian terminology, the American Civil War was largely fought by child combatants in numbers ever greater than those found in contemporary wars (Rosen 2005: 5).

P.W. Singer suggests, children have been present in armies in a number of cases in the past, for instance, young pages armed the knights of the middle ages and drummer boys marched before Napoleonic armies, child combatants also participated in the American Civil War [most notably when a unit of 247 Virginia Military Institute Cadets fought with the Confederate Army in the battle of New Market (1864)] and underage Hitler Jugend (Hitler Youth) fought in the World War II (Singer 2006). However, Singer goes on to argue, these were the exceptions to the general rule of warfare where children had no place in combat. But today, he asserts, the traditional rules of warfare no longer hold, and child soldiering is the growing feature of war.

Geographical Sketch of the Phenomenon

Singer rightly argues that this phenomenon is far more widespread today, as he points out, in the last few years, young people have served as soldiers on every continent but Antarctica. In the past decade, child soldiers have been involved in nearly 30 armed conflicts in about 41 countries, either as part of the government forces or armed opposition groups or both (UN 2001). These countries include- Algeria, Angola, Burundi, Chad, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Rwanda and Uganda (in Africa); Cambodia, India, Myanmar, Pakistan and Sri Lanka (in Asia); Iraq, Iran, Israel occupied Territories (in the Middle East); Colombia, El Salvador, Honduras (in Central America). Child soldiers are also found in some parts of Central Asia and have participated in the Balkan conflicts during the 1990s. As of 2002, children below 18 years of age were believed to be serving in 72 government or rebel armed forces in about 20 countries (Achvarina and Reich 2006).

For a long time Africa has been at the centre of the child soldier crisis. 'In 2002, the two worst places in the world to be a child were located in Africa: Angola and Sierra Leone, both recently affected by long-running conflicts' (Danso 2005: 7 cited in McIntyre 2005). According to a new report by former United Nations (UN) Secretary General Kofi Annan, government forces, rebel groups, armed militia and mercenaries operating in conflicts in at least 12 countries recruit children to serve as soldiers or are responsible for murdering, torturing and committing sexual crimes against them (UN 2006). The report points out, in certain conflicts, major steps have been taken to protect children and youth, while in a number of other regions- particularly in the Middle East- spiraling violence has resulted in thousands of victims.

The report further states, in regions like West Africa and the Great Lakes region of Central Africa, 'some rebel groups and bands of mercenaries are moving across borders to prey upon vulnerable children in neighbouring states.' It lists 'parties in Burundi, Chad, Colombia, Cote d' Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Myanmar, Nepal, the Phillipines, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Uganda as recruiting or using children as armed combatants or committing other abuses and violations against them' (UN 2006). The use of child soldiers is not confined to the developing world or countries affected by armed conflict. Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported, around 13 NATO members recruit child combatants into their military forces. Of the five permanent members of the Security Council, Russia is the only country which does not recruit child soldiers (HRW 2001).

Definition of a Child Soldier

At this point it is imperative to define who a child soldier is, since efforts by the international community to provide a definition of a child combatant have provoked much debate and also criticism by some commentators on this problem. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child 1989 (UNCRC) defines the child soldier as any person under 18 years of age who is recruited or used by an army or armed group. There are a number of critics of this straight 18 position. Many commentators believe that

this position smacks of Eurocentricism since in various societies and cultures childhood does not end at 18 or adulthood does not begin after 18.

In most African societies, adulthood is not about biological age but about social status or hierarchical position in society. This suggests that childhood, adolescence and adulthood are concepts which cannot be placed in distinct concrete boxes since the boundaries between them are ever-shifting and fluid in nature. Rosen points out, 'the medieval attitude toward children was generally one of indifference to age' (Rosen 2005: 7). But during the middle ages, new ideas about childhood began to develop, the belief in the innocence of childhood, the practice of treating childhood and adolescence as separate categories, 'and the isolation and prolongation of childhood as a special protected state' (Rosen 2005: 7).

These concepts and practices which were almost unknown in the preindustrial world began to develop and spread in the west with the industrial revolution. In rest of the world, there were of course 'chronologically young people', however, childhood as viewed or understood in the west, 'did not necessarily exist as a salient cultural or social category', argues Rosen (Rosen 2005: 7). He stresses the emergence of formal and institutionalised schooling, which accompanied the industrial revolution, as pivotal to the development of the idea which portrayed children as innocent and weak. As a result of colonialism and globalisation and the ratification of international treaties, the single age (18) of maturity found its way into the legislations and policies in many countries across the globe. However, there are those states that wish to continue recruiting under -18s and have declared 16 or 17 years as the minimum age of recruitment while others wish to prohibit all recruitment and use of under - 18s.

The United States of America accepts voluntary recruits from age 17; it has deployed 17 year olds in the Gulf War, and the Somalian and the Bosnian conflict. The United Kingdom accepts volunteers from the age 16 years; there were 6000-7000 under-18s in the British armed forces in 2001. In fact, UK is the only European country which routinely sends under-18s into battle. Both the United States and the United Kingdom

have signed but not ratified the Optional Protocol (OP) 2002 to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the recruitment of child combatants (HRW 2001).

These culturally and politically constructed concepts of childhood, adolescence and adulthood are in turn distorted and at times removed from the sphere of their artificially constructed boundaries, as young people get entangled in the vicious armed conflict. For instance, in the case of Angola, on demobilisation of child soldiers, NGOs called for segregation which often entailed recognising their status as 'child-adults'- children in body, but adults in their heads (Parsons 2005: 60 cited in McIntyre 2005). Childhood, adolescence and adulthood as defined by various societies and cultures and the definition of the child soldier as provided by the international community will be discussed at length on the chapter on cultural construction of childhood versus universal law on child soldiers.

International Law on Child Soldiers

Until the 1990s, legally, the issue of child soldiers was not given much attention. In 1990, African Unity (OAU) adopted the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child which addresses the issue of child soldiers. In 1998, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court came into effect which is empowered to prosecute as war criminals those who recruit children under 15. After a period of few years, the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) came into force in 2002; it sets 18 as the minimum age for direct participation in hostilities and compulsory recruitment by governments. Although the Optional Protocol has been signed by over 100 states, large number of governments continue to recruit children aged 16 and 17.

As one considers the plight of a child soldier, it appears that identity of the former is perpetually in question, whether it is the legal issue of who is a child soldier, or whether it is the issue of demobilisation and reintegration into the civilian life - a shift from a military identity to a civilian identity. Child soldiering deserves greater attention for it is detrimental to the mental and physical health of the children and youth involved in conflict and also adversely affects the health of the state or states which are parties to the

armed conflict. Human capital takes years to accumulate, and with burgeoning former child combatants, any damage to mental and physical state of these former soldiers and interruption of education could hinder or deteriorate the productivity and performance of the entire state for increasing number of years. Further, though the post cold war era is characterized by internal conflicts and civil wars where increasing number of children and youth participate, these armed conflicts possess the propensity to spill into the neighbouring regions as the displacement of the population of a state and the refugee crisis deepen, threatening international peace and stability. A number of conflicts are sustained through the recruitment of children and youth, often leading to the intractability of the conflict. Therefore the child soldier crisis must be viewed in terms of human security as well as national and international security.

These young people who participate in conflict spend their early life fighting and often end up with no education and vocational skills apart from military training. Once the conflict is over, the existence of these child soldiers is subject to uncertainties; trapped in a quagmire of shifting identities, on demobilisation and reintegration into civilian life, they face much difficulty- a shift from a military identity to a civilian identity is not an easy walk. These children are not always easily accepted by their families and communities and at times they do not wish to disarm for varied and complex reasons which include fear of legal and physical retribution for the abuses perpetrated by them, difficulty in coming to terms with civilian identity and so on.

Thus, greater and deeper understanding of the issues which concern these young soldiers is essential. Though children and youth are often forced by both the armed groups and armed forces to join up, there are a large number of young people who volunteer. It is imperative to address the factors which lead these young people to take up arms. The consequences of child soldiering are degenerative, likely to engender a society of morally depraved individuals since children and youth rather than undergoing moral education, begin their early years killing and maiming people. Repercussions of this phenomenon are huge social, economic and political costs.

Some of the regions included in this research are- Afghanistan, Sri Lanka (from Asia), Colombia (from Latin America), Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of Congo (from Africa) and United Kingdom (from Europe).

Asia and Pacific

In several countries and regions across the Asian continent, young boys and girls are increasingly being recruited by both the armed forces as well as armed militias. The first ever survey on the use of child soldiers in Asia carried out by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (CSC) reported, 'the appalling use of tens of thousands of children as cannon-fodder across the region,' is rising dangerously. It further observed, "From Mindanao to Manipur, Aceh to Jaffna, children are recruited to serve war's ends -- as porters, 'safe' carriers for bombs, couriers, spies and combatants" (CSC 2000). In several cases, national armies or government forces enlist young people to perform hazardous tasks like intelligence work since children are viewed as being able of eluding counterintelligence agents. Coalition head Rory Mungoven identified Myanmar as 'one of the world's single largest users of child soldiers,' observing that Myanmar's military regime as well as ethnic insurgent groups together enlist thousands of children and youth as soldiers, porters and "sexual slaves." The report also identified Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Cambodia as the countries worst afflicted by the widespread use of child soldiers.

In Afghanistan, children and youth have participated in the fighting forces against the Soviet occupation of the 1980s and the ensuing civil war among the rebel militias in the region. Both the Taliban and the Northern Alliance have reportedly deployed children in combat. In fact Afghan children have been raised in a highly militarised Kalashnikov culture and some Madrasas in Afghanistan as well as Pakistan are centers for indoctrination and recruitment of young people by Afghan terrorist groups. Wessells writes, 'in the fight against the Taliban following the 9/11 attacks on the United States, large numbers of 14- to 18-year-old Tajik and Uzbek boys fought in the Northern Alliance forces' (Wessels 2006). After the Taliban was defeated, some child soldiers remained with their commanders in local security forces. 'Ongoing Taliban activity and

ethnic tensions threaten to destabilise the country, which in 2004 conducted its first national elections' (Wessels 2006).

Children and youth were also deployed by the Taliban against the US-led coalition forces which attacked Afghanistan in 2001. It has been reported that 'the very first U.S. soldier killed in the" war on Terrorism" was a Green Beret killed by a fourteen year old sniper in Afghanistan' (Singer 2006). Singer states, 'at least six young boys between the ages of thirteen and sixteen have been captured by US forces in Afghanistan in the initial fighting and were taken to the detainee facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba' (Singer 2006). Afghanistan is no longer at war, but the country remains to be unstable experiencing frequent clashes between Taliban-led insurgents and government and international troops. A number of illegal armed gangs and drug militias continue to roam the country, engaging in violence and on a constant lookout for young recruits. Years of conflict and instability and the recent invasion of the country by the United States has plunged the country into dire poverty. The slow place of development could easily lead former child combatants to turn to armed factions and militias.

In Sri Lanka, the Liberation of Tamil Tigers Elam (LTTE) has a long record of recruiting children in its ranks. For more than two decades since the armed struggle of the LTTE began, young people have been forcibly recruited by Tamil Tiger rebels and they still continue to deploy children and youth in combat. The LTTE is notorious for using propaganda to lure school children. Children are made to believe that resort to arms is the only way to defend their families and communities. A cult of martyrdom is created and war glorified to attract children on the grounds of national liberation. The Tigers claim that these children are volunteers handling non-combatant work denying that they recruit children for military purposes. As the Karuna faction emerged in the east following the split in LTTE in 2004 the recruitment of children was to stop in the parts held by Karuna. However, the recent Rock Report by Allan Rock, the Special Adviser to the United Nations Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict has revealed that 'elements of the Sri Lankan military are actively aiding and abetting recruitment of child soldiers by the Karuna group in the east' (Reddy 2006).

Currently, the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government are engaged in fighting. Recent UN statement said 'some 3,000 civilians had been killed in the conflict since the resumption of armed hostilities last year, bringing the number killed to 67,000. More than half a million have been forced to flee their homes throughout the country, nearly 2,13,000 of them newly displaced since the resumption of armed conflict' (UN 2006). Save the Children reported, in Sri Lanka, at least 5,000 children have been recruited since 2001. Despite the ceasefire signed in 2002, the threat of re-recruitment is once again so strong that parents are afraid to let children leave the house (Save the Children 2007). In the past the LTTE mobilised special battalions of teenage girls and boys, some as young as ten. Despite international commitments to prohibit the use of children in combat, throughout 2000 there were reports of renewed recruitment drives and military drilling in schools in LTTE-controlled areas.

During Cambodia's civil war, young people, both boys and girls, were extensively recruited by both the governmental armed forces and the Khmer Rouge. Children and youth have also been involved with rebel factions or militias in the lower –intensity conflicts across India, Nepal, the Philippines, Indonesia and, in the recent past, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. As mentioned previously, not only developing regions have seen the recruitment of young people in combat, developed states have also deployed children in armed forces (For instance, Australia's deployment of under-18s in the East Timor peacekeeping force in 1999). Australia and New Zealand generally recruit at 17 (16 in exceptional cases in Australia). China seems to conscript and accept volunteers, both boys as well as girls, at the age of 17. As far as Japan is concerned, it claims not to enlist below 18, however, it does accept youth cadets into its Self Defence Force for technical training from age 15.

In India, children and youth are involved with insurgent groups in a number of states like Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkand and Jammu and Kashmir. Many participate in combat as cooks, decoys to spot movements of security forces, are used to transport ammunition and for money laundering; while others are engaged as direct combatants. It is true that in India child soldiers are not as wide a problem as in some neighbouring countries like Sri Lanka and Afghanistan, however, if

this disturbing trend is not given the attention it demands by the government then it is likely to reach alarming proportions.

In Chhattisgarh, both the rebels as well as the security forces are said to recruit young people below 18 years of age. In 2002, the Peoples' War Group (PWG) targeted both boys and girls. Further, rights activists allege even security forces are involved in the recruitment of children and youth as special police officers. A report by Asian Centre for Human Rights pointed out, a team which visited Bangapal relief camp in the state interviewed nine minor girls, who were enlisted as Special Police Officers (SPOs). These girls claimed that they were being trained in fighting tactics. However, officials denied the allegations. KPS Gill, ex-security advisor to Chhattisgarh government remarked, 'No children have been recruited by security forces. The basic built of tribals and undernourishment makes them look younger' (John 2007).

In Andhra Pradesh, young people, boys as well as girls are present in the Peoples' War Groups' ranks. On May 29, 2003 the vernacular Telugu media reported from Karimnagar district, Andhra Pradesh, that left-wing extremists of the PWG had, on May 24, abducted a minor girl, Narsingojula Padma, aged 14 years, from Patha Rudraram village (Ramana 2003). Young people initially develop intimacy with the rebels and some of them gradually join them. In fact for some years, the PWG had its own children's corps called Bala Sangham. These children were used for intelligence gathering, serving extortion notes, and carrying food and arms. In a report titled 'Children in South Asia: Securing their Rights', the Amnesty International observed that the PWG had enlisted children between the ages of 8 and 15 'believing that they [the PWG] could train children more effectively than women to resist police interrogation' (Ramana 2003). Some sources have reported that the Bala Sangham is no longer operational, it has been disbanded.

Latin America

In several countries in Latin America, both governmental armed forces and armed groups continue to enlist large numbers of young people as direct or indirect participants. The countries most affected by the widespread use of child soldiers have been Colombia and

Peru. Most states in the Latin American region have set 18 years or more as the minimum age for voluntary recruitment as well as conscription or compulsory recruitment into the governmental forces. Cuba is the only country in Latin America which legally conscripts under-18s, although many states in the region allow voluntary recruitment at 16. Domestic legislation is not always applied in practice however, in a number of states mainly Paraguay and Peru there have been reports of underage recruitment to the governmental armed forces. Further, conscription laws are often applied in a discriminatory manner, targeting particularly the poor, disadvantaged and minorities.

One practice which is common among armed forces across the continent is the horrifying treatment or brutalisation of the recruits, particularly young people. In Argentina, the practice of conscription was abolished after there were reports of the abusive treatment of recruits. In Paraguay, 56 under-18s died during their service in the military, six of them under the age of 18 in 2000 alone. During the civil wars that have plagued the region, government-aligned militias and paramilitaries have frequently recruited children. For instance, in Colombia up to 50 percent of some paramilitary units have been less than 18 years of age. Another universal feature across the continent is the presence of military schools which enlist tens of thousands of teenagers each year. There are some states in the region like Chile where students are considered members of the armed forces. Armed opposition groups in Latin America have also frequently recruited child soldiers. In Peru, the leftist Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) movement, before its eventual disintegration, was reported to have forcibly enlisted thousands of young people from indigenous communities in areas under its control.

The Colombian conflict is marked by widespread recruitment of child combatants. With 11,000 child soldiers, Colombia is among the countries with the largest numbers of child combatants in the world (UN 2006). Both the rebel groups, the Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) have recruited children in their ranks. While FARC has claimed that its minimum age of recruitment is 15, ELN has denied enlisting under-16s, however, both factions are reported to have recruited younger children. Children have also been involved in the Colombian

government's military and rightist paramilitary groups such as the United Self-Defence Forces (AUC). These child soldiers were nicknamed little bees by the FARC guerrillas, since, like P.W. Singer points out, they would sting the enemies before the enemies knew they were under attack. The military referred to these child soldiers as little bells. And in urban militias, they were known as little carts, as they were used to sneak weapons through checkpoints. Children in these organisations have been used for various purposes- to make and deploy mines, to collect intelligence and also serve as advance troops in ambush attacks against soldiers, paramilitaries and police officers. The FARC is said to recruit children from Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela, some of them as young as ten years of age.

Despite the recent decrease in the intensity of violence in the country since the 2001-2002 peak of hostilities, children and youth are still affected by the ongoing armed conflict and their recruitment in armed groups continues. Around 7000 children are still enrolled in non-state armed factions, despite the increase in the number of soldiers demobilised (UNICEF 2006). The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers reported, up until December 2000 the government forces regularly recruited children-a total of approximately sixteen thousand-but the Colombian government now prohibits the recruitment of people under 18 years of age (CSC 2002). However, paramilitaries continue to enlist children and youth, particularly from urban militias. Up to fourteen thousand children have been recruited by armed opposition groups and paramilitaries (CSC 2004). 'Women and girls are believed to make up half of guerrilla groups such as the FARC. In rural Colombian villages, families live in fear, not only of attack by paramilitaries or rebels, but also of their sons' and daughters' recruitment' (Wessels 2006).

Africa

Children and youth have been involved in African liberation struggles, they have been glorified as their vanguards and as voices against colonial oppression and exploitation. For a long time the African continent has been at the epicentre of the child soldier phenomenon. Presently, most of Africa is experiencing a political and economic crisis.

As the proportion of young people rises, economic and political conditions deteriorate. Ebo notes, in the larger context, Africa exists and functions as a part of a wider but single global system of production and exchange, and African states together form a loose conglomerate of fragmented neo-colonies whose economies are separately more sensitive to London, Paris and, New York; than to Lagos, Abidjan or Johannesburg (Ebo 2005 cited in McIntyre 2005).

It may be argued that many conflicts are but violent manifestations of the multi-faceted crisis of under development that has enveloped most of the continent. Young people are caught in this web of Africa's development crisis which offers a fertile ground for incessant conflicts and exerts pressure on child and youth agency. A number of reasons have been pointed out by some commentators like David Rosen which make the African continent vulnerable to the child soldier problem:

- Children and youth have been involved in many pre-colonial African societies and were part of the military in virtually every anti-colonial war of liberation on the African continent.

- A large proportion of the African population is young and the presence of war in many African regions makes children and youth vulnerable to involvement in conflict. Conflict in regions like Angola and Sierra Leone were sustained due to the involvement of children as soldiers.

- Social and cultural boundaries between childhood and adulthood are quite different in the African society than in contemporary western society. Children constitute a large part of labour force in most African regions subsistence, market and service economies. However, they are socially and economically marginalized, and often the presence of war makes them vulnerable to joining an armed group for economic reasons (Rosen 2005: 62).

Afua Twum Danso remarks, a crisis of youth is in effect a crisis of the continent and vice versa (Danso 2005: 7 cited in McIntyre 2005). There is an inverse relationship between African development crisis and the child soldier crisis in Africa. The former exacerbates

the latter and the youth crisis (child soldier crisis) obstructs the development of the continent further plunging it into violence, chaos and anarchy. In recent years, the countries most affected by this problem have been Angola, Burundi, Congo-Brazzaville, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Uganda.

The overwhelming majority of African States, in line with the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990, set 18 as the minimum age for recruitment, both voluntary as well as compulsory recruitment). However, several states in the region do not always follow these laws in practice. Burundi and Rwanda have the lowest legal recruitment ages in Africa, seemingly 15 or 16 years for volunteers. Uganda and Chad seem to accept recruits below 18 years of age with parental consent. Some countries such as South Africa and Mozambique allow for the recruitment age to be lowered in time of war or national emergency. Further, in a number of states children below 18 years of age may be recruited for there is no provision through which the age of the child can be identified due to lack of systematic birth registration in these countries. In several countries of the region it is not easy to distinguish between recruitment and traditional initiation rituals of passage into adulthood, particularly for young boys. For instance, in Sierra Leone young boys are initiated into traditional hunting societies which are now integrally involved with civil defence militias.

Armed groups throughout Africa have frequently recruited children and used them in combat. In DRC, the fluid nature of the alliances between some of the armed factions and their foreign or Congolese sponsors highlights their lack of a principled political program. The alliances were based on the selfish interests of the militia leaders who did the bidding of their sponsors in exchange for direct military support. In general, the armed factions present in the DRC lacked military training or the means to implement sophisticated military strategies. Often battles were fought and won on the basis of numerical supremacy, hence more children an armed faction could recruit, greater it considered its chances of military victory. All parties to the conflict have used child combatants.

Congolese child combatants were called kadogos, "little ones" in Swahili. They have also served in Kabila's Presidential Guard and in fact when in January 2001 Kabila was assassinated, many held his kadogos responsible. The recruitment of child combatants in the DRC first escalated dramatically in 1996. During this year, in the eastern town of Bukavu thousands of children reportedly underwent military training with the Alliance des forces démocratiques pour la libération du Congo (AFDL). Some children, seduced by propaganda, enlisted into the AFDL voluntarily. But thousands of other boys and girls were forced into joining up. This set a precedent for using child soldiers which has been followed by all other militias in the region. Save the Children reported, an estimated 11,000 children are currently involved with militias in DRC (Save the Children 2007).

Sierra Leone is amongst one of the countries that has the world's worst records for recruiting children as soldiers. Between 1992 and 1996, the period of the worst fighting between the Government forces and the RUF (Revolutionary United Front), approximately 4,500 children were forcefully recruited by both the government forces as well as the RUF. In fact a weekly locally produced newspaper of Sierra Leone reported that "more than 60 per cent of [a group] of 1,000 fighters" screened by the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Resettlement Committee before the military coup of 25 May 1997 were below 18 years of age.

For years after Sierra Leone became independent from the British rule in 1961, a powerful elite ruled from the capital Freetown while the rest of the country faced economic problems. Violence and corruption intensified with the election of Stevens as president of Sierra Leone in 1967. Stevens' rule which was marked by widespread poverty, rampant corruption, the personal enrichment of the elite, lack of education and burgeoning unemployment resulted in resentment among the rural poor so that when the RUF, a rebel movement was created there was no dearth of recruits. But what began as a movement to rid the country of the corrupt military regime soon degenerated into a movement dominated by young and impoverished men indulging in corruption by looting the countryside for their own selfish interests. All parties to the conflict struggled to control the country's vast diamond resources also referred as 'blood diamonds' for their role in funding and perpetuating the civil war. In Sierra Leone, RUF as well as the Armed

Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) have recruited children as young as seven during the civil war. In the RUF strongholds which included the diamond fields of Tongo in Southeastern Sierra Leone and in the Kono diamond mining district of eastern Sierra Leone, males, including children and youth were used in combat and in diamond mines while females were forced into domestic chores and were also reduced to sex slaves.

Children as young as eight are being recruited by the government army of Southern Sudan. Around 75% of former girl soldiers in Liberia reported having suffered sexual abuse or exploitation. In 2005 over 8,000 children were still fighting in West Africa, with another 20,000 in the process of or waiting to be released (Save the Children 2007). In Uganda, the LRA has systematically abducted young people from their schools, communities and homes to camps in Sudan, forcing them to serve as soldiers. These children have often been turned into sexual slaves and young girls are usually taken as wives by the commanders. Save the Children reported, in Uganda 1,500 children are still held by the Lords Resistance Army. Another 10,000 children associated with the LRA are still unaccounted for (Save the Children 2007). In Angola, both parties to the conflict, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) resorted to the manipulation and mobilisation of young people for their own selfish interests. Many children were also forcibly recruited or abducted from neighbouring Namibia. Girls, as young as 13, were made to serve as camp followers, porters and even concubines.

Europe

Young people have also been involved as direct and indirect participants in several European conflicts in recent years, mostly with armed factions, however, in some cases government-aligned paramilitaries have also recruited children in their ranks. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, Chechnya, Kosovo, Nagorno-Karabakh, south-east Turkey, and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, children and youth have been used as spies and messengers, have carried weapons and ammunition, and have also participated as direct combatants.

As mentioned before, not only developing states or rebel factions have recruited or continue to recruit young people but developed countries also frequently enlist under 18s in the governmental armed forces. For instance, under-18's are routinely recruited and trained by the armed forces of the United Kingdom, they are also sent to the frontline. Soldiers below 18 years of age from the UK were deployed in the former Republic of Yugoslavia during the Kosovo crisis. Children and youth were sent to the Falklands and the Adriatic Sea. Around 200 child soldiers were deployed in the Gulf. In April 1999, according to media reports, the youngest tank driver, a 17-year old was "ready for battle" and had already been deployed in Macedonia. In October 1999, 10 Royal Navy Personnel who were below 18 were serving aboard ships in support of operations in East Timor. During the invasion of Afghanistan, under-18s were also sent by the British armed forces to fight the Taliban and Al Qaeda (Amnesty International 2000). In September 2000, the UK signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) on the involvement of children in armed conflict according to which states parties are required, among other things, to take all feasible measures to ensure that under 18 members of their armed forces do not take a direct part in hostilities (Article 1).

However, UK added a declaration which states that it understands that Article 1 of the Optional Protocol would not exclude the deployment of members of its armed forces under the age of 18 to take a direct part in hostilities where:

a) there is a genuine military need to deploy their unit or ship to an area in which hostilities are taking place; and
b) by reason of the nature and urgency of the situation either because it is not practicable to withdraw such persons before deployment, or because to do so would undermine the operational effectiveness of their unit, and thereby put at risk the successful completion of the military mission and/or the safety of other personnel.

There is no conscription to the armed forces in the UK. But in recent years, the armed forces have been faced with a major shortage of personnel due to problems in both recruiting and retaining service people. These problems are compounded by rising

demands for deployment abroad because of UK foreign policy commitments. As a result in October 1999 the Ministry of Defence (MoD) carried out a feasibility study to consider the deployment of the Territorial Army (reservists) to take the burden off regular forces; there have been reports of officers targeting homeless youth. Recruitment campaigns have been openly targeting children and youth. The UK armed forces have been involved in a range of promotional campaigns and activities aimed at young people. In April 1999, the Head of the Army's Recruitment and Marketing Department stated that 'the total recruitment budget for the army was 50 million pounds, of which 20 million pounds was allocated for advertising to attract recruitment' (Amnesty International 2000). This money has been used for commercials, video-games, fashion accessories and adventure-camps aimed to attract young people. In 1998, a CD-rom entitled 'First Contact' was launched by the army, to give out information to young people about the work of the armed forces. For instance, video-games (one entitled "wargasm") 'requiring the user, among other things, to kill an on-screen enemy and to assemble an assault rifle. The CD-rom was distributed free through newspaper advertisements' (Amnesty International 2000).

In 1998, when the United Kingdom was asked to justify its policy concerning the operational employment of personnel under - 18, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces referred, 'preliminarily, to the armed services' need to recruit around 25,000 volunteers each year', for the purpose of supporting the UK's commitments at home and abroad. He also argued that there is strong evidence which suggested that those below 18 responded better to training and tended to stay longer in the services. The minister also mentioned the increasing competition from other employers for suitable recruits and admitted that competition increased once potential applicants gained qualifications from further education (Amnesty International 2000).

Defence Analytical Services Agency estimated that the number of children recruited into the armed forces of the UK began decreasing significantly in 1990. This trend continued till 1996. In 1997, there was a sharp increase in the recruitment of under-18s and is still

rising. It has been estimated that between March 1998 and March 1999, 9,466 under-18s were enrolled in the UK armed forces. Around 6,676 under 18s were in the ranks of the UK armed forces in 1998 (1,388 16-year-old boys, 160 16-year-old girls, 4,506 17-year-old boys and 622 17-year-old girls). While in 1997 they numbered 4,529. Recent trends reflect a rise in the recruitment of children by UK armed forces. Recently, The Ministry of Defence has admitted that army commanders were put under pressure by successive deployments to Iraq and as a result broke international rules by sending soldiers who were below18 years of age. In 2003 Britain ratified the UN's Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. The treaty obliges signatories to take 'all feasible measures to ensure that members of their armed forces who have not attained the age of 18 years do not take a direct part in hostilities'(AmnestyInternational2000).

'The MoD has admitted that during the first two years of the war in Iraq, 15 British service personnel aged 17 served in the country. As many as four of the 17-year-olds who did so were female' (Amnesty International 2000). Due to manpower shortage, the forces –particularly the army- are stepping up their recruitment drive among the young people. In 2006 over 14,000 people left the army and only 12,000 joined. 'Teenagers are by far the largest recruiting group for the military. Last year, 2,760 new recruits to the three armed services were aged 16, and 3,415 were 17. By contrast, there were only 980 recruits aged 23 and 160 aged 28' (Kirkup 2007).

Middle East and North Africa

Since the past two decades, young people have been involved with the armed forces and armed groups in several countries across the Middle East and North Africa. These countries include Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Israel occupied territories, Algeria, Egypt and Sudan. In the early 1980s, during the Iran-Iraq war there were reports of extensive child recruitment in Iraq, boys as young as 12 were part of the Iraqi military. Iranian children were also involved during the war, many of them were used by popular militias in human wave attacks against Iraqi forces. They were often presented with a symbolic key to the

paradise promised them as martyrs. In Lebanon, large numbers of young people were engaged as direct participants during the civil war. The South Lebanese Army, a militia supported by Israel in South Lebanon, is reported to have forcibly enlisted young teenagers to its ranks.

Even today children below 18 years of age continue to serve with government forces as well as armed militias in several countries across the region and are frequently subject to various forms of militarisation whether in their communities or in educational institutions. In Algeria and Egypt, Islamist opposition groups have been reported to recruit children below 15. Further, some sources have claimed various Kurdish armed factions in northern Iraq, Iran and Turkey have used child soldiers as young as ten. There have been reports of young people being used as soldiers or guards by Islamist groups, tribal militia and Qat farmers in Yemen.

Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) reported that recently in Iraq, a prominent local NGO pointed to the recruitment of some children by insurgents to fight in Iraq. The Iraq Aid Association (IAA) in Baghdad, which works with children suffering psychological trauma due to violence observed most children who serve as soldiers harbour reasons for revenge. Ten-year-old Mustafa Ibrahim remarked, the reason he despised US troops is that his parents were killed by them in May 2004 as they fled a battle in Fallujah city. 'I do not have anyone for me in this world and I want to meet my family in heaven by revenging their death because God will compensate me for this,' he said. 'I have been trained to be a suicide bomber but he [the insurgent trainer] wants me to wait for an opportune time to become a shahid (martyr) in a very special attack and until that happens, I have to help in attacks against the US troops who are against Islam and [who are] the killers of my parents,' Mustafa said. At least three insurgent groups [which declined to be named] - two groups in Baghdad and one in Anbar have admitted to recruiting children as helpers (IRIN 2006).

Following chapters will attempt to explore the child soldier problem in culturally, socially, religiously and politically diverse regions of the world, while focusing on the issues such as- genesis of the phenomenon, cultural relativism versus universal law on

child soldiering, motivations for volunteerism, consequences of this problem and identities of these young soldiers.

CHAPTER 2

ORIGINS OF THE CHILD SOLDIER PHENOMENON

Historising Child Soldiering

When did the practice of child soldiering begin? First, to answer this question it is imperative to understand briefly the concept of childhood as it has evolved from the archaic times. In the 1960s, Philippe Aries initiated a historical debate about the 'invention of childhood'. He argued 'in medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist' (James and Prout 1994: 16). He suggested that it was only between the 15th and the 18th centuries that the notion of childhood emerged in Europe. Further, 'in many African societies, as in other non-Western cultures, chronological age as an indicator of the termination of childhood is not a useful concept', argues Afua Twum Danso (Danso 2005: 12 cited in McIntyre 2005). In many African societies even today, childhood refers to a position or status in the community than to biological age.

However, as mentioned previously, due to colonialism and globalisation, and the ratification of international treaties, most countries across the globe have adopted age 18 as an arbitrary cut-off point for childhood. According to the International Community as is explicit in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC 1989), a child soldier is 'any person under 18 years of age who is recruited or used by an army or armed group.' Despite different notions of childhood in diverse cultures, this chapter will consider those below 18 years of age as children. The precise origins of child soldiering are not known, the issue remains cloaked in obscurity even though some accounts have made attempts to trace the beginnings of this phenomenon. In fact, these efforts by various authors have led to the emergence of disparate views on the origins of this practice. However, it has been widely argued that throughout history, in various cultures and societies, children and youth participated in military campaigns. In the cultures of the Mediterranean basin, it is said that it was customary for young people to serve as aides, armour bearers, and charioteers to adult combatants. Several accounts suggest that instances of this practice

can be traced in the Bible - David's service to King Saul, and also in Greek mythology - the story of Hercules and Hylas.

The tale of David and Goliath can be found in the First Book of Samuel. The story goes, Goliath, a Philistine giant mocked the Israelites and challenged them to choose a man to fight him, or become subjects of the Philistine army. He cried out, 'if your man can kill me, we Philistines will be your servants. But if I prevail against him, and kill him, you Israelites will be our servants.' David, a young shepherd boy and the youngest of the sons of Jesse the Bethlehemite volunteered to fight the Philistine Goliath. The King Saul of Israel offered David his own sword and heavy armour, but David remarked, 'I am not used to this heavy armor; it will only hinder me.' Thus he entered into battle without any armour or weapon, carrying his staff he chose five smooth stones from the brook and put them in his bag. He had his slingshot in his hand. The story alleges that David beheaded the giant Goliath. David, at this time is believed to be around fifteen years of age.

Ancient Greece

In ancient Greece, the participation of young boys in the military is said to have been formalised as part of the pederastic tradition where homosexual couples were considered to make an extremely effective fighting force. The term pederasty is derived from the combination of two Greek words - *pais* and *erastes*, where *pais* refers to boy and *erastes* to lover. Thus, Greek pederasty was a relationship or an intimate bond between an adolescent boy and an adult man outside of his immediate family. The Greeks viewed this tradition as an integral part of their culture from the time of Homer onwards and it was initially constructed as an aristocratic moral and educational institution. Ancient Greeks also considered pederasty integral to Greek military training and a major factor in the deployment of troops.

According to Greek legend, the Sacred Band of Thebes was an army of 150 pairs of pederastic couples, or a total of 300 men, which formed the elite force of the Theban army in the 4th century BC. It is believed to have been organised by Gorgidas, the Theban commander. After an existence of several decades, it was finally defeated by

Phillip of Macedon and his son, Alexander the Great, at the battle of Chaeronea in 338 BC. The rationale behind the army was that the strong bond between lovers would inspire them to fight much more fiercely against the enemy than would a band of one's family or tribe. And that a soldier would rather die in combat than disgrace his lover.

According to Plutarch, the army's formation was inspired by Plato's Symposium, wherein the character Phaedrus remarks:

And if there were only some way of contriving that a state or an army should be made up of lovers and their loves, they would be the very best governors of their own city, abstaining from all dishonour, and emulating one another in honour; and when fighting at each other's side, although a mere handful, they would overcome the world. For what lover would not choose rather to be seen by all mankind than by his beloved, either when abandoning his post or throwing away his arms? He would be ready to die a thousand deaths rather than endure this. Or who would desert his beloved or fail him in the hour of danger? (Plutarch 75 A.C.E:18).

It is believed that, originally, the Sacred Band was formed of picked men in couples (homosexual lovers), chosen from the ranks of the existing Theban citizen-army. The housing and training of these couples was at the city's expense. During their early years, Gorgidas, the Theban commander, dispersed them throughout the front ranks of the Theban army in an attempt to bolster a general morale. Around 379 BC, the Theban general Pelopidas is said to have assumed command of the Sacred Band and then Pelopidas formed these couples into a distinct unit. Plutarch in Pelopidas writes, he 'never separated or scattered them, but would stand [them with himself in] the brunt of battle, using them as one body.' This army is said to have become the "crack" force of Greek soldiery, and the forty years of their known existence (378 – 338 BC) marked the pre-eminence of Thebes as a military and political power in late-classical Greece.

Under the leadership of Pelopidas, this Band fought the Spartans at Tegyra in 375 BC, and it also played a central role in the Battle of Leuctra in 371 BC, which Pausanias called the most decisive battle ever fought by Greeks against Greeks. But in 338 BC the

army was defated at the Battle of Chaeronea with the annhilation of power of the Greek city-states. According to Plutarch, all three hundred died during the battle, he points out 'that after the battle Philip found the three hundred members of the Sacred Band all lying together among their weapons oosite the Sarissae that they had faced in the struggle' (Rahe 1981: 85). However, other authors claim that two hundred and fifty-four died and all the rest were injured. Infact, in the early 1800s, during the excavation of their communal grave at Chaeronea, two hundred and fifty-four skeletons arranged in seven rows were discovered.

Ancient Rome and Medieval Europe

The Romans also recruited young people in combat and as Plutarch has argued, according to regulations youth were required to be at least sixteen years of age. Today as per the international community, those below 18 years of age are considered children. In Medieval Europe, Afua Twum Danso points out, 'children were not only economic actors, beginning apprenticeships at the age of 12 or younger; they were also active political agents, often initiating resistance and uprisings' (Danso 2005: 14 cited in McIntyre 2005). He suggests that the Children's Crusade, which began in the spring of 1212 near Cologne, was a peaceful movement of the poor, mostly farm workers and shepherd and was initiated by a 12-year-old boy called Nicholas. He led a crowd of approximately 20,000 children and adults over 700 miles across the Alps to Italy. In France too, began a similar movement under the leadership of a 12-year-old boy named Stephen, who ushered a crowd of 30,000 into Paris.

Children's Crusade: Diverse Perspectives

The children's crusade is a historical event which is said to have occurred around 1212, several accounts claim as the crusaders failed to maintain control of the holy land, after the battle of Hattin in 1187, a group of children embarked upon a struggle to liberate it. Reportedly, there were two separate crusades, one in France under the leadership of Stephen, a shepherd boy, and the other in Germany led by young shepherd Nicholas.

Many accounts suggest, these child crusaders had believed that the reason why other crusaders failed were the sins of the adults involved. They assumed that their innocence would enable them to regain the Holy Land.

In the crusade which began in France, Stephen of Cloyes supposedly claimed to have seen a vision in which Jesus Christ appeared as a pilgrim seeking a morsel of bread and he handed Stephen a letter for the king. Stephen decided to march to Paris to deliver the letter. On his way he attracted a crowd of around 30, 000 children. Stephen along with this crowd marched to the port of Marseilles, where two merchants, Hugo Ferreus ("Iron Hugo") and William Porcus ("William the Pig") offered to transport them by ship. Aubrey of Trois Fontaines argues that these children were given seven ships to transport them to the Holy Land. Of these seven ships, two drowned in a storm off the Island of Peter while the other ships reached Egypt where the children were sold as slaves to the Saracens. However, most contemporary accounts, though acknowledging Stephen's visit to the king, do not mention a pilgrimage to Marseilles, much less the Holy Land and do not call the event a crusade.

In the case of the crusade that began in Germany, many accounts suggest that groups of young people from different locales (numbering around 20,000) headed south along the Rhine and finally united under the leadership of a young shepherd called Nicholas. Contemporary Giovanni Codagnello suggests, Nicholas had a vision in which he was asked by an angel to regain the Holy Sepulcher which was, during that time, under the Saracen control (DeVries 2002). Several pilgrims seemed to have perished on their way to the Holy Land, others returned home, however large number of crusaders, around 7,000 reached the Italian port of Genoa on August 25, 1212. Nicholas had promised that the sea would part, enabling them to reach the Holy Land. However the Mediterranean did not part, and soon the crusade fell apart. One group reached Marseilles from Genoa, another reached Rome, still another went to Brindisi, where the wise bishop forbade them from further attempting to reach the Holy Land. Some pilgrims even seemed to have secured boats for the Mediterranean crossing, although the *Chronicon Eberheimense* reports that no sooner had these set sail that they were taken captive by Muslim pirates

and finally sold into slavery. Further, as far as Nicholas' fate is concerned, perhaps only two sources mention him once he took off from Genoa: while the *Gesta Treverorum* suggests that he died in Brindisi, the *Annales Admuntenses* states, 'he survived this initial crusade and later, in 1217, took the cross and fought at Akirs and Damietta' (DeVries 2002).

How old were these crusading 'children'? Well, it is not quite clear if these young people were actually 'children'. Kelly DeVries argues, to describe these crusaders, the original sources use words like *Puer, Puella,* or *Puelle*. But these accounts include them with *homines* and *feminae* and even *infantes lactantes*, a number of contemporary historians view this crusade less as one in which only children, or even predominantly children or even adolescents, participated. In fact, they regard it more as a 'popular' or even 'poor' crusade, in other words as one designated more by class and wealth than by age. Other modern accounts do not mention the age of these pilgrims. Kelly observes, only medieval chronicles written long after the crusade insist that these crusaders were young people. Further, Georges Duby and Philippe Aries suggest that the word *puer* was often used during the middle ages to refer to an agricultural labourer or wage-earner. A number of historians now believe that the Children's Crusade of 1212 is perhaps a fable or little more than a fantasy, however, there are some authors like Afua Twum Danso who suggest that the event actually took place.

Western Europe and United States (Prior to 20th Century)

David Rosen points out that in Western Europe and the United States, till recently, the armies were filled with "boy soldiers". Beginning in the Middle Ages, boy soldiers were routinely recruited into the British military, and by the late nineteenth century, the recruitment of young people became organised and systematic through the efforts of various institutions that emerged during this period. 'In Great Britain, the Royal Hibernium Military School was founded in 1765 for the children of so-called rank-and-file soldiers', argues Rosen. It began as an orphanage for working class and poor boys, but soon, it established links with the military. Further, twelve and thirteen year olds who

were among the earliest recruits served under General Thomas Gage in 1774 to crush the American Revolution (Rosen 2005: 4). Rosen argues, a wide variety of data also indicate the presence of young people on the American side of the Revolutionary war. In the west, most military service until the twentieth century was voluntary, but even with the emergence of conscription the recruitment of children as soldiers continued as schools and military apprenticeship programs continued to channel boys into the military.

Warfare in Preindustrial Societies

Rosen states, 'in preindustrial societies, there is no single, fixed chronological age at which young people enter into the actions, dramas, and rituals of war' (Rosen 2005: 4). He points out that anthropologists have frequently cited cases of children at war in these societies. Francis Deng reports that traditionally among the *Dinka* of Sudan boys were initiated into adulthood between the ages of sixteen and eighteen and they immediately received spears that symbolised the military function of youth. Sometimes in many societies of East Africa like the *Maasai* and the *Samburu,* young boys of varying chronological ages were collectively inducted into the status of warriors. Further, the female warriors of Dahomey were recruited between the ages of nine and fifteen. Even in Latin America, among the *Yanomamo* of Venezuela and Brazil, 'where warfare was especially valorised, young people mostly set their own pace in determining when they wanted to take up the role of warrior' (Rosen 2005: 4).

Children in the Royal Navy (18th Century)

In the eighteenth century, the Royal Navy often used boys as young as nine as servants. (Around 1794, the lower age limit was raised to 13). They worked as cabin boys to officers and senior seamen, but these boys were also apprentice seamen as they were used to climb the masts to assist with the sails. If they fell from the mast to the water or deck below, they usually did not survive death. During battles they were made to provide gunpowder for the cannons on Royal Navy ships and this earned them the title "Powder Monkeys". Paul Dowswell argues, a powder monkey was a boy who fetched gunpowder

from the ship's magazine for a gun crew. The reason why boys were used for this job rather than for operating guns was that they did not have the strength required for handling these heavy weapons. The job given to the powder monkey was extremely dangerous. 'Stray sparks or red hot shrapnel could ignite the cartridge, blowing the boy who was carrying it to pieces. A powder monkey had just as much chance of being crushed by his own gun, or killed by flying splinters or an enemy cannon ball, as any other member of his gun crew. Boys could also be called upon to fight in hand to hand combat, boarding an enemy vessel or repelling invaders' (Dowswell 2006).

Young People in the Mende Warfare (19th Century)

Further, among the Native Americans of the plains, like the nineteenth century Cheyenne, boys entered their first war parties when they were around 14 or 15 years of age gradually evolving into seasoned warriors. Kenneth Little's ethnography, 'The Mende of Sierra Leone' shows that children were regularly used in the 19th century warfare in Sierra Leone. The *Mende*, one of the most important ethnic groups in Sierra Leone, used a predatory style of warfare-designed for plunder and slave taking rather than for territorial expansion (Rosen 2005: 63-64). Captive females and young children who worked as slaves were important in the expansion of the rice economy. Rosen argues, although Little does not provide specific information about chronological age, it is clear that those men and boys who were physically able to fight became part of the *Mende* fighting forces. At puberty when *Mende* boys were initiated into the *Mende* male secret association, the Poro; they made transition into manhood as well as warrior status simultaneously.

From Poro initiations they emerged as warriors. The youngest recruits who were known as "war sparrows" served as bearers but also participated in the fighting when called on. The youngest warriors of the *Mende* fighting forces were in their early teenage years. Such young people who are today viewed as boys or children in the west were regarded as young adults by the *Mende.* The organisation of 19th century *Mende* warfare was typical throughout much of the forested area of Sierra Leone. Similar patterns were

prevalent among the *Kono* and other *Mende* neighbours (Rosen 2005: 64). Women did not participate in direct combat since they were reduced to slaves and adult male captives were executed. Primarily males (young boys and adults) served as combatants. Rosen argues, 'although the modern use of child soldiers in Sierra Leone is not merely a projection of 19th century warfare into the present period, the historic link between warfare and human exploitation makes it clear that the involvement of children in war is not simply a modern-day abhorrence' (Rosen 2005: 64).

Cantonist System (19th Century)

Further, in the nineteenth century a large number of Jewish boys, referred to as the cantonists, were forced into military training establishments to serve in the army. On August 27, 1827, Nicholas published the decree known as the, "*Rekrutschina*" which officially called for the recruitment of Jewish boys between the ages of twelve and twenty-five for the military. In reality, many children younger than twelve were forced into service. From the age of eighteen, their service would continue for an additional twenty-five years. The decree was an attempt to institute a large-scale enforcement of Jewish boys to accept baptism (Domnitch 2004).

For the next thirty years, approximately seventy thousand Jews were forced into the military. Among them fifty thousand were children. They were sent far away from their homes and soon efforts to proselytize them began. Many children died due to the physical punishment, while others intimidated by torture succumbed and accepted baptimism. As a result the Kahal or the Jewish community was shaken and parents were perpetually haunted by the fear of their sons being abducted anytime to serve in the army. On February 19, 1855, Nicholas died and Alexander II came into power. After a period of six months, Alexander II issued the beginning of a series of laws, which incrementally abolished the terms of the Cantonist system.

American Civil War (19th Century)

During the later part of the nineteenth century the American Civil War took place. Several accounts claim that young people participated in the Civil War and were in fact present in all aspects of the war which included fighting on the battlefield. It is believed that perhaps around five percent of these soldiers were under eighteen, and some were as young as ten. William Black, the youngest wounded soldier, was twelve when his left hand and arm were shattered by an exploding shell. In 1861, President Lincoln had announced, those boys who are under eighteen years of age could enlist only with their parents' consent. And the following year, he prohibited any enlistment of those under eighteen. However, due to heavy casualties, recruiting officers continued to enlist underaged volunteers. And thousands of young people ended up participating in the war as messengers, drummers, and also as combatants. They carried stretchers and bandages, assisted surgeons; and some even nursed the wounded.

David Rosen states, young people followed their brothers and fathers into war and some even lied about their age. They mostly had support roles but soon began participating in combat activities. And when required, they also made use of weapons that were cut down and adapted for use by children and youth. Their motives for enlisting in combat were varied. Some wanted to get rid of their abusive family life, while some desired to escape the monotony of the farm life. Then there were those young Northerners who hoped to annihilate slavery from their country. And some young confederates wanted to repel northern invaders from their soil. Some commentators have called the American Civil War a 'war of boy soldiers'. However, the real figure of participation of boy soldiers in this war is uncertain. Those who claim that the civil war could have been called "the boy's war" have estimated that out of a total of 2.7 million soldiers more than a million were 18 or under; about eight hundred thousand were 17 or under, two hundred thousand were 16 or under; about one hundred thousand were 15 or under; 300 were 13 or under. However, according to more careful historical analysis between 250,000 and 420,000 boy soldiers, including many in their early teens and even younger, served in the Union and Confederate armies. On the whole, between 10 and 20 percent of recruits were underage

(Rosen, 2005:5). As mentioned before, Rosen argues that applying modern humanitarian terminology, the war to end slavery was in large part fought by child soldiers in numbers ever greater than those found in contemporary wars.

Further, Rosen adds that as far as the participation of young boys in the American Civil War is concerned, another aspect which deserves attention is how the involvement of these young people was viewed and understood during that time. In the aftermath of the civil war, accounts of young soldiers suggest that the participation of these young boys in the civil war was glorified and their nobility and sacrifice celebrated. In the North, wartime funeral sermons at the burial of those killed invariably praised the sacrifice of "Christian boy-soldiers" on behalf of abolition and the preservation of the Union. In the South, the nobility of the boy soldier was tied to the ideology of the "lost cause" (Rosen 2005: 6).

World War I (Beginning of the 20th Century)

In the beginning of the twentieth century, during the World War I, despite official age restrictions on recruitment, young boys reportedly continued to enlist. Several accounts claim that in 1914, large number of British teenage boys below the minimum age of 18 (or 19 for service overseas) enlisted with the assistance of recruiting sergeants, who collected a bonus for each person they conscripted. For instance, when Jim Norton, a 16-year-old boy was questioned by the sergeant about his age, and he gave an honest reply, he was told to come back with a different story. Norton returned claiming that he is 19 years old. The same story was told by Albert 'Smiler' Marshall, another underage volunteer who, until his death on 16 May 2005, aged 108, was the last surviving British cavalryman of the World War I. Private James Martin, whose story is memorialised in the book soldier boy, by Anthony Hill, was the youngest Australian to die in World War I. He enlisted in Melbourne in 1915 at age 14 and died a few months later near Gallipoli. Albert Cohen of Memphis, who enlisted at age 13 and died at age 15, is reported to be the youngest U.S. soldier to see combat in World War I (Rosen 2005: 8).

For a long time, Palestinian children and youth have served in the armed groups fighting against the Jewish presence in Palestine. Rosen states, the militarisation of Palestinian children and youth began at the end of the World War I, when the Balfour Declaration opened the door to increased Jewish immigration and settlement in Palestine. He further adds, from the beginning of the conflict, the conviction that the young people have a duty to sacrifice themselves for the Palestinian cause has held a central place in militant forms of Palestinian political consciousness.

World War II (20th Century)

During the World War II which began in 1939, Nazis unleashed terror among the Jewish population of Europe which led to the massacre of around six million Jews. As a result of the Nazi policy towards Jews, several armed organisations were formed. For instance, groups of Jewish partisans or "ghetto fighters" emerged in the cities of Eastern Europe, and individuals and groups of Jews throughout Europe fled into forests and rural areas where they either formed or joined partisan forces. According to a study of a thousand Jewish soldiers of the Lithuanian division of partisans more than one-third of the division's Jewish soldiers were fifteen to twenty years old. In fact, a large number of these children had been a part of youth groups prior to joining the division. Children and youth played a significant role in partisan resistance against the Germans. They formed the core of the urban partisans units and were an integral part of several forest partisan groups. Some of these young people were engaged in support roles. For instance, they served as couriers, distributed resistance publications, assisted in manufacturing crude weapons, or were involved in household activities such as cooking or rearing animals (Rosen 2005).

However, in most cases young people were involved in direct combat. These young warriors did not always regard themselves as children. "Often they referred to themselves as 'youth' a term normally used in Hebrew, Yiddish, and Polish to describe young people from about 13 to 21 years of age. At other times, young people described themselves as

children but saw little conflict between the life of the child and the serious business of resistance" (Rosen 2005: 21).

A number of other militarised youth organisations emerged during the World War II. For instance, in Spain there was the *Flechas* (Arrows) of the *Falange*, in Italy, there were the fascist *Figli della Lupa* (Children of the Wolf), *Balilla* and Vanguard. However, one of the most notorious youth organisations to emerge during this time was the Hitler Youth or as it was known in German – Hitlerjugend. It was founded in 1922, well before the Nazis took over Germany in 1933. And by the time, the World War II broke out in 1939, almost every German boy between the ages of 10 and 18 was enlisted in this organisation. Infact, Joseph Ratzinger, the present Pope Benedict XVI was also a member of Hitlerjugend.

If parents raised objections to the recruitment of their children in this army, they were told that their son was only on loan to them- he was actually the property of the German people. Then there was the League of German Girls or Bund Deutscher Madel (BDM). Girls were important for the purpose of producing more members of the 'master' race. It is important to note that members of the BDM were usually better educated than their non-BDM counterparts. Infact, the SS Women's Corps which was founded in 1942 by Heinrich Himmler was populated by BDM graduates.

Late 20th Century Warfare

In the 1960s and 70s, during the Vietnam War, young people were used by the Viet Cong to detonate explosives or throw hand grenades at US troops. This led to fierce reprisals by the United States and in 1968 at My Lai, more than 300 unarmed civilians- primarily children, women and old men- were killed by U.S. soldiers. It is argued that it was in 1986 that the international attention was dramatically focused on child soldiers in their modern form, when the National Resistance Army fought its way into Kampala, the capital of Uganda. Observers were shocked to see four and five-year-olds in its ranks.

Uganda's rebel army had an estimated 3000 child soldiers under the age of 16, including 500 girls.

Most commentators of the child soldier crisis agree that child soldiering is not a new phenomenon and for many centuries, children and youth have been involved in combat. However, a large number of them believe that the end of the cold war has ushered in a new era where wars are no longer fought on defined battlefields between soldiers in government armed forces. It is often argued, the post cold war period is characterised increasingly by internal conflicts devoid of laws and the rules of war. Further, poverty, the proliferation of small, lightweight and cheap weapons, and the changing nature of warfare have led to the intensification of the child soldier phenomenon.

In 1993, Graca Machel, former first lady of Mozambique, was chosen by the United Nations to conduct the first study of the impact of armed conflict on children. The Machel Report as it is called was approved in November 1996 by the General Assembly. This report makes a distinction between traditional, rule-bound warfare, including national liberation struggles, and the patterns of warfare found in post-colonial states. It states that modern wars involve the "abandonment of all standards" and have a special "sense of dislocation and chaos". Machel asserts that the "callousness of modern warfare" has resulted from the breakdown of traditional societies engendered by globalisation and social revolutions.

The report cites such phenomenon as 'the vestiges of colonialism, internal dissent, structural monetary adjustments, uneven development, the collapse of government, the personalisation of power, and the erosion of essential services as factors contributing to a breakdown in the rules of warfare.' It states that this breakdown has resulted in the loss of distinction between combatants and non combatants, particularly dreadful levels of brutality and violence, use of ghastly tactics including systematic rape, scorched-earth policies, ethnic cleansing and genocide. Further, the breakdown in the rules and standards of warfare has led to human rights violations against women and children, including the recruitment of children into armed forces and groups. The report suggests, particularly in

Africa, the "strong martial cultures" no longer have rules that prohibit attacks on women and children.

Graca Machel herself states in the report, "war today just simply does not match the traditional conception of two opposed armies; or even of an internal conflict pitting an armed opposition force against the established government, in which each side generally abides by the 'rules of the game', respecting the basic inviobility of civilian non-combatants and the special protection due to the young" (Machel Report 1996).

Old Wars and New Wars

It has been widely argued that modern or new wars differ significantly from traditional wars. This implies that small scale civil wars and ethnic conflicts that now dominate international politics are quite different from previous international wars and wars of national liberation. The traditional or old wars are said to be rule-bound and limited while new wars anomic and chaotic. Michael Wessels argues that in recent years the nature of armed conflict has changed considerably. The end of Cold War brought about an era of ethnopolitical conflicts that are rarely fought on well-defined battlefields. Conflicts are mostly internal, and they are characterised by butchery and violence against women. 'More than 80 percent of the victims are noncombatants, mostly women and children' (Wessells 1997). Veal and Stavrou comment, the presence and involvement of children in combat, as casualties and soldiers, is not a new phenomenon. However, during the last few decades, a shift has occurred from using children and youth, not only as indirect combatants, but also as 'principal' participants in several wars across the globe. 'Between 1998 and 2001 children were being used as soldiers in at least 87 out of 178 countries – including both conflict and non-conflict situations' (Veal and Stavrou 2003).

McManimon argues that at the beginning of this century, wars were fought between men in government armed forces, primarily on defined battlefields. However, today in a number of conflicts, non combatants are specifically targeted (now 90% of all war casualties and their communities' social institutions). Children have become increasingly involved in contemporary warfare, both as civilian victims and as combatants. 'Poverty,

the social disruption and destruction stemming from these wars, and the proliferation of small and cheap weapons are major factors in making child soldiers a growing phenomenon' (McManimon 1999). The argument goes that the traditional wars were rule-bound and limited in a number of ways- presence of clear political objectives; well-defined beginnings and end; the existence of geographically bounded battle-fields; fought in accordance of certain rules and a clear distinction between civilians and combatants. David Rosen asserts that the humanitarian accounts have portrayed new wars to have few if any of these characteristics. Modern wars are dubbed aimless and chaotic. Further, these wars are said to make no distinction between civilians and combatants.

Peter Warren Singer argues, wars were once fought exclusively between soldiers or governmental armed forces, however, in recent decades the worldwide percentage of victims from armed conflicts has become predominantly civilian. He remarks, 'in World War I, civilian casualties were under 10 percent of the total; in World War II, they had risen to nearly 50 percent.' Similar trend continued through the next years and now, he maintains, the overwhelming majority of those killed in conflicts are not soldiers but non combatants. For instance, 'during the late 20th century, of all those killed in African conflicts, 92 percent were civilians. Similar figures were estimated in the Balkan conflicts. Singer remarks, there was a time when civilians had no place on the battlefield; 'now the battlefield is almost incomplete without them' (Singer 2005).

Rosen argues, its true that most wars today which are basically civil wars usually lead to high civilian casualty rates. However, he continues, despite the terrible circumstances in which many contemporary wars are fought, neither high civilian casualties per se nor terrorist episodes constitute a real change from the way wars have been fought throughout the ages. He argues, the assertion that 19th and 20th century wars of Europe were rule-bound wars is a highly distorted version of warfare in Europe during the time. For a better view of 18th and 19th century warfare in Europe, he recommends Jacques Callot's 1631 etchings of the French invasion of Lorraine, Han Ulrich Franck's etchings of the Thirty Years' War, and Francisco de Goya's etchings of events during Napoleon's invasion of Spain in 1808. He says these portrayals of atrocities inflicted upon civilians –

mostly peasants, by uniformed soldiers of European monarchies are contrary to the idealised versions of European warfare (Rosen 2005: 12). Further, Rosen asserts that "the rules" never prevented these same European (and U.S.) armies and their post colonial successors from extensively and indiscriminately killing non-combatants in wars against indigenous peoples, although the genocidal killing of indigenous peoples has been largely invisible. And yet all humanitarian and human rights accounts, he says, continue to hold that the fundamental nature of war has changed overtime. He continues even if warfare could be shown to be changing overtime, there exists no empirical evidence for making a strong distinction between old wars and new wars at the end of colonialism.

He says that some of today's wars do occur in the context of the collapse of the state. For instance, small scale wars in Sierra Leone, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. However, he continues, the war in Sierra Leone is not irrational or anomic. In fact, parties to the conflict in Sierra Leone have had specific goals, mainly the control of the key resources of the Sierra Leone economy. Further, the collapse of the state also does not in itself explain the social and political context that allows the use of children in combat. He argues child combatants have always participated in battles, 'so the roots of the child soldier crisis cannot be said to lie in the anomie of modern warfare as it is experienced in post-colonial states' (Rosen 2005).

In Rosen's view, 'instead of mythologising the past and rendering invisible' the thousands of young soldiers who participated in wars of national liberation, it is important to question as to why there was no international child-soldier crisis at that time. He quips, 'perhaps the child soldier crisis is the crisis of the post colonial state. For that reason the international community of humanitarian and human rights groups and of governments, once avid supporters of the armies of national liberation, have now redefined all rebels and their leaders as apolitical criminals and child abusers' (Rosen 2005: 14).

New Wars and Small Arms

There is a large body of literature which suggests that the child soldier crisis is closely linked to the small-arms trade. Some authors assert that in traditional wars, children reportedly served only in support roles such as messengers, spies and lookouts whereas in modern wars lightweight weapons have transformed the role of children in combat as now they are increasingly participating in warfare as combatants. Wessells argues, increasingly children participate as combatants or serve as bodyguards, informants, porters, sentries, spies and also as cooks in the fighting forces. Many of them belong to organised military units, are often clad in uniforms, and receive explicit training, 'their lethality enhanced by the widespread availability of lightweight assault weapons.' There are other children who engage in relatively unstructured but politically motivated acts of violence, such as throwing stones or planting bombs (Wessells 1997).

There are a number of authors who believe that the intensification of the child soldier phenomenon is directly related to the proliferation of small arms while there are those who argue that the relationship between child soldiering and small arms is not causal. Veal and Stavrou remark the 'increase in the use of child and adolescent soldiers is directly related to changes in the value of weapons technologies, or, in other words, the proliferation of small arms.' They observe there are two points that are significant in this regard- the first is a design and development issue. For much of the 20th century, arms and weaponry were either quite expensive and/or too heavy for children to handle. Technological developments, facilitated by sophisticated information and communications technology-enabled design tools, have made it easier to manufacture simple and lightweight weapons. The second is a supply issue. The post-Cold War era has led to the wholesale flooding of redundant, cheap but efficient weapons in Africa (Veal and Stavrou 2003).

However, Rosen argues, small arms can be terrifying weapons of destruction, but their role as a factor in the child-soldier crisis is, at best, indirect. In July 2001, the United Nations hosted the UN Conference on the Illicit Trade of Small Arms and Light Weapons

in All its Aspects. Rachel Stohl observed, the report highlights the reliance on children to wage war that has become a symptom of the massive proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons. Children as young as 7 or 8 are sometimes handed a weapon, and if they are able to hold it, they are recruited for military training. Without small arms, children are often not as useful to armed groups. Children may still be used for domestic chores around a camp, but generally not as combatants. The reliance on small arms often blurs the distinction between adult and child soldiers. However, the report also notes that while small arms may make the use of children more feasible, the relationship is not causal. Small arms proliferation does not serve as an indicator for the use of child soldiers as children are also used as soldiers in areas where arms are in short supply.

International Organisations like the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Human Rights Watch (HRW) claim that small arms trade have contributed to the intensification of the child soldier crisis. UNICEF claims that the presence of these weapons creates a "culture of violence". Similarly, the organisation of African Unity's 2000 Bamako Declaration on Small Arms Proliferation also states, 'we must recognise that the widespread availability of small arms and light weight weapons has contributed to a culture of violence.' One major argument made by several authors and organisations is that small and lightweight weapons can be easily handled by children and therefore it is easier than in the past for young people to participate as direct combatants. Human Rights Watch declares, 'Technological advances in weaponry and the proliferation of small arms have contributed to the increased use of child soldiers. Lightweight automatic weapons are simple to operate, often easily accessible, and can be used by children as effectively as adults.' According to UNICEF, because children can use these arms without much prior training and because the weapons require little maintenance and support, it is easier than in the past for children to become direct combatants.

However, according to Rosen, the most popular weapon for child soldiers-AK-47 or Kalashnikov assault rifle which has been available since 1949 is similar in weight to or even heavier than many of the rifles used in the U.S. Civil War. AK 47 which weighs 9 pounds and 7 ounces was the key weapon of rebels, insurgents and national liberation groups. The U.S. rifle musket of 1861, which went into mass production during the Civil

War weighed 8.88 pounds which made it a simple and durable weapon. During the Civil War, hundreds of thousands of British Pattern 1853 Enfield rifles (this rifle weighed just under 9 pounds) were smuggled into the South. Another weapon which went into circulation during the Civil War was a carbine rifle produced by Sharps, which at 8 pounds weighed less than many contemporary weapons (Rosen 2005: 15).The British Lee-Enfield 303 rifle was developed during the Boer War and became a staple weapon of the Nuer during the first civil war in Sudan (1955-1972). It was considered a heavy weapon at about 9.5 pounds. Rosen points out, this rifle is almost identical in weight to the AK-47, which is among the most popular weapons for child soldiers. The M-16 rifle (The 6 pound- 5 ounce US made rifle) is a lighter weapon and there is no correlation between its availability and the practice of child soldiering, argues Rosen. He further states, 'it is rare to find factual references to the firepower or weights of any of these weapons in humanitarian discourse on small arms or even descriptions of how they might be used' (Rosen 2005: 15).

He contends, for instance the M-16 is a light weapon but is not widely used by child combatants. Sometimes it is considered too long and unwieldy to be handled by children. In fact child combatants use weapons that are considerably heavier. For instance, child combatants of the Hizbollah in Southern Lebanon often used rocket-propelled grenade launchers (RPGs) against Israeli soldiers. The RPG-7 which weighs over 17 pounds is the most widely used of these weapons and the grenade is an additional 5 pounds in weight. He argues that weapons such as the AK-47, the M-16, and the German G-3 can fire hundreds of rounds per minute, however there are major practical limitations to their use. Persistent firing overheats and finally destroys the barrel of the gun. 'In fact, combat training in the west stresses the economy of weapons use and firepower. Soldiers are trained to use only one or two shots at a time', argues Rosen. He points out, compared to the weapons of the 19th century and early 20th centuries, modern weapons like AK-47 and M-16 have much more fire power, but the weight has not changed substantially since then.

He further states, in countries like Sierra Leone and Rwanda most of the people were killed and maimed by knives and machetes, not with guns. In Rosen's view, "there is virtually no hard evidence that the spread of small arms has anything to do with the use of children, even if some advocates describe it as 'self-evident'" (Rosen 2005: 14). However, it is hard to deny that the supply of small arms by the western countries including the United States have created the conditions for the intensification of this phenomenon. McManimon claims that the United States is responsible for creating the conditions leading to the use of child soldiers. Of the 42 armed conflicts that occurred in 1994-95, 39 involved armed forces that had received arms and ammunition from the United States. As of November 1998, the U.S. provided military aid to 11 of the 22 governments involved in armed conflict whose armed forces or supported paramilitaries were reported to use children under 17. (These countries are Algeria, Angola, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Colombia, Congo-Brazzaville, Pakistan, Peru, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Uganda).

He further states, in fiscal year 1997, the U.S. authorised almost a quarter billion dollars in foreign military sales and excess defence articles, provided more than $3 million in training, and authorised more than $10 million in commercial military sales to these 11 governments or their sponsored groups. For instance, in 1997 in Colombia, where documentation showed more than 15,000 child soldiers in government forces, 'U.S. foreign military sales and giveaways of excess defence articles surpassed $26 million, plus $403,000 in military training through the International Military Education and Training (IMET) and Joint Combined Education Training (JCET) programs. Additionally, U.S. companies were authorised to sell Colombian state entities 30,000 grenades, one million rounds of ammunition, and 7,000 M-16 assault rifles' (McManimon1999).

Conclusion

In sum, it may be argued that child soldiering is not a new phenomenon. However, it is a growing phenomenon as large numbers of young people today than ever before in history

are involved in this devastating practice. Growing poverty, lack of resources, uneven economic and social development are some of the major factors that contribute to the eruption of armed conflicts in various regions across the globe. Further, as McManimon puts it, 'poverty, the social disruption and destruction stemming from these wars, and the proliferation of small and cheap weapons are major factors in making child soldiers a growing phenomenon' (McManimon 1999). However, it is imperative to note, the relationship between child soldiering and small arms is not causal. Small arms or lightweight weaponry may make the use of children more feasible, however, proliferation of small arms does not serve as an indicator for the use of children in combat as children are also used as soldiers in areas where arms are in short supply.

Further, in Rosen's view, "there is virtually no hard evidence that the spread of small arms has anything to do with the use of children, even if some advocates describe it as 'self-evident'" (Rosen 2005: 14). However, despite the argument which Rosen makes and even though the relationship between child soldiering and small arms is not causal, the proliferation of small arms does seem to have created the conditions for the increasing use of child soldiers and the western governments (United States and others) have a responsibility to stop supplying weapons to the conflict-ridden regions of the world, where the easy availability of small weapons in the hands of children has made their participation in combat easier.

CHAPTER 3

CUTURAL CONSTRUCTON OF CHILDHOOD VERSUS THE UNIVERSAL LAW ON CHILD SOLDIERS

Defining Childhood

Among the most difficult tasks in dealing with the phenomenon of child soldiering is to define a child or advance a universal definition of childhood transcending all cultural, social and geographical boundaries. The United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), a universal legal device which has been signed by 192 states defines a child as 'every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier' (UNCRC 1989).

The definition of the term 'child soldier' is encapsulated in the Cape Town Principles 1997, according to which a child soldier is:
'Any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force in any capacity, including but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers and those accompanying such groups, other than purely as family members. It includes girls recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriage. It does not, therefore, only refer to a child who is carrying or has carried arms.'

Proponents of cultural relativism have raised criticism against the UNCRC by arguing that childhood is a relative concept that changes 'according to historical time, geographical environment, local culture, and socio-economic conditions.' De Waal emphasises the western roots of this definition: 'the idea of a single (gender neutral) age of legal maturity reflects the western juridical tradition and concepts of citizenship built around the universal franchise and eligibility for conscription into the army' (Danso 2005: 11 cited in McIntyre 2005). Danso points out that on the question of age one commentator remarked, 'Needless to say that the notion that someone by some magical wand on the stroke of a pen turns into a fully competent mature, wise and autonomous individual upon attaining a certain arbitrary fixed age has no scientific empirical basis in fact and reality' (Danso 2005: 11 cited in McIntyre 2005).

According to Alan Prout and Alison James, for a long time, development has been the key concept in the dominant framework surrounding the study of children and childhood and the themes which predominate in relation to it are 'rationality', 'naturalness', and 'universality'. They argue, 'these have structured a mode of thought which stretches far beyond the disciplinary boundaries of psychology, influencing not only sociological approaches to child study but the socio-political content of childhood itself' (James and Prout 1997: 10). The notion of development closely links the biological facts of immaturity, such as dependence, to the social aspects of childhood. They further assert, until the late 1970s, the universality of social practices surrounding childhood was regarded as relatively unproblematic.

According to Prout and James, resting on the assumed naturalness of childhood there was in fact little theoretical space within which to explore alternatives. They continue, this developmental approach to childhood, offered by psychology, is based on the notion of natural growth. It is a self sustaining model whose features can be crudely delineated as follows: rationality is the universal mark of adulthood while childhood represents the phase of apprenticement for its development. Thus, it is important to study childhood as a presocial period of difference, a biologically determined stage on the path to full human status i.e., adulthood. They write, 'The naturalness of children both governs and is governed by their universality. It is essentially an evolutionary model: the child developing into an adult represents a progression from simplicity to complexity of thought, from irrational to rational behaviour. As an explanatory frame, it takes its inspiration from an earlier era, from the dawning of a scientific interest in society' (Prout and James 1997: 10).

Within the framework of this evolutionary model, Jean Piaget's work on child development is of much significance. In Piaget's theory, child development has a specific structure that consists of a series of predetermined stages, leading towards the ultimate achievement of logical competence i.e. from the immaturity of a child towards adult rationality. 'Within such a conceptual scheme children are marginalised beings waiting

temporal passage, through the acquisition of cognitive skill, into the social world of adults' (James and Prout 1997: 11). A number of other accounts of childhood have been inspired by Piaget's work on child development. For instance, his theory of developmental stages in cognition has had much influence on contemporary western orthodoxies about child-rearing practices. Further, Walkerdine points out that Piaget's theory is central to current educational thinking and practice. In fact in western societies, this perspective is embedded into the everyday understanding of children to such an extent that it is almost impossible to think outside it (James and Prout 1997: 12).

During the 1970's, changes in the general intellectual climate gave way to new directions in the study and understanding of childhood within several disciplines. A number of attempts have been made to address the issues concerning the inadequacy of the dominant frameworks for the study of childhood within the framework of social sciences and history. Richards (1974) and Richards and Light (1986) offered a critique of psychological accounts of child development; Mackay (1973) and Denzin (1977) came up with an alternative approach to traditional concepts of socialisation. Prior to 1970s, Philippe Aries (1962) had begun a new historical debate concerning 'the invention of childhood'. Though Aries was not the first historian to propose a radical critique of concepts of childhood, his work had a strong influence on the social sciences. His dramatic and radical contention that 'in medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist' was accepted by sociologists. 'Soon it became incorporated as an example of the variability of human societies, all the more useful because it looked not to the 'exotic' or 'primitive' but to a familiar western European past' (Prout and James 1997: 16).

Aries suggested that it was only between the 15th and 18th centuries that the notion of childhood emerged in Europe. He argued that, 'beyond the dependent stage of infancy, children were not depicted. They were there as miniature adults only. However, from the 15th century onwards children began to appear as children, reflecting their gradual removal from the everyday life of adult society' (James and Prout 1997: 16). According to Aries, this was first fostered through the rise of new attitudes of 'coddling' towards children, which emphasised their special nature and needs. Second was the emergence of

formal education and long periods of schooling as a prerequisite for children before they took up adult responsibilities. In the beginning only economically and practically possible for the upper classes, who alone had the time and money for 'childhood', these developments soon diffused downwards through society resulting in the institutionalisation of childhood for all. Aries' work stimulated much historical work regarding the concept of childhood. Some of it rejected his idea of 'the discovery of childhood' while other accepted and endorsed his work.

Danso writes about the emergence of new ideas about childhood. He argues, from the 17th century, new notions regarding childhood began to take shape in western society, initially among the middle classes. 'The changes that took place can be attributed to two men: John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau. The latter has been particularly credited with pioneering the ideology of the innocence of childhood on which the modern western concept is based.' In this new ideology, 'childhood' has its place in the order of human life, therefore, 'the man must be considered in the man, and the child in the child' (Danso 2005: 15 cited in McIntyre 2005).

Danso further writes, slowly childhood and adulthood were treated as distinct stages and former with special qualities requiring special protection. These ideas further spread to the working classes and in the 19th century, special legislation was introduced which was central to the 'determined efforts made to provide such a childhood for everyone, even if it meant squeezing them into the mould' (Danso 2005: 15 cited in McIntyre 2005). For instance, the British 1870 Education Act made provision for compulsory education for all who could not afford it. And in ten years time, most children below the age of 13 were attending school. In Britain, laws were passed which banned children from public houses and forbade them from gambling. This new imposed concept of childhood led to unease among the children themselves. For instance, the 'infantalisation' of the school environment sparked riots in British public schools in the 18th and 19th centuries, including Eton, Rugby, and Winchester. Some thinkers view these developments as negative as they underestimated children or young people, making them dependent on adults and treating them as weak and vulnerable beings in need of protection.

However, these new ideas soon extended to all classes in North America as well as Europe and gradually diffusing to the rest of the world through colonialism and globalisation, they were finally standardised in International Law. Alcinda Honwana rightly states, 'by traditionally embodying the image of the dependent child and the potential victim, international law has failed to look at childhood as a social and historical construction' (Honwana 2001: 133 cited in Chesterman 2001). Further, it is important to acknowledge that even if common standards of childhood have been adopted by the international community and have found their way into the international treaties on child rights, in practice many non western countries, especially African states continue to hold traditional concepts of childhood. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) which was adopted in July 1990 advances the same definition of childhood which was adopted by the CRC i.e. a child is every person who is below 18 years of age. However, as of 2005 only 28 member states of the African Union had ratified the charter. Those states which had neither ratified nor signed the Charter during this time included: Botswana, Burundi, Central African Republic, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe and Sudan.

Cultural Relativism

La Fontaine (1979) argues, the immaturity of children is a biological fact of life but the ways in which this immaturity is understood and made meaningful is a fact of culture (Prout and James 1997). It is these 'facts of culture' which may vary and which can be said to make of childhood a social institution. It is in this sense, therefore that one can talk of the social construction of childhood, write Prout and James. According to Sabeur Mdallel, the concept "child" varies as we move geographically from Asia to Europe or to Africa. The geographical move implies a much greater cultural move. However, it is important to note that the notions of childhood are not just cultural and social constructs, they are historical constructs as well that change over time. For instance, Hendrik focuses on the shifting concepts of childhood in 19th and 20th century Britain, 'from an idea of

childhood fragmented by geography (urban/rural) and class to one that was much more uniform and coherent' (Honwana 2001: 133 cited in Chesterman 2001). Further, Hunt argues that 'concepts of childhood differ not only culturally but in units as small as the family, and they differ often inscrutably, over time' (Hunt 1994).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, in several non-western societies as well as many traditional African societies, the western concept of biological age is not useful in suggesting the termination of childhood. In a number of African societies, childhood refers more to a social status than to chronological or biological age. Last points out, 'in pre-colonial northern Nigeria, boys became adults by acquiring a dependent; that is, by 'taking a wife', whilst girls achieved adulthood on their entry into motherhood' (Danso 2005: 12 cited in McIntyre 2005). Afua Danso states, however, in many societies across the African continent the majority of women (along with paupers and foreigners) would always be considered minors, regardless of their age. Bennett makes an interesting point regarding the difference in perception of childhood in various diverse cultures and societies. He focuses on the role a certain type of economy may play in influencing the duration of childhood. He points out, 'if people live at subsistence level, capacities and responsibilities of adulthood begin early: Because an average life span is short and survival is a struggle, a long period of dependency as a child is a luxury that families cannot afford' (Danso 2005: 13 cited in McIntyre 2005).

Susan Shepler points out, 'child labor almost defines childhood in Sierra Leone. A child who does not work is a bad child' (Shepler 2004). She continues, often the child might have to fetch wood from the forest, may have to go to school, if not school, then work on the farm or garden or assist the adults with whatever work they are engaged in. He or she is often required to do the laundry (by pounding clothes against stones at the river). Children are often engaged in selling small items; they wander around with head pans heaped with vegetables on their heads. An urban child would have to engage in relatively different activities, but would still be required to work. Further, David Rosen, Angela McIntyre and Shepler point out the importance of secret societies in Sierra Leone. Secret societies play a crucial role in the transition from childhood to adulthood. Shepler states,

'No one can be fully considered an adult without being initiated, and especially in rural settings, everyone is initiated.' Shepler asserts that secret society initiation can be viewed as a type of educational institution. In earlier times, for months young people would be in the bush with adults to learn skills specific to their sex. The youth were trained by adults for several years before they were fully initiated.

In the modern times, the initiation process has experienced tremendous change. Even before the war, this process had seen major change over earlier times. Increasing numbers of children began to attend formal Western style schools and there was not much time for them to be sequestered for initiation training. Now training in the bush is mostly a matter of days unlike the earlier times when it went on for months. During their school holidays, students may come home from school for their initiation process. These initiation practices have particularly almost eroded in urban areas and the mix of various ethnic groups has resulted in syncretism. Consequently, a crisis about authentic traditional practices has emerged. However, in Sierra Leone the practice of initiation is not yet lost in the confusion of emerging developments.

Despite different conceptions of childhood among diverse cultures and societies, as mentioned before, a universal definition of childhood has been adopted by the International community. However, as will be seen in the next section, the age limit for recruitment of children in the military has always been the subject of intense debate and it still continues to be, either due to varied cultural notions of childhood in different societies or because of the selfish interests of both the government armed forces and armed opposition groups.

International Law on Child Soldiers

At the end of the Second World War a child's engagement in combat was mostly perceived or viewed as a heroic self-sacrifice. Thus, at the time when Geneva Conventions (1949) came into force, the use of child combatants as indirect or direct participants was not considered an illegal act. In fact even today some view the

involvement of children in armed conflict as a public duty or a political obligation justifying it as their social or cultural tradition. Barbara Fontana states, in the 1949 Geneva Conventions, 'children were protected as members of the civilian population and therefore, by definition, as non-participants in the armed conflict. Specific provisions were drawn up to ensure special treatment for children, with regards to relief material, distribution of food, medical care, as well as to family reunification' (Fontana1997). In the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949), there are seventeen provisions relating to the protection of the civilian population which pertain to the child. Fontana asserts, 'The provisions themselves vary as to which group of children it refers to, as there are four different age groups identified. The ages are seven, twelve, fifteen and eighteen. The eighteen age limit refers only to the death penalty provision of the Fourth Geneva Convention' (Fontana1997).

During the 1970s, Diplomatic Conference on the Development of Humanitarian Law (1974-1977) was held which led to the adoption of the two Protocols additional to the 1949 Geneva Conventions on international humanitarian law. This Conference acknowledged the increasing participation of children in international or non-international armed conflicts across the globe. The Protocol I relates to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts and the Protocol II to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts. Under Protocol I, fighting parties in international armed conflicts are required to distinguish at all times between combatants and civilians so that only military is the legal target of attack. The Protocol I dealt with those internal armed conflicts where people were fighting against colonial domination, alien occupation and racist regimes to assert their right to self-determination. This instrument made the first attempt to address the problem of children participating in combat. Under the Fourth Convention, a belligerent was prohibited from recruiting "protected persons" (which included children) of an adversary to its armed forces, however, this was an unexceptional provision taken from customary international law. The Protocol required states to refrain from recruiting children who were their own nationals.

Article 77 of Protocol I provides that:
"(2) The Parties to the conflict shall take all feasible measures in order that children who have not attained the age of 15 years do not take a direct part in hostilities and, in particular, they shall refrain from recruiting them into their armed forces. In recruiting among those persons who have attained the age of 15 years but who have not attained the age of 18 years, the Parties to the conflict shall endeavour to give priority to those who areoldest.

(3) If, in exceptional cases, despite the provisions of paragraph 2, children who have not attained the age of 15 years take a direct part in hostilities and fall into the power of an adverse Party, they shall continue to benefit from the special protection accorded by this Article, whether or not they are prisoners of war."

It has been argued that there are several loopholes in this article. Firstly, the phrase "take all feasible measures" is said to be a diplomatic compromise that permitted states party much freedom to elude the general prohibition. The expression - "take all necessary measures" – recommended by the International Committee of the Red Cross was not accepted. Another proposal put forward by the Red Cross was banning the voluntary enrolment of children, however, even this was dropped.

Secondly, no minimum age limit was mentioned to define the term "children" in art 77 (2). It is said that this was a deliberate act, partly to shun the debate regarding the minimum age for recruitment and partly to accommodate the diversity of national laws defining the concept of childhood. However, the omission of any definition of childhood resulted in ambiguity that could be easily exploited by the states for their own self-interest.

Finally, under the Protocol, states parties were required only to ensure that children did not take a "direct" part in hostilities. Consequently, this triggered a debate about what constituted "direct" or "indirect" participation. The term "direct" referred to some sort of active participation in armed conflict alongside the regular armed forces. According to

the International Committee of the Red Cross, it meant a causal connection between the act of participation and its immediate result in military operations. Therefore, "direct" participation implied any attempt to kill, harm and capture enemy soldiers or any attempt to damage their installations. Perhaps it also included spying, artillery spotting and conveying arms and equipment to regular troops. On the other hand, "indirect" participation perhaps referred to support activities, such as domestic activities, manufacturing munitions and gathering and transmitting information. As far as the prohibition of only direct participation is concerned, there exists considerable evidence that children who are initially recruited for support activities, later often become active combatants. Further, it may be argued that through any degree of participation – direct or indirect- children may be exposed to danger during hostilities.

The Protocol II deals with non-international armed conflicts, or conflicts within the borders of a state. This Protocol spells out the fundamental rights of all who are not direct participants in the combat, such as, the right to life, liberty and security of person. It also makes provision of special care and aid that is to be given to children for their normal childhood. This Protocol applies to those conflicts which do not come under Protocol I. These are defined as conflicts between governmental armed forces or state armies and "organised armed groups" which operate under a responsible command structure and exercise sufficient control over a portion of a state's territory to enable them to carry out sustained military operations.

Protocol II lists some fundamental protections for non-combatants including the recruitment of children. Article 4(3) provides that: Children shall be provided with the care and aid they require, and in particular:

(c) children who have not attained the age of 15 years shall neither be recruited in the armed forces or groups nor allowed to take part in hostilities;

(d) the special protection provided by this Article to children who have not attained the

age of 15 shall remain applicable to them if they take a direct part in hostilities despite the provisions of sub-paragraph (c) and are captured.

During the drafting of this article, again there was no consensus on the age of a child soldier, a number of delegations considered age 15 too young while others did not agree on age18, thus making it impossible to "raise the age" of a child soldier to 18. However, it is important to note that the Protocol II went beyond the scope of all earlier treaties by prohibiting all levels of recruitment of children in armed conflict. It provided that children may not "take part in hostilities", proscribing all forms of recruitment, including voluntary participation. During this time, there was consensus that children attained a certain maturity at the age of 15, however there was no agreement on a specific definition of the child. Under the fourth Geneva Convention, special protection ends at the age of 15. Article 77 prohibits child participation in armed conflict below that age.

According to Cohn and Goodwin '[t]he text reflects the wish of governments to avoid entering into absolute obligations with regard to the voluntary participation of children in hostilities' (Fontana1997). Article 77 refers only to direct participation and it is not quite clear whether recruitment, as used in this Article also refers to forced recruitment, voluntary enlistment or both. One of the major flaws of IHL is that it does not sufficiently address current armed conflicts. Most conflicts today where children are used as combatants are internal armed conflicts. The Protocol II does not 'apply to situations of internal disturbances and tensions, such as riots, isolated and sporadic acts of violence and other acts of a similar nature, as not being armed conflicts.' Thus, this protocol basically applies only to internal armed conflicts of a very high intensity. It is also important to note that there is no monitoring body in IHL to ensure the respect of humanitarian norms in times of conflict. Further, most states engaged in armed conflicts have not ratified Protocol II. Only if the state has ratified the Protocol, will its non-government entities will be bound by it. Since most conflicts are internal and below the Protocol II threshold, the provisions of IHL are insufficient to prevent the practice of child soldiering. Fontana argues, however, some progress has been made with the Protocol II which relates to non-international armed conflicts.

After a decade, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. It was the first legally binding international instrument to incorporate the full range of human rights – civil, cultural, economic, political and social. The Convention sets out the specific rights of children in 54 articles and two Optional Protocols. It spells out the basic human rights of children which include: the right to survival; to develop to the fullest; to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life. The basic principles of the Convention are non-discrimination; devotion to the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and respect for the views of the child. Under Article 45 of the Convention, the UNICEF is required to promote and protect the rights of the child by supporting the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, to which the states are supposed to report progress every five years. Till date 192 states have ratified the CRC, it being the most rapidly and widely ratified human rights treaty in history.

Article 38 of the Convention deals with armed conflict, however as far as protection from recruitment is concerned it does not have much to offer. Although the UNCRC defines the child as a person below the age of 18, Article 38 maintains the 15 years age criterion for child soldiers. Article 38 provides that:

'States Parties undertake to respect and to ensure respect for rules of international humanitarian law applicable to them in armed conflicts which are relevant to the child. States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that persons who have not attained the age of 15 years do not take a direct part in hostilities. States Parties shall refrain from recruiting any person who has not attained the age of 15 years into their armed forces. In recruiting among those persons who have attained the age of 15 years but who have not attained the age of 18 years, States Parties shall endeavour to give priority to those who are the oldest. In accordance with their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect the civilian population in armed conflicts, States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure protection and care of children who are affected by an armed conflict.'

Fontana writes, 'rather than retake the provisions of Protocols I and II and maintaining the distinction between the types of armed conflict – Protocol I: inter-State conflicts and wars of national liberation; Protocol II: intra-State conflict of high intensity – Article 38 merges both provisions, improves upon Protocol I, but is less progressive than Protocol II. It requires state action only in cases of direct participation' (Fontana1997). Fontana further states, the main drawback of the UNCRC is that the non-government agencies are not bound by its obligations. Due to the absence of a derogation clause it is not quite clear which obligations a state will have to continue to observe during combat, albeit internal or international. It is also unclear as to which obligations the state will have to observe during civil strife and internal violence beneath the Article 3 threshold. She continues, the absence of a derogation clause can also result in an extensive interpretation. Article 39 relates to the rehabilitation of children that have experienced traumatic events or suffering due to armed conflicts. It is a necessary correlate to Article 38.

Another landmark development was the adoption of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), which considers conscription, enlistment or use in hostilities of children below 15 years of age in both international and internal armed conflicts a war crime. The International Criminal Court (ICC) was founded in 2002 as a permanent tribunal to prosecute crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. Some countries, including the United States, Russia, China and India are opposed to the ICC and have expressed concern about weak procedural safeguards, politically-motivated prosecutions and interference with state sovereignty. The ICC has been actively engaged in investigations of certain cases which include the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda and Darfur. Recently in January 2007, the ICC initiated its first trial, charging former Congolese rebel Thomas Lubanga of using child combatants.

Further, in August 1999, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1261 which strongly condemned the effects of war on children. This resolution prohibits the targeting and the recruitment of children in combat, however it incorporates the principles of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, according to which 'conscripting or enlisting children under the age of 15 into the national armed forces or using them to participate

actively in hostilities' is considered a war crime, thus prohibiting only those who are below 15 years of age. Under the International Labour Organisation's Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, adopted in 1999, forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict, is regarded as one of the predefined worst forms of child labour. In terms of the Worst Forms of Child Labour Recommendation ratifying countries should ensure that forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict is a criminal offence, and also provide for other criminal, civil or administrative remedies to ensure the effective enforcement of such national legislation [Article III (12) to (14)].

In January 2000, states across the globe agreed on a new international treaty to end the use of children as combatants. The new protocol was adopted unanimously by the United Nations General Assembly in May, 2000, and opened for signature in early June. It came into force in 2002 and is known as the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (which has been ratified by every government except the United States and Somalia) generally defines a child as any person under the age of eighteen. However, as mentioned previously, in the case of armed conflict, the convention lays down the lower age of fifteen as the minimum age for recruitment and participation in armed conflict. The new protocol helps to correct this anomaly. The objective of the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict 'is to seek limits on the use of children in armed conflict and, particularly, to raise the minimum age limit for recruitment and to limit the actual participation of persons under 18 years in hostilities.' As of April 2004, 115 states had signed it, and 71 states had ratified it. With the Optional Protocol, according to Otunnu, "there is now 'a universal standard' to aim for and a rallying point for the international community to really tackle those parties that continue to use children as weapons of war" (Disarmament Diplomacy 2002).

Key provisions of the Protocol:

- Participation in Hostilities: Governments must take all feasible measures to ensure that members of their armed forces that are under the age of eighteen do not take a direct part in hostilities.

- Conscription: Governments must not conscript (compulsorily recruit) any persons under the age of eighteen.

- Non-governmental Armed Groups: Rebel or other non-governmental armed groups are prohibited from recruiting under-18s or using them in hostilities. Governments are required to criminalise such practices and take other measures to prevent the recruitment and use of children by such groups.

- Voluntary recruitment: Governments must raise their minimum age for voluntary recruitment beyond the current minimum of fifteen, and must deposit a binding declaration stating the minimum age they will respect. (In practice, this means the minimum age for voluntary recruitment is sixteen). To ensure that combatants below the age of eighteen years are voluntary, the protocol requires that:

    - Such recruitment is genuinely voluntary
    - Such recruitment is carried out with the informed consent of the person's parents or legal guardians
    - Such persons (potential recruits) are fully informed of the duties involved in such military service, and that
    - Such persons provide reliable proof of age prior to acceptance into national military service

All of these conditions have to be met since they are cumulative. However, it should be noted that the protocol applies only to that state which is a party to it. Brett and Specht argue, "the Optional Protocol safeguards fall into two groups: those that are clear and relatively precise, such as the requirements of proof of age and of parental or other legal consent; and those that are vaguer, or in the case of being 'genuinely voluntary', self-

evidently circular" (Brett and Specht 2004: 115). They continue, 'ILO standards and their application over many years are especially relevant and helpful in relation to these two, less precise criteria in the Optional Protocol' (Brett and Specht 2004).

- Implementation: Governments must demobilise children recruited or used in violation of the protocol, and provide appropriate rehabilitation and reintegration assistance.

- Ratification: All governments can sign and ratify the protocol, regardless of whether or not they have ratified the underlying Convention on the Rights of the Child.

- Monitoring: Governments must submit a report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child within two years of ratifying the protocol, providing comprehensive information on the measures it has taken to implement the protocol. Thereafter, follow-up reports are made every five years.

Rachel Harvey states, 'a positive aspect of the Optional Protocol is that, as with the CRC, it will apply to all levels of conflict. Therefore the OP not only increases the protection in terms of recruitment for children but also applies when Protocol II cannot protect them' (Harvey 2000). Recently, in February 2007, a conference in Paris was held which focused on the plight of child soldiers. Fifty eight head of states present at the conference committed themselves to ending the practice of recruiting child combatants. The United Nations children's agency UNICEF, which sponsored the Paris meeting, estimates that more than 250,000 children were recruited or used by armed forces in 2006. The Paris Commitments will complement the International Criminal Court, UN bodies and other political and legal mechanisms which are working towards preventing exploitation of and violence against children. The "Paris Principles" incorporate the spirit of the ground-breaking "Cape Town Principles" which were agreed at a symposium in South Africa in 1997.

PARIS PRINCIPLES 2007

- States should tackle reasons why children join armed groups
- No amnesty for those who commit crimes against children
- Child soldiers who commit crimes are victims not criminals
- Countries must strive to prevent, protect and reintegrate children
- The needs of girl soldiers must be addressed
- Efforts must be made to reunite scattered families

Amongst the 58 countries that signed the "Paris Principles" were 10 of the 12 states where the United Nations discovered child soldiers often being recruited on a "massive scale". Among the countries that signed the document were a number of African states with a high number of child combatants, including Angola, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and Uganda. However, this document unfortunately carries just moral and symbolic rather than judicial weight.

Conclusion

Overall, the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child represents a significant improvement of existing international law on child soldiers. However, there are certain weaknesses in this Protocol:

Firstly, it provides a different standard for armed groups from that of states parties. Under the Optional Protocol states parties are required to take all 'feasible measures' to ensure that members of their armed forces who have not attained the age of 18 years do not take a direct part in hostilities, however as far as the armed groups are concerned, the Protocol states that they may not 'under any circumstances' use in hostilities, persons under the age of 18 years. As mentioned previously, the Protocol provision relating to all 'feasible measures' was interpreted by the United Kingdom which ratified the convention in the following manner -

"The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland will take all feasible measures to ensure that members of its armed forces who have not attained the age of 18

years do not take a direct part in hostilities. The United Kingdom understands that article 1 of the Optional Protocol 'would not exclude the deployment of members of its armed forces under the age of 18 to take a direct part in hostilities' where: -

a) there is a genuine military need to deploy their unit or ship to an area in which hostilities are taking place; and

b) by reason of the nature and urgency of the situation:-

i) it is not practicable to withdraw such persons before deployment; or

ii) to do so would undermine the operational effectiveness of their ship or unit, and thereby put at risk the successful completion of the military mission and/or the safety of other personnel."

Thus, the phrase 'feasible measures' leaves much space and can be widely interpreted as well as misused by the states parties.

Secondly, it may be argued that there is a certain double standard attached to the Optional Protocol as it prohibits recruitment of children who are below 18 years of age but permits voluntary enlistment of under 18s. This provision can be easily misused by both the state parties as well as the armed groups since there is often no clear line between forced and voluntary recruitment. There have been several cases when young people have volunteered to take up arms, however it is important to acknowledge that not all volunteers are truly voluntary. Or as Brett and Specht ask - how voluntary is voluntary recruitment? Often coercive mechanisms are used by both armed groups and armed forces to persuade young people to join up.

Thirdly, Article 1 of the Optional Protocol states that 'States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that members of their armed forces who have not attained the age of 18 years do not take a direct part in hostilities.' This provision only mentions direct participation, however indirect participation in combat or non-combatant activities may also expose children to enemy attack.

Considering the evident weaknesses in the existing international law on child soldiers, it is vital to strengthen it so that this horrific phenomenon can be effectively dealt with. However, it is important to acknowledge the fact that these international laws do not hold much importance in many remote areas or deep interiors of the world, where people are not cognizant of them or where these laws are neither understood nor implemented. Therefore, the first step towards countering this phenomenon is to disseminate information and knowledge about the international law at the national as well as the local level.

The next step is to reconcile international laws with local understandings. As Honwana puts it, 'International conventions have to be understood within the context of local world views and meaning systems. This is what will allow them to be recognised, accepted and enforced at the local level, where protection of children from armed conflicts is greatly needed' (Honwana 2001: 140 cited in Chesterman 2001).Thus, it is also imperative to consider local and cultural norms about notions of childhood and child protection when dealing with young people who are or were engaged in hostilities. The interaction and reconciliation between the global and the local levels is likely to produce adequate strategies which in turn will engender an environment appropriate for the effective protection of young people against the atrocities of armed conflict.

CHAPTER 4

RECRUITMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN COMBAT

The recruitment of children and youth in combat evokes a number of questions- whether they are forced into the militias, are they coerced into joining up or if they join by "volition". This chapter seeks to explore these questions in detail while discussing various methods of recruitment- forced, compulsory, voluntary and coercive. The recruitment of young people into combat is usually meticulous, efficient and systematic. It has been observed that various militias adopt obvious similarities and patterns. Even in the cases where young people volunteer to join up, the systematic nature of the recruitment and indoctrination process is still prevalent. The process begins when the armed militias attempt to sever family, community and any other ties and former associations of the child who is in the process of adopting new roles and new identitie(s).

Forced Recruitment

Children and youth are often recruited into the military through coercion, either through compulsory recruitment or forced recruitment. Both governments as well as the rebel forces have made use of children in combat. Compulsory recruitment, or conscription, consists of the legal obligation of nationals of a country, which may include those under the age of 18, to perform military service. Forced recruitment, as practiced by both government and opposition armed groups, entails the use of threat of or actual physical violence on the children or someone close to them. A number of reasons for the preference for young people in combat have been pointed out by the human rights workers and researchers in the field of child soldiering. Ilene Cohn and Guy S. Goodwin-gill argue, reasons behind forced recruitment include population control, ethnic, class or racial discrimination (Cohn and Goodwin-gill 1994: 72). It has been widely argued that one of the major factors for the recruitment of child soldiers is manpower shortage, followed by their level of obedience towards the commanders and their fearlessness in the face of the gravest danger.

Jimmie Briggs states, many military commanders across the world consider young people attractive recruits as they can be easily trained to perform the most repulsive orders, 'they are able to tote most of today's lightweight weapons, and they can be found in abundance when adult males become scarce. He remarks, the sad truth is that, under the right circumstances, children are capable of the most horrific acts' (Briggs 2005).

Manpower shortage

One of the fundamental reasons for recruiting child combatants is shortage of manpower. Protracted conflict results in the depletion of fighting forces, this in turn often incites conflict group leaders to deploy children and youth to sustain war. Rebel groups and guerrilla forces are usually the first to resort to this option, since they lack administrative means for conscripting members of the general population, but, when governments are in a desperate need of replenishing their armed forces, they too give in to the same temptation. Mwizi Mthali of the TransAfrica Forum argues, 'long-running regional conflicts, poverty and an AIDS epidemic that has depleted the number of young men available to fight have made children and the military the strangest of bedfellows' (Macklin 2000). Wessells notes, when governmental armed forced experience manpower shortage, they may find it convenient not to search too carefully for the accurate birth date of a conscript. As far as rebel factions are concerned, they rarely have use for birth records (Wessells 1997).

In many countries, children are often forcibly conscripted. The law might require citizens over a prescribed age to participate in the military, however, if administrative systems are dysfunctional or weak or if there is depletion of the adult fighting forces, lawful conscription can give way to lawless press-ganging. During the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for instance, although the state was formally committed to recruiting only adults, the government army (the Forces Armées Congolaises) was enlisting under-age recruits. Similarly, in Ethiopia in the 1980s, the government of the Dergue regime periodically seized young people from city streets, schools and marketplaces without any consideration for their age.

In the wake of the post 1983 riots in Sri Lanka and the intensification of the ethnic conflict children were being recruited into the LTTE's Baby Brigade and with the intervention of the Indian Peace-Keeping Forces (IPKF) in 1987 they were integrated with adult units. As the conflict dragged on, the LTTE experienced shortages of manpower which in turn resulted in the recruitment of young boys in the 9 to 12 years age group. The recruitment of young boys increased again in the 1990s, when conflict erupted for the second time. Further, as the government administration in the North came under the control of the LTTE, it increasingly relied on child combatants to sustain its fighting forces. During the civil war, legislation for systematic and fair conscription was not considered important or 'necessary'. In West Asia, during the first Gulf War between Iraq and Iran, when Iran began to face manpower shortages, Iran's President Ali-Akbar Rafsanjani, in 1984 declared that 'all Iranians from 12 to 72 should volunteer for the Holy War' (Singer 2005). Large numbers of school children were subjected to manipulation, they were indoctrinated in the glory of martyrdom, and sent into combat.

In the case of Britain, Armstrong states, 'shorter gaps between tours of duty, concerns over equipment, resentment at the poor state of accommodation and rising military death tolls in Iraq and Afghanistan are producing a retention crisis in the British military' (Armstrong 2007). In 2006, 14,000 personnel left the army and thereafter only little over 12, 000 enlisted in the military. Armstrong argues, this year's (2007) recruitment target - 8,500 soldiers – seems unlikely to be met. Hit by the Iraq crisis, the British army is enlisting teenagers and school children.

Young impressionable children

According to Cohn and Goodwin-gill, through brutal indoctrination young, impressionable children can be turned into the fiercest fighters. Similarly, McConnan claims that 'the comparative agility of children and their small size, and the ease with which they can be physically and psychologically controlled, are regarded as an advantage by military commanders' (McConnan 2000). Further, a relief worker in Liberia told Human Rights Watch (HRW) that 'I think they use children because the

children don't understand the risks. And children are easier to control and manipulate. If the commanding officer tells a child to do something, he does it. In this society, children are raised to follow instruction' (HRW 2000). Naomi Cahn, referring to Africa suggests, armed factions have recruited increasing number of children since they are viewed as 'ideologically malleable and highly adaptable' (Cahn 2005).

Ilene Cohn and Goodwin-gill argue, evidence suggests that the Mozambican resistance (RENAMO) which systematically practiced forced recruitment preferred children to adult combatants. As a RENAMO deserter forcibly recruited at age ten explained, 'RENAMO does not use many adults to fight because they are not good fighters....kids have more stamina, are better at surviving in the bush, do not complain, and follow directions' (Cohn and Goodwin-gill 1994: 26). A typical RENAMO recruitment practice involved taking a boy soldier back to his village and forcing him to kill someone known to him, this had the effect of alienating the child from his family and community. Such children may develop a dependency relationship with their captors, eventually even coming to identify with their cause (Cohn and Goodwin gill 1994: 27).

In the case of the LTTE and other militant outfits in Sri Lanka, several authors have argued that the reason for their preference for young people is that they can be easily molded and trained to kill the enemy and also carry out suicide missions and human wave attacks. Further, they are believed to have more stamina and are capable of surviving in the bush. Daya Somasundaram referring to Sri Lanka observes, during their formative period children are particularly vulnerable and their involvement in war causes permanent scarring of their developing personality. Military leaders mostly prefer younger soldiers because they are less likely to question orders from adults and are often claimed to be fearless. Further their small size and agility makes them ideal for hazardous assignments (Somasundaram 2002).

Cost-effective

Several authors argue that recruiting and maintaining children is cost-effective. In Singer's opinion the recruitment and use of children is viewed by conflict group leaders

as a low cost and efficient way for their organisation to mobilise and generate force. They are often enlisted for hazardous tasks like laying and clearing landmines and handling toxic weapons. Children perform all these tasks at lower costs. It has been estimated that expenditure on child combatants is less than half than what is incurred on their adult counter-parts. According to some commanders children often slow down operations, are usually eager to take excessive risks as these commanders believe that child combatants are unable to understand the dangers they face, however, many of them prefer children to adults due to their level of obedience and willingness to follow the most unacceptable orders (Wessells 1997). Adolescents are often required to carry out suicide missions, as some commanders regard them as mentally predisposed for such duty. In countries like Sri Lanka and Burma/Myanmar, child soldiers were given drugs-such as amphetamines and tranquilizers-to blunt fear and pain and then used for "human wave" attacks that led to massive casualties. In Guatemala, underage soldiers were used as scouts and land mine "detectors" (Wessells 1997).

Singer notes, armed factions like Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad have pulled children into the 'terrorism game'. According to Time Magazine, more than 30 suicide bombings since 2000 have been carried out by children and many juvenile al-Qaeda terrorists have been detained at the U.S. military prison at Guantanamo Bay in the special "Camp Iguana" facility. Singer notes that even 13 year olds have been deployed as suicide bombers in the Palestinian conflict, child suicide bombers have also been used in the Sri Lankan conflict, and in Colombia the guerillas recruited a nine-year-old boy to bomb a polling place in 1997 (Singer 2005).

Small arms

Amnesty International points out that the easy availability of small, lightweight weaponry these days has led to the increasing use of children as combatants. Several commentators argue that previously children and youth were recruited in smaller numbers and their involvement in combat was mostly restricted to indirect combat activities and sexual slavery as they could not operate weapons necessary for armed combat. Now the proliferation of illicit small arms has facilitated the recruitment of children in combat.

McManimon points out, use of children in conflict is made easier by millions of small arms and assault weapons floating across the globe. Due to illegal arms trafficking and poor monitoring of the legal trade, almost anyone can acquire these weapons and put them into the hands of young people. These weapons are quite inexpensive—an AK-47 and two clips of ammunition can be bought for $12 on the Mozambican border. Singer argues, 'in Sudan an AK-47 costs the same as a chicken, in northern Kenya the same as a goat. Small arms represent less than 2 percent of the cost of the global-arms trade, but are responsible for about 90 percent of contemporary war casualties' (Bhaba 2005).

Moreover, they are simple, easy to maintain and can be effortlessly operated by even a 10-year old. Cohn and Goodwin-gill argue, young people have trained for combat throughout history, however, their direct participation was often limited due to the weight of the weapons as they were bulky and difficult to handle. But today with the advancement in arms technology young boys and girls can operate common weapons like M16 and AK47 assault rifles with much ease. Cohn and Goodwin-gill assert, 'more children can be more useful in battle with less training than ever before, putting them in more danger and making them more dangerous to their adversaries- a factor that makes them attractive as recruits' (Cohn and Goodwin-gill 1994: 23). Briggs states, child soldiering is not a new phenomenon, however, children and youth are more noticeable now due to the increased availability of automatic weapons. Small arms such as AK 47 assault rifle and an M16 are much easier for young people to handle. This is also true for grenade tubes and shoulder-fired rocket launchers (Briggs 2005: 45-46).

Coercive or Abusive Recruitment

Cohn and Goodwin-gill point out, 'coercive or abusive recruitment covers those situations where there is no proof of direct physical threat or intimidation, but the evidence supports the inference of involuntary enlistment' (Cohn and Goodwin-gill 1994: 28). They further point out that the vast majority of young soldiers are not forced into taking up arms, but are subject to many subtly manipulative motivations and pressures. Cohn and Goodwin-gill rightly argue that the motivations behind volunteerism lie deep in

the roots of the conflict and in the socio-economic and political issues defining the lives of these volunteers.

Rachel Brett and Irma Specht raise the question- how voluntary is voluntary recruitment? According to Brett and Specht their research shows, many young people define themselves as volunteers although it is clear that objectively they had no real choice. According to Cohn and Goodwin-gill, a very fuzzy line exists between voluntary and coerced participation, a child may be susceptible to certain types of pressures coming from certain people. Wessells remarks that coercion aside, young people may join up for security reasons, a pressing need for unaccompanied children who are vulnerable to almost all types of threat. Desperation for food or medical care often attract children and youth towards the military life as sometimes they are left with no option but to serve the armed forces or the armed groups to earn decent wages to support themselves or their families. For these reasons, he argues, "it is meaningless to ever speak of children's involvement in the military as strictly 'voluntary'" (Wessells 1997).

Recruitment of Girl Child Soldiers

In the year 2004, a groundbreaking Canadian study on girls in war was launched in Montreal by Rights and Democracy and the United Nations. This study which was based on over three years research, with special focus on the girl soldiers in conflicts in Mozambique, Uganda and Sierra Leone challenged the conventional view of girls in war. Susan McKay and Dyan Mazurana pointed out that girls are not just victims of violence and abuse but also perpetrators. Their research throws light on why young women and girls would make a choice to participate in combat and engage in acts of violence, and also how they can be manipulated into joining the military life through propaganda and forcible recruitment.

Brett and Specht point out, as with young soldiers in general, attention has been drawn mainly to the problem of those girls who have been abducted, however, there are several instances where a large number of girls have in fact volunteered. Even in cases like Sierra

Leone and Sri Lanka where most girls were abducted, some girls took up arms by choice. They further observe that due to little in-depth research, 'there is insufficient evidence to tell how many girls volunteered in such circumstances. Furthermore, girls in these situations may consider it to be in their own interest (retrospectively) to let it be assumed that they, like the majority, were abducted' (Brett and Specht 2004: 85). Girls are often reluctant to identify themselves as having participated in combat due to the negative repercussions this might have as far as their reintegration into civilian life and possible prospects including marriage are concerned. Further, their involvement in combat is 'usually countercultural and is often associated with perceptions of them being sexually active', observe Brett and Specht. As compared to boys, girls in many conflicts are recruited as sexual slaves, however, this is not to overlook the fact that in a number of situations they have also served as frontline combatants.

Now the following section sheds light on the motivations for volunteerism or factors which contribute to the child soldier crisis. Broadly, the main factors that contribute to the involvement of children and youth in conflict are war/militarisation of daily life, structural violence (poverty, education and unemployment), family; and additional factors include peer groups and other social influences.

War/Militarisation of Daily Life

Brett and Specht argue, the presence of armed violence influences young people to use armed violence themselves. It engenders a sense of insecurity, and an atmosphere where violent behavior is considered legitimate and is linked to the ready availability of weapons (Brett and Specht 2004: 12). Militarisation of daily life which includes heavily armed policemen or soldiers patrolling the streets, military censorship of social life, military personnel occupying high government posts, often results in a young person's decision to take up arms. In some countries such as Sudan and Colombia, armed conflicts have lasted for a very long time resulting in cycles of violence that transcend generations. 'Violence and aggression are often the leitmotif of socialisation processes of child soldiers, rendering them at risk for violent behaviour, and making them an easy target for manipulation by unscrupulous guerrilla leaders' (Russell and Godziak 2006).

Afghanistan has a long history of violence, because of security problems most Afghans including young people have always carried weapons. For many young volunteers there is no other way but to enter war to defend themselves and their families. During the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s, most armed groups or factions began importing military weapons. As one volunteer remarked, 'instead of toys we had lots of weapons' (Brett and Specht 2004: 13). An extensive command structure down to the level of village commanders was created by the *mujaheddin.* Young boys, mainly teenagers were frequently recruited by the commanders. Girls were enlisted for sexual exploitation and some commanders even had "dancing boys" for their private entertainment. Wessells argues, "Afghan children learned about violence at an early age, if not through firsthand experience then through schools, where math was taught according to formulae such as 'One dead Russian plus one dead Russian equals two dead Russians'" (Wessells 2006).

Young people continued to be recruited by the militias as the fighting broke out between the Afghan warlords in the aftermath of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. In 1995, the Islamist Fundamentalist Taliban came to power, which oppressed not only women but also various ethnic and religious groups and fighting against the Taliban persisted, particularly in northeastern provinces, the stronghold of the Northern Alliance. For the sustenance of their fighting forces, the Taliban recruited a large number of young people from *madrassas*, including those in Pakistan (Wessells 2006).

In the case of Sierra Leone, living in a context of war a number of volunteers joined the rebels or armed forces, because they had no other choice. War in Sierra Leone resulted in closure of schools, exacerbated economic and political tensions and led to militarisation of daily life where being a part of the armed forces or armed groups was both economically secure and safer than to lead a civilian's life. The conflict led to the militarisation and polarisation of the economy as state revenues and diamonds (the two major centers of economic activity) came under the control of opposing armed forces. Rosen notes, the diamond areas on or near the Liberian border were under the control of the rebels. The political ties between the RUF rebels and the government of Liberia ensured that rebel mining and selling of diamonds delivered a steady supply of weapons.

'Rebel control of the diamond fields also disrupted the diverse patronage system that was the original means for attracting young people to the APC strongmen. The RUF stepped in to fill the vacuum' (Rosen 2005: 85). Due to its hold over diamonds, the RUF was able to attract young men. State revenues – aside from those obtained from diamonds – were now used for the country's growing militarisation. By 1992, the Sierra Leonean economy was in a miserable state and thus enlisting in the army was commonly viewed as the only option left to a young man through which he could earn a decent living. During this period, protests took place not against war but were initiated by those young people who had been turned down when they volunteered to join up.

In Sri Lanka, it was in 1987 that the LTTE's militarisation of education in northern Sri Lanka intensified, when it experienced shortage of manpower. Daya Somasundaram observes that more recently the LTTE has introduced compulsory military-type training in areas under its control for the purpose of instilling military thinking in the minds of people. Everyone, beginning from the age of about 14, is required to train in military drill, use of arms, and mock battles together with military tasks such as digging bunkers and manning sentry posts. Only those who have been trained are entitled to government rations, travel and other benefits provided by the Tigers.

The Tigers usually demand that each family in the district give at least one child to them for the cause of liberation of the Tamils in Sri Lanka. They use several means to gain the sympathy of young people such as distributing cassettes of patriotic songs, displaying poster pictures of dead cadres all over, organising photo exhibitions on atrocities committed by the Sri Lanka Army, commemoration of events such as Hero's day and incorporation of the LTTE's version of history in school curricula with compulsory tests on them. Other ways which the Tigers employ to lure children and youth include parading young soldier units before school children, broadcasting Rambo-like TV movies of live combat training and actual combat, highlighting the glamour and prestige associated with a career in the LTTE's military ranks. Even parks and playgrounds in the LTTE-held areas are designed in ways which give a sense of a battleground. In the year 1990, a common picture visible everywhere in Jaffna, was of 'an LTTE soldier holding

children on either side and walking towards a hill top where a gun was planted upside down. This symbolically portrayed the vision of the LTTE' (Kumar 2001: 33).

In the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Amnesty International states, 'Since 1996, the DRC conflict has led to a total militarisation of the country with more than 20 armed groups, tribal and community militias, paramilitary groups and government forces committing serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, and destroying all basic socio-economic infrastructures' (Amnesty International 2006). In December 2002, a peace agreement was signed which led to the establishment of a transitional power-sharing government in June 2003. However, widespread human rights violations, ethnic divisions and violence continued in large areas of eastern DRC and large numbers of Congolese people continued to die every day from the violence or from starvation and preventable diseases, brought about by the insecurity, displacement and lack of access to humanitarian or medical aid. In the provinces of North-Kivu, South-Kivu, large parts of Orientale (notably Ituri district), Katanga, and Maniema, people continue routinely to suffer killings, rape, torture, forced displacement and looting by armed militias and armed forces (Amnesty International 2006).

In Colombia the culture of arms is so prevalent that some see it as unnatural not to have or like weapons. Colombian conflict has shattered many rural communities and displaced approximately two million people since 1985. Further instances of militarisation of daily life include El Salvador in the late 1970s and 1980s, the rural highlands of Guatemala and the townships of South Africa. Further, referring to the participation of children and youth in Chhatisgarh in India, founder-secretary of Control Arms Foundation of India (CAFI) Binalakshmi Nepram remarked, factors such as lack of opportunities, poverty, dearth of recreation opportunities and curiosity compel children into joining armed factions. 'The situation of abnormality has become a part of conflict zones, where there is constant tension because of *bandhs* (strikes). Rebels share the feel of a weapon with kids. They allow them to touch and handle it. A nine or 10 year-old gets attracted and is eventually using weapons for killing people,' she added (John 2007).

Structural / Physical Violence

Poverty

Poverty is frequently cited as the cause of child soldiering. It is a strong contributory factor. This applies both in war situations as well as more peaceful circumstances where young people are recruited by the armed forces. Poverty affects the ability of young people to access schooling which in turn also affects or limits the economic and employment opportunities for these young people and all these aspects of general poverty tend to be exacerbated by war. In the case of the DRC, Brett and Specht point out, a study of demobilised child soldiers in a transit center in the country found that 61 percent of the 300 children surveyed said that their family did not have any income, and more than half had at least six siblings. 'Though this does not imply that poverty in itself explains why young people take up arms, but it is definitely a strong contributory factor,' (Brett and Specht 2004: 14).

Sierra Leone is a case in point where poverty, lack of education and job opportunities, the personal enrichment of the elite, the failure to use the wealth of Sierra Leone to develop a robust market economy led to the alienation of youth. The origins of the RUF lie in the aspirations of alienated and homeless children and youth. It recruited alienated youth into the political struggle for resources and power. The rebels simultaneously empowered and exploited children's youth and energy. For many, as mentioned before, being a part of the army or the armed groups was both economically secure and safer than to lead a civilian's life. In the case of Colombia, Human Rights Watch Report (2003) reported, at least one of every four irregular combatants in Colombia's civil war is below eighteen years of age. These children mostly belong to poor families. 'They fight against other children whose background is very similar to their own, and whose economic situation and future prospects are equally bleak. With much in common in civilian life, children become the bitterest of enemies in war' (HRW 2003).

Lack of educational opportunities, lack of jobs in rural and marginal areas, social exclusion and mistreatment are major factors which compel children to abandon their

homes and seek a better life with the guerillas. Nearly 83 percent of children enlist in the illegal armed factions voluntarily. The war essentially 'generates a leaning towards a culture of violence', particularly among children who have known anything but violence (Briggs 2005: 43). After questioning Khmer refugees at the Thai border, Neil Boothby came to a conclusion that lack of food and protection resulted in many Cambodian children joining armed groups between1979-89.

Education and Unemployment

Due to militarisation of daily life or the presence of war children are unable to gain education and learn useful skills. This in turn leads to their marginalisation from the mainstream society. Several commentators and human rights activists note that as long as young people view themselves as outcasts, they are more likely to resort to warfare. These trends were observed in the UN Secretary-General's 2001 Report on the Prevention of Armed Conflict, which stated that: 'Young people with limited education and few employment opportunities often provide fertile recruiting ground for parties to a conflict. Their lack of hope for the future can fuel disaffection with society and make them susceptible to the blandishments of those who advocate armed conflict.'

However, it should be noted that the presence or absence of education both can influence a young person's decision to join an armed force or an armed group. Many young people who do not have access to education- whether due to poverty or closure of schools or are excluded from education because of bad behavior have to find something else to do. Lack of adequate schooling limits employment choices. During armed conflict, armed groups and armed forces provide alternate forms of economic activity for young people.

The quality of the education system may also motivate young people to take up arms (Brett and Specht 2004: 17). For instance, in the case of South Africa, elements of the educational system became a major factor in the political mobilisation of youth, particularly in the townships. These included the poor quality of the education that was available, the difficulty of access for those in poverty, corporal punishment, and the Bantu Education Act introducing Afrikaans as the language of tuition. For many young

people it was the most immediate impact of the apartheid system. This finally led these young people to become active through SRCs (Student Representative Council) (Brett and Specht 2004: 17).

Schools are also used as recruiting grounds. For instance in the case of both Afghanistan and Pakistan, educational institutions (*Madrasas*) are used as recruiting grounds by Afghan militant groups and other armed factions. In the United Kingdom, educational institutions are used to promote recruitment to the armed forces, sometimes there is a close link between the army and the school. Further, for many adolescents, education that is considered unlikely to lead to employment is viewed as irrelevant and futile, and so they are more likely to drop out and may eventually end up joining an armed group for all the lucrative promises made by the rebel leaders. Unemployment is a major contributory factor in the child-soldier crisis. In Angola, both UNITA and the MPLA (parties to the conflict) resorted to the manipulation and mobilisation of youth to meet their own selfish ends. Youth of Angola could be easily mobilised and incorporated in the dynamics of war due to few opportunities available to them in terms of formal education and jobs.

In Sri Lanka, UNICEF reported that 'wide disparities in socio-economic status, employment opportunities, and access to welfare services' contributed to ethnic tensions 7and this in turn led to the outbreak of violence in the 1980s. The conflict in the country resulted in the diversion of funds away from welfare and social services to defense and internal security and weapons alone seemed to ensure the best chance of survival.

Physical violence

Many children who choose to take up arms have personally witnessed or experienced extreme forms of physical violence including death squad killings, destruction of home or property, massacres and sexual abuse. Cohn and Goodwin-gill argue, in eastern Sri Lanka, some young people join the LTTE after experiencing abuse or seeing their family being detained, beaten, abused or killed by the army. Many young girls take up arms due to the need to protect themselves from rape and sexual abuse. One of the girls interviewed by Brett and Specht from the DRC remarked, 'Home life was difficult. My

father (step father, in fact) was a heavy drinker, he didn't work. He drank and then he struck us all. Mom often went to the fields, she left us with him, and he drank and struck us. When he drank a lot, he did as if I was his wife. I left because he beat us, he drank, and then he took me as his wife. I preferred to die in the war rather than to stay at home 7and to keep on suffering' (Brett and Specht 2004: 88).

Family

The presence or absence of family both can affect a child's decision to take up arms. Children separated from their families whether temporarily or permanently are vulnerable to both forced and voluntary recruitment. The family can be identified as a major factor in the development of children and their choice of occupation (Brett and Specht 2004: 23). In some cases, involvement in the military is natural or acceptable particularly if this is combined with an ethnic, ideological or religious cause. For many volunteers in Afghanistan, the main reason for involvement in the conflict was the family environment where being a part of the military was a family tradition.

Domestic exploitation and abuse often leads a young person to take up arms. It is important to note that most girls who were interviewed by Brett and Specht gave domestic violence and abuse as the main reason for joining up. According to Erika Paez, in Colombia some 40% of the girls who join the armed groups do so mainly because of domestic abuse and exploitation. Many boys, particularly from Colombia and Sri Lanka who were interviewed by Brett and Specht for their research also gave domestic violence as a reason for volunteering (Brett and Specht 2004: 89).

Sometimes family and friends have a major influence on young people and often affect the choices they make. Family environment has a major impact on children and youth. Brett and Specht write, although the family's presence, absence, or role comes through as a major factor in the general environmental context of these young people, its importance increases as the critical moment of decision is approached. In some cases, involvement in the military life is a family tradition or an acceptable part of family life. As one person interviewed by Brett and Specht from the DRC pointed out, 'I come from a warrior's

family, as far as I remember, my father has always been in the rebellion. Sometimes lack of family acts as a push factor, those young people who are either without family or are separated from it are often vulnerable to both forced and voluntary recruitment' (Brett and Specht 2004: 24).

Additional Factors

Peer groups and other social influences

It has been widely argued that peer groups can be a major influence on adolescents since adolescence is a stage of vulnerability and identity formation. This does not imply that all young people in a group will join but if most members of a particular group are involved or are considering joining an armed group or armed force, the pressure to join is greater. 'For many Palestinians, to throw a stone is to be one of the guys; to hit an Israeli car is to become a hero; and to be arrested and not confess to having done anything is to be a man' (Cohn and Goodwin-gill 1994: 40). Cohn and Goodwin-gill argue that in Liberia the feeling that everyone is doing was predominant, thus Charles Taylor was reportedly able to recruit young people without physical force.

Rachel Brett and Irma Specht argue, adolescents account for the vast majority of the world's "child soldiers", yet were identified by Graca Machel in the UN study on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children as being the most neglected age group. According to the developmental theory of Erik Erikson, adolescence is a phase in human life during which the self-image of a young person is of much importance. It is a period when the individual is constantly focusing on the reaction of "significant others" such as family members and particularly peer groups. And as Brett and Specht argue, that he or she 'will try to adopt behaviour and/or appearance that conform to the ideal style of the moment. The impact of such influences inside armed groups or at the time of signing up should not be underestimated' (Brett and Specht 2004: 29).

According to Brett and Specht, specific features of adolescence such as 'vulnerability with the uncertainties and turbulence of physical, mental and emotional development', 'feelings of opposition and resistance to authority and power structures in the family, at

school, and at state level' often contribute to a young person's decision to take up arms. As one of the boys they interviewed from Congo-Brazzaville remarked, "I believed that I was an adult, and I had nothing else. I said to myself that it would be good for me, and then the young people who are already in the 'company', they encourage you" (Brett and Specht 2004: 30). Another boy from the United Kingdom argued, 'it was actually really nice to be able to do something on my own. At the time I was, how do you say, starting to feel more confident, more free to do what I wanted really. It was nice. It was nice to be able to go out somewhere, to find out and do what I want' (Brett and Specht 2004: 30). As Brett and Specht argue, there are various factors that could draw the adolescent towards an armed group, 'but it is the impression of invulnerability-that all difficulties can be overcome'-that influences the decision whether or not to join up.

Scholars such as Jesse Newman argue that adolescents and young people should be viewed as a specific vulnerable group in times of combat as they are 'more prone to hazard than children in situations of armed conflict.' Newman remarked, 'compared to young children, adolescent boys are particularly attractive to military leaders who recognise their physical strength and ability as assets to military endeavours' (IRIN 2007).

Politics and Ideology

Several armed conflicts are fought for the purpose of liberation and securing a separate homeland. These are often identity conflicts which mostly emphasise an ideology which makes a sharp distinction between Us and Them. Wessells notes, here the ideology glorifies the in-group or holds it in high esteem while denigrating the out-group, and honors high levels of commitment to 'the cause.' Particularly in conflicts coloured by strong religious ideologies, young people may be fanatically committed to the supposed cause perceiving it as having divine sanction. Wessells further notes that for adolescents who are trying to come to terms with their identity, ideology seems to provide a direction that is otherwise absent. In apartheid South Africa, for instance, black township youth the Young Lions- adopted an ideology of liberation, which added substance to the harsh

realities of their existence conferring 'a clear sense of identity and direction' (Wessells 1997).

In India, a young girl who joined the People's War Group (PWG) when she was just 15 years old claimed that she was inspired by the lyrics sung by a PWG squad that visited her village in Warangal district, Andhra Pradesh. Those interviewed in Naxalite-effected regions pointed out some of the reasons why young people are drawn towards the Naxalite movement. They claimed, some of these children admire and hero-worship the weapon-wielding cadre or commander of the squads that frequently visit their area. Sometimes young people from the disadvantaged and marginalised sections of the society are drawn towards the movement and end up enlisting in the militias. For some, as was the case in Bihar, due to poverty and starvation joining the rebels was the only option (Ramana 2003).

Brett and Specht assert that ethnicity and religion are not so much the cause of youth involvement in armed conflict but rather the contributory factors that are part of the political context in which these young people are born and brought up. According to Brett and Specht, the political context in which young people grow up does influence their perception. The youth central to the 1987 Palestinian Uprising were exposed to a - range of traumatic experiences by the Israeli Security Forces, including the denial of their national identity. This reinforced a sense of a common Palestinian identity as opposed to the Israeli identity. Soon children and youth resorted to violence and this culminated in the Palestinian uprising. Often political leaders exploit the differences between people and exaggerate them to spread fear for the purpose of mobilising young recruits to join in the fighting. The LTTE claims that children who join its ranks are volunteers for the cause and it would be unimaginable to 'refuse their desire to combat Sinhalese imperialism, which is the concern of all Tamils.' Cohn and Goodwin-gill argue that some young people may profess loyalty to a religious, nationalistic or political ideology in the name of which they join the rebel group. However, instances of youth indoctrination leading to enlistment abound negating any presumption of 'voluntary participation for the cause'. According to them this in fact suggests that children and youth may not possess

the cognitive capacity to think rationally about concepts like ideology and nation (Cohn and Goodwin-gill 1994).

Societal roles

According to Brett and Specht, some girls (from Democratic Republic of Congo and Philippines) who were interviewed, volunteered to fight in order to assert their equality with boys. In the Ethiopian case, Tigrean girls and women who joined the fighting forces of the TPLF rejected the cultural markers of femaleness and adopted more masculine ones. The women and girls adopted the symbols that represented a fighter identity (Veale 2005: 107 cited in McIntyre 2005).

Culture and Tradition

In some cases, culture and tradition can also play a role in influencing a young person's decision to join an armed group or an armed force. In Afghanistan, for some, family involvement in warfare has become a cultural tradition. In the case of Sierra Leone, Rosen argues the manner in which children and youth were drawn into warfare grew directly from Sierra Leone's culture of youth violence and particular history of slavery which lasted till 1929. In some cases, culture has been used to influence young people to join up. For instance in the case of the LTTE, verses from the ancient Tamil literary collection, Puranaanooru (400 poems of war and wisdom) are invoked which glorify mothers' pride in anointing their sons and sending them into combat to win honourable death. Further, Rosen argues that social and cultural boundaries between childhood and adulthood are quite different in the African society than in contemporary western society. Children constitute a large part of labour force in most African regions' subsistence, market and service economies. However, they are socially and economically marginalised and often the presence of war makes them vulnerable to joining an armed group for economic reasons.

Demographics

Several commentators observe that one of the reasons for the increase in the number of young people participating in combat can be attributed to population bulges. The 2007 World Development Report states, the number of young people will dramatically increase in the next 20 years in sub-Saharan Africa and in the Middle East (Gaza, Iraq, and Yemen). Samuel Huntington, in his book, "The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order", asserts that 'youth bulges' in Muslim societies have contributed to the radicalisation of the Muslim world: 'The key factor is the demographic factor... Generally speaking, the people who go out and kill other people are males between the ages of 16 and 30. During the 1960s, '70s and '80s there were high birth rates in the Muslim world, and this has given rise to a huge youth bulge' (IRIN 2007). The US foreign politics uses this argument to explain current political instability and the growth of terrorism networks in the Arab world.

Referring to the prevalence of the child soldier crisis in Africa, several commentators like David M. Rosen, Paul Richards and Afua Twum Danso argue that a large proportion of the African population is young and the presence of war in many African regions makes children and youth vulnerable to involvement in conflict. Young people are the major participants in most wars of the region. In fact some armed factions in African civil wars comprise largely of young teenagers, including girl soldiers as well. Sometimes combatants are as young as 8 or 10. Krijn Peters and Paul Richards remark, 'this is partly demographic. Africa is not only the world's poorest continent, it is also its youngest. Half or more of the population of African countries are under the age of 18 years. Militia life offers training and a livelihood in countries where poverty and numbers overwhelm education and jobs' (Peters and Richards 1998). Conflicts in regions like Angola and Sierra Leone were sustained due to the involvement of children as soldiers. It may be argued that the linkage demographics and violence remains controversial, however, most thinkers working in the field of child soldiering observe that there exists a correlation between a large youthful population and conflict. For instance, when the civil war in Sierra Leone came to a halt in 2002, 63 percent of the general population was under 25-years-old.

Patrimonialism

There's a phenomenon that anthropologist William Murphy has termed patrimonialism- it is described as a form of association 'that ties vulnerable children to unrelated but powerful and domineering adults within their communities- a response to the pervasive 'protection vacuum' that afflicts so many thousands of orphaned, displaced, or otherwise dispossessed children'. This is further compounded by the problem of AIDS, 'as elders able to mentor rootless youth are decimated, children attach themselves to adults capable of ordering their universe, however brutally' (Bhaba 2005).

A number of commentators have pointed to the prevalence of patrimonialism in many African states. In Angola authority is traditionally largely derived from age, it has special status and respect being accorded to the elders. The government is frequently portrayed as father and is not expected to be criticised and any criticism of the government would imply a son criticising his own father (Parsons 2005 cited in McIntyre 2005). This absurd notion has a particular relevance to the history and structure of Angola's civil war. The UNITA leader Savimbi styled himself as founder and father of the movement and he was to be addressed by UNITA children as 'father'. This practice also highlights the issue of identitie(s) of child soldiers as the practice had an effect of dissociating children from their own families and increasing their reliance on UNITA as 'family'. UNITA women who were interviewed expressed their desire to return to their 'blood families'. Thus it is quite clear how UNITA made great attempts to re-create the identity of these children and erode their previous identities. The other faction, MPLA also attempted to style itself as a 'family' but without much success, partly because of its more urbanised and necessarily less concentrated structure.

Apart from the factors mentioned above, in certain cases such as Liberia and Sierra Leone children enlisted in combat for the sake of 'adventure', "attracted by the sheer fun of belonging or in order to become 'famous and admired'" (Brett and McCallin 1998: 60). Overall, it may be argued that the presence of armed conflict has a deep impact on families, the economy, the education system, and employment or other means of

economic livelihood for young people themselves and for their parents, which in turn create a need for self-protection and protection of other members of the family. Each of these elements can trigger a young person's decision to take up arms. While the presence of war may contribute to a young person's decision to join an armed force or armed group, however, this does not explain why some young people take up arms and others do not in the same situation.

Brett and Specht make an interesting argument, they assert that the specific combination of the different environmental factors make some significantly more vulnerable. However, the factors are also cumulative; thus a poor child, living in a conflict zone, without family, deprived of education or employment opportunities, is seriously at risk of getting involved in combat. Further, the child's family and education are also influential and critical factors: 'they may directly or indirectly (through presence, absence, and attitude) make the difference, for the at-risk young person, between joining and not doing so' (Brett and Specht 2004).

Recruitment of Children and their Identity Transformation

Veale observes, within the discipline of psychology, there has been a change in the way identity is perceived- from understanding identity as 'trait-like, internal, and stable to exploring how identity is produced and transformed'- through involvement in the social and cultural practices of diverse social worlds. Through this process, individual's identities may said to be a result of his or her association with a particular groups' 'activities, meanings and symbols' and dissociation with others. Veale further suggests that 'Individuals may have multiple identities that find expression in or are constrained by their participation in different groups' (Veale 2005: 106 cited in McIntyre 2005).

As far as the recruitment process of children and youth in combat is concerned, it may be argued that the armed groups involved in this process, on enlistment, first act to sever the family and community or any other ties of the young person. Then the child is systematically taught to embrace violence as part of his or her existence, going on to witness extremes of violence which include massacres, summary executions, ethnic

cleansing, death squad killings, bombings, torture, sexual or physical abuse, and destruction of home and property. The child is often made to carry out acts of violence against his own family members or neighbours by the commanders. Thus there is a clear shift from the civilian identity to military identity of the child. Soon, this child appears to come to terms with his or her new identity as an instrument of war, serving a multitude of roles such as spy, porter, raider, sapper, infantry shock troops and even frontline combatant.

In the case of Sierra Leone, Rosen writes, 'at a more fundamental level, the war recapitulated in modern form some of the worst excesses of pre-colonial and colonial slavery, which transformed Sierra Leonean men, women, children and youth into forced laboures, sexual slaves, and slave soldiers.' He continues, 'every slave is torn out of his or her community and culture, and family ties are thus destroyed' (Rosen 2005: 59). In Sierra Leone, children and youth who were abducted by the RUF were permanently tattooed with the mark of the RUF, it has also been reported that children were compelled to publicly murder family and community members to ensure their alienation from them. The nicknames which were adopted by these young soldiers also reflect a disconnect between their former family and community ties and their new role as soldiers. Rosen states, the self-styled noms de guerre of the RUF fighters included – Black Jesus, Captain Back blast, Body naked, Colonel Bloodshed, Commando around the world, Commander Blood, General Share Blood, General Bloodshed, Commander Bullet, Major Cut throat and so on.

Further, in the case of Ethiopia, Angela Veale explored 'the identity transformations experienced by women who were recruited as children to fight with the Tigrean People's Liberation Army and demobilised as adults in 1992/1993.' Veale dealt with several issues concerning these women including 'how being part of the military impacted on constructions of the self as female in the fighting forces and at reintegration' (Veale 2005: 106 cited in McIntyre 2005). As mentioned previously, Tigrean girls and women who joined the fighting forces of the TPLF rejected the cultural markers of femaleness and adopted more masculine ones. The women and girls adopted the symbols that represented a fighter identity (Veale 2005: 107 cited in McIntyre 2005). Women's and

girls' identity as fighters was tied up in the political goals of the collective. On demobilisation they were disappointed to shed their military identity and adopt the traditional 'female' roles of the male-dominated Ethiopian society. This case illustrates how in certain situations, girl fighters emerged not as victims but as having been empowered and emancipated by their experiences in the fighting forces. However, it is important to note that this case is not representative of the plight of girl soldiers in most armed conflicts. In most cases girl soldiers are sexually abused and exploited.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to analyse whether children and youth are forced into armed militias, are they coerced into joining up or if they join voluntarily. Children are both forced and coerced into combat. In a number of conflicts, they have also volunteered in large numbers to join up. A recent study by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) observed that two-thirds of child soldiers served under their own initiative in armed forces.

However, there is some debate as to how much choice these young people actually have. It has been seen that many young people are compelled to take up arms due to pressures beyond their control. Sometimes they have no other alternative but to enlist in the military or armed militias to protect themselves and their families. Recently, during the 2006 Israel-Lebanon conflict, many young people volunteered to join the armed wing of Shia-backed Hezbollah. Amal Saad Ghorayeb, lecturer at the Lebanese American University observed, 'Under attack and insecure, young people in these areas grew up feeling protected by, and proud of, Hezbollah.' Charles, 17, who was recruited in eastern Congo by the predominantly Hema militia group, Union des patriotes congolais (UPC) remarked, 'It is better for me to stay with the militias than in my home village, because it was attacked several times' (IRIN 2007). This reflects, as Cohn and Goodwin-gill argue, a very fuzzy line exists between voluntary and coerced participation.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD SOLDIERING

This chapter attempts to discuss the implications of the use of child soldiers on conflict and society and the socio-psychological impact of war on former child soldiers as they undergo disarmament and demobilisation and eventual reintegration into the civil society.

Implications on the Use of Child Soldiers

Peter Singer notes that the use of children and youth in combat has had significant implications for certain recent armed conflicts in various regions of the world. Firstly, he argues, that the presence of child combatants has led to the intensification of certain conflicts due to the 'ease of force generation'. He argues, young people are often deployed in combat as they represent quick, easy, and above all, low-cost method for armed groups to generate force. Armed organisations which previously would not have been viewed as viable military threats are now able to generate serious forces through the recruitment of young people in their ranks. The relative ease through which children and youth are recruited may also result in the intractability, persistence and even resurgence of the conflict. Armed groups that use young people are sometimes able to reconstitute themselves rapidly and with much ease, even if they have suffered defeat at the hands of opposition groups.

Singer provides the example of the RUF in Sierra Leone. He argues, the RUF was 'completely routed in two separate instances (once by the private military firm Executive Outcomes and the second time by the ECOMOG force), but each time the core leadership escaped and the group used abducted children to return to strength and break a ceasefire' (Singer 2001: 51). Further, Wessells remarks, 'a society that mobilises and trains its young for war weaves violence into the fabric of life, increasing the likelihood that violence and war will be its future' (Wessells 1997: 33). Children and youth who are trained to kill often contribute to further lawlessness and violence in society. Wessells notes that the presence of young people in combat also poses a threat to fragile cease-

fires and obstructs reconciliation and peace efforts. Moreover even after a ceasefire agreement has been signed between the conflicting parties, conflict at the local level often continues unabated. He believes that 'child soldiers are pawns in local conflicts as they provide a ready group for recruitment' for various armed militias which hinder peace and reconciliation efforts by fomenting political instability.

Secondly, Singer (2001) argues, the recruitment of children also implies that 'the connections between the motivations of the group's leaders and its likely success in fielding a combat organisation are broken. Fringe movements which would have been marginalised in the past, can become quite powerful forces, spurring further conflict' (For instance, the Lord's Resistance Army, a cult-like group in Uganda that has fought a two decade civil war). He continues, these changes have further complicated post-conflict situations, as the usual guarantees, rewards, and confidence-building measures aimed toward achieving peace and normalcy do no matter much to such groups with minimal political agendas.

Thirdly, Singer points out that the methods employed by armed groups to turn children into soldiers entail serious violations of the laws of war. He further states that many commanders make use of children and youth in two ways- using them as shields or as cannon fodder. The first is the recruitment of children and youth to protect the lives of the commanders or leaders of the armed militias and better trained, and more valuable, adult combatants. Some armed groups frequently use children for suicide missions or 'human wave attacks', 'where the tactic is designed to overpower a well-fortified opposition through sheer weight of numbers' (Singer 2001).

Impact of War on Combatants

War impacts young people in a number of ways and on several levels- physical, emotional, social as well as psychological.

Physical

Due to their involvement in conflict, young people often suffer physical injury and sometimes become physically disabled for life. Children usually suffer greater casualties than their adult counterparts perhaps due to their lack of experience, and some commentators point out, due to their immaturity to deal with the situations they are forced to live in. It has also been widely argued that because of drug use, they can be less cautious and often unaware of their own mortality. Ishmael Beah, a former child soldier and the author of the book 'A Long Way Home' when asked about the use of gunpowder with cocaine in a recent interview, remarked, 'It changes the way you feel, but I think they mix it because then it is more powerful than regular cocaine.....One thing that it really does is it makes you feel numb to everything. It makes you see everything not as a big deal, not as important. It comes to a point where pulling a gun out and shooting somebody in the head is almost funny....' (Weich 2007).

The Graca Machel Report on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children (1996) stated, 'Thousands of children are killed every year as a direct result of fighting - from knife wounds, bullets, bombs and landmines, but many more die from malnutrition and disease caused or increased by armed conflicts. In Mozambique alone, between 1981 and 1988, armed conflict was the cause underlying 454,000 child deaths. Many of today's armed conflicts take place in some of the world's poorest countries, where children are already vulnerable' (Machel Report 1996).

FAO Report of 1996 pointed out, 'There is the general assumption that child soldiers are not at risk of malnutrition.' For instance, in Liberia it was assumed that since child soldiers had weapons, it was not difficult for them to acquire weapons. They ran errands for their commander who in turn looked after them and were mostly fed as they were quite close to the "big people". However, the Report pointed out that 'obviously, these children can be extremely vulnerable to malnutrition when the conflict is going badly.' As the UNICEF reported, in Liberia, 'child soldiers are well-treated when they are needed - to protect the leaders, or in the front line - but when they are not needed they are

left on their own. After Operation Octopus in Liberia, many children were found starving and mad in the swamps' (UNICEF 1994).

Emotional and Psychological

Naomi Cahn in the article titled 'Poor Children: Child Witches and Child Soldiers in Sub-Saharan Africa' argues, neuroscience explains the impact on children like child soldiers when they are forced out of their homes and families. She states that a number of studies show that early abuse and neglect may lead to a change in the structure of a child's brain. 'The correlation between abuse and neglect and subsequent delinquent behaviour has both a psychological and neurobiological explanation.' (Cahn 2005) Children who have experienced abuse are much more likely to develop psychological problems.

Martin Teicher suggests "that human brains have adapted to experience and that experiences of abuse result in traits such as 'the potential to mobilise an intense fight-or-flight response, to react aggressively to challenge without undue hesitation, to be at heightened alert for danger.....' " It has been argued that when children are neglected or experience abuse, their brains may develop in a manner that they overreact to situations that are threatening 'so that delinquent behaviour results from the brain using these early lessons of fear to defend itself' (Cahn 2005). Dodge and Raundalen who have identified Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in children, argue that the psychological impact of conflict or war on children is described 'in terms of known psychological reaction patterns ranging from aggression and revenge (an aspect which Danso argues is exaggerated) to anxiety, fear, grief and depression' (Dodge and Raundalen 1991).

The Graca Machel Report on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children (1996) stated, 'historically, those concerned with the situation of children during armed conflict have focused primarily on their physical vulnerability. But the loss, grief and fear a child has experienced must also be taken into account. For increasing numbers of children living in war-torn nations, childhood has become a nightmare..... The psychosocial concerns intrinsic to child development must be taken into account' (Machel Report 1996).

The experience of war affects these young people emotionally as well as psychologically. They often suffer from increased anxiety, nightmares and sleeplessness, eating disorder or loss of appetite and various other psychological problems. While referring to Sri Lanka, Daya Somasundaram states, 'death and injury apart, the recruitment of children becomes even more abhorrent when one sees the psychological consequences' (Somasundaram 2002). He notes that among the children who visited his unit for treatment, a wide range of psychological conditions were discovered- from neurotic conditions like somatisation, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder to more severe reactive psychosis and what has been termed malignant post-traumatic stress disorder. He observes that it is during their impressionable formative period that children are particularly vulnerable and the experience of war or violence often permanently scars their developing personality.

Briggs points out, Guillermo Carvajal, a member of the Colombian Psychoanalysis Society, discusses the psychology of war. In his study of the psychological impact of the conflict on Colombian youth, he observed that there are 'two wars, one real and one imaginary. The first one is experienced from the outside, with concrete violent events. The second one is experienced exclusively in the mind, with violent mental objects generated by a violent environment.' Further, Briggs makes an important point by arguing that the manner in which conflict impacts a young person depends on his or her 'relation to it'. For instance, Carvajal views those who have been nurtured to have the "warrior frame of mind" as being quite different from those who endure constant mental trauma resulting from victimisation through displacement, physical wounding, or imagery (Briggs 2005: 63).

Social

Often children accustomed to military life are not able to cope with the civilian life. Some commentators also point out that sometimes they are unable to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong since many child combatants never received any kind of social instruction or formal and moral education within civil society. As mentioned previously, child soldiers often suffer from drug and alcohol addictions they may have developed

during their participation in combat. Even if the ex-combatant is rehabilitated into society, he or she may find it difficult to adjust in the civilian life due to a different pattern of the socialisation process which these child soldiers undergo during their formative years and often he is unable to sit still or concentrate.

Singer argues, in the aftermath of conflict, as compared with their adult counterparts, young people usually bear greater burdens. He points out that most have special rehabilitation needs. These former combatants who were recruited when children either have no formal education or were removed from school at an early age, thus they may not have any useful peacetime skills. Many of these ex-soldiers were forced into committing atrocities against their own families and communities, and may have suffered physically as well as psychologically, however, Singer continues, 'Perhaps, the most serious long-term consequence is the disruption of psychological and moral development' (Singer 2001). After demobilisation, many children often join new armed militias or begin engaging in criminal activity. This in turn exacerbates violence resulting in the difficulty of reintegrating various hostile groups into society. Singer notes that Liberia is a case in point 'of how conversion of a generation of children into soldiers not only increased the likelihood of conflict recurrence within the country, but also endangered regional stability.' Child combatants from Liberia have often ended up fighting in Sierra Leone, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, and also in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Neil Boothby argues in northern Uganda some children who were socialised into killing through the indoctrination process, and hadn't killed in a while would actually approach their commanders and ask them 'when can I, when can I next do this.' Boothby further points out often in the army they have certain privileges- food, clothing and power. However as their disarmament and demobilisation takes place and they reenter society, they lose these accoutrements and these statuses. This loss of status and privileges may force the former child soldier into joining an armed militia where he or she may be provided with benefits and privileges.

Thus it may be argued that the involvement of young people in combat not only affects the individuals or young combatants but may also have far reaching and serious

implications for the society as well since if not successfully rehabilitated these former soldiers could pose a threat to the society. Further, as mentioned before, child soldiering adversely affects the health of the state or states which are parties to the armed conflict. Human capital takes years to accumulate, and with burgeoning former child combatants, any damage to mental and physical state of these former soldiers and interruption of education could hinder or deteriorate the productivity and performance of the entire state for increasing number of years.

Considering the impact of child participation in combat and its implications and ramifications for the society it may be argued that psychosocial reintegration programs for former child combatants are an important step towards reconciliation and peace building, ensuring stability and security of the violence-affected region. "Psychosocial" has been defined as 'the influence of social factors on an individual's mind or behavior, and to the interrelations of behavioral and social factors; also, more widely pertaining to the interrelation of mind and society in human development' (Russell and Gozdziak 2006). In this context, Russell and Gozdziak seem to have rightly argued that different circumstances may require various reintegration program models, however, it is imperative 'that they include some element of psychosocial programming for former child soldiers to prevent renewed conflict in these communities and enable their children to resume normal lives' (Russell and Gozdziak 2006).

The next section will elaborate on the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) process of former child combatants into the civil society. It will also address and analyse various approaches to this process.

Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration (DDR) Process

Article 39 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that 'States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed

conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child.'

Disarmament: This refers to collection of small arms as well as lightweight and heavy weapons within a conflict zone. Besides weapons collection, this process frequently entails assembly of combatants and development of arms management programs, including their safe storage and sometimes their destruction. The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers points out, because many child soldiers do not carry their own weapons, disarmament should not be a prerequisite for the demobilisation and reintegration of child soldiers.

Demobilisation: This process implies formal and controlled discharge of soldiers from the armed force or an armed group. The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers argues, 'in demobilising children the objectives should be to verify the child's participation in armed conflict, to collect basic information to establish the child's identity for family tracing, to assess priority needs, and to provide the child with information about what is likely to happen next' (CSC).

Reintegration: This is a long-term process which aims at giving former soldiers a viable alternative to their participation in armed conflict and helps them resume a normal life in the civil society. The process of reintegration involves family reunification (or finding alternative care for former child soldiers if reunification is not possible), provision of education and vocational training, devising appropriate strategies for economic and livelihood support and in certain cases providing psycho-social support.

Phases of the DDR Process

Singer has identified the following overlapping phases through which a child soldier can be reintegrated into the civil society. The first consists of disarmament and demobilisation, involving identification of child combatants, and removing them from military life. The next phase is physical and psychological rehabilitation, as mentioned

before, former young soldiers often suffer physical injury and their involvement in violence or war seriously affects their mental as well as psychological health. The final phase is that of reintegration with families and the community. Singer suggests that successful reintegration must include sustained follow-up support which involves programs for building self-capacity and extended counselling.

According to Neil Boothby child soldiers or children who have participated in armed groups are often invisible. He points out, once the peace agreement is signed there is often a concerted effort by the armed forces or armed groups to hide these children (For instance, the case of Mozambique, where RENAMO had around 10, 000 under-aged children amongst its ranks). In Mozambique when peace agreement came into place, Boothby asserts, RENAMO cut these children loose and when these children were spoken to, they complained, when they wanted us to fight they called us adults, but when it came time to actually be helped they put us back in the child category. Thus, in this context, Boothby like Singer argues that the first step towards successful reintegration of child soldiers into society is the identification of these children[1].

Next step he suggests, is to get these children out of the military life and 'put them in a special sort of category', the third step is to search for the families of these children and work towards their reunification. And the final step, he argues, should include some kind of vocational training and livelihood skills. Therefore, argues Boothby, in the aftermath of the conflict, it is imperative to look at the education and the economics of the situation. He continues, by and large, whether its Sierra Leone or whether its Liberia, or any other conflict situation, what is important for these demobilised child soldiers is some sort of independent productive life. Hence, he says, focusing on practical kinds of education like vocational skills is essential for effective reintegration. Most groups like NGOs and international organisations argue that all the above steps are to be taken for successful reintegration and rehabilitation of former child soldiers into civil society. For instance, UNICEF calls for the universal and 'systematic demobilisation of all child soldiers;

[1] ADM's Glenn Baker interviews Neil Boothby from the UNHCR for *"Child Combatants: The Road to Recovery"*

provision of support for their reintegration, with an emphasis on access to education and vocational training; and strengthening the capacity for provision of appropriate psychosocial care and support for former combatants.'

However, it is important to bear in mind that not all commentators and activists working in this field agree on what approach is to taken towards rehabilitation of former child soldiers. Susan Shepler explored the plight of children being demobilised in Sierra Leone. Shepler remarks, often the efforts of humanitarian organisations fail because outside values and models are applied without any consideration or whether they will work in other cultures. For instance, in some environments, art therapy and stressing education might work well, however in today's Sierra Leone, vocational training and encouraging youth to engage in the agricultural system might be most suitable.

Approaches to the DDR Process

Afua Twum Danso in 'The Limits of Individualism' points out that some commentators and practitioners like to follow the so-called western 'medicalised' model of therapy and trauma counseling which focuses on the individual. While others favour the community-based traditional approach according to which the child is seen as part of a wider community and therefore to reintegrate a child soldier into society it is also important to rehabilitate the community as a whole. Many western experts such as Winkelmann (1997) believe that children's psycho-social responses to violence have universal features since the psycho- dynamic process is the same in all humans, regardless of age, culture and country of origin of the individual (Danso 2000).

David Tolfree established a community development framework that is now accepted by many non-governmental organisations including Radda Barnen and SCF-UK. The major features of this approach are as follows:

Firstly, this model emphasises the need for long term development and not just the more immediate relief from suffering. Secondly, it lays emphasis on the significance of the

social and cultural context in which people experience stress as a result of armed conflict, and not just individual suffering. Next, this model looks at traumatic experience as one among many aspects of stress faced by people living in conflict situation. Experience of violence may be compounded or intensified by difficulties which include poverty, poor housing, unemployment, lack of social resources and so on. Lastly, this approach or the community based initiatives place much emphasis on common needs within the community rather than the specific needs of an individual. Danso argues, 'thus it can be seen that a community development approach provides a more flexible response that takes account of the social context, and incorporates the community in the process of defining and implementing solutions to their situation' (Danso 2000).

McCallin suggests, 'the foundation for successful reintegration is synonymous with family reunification and a productive involvement in community life' (McCallin 1995: 15). Danso argues that Summerfield (1996) is critical of the notion of 'trauma' in a non-western context and emphasises the importance of community-wide rehabilitation which is based on social development rather than on the individual. However, Derek Summerfield recently argued that 'No one is saying that local cultures can always cope, but the ethical response is to start from where they are and not provide responses rooted in a sense of western rationality'(Snelling 2006).

Danso further states, while focusing on traditional and local approaches to healing and rehabilitation in Angola and Mozambique, Honwana (1999) criticises the application of western models of therapy or healing in non-western contexts. Alcinda Honwana, a Mozambican anthropologist and specialist in post-conflict healing explains why Mozambique encouraged the traditional healing method: 'Western approaches tend to be expensive, require specialist training and are limited in the numbers they can reach (and) therapies which do not account for the role of ancestral and malevolent spirits in the causation or healing of trauma may actually hamper family and community efforts to provide care' (Reuters 3/10/2006).

Dodge and Raundalen note that '[p]sychological wounds and trauma suffered in childhood may affect the individual child and, as a consequence, the society for decades' (Dodge and Raundalen, 1991: 21). Reichenberg and Friedman state, the child's identity is neither isolated from nor absorbed in the social fabric. It is apart and a part. Healing of trauma cannot be accomplished by an individual alone; it must take place in all of life's relevant dimensions, that is, the context of family, community and culture (Reichenberg and Friedman 1996: 318 cited in Danso 2000).

As Danso reflects upon the work of these authors and commentators, he remarks that there exists an alternative view (other than the western model of therapy and the community-based approach) which emphasises the benefits of both approaches. This requires bringing together or integrating the psychological (individual) and social (community) aspects of rehabilitation to form an integrated approach. In Danso's view this integrated approach is a more holistic option which is likely to be the more effective form of rehabilitation and reintegration. This approach which is termed as the 'psychosocial approach' is outlined in the Cape Town Annotated Principles and is described as thus:

"The term 'psycho-social' underlines the close relationship between the psychological effects of armed conflict, the one type of effect continually influencing the other. 'Psychological effects' are those which affect emotions, behaviour, thoughts, memory and learning ability and how a situation may be perceived and understood. 'Social effects' refers to altered relationships due to death, separation, estrangement and other losses, family and community break down, damage to social values and customary practices and the destruction of social facilities and services. 'Social effects' may be extended to include an economic dimension, many individuals and families becoming destitute through the material and economic devastation of war, thus losing their social status and place in their familiar network" (Cape Town Annotated Principles and Best Practice on the Prevention of Recruitment of Children into the Armed Forces and Demobilisation and Social Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Africa adopted on 30th April 1997).

According to Danso, it is important to go beyond the level of the individual in the reintegration and the rehabilitation process of child soldiers, however, 'that does not mean dismissing the level of the individual altogether.' Further, Danso calls for the need of incorporating a national level model into the definition of the notions of 'rehabilitation' and 'reintegration'. He argues, for an effective reintegration programme, rehabilitation should be based on the continuous interaction of the three levels of the individual, the community and the nation with a stronger emphasis on the nation. Some commentators have rightly argued that even if reintegration of the individual and rehabilitation of the community is done simultaneously without reconstructing the larger society, reintegration efforts will not be successful. Thus, it is imperative to develop the nation economically, socially and politically.

Demobilisation and Reintegration of Girl Soldiers

Several commentators on child soldiering such as Krijn Peters, Keairns, McKay and Mazurana have argued that girl soldiers are still often out of the picture and further research is required to learn about their particular circumstances. Girls, during their involvement in conflict often share the experiences of boy soldiers, however, they usually suffer from sexual exploitation more than boy soldiers do since they are used as sex slaves by the commanders and senior leaders and often raped by boy soldiers too. As Maggie Black reports, "in Northern Uganda, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has made a practice of abducting girls and forcing them to become their 'wives'" (Black 1998: 8).

In the last decade, some of the most horrifying cases of rape during conflict occurred in the DRC, ex-Yugoslavia, Rwanda and Sudan affecting thousands of women, particularly young girls between 15 and 24 (IRIN 2007). Therefore, reintegration or rehabilitation needs of girl soldiers are different from boys or as many commentators have argued that girls have specific needs during the reintegration process. Until recently, the issue of girl soldiers did not receive much attention. It was in 2003, given the dearth of awareness on this issue that the Quaker United Nations Offices in New York and Geneva, in conjunction with Dr. Von Keairns of the Arsenal Family and Children's Center in

Pittsburgh, PA, set out to engage in the study on the demobilisation and reintegration needs of girls who have been involved in armed groups.

The study titled "The Voices of Girl Child Soldiers", focused on four countries namely Angola, Colombia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka. The interviews which were conducted by research teams were analysed by Dr. Keairns. Besides addressing the demobilisation and reintegration needs, the study also focused on the reasons why girls joined the armed groups. It observed that almost three quarters of the girls interviewed were not abducted, but volunteered to join up; and almost all ended up regretting the decision. The study further observed, 'this is a very different profile of girls than originally conceived; the problems of kidnapping, sexual abuse and sexual slavery was not common to all young women in militias. Many of the girls stated that they learned skills while in the armed group' (Keairns 2002).

The Save the Children Federation places much emphasis on Gender Equity as an indispensable component for the rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers. It observes, 'Girls and boys fulfill different roles within armed groups both during and after conflict'. It, therefore, suggests that needs assessment and program design must include a gender analysis of these differences so that girls and boys can be successfully rehabilitated and reintegrated into society. This is an extremely significant point considering the fact that girls represent the reproductive force of a war-torn community. Girls' physical and mental health needs are directly linked with the future health and viability of the community.

The report, titled 'Where are the Girls?' (2004) which focuses on northern Uganda, Sierra Leone and Mozambique observes that girls have recently been involved in armed conflicts from Angola to Sri Lanka, Colombia to Uganda. Diane Mazarana, one of the report's authors argued, 'Our work found that the vast majority were sexually assaulted. You'd be dealing with very high rates of sexually transmitted diseases, about 30% of the girls in the three countries we worked in became pregnant during captivity in the fighting forces and are now returning as girl mothers' (Mazarana 2004). The report observed that relatively few girls went through any disarmament or demobilisation programmes.

During the Demobilisation Stage, Specific Problems arise for Girl Soldiers

Often, many girls do not make it into the demobilisation process at all. There are a number of reasons why girls do not go through this process. Sometimes those at the center of planning and organisation of the demobilisation process do not recognise the role of girls as "soldiers" as opposed to camp followers, wives or concubines and thus they are screened out. Glassborow pointed out, 'the DRC government launched a nationwide programme after 2003 to coordinate disarmament and demobilisation and to reintegrate fighters into civil society.' Renner Onana, a United Nations demobilisation officer who was on the programme's drafting team, told IWPR, 'We did not touch the issue of the girl soldiers, but wrongly took them as the dependants of combatants.' Regrettably, he said, 'it was not seen as a serious issue' (Glassborow 2006).

During the civil war in Sierra Leone, there was widespread use of girls by almost all armed factions including the government forces. The Report, Where are the Girls? observes, 'due to a combination of deliberate obstruction, misconceptions about their roles and failed policies, the majority of girls and young women involved in the various fighting forces have been excluded from the government's DDR programs' (Where are the Girls? 2004). As in Northern Uganda, girls and young women in Sierra Leone point out, education and skills training are extremely important in assisting their reintegration that local and international agencies could provide.

Sometimes girls are reluctant to identify themselves as girl combatants because they fear negative repercussions in terms of reintegration into civil society and possible prospects including marriage where being involved in armed groups is viewed in negative terms. A study by the Women's Commission in 2005, described how in Kosovo young girls were 'specifically vilified for having been raped by their captors or for taking on traditional male roles. Among other things, this resulted in lost opportunities for marriage and the chance of a normal life' (IRIN 2007).

Sometimes male soldiers may wish to hold on to the girls for various reasons, often girls are made to undertake household chores. In many armed groups girls are used as sex

slaves. In a report titled 'DRC: Children at War' (October 2006), Amnesty International observed that involvement of large numbers of girls in armed groups has been 'largely overlooked by the government and international community.' The report states, there is 'systematic abuse of these children through torture, sexual violence and ill-treatment.' Commanders and male fighters often do not feel obliged to release the girls, as they claim them as their "wives" (Glassborow 2006).

In a number of societies, the economic opportunities available to girls are more limited than for boys. This is compounded by their participation in conflict, and the evidence of the baby may further stigmatize them because of the implications of sexual activity (Brett and Specht 2004: 100). The Report 'Where are the Girls?' found that social reintegration of girl mothers and young women who were girls when they joined the armed groups and who return with babies, is a daunting task and these girls and their children are at high risk.

Another aspect which demands attention is the question of girls who volunteered, and also whether these girls would want to be reintegrated into the society from which they had sought to escape. The report 'Where are the Girls' found that in the aftermath of war, girls and women are mostly expected by organisations and community leaders to adopt traditional gender or 'female' roles instead of using the strengths they have developed to make new choices and seek broader opportunities.

For instance, in the case of Ethiopia, according to Angela Veale one of the things that former girl soldiers missed on demobilisation was the collective nature of military life and the sense of common purpose. As mentioned previously, Tigrean girls who joined the fighting forces of the TPLF 'rejected the cultural markers of femaleness and adopted more masculine ones' (Veale 2005: 107 cited in McIntyre 2005). However, reintegration into Ethiopian civil society meant a loss of collective identity by which they had defined themselves since they were children and were expected to adopt the 'traditional feminine' values of Ethiopian society.

On the whole, it may be argued that reintegration efforts should be adapted to include the specific needs of girl soldiers and girl soldiers with babies, keeping in mind the socio-cultural context. Some commentators have argued that in this sense it is important to work with the entire community so that these former girl soldiers are accepted back in the community and are assisted by the latter in their reintegration and resumption of normal lives. Community approaches are also said to be important in addressing present and past sexual abuse of girls which often lead to serious physical health problems and psychological disorders. One major concern is the threat of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) since most girls who were involved with the fighting forces are purportedly infected, yet few are tested or treated. HIV and AIDS represent a major threat to these former girl soldiers and their children.

The demobilisation and reintegration process is fraught with difficulties. Rehabilitation programmes need to be adapted to specific socio-cultural needs. For the purpose of rehabilitation of former child combatants, the psychosocial approach appears to be the most effective approach. Although, reconstruction of a society is not an easy task, yet it is important to incorporate both the individual-centered approach and the community-based approach along with economic, social and political restructuring of the war-torn society for effective reintegration and rehabilitation of former child combatants.

Demobilisation and the Identity of Former Child Soldiers

Identity Transformation

Demobilisation process entails the identity transformation of a child soldier into a civilian, no longer engaged in a military life. Whether it is the community-based initiative focused on traditional healing or western model which emphasises trauma therapy, both these approaches work towards helping the former child soldier adopt a new identity which would help her or him shed its past associations with violent military life.

Referring to the use of traditional healing in the aftermath of the conflict in Uganda, Irae Baptista Lundin of the Maputo Centre for Strategic and International Studies pointed out that the treatment or the healing process generally followed three stages:

The first step involved helping the former child soldier lose his identity as a killing machine and regain a civilian identity - "become a person again". This process required a steam bath, then a bath in water fortified with various herbs. The next step was to convey to the child's dead relatives that the 'lost sheep' had returned home. 'Finally, the ritual ended with reconciliation with the spirits of those killed by the child, where the child asked them for forgiveness' (Reuters 3/10/2006).

Difficulties in the Adoption of New Identities

As child soldiers go thorough the demobilisation process, on the face of it they leave behind their military identity and enter into civil society where they are expected to adopt a civilian identity. However most of these former soldiers experience a struggle within them where to let go off their past associations with a violent military life and a military identity is not an easy task. Veale points out that in the case of Ethiopia, demobilisation marked a new phase in the lives of women soldiers as they were expected to embrace new identities- those of civilians and 'females'. On demobilisation and reintegration, women fighters discovered that the values, socialisation experiences and expectations that they had internalised during their fighter years, as women, were at odds with the traditional, feminine values of the Ethiopian society.

They were compelled into making certain adjustments within themselves to lessen the conflict they experienced with civilian society. However, these women refused to abandon or compromise the internalised beliefs of competence, ability and right to participate in an equal society. Reintegration meant a loss of a collective identity by which they had defined themselves since they were children and re-socialisation as 'civilians' and 'women'. It is important to acknowledge that all of these women fighters

interviewed by Veale emerged not as victims but as having been empowered by their experiences in the fighting forces.

Further, there is the issue of child combatants being treated as children or adults. It is pertinent here to note the case of Angola. When the civil war in Angola wound to an end and the demobilisation process began, in the case of child soldiers NGOs called for segregation which often involved recognising their status as 'child-adults'- 'children in body, but adults in their heads' (Parsons 2005: 60 cited in McIntyre 2005). This is quite an intriguing classification for if we consider the western idea of childhood and adulthood where childhood represents innocence, vulnerability and immaturity and adulthood maturity and rational thought, then does the above classification imply that their experiences in war have made these children more mature and rational or whether they have been robbed of their innocence. And if being an adult means one is less vulnerable or more rational and more mature in his or her thinking, then it may be argued that after demobilisation or during demobilisation these former child soldiers are left even more vulnerable as far as the question of their identity and their place in society is concerned.

Conclusion

To recapitulate it may be argued that the involvement of children and youth in combat can have a devastating impact on these young soldiers as well as the society itself. War affects these young people physically, socially and psychologically, and mostly on demobilisation their lives are in disarray. Often unable to reconcile themselves with their new identity as civilians they are prone to reentering the military life by joining the armed militias which roam the streets of the war torn region. As Jacqueline Bhabha questions, 'how can combatants who have known nothing but armed combat, killing, and brutality since early childhood be weaned from war and rehabilitated?' She maintains, 'though many demobilisation and rehabilitation programs have been established, progress is slow and arduous' (Bhabha 2005). Mark Malan in the article 'Disarming and demobilising child soldiers: The underlying challenges' makes an important point: 'there

is also a generally fallacious assumption that all children find disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes necessary or attractive' (Malan 2000).

What he argues is that the peace dividend or the rewards offered to former child soldiers may not be, or perceived to be a common good. In a number of pre-conflict societies including Sierra Leone and Liberia the survival strategies of the elite led to the marginalisation of children and youth. In this context, warfare, for these young people engendered critical and useful avenues for attaining new power. Consequently, argues Malan, post-conflict situations or rehabilitation and reintegration programmes are not necessarily attractive for the demobilised children.

As mentioned previously, Neil Boothby has also argued, often in the army these children have certain privileges- food, clothing and power. However, on demobilisation and reintegration into civilian life, they lose these accoutrements and these statuses. This loss of status and privileges may compel the ex-combatant to return to military life by joining an armed militia which may provide him or her with all these benefits and privileges. Malan argues, a key challenge towards successful reintegration of these former child soldiers into society is to 'create a sense of hope for children in the post-conflict environment and to restore children as individuals with faith in peace' (Malan 2000).

However, it is important to note that this is only possible if the war ceases, because the fact of the matter is that as long as wars persist, it is likely, infact, certain that young people will be drawn into them either by volition or through coercion, particularly in the African conflicts where in most states majority of the population is young. Further it is often observed that even if the war formally ends through a peace accord in certain regions, the fighting continues and soon erupts into a war, where young people are easily and often readily taken by the militias. This was evident in Sierra Leone, other African countries, Afghanistan and very recently in DRC where even after the peace agreement has been signed and the war formally declared over, fighting still continues in the east of the region and children are being frequently recruited by the militias. Thus to 'create a sense of hope for children in the post-conflict environment and to restore children as

individuals with faith in peace' is not an easy task considering the propensity of violence to resurface.

Therefore, alongside demobilisation and reintegration of child soldiers into civilian life, it is also imperative to work towards restructuring and reconstructing the war torn society through the assistance of the international community and NGOs involved in the rehabilitation process. Unless the factors which lead these young people to take up arms are addressed, rehabilitation efforts will not prove to be effective. In this context, the psychosocial approach towards reintegration and rehabilitation seems to be of much relevance for successful reintegration of former child soldiers.

CONCLUSION

Child soldiering is not a new phenomenon but a growing phenomenon as large numbers of young people, than ever before in history, are swamped in this devastating practice. Civil wars in several regions are often sustained by burgeoning number of child combatants leading to the intractability of the conflict. This, in turn, results in the obstinacy of the child soldier problem. It not just impacts those involved but smites the entire society. Repercussions of the crisis- physically and psychologically scarred children and youth, maimed individuals, heart-stricken communities, a bruised, disfigured society and a run down state marred and exhausted by years and sometimes, decades of bloodshed- all deal a blow to the functioning of a healthy and a normal society.

Years of violence and militarisation of daily life instill a sense of military identity among child soldiers where these young people have often known nothing since their formative period but violence and only violence, killing and maiming their own people. Therefore, this phenomenon does not just pose a threat to the young generation but also threatens the security and the economic, social and political development of the entire society and the state. Further, it has been seen that a number of conflicts do not stay confined to a particular region and often spill into the neighboring states. The propensity of violence to spill into other regions may pose a threat to the global security as well.

This study has attempted to explore the plight of child soldiers across the globe. For this purpose it has focused on certain regions from Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. One of the objectives of the research is to find out, if the participation of children in armed conflicts can simply be attributed to culture and tradition or there are certain socio-economic and political factors which are common to all these geographically, socially and culturally diverse regions. Through the analysis of various conflict situations from different parts of the world, this study discovers that regardless of largely diverse regions– geographically, politically, culturally and religiously- war/militarisation of daily life, structural violence, family and family events- emerge as major contributory factors

to voluntary participation of young people in conflict, culture and tradition being the secondary factors.

It is often assumed that children are enlisted into militias and military forces through forced recruitment, conscription, and gang-pressing, however, such practices are relatively rare, although highest in the African continent. A recent study by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) observed that two-thirds of child soldiers served voluntarily in armed forces. Even in Africa, according to ILO research, two-thirds of child soldiers interviewed in Burundi, Congo-Brazzaville, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Rwanda said that they took the initiative of enrolling themselves "voluntarily" (Dumas and de Cock 2003 cited in Brett and Specht 2004). However, there is some debate as to how much choice these young people actually have. It has been observed by some commentators (Singer, Cohn and Guy Goodwin-gill), that sometimes young people have no other option but to join the armed forces or armed militias for the sake of their survival or to protect themselves and their families. They are often indoctrinated so that they come to associate or identify with the 'supposed' cause of the armed group (For instance, LTTE in Sri Lanka, armed militias in Palestine and Afghanistan, and separatist groups in the Northeast of India).

Though young people are often coerced and even forced into joining up, they should not always be viewed as merely victims in need of protection. In the discourse on the child soldier phenomenon, child soldiers across the globe are often represented as victims or passive actors in the contemporary warfare and also as innocent observers of a changing world. This denies them agency as political actors and conflict stakeholders. For instance, in a number of African conflicts, it has been observed, for many young people, one of the root causes for their involvement in combat was their exclusion from the economic, political and social structures of their state. Therefore, in such cases it is not advisable to treat young people as mere victims or passive actors in combat. For their successful reintegration into society, it is imperative to address their grievances and involve them in peace initiatives.

Further, as far as the roles and experiences of child soldiers are concerned it is imperative to move beyond the monolithic stereotypes which assume boys as direct combatants and girls as sex slaves. This misrepresents the multiple roles and tasks carried out by these young soldiers in armed militias. Historically, girls were mostly used for support roles in combat which involved domestic work, cooking and nursing the injured, however, in a number of conflicts today, they engage in direct combat and even suicide bombing as is evident in Sri Lanka and Palestine.

Moreover, though child soldiers, girls as well as boys are often vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation as compared to their adult counterparts, it is erroneous to assume that all young soldiers have been sexually abused. Though girls are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation than boy soldiers, however as mentioned previously, not all girls experience such treatment as is noted in the study conducted by Angela Veale in Ethiopia, in fact those girls who were interviewed by her pointed out that they felt empowered and emancipated through their experiences in the armed forces as compared to their previous lives in the traditional male dominated Ethiopian society and on demobilisation most were disappointed since they were expected to adopt traditional 'female' roles and a 'female' identity.

Similarly, Harry West's interviews with adult women who served in the FRELIMO's Destacemento Feminino (Female Detachment) when they were children show that many of them viewed their involvement in the fighting forces as empowering and liberating. Many of these women perceive their participation in war as emancipating them not only from colonial rule but also from the traditional male dominated society. However, this does not imply that the involvement of girls in armed resistance is an acceptable practice but it is rather disappointing that these girls often had no choice but to seek their liberation and emancipation from domestic abuse and the traditional male dominated structures through their involvement in combat.

As far as the International Law on child soldiers is concerned, as mentioned previously, the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child

represents a significant improvement of existing international law on child soldiers. However, there are certain weaknesses in this Protocol:

Firstly, it provides a different standard for armed groups from that of states parties. Under the Optional Protocol states parties are required to take all 'feasible measures' to ensure that members of their armed forces who have not attained the age of 18 years do not take a direct part in hostilities, however as far as the armed groups are concerned, the Protocol states that they may not 'under any circumstances' use in hostilities, persons under the age of 18 years.

Next, there is a certain double standard attached to the Optional Protocol as it prohibits recruitment of children who are below 18 years of age but permits their voluntary enlistment. This provision can be easily misused by both state parties as well as armed groups since there are times when there is no clear line between forced and voluntary recruitment. There have been several cases when young people have joined the military or armed militias by volition, however it is important to acknowledge that not all volunteers are truly voluntary. Often coercive mechanisms are used by both armed groups and armed forces to influence a young person's decision to join up.

Finally, Article 1 of the Optional Protocol states that "States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that members of their armed forces who have not attained the age of 18 years do not take a direct part in hostilities." This provision only mentions direct participation, however indirect participation in combat or non-combatant activities may also expose children to enemy attack.

Considering the above weaknesses, it is imperative to strengthen the international law on child soldiers so that this devastating practice can be effectively dealt with. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that these international laws are often barely understood by the people in remote areas or deep interiors of the world. In many cases, the masses are not even aware that such laws exist. Therefore, the first step towards countering this phenomenon is to disseminate information and knowledge about the

international law at the national as well as the local level. The next step is to reconcile international laws with local understandings. As Honwana puts it, 'International conventions have to be understood within the context of local world views and meaning systems. This is what will allow them to be recognised, accepted and enforced at the local level, where protection of children from armed conflicts is greatly needed' (Honwana 2001: 140 cited in Chesterman 2001). Thus, it is essential to consider local and cultural norms about notions of childhood and child protection when dealing with those children and youth who are or were involved in combat. Through the interaction and reconciliation between the global and the local level, it is possible to develop adequate strategies which are likely to help in the successful reintegration of young people in society.

As far as the strengthening of the international law is concerned, many factors come in the way which complicate the enforcement of prohibitions against the use of children in combat. Firstly, in a number of regions, especially in many African countries and other regions where there are no birth records of children or where birth registration systems do not exist, it is quite difficult to verify the age of soldiers enlisted by the armed forces or militias. Children may lie about their age or are often made to lie by the commanders during the demobilisation process. Further, in a number of cases, young people who joined the armed forces or militias, by the time of demobilisation are no longer children but adults. Often rehabilitation programmes fail to address their needs since they are not included in these programmes and policies which deal with only those soldiers who are below 18 at the time of demobilisation. However, it is important to bear in mind that even those who fought as child soldiers but on demobilisation are no longer below 18, deserve to be a part of the rehabilitation programmes which entail education or vocational training, alternate means of livelihood and psychosocial therapy. This is because these people also missed out on education, spent their formative period fighting in combat, were separated from their families and communities and were often abused and exploited by the leaders and military commanders.

Considering the relative lack of focus and awareness about the plight of girl soldiers, it may be argued that reintegration and rehabilitation programmes should be adapted to include the specific needs of girl soldiers and girl soldiers with babies, keeping in mind the socio-cultural context. Some commentators have argued that it is important to work with the entire community so that these former girl soldiers are accepted back in the community and are assisted by the latter in their reintegration into society.

Rehabilitation and reintegration programmes are not necessarily perceived as lucrative by demobilised children. Young people who had certain privileges or had gained a sense of power within armed militias usually find the reintegration process quite disappointing and unattractive. Even those who had a sense of belonging within armed forces and groups find it very difficult to come to terms with their new lives, especially if they are expected to return to traditional roles in hierarchical societies segregated by age and sex. As mentioned previously, in the case of Ethiopia most women interviewed by Veale (who fought as child soldiers) were reluctant to disarm and reintegrate into the male dominated structures and take up traditional or supposed 'female' roles in the orthodox Ethiopian society.

Finally, the demobilisation, reintegration and rehabilitation programmes need to be adapted to specific socio-cultural needs. For instance, approaches which focus merely on the individual are usually not very effective in the non-western context. Therefore, programmes which seek to rehabilitate former child combatants must also involve entire communities. On the whole, it may be argued that successful reintegration of child soldiers into society is only possible if the war ceases, because as long as war drags on, it is likely that children and youth, especially those who are economically, socially or politically disadvantaged or marginalised, will continue to enlist in armed forces or armed groups either by volition or through coercion. It has also been observed in certain cases that even if the war formally ends and a peace accord is signed between the conflicting parties, the fighting persists and soon erupts into a war, where young people are easily and often readily recruited by the armed militias. Hence to deal effectively with the problem of child soldiering, it is imperative to address the root causes or the underlying factors responsible for this practice. Unless the factors which compel children

and youth into joining armed groups are addressed, rehabilitation efforts will not prove to be effective. It is also essential to deal with the factors which result in armed conflicts and persuade the conflicting parties to engage in non-violent or peaceful conflict resolution.

Therefore, alongside demobilisation, reintegration and rehabilitation of child soldiers into civilian life, efforts must be focused on the reconstruction of the damaged society through the assistance of the international community and NGOs involved in the rehabilitation process. In this context, the psychosocial approach towards reintegration and rehabilitation appears to be relevant for successful reintegration of former child soldiers. Another aspect which deserves attention is the presence of child soldiers in India. While international attention has focused on the plight of child soldiers in Africa, Latin America, Middle East, and in Asia mostly Sri Lanka and Myanmar, there is hardly any substantial discourse on the plight and status of child soldiers in India. Although, International agencies like the United Nations do claim the existence of child soldiers in Kashmir (who are said to be recruited by armed groups and separatist militias in the region), certain regions in the Northeast of India and the Naxal belt, there are hardly any government documents and reports accessible to the public on children and youth used by armed militias in India. Now, to begin with, its time for a public discourse on the plight of child soldiers in India, particularly in certain Naxal strongholds and the Northeast of India.

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