GLOBAL CHILDHOODS

~ *ISSUES AND DEBATES* ~

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CHILDREN AND DISASTER: 'CHILD SOLDIERS' AND ORPHANS

- Child soldiers and orphans are two categories of 'unchildlike' children that have prompted global concern and intervention since the *Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child* (1924).

- The lived experiences of 'child soldiers' are more complex than the polarized representations in the media, or as affirmed in the *Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict* (UN, 2000c), and there is no simple distinction to be made between 'victims' and 'perpetrators', or 'coerced abductees' and 'decision-making agents'.

- Understandings of what constitutes an orphan differ between official definitions provided by bodies such as UNICEF and the ICRC and popular representations, creating the inaccurate belief in the Global North that there are millions of 'orphaned' Global Southern children in need of rescue through adoption and other interventions. At the same time many children with parents are vulnerable, prompting UNICEF to shift its emphasis from orphanhood to vulnerability and favouring the term 'unaccompanied children' over orphans.

- Significant tensions exist in approaches to the support of children separated from their families through war and disaster: between child-focused or rights-based approaches that emphasize care options which include extended family and community and welfare-based approaches that often amount to child rescue.

INTRODUCTION

By reason of their relative powerlessness, children frequently experience extreme hardships during, and in the aftermath of, war and disaster (Alam, 2010; Enarson and Phillips, 2008). Images of the suffering of children in both socio–political and natural catastrophes form a staple of modern news media coverage, whether during the fall of Saigon in 1975, the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami, the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, or in the

demobilization of militarized children from any number of armed conflicts around the globe (Holland, 1985). Children affected by socio-political and natural disasters are frequently more susceptible than adults to the immediate dangers and diseases that flourish in conditions of devastated infrastructure. Further, children endure the long-term impact of war and disaster, through dislocations of family, interruptions to schooling and other perils, including death and injury from unexploded ordnance such as landmines (UNICEF, 2006).

In line with the twentieth-century globalized focus on the welfare, protection and rights of children, several child agencies have focused on both orphans and child soldiers. This emphasis has led to international policy and treaties around the treatment of such children. Children in each category are seen as imperilled and placed in situations which are *unchildlike* – that is, situations that are not compatible with a normative vision of children and their needs.

While recognizing the dangers and privations to which many child soldiers and orphans are exposed globally, our aim in this chapter is to complicate understandings of these two categories of children with reference to tensions between child welfare and child rights approaches to children and their capacities. These approaches in turn reflect epistemological differences in the conceptualization of the child as *being* and the child as *becoming*, as discussed in earlier chapters. Drawing attention to a range of research on both child soldiers and orphans (unaccompanied children) and approaches to children in war and disaster, the chapter aims to introduce readers to the complex debates that surround these two categories of children.

CHILD SOLDIERS, ORPHANS AND SURVIVORS: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Children have never been excluded from war, whether as active participants or as members of civilian populations overrun during armed conflict. The vicious treatment of infants and small children, emblematic of innocence and helplessness, features strongly in the demonization of various foes and characterizes nearly every phase of colonization as reported in the earliest records, most often in describing the malign tendencies of 'uncivilized' first peoples or 'the enemy'. Over the past 20 years or more, the representation of armed conflicts, particularly in developing countries on the African continent but also throughout Asia and South America, has continued this tendency (Lee-Koo, 2011).

From our brief history of childhood, we know that boys as young as seven were apprenticed as active participants into both the land and sea forces of European nations and the US from at least the seventeenth century until the early twentieth century (Marten, 2002; Paris, 2000). Underage youths who 'ran away' to both World Wars continue to be celebrated as brave individuals (Bishop, 1982; Van Emden, 2005), and armed forces in the Global North target youths in recruitment campaigns, on the basis that life in the military develops valuable citizens and enhances individual capacities (Lee-Koo, 2011). Yet, our current responses to militarized children can range from pride in heroic young citizens in the making;

to pity and calls for leniency for exploited innocents; to outrage at the atrocities committed by 'barbaric' youth brigades; to wonder at the survival and redemption stories of former child fighters.

Similarly, bound by prejudices and assumptions concerning the capacities and resilience of children which derive from the affluent Global North, contemporary responses to the plight of orphaned children, particularly those orphaned by disasters, frequently activate deep-seated 'rescue' responses (Briggs, 2003; Doyle, 2010). In some circumstances, these responses have been acted out in rescue missions aimed at the evacuation of children from disaster zones. Such actions are endorsed by the Geneva Conventions under the Additional Protocol I (ICRC, 1977) with strict processes in place which insist on evacuation as a temporary response to be accompanied by measures to ensure the child's identity is not lost and that re-unification with family is facilitated post-emergency.

Since the end of the Second World War and during both the Korean and Vietnam Wars, one form that this kind of rescue operation has taken has been for children to be removed from their countries of origin and adopted into foreign families (Zigler, 1975; Choy, 2007; Bergquist, 2009; Fronek, 2009, 2012). The prevalence of adoption as a response to the predicament of children in emergencies led to a specific article (Article 21) on inter-country adoption (ICA) being included in the UNCRC, in which it is stated that the removal of any child for inter-country adoption must only be undertaken as a last resort, where all other care options for that child have been exhausted, and that in overseeing the transnational adoption of its children, state parties 'shall ensure that the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration' (UNCRC, 1989). Notwithstanding this article, inter-country adoption as a result of interventions in disaster zones remains an area of concern, involving dubious legality and in some cases the criminal trafficking of children (International Social Services, 2010).

Child rescue narratives overlook both the long histories of self-reliant children and child-headed households (CHH) around the world, and other interests of the children (in addition to the need to be safe from immediate danger) which are potentially compromised by rescue. These include the need to be within their own communities, their need for continuity, and the fact that even when parents have died, children may have affective ties with many others including other children in similar situations, members of extended families and communities. As we have already explored in the previous chapter's discussion of CHH in relation to home as a place of childhood, CHH are prominent in research on the natural and socio-political disaster of HIV/AIDS-affected communities in Africa and elsewhere. However, what researchers term 'orphan competent' communities challenge prevalent assumptions of children's inherent vulnerability and (in)competence in circumstances of both socio-political and natural disasters.

Notwithstanding a growing body of research on the capacities of children to cope and provide for themselves under certain conditions and their resilience, the rescue narrative continues to have appeal in responses to the plight of children in disaster (Briggs, 2003; Doyle, 2010; Murphy et al., 2010; Fronek and Cuthbert, 2012b). In general terms, part of the longevity of this narrative – which authorizes adults to step in and intervene even to the extent of removing children from

the circumstances in which they find themselves – is that it endorses received understandings of the respective roles and responsibilities of adults and children. The role of adults is to take control and, by reason of their superior capacities, to offer assistance and care to children who, by their natures, are vulnerable and less competent.

Some emergency situations are so dire that interventions such as evacuation are needed. As noted above, the evacuation of children in war-time emergencies is explicitly allowed for in the Geneva Conventions Additional Protocol I (ICRC, 1977) – but, such evacuation is framed as being temporary only, with family reunification as soon as circumstances allow being a prime objective (ICRC, 1977; Dixit, 2001). Even temporary separation from family may do more harm than good, as is highlighted in reviews of research literature on the evacuation of children in war and disaster (Dixit, 2001; Fronek and Cuthbert, 2012b). The impact of war and other emergencies is compounded for children when combined with family separation and dislocation from community and environment. Overwhelmingly, the evidence points to better outcomes for children facing disasters, including war, when their affective and social networks remain intact.

The Machel Report (Machel, 1996) outlines the potential harms faced by children separated from caregivers and evacuated during crises, including their potential exploitation on the inter-country adoption market. In the event of imminent danger, the report recommends families be evacuated rather than separating children from caregivers. The same point is made in the International Committee of the Red Cross (2004) inter-agency guiding principles for unaccompanied and separated children (ICRC, 2004), which state that inter-country adoption in the country of asylum is normally not considered in the interests of the child. Thus, we need to be critically attuned to whose interests are being served when child rescue and adoption narratives are mobilized.

Many proponents of child rescue approaches to children in emergency situations advocate for child rescue from an interested perspective. They seek children for the purposes of adoption and promote adoption-driven evacuations and removals in contrast to more child-focused approaches, which might place adoption on a care continuum for children in emergencies that also includes efforts at family preservation, family re-union, and community support (Mezmur, 2009). The latter approach is that supported by the UNCRC (1989), the ICRC through both its Protocol additional to the Geneva Conventions (ICRC, 1977) and its inter-agency guiding principles on unaccompanied children (ICRC, 2004), International Social Services, UNICEF and international protocols and agencies.

A WORLD OF ORPHANS?

While not all children in disasters are orphaned and not all orphaned children exist in circumstances of disaster, there is, as we discuss below, considerable blurring between these categories of children who are linked as objects of concern and in need of intervention. This, we suggest, arises from assumptions in the Global North

which favour the nuclear family as the optimal unit for the raising of children and tend to co-opt all children whose support is not immediately recognizable as being orphaned. In the wake of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, which has devastated populations in many parts of the developing world and especially many poor African nations, and in other large-scale disasters, the figures of the unsupported child and the child in disaster have assumed considerable prominence as objects of global concern, policy focus and intervention. Interventions to assist such children are not without controversy, as with the illegal removal of children from Haiti in 2010 for adoption by families in the US (Dambach and Baglietto, 2010; Hague Justice Portal, 2010).

While our discussion proceeds on the assumption that children left orphaned or otherwise unsupported and children in emergency situations need appropriate care and support in order to grow and develop normally, we foreground differences in views as to what form this support should take. These differences highlight tensions in prevailing views on children and childhood with respect to the degree to which some children, or children of a certain age, may be competent to put in place their own care arrangements with community support, and the contrasting views which assume that children can never be competent to provide this support and their proper care requires a wholesale intervention (often akin to the rescuing of the child from these circumstances).

Any consideration of the category of the orphan child must begin with understanding what the term means and how it is used. Popular and sentimentalized understandings of the word orphan in the Global North take the term to mean a child who has lost both its parents and is thus at risk of being wholly unsupported and in need of family-based care and shelter. It may be noted that with the progressive nuclearization of families in the Global North from the time of the advent of industrialization and accelerating in the first half of the twentieth century, the relative isolation of many nuclear family units significantly amplifies the emotional and material consequences of the death of one or both parents and results in the concept of orphanhood taking on tragic dimensions.

The current definition of orphan used by UNICEF differs from this popular understanding, as it is used to refer to a child who has lost at least one parent (single orphan) in addition to children who have lost both parents (double orphans). Thus, when UNICEF or other bodies cite statistics for orphaned children – for example, the figure of 132 million orphans worldwide given by UNICEF in 2012 – the very large numbers cited include children who may have at least one parent living. Thus UNICEF advises that of this 132 million children classified as orphans only 13 million have lost both parents, the majority have the support of at least one parent and extended family members. Salient misunderstandings arise from this terminology:

> However, this difference in terminology can have concrete implications for policies and programming for children. For example, UNICEF's 'orphan' statistic might be interpreted to mean that globally there are 132 million children in need of a new family, shelter, or care. This misunderstanding may then lead to responses that focus on providing care for individual children rather

than supporting the families and communities that care for orphans and are in need of support. (UNICEF, 2012b)

As this UNICEF explanatory note indicates, even children who have lost both parents may not live entirely unsupported, as they may have the support and care of extended family or community.

UNICEF and other agencies that focus on children in emergency situations have been at pains to address 'misdirected' (Doyle, 2010) assumptions about children in emergencies and orphanhood and to tackle Eurocentric assumptions about the appropriate care of children in such circumstances. In the last 20 years, there has been a determined shift away from using the word 'orphan' in favour of the term 'unaccompanied' child, as in this statement by the UNHCR in 1994:

> Unaccompanied children are those who are separated from both parents and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so. The children should not be described as "orphans", but as "unaccompanied children". It cannot be assumed that unaccompanied children in Rwanda and in the refugee camps are orphans. The status of being an orphan always requires careful verification since the term "orphan" is sometimes used in the region for children who have lost one parent. Even though some children have come from orphanages in Rwanda […] many, if not most, alleged orphans have living parents [who] may have entrusted their children to an orphanage as a security measure or to ensure adequate provision of food and shelter. (UNHCR, 1994)

This statement further highlights differences in global understandings about how and where children are best, or most appropriately, supported and raised. Assumptions in the Global North are that children should be cared for within the family structure known as the nuclear family, and that anything less than or different from this mode of care represents a deficit. Of course, with high rates of marital dissolution and single-parent households in most Western societies, and the widespread phenomenon of the 'deadbeat dads' (that is fathers who fail to maintain contact with and financial support of their children), many children around the world live effectively as 'single' orphans.

In recognition of the fact that orphanhood itself may not necessarily equate with vulnerability and lack of support *and* that many children remain vulnerable even when they have two parents, UNICEF is in favour of de-emphasizing orphanhood as necessarily equating with vulnerability and replacing this with a focus on a wider range of factors which may lead to children being vulnerable (UNICEF, 2012b). In line with this approach, UNICEF and other child-focused aid agencies such as the ICRC (2004), de-emphasize individualized approaches to children akin to child rescue actions in favour of more holistic support for the communities that provide care for children left temporarily or permanently unsupported through war and other disasters (UNICEF, 2012b). This contextualized approach to the care of children is aligned with the emergence in recent years, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, of the more holistic child well-being approach in international and national children's

policy, and brings a slow recognition that the facts of being poor, or 'orphaned', or resident in the Global South do not in and of themselves create conditions justifying intervention, rescue or adoption by foreign nationals (Smolin, 2007).

DO ORPHANS NEED ADOPTION (OR DOES ADOPTION NEED ORPHANS)?

A realm of global activity in which the category of orphan is most hotly contested is that of inter-country adoption (ICA), in which proponents of the adoption of children routinely point to the large numbers of orphans globally – mobilizing images of children who are totally unsupported and in need of family-based care – for whom inter-country adoption is posited as the only solution to their plight. This argument is in contradiction to the advice of UNICEF, the UNHCR and other international agencies, arises from different understandings of the term orphan, as outlined above, and is then enmeshed in different and competing views of the place of inter-country adoption as a response to children in need, relative to a range of other care options. These differences are outlined effectively by the African scholar Benjamin Mezmur who equates adoption-driven approaches to child rescue with serving adults' *rights to a child* for the purposes of family formation, and aligns more holistic approaches to child placement and care, which might include ICA in particular circumstances, with addressing the *rights of the child* (Mezmur, 2009).

In addition to confusion around the term 'orphan', there is, we suggest, a global politics at work by which some in the Global North seek to perpetuate the use of the term and the particular meanings it generates – of vulnerability, of the need for rescue, and the need for adoption into a loving northern home – for particular reasons. Legally an orphan is the only category of child who may be made available for adoption. In order to be made available for adoption by foreign nationals, therefore, a child must be certified as an orphan. While adoption proponents argue that orphans need adoption, and that only adoption into a loving home can provide the child with what it needs to grow and develop normally and fulfil its potential, this position ignores a growing range of child-care regimes which are available to children in their own countries and is in clear contravention of the UNCRC (UN, 1989), the Hague Convention on ICA (1993), and statements by UNHCR (1994) and the ICRC (2004). It is perhaps more correct to say that the inter-country adoption market needs a steady supply of orphans to meet demand for children for family formation. Efforts within the global children's movement to keep more children in their home communities and the retreat from the notion of orphanhood as necessarily equating with vulnerability and need have not been good for ICA, whose numbers are now in global decline (Selman, 2012).

While ICA developed in response to the plight of children in war-time emergencies – primarily the Korean War (1950–53) – it has since been regularized as a route to family formation for a range of adults who for biological and social reasons cannot have children of their own (Cuthbert, Spark and Murphy, 2009). Thus, over the second half of the twentieth century, ICA grew as a demand-driven phenomenon.

This is distinct from a needs-driven phenomenon in which ICA is viewed and prac-tised primarily to meet the needs of genuinely orphaned or unsupported children for family-based care when all other possibilities have been exhausted. As we outline in the next section, natural disasters have also created circumstances in which chil-dren temporarily separated from parents or members of extended families have been constructed as 'orphans' and subject to removal (in some cases mass removal) from their countries of origin for the purposes of adoption.

CHILDREN IN DISASTERS

Children are particularly vulnerable in times of emergency, crisis and disaster whether this is caused by war or natural events such as earthquakes, floods or fire. However, the children of some countries are more vulnerable than others – in under-developed countries where, for example, social supports and emergency response infrastructure are less developed, emergencies can have devastating and long-term impact on com-munities, including children. One of the additional risks the children of the Global South face in disasters is the application of what has been called 'misdirected kind-ness' (Doyle, 2010) in the form of removal or 'rescue' by adoption agents. The main difference between such rescue attempts since the Second World War is that children have been removed permanently for the purposes of adoption, rather than tem-porarily evacuated. In war-torn Vietnam, post-Ceauşescu Romania, and in response to natural disasters in South-East Asia and the Caribbean, significant numbers of children were subject to mass removal by foreigners for adoption (Bergquist, 2009; Brookfield, 2009; Rotabi and Bergquist, 2010; Selman, 2011; Fronek and Cuthbert, 2012a, 2012b).
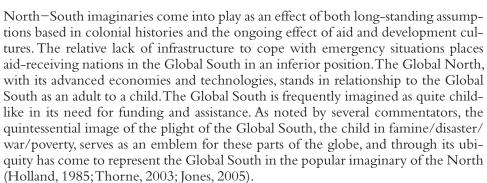
In assessing the appropriateness or otherwise of this response to the plight of chil-dren in emergencies, it is worth asking whether such an intervention could occur in more developed countries.[1] Can we readily imagine that mass evacuation and adop-tion by foreign nationals would have been considered appropriate responses to assist some of the thousands of US children affected by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, or Australian children displaced by the catastrophic bushfires in the Australian state of Victoria in 2009, or by the floods in the states of Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria in 2010–11, or the serial earthquakes which devastated the New Zealand city of Christchurch and its surroundings in 2010 and 2011? Can we imagine US, Australian or New Zealand children, many of whom might have one or both par-ents who survived the disaster, being airlifted from their communities for adoption by foreigners, with their names and identities permanently changed? Why, therefore, does the permanent removal for adoption of children from disasters in poor nations *appear* acceptable?

Different criteria pertain in Global Northern nations, due to differences in the levels of infrastructure and, both flowing from this reality and extending beyond it, assumptions about the competence of these nations to manage their own emergen-cies, with targeted and limited support from other nations. When disaster strikes in the Global South, a range of other considerations and what we might call global

North–South imaginaries come into play as an effect of both long-standing assumptions based in colonial histories and the ongoing effect of aid and development cultures. The relative lack of infrastructure to cope with emergency situations places aid-receiving nations in the Global South in an inferior position. The Global North, with its advanced economies and technologies, stands in relationship to the Global South as an adult to a child. The Global South is frequently imagined as quite child-like in its need for funding and assistance. As noted by several commentators, the quintessential image of the plight of the Global South, the child in famine/disaster/war/poverty, serves as an emblem for these parts of the globe, and through its ubiquity has come to represent the Global South in the popular imaginary of the North (Holland, 1985; Thorne, 2003; Jones, 2005).

When disaster strikes in the Global North, as with Hurricane Katrina in the USA in 2005, the communities are credited with capacities to get themselves back on their feet and to recover, even when it is acknowledged that post-disaster responses could have been better managed. Further, in such contexts, reunification is a priority for children separated from their parents – as was the case post-Katrina (Fronek and Cuthbert, 2012b). In the 2011 Australian floods, where the scale of post-disaster recovery was likened to the aftermath of war, the immediate post-disaster focus was on building community resilience (ABC, 2011; Brandenburg et al., 2007). Both implicitly and explicitly, re-uniting dislocated children with their families, keeping children in these communities and, to the extent that they are capable, involving children in community recovery processes are considered central to the task of post-disaster recovery. These objectives are in line with all international protocols on the care of children and communities in disaster.

Another set of dynamics is at work when disaster strikes the Global South (Nicolas et al., 2009). Heightened calamity and rescue discourses produce an homogenously apocalyptic view of disaster zones in the Global South. The disaster zone is constructed as a place where no care for children appears possible (Fronek and Cuthbert, 2012b). Following the argument of Pupavac (1998, 2001) on the infantilization and pathologization of the Global South in aid and other discourses, portrayals of disaster zones in the developing world see all victims reduced to 'children' in their need for aid. Frequently, aid and disaster recovery projects funded by foreign donors bypass local community structures and support networks, further rendering adults in the affected communities powerless and childlike (Fronek and Cuthbert, 2012b), and as passive recipients of recovery assistance rather than as active participants in their own recovery in partnership with foreign aid donors. The people, culture and nation caught up in disaster are represented as near to wholly dysfunctional. Adults are systematically disempowered, local care structures for children and vulnerable people are overlooked, and many children who are not in fact orphaned, are treated as orphans without adequate care or support, in need of rescue (and available for adoption) by adults from the Global North.

Such a view, which runs counter to international aid protocols as we have seen, aligns with the needs and interests of the international adoption market for which emergencies in the form of disaster and war represent significant opportunities for the sourcing of children for adoption. This is especially the case since the introduction of the *Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of*

Intercountry Adoption (Hague Conference on Private International Law, 1993) which has dramatically reduced the numbers of adoptable children being made available through regulated channels on the global adoption market.

It has been argued by several scholars that proponents of ICA who posit adoption as the most suitable way of dealing with children in distress have a significant interest in perpetuating the use of the term orphan and the misunderstandings that arise from the differences between official definitions and popular understandings of its meaning (Smolin, 2012; Fronek and Cuthbert, 2012b). Thus, an organization called The Orphan Foundation which has as its aim 'removing barriers to adoption' states that there are 163 million orphans in the world for whom adoption into a loving American home is an objective worth striving for (The Orphan Foundation, 2008). Australian celebrity adoption proponent, Deborra-Lee Furness (the wife of actor Hugh Jackman) paints a similar picture; she advocates an end to the needless delays imposed by Australian 'anti-adoption' bureaucracies that are preventing these 'millions of orphans and unwanted children' finding loving Australian homes (Furness, 2008, 2013).

For Furness and many other proponents of ICA, any attempt to regulate the practice of ICA, to de-emphasize the term orphan or to preference holistic in-country community support in poor communities, communities affected by HIV/AIDS or in the aftermath of war and other disasters, is seen as anti-adoption (Fronek, 2009; Poe, 2010). The conceptualization of the needs of the child in disaster and distress which emphasizes holistic support to children in their communities, works against the sentimentalized 'rescue' narratives which have underpinned the history and practice of ICA for over 60 years.

The intertwined histories of war and disaster and inter-country adoption from the second half of the twentieth century to the present highlight the contestations around the category of the orphan child and the child in disaster and the difficulty, in this conflicted space, of identifying what might be in the best interests of children, both with respect to their immediate safety and longer-term considerations. An equally contested space is that occupied by child soldiers and children caught up in armed conflict to which we turn in the second half of this chapter.

CHILD SOLDIERS AND CAAFAG

As detailed in Chapter 3, the history of the UNCRC is rooted in nineteenth-century child labour reform and child protection movements at the national level. It is also based in the internationalization of policies aimed at global reform in the treatment of children that came in the wake of the two World Wars of the twentieth century. There we saw that the first stage of attempts to recognize 'the rights of the child', by the League of Nations, was a direct response to witnessing of the effects of the First World War on children. More particularly, the violence perpetrated against children in the Second World War — in concentration camps, and in the orphaning and both social and family dislocation experienced by children in the aftermath of the war — was germinal in the reformulation of those earlier efforts into the UNCRC. Yet in the Second World War, children were not uniformly victims of the

war; many were enthusiastically militarized, whether through enlistment or paramilitary youth organizations, while others aided or took part in resistance movements. As a child living under Nazi occupation in the Netherlands, the actress Audrey Hepburn, one of the earliest UNICEF ambassadors, famously acted as a courier and messenger for the Dutch resistance. She was just one of thousands of otherwise ordinary children to do so across occupied Europe. Further, those children who were displaced and disposed were not necessarily passive in their repatriation. For example, Ian Serrallier's children's classic *The Silver Sword* (1956) fictionalizes the true story of children independently and competently travelling from Poland to Switzerland in the wake of the war.

The agentic rights-bearing child that emerges from the UNCRC, who has access to schooling and opportunities for sports and play, is a child of optimism and peacetime. With respect to the prospect of war and the prospect of children's active involvement in war, the UNCRC shifts the discourse from that of rights and agency back to that of welfare, protection and vulnerability. Article 38 of the UNCRC specifically calls on governments to avoid the direct involvement in hostilities of people aged under 15. The *Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict* (adopted by the UN General Council in 2000, coming into force in 2002, hereafter the *Optional Protocol*) extends that effort, but first we will outline just who this document is intended to cover.[2]

Prior to the *Optional Protocol* (UN, 2000c) the 'subjects' at issue − we cannot call them 'agents' as they are not constructed as full agents − were referred to as 'child soldiers'. In response to concerns that this term leaves out many of the ways in which children are affected by armed conflict, this has been replaced by the broader term, 'children associated with armed forces or armed groups' or CAAFAG. For ease of reading, we will continue to use the term 'child soldiers' throughout this chapter, but in doing we are including the fuller definition of CAAFAG. Just who is comprehended within the acronym CAAFAG is set out in the *Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups 2007* (hereafter, the *Paris Principles*):

> 2.1: "A child associated with an armed force or armed group" [CAAFAG] refers to any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys, and girls used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities. (UNICEF, 2007b: 7)

The definition, then, is based on a clear differentiation from the child who circulates in the stereotypically 'proper' spaces of childhood, of 'home' or 'school'. The document as a whole assumes that that the activity of such a child is involuntary, or at least coerced (for persons below 18 are not supposed to be able to give fully informed consent). We can also see from the tasks listed that the child's possible activities might also be seen as 'work' (an 'unchildlike' activity).

Article 1 of the *Optional Protocol*, on which the *Paris Principles* are based (UNICEF, *Guide to the Optional Protocol*, 13) puts the onus on states to ensure that

those under 18 are not sent into active service, and that they are not recruited for or used in armed conflict by non-government militia. This proscription is very much based on a notion of children as vulnerable and subject to coercion. Article 2 goes on to affirm that there shall be no compulsory recruitment (conscription) of those under 18. However, by setting the minimum age for recruitment at 15, Article 3 allows countries such as the USA, the UK and Australia (and others) to retain the ability to enlist young volunteer recruits with parental/guardian consent, as long as they are not deployed in active warfare. Article 4 sets out the inequality between State and non-State militia, as the latter are not to recruit (compulsorily or voluntarily) anyone under 18. The intent and import of the document, then, is very much an extension of the protective elements of the UNCRC.

The implementation of the *Optional Protocol* therefore has a number of possible effects for children. The use of children over 16 in regular forces is largely uncontentious and those states that want to retain the right to enlist these 'children' are prepared to keep them out of active service. But what of child soldiers, who are allied with armed forces within conflict zones, as defined in the *Paris Principles* and in contravention of the *Optional Protocol*? Children in war are part of a much more intensive interest, particularly from those in agencies either required or committed to uphold the *Optional Protocol* in their delivery of aid. In turning to discuss the ways in which child soldiers are dealt with on the ground, most often by aid agencies or researchers working with them, we will see that the assumptions of the UNCRC and the *Optional Protocol* are not so easily mapped onto children's lived experiences.

'AIDING' CHILD SOLDIERS

The vast majority of the literature that deals with child soldiers is retrospective. Research is based on the provision of aid to, or the re-conceptualizing of, children, male and female, who have returned from experiencing life in an armed militia in one or more possible roles, and is reliant on memory and the post-war narration of experiences. Such children might have been active fighters, or might have taken on support roles (cooking, acting as bearers). They might also have been used as sex-slaves. Just what roles they played – active or supportive – features large in the demographic data collected by most researchers, particularly those interested in the children's ongoing mental health.

Second, the focus is almost exclusively on children in developing or under-developed countries (Betancourt et al., 2011; Mæland, 2010; Brett and Specht, 2004). Where child soldiers form a part of a regular military force, particularly in developed countries, under-18s do not attract the same kind of concerned research. This is perhaps because, in line with compliance with the *Optional Protocol*, youth recruits in developed countries are not deployed on active service; but, as Lee-Koo (2001) argues, it is also because their military service is much more likely to be constructed as a path to productive citizenship. It is the child soldiers in developing

and under-developed countries who attract the most concern and condemnation, and who are constructed as either abused or demonically 'unchildlike'.

Third, as noted, much of the research on child soldiers is aimed at, or is a part of, efforts to deliver aid to war-affected areas. Much research is therefore explicitly allied with the preconceptions and the aims of the bodies delivering the aid. There are many aid initiatives aimed at preventing children from becoming 'victims' of war; but aid generally comes with conditions attached concerning who may receive it and how it may be deployed. Accordingly, what is researched is, to some extent, dependent on how aid is delivered. The major donors and/or aid providers to war-affected countries are from international agencies, many either under the auspices of the UN or who are committed to the UN's policies. The assumptions of what it is to be a child soldier and how best to 'aid' children post-conflict are therefore likely to be based in the UNCRC's conceptualization of the child.

There are three stages that are of interest to such agencies: the children before they became soldiers, their experiences during armed conflict (as monitored after the fact) and their lives after demobilization. Each of these stages can be dealt with from the theoretical perspective of the 'becoming' or the 'being' child. In the first stage, the child may be seen as the standard developmental child, bucolically innocent; or, as a proto-agent living in (overwhelmingly) impoverished circumstances that regularly lead to civil unrest in under-developed countries. In the bulk of the literature on child soldiers these are the assumed states prior to entry into armed conflict. In the second stage, while at war, the 'becoming' child is generally characterized as abused and forced into committing atrocities, vulnerable and malleable in the hands of malevolent adults/leaders. More rarely, there is an acknowledgement that children at war are also 'being', that is, agents able to take up arms for a cause that they see as offering the possibility of change.

In the third stage, after returning from the battlefields, the 'becoming' child is seen as needing to be reintegrated into a community and society that will 'cherish' and care for them as they continue their interrupted progression from child to adult. This approach almost always implies that the child is re-childed. Attempts at re-childing a 'being' child can lead to frustrated and disempowered individuals (see Chapter 5). Such efforts at re-childing may also lead to re-radicalization if the basic socio-economic and political circumstances have not changed (McMullin, 2011). McMullin argues that the shaping of the 'child soldier' according to the terms of the UNCRC and the *Paris Principles*, with its concentration on reintegration, ironically often makes nothing better and sometimes even worsens conditions for the child.

VICTIMS IN NEED OF TREATMENT

The main way of responding to the perceived post-conflict needs of child soldiers directly reflects the treatment of adult returnees from most modern wars, particularly those that have attracted UN intervention: that is, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR). In the DDR of children returning from armed conflict, youth

are demobilized to temporary holding camps once disarmed, and then attempts are made to reintegrate them into communities. Much of the psychologically premised research has been carried out at the point of reintegration. This is the site of the child soldier as a 'victim in need of treatment'.

There is a strong sense of child soldiers requiring medical 'treatment' − whether from psychologists, psychiatrists or physicians. For example, there is a lot of concern to monitor the mental health of returned child soldiers, on the assumption that they are likely to be suffering from PTSD. This is most obvious in the cluster of psychological studies on child soldiers in a number of countries of Africa. One of the best-known researchers and commentators in this field is Therese Betancourt, who along with her co-authors has conducted widely cited, longitudinal studies of former child soldiers in Sierra Leone and Northern Uganda. Conducted in collaboration with community groups and aid agencies, Betancourt et al. (2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2012) are concerned to trace the levels of PTSD and other mental health problems amongst returned child soldiers, the levels of reintegration into their communities and to follow returned child soldiers' development into adulthood. Betancourt et al. argue that the effects of experiences of witnessing or perpetrating 'intense physical violence' (2010a: 1078) become more obvious over time along with the long-term effects of reintegration (or lack thereof), and that what appears to be unproblematic or at least not obviously problematic in (late) childhood leads to mental health issues in adulthood. Betancourt and her colleagues are openly concerned to treat the 'becoming' child, who has been 'deprived of their rights to the care and protection of their families, and denied education and other developmental opportunities' (Betancourt et al., 2010a: 1078).

For each of their studies Betancourt et al. (2010a, 2011) drew on large pools of male and female subjects from communities in refugee camps, comparing the mental health indicators of returned child soldiers with their peers who remained in communities during the wars, cross-correlating the data for gender differences. Collecting and reporting their data at intervals, they variously observed that how well returned child soldiers are accepted by their communities is a determinant for their mental health outcomes (2010a, 2011, 2012); the effects of gender on community acceptance and reintegration, and on resilience (2011); and the efficacy of different treatment protocols for boys and girls (2011, 2012).

Their findings are that the female child soldiers in their cohort had less access to schooling, citing education as a high indicator for reintegration and confidence (see also Angucia et al., 2010), and are stigmatized as having been sex-slaves. Boys were more likely to have been active combatants (42 per cent vs. 28 per cent) but each gender was just as likely to have been exposed to or to have perpetrated violence; girls were likely to be more anxious and aggressive than their non-child soldier peers. The boys who were raped (5 per cent) were shown to suffer more psychological effects in the long term than the girls (44 per cent), who suffered but were not completely debilitated (2011). The longitudinal nature of Betancourt et al.'s studies provides support for later findings about resilience and adaptation amongst returnees, with girls being more stigmatized and more likely to suffer depression immediately after repatriation (2010b), but more resilient and better at coping in the

long term, returning to culturally accepted gender behaviours such as 'being kind' to regain a degree of acceptance (see also Jordans et al., 2012).

Relatedly, Annan et al. (2009), in their qualitative study of male returned child soldiers in Northern Uganda, find a polarization on the basis of resilience, between child soldiers who continue to be 'lost' to their communities and those who reintegrated. They argue that the deciding factor appears to have been the level of acceptance they achieved, that is, not facing discrimination from their (displaced and encamped) family and friends. Klasen et al.'s (2010) early intervention study of 'positive adaptation' amongst Ugandan former child soldiers found that of the 30 per cent in their sample who were found to be resilient, gender was not a factor but socio-economic status was (with higher status producing greater resilience). In their comparative study of nearly 600 male and female returned child soldiers and their non-militarized peers in Burundi, Jordans et al. (2012) report that 69.4 per cent of the child soldiers joined voluntarily.

All the above studies are intertwined with the deployment of aid at the final point of DDR (reintegration) and are concerned with psychological treatment and/or psychologically informed education. Other approaches to the child soldier as 'victim in need of treatment' are more concerned with the physical after-effects of having been a child soldier. A member of the Save the Children Fund (Uppard, 2003) characterizes returned female child soldiers in Sri Lanka very much as vulnerable innocents, but is concerned to address their physical health. Female child soldiers, many of whom have been sex-slaves, are likely to have acquired STIs; to have long-lasting physical effects (sterility) if not treated; to be branded as 'whores', socially excluded and ignored in statistics.

How well do these approaches, all clearly premised on developmentalist assumptions, stand up to scrutiny? The lack of efficacy of the education programmes for girls reported in several studies is unsurprising, particularly if schooling is experienced as a form of 're-childing' by someone who has achieved agency. The reported raised levels of aggression and anxiety in these studies (Betancourt et al., 2011) not only show that child soldiers do not have an easy time adapting to expectations of their communities but imply that returning to limited agency after chaotic and abusive, but nevertheless agentic, experiences is in some ways a poorly thought-through approach. Further, Angucia et al.'s reporting of the input of adults in directing the returnees to return to education suggests a similar dynamic to the CHH in Chapter 5. We saw there that when youth have had experience with responsibility it is harder for them to return to former familial dynamics of subordination.

It may be that the girls' greater resilience to sexual abuse (Betancourt et al., 2011) has something to do with the gender expectations of their habitus; that it is, sadly, with a recognized possibility that they are open to sexual abuse within their gender habitus (whereas boys are not). Further, the reporting of higher rates of 'depression' amongst girls who have been used as sex-slaves (Jordans et al., 2012) may have as much to do with the temporal proximity of the study to demobilization and factors such as re-childing, given the reported resilience in long-term studies (Betancourt et al., 2011). Indeed, resilience in general may also be related to

the individual's capacity to recover rather than a given developmental stage being crucial to future health, much as there have been adult returnees from many wars who have been resilient and coped perfectly well in later life and others who have been comprehensively destroyed (BWHO, 2012).

There are also instances where outcomes are reported that are clearly undermined by the data. For example, Jordans et al. (2012) claim that their interviewees are not 'really' volunteer recruits, at the same time as they document explanations given by child soldiers for joining militia (vengeance, ideology, prestige, fear, material benefit, peer pressure, social exclusion) that speak of rational decision-making, not all of which can be interpreted as coercive. Annan et al.'s study (2009), incidentally, supports McMullin's (2011) contention that children have reasons for deciding to join militia that lie in pre-existing socio-political circumstances, including unsupportive family relationships, lack of employment and lack of education, to which many of their interviewee child soldiers were returning. Hamnett (2008) also discusses the wider circumstances behind children becoming soldiers: poverty, lack of opportunities of all kinds, war and disease. The delivery of aid that is based on education and skills-training intended to prepare returnees for work often fails to recognize that there is no work to which those skills can be applied and there is little recognition of these young people as 'agents in their own right'.

AGENTS IN THEIR OWN RIGHT

The discussion of children's reasons for taking part in armed conflict, as reformulated to recast them as victims, disempowers them in a way that is patronizing (Jordans et al., 2012). Yet there is implicit recognition within the *Optional Protocol* that young people below the age of 18 may consciously choose to join a state's armed force, often as a means to waged and subsidized education and training (Lee-Koo, 2011); it seems illogical that all child soldiers in non-state militia are then necessarily victims, as is often portrayed in the literature on child soldiers. The construction of children as 'a distinctive type of human being' in the UNCRC is challenged by the lived experiences of such child soldiers, for just as a proportion are brutally forced to become soldiers, others are conscious volunteers (Bhabha, 2006: 1532).

At the same time, as children's reasons for becoming soldiers might have been strategic and based in socio-economic conditions affecting both them and their non-militia peers, they may be demobilized into 'a range of structural and often pre-existing challenges that may even be among the roots of war, such as social inequality and chronic poverty, [that] can account for ongoing psychological distress in its aftermath' (Vindevogel et al., 2013: 757). International DDR aid that does not extend beyond an immediate period of resettlement is unlikely 'to mend the war-affected surroundings at all socio-ecological levels' (ibid.: 763). It is therefore also reasonable on the part of communities to be cautious in reintegrating former child soldiers, for once it is accepted that they are not just 'misguided

children' but politically conscious agents, it is clear that their path to returning to a non-militarized life is more than a matter of 're-childing' the child.

There is also a problem in making clear distinctions between the *Paris Principles*' definition of the child soldier and children living (and acting) in sites of conflict. As Pedersen and Sommerfelt (2007) argue, there are many conflicts in which children may be involved where it is difficult to delineate easily between those affected and those participating. Children in armed gangs in Brazil, for example (though one could as easily give examples from Guatemala or the USA), are exposed to war-like violence. Pedersen and Sommerfelt argue that 'one should focus on armed conflicts that are organized in a war-like fashion, regardless of whether or not the conflict is formally regarded as war' in order to frame the 'social indicators' of child soldiers (2007: 255). Indeed, there is evidence from anthropological research that in such circumstances it is possible that child soldiers are 'socialized' into violence. For example, in Bosnia during the break-up of the former-Yugoslavia, children were observed 'playing war' and were not discouraged by adults from doing so; such war-like play became a normalized part of their lives (Korbin, 2003). Further, it is clear that some child soldiers join armed militia as committed agents and retain that agency and commitment into adulthood (Kanagaratnam et al., 2005).

More critical of under-examined assumptions in the developmentalist (psychological) literature, Shepler's (2005) ethnographic study of former child soldiers in Sierra Leone and their parents, teachers and community leaders, reveals how strategically each group manipulates the UNCRC view of child soldiers as 'innocent' and 'apolitical'. Returnees, many of whom were already active social and economic agents before they became fighters, recognize what is expected from the variety of audiences they encounter and put on the appropriate social mask of 'non-agency' to get what they desire (aid funds, education, reintegration, forgiveness, acceptance), while still speaking about their experiences in terms of their agency amongst their fellow former soldiers (Shepler, 2005: 199–200). In a complementary manner, the local adults sensitized to the discourse of the UNCRC appear to consciously, and paradoxically, use the UNCRC to re-infantilize these former soldiers into the space of respect for adults. Shepler describes how techniques 'primarily from the fields of education, psychology and social welfare' (Shepler, 2005: 207) are used along with the discourse of 'human rights' (ibid.: 208) to 'discipline' the agentic and 'being' child soldier back into the community. Thus, 'if we see a former child soldier as only traumatized (though he or she may well *be* traumatized), we miss all the other aspects of his or her reintegration, most importantly the social aspects' (ibid.: 208).

At a broader level, the UNCRC model of the child may contain the seeds of inefficacy for the deployment of aid. In his study of DDR programmes in Angola, Jaremey McMullin (2011) argues that post-conflict attempts at DDR were based on an unhelpful universalizing model of the child that excluded child soldiers and 'rendered them invisible' (2011: 750–2). That is, those who did not fit the model of the vulnerable victim were left at the margins. Further, in implementing DDR and UNCRC-based aid, children of the Global South are contrasted with children of the Global North, and thereby used to police the boundaries of the normative

'sacred child' which 'performs a containment function […] that erases discussion of victims and perpetrators across a vertical, international axis and that absolves international states, donors and institutions of obligations to cast child rights in terms of access to better political and economic conditions locally, nationally and globally' (ibid.: 760). In so doing, whole societies, specifically those with high populations of young people which are almost exclusively nations of the Global South, are by extension infantilized and their young constructed 'as dangerous, destabilizing and crippling to development' (ibid.: 760).

Similarly, Lee-Koo (2011) provides an excellent example of the binary juxtaposition of the acceptable Global Northern youth soldier and the unacceptable Global Southern 'barbaric' child monster. Based on close readings of representations of children in the two domains, from the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers and the Australian Defence Force (ADF) 'Gap Year' recruitment campaign (for 16–18 year olds), she demonstrates how the Global South's child soldier is constructed as alone, vulnerable and 'out of control' in contrast to the ADF's productive citizen-in-the-making, 'and reinforces pre-existing notions of the global South as a morally defunct zone of tragedy' (Lee-Koo, 2011: 731). Lee-Koo argues that aid agencies aiming to increase humanitarian intervention and to garner support from the Global North rely on a form of imagery that is colonial in flavour, stemming from 'distant powers (including states and transnational organizations) which seek to maintain asymmetrical power relations […] in order to conduct humanitarian operations' (ibid.: 735). The representation of child soldiers of the Global South silences their on-the-ground needs, their range of capacities and the possibility that they are agents motivated by complex socio-political circumstances (ibid.: 740).

In the research we have canvassed in this chapter, it is logical that the 'becoming' child dominates much of the discussion of children in disasters, as these children are the immediate object of international aid that is subject to the provisions of the UNCRC, its related Optional Protocols and other aid-governing documents. Complementing and problematizing the UNCRC view of children who are caught in the wake of war and/or disaster are arguments that deepen our understanding of children as subject to the wider social and political forces (the habitus) into which they have been socialized. This characterization of child soldiers and orphans of disasters more often comes out of discussions in the social and political sciences, which are critical of approaches to assisting children that do not take into account the child's capacity for agency, that do not acknowledge that children are not uniformly 'victims', and in which we encounter again the 'being' child.

NOTES

1   The argument in this paragraph is adapted from a discussion published in Fronek and Cuthbert (2012a).
2   There are 129 signatories to this Protocol, and 152 parties. (http://treaties. un.org/, accessed 22 September 2013).

Further reading

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