International Institute of Social Studies

(signature)

Save the War Child:
How Donor Gaze and Affect Economy Frame the Representation of Child Soldiers on Western NGO Websites

A Research Paper presented by:

Arunima Dey

India

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for obtaining the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Major:

SPD

Specializations:

Children and Youth Studies

Conflict and Peace Studies

Members of the Examining Committee:

Dr. Kristen E. Cheney
Dr. Shyamika Jayasundara-Smits

The Hague, The Netherlands

December 2021

Acknowledgements

Contents

Abstract

In the post-Cold War period, child soldiers have captured the attention of the humanitarian sector, international law, policy makers, child rights proponents, and news media. The manner in which child soldiers have been and continue to be represented in media and by other stakeholders involved in prevention of their recruitment and rehabilitation have come to shape not just perceptions about them but also material responses to them. In this research paper, I explore how certain Western NGOs who work with child soldiers frame their online content about such children, and their work in general, in a manner that is guided by the donor gaze and affect economy. I argue that representations which seek to fulfil the demands of the donor gaze and aim to induce affect are limiting in nature, thereby obscuring those aspects of child soldiers' realities that do not hold affective capital and are not considered worthy of donor's funding. I reflect on how these limiting representations can restrict more accurate interventions for child soldiers in particular, and what they tell us more broadly about the manner in which the aid sector functions.

Relevance to Development Studies

NGOs are a prominent part of what is largely understood as 'development'. Within the purview of development studies, it is crucial to know how humanitarian aid agencies operate and what are the unproblematised aspects of the same. One of these aspects is that of how they represent their subjects of intervention. Representations are shaped in ways to validate why a certain issue requires the attention of the aid sector. However, there is a need to critically evaluate how these representations tend to show what one (donor) wants to see (to give funds) rather than what it really is. When it comes to child soldiers, their accurate representation becomes critical to allow for proper interventions for preventing their recruitment and reintegrating them into post-conflict societies. Therefore, this research paper problematises representations of child soldiers where the realities of those receiving aid are reduced to stories of passive victimhood and suffering that becomes emotional fodder for the privileged donor to feed on. The research contributes to development studies by arguing for more honest representations that can make the aid/development sector more accurate and ethical in its workings.

Keywords
Child soldiers, donor gaze, affect economy, representations on Western NGO websites, narrative analysis, frame analysis, visual analysis.

Chapter 1 How Child Soldiers are Represented and Why?

"Amid the generalized anxiety surrounding the predicament of youth in the twenty-first century, deemed to be in 'trouble' in one sense or another all across the globe, one would be hard-pressed to find a figure more troubling than that of the child soldier."

(Mackey 2013: 100)

Child Soldiers and their Media Representation

According to the UN, in 2020, "[m]ore than 8,500 children were used as soldiers … in various conflicts across the world" (Nichols 2021). To capture what one means by a 'child soldier', I follow the Cape Town Principles definition, which claims:

> … 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 (Mazurana *et al.* 2002: 100; McKay 2005: 387; Veale 2003: 11).

Though child soldiers have existed as early as the American Civil War and the two World Wars (Rosen 2005), in the post-Cold War and contemporary period, they came into focus once their use in the new wars started to capture the attention of international law, child and human rights activists as a consequence of the emerging "common understanding of childhood and soldiering as diametrically opposed concepts" (Steinl 2017: 3). Child soldiers complicate the popular universalised notion of childhood as an age of innocence and lacking capability/agency (Shepler 2003: 57; also Rosen 2005, 2007; Drumbl 2012; Honwana 2006; Boyden and Berry 2004). Hence, since the 1990s, child soldiers, seen as emblems of 'childhood gone wrong' became an issue to be addressed for the humanitarian sector and media (Hynd 2021: 75; Brocklehurst and Peters 2017: 75-76).

The Graça Machel Report (2001) arguably was among the first influential texts to bring forth the issue of contemporary child soldiers. This was followed by scholarship noting various trajectories of how child soldiers in varied situated contexts get incorporated in armed conflict, followed by their experience with the armed group, and ultimately their reintegration into post-conflict societies (or at times, prosecution) (Rosen 2005, 2007; Honwana 2006; Boyden and Berry 2004). As child soldiering became a 'problem' (and rightfully so), it captured the attention of news media as well as child-focused NGOs. Images and stories about child soldiers have come to dominate news related to new wars in the Global South, be it Africa or the Middle East, such that these children have become the "new faces of war" (Singer quoted Moynagh 2020: 76). Surely, one has chanced upon the widespread image of a child soldier as "a small, wild-eyed African boy in ragged clothes, brandishing an AK-47" (Hynd 2021: 75; also Lee-Koo 2011: 727; Denov 2012: 283). This, however, is an example of a constricted representation where child soldiers are just imagined as 'kids with guns'. A child soldier can occupy multiple subject positions, and move in and out of them in terms of their agency and vulnerability, their victimhood and perpetuator identity (Macfarlane 2021; Rosen 2005; Honwana 2006; Grétry 2011). However, academics have already highlighted that media depictions of child soldiers are reductivist since they are either portrayed as innocent victims or as deviant aggressors, especially in case of African child soldiers, to perpetuate

the narrative of Africa as the dark, barbaric continent (Denov 2012; Drumbl 2012). Shepler (2004: 120) notes that child soldiers embody the "contradiction inherent in the modern construction of youth: innocents versus perpetrators" wherein they are either seen as helpless kids who need protection and rescuing or as adherent youth who enjoy committing violent acts.

The perpetuator image is more common in news outlets while the victim image serves well for NGOs working to rehabilitate child soldiers. Both representations tend to argue largely for an unproblematised "model of unilinear transformation" from being aggressors or victims to "ordinary" youth reintegrated into society (Shepler 2004: 121). The images and narratives about a child whose childhood was corrupted, and whose innocence must be restored function as key currency in mobilising affect economy, i.e., an appeal to emotions and 'doing right' to help the 'victims of lost childhood'. Furthermore, such images are produced to satisfy the donor gaze, i.e., what the donor wants to see in order to donate.

The Problem of Representation: Factors Influencing (Limited) Framing of Child Soldiers

Media has the power to shape or foreground a certain reality, and in turn functions to legitimise specific ideologies, opinions and actions towards the 'represented' (Hall 1997a). In the case of representation of child soldiers by Western NGOs, the media generated by them propagates depictions/framings that aim to fulfil the donor gaze and evoke an affective response. I, therefore, asked: *How does the donor gaze and affect economy influence representations of child soldiers produced by child-focused Western NGOs?*

I argue that the images and narratives around African child soldiers framed by the donor gaze and affect economy limit representation of what may be considered non 'donor worthy' realities of child soldiers. Moreover, the aspects of affect, donor gaze along with the consumerist nature of aid-giving (which promotes self-appeasing desires of donors from 'doing good') in the current environment of humanitarianism, where culpability to donors is a high priority, depoliticise child soldiers and their realities, and takes attention away from the Global North's role in conflicts in Africa/Global South.

I analyse three Western NGO websites (Romeo Dallaire Institute, War Child Holland and UK) that work with child soldiers to show that donor gaze and affect economy operating within the liberal peace paradigm in post-war regions influence narratives and framings of these children in a manner that creates gaps and discrepancies between what is depicted and what their lived and situated realities are. I argue that these representations reduce child soldiers to passive victims whose agency is deliberately unacknowledged. Essentially, limiting representation of child soldiers restricts more well-rounded approach to them and the interventions targeted towards them.

Why Responsible Representation of Child Soldiers Matters

Media plays a significant role in defining social reality, shaping public perceptions and engagement with an issue, and guiding social interventions/actions in policymaking and humanitarian assistance (Hall 1997a, 1997b). I find that representations of child soldiers influenced by the donor gaze (what the donor demands see to give funds) and affect economy (inciting an emotional response of moral responsibility and pity) propel certain realities about child soldiers while obscuring others, thus reducing scope for adequate interventions.

In order to explore this claim, in the next chapter, I will first undertake a literature review to elaborate how such depictions, particularly by Western media and NGOs, have been

problematised by scholars so far. Next, I will focus on how the conceptualisation of new wars within the liberal peace framework has impacted the way in which child soldiers are represented. Following this, I will elaborate on the concepts of affect and donor gaze, and how their influence frames representations of child soldiers. I will close Chapter 2 by explaining the methodology used, i.e., narrative, frame and visual analysis, and how I will apply them as I examine the selected NGOs' website content.

In Chapter 3 and 4, I analyse the website content of Dallaire Institute and War Child (specifically, War Child Holland and UK with some references to their international website). I have selected these specific organisations as they are all established in the Global North, and work with children in conflict. Dallaire Institute focusses exclusively on child soldiers, while War Child has a broader focus on children affected by war of which child soldiers are a part. In Chapter 3, I will explore the ways in which child soldiers' depictions are framed to appease the donor gaze, and how that limits their representation. I focus on how the representations are influenced by the NGOs' need to show 'fixable' problems, successful past projects and involvement of (Western) experts to appease the donor gaze. I also explore how the victim frame for child soldiers remains persistent to justify seeking for funds. In Chapter 4, I analyse how representations that aim to evoke affect (much like the donor gaze) obstruct accurate representation of child soldiers. I examine the ways in which images of lone children, stress on a child's right to play, first-person narratives (by child soldiers) and emotive language used to speak about the issue induce affect and how that shapes representation. In my final conclusive chapter, I reflect on how limiting representations determined by the donor gaze and affect that shape the issue of child soldiers then potentially influence the nature of interventions. I also comment on what does it tell us about the aid sector; the ways in which it operates and how it obscures the West's involvement in generating wars when one scrutinises why child soldiers are represented the way they are.

Chapter 2 Understanding Factors that Shape Child Soldiers' Representations and How to Examine Them

In this chapter, I elaborate on the concepts of new wars, liberal peace, donor gaze and affect economy, and how they influence representations of and narratives about child soldiers. I also explain the methodology applied to analyse the selected NGOs' website content in the following chapters.

How 'New Wars' Discourses Determine Child Soldier Representations

New wars in Africa, leading to political and civil unrest, are considered an "especially aberrant and horrific phenomenon", which took "center stage" in the post-Cold War period (Rosen 2007: 298). Lee-Koo (2011: 731) expands on what new wars mean claiming that they "involve an array of state and non-state actors contesting divergent political, economic and cultural agendas through a range of traditional and non-traditional militarised strategies". A crucial feature of the new wars is that they intentionally involve civilians (Wells 2008: 237), including children, often by force (Brocklehurst and Peters 2017: 73).

Western media representations of child soldiers found in traditional news outlets and in most child-focussed Western NGOs' websites are based on how 'new wars' are framed (Lee-Koo 2011: 731). For instance, if new wars are seen as a result of "ancient ethnic hatreds" understood as depicting the perils of a still barbaric culture, then child soldiers are "explained as the product of moral decay" (Lee-Koo 2011: 731). Such depictions deliberately ignore the complexity of the situation such as how Western politics might be responsible for creating conflict in Africa. Instead, the West becomes the idealised norm while Africa/Global South becomes the problematic Other. For Lee-Koo (2011: 732), this "determinist view" of new wars leads to the representation of child soldiers involved in them as "the natural, unavoidable and threatening product of the post-cold war era's ethnic conflicts". When new wars in Africa (or Global South at large) are depicted as a sign of moral deficit, as an indication of savagery of the people, the child soldier figure becomes framed as the result of such culture; *a violent perpetuator*. This is one of the dominant representations of child soldiers in Western news media.

The 'child soldier as violent deviant/perpetuator' frame is meant to be understood as a consequence of having their childhood innocence stolen by growing up in an uncivilised culture, which must be restored. This particular framing "dovetail[s] neatly with depictions of Africa both as a place born of hell and misery and as a continent that, like a child, can be saved" (Mengestu quoted in Mackey 2013: 119). Furthermore, the child soldier as perpetuator frame contributes towards "a sensationalization of violence" since these children as seen as emblems of 'childhood gone wrong' and such representations sell in media (Steinl 2017: 11). Denov (2012: 282) argues that when child soldiers are depicted as "'dangerous' and 'disorderly'", it allows for their pathologizing. For instance, images of boy soldiers holding guns and often smoking a cigarette "effectively pathologise childhoods in the global south" by visually depicting children doing things or having traits that they "ought not to have" (Macfarlane 2021: 68).

Furthermore, such representations contribute towards "underscor[ing] the perceived moral superiority of the North as compared to the 'savage' South" (Denov 2012: 282). These Orientalist depictions create "binary oppositions" of "good/evil, … rational/irrational" that

positions the North as the rightful and capable saviour of the unfit, unideal African Other (Brooten 2008: 220). Similarly, Martins (2011: 436, 437) claims that these depictions legitimise "intervention in the name of children in the South [that] gives the neocolonial civilizing mission and neocolonial occupation the contours of an unquestionable moral mission of redemption" where the all-knowing and well-meaning West comes for the rescue of a dark, primitive Africa. Similarly, Lee-Koo (2011: 738) argues that representations of child soldiers are not just (if at all) meant to foreground violation of child rights but used as a tool to effectively "reinforce the pre-existing moral code of a conflict of humanitarian heroes on the one hand and an inhumane militia on the other". The 'child soldier as deviant/perpetuator' sensationalised representations by Western news agencies are, as noted above, an example of 'what sells' while the same when used by Western NGOs suggests that such children with corrupted childhood must be saved by the benevolent and civilised donors in the North. Such portrayals transform the colonial 'White man's burden' to a neocolonial 'Western donor's burden'.

Within the purview of Western donor's burden as perpetuated by NGOs in the Global North, the more persistent framing of child soldiers is that of a helpless, non-agentic victim. Here again, the notion of a wronged, stolen childhood dictates the framing. For instance, in case of the victim frame, child soldiers are seen as "damaged because they are severely traumatized" (Steinl 2017: 12). Therefore, they must be rescued, and have their childhood restored by the well-meaning Western donor who has the power to do so. The 'child soldier as victim' frame "is deeply rooted in a concept of childhood as a state of passivity and vulnerability, which demands protection", such that "possibility of agency, even of a limited or tactical sort" from the child is deliberately ignored (Martins 2011: 437). They are intentionally portrayed in a manner that clashes with Western notions of "what childhood is and should be" (Olson 2017: 160). The Western (and universalised) idea of childhood is that of an idyllic age of innocence, and child soldiers in new wars have been sensationalised precisely because they are not "this reassuringly pure and innocent child, but a child who also commits terrifying acts of brutality" (Moynagh 2011: 47).

It is crucial to note that the 'child soldier as a passive, non-agentic victim' frame has drawn the attention of stakeholders involved in international law and child rights, and this has played a significant role in largely protecting child soldiers from being prosecuted for any war crimes (Steinl 2017: 26). It has also contributed towards providing better protection to children affected by conflict and wars (Steinl 2017: 26). However, there are clear pitfalls as well. Berents (2019: 461) claims that "totalizing narratives of victimhood obscure and homogenize the complexity of the lived experience of children in war". Similarly, Steinl argues that the victim frame "freeze[s] child soldiers' identities to a state of permanent victimhood" that "has a depoliticizing effect", thereby "hinder[ing] the[ir] meaningful participation … in efforts directed at peacebuilding" (Steinl 2017: 13, 28). Interestingly, Moynagh (2020: 73) argues how photographs that aim to portray child soldiers as victims, show the "the child soldier as atrocity" that allows for side-lining of the "violence committed by the child soldier in favor of the violence done to childhood itself" (Moynagh 2020: 73).

The victim framing of child soldiers found excessively on NGO websites tend to claim that most children are abducted and recruited forcefully. This, however, is far from the truth; "approximately two-thirds of child soldiers" (Drumbl 2012: 482) join armed groups willingly or as a strategic choice (Rosen 2007: 298-299). The presumed donor visiting these websites are told that these children were forced to be a part of a rebel group and commit heinous crimes so that the donor is assured that s/he is indeed helping a helpless child and not an agentic one who has made choices to loot or kill willingly.

How Child Soldier Representations are Influenced by the Liberal Peace Paradigm

The incessant need to establish liberal peace is arguably the most popular interventional response of Western NGOs to new wars in Africa. The liberal peace process is a notion taken from the West that stresses on "democratization, the rule of law, human rights, free trade, globalized markets, and neoliberal economic development" (Richmond 2006: 75) with the belief that these aspects will lead to a "self-sustaining peace within domestic, regional and international settings" where "overt and structural violence are removed" (Richmond and Franks 2007: 29). Importantly, liberal peace asks for the need to uphold and protect human rights (Padmi 2017: 150; Cavalcante 2014: 146). This "justif[ies] interventions … in terms of promoting individual needs" (in case of child soldiers, their rehabilitation in post-conflict societies) (Peterson 2016: 234).

Western NGOs working with child soldiers follow the liberal peace framework in order to protect these children from getting prosecuted and enabling their reintegration by mobilising the rights associated to being a child as of paramount significance over any actions committed by the child. Furthermore, by adopting the liberal peace model, these NGOs "justify the strategic choices they make in the field as to which actors they work with and for" and "whom to help and why" (Richmond 2006: 82). In this context, the aspect of representation becomes crucial to justify as to why they are helping child soldiers and seeking funds to do so. Hence, unsurprisingly, representation of African child soldiers (and non-Western children generally) in media generated by Western NGOs is dominated by narratives of victimhood where the rights of the child has been curbed, which must be restored. These 'stolen' rights are largely imagined as the right to play and protection (drawing again from the universalised notion of childhood as an age of innocence).

Essentially, since the liberal peace model focusses on safeguarding human rights, NGOs adopt this framework by showing that their projects are meant to restore the supposed violated rights of the child soldiers in order to justify asking for funding. Ideologically, the Western donors, who are among the facilitators of liberal peacebuilding projects, want to see that the NGOs are applying interventions that aim to reinstate the rights denied to child soldiers. Hence, to fulfil the donor gaze, NGOs foreground narratives that underline the importance of reinstating these children's right to play and protection, i.e., their right of being a child, which have been denied by their association with armed groups. Furthermore, framing and narratives that show the absence of rights for child soldiers who are not able to have a 'normal' childhood that allows them to play and be carefree is used for the purpose of evoking affect, i.e., an emotional response of pity and outrage in the donor at these children's defied rights, thereby evoking the desire to fulfil their assumed moral duty to undo the wrongs.

Stephenson Jr. and Zanotti (2012: 47) argue that Western NGOs espousing the liberal peace tenets (such as democracy and individual rights) are ironically hegemonic in their operations by not paying adequate attention to local ground realities. Functioning within the liberal peacebuilding process, the aid sector reduces child soldiers to just victims of abused rights who must be saved (with the help of Western donors' funds), and so these children's agency (and capable use of it) is largely ignored. This is done to appease the donor gaze and to induce affect, and it shows that while NGOs "retain the controlling voice", those they aim to help "become displaced into a mythic realm of reductive, essentialised stereotype" (Nichols quoted in Kessy 2014: 25). In effect, "child soldiers are exoticised [and] decontextualised" in this 'victim of abused rights' framing, thus obscuring "the grey, ambiguous and paradoxical zones" of agency/incapacity, victimhood/perpetuator, childhood/adulthood that they occupy (Denov 2012: 283; 280).

By perceiving child soldiers as just victims of violated rights, and of stolen childhood, Western NGOs mask the larger realities of war. The Western aid sector deliberately ignores the "possible connections" of the Global North that are responsible for creating new wars and civic unrest in Africa/Global South (Lee-Koo 2011: 732). If these aspects are taken into consideration, the factors that lead to children joining wars un/willingly can be accessed and addressed more accurately.

The aim of humanitarian aid agencies that work with child soldiers, arguably, is not to put an end to wars[1], but how to make wars safer for children. Western NGOs, through 'the abused rights victim' narrative, mobilise liberal peace's aspect of restoring and upholding human rights in order to shield children from the atrocities of war (and thus saving their right to childhood). Such narratives, as argued above, are indeed reductivist. However, they continue to largely persist as they have the capacity to evoke affect and fulfil the donor gaze; aspects considered crucial in the current donor-driven aid sector environment. Thus, next I elaborate on the concepts of donor gaze and affect economy to understand the manner in which they influence child soldier representations.

Understanding the 'Donor Gaze' in Humanitarianism

The donor gaze is "a very narrow 'window-on-reality'" that is "limiting and controlling," and "affects self-definition of the represented" (Kessy 2014: 15, 16). Arguably, "the 'aid industry' benefits from disempowering images of the 'helped' Other because aid practitioners want to keep their jobs, … and to the fullest extent possible publicize and justify what they do" (Kessy 2014: 18). Showing the complexities and ambiguous realities of child soldiers is not beneficial, and so, the sensationalised images of kids with guns larger than them form a "limited discourse" that "totally or partially silences" the represented by turning them "to common stereotypes that are known in the West and can be easily recognizable" (Kessy 2014: 18, 24-25). Thus, such representations have "less to do with their [child soldiers'] reality and more to do with what is important for the dominant hegemoni[c]" depictions that draw funding, i.e., the victim child in need of saving by the superior West.

The donor gaze operates with the notion of Africa as a place of "cultural, moral and material deficiencies", thus in turn legitimising the White saviour discourse of the West "'once again' saving Africa" (Kessy 2014: 19). Indeed, representations that strive on "a 'Western imagination' of Africa's core deficiencies" fail "in representing the diversity of individual experiences" (Macfarlane 2021: 68). One example of this being the immensely popular *KONY 2012* documentary (Invisible Children 2012) that "glorifyi[ed] an American charity's initiative" to save the child soldiers in the LRA, Uganda, thereby foregrounding "'the-Africans-can't-do-it themselves' attitude" (Kessy 2014: 67). The documentary "problematically simplified children's lives and perpetuated the global North's superiority in saving children of the global South – a dynamic, which is commonly seen in child related humanitarian work" (Macfarlane 2021: 7).

Koot and Fletcher (2021: 1) speaking in regards to philanthrotourism, wherein donors visit "the sites of development interventions" claim that when donors see the sites and subjects who receive aid (from them), they

> experience jouissance, a particular type of ambivalent enjoyment that goes beyond
> 'pure' pleasure to encompass an element of discomfort or even pain in confronting

---

[1] This is too big an undertaking for a single NGO to proclaim. More so, the irony remains that without wars, NGOs working in conflict-ridden states would cease to function.

distasteful aspects of the development landscape, such as orphaned children and poverty.

The donor gazes upon the 'bad' to feel discomfort but also derives pleasure from having the ability to correct the wrongs. The donor gaze leads to a "'staged authenticity' … in which 'backstage' issues are hidden from participants, who only get to see the public 'frontstage'" (Koot and Fletcher 2021: 2). The donor gaze demands to see "'authentic' development projects … and in particular the success or potential of this development" (Koot and Fletcher 2021: 2). In my analysis of NGO websites that work with child soldiers, I reveal how this need to show successful interventions guide the content of the website to justify appeal for more donations.

Understanding the Role of 'Affect' in Humanitarianism

Tied to the idea of the donor gaze is also the concept of 'affect'. Richard and Rudnyckyj (2009: 59) note "the transitive and reflexive capacity of affect" wherein affect is not seen "as an object circulating among subjects, but rather as a medium in which subjects circulate". They also note: "Affect is a means of subjectification that simultaneously produces those who enact it and those upon whom it acts" (Richard and Rudnyckyj 2009: 61). The use of affect produces a certain type of child soldier frame and narrative that defines the child as a helpless, rights-deprived subject (the one that needs to be saved), and the Western donor as benevolent (who does the saving). Within the context of the aid sector, images and stories about child soldiers in particular, and "'disadvantaged' (nonideal, nonnormative) childhoods" in general "rely heavily on forms of sentiment that are cultivated to produce affective capital for donors" (Sinervo and Cheney 2019: 2, 3). The use of children's faces play a significant role in this (pictures of child soldiers staring at the camera are in abundance); "children's faces have been (and remain) a key means by which Western subjects have come to know the other" and "have often served as a way to alert privileged people of their obligation to communities in need and as vehicles for achieving social change" (Zarzycka 2016: 32, 31). These images are "designed to appeal to the donor's needs for gratitude and self-contentment" who are "autonomous, independent, rights-bearing, rational individuals" (Zarzycka 2016: 37, 38), while the represented is seen as the one riddled with deficiencies and deviancies. Indeed, as Adams (2013: 10) claims, "[t]he affect economy we live within today makes use of affective responses to suffering in ways that fuel structural relations of inequality".

The driving power of affect coupled with the donor gaze within the aid sector propels images of and narratives about children that show "need, victimhood and disadvantage" (Sinervo and Cheney 2019: 5), instead of their lived realities. In my analysis, I explore the ways in which affect is mobilised and how its influence eschews representation of child soldiers.

Narrative, Framing and Visual Analysis to Examine How Donor Gaze and Affect Economy Operate

In order to explore the effects of affect and donor gaze in shaping representations of child soldiers on NGO websites, I will apply narrative, framing and visual analysis. Below, I explain these methods and how I will use them.

Understanding Narrative Analysis and Applying it to NGOs' Website Content

Narrative analysis focusses on how events or stories are told. As I examine the content of selected NGO websites, I delve into the nature of vocabulary and the tone used (is it urgent, emotional or detached and factual?). I also look at the manner in which information is presented to the potential donor. For example, what do the choice of selected first-person child soldier narratives found on these websites suggest regarding the kind of information the NGOs want the donor to hear; what aspects of the stories (by and about these children) are stressed upon and why? By focussing on how a story is told (how child soldiers are framed, what is foregrounded and what is left out), I explore the ways in which NGOs speak about these children in order to fulfil the demands of the donor gaze and mobilise affect to secure funds.

Shenhav (2015: 3) claims: "People tell stories for a variety of reasons: it may be to justify themselves, to persuade, to entertain, or even to mislead. Some of these motives are quite practical". He also adds, "stories can guide people's actions" (Shenhav 2015: 3). Keeping this in mind, I pay attention to the narratives NGOs tell about these children and their projects/interventions for them to note the ways in which they justify what they do and why, which serve the practical and important purpose of persuading the donor for funding. I also analyse the manner in which the narratives aim to produce the emotion of affect; to 'move' people to donate. I take the critical position that these narratives are limiting because "story-making presupposes selection … what is selected overshadows what is discarded; what is told marginalizes what remains untold" (Shenhav 2015: 3). Thus, I explore possible gaps in narratives which NGOs create (such as failed rehabilitation of child soldiers despite interventions) in order to prevent the potential donor from thinking that their money is not being used for a 'good cause' or yielding positive results. Narrative analysis also stresses on the aspect of temporality and causality (Mukhtarov 2021) wherein "a narrative is essentially a representation of a course of events" (Shenhav 2015: 12) and how these events are connected. In my analysis, I will explore this aspect and the purposes they are meant to serve.

In essence, I pay attention to the notion of ownership of a story/narrative. Shenhav (2015: 5) asks: "Is [a story] owned by the speaker or by those who hear and interpret it?". In my analysis, I scrutinise the voice behind the story; instead of accepting what is being told and shown, I ask why it is done so, and explore what is being un/intentionally left unheard and unseen.

Understanding Frame Analysis: How NGOs Frame Their Website Content

When we speak of which story is told and how, framing plays a crucial role in doing so. Thus, along with narrative analysis, I will also apply the concept of framing. Essentially, framing dictates the manner in which one un/consciously chooses to re/tell a piece of information. The information can take the form of a report, a news article, or in this case, the content that NGOs publish on their websites. Entman (1993: 52) defines framing as follows:

> Framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation. Typically frames diagnose, evaluate, and prescribe.

In the following chapters, I examine how a story is framed, such as which aspects of the narrative are foregrounded, and for what purposes, and how that can restrict accurate

representations of child soldiers. To elaborate, according to Entman (1993: 52), frames basically aim to do four things; firstly, a frame will identify a 'problem'. Next, it will identify what is causing the problem, followed by "mak[ing] moral judgements", and finally, it will propose "remedies" (Entman 1993: 52). Keeping this mind, I analyse how NGOs frame a problem and its causes, and how this framing then justifies the nature of interventions for which the NGOs seek funding for.

Framing is done with the aim of drawing certain aspects 'center-stage' while pushing others behind the curtains. It deliberately aims to draw attention to 'something', and in the process, draws attention away from whatever is 'not-something'. Thus, I look for "omissions of potential problem definitions, explanations and evaluations" (Entman 1993: 54) in the content published by NGOs that do not satisfy the donor gaze and induce affect, and explore if that ultimately reduces the scope of interventions that child soldiers might actually need.

Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007: 12) speak of framing as a "macrolevel construct" which "refers to modes of presentation that journalists and other communicators use to present information in a way that resonates with existing underlying schemas among their audience". In case of NGOs, the information they publish on their websites, brochures etc. follow patterns and schemes that their readers and donors expect and are familiar with. For instance, the nature of content shared by NGOs is largely about natural or manmade calamities, those in need and how 'we' (usually the privileged Westerner) can help 'them' (the African starving child, the supposedly repressed women in burqas). As viewers, readers and donors, we expect NGOs asking for funding to *save* someone or something. I enquire into how NGOs working with child soldiers mobilise this notion (of 'saving the child soldier and thus saving childhood') to seek funds.

Applying Visual Analysis to Pictures Published by NGOs Online

The NGO websites in question (Romeo Dallaire Institute, War Child Holland and UK) all use pictures of child soldiers, children in conflict or children in need. To analyse the framing of the pictures, I will apply Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) method of visual analysis who interpret literal camera framing techniques to demystify the ideological underpinnings behind producing an image in a certain way. For example, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) argue that a picture taken from above makes the represented subject look small giving a sense of power to the viewer over the seen, and that if the subject is looking straight at the camera, he/she is demanding engagement with the viewer. Here, in order to be mindful of the fact that photographers might not always be consciously framing a picture as I am interpreting it, analysing the texts that accompany such images will prove to be crucial for which I will apply the aforementioned techniques of narrative and frame analysis.

Ethical Challenges

As I was not able to gain information regarding how the pictures of children found on the selected NGO websites were taken and what was the process of consent, I have covered the faces in images where the child's face is clearly visible. In instances where the expression on the face is part of the analysis, I have hidden their eyes.

My ideological point of departure for the thesis is twofold; first that representation (how a subject is seen or spoken about and by whom) plays a critical role in shaping both perspectives and material responses to the issue. Second that child soldiers' representations have continued to be problematic despite plenty of criticism around the same. Due to this reason, I find the term 'child soldier' itself as one that risks fixing these children's identity as just that. 'Children who are involved in non/combatant roles with armed groups' is arguably a more suitable phrase to refer to them. Nonetheless, I have still used 'child soldier' in an attempt

to maintain brevity. My concern remains that by doing so, perhaps I risk restricting these children's identities as just 'child soldiers'. Thus, in my knowledge, I have made the fullest attempt to avoid this.

Chapter 3 Identifying Donor Gaze and How it Causes Problematic Representations

In this chapter, I explore how donor gaze shapes the website content of Dallaire Institute, and War Child UK and Holland. I examine instances where visual, audio and textual narratives aim to fulfil the demands of the donor gaze and its effects.

Securing Funds: Showing 'Fixable' Problems and the Donor's Privilege and Power

Dallaire Institute is arguably the biggest NGO that works exclusively on the issue of child soldiers, thus making it a crucial organisation responsible for representing them. Dallaire Institute's homepage has a slideshow of two images (Figure 1 and 2, below).

Figure 1

First slideshow picture on Dallaire Institute's homepage

Source: Dallaire Institute 2021a

Figure 1 is of a dirt road with fences on both sides. It deliberately does not tell us exactly where is this picture taken. We do not know the country or the precise location (is it a marketplace? A school?). At first glance, the picture suggests 'somewhere in Africa' that is poor and possibly in or post-conflict as indicated by the presence of military forces. The fact that the picture clearly shows Sub-Saharan Africa but does not indicate which country (let alone the exact place) tends to reproduce Western perceptions of the entire continent as uniformly underdeveloped and decrepit.

The picture is taken from what Kress and van Leeuwen (2006: 369) call a "very long shot". This type of shot indicates "a set of invisible boundaries beyond which we allow only certain kinds of people to come" (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 370). The 'very long shot' implies that the viewer and those in the picture maintain a "distance between people who are and are to remain strangers" (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 370). In effect, the image does not ask the website visitor/potential donor to relate to either the children or the military men. However, the use of the words 'together we can build a world…' explicitly evokes our

(the developed West's) duty of saving, protecting and building a better life for the poor African children. The words suggest that the donor has the power to help these children 'somewhere in Africa', in the heart of darkness with dirt roads, and shantytowns. This satisfies the donor gaze of seeing a tangible, material reality of what presumably needs to be fixed.

Previously, I noted that framing aims to portray a problem in a manner so as to justify a specific response/remedy. The picture captures a place in need of development, and the child's blue schoolbag with the Dallaire Institute logo becomes a material symbol of help that can be provided through funds. Dallaire Institute frames the issue as insecurity and underdevelopment in a way that suggests these problems can be solved by monetary help; military presence needs money and so does building schools and roads. Structural and historical causes that may have led to children joining armed groups which are too complex to resolve simply by 'throwing money' are obscured in the framing in favour of causes that give the impression of being 'fixable' with donations. Arguably, this is why the exact location and situation is not made explicit. We see military men in the image but we are not informed why. What exactly is the reason for their presence? The donor gaze is fulfilled by simply seeing an underdeveloped Sub-Saharan Africa; a popular and well-accepted notion in Western imagination.

The first image changes within a couple of seconds to the next one (Figure 2, below). In this image, there are children whose faces are visible but the main child in focus has his back to the viewer.

Figure 2
Second slideshow picture on Dallaire Institute's homepage
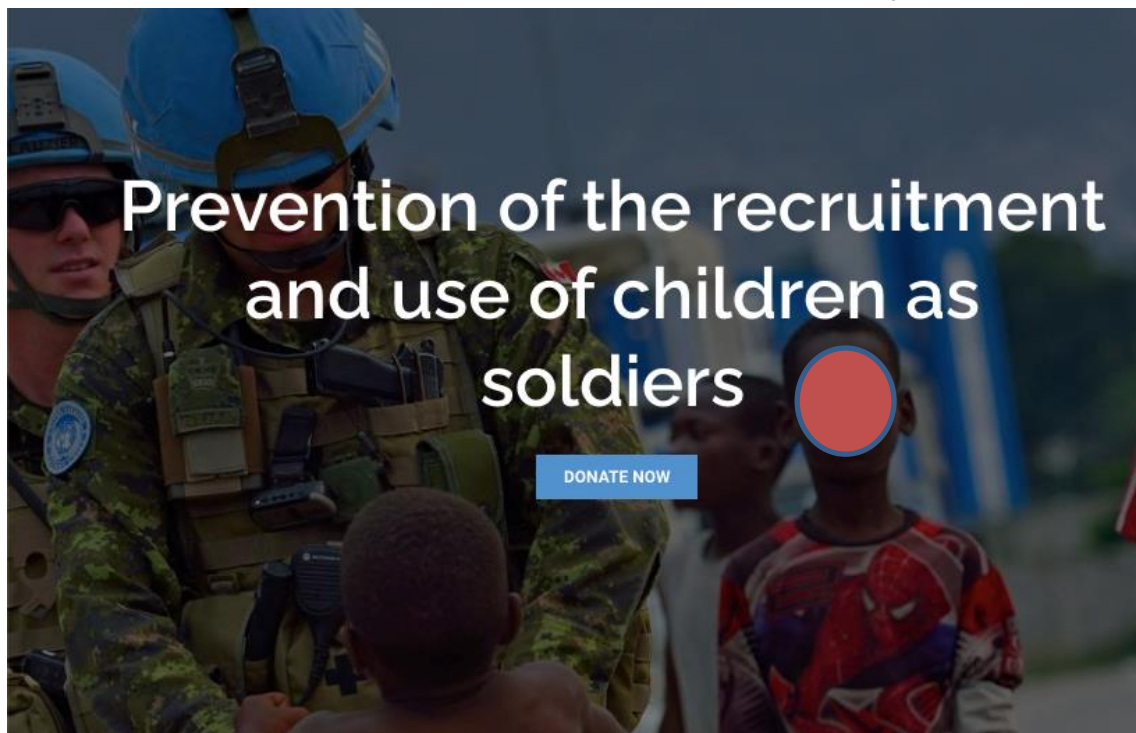
Source: Dallaire Institute 2021a

When we see the boy turned away from us, applying Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006: 367) image analysis method, we are not asked to associate or relate to him. The distinction and distance between 'them', the victimised child soldiers, the kids in need, and us, the wealthy, Western donors, filled with the desire to help the underprivileged, remain, or rather, is maintained. The boy's head is tilted upwards and he is looking up at the soldier. The boy is also shirtless as opposed to the fully clothed and armed military personnel. We see the white soldier from a "frontal angle" that indicates "involvement" and suggests "what you see

here is part of our world, something we are involved with" (Kress and van Leeuwan 2006: 374). The viewer is invited to identify with the white soldier who is helping the children, bringing joy (it appears that they are playing or giving each other fist bumps). The suggestion is that just like the soldier on the ground, the donor can bring joy to these children's lives by giving money from afar.

This image is taken from a "far social distance" wherein the viewer demands: "Stand away so I can look at you" (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 370). This type of distance fulfils the donor gaze wherein one *gazes down upon* those less fortunate, supposedly less agentic people than the donor. This is not a framing or a narrative where everyone helps one another as equals. The power difference is still existent despite the use of the words 'together we can' in Figure 1. We might be together in the issue of child soldiers, but we all have different roles to play; the donor and Dallaire Institute does the saving, while the African child soldier is saved.

Below the images, we see a link to their podcast series, which started in February 2021, and currently has 6 episodes (Dallaire Institute 2021b). In the second podcast, 'Women and Girls in Conflict' (Dallaire Institute 2021c) which draws attention to female ex-child soldiers, we hear a testimony[2] of victimhood wherein the female speaker was abducted and raped by an armed group. This is indeed a reality but there are many cases such as Ethiopia (Veale 2003), Eritrea (Bernal 2000), and Mozambique (West 2000) where girls and women have joined armed groups voluntarily. In these cases, female soldiers had "relatively high status", and "they felt pride, self-confidence, and a feeling of belonging" (Coulter, Persson and Utas 2008: 15). The girls and women believed in the cause they were fighting for and were seen as emblems of "strength, independence, courage, persistence, and character" (Coulter, Persson and Utas 2008: 14). Interestingly, many of the female ex-combatants do have trouble reintegrating after breaking away some typical culturally and socially inscribed 'feminine roles' (West 2000; Coulter, Persson and Utas 2008). As Bernal (2000: 61) claims, based on the assumption that female combatants have "experienced independence, sexual freedom, and equality with men", "[t]heir morality is suspect, their femininity … doubtful, and their ability to behave as obedient wives [becomes] questionable". These are crucial issues too but since the response lies in changing societal mentality, which is a much harder and time consuming project as compared to issues that can be addressed materially, the donor gaze that seeks clear interventions to concrete problems and quick results does not find such issues as worthy of donations, and so these aspects are left out of the narrative.

Lastly, Dallaire Institute refers to donations as "your gift" on their 'Donate' page (Dallaire Institute 2021d). Use of the term 'gift' appeases the donor gaze such that it elevates the donor to the position of a well-meaning patron from afar bestowing monetary kindness on the underprivileged. However, there is also information on getting tax receipts for donations. So, it is really just an altruistic 'gift' when there are monetary benefits to be had along with the satisfaction one derives from having fulfilled their supposed moral commitments to the needy?

## Appeasing the Donor by Showing (Relatable) Experts and Success Stories

Dallaire Institute's 'Donate' page (Dallaire Institute 2021d) has a picture of Romeo Dallaire sitting next to a few African children (Figure 3, below). While the children share the frame

---

[2] I return to the aspect of use of testimonies for evoking affect in the next chapter.

with him, they are blurred out with overlapping text and it is Romeo Dallaire who is prominent.

Figure 3
Romeo Dallaire's photo on Dallaire Institute's 'Donate' page
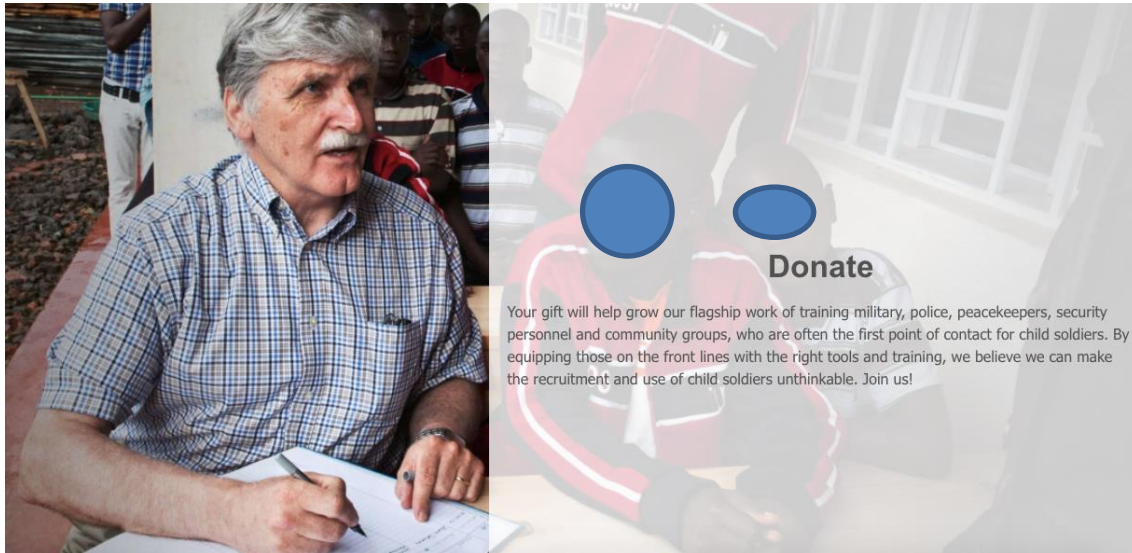
Source: Dallaire Institute 2021d

It is clear who the donor is supposed to identify with; who the donor can believe is capable of helping the blurred children on the side. In this picture, it is not the 'subject' of intervention whose image is used to garner funds but the agents and experts who can make these interventions successful.

Furthermore, the aforementioned podcast series claims to "bring together subject-matter experts on the recruitment and use of children in conflicts, individual testimonies … through in-depth interviews and storytelling" (Dallaire Institute 2021b). The 'experts' are meant to provide 'facts', and thus to satisfy the donor gaze of showing how qualified Dallaire Institute is in delivering what they claim to do. Furthermore, on their homepage is a video that details Dallaire Institute's role in establishing the Vancouver Principles (guidelines that focus on prevention and protection of children being used in conflicts) (Dallaire Institute 2021a). The brief description mentions how they have worked with "over 75 experts from across the globe" (Dallaire Institute 2021a). Similarly, in the 'Our Approach' section (Dallaire Institute 2021e), there is another reference to how Dallaire Institute collaborates with experts in the field of conflict resolution, and peacebuilding. Thus, the mention of expert involvement is a constant recurring point throughout their website. Gill and Wells (2014: 33) claim that "nonprofits adopt a seemingly uncomplicated discourse of expertise. Non-profits claim to possess a particular expertise that ostensibly renders them most suitable to address and organize around their interest(s)". The over-emphasis on expertise is a clear attempt to legitimise the work they do, how they do it and what they aim to do in the future. Having experts explain what is the issue and how to solve it fulfils the donor gaze; the need to know that the funds are going into trusted hands who know what they are doing and are capable of achieving the tasks they plan on implementing with those funds.

While the stress on experts aims to show that they collaborate with people who have knowledge and experience regarding the issue, there is an absence in their narratives about the possible roles the locals (both adults and children) can play in post-conflict, peacebuilding projects. This reveals a disregard for the importance of local communities to where these children belong and how they can play a crucial role in helping former child soldiers rehabilitate or prevent their recruitment in the first place. Figure 4 (below) is a picture published in their "In-House Expertise" section (Dallaire Institute 2021e).

Figure 4
Picture of Dallaire Institute's executive director giving a speech

Source: Dallaire Institute 2021e

The picture shows a Canadian (white) woman delivering a speech to a room full of African children. There are also two male African speakers at the table who might have spoken to the audience. However, the fact that the picture published is that of the Western 'expert' speaking can be best described as reproducing the normalised narrative of 'West knows better'. Kothari (2006: 11) states:

> In order to begin to understand the forms of global distinctions that are exhibited in contemporary discourses and practices of international development, it is necessary to ascertain how certain people and places (the west) came to exemplify … political competency and modernity while other people in other places (the third world) became the symbol of … political dysfunction and underdevelopment.

Given that the potential donor is also from the Global North, it is more reassuring to see another Westerner, someone he/she can relate to and someone whose expertise is more believable than that of the two African men at the table. The picture shows the woman clearly while the rest of the people in the picture have either their back towards us (the African children) or have their faces obscured by lack of lighting (the two African speakers). Applying Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) again, the presumed Western donor is being asked to identify

16

with supposedly the most identifiable person in the room; an expert from their side of the world who they can trust with their money.

Along with Dallaire Institute's repeated insistence on expertise, there is a clear attempt to foreground their achievements. On the homepage, there is a 3.07 minutes long video titled 'Children Should not Fight Wars' (Dallaire Institute 2021a). The video shows Romeo Dallaire and other key figures of the organization speak of their agenda (those whom the Western donor can identify with), their work so far and future plans. Similarly, in their first podcast titled '10 Years of Impact', Romeo Dallaire speaks of why he founded the organisation and what they have achieved so far (Dallaire Institute 2021f). Applying narrative analysis, the aspects of temporality and causality are deployed here. The podcast meticulously charts and explains how far they have come, and the amount of work they have done. One of the reasons why the first podcast focusses on this is to ensure that the potential donor is convinced of the important work they do.

Notably, nowhere (in the video, podcasts and written content) is there any mention of failed interventions, or any in-depth, elaborate mention of difficulties or hindering challenges in their 10 years of work across several African countries. There is no acknowledgement of the fact that how despite quality interventions, child soldiers might still not be able to reintegrate properly. There are studies that show many former child soldiers tend to have violent tendencies (Robjant *et al.* 2020; Hermenau *et al.* 2013), and that these struggles might still persist even post interventions. For instance, Betancourt *et al.* (2010) note that while interventions such as re-joining school can improve the former child soldiers' psychosocial health, many still continue to face difficulties like anxiety, depression and violent behaviour. There is a clear omission of challenges that persist despite interventions. For NGOs, revealing this aspect can run the risk of turning away donors, since the donor gaze demands that the donations are indeed being spend on 'doing good' and 'making a difference'. Arguably, aid agencies appear to function with the notion that donor gaze expects their funds to be a 'fix-all' solution. Moreover, though there is plenty of information regarding their work, there is little shared as to how it has impacted children and their communities.

Gill and Wells (2014: 46) claim that the term 'donor gaze' "refer[s] to how NPOs may privilege the values, symbols, and practices of the donors/volunteers who are 'local' to the NPOs' base in the developed world". For NGOs to continue their work, they must prove to the Western donors that the monetary aid is going to capable 'experts' who they can identify with (i.e., someone Western), and that the funds are being put to proper use and producing good results (Gill and Wells 2014: 31). So, as NGOs "focus on the continual satisfaction of donors, they may risk neglecting the needs of the communities and clients they serve" (Gill and Wells 2014: 31). For instance, restricting representation to appease the donor gaze of continued challenges that ex-child soldiers face even with interventions (such as persistent poor mental/emotional/physical health that can further impact their ability to work, learn and reintegrate into society) limits future scope of more well-rounded approaches.

Showing 'Messy Realities' to Mobilise Donor Gaze

War Child Holland's article titled 'Time to Think Again about Child Soldiers' (War Child Holland 2020) aims to dissuade misconceptions around these children and reveal their realities. It clearly addresses the fact that many child soldiers willingly join armed forces in order to escape other structural inequalities and violence. Therefore, the article stresses on how realising this aspect can lead to interventions that focus on prevention of recruitment and that "current interventions miss the mark" (War Child Holland 2020). War Child's response is to provide children with vocational training and opportunities of safe and stable survival, so that they are not compelled to join armed groups. More importantly, by speaking of

interventions that prevent recruitment, War Child Holland mobilises the donor gaze as it shows the donor that besides just donating for reintegration projects, s/he has the power to stop children from being recruited by armed groups in the first place.

The article also mentions how reintegration programmes are often insufficient as they only focus on ex-fighters, while in reality, many children do not actually partake in combat. Indeed, many child soldiers are not seen as qualified to undergo the DDR (disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration) process, especially girls who are misrepresented as dependents or wives of their captors - or 'husbands'" (Fox 2004: 474; also Brooks 2012: 294; Brett 2004: 35). While this opens scope for interventions to identify and support children who were not included in DDR processes, these representations showing 'messy realities' of ex-/child soldiers excluded from reintegration programmes continue to reinstate the victim narrative, and do not attempt to explore how within these complexities, these children are capable of showing agency. The article also notes the importance of being mindful of how child soldiers' experiences vary significantly depending on the context and place, and so responses to help them must be tuned according to their specific needs. Hence, by rejecting the notion of 'one-size-fits-all' reintegration projects and bringing forth the need for more adaptable interventions as per the current realities of child soldiers in a specific context, War Child Holland validates seeking more funds from the donor.

The article has two pictures, and in both, we see the supposed former child soldier in shadows where their faces are obscured to secure their identities.

Figure 5
Image of female ex-child soldier

Source: War Child Holland 2020

One picture is that of a girl (Figure 5, above). Though the article does not explicitly mention female child soldiers, showing a girl in the picture shifts the "popularized discourse [that] tends to portray child soldiers as boys, [though] nearly 40 percent of child soldiers are girls" (Drumbl 2012: 482). The image of the girl also implicitly reminds the donor that girl soldiers, as noted above, struggle more with reintegrating into society especially due to social ostracism (Veale 2003; Mazurana and McKay 2003; Mazurana *et al.* 2002). While revealing this fact is important, it is arguably done so because it contributes to the victim framing of (in this case, female) child soldiers.

18

In 2019, War Child UK published a report titled 'Rethink Child Soldiers'. The report is around 40 pages long and attempts to complexify the child soldier issue and how it requires multidimensional interventions. The report states:

> This perception of children as victims or perpetrators is in reality more complex. Children exhibit agency, making choices and decisions that shape their lives, even if those choices are made within constrained and limited environments (War Child UK 2019a: 10).

It is interesting to see an NGO seemingly step out of the either/or victim/perpetrator narrative. However, the messy realties and complexities shown actually continue to perpetuate the victim frame rather than treat these children as agentic. Furthermore, the report provides a detailed explanation regarding why more funding is required in order to have long term interventions for child soldiers' successful reintegration. Effectively, the report appeals to the donor gaze by showing the messiness of child soldiers' realities that reinforce their victimhood and suffering which then validates seeking funding to provide better interventions.

Framing Child Soldiers as 'Victims' and 'Becomings' to Satisfy the Donor Gaze

War Child Holland's article 'How We Work to Combat Stigmatisation' (War Child Holland 2021a) speaks of the discrimination and social ostracism many former child soldiers face upon returning to their post-conflict societies. The article focuses on explaining what stigma is, how it can impact the overall mental well-being and self-image of the stigmatised, and what War Child Holland is doing in post-conflict communities to raise awareness against such discrimination. Interestingly, the article refuses to use the term 'child soldiers' and instead says "children who were forced to fight" (War Child Holland 2021d). While refraining from using the term 'child soldiers' can be seen as a conscious effort to not define a child's identity as just a 'child soldier', it deliberately mispresents these children by claiming that they were 'forced to fight' in order to show them as innocent victims. Since the article is about destigmatising former child soldiers, a victim frame and narrative is applied. War Child Holland obscures the reality that many children join rebel groups willingly (Drumbl 2012: 482). Lack of acknowledgement of this, denies a chance of a nuanced argument that children who join willingly are not necessarily criminals and inhibits exploring under what circumstances did these children join armed groups. Moreover, by asking to destigmatise returning child soldiers who were 'forced to fight', arguably, the article implicitly suggests that only those forced/coerced deserve social reintegration and acceptance.

This is also the only article among the content analysed from Dallaire Institute, War Child Holland and UK's websites that includes a picture of a child soldier holding a weapon (Figure 6, below). For ethical reasons, his face is not shown, but it does reproduce the most common image when one speaks of a child soldier: An African boy with an AK47. The picture functions as a strong visual reminder for the donor that child soldiers carrying arms (thus endowed with the potential to kill and maim) do very much still exist. I find that such pictures aim to sensationalise 'childhood gone wrong', and turn the child into a spectacle on which the donor gaze feeds on. The picture provides the donor with visual evidence of 'corrupted' childhood that needs fixing, which the donor can help fix. The image justifies funding as the donor gaze sees the need to return these kids to childhood imagined as a time of protection and play[3].

---

[3] I return to the aspect of play in the next chapter.

Figure 6
Image of male child soldier with AK47

Source: War Child Holland 2021a

Similarly, Dallaire Institute's 'Children Should not Fight Wars' video's description on the website's homepage states: "Yet, tens of thousands of children are forced, coerced or born into conflict every day where they end up fighting in conflicts created by adults" (Dallaire Institute 2021a). Here, we see a framing of child soldiers as victims who get 'forced' and 'coerced' into fighting wars. In the very beginning of the video, the voiceover claims:

> Often drugged and given guns to fight … deprived of education and healthcare and they [child soldiers] are separated from their families. Many lose their lives and those who survive live with lasting long term physical and psychological effects (Dallaire Institute 2021g: 00.05).

This narrative yet again obscures the fact that majority of the children willingly participate in wars. By omitting this aspect, the video does not explore why children choose to join armed forces and what can possibly be done to stop it. The video mentions that child soldiers suffer long-lasting emotional and/or physical trauma. This fact is shared not just for its significance but also because it reinforces their victimhood. The donor gaze demands to see that the funds are being used to help victims and not children who had joined armed groups willingly as that makes them agentic and not powerless subjects whose rights to childhood had been curbed.

Furthermore, in Dallaire Institute's '10 Years of Impact' podcast, we also hear the testimony of a former child soldier and now youth advocate who states:

> There is no country without children that can progress … you recruit children in the army, they will not have a future. They will be only thinking of fighting and when the children get spoiled, the country will not have progress (Dallaire Institute 2021f 01:45).

Interestingly, he notes that he joined the Sudanese rebel group because he wanted to fight for the country as his father did. This goes against what the host of the podcast says as a generalisation previously that children "were abducted … drugged and given guns to fight" (Dallaire Institute 2021f: 00:40). However, the Youth Advocate then proceeds to tell how difficult life is for children who fight in armed groups, underlining how he regrets his decision. Effectively, while the podcast acknowledges that children join willingly, it also implicitly

20

suggests that children being children are incapable of making decisions that serve their best interests.

Furthermore, in the aforementioned quote, children are framed as 'becomings' rather than 'beings'. We notice the same in the fifth podcast episode titled 'Prioritizing Prevention' where an 'expert' speaks of how children who live in and partake in conflict are raised without learning peace, and grow up to be violent adults, thus jeopardising the future of the country (Dallaire Institute 2021h). Drawing from Children and Youth Studies, 'being' and 'becoming' can be understood as follows:

> the 'being' child is seen as a social actor in his or her own right, who is actively constructing his or her own 'childhood', and who has views and experiences about being a child; the 'becoming' child is seen as an 'adult in the making', who is lacking universal skills and features of the 'adult' that they will become (Uprichard 2008: 304)

The narrative here focusses on the future rather than the present as one is concerned with not who the child is now but what s/he can potentially become. This "temporal focus necessarily forces us to neglect or dismiss the present everyday realities of being a child" (Uprichard 2008: 304). By refusing to see children as 'beings', the narrative discards the agentic child, and this specifically allows one to continue the victim framing of child soldiers who either has no agency or does not know how to make the best use of it as they are not seen as capable of doing so. By showing African child soldiers as vulnerable who do not know what is best for them by means of selective testimonies and 'expert opinions', the donor gaze is fulfilled. By framing child soldiers as 'becomings', the donor finds affirmation in giving funds for a cause meant to save the future of the children (and their country). The donor gaze demands to see donations used for idealised goals; building a better future, and making better adults. Due to this, the child in the present as a capable being is neglected, thus making child soldiers as subjects to work upon rather than to work with in reintegration and peace-building processes.

The aspect of framing children as 'becomings' and more so as victims also function to evoke affective capital that is tied to the donor gaze. The appeal to emotions of the donor to gain funds is a significant factor that frames NGOs' representations of child soldiers . I explore this in the next chapter.

Chapter 4 How Affect Operates and Limits Representations

In order to ignite "a donor's 'need to help'", images and narratives about children from the Global South are framed by Western NGOs in ways that mobilise "the affective currency of childhood and the emotional capital that they elicit", but at the same time, do not "accurately represent their concerns, challenges, or cultural frameworks" (Sinervo and Cheney 2019: 3, 4). The same is largely true regarding the Western aid sector's representations of child soldiers. In this chapter, I explore how affect is evoked in NGOs' narratives and images about child soldiers, and the ways in which it inhibits their realities, thereby possibly influencing interventions.

The Affective Capital of Innocence, Victimhood and Building a Better Future

As noted in the previous chapter, narratives about victimhood and showing children as future of the nation function to appeal to the donor gaze. Here, the aspect of affect also comes into play. Stories of child soldiers as victims forced/coerced to join armed groups undoubtedly have a bigger impact in producing affect (sympathy, pity) as opposed to stories of children joining on their own will. Similarly, helping children for brighter futures as they are seen as 'becomings', i.e., adults in making, aim to induce an emotional response of doing right by these children. In Dallaire Institute's podcast 'Women and Girls in Conflict' (Dallaire Institute 2021c), stories of girls being abducted and used as sex slaves prove to be strong affective currency that is seen as capable of evoking a sense of moral responsibility in the Western donor towards saving the victimised African girls. Similarly, as discussed previously, in the podcast titled 'Prioritizing Prevention' (Dallaire Institute 2021h), the focus on protecting children from recruitment is validated by the notion that children who grow up in violent environments and doing/seeing violence will become incapable adults. The idea of children with lost/stolen childhood and dim futures brings forth the affect of ethical necessity to save the children from becoming failed adults.

In 'Children Should not Fight Wars' video, we are told that former child soldiers who went through rehabilitation processes are the "lucky ones" and are "doing much better in society" (Dallaire Institute 2021g: 01.59). Following this, an activist mentions: "Youth [are] the leaders of tomorrow. So if we prepare today the leaders of tomorrow, it can save the nation" (Dallaire Institute 2021g: 02:10). These children are considered 'lucky' because now they have a chance at a better future ,and thus can potentially become capable (adult) leaders. The play of affect here is the altruistic cause of saving child soldiers, thereby building better future communities. These children are seen as subjects who need to be moulded ('prepared' as the activist says) into what is considered 'successful adults'. Thus, much like the influence of donor gaze, affect too reduces child soldiers to mere 'becomings' whose now/present abilities and identities are obscured in favour of what they can (should) become in the future. In fact, the video calls children "society's most vulnerable" (Dallaire Institute 2021g: 02:41) with the intention of inducing affect; the need to protect the weak. The assertion that all children are equally vulnerable is incorrect. While age can be a reason for vulnerability, it is not the only singular factor. A child (or an adult) can be vulnerable based on his/her gender, race, economic background, religion in a specific given time and context. Furthermore, defining children as 'most vulnerable' is problematic as it reduces them yet again to passive beings, foregrounding a protectionist discourse that refuses to see children as intelligent and

aware beings. While such sweeping assertions induce affect, they ultimately do so at the cost of mispresenting/erasing the reasons that actually make a child vulnerable. Labelling a child vulnerable for the sake of affect just because s/he is a minor (under 18) is a deeply reductivist argument that denies looking at their ground realities, which shape their lived experiences, and dismisses different cultural understandings of childhood/adulthood.

Figure 7

Screenshot from 'Children Should not Fight Wars' video

Source: Dallaire Institute 2021g: 02.29

Towards the end of the video, we see an animated silhouette of a boy and a soldier kneeling in front of him with wind blowing and blue birds flying (Figure 7, above). The blowing wind signifies change, a movement from conflict to peace which is reinforced by the doves (also the NGO's logo) that have been a longstanding emblem of peace and innocence. The doves can also be read as resembling the children who have the capability to soar with the help of the kind soldier on-site and soldier-donor protecting these children from afar. The video, in essence, as I explained in my methodology, does what framing aims to do, it identifies a problem (child soldiers), takes a moral ground (children as innocent victims of abused child rights and future of the nation who need protecting), then gives diagnosis and actions taken to rectify the problem (reintegration programmes). All of this goes into producing affect in potential donors of partaking in a noble cause of saving innocents, and building brighter futures (for the children and thus, their communities).

The Affect of a Child's Right to Play

On the 'Donate' page of War Child UK, the donate box has certain amounts listed and states what each amount can do for a child (War Child UK 2021a). For example, GBP 5 can buy kids toys who have "lost everything due to conflict, giving them the chance to play again" (War Child UK 2021a). Moreover, War Child's parent website has a slideshow of 4 images on their homepage (War Child 2021a). The second and third picture (Figure 8 and 9, below) show children at play. By saying that donations can help a child 'play again', and by showing

happy children at play, War Child suggests that they aim to restore children's 'normal' childhood of which 'playing', as opposed to adults who 'work', is an essential part.
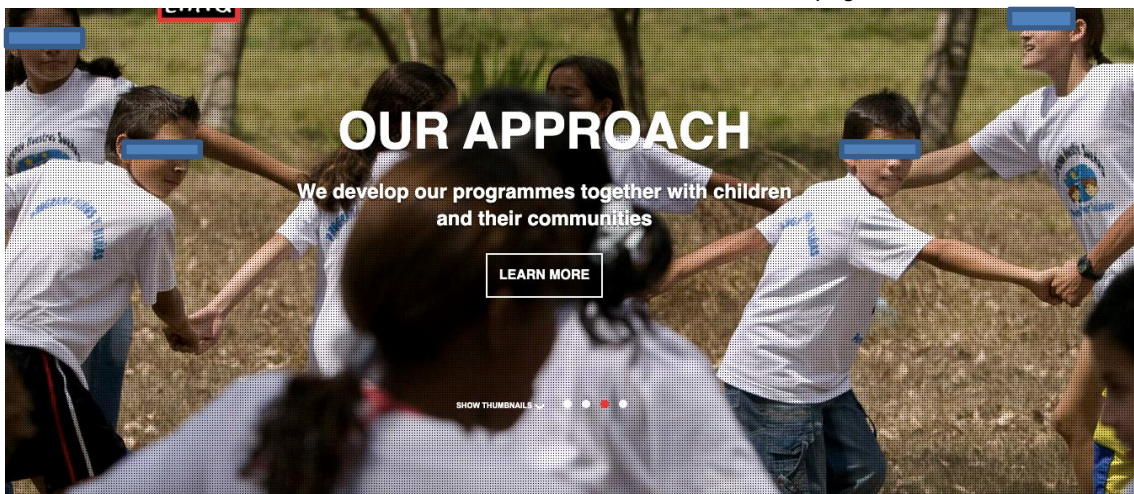
Figure 8

Screenshot 1 from slideshow on War Child's homepage
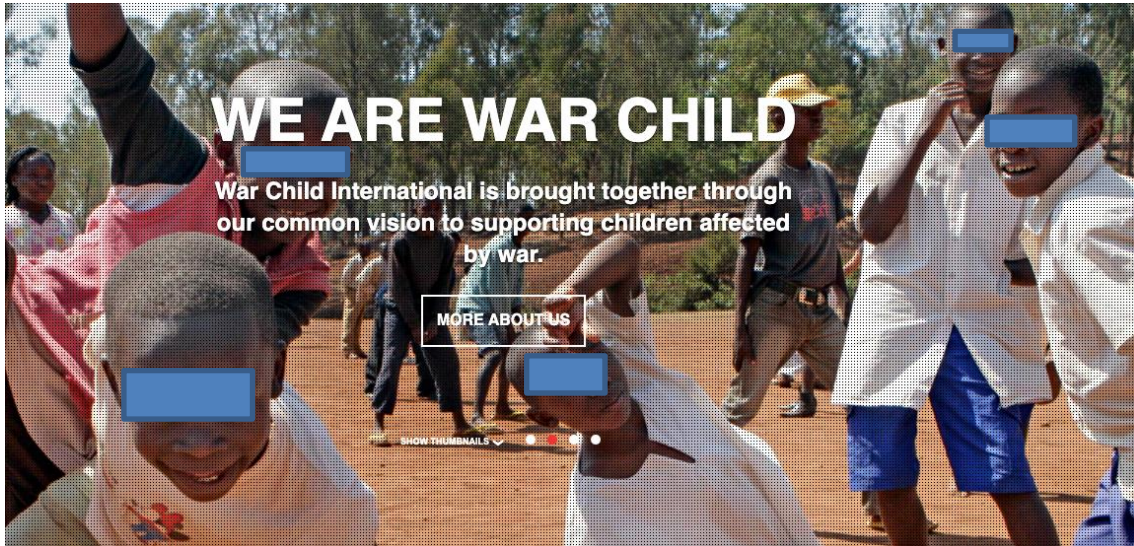
Source: War Child 2021a

Figure 9

Screenshot 2 from slideshow on War Child's homepage

Source: War Child 2021a

War Child UK's article 'How We Help Child Soldiers' (Bartlett and Muzard 2018) includes a testimony of a former child soldier who claims how he enjoys playing football and how War Child UK makes him feel happy again. The article, therefore, stresses on a child's right to play. We see a picture of the child's foot balancing a football (Figure 10, below). The photograph does not show his face, which is the correct ethical stand regarding picturing child soldiers. Nonetheless, the image and narrative about the ex-child soldier playing football shows his restoration of childhood. This functions as strong affective currency captured in the aspect of bringing back a child's stolen childhood. In War Child UK's report 'Rethink Child Soldiers' (War Child UK 2019a), we see a picture of a child drawing his/her family with colour pencils (Figure 11, below). Drawing/colouring can be seen as an activity that can be both educative and entertaining/playful. Hence, the image is meant to signify how War

Child is facilitating a 'return to childhood' for former child soldiers (War Child UK 2019a: 13).

Figure 10
Image of former child soldier balancing a football

Source: Bartlett and Muzard 2018

Figure 11
Image of former child soldier making a drawing (cropped to fit page)

Source: War Child UK 2019a: 13

Similarly, Dallaire Institute's journal series titled *Allons-Y* continues to stress on narratives about stolen childhood and children's right to play. The third volume of the journal

published in 2019 has an interesting cover (Figure 12, above). We see a digital artwork of a child soldier looking through his binoculars. In the lenses of the binoculars, we see children holding hands and playing. The suggestion here is that the child soldier is longing for a 'normal' childhood, which he is missing out.

The image creates the universalised notion of childhood as an age of innocence, "a mythical period of wide-eyed wonder and magical moments" (Garlen 2019: 55). What we see through the lenses implies "what children's experiences 'should' be like", and "[t]his fantasy of childhood as a blissful epoch of care-free enchantment is a powerful social construct" (Garlen 2019: 55), which refuses to acknowledge that children are capable of thoughts, opinions and agency. Duschinsky claims: "Discourses of childhood innocence seem to have an unimpeachable moral status" (quoted in Garlen 2019: 55). This moral ground plays on affect to effectively drive the need to donate to 'noble' causes, i.e., returning children their lost childhood. This return to childhood is largely imagined as a child's right to play. As we see in Figure 11, the child soldier is looking at children playing, implying that he wishes to be like them.

While it is true that children (or rather, everyone) should have lives free of violence, it must also be acknowledged that across cultures, having responsibilities, being able to make decisions and express opinions is an everyday reality and an empowering position for children. Speaking specifically with regards to child soldiers, Rosen (2007: 297) claims that influenced by "human rights and humanitarian imperatives" the universalised definition of childhood as an age of innocence "pays little attention to the enormity of the issues of social and cultural changes contained in the transnational restructuring of age categories". Rosen (2007: 297) further asserts that there is no singular definition or rendering of what childhood can/should be, but human rights and international law define the child as a passive, non-agentic subject in need of protection which "contrasts with anthropological evidence that children are active players and participants in society". This protectionist discourse based on the definition of "childhood as a space of universal vulnerability to be guarded, protected" (Zarzycka 2016: 38) and as an age of play without responsibilities restricts the involvement of children in post-conflict peacebuilding projects. This then obscures the possibility of interventions by NGOs that not simply aim to protect child soldiers but also actively engage them in reintegration and peacebuilding processes by paying attention to what these children have to say. It appears that the humanitarian sector cannot reconcile with the fact that children can be kept safe, and at the same time, can also actively participate in post-conflict societal reconstruction.

The Affective Impact of Omitting and Showing Local Adults

At the bottom of Dallaire Institute's homepage, we see a picture (Figure 13, below) of a child's hand holding onto an adult hand where the bigger hand almost encloses the smaller one. Significantly, the adult is wearing a MONUC uniform (a UN peacekeeping mission in DR Congo) (Dallaire Institute 2021a). The image reproduces the framing of children as dependent and in need of protection by not just adults but qualified adults who are formally trained to do so as symbolised by the MONUC logo on the adult's shirt. Indeed, in all the photographs found on the homepage (Figure 1, 2), and 'Children Should not Fight Wars' video (Figure 7), we constantly see children in the presence of uniformed personnel and no local civilians. Romeo Dallaire himself was a military man, and the narrative here appears to be that only trained professional, i.e., 'experts' in peacekeeping and security are best equipped in protecting children.

Figure 13

Image of a child's hand enclosed in a MONUC personnel's hand
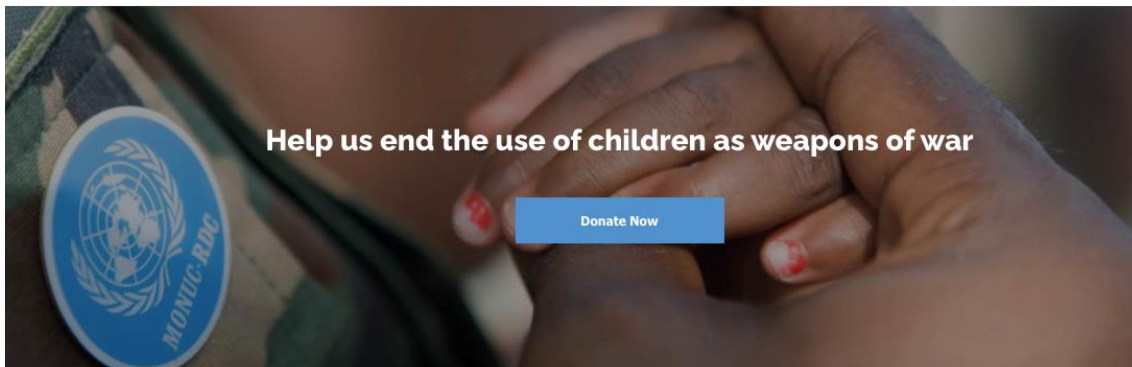
    In Dallaire Institute's images and narratives, there is no acknowledgement of the possible roles child soldiers' family and community can play in reintegration processes, or rather, they (much like the kids) are not seen as agentic and capable beings who can provide for these children. The absence of civilian adults in Dallaire Institute's website content reflects a strong paternalistic and patronising attitude wherein the African civilian adult too is infantilised, and thus, considered incapable of doing or knowing what is best for their own children.

    The 'Rethink Child Soldiers' report (War Child UK 2019a) also uses several pictures of ex-/child soldiers by themselves. One picture shows a young girl alone with scares and bandages on her upper arm (Figure 14, below).

Figure 14

Image of former child soldier with scars and bandaged injuries

    Images of children alone, especially those with visible symbols of physical violence on their body or sad/tearful/scared faces are powerful affect inducing agents. Seeing a picture of a lone child on a NGO website implicitly suggests that s/he needs adult protection. A

photograph of a physically hurt and/or scared/crying child aims to evoke sympathy in the donor and the urgent imperative to save/protect him/her. Images of children without adult family members or local adults in the frame portray them as pseudo-orphans, thereby allowing the donor to have an affective response of pseudo-parenting through donations and sponsorships. Zarzycka (2016: 35) notes that "today's ideas of 'saving' and 'sponsoring' are connected to 'parenting,' both as an economic and an affective function", and so, in order to stress on children's "need of adult care" any "existing networks are stripped away by the frame of the picture". In fact, on War Child Holland's 'Donate' page (War Child Holland 2021b), there is an option of donating to a specific person. Zarzycka (2016: 35) claims that when organisations allow for donations to be made to a certain individual, they propagate a "personal relationship, … one based on beneficence, rather than rights". The donor derives a sense of moral righteousness from what is meant to be seen as 'parenting from afar'. This aspect elevates the already privileged donor to a position of power where s/he can choose exactly which child is saved through their pseudo-parental benevolence.

Now regarding the aspect of including local adults in pictures and narratives, War Child (on their parent website), claims "We develop our programmes together with children and their communities" (Figure 9, above). Furthermore, the 'Rethink Child Soldiers' report (War Child UK 2019a) even notes how attempts to rehabilitate child soldiers by 'outsiders' might lead to mistrust and can have adverse effects (War Child UK 2019a: 15), thus foregrounding the local community as key agents for successful reintegration of child soldiers. Similarly, the article 'It's time to Rethink Child Soldiers' (War Child UK 2019b) has a picture of smiling African kids looking over the fence of a playground. The faces are in the dark, thus keeping with the ethical choice of not showing the children's faces entirely. Importantly, we see an adult at a distance looking at the kids.

Figure 15
Image of children in playground with adult male in the background

Source: War Child UK 2019b

By capturing the local adult in the background, War Child UK reaffirms its agenda of recognising the importance of caregivers and local networks for children's holistic development. However, with regards to child soldiers, there is little proof in their website content as to how exactly this is done. For instance, in the report, there are brief testimonies by parents of former child soldiers about the ineffectiveness of short term interventions (War Child UK 2019a: 19). However, there is no clear elaboration on how the caregivers and community

adults are involved in rehabilitation projects for these children. Arguably, the notion of treating the local community as equal stakeholders in shaping and implementing interventions for child soldiers verges on mere tokenism. Furthermore, by including local adults/caregivers of child soldiers in visual/textual narratives, the organisation aims to show that it is doing effective and noble work by not just helping the children but also their families/communities.

The Limiting Effect of Emotive/Hyperbolic Language and Testimonies

Along with images, use of emotive language also mobilises affect. In Figure 13 (above), we see the text "Help us end the use of children as weapons of war", and then a "Donate Now" button in the center of the picture (Dallaire Institute 2021a). By referring to children as 'weapons of war' and asking one to 'donate now', Dallaire Institute uses hyperbolic language and tries to press on the urgency of the situation to create the affect of moral responsibility. On the homepage of the main War Child website, the first text we see is over a picture of a smiling girl that says "War Child works towards a world in which no child's life is torn apart by war" (War Child 2021a). The language is simple, but at the same time emotive and verges on the dramatic by use of the phrase 'life torn apart'. On the 'Our Vision' page (War Child 2021b), and the 'Donate' page of War Child Holland's website, we find the statement: "Because no child should be part of war. Ever" (War Child 2021b; War Child Holland 2021b). The language used is succinct yet powerful. The statement 'no child should be part of war' followed by a period, and then just the word 'ever' shows a strong moralistic stand, one which can hardly be critiqued. This reflects what Gill and Wells (2014: 33) claim to be a tendency among NGOs where they "make broad appeals to rights and humanity and argue that they are able to support and improve (global) human rights". Bombastic statements that demand an utopic humanity effectively shifts attention from specific ground realities from which war/conflict in a given context emerge. In fact, such 'do-good for humanity' language from Western NGOs ignores, as noted before, the aspect of Global North being potentially responsible for at times creating situations of conflict in the Global South (Lee-Koo 2011: 732). Zarzycka (2016: 38) claims that such language aims at "forging affective transactions as the acceptable promotion of social change" that "obscures notions of local networks, self-reliance, community … and wider political agendas of welfare dependency". Note how War Child asserts that no child should be a part of war, but does not aim to stop wars from occurring. On one hand, it can be considered outlandish for a single organisation to claim that they want to stop wars. On the other hand, the suggestion of leaving children out of conflict, or rather, making wars safer for children underlines the political agenda of not particularly wanting to stop conflict as wars ultimately sustain the existence of humanitarian organisations involved in post-conflict peacebuilding projects.

Along with the use of hyperbolic language, NGOs also use testimonies by child soldiers for the purpose of drawing out affect. The 'Rethink Child Soldiers' report's (War Child UK 2019a) affective quotient is found in snippets of first-person narratives by former child soldiers that capture various aspects of child soldiering such as what propelled them to join armed groups, their roles and tasks during their time in the bush, and the myriad of challenges they face on returning. These are not full or detailed testimonies but impactful one-liners or short paragraphs that show the victimisation of these children, their desire to live 'normal' lives, and various difficulties that are preventing them from doing so. One former child soldier states "Many children enlist in armed groups … because of the suffering, they do not have anyone to support them in relation to their problems", while another claims: "They [armed group] are not nice or kind to us" (War Child UK 2019a: 8, 17). It is interesting how the first-person narratives while acknowledging that children join armed groups willingly,

nonetheless, show them as victims of circumstances. The narrative is shaped in a manner that omits the possibility of a child joining an armed group as a conscious and pragmatic decision of finding food, security by being around combatants than without. Another ex-child soldier states, "[the armed group] killed my father … So I joined [the opposing armed group]" (War Child UK 2019a: 8). Here, we see a narrative of how being exposed to violence and trauma can make children violent. Affect is found in the aspect of hearing from the children themselves the traumatising incidents they have experienced, and in the horror of seeing 'innocent' children turn into violent deviants. The snippets of first-person narratives serve the purpose of garnering sympathy by largely relying on the victim frame. In order to make these testimonies affective, we only see short statements that have shock value. A detailed, non-censored testimony (where the child too does not feel the need to self-censor), which can help all stakeholders involved in properly identifying the exact nature of support needed in a particular setting, are omitted in favour of attention-grabbing emotive statements.

In the article 'It's time to Rethink Child Soldiers' (War Child UK 2019b), we find a quote by a former child soldier that claims: "The quality and quantity of support provided is insufficient. It does not address the expectations or needs of the children" (War Child UK 2019a). The purpose of the quote is to ensure that the donor is hearing it straight from the ex-child soldier that more funds are required for better and longer support. A direct plea from the 'subject' of intervention creates an affective pseudo-dialogue with the donor who sees the person in-need articulate his/her neediness and ask for help. Similarly, another War Child UK article 'How We Help Child Soldiers' (Bartlett and Muzard 2018) includes a first person narrative by a former child soldier. We are told his name and reading his story 'in his own words' is meant to have an affective impact. The boy narrates that the militia "kicked down the door and forced their way into the house" and "executed" his brother (Bartlett and Muzard 2018). He adds: "My mother cried out and attacked the soldier who shot my brother. So they tied her up and killer her too" (Bartlett and Muzard 2018). He claims that after witnessing this, he joined an armed group willingly. So, on one hand, the story represents the dire circumstances that can potentially force a child to partake in conflict. On the other hand, hearing a tale of horror from a living witness who is considered a child (based on the age definition that the humanitarian sector follows) functions as powerful affective currency to evoke pity in the donor; s/he is 'moved' by the terrible, sorrowful story to help the child. The former child soldier than claims: "Only when the French army came to disarm us, that's when I put my gun down" (Bartlett and Muzard 2018). So, possibly he performed a combatant role during his time with the armed group. However, his testimony does not include anything regarding what he did while he was a child soldier. The censoring of his actions as a child soldier by either War Child or the boy himself suggests the need to show him to the donor as a victim in order to evoke affect. Even though we are told the extenuating circumstances that made him join an armed group, the mention of any violence committed by him has the risk of undermining affect of pity or responsibility of 'saving' the traumatised child. Shepler (2004: 121) notes that child soldiers in their attempt to reintegrate back into their communities and/or to get aid from humanitarian agencies "make use of the ideology of youth innocence central to Western models of childhood". Ironically, the very children that NGOs continue to portray as passive victims show awareness of how the humanitarian sector works, thereby applying their agency and intelligence to use the language of victimhood and suffering that the aid agencies and donors want to hear in order to receive help, or even protect themselves from getting prosecuted.

Locating Child Soldiers Within the Spectacle of Fundraising

Funds are essential for NGOs to operate, and the ways in which fundraising is done reveals a donor-appeasing culture, where making sure that the donors are 'getting something in return' for their money is as important (if not more) as ensuring that those funds are going towards the causes/people they are meant for.

In the 'Ways to Get Involved' page (War Child UK 2021b), we see multiple ways in which War Child UK tries to raise funds. For instance, the organisation collaborates with gamers and game developers (War Child UK 2021c), and also popular musicians and bands to record albums and throw concerts (War Child UK 2021d). Similarly, on their 'Start Fundraising' page (War Child UK 2021e), War Child UK offers weekend getaways, treks and sky-diving. The use of video gaming, getaways, adventure sports, celebrities and concerts underlines a deep-rooted hedonistic and consumerist culture wherein the donor does not simply donate out of altruism but also seeks to be entertained by games, holidays, and their favourite celebrities in the process. This mobilises an affective transaction stemming not just out of pity for those in need but also enjoyment for self in 'doing good'. Giving to an humanitarian cause has been turned into a narcissist endeavour of doubling the pleasure for the Western donor; one of enjoying holidays/games/music, and the other of helping the marginalised/underprivileged somewhere on the other side of the planet. It is not enough to just have the moral high ground that comes with the act of donating but also actively get entertained in the process.

Regarding the use of celebrities, Chouliaraki (2013: 79, 80) claims that an "important dimension of humanitarianism" is "its dependence on spectacle" and "[i]n this light, celebrity is a crucial dimension of the theatrical structure of humanitarianism … a figure who commands the necessary symbolic capital" to dictate what people should do and how to act at times of humanitarian crisis. As for concerts, "they use the global appeal of rock[/music] to disseminate and legitimize the moral imperative of solidarity" and "privilege spectacle over argument" (Chouliaraki 2013: 106). The idea embraced here is that of *we* (the Western donors) all come together to save *them* (the needy in the Global South). Chouliaraki (2013: 111) critiques such concerts claiming that they "signal the power of consumer culture to reduce humanitarian causes into depoliticized commodities, devoid of political and historical content". Western NGOs, by turning fundraising into a spectacle of entertainment, take attention away from the aspect that the Global North's politics are tied to many situations of conflict (and other issues such as poverty) in the Global South. The consumerist nature of aid shifts focus from problematic issues regarding the continuation of wars and the West's role in perpetuating them. Within this donor-pleasing aid culture, culpability to child soldiers, i.e., the West's involvement in conflicts that then led to children's recruitment in wars, is replaced instead by culpability to (Western) donors. There is no attempt at holding the Global North accountable in any way for the geo-politics that have allowed the persistence of child soldiers in Africa/Global South. Largely, the narrative and ideology for Western donors is not even about donating to 'fix the wrongs'. Rather, the aid sector adopts a transactional structure where the donor gets something fun/exciting in return for helping the needy. One can argue that the donors have to be satisfied to ultimately help those who need it. However, this cannot justify the narcissistic donor-aid culture that shrugs off the graver aspects of Western accountability when it comes to wars and conflict.

Chapter 5 Limiting Representations and Where Does This Lead Us?

NGOs need funds to do their work. Therefore, it is understandable that attracting and convincing donors is an imperative that requires them to frame and narrate their vision, agenda, ongoing projects and the subjects of intervention in a manner that legitimise asking for (more) funding. Similarly, the use of affect is meant to further propel the donor to donate by playing on his/her need to feel that s/he is doing the morally right thing. Affect also feeds into the donor's paternalistic tendencies and the self-appeasement one gains from doing humanitarian work; 'saving' the Other. In my analysis, I explored how visual, audio and textual representations of child soldiers on certain NGO websites, which are framed with the purpose of fulfilling the demands of the donor gaze and mobilising affect, are largely limiting that do not accurately depict the realities of these children.

The donor gaze functions as a "panoptic gaze [that] constricts discussion topics, agendas, and outcomes" (Kapoor 2020: 150), thereby silencing aspects that can be crucial for providing adequate support to ex-/child soldiers. For instance, there is a lack of acknowledgement of how despite quality interventions, child soldiers might still not be able to reintegrate properly. There are studies that show many former child soldiers tend to have violent tendencies and find difficulty (especially girls) in feeling a valued part of their societies on return from armed groups (Robjant *et al.* 2020; Betancourt *et al.* 2010; Bernal 2000; West 2000; Veale 2003; Hermenau *et al.* 2013), and that these struggles might still persist even post interventions. NGOs do not reveal these realities and their less/unsuccessful projects as doing so can turn away donors, since the donor gaze demands to see that their donations are 'making a difference'. The donor gaze fails to take into consideration that stories of 'failure' can open avenues for further interventions that are better equipped to meet the needs of ex-/child soldiers. Ultimately, the predominance of donor gaze forces NGOs to act in a manner where they show more culpability towards their donors rather than those the aid is meant to help.

Similarly, with the aim of inducing affective capital, Western NGO representations of child soldiers allow for "objectification", "misrepresentation, and thereby misrecognition" of the subject (Sinervo and Cheney 2019: 5). Images and narratives that aim to evoke affect show "victimhood and disadvantage" (Sinervo and Cheney 2019: 5) instead of the lived realities of those they represent. For instance, the aspect of child soldiers joining armed forces willingly is co-opted in a victim narrative of children doing so because they found themselves in terrible situations, and because don't know what is best for them. The victim frame continues to persist in representations where children are deliberately shown alone (without family members or local adults) as that creates for the donor the affect of distance parenting along with child saving. Showing children isolated from their communities in pictures and narratives denies the importance of local networks in rehabilitation projects for child soldiers. In instances where parents and local adults are shown or mentioned, it is done so either to show that the organisation is doing the noble work of not just helping children but also their families, or to reinforce the victimhood of children through (selective) testimonies of their parents/caregivers. Furthermore, there is an unproblematised stress on Western experts (where their 'expertise' is largely accepted because they are from the Global North) since the donor gaze demands seeing their donations going to 'capable' and 'relatable' hands. The refusal to see children and local communities as key agents in peacebuilding and reintegration processes coupled with the reliance on Western 'experts' for planning and implementing

interventions continue to produce the North/South hierarchy where the West has the solutions and the South is the passive recipient of help.

The protectionist discourse of the victim frame for child soldiers reduces these children to 'becomings', i.e., individuals in making who need protection and guidance to become capable adults. Even in instances where the 'messy realities' of child soldiers are shown, it is done so within the frame of victimhood and not to identify how the complexities of their lives can also bring forth avenues to realise these children's capabilities. These representations do not see ex-/child soldiers as agentic beings capable of conscious thought and action, of articulating what exactly they need and how they want that to happen. Despite claims by organisations like War Child about including children and their communities in projects, there is little evidence how this is done in case of child soldiers.

The victimhood narrative is so deeply entrenched in the humanitarian aid discourse that even child soldiers use the language/narrative of passive victims who had their childhood stolen (Shepler 2004: 121). The aid sector sees foregrounding victimhood as the most validating way to get funds. This is because the donor gaze considers the helpless as worthy subjects of funds, and affect is induced through stories of suffering rather than agency. Within such a discourse where ex-/child soldiers hide their realities to get aid from NGOs, one closes the possibility of what exactly are these children's concerns and needs, thereby obstructing opportunities for accurate and more targeted interventions. There is a need to involve children and their communities as active agents in rehabilitation and peacebuilding projects in post-conflict societies. By treating children as subjects not on whom but with whom interventions are planned and implemented can potentially lead to more effective results.

It is arguably impossible to not serve the donor gaze in current times where culpability to donors is crucial for NGOs to continue their work. Nonetheless, for a complex matter like prevention of recruitment and rehabilitation of child soldiers, it is important for NGOs to accurately represent them. It can be argued that funds to actually help them are more important than how they get represented. However, with accurate representation (to all stakeholders) more sites of interventions can be explored.

Furthermore, questions must be raised regarding the narcissistic, consumerist and paternalistic culture that has become intrinsically tied to fundraising and aid giving processes. Indeed, representations of child soldiers as victims in need of saving to evoke affect and appease the donor gaze along with the consumerist nature of aid-giving (where for the Western donor, 'giving' becomes a self-gratifying and pleasure-seeking act) takes attention away from uncomfortable realities of how the Global North is inevitably tied to, or in ways responsible for, the conflicts stemming and continuing in the Global South. Emotional narratives and representations of victimhood, and Western donors going on tours, attending concerts for fundraising turn child soldiers (or any subject of intervention) into a spectacle that depoliticises them and shifts focus away from their realities, thereby obscuring how the 'saviour' West's politics is also accountable for the conflicts the Western NGOs are trying to solve and the people they are trying to save.

References

Adams, V. (2013) *Markets of Sorrow, Labors of Faith: New Orleans in the Wake of Katrina*. Durham: Duke University Press. doi: 10.1515/9780822379195.

Allons-Y (2019) Cover Photo. *Militarization, Violence, and Displacement: War's Impact on Children in 2018*, Vol 3. Available at: https://ojs.library.dal.ca/allons-y/issue/view/923 (Accessed: 20 August 2021).

Bartlett, B. and Muzard, C (2018) 'How We Help Child Soldiers', *War Child*, 12 February. Available at: https://www.warchild.org.uk/whats-happening/blogs/how-we-help-child-soldiers (Accessed: 20 August 2021).

Berents, H. (2019) '"This is my story": Children's war memoirs and challenging protectionist discourses', *International Review of the Red Cross*, 101(911), pp. 459–479. doi:10.1017/S1816383120000120.

Bernal, V. (2000) 'Equality to Die for?: Women Guerrilla Fighters and Eritrea's Cultural Revolution', *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 23(2), pp. 61–76. Available at: www.jstor.org/stable/24497999 (Accessed: 26 March 2021).

Betancourt, T. S. *et al.* (2010) 'Sierra Leone's Former Child Soldiers: A Follow-Up Study of Psychosocial Adjustment and Community Reintegration', *Child Development*, 81(4), pp. 1077–1095. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01455.x.

Boyden, J and Berry, J. (2004) 'Introduction' in Boyden, J. and Berry, J. (eds.) *Children and Youth on the Front Line: Ethnography, Armed Conflict and Displacement*. New York: Berghahn Books, pp. xi-xxvii.

Brett, R. (2004) 'Girl Soldiers: Denial of Rights and Responsibilities', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 23(2), pp. 30–37. doi: 10.1093/rsq/23.2.30.

Brocklehurst H., and Peters K. (2017) 'Constructing and Deconstructing Child Soldier Narratives', in Harker, C., Hörschelmann, K., and Skelton, T. (eds.) *Conflict, Violence and Peace*. Singapore: Springer, pp. 71-87. doi: 10.1007/978-981-287-038-4_4.

Brooks, J. (2012) 'The Struggle of Girl Soldiers Returning Home', *Peace Review*, 24(3), pp. 292–297. doi: 10.1080/10402659.2012.704255.

Brooten, L. (2008) 'The "Pint-Sized Terrorists" of God's Army: Child soldiers, media, and global politics', *Journal of Children and Media*, 2(3), pp. 219–234. doi: 10.1080/17482790802327459.

Cavalcante, F. (2014) 'The Influence of the Liberal Peace Framework on the United Nations Approach to Peacebuilding in Guinea-Bissau', *RCCS Annual Review*, 6 (October 2014), pp. 141-161. doi: 10.4000/rccsar.564.

Chouliaraki, L. (2013) *The Ironic Spectator: Solidarity in the Age of Post-Humanitarianism*. Malden, MA: Polity Press.

Coulter, C., Persson, M. and Utas, A. (2008) *Young Female Fighters in African Wars: Conflict and Its Consequences*. The Nordic Africa Institute Policy Dialogue No. 3. Available at: http://nai.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:241304/FULLTEXT01 (Accessed 18 March 2021).

Dallaire Institute (2021a) *Homepage*. Available at: https://dallaireinstitute.org/ (Accessed: 15 August 2021).

Dallaire Institute (2021b) *Dallaire Institute's Podcast*. Available at: https://cpspodcast.buzzsprout.com/ (Accessed: 1 August 2021).

Dallaire Institute (2021c) *Women and Girls in Conflict* [Podcast]. 26 March. Available at: https://cpspodcast.buzzsprout.com/1699624/8218384-women-and-girls-in-conflict (Accessed: 2 August 2021).

Dallaire Institute (2021d) *Donate*. Available at: https://dallaireinstitute.org/donate/ (Accessed: 5 August 2021).

Dallaire Institute (2021e) *Our Approach*. Available at: https://dallaireinstitute.org/our-approach/ (Accessed: 5 August 2021).

Dallaire Institute (2021f) *10 Years of Impact* [Podcast]. 19 February. Available at: https://cpspodcast.buzzsprout.com/1699624/7962688-10-years-of-impact (Accessed: 2 August 2021).

Dallaire Institute (2021g) *Children Should Not Fight Wars*. 21 April. Available at: https://vimeo.com/539837293 (Accessed: 5 August 2021).

Dallaire Institute (2021h) *Prioritizing Prevention* [Podcast]. 29 June. Available at: https://cpspodcast.buzzsprout.com/1699624/8784339-prioritizing-prevention (Accessed: 2 August 2021).

Denov, M. (2012) 'Child Soldiers and Iconography: Portrayals and (mis)representations', *Children & Society*, 26(4), pp. 280–292. doi: 10.1111/j.1099-0860.2010.00347.x

Drumbl, M.A (2012) 'Child Soldiers and Clicktivism: Justice, Myths, and Prevention', *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, 4(3), pp. 481–485. doi: 10.1093/jhuman/hus023.

Entman, R.M. (1993) 'Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm', *Journal of Communication*, 43 (4), pp. 51-58. doi: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x.

Fox, M.-J. (2004) 'Girl Soldiers: Human Security and Gendered Insecurity', *Security Dialogue*, 35(4), pp. 465–479. doi: 10.1177/0967010604049523.

Garlen, J. C. (2019) 'Interrogating innocence: "Childhood" as exclusionary social practice', *Childhood*, 26(1), pp. 54–67. doi: 10.1177/0907568218811484.

Gill, R and Wells, C.C. (2014) 'Welcome to the "Hunger Games": An Exploration of the Rhetorical Construction of Legitimacy for One U.S.-Based Nonprofit Organization', *Management Communication Quarterly*, 28(1), pp. 26–55. doi: 10.1177/0893318913513434.

Grétry, L. (2011) 'Child Soldiers: Our Representation Challenged by Their Reality', *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 31(9-10), pp. 583–593. Available at: 10.1108/01443331111164160.

Hall, S. (1997a) 'The Work of Representation', in Hall, S. (ed.) *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage Publications, pp. 13-74.

Hall, S. (1997b) 'The Spectacle of the Other', in Hall, S. (ed.) *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage Publications, pp. 223-290.

Hermenau, K. *et al.* (2013) 'Growing Up in Armed Groups: Trauma and Aggression among Child Soldiers in Dr Congo', *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 4(1). doi: 10.3402/ejpt.v4i0.21408.

Honwana, A. M. (2006) *Child Soldiers in Africa*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Hynd, S. (2021) 'Trauma, Violence, and Memory in African Child Soldier Memoirs', *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, 45(1), pp. 74–96. doi: 10.1007/s11013-020-09668-4.

Invisible Children (2012) *KONY 2012*. 5 March. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4MnpzG5Sqc&t=1s&ab_channel=InvisibleChildrenInvisibleChildrenOfficialArtistChannel (Accessed: 12 June 2021).

Kapoor, I. (2020) *Confronting Desire: Psychoanalysis and International Development*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Kessy, R.(2014) *Decoding the donor gaze: documentary, aid and AIDS in Africa*. PhD thesis. University of Huddersfield. Available at: http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/23747/ (Accessed: 18 June 2021).

Koot, S. and Fletcher, R. (2021) 'Donors on Tour: Philanthrotourism in Africa', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 89, pp. 1-11. doi: 10.1016/j.annals.2021.103216.

Kothari, U. (2006) 'An Agenda for Thinking about 'Race' in Development', *Progress in Development Studies*, 6 (1), pp. 9–23. doi:10.1191/1464993406ps124oa.

Kress, G., and van Leeuwen, T. (2006) 'Visual Interaction', in A. Jaworski and N. Coupland (eds.) *The Discourse Reader*. 2nd edn. Abington, Oxon: Routledge, pp. 362-384.

Lee-Koo, K. (2011) 'Horror and Hope: (re)presenting militarised children in global North-South relations', *Third World Quarterly*, 32(4), pp. 725-742. doi: 10.1080/01436597.2011.567005.

Macfarlane, K. (2021) *The Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Nepal and Sri Lanka: Navigating post conflict identities in civilian life*. PhD thesis. The Australian National University. Available at: https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/237213/1/Thesis%20Final%20KMacfarlane%202021.pdf (Accessed: 18 June 2021).

Machel, G. (2001) *The Impact of War on Children*. London: C. Hurst & Co.

Mackey, A. (2013) 'Troubling Humanitarian Consumption: Reframing Relationality in African Child Soldier Narratives', *Research in African Literatures*, 44(4), pp. 99–122. doi: 10.2979/reseafrilite.44.4.99.

Martins, C. (2011) 'The dangers of the single story: Child-soldiers in literary fiction and film', *Childhood: A Global Journal of Child Research*, 18(4), pp. 434–446. doi: 10.1177/0907568211400102.

Martins, C. (2013) '"How Many People Have You Killed?": Child-Soldiers in Literature and Film', *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 53(211), pp. 649–675. doi: 10.4000/etudesafricaines.17444.

Mazurana, D. and McKay, S. (2003) 'Girls in Fighting Forces in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone, and Mozambique: Policy and Program Recommendations', *ResearchGate*. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Dyan-Mazurana-2/publication/228475893_Girls_in_fighting_forces_in_Northern_Uganda_Sierra_Leone_and_Mozambique_Policy_and_program_recommendations/links/0a85e53c0076de33c6000000/Girls-in-fighting-forces-in-Northern-Uganda-Sierra-Leone-and-Mozambique-Policy-and-program-recommendations.pdf (Accessed: 18 March 2021).

Mazurana, D. E. *et al.* (2002) 'Girls in Fighting Forces and Groups: Their Recruitment, Participation, Demobilization, and Reintegration', *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 8*(2), pp. 97–123. doi: 10.1207/S15327949PAC0802_01.

McKay, S. (2005) 'Girls as "Weapons of Terror" in Northern Uganda and Sierra Leonean Rebel Fighting Forces', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 28(5), pp. 385-397. doi: 10.1080/10576100500180253.

Moynagh, M. (2011) 'Human Rights, Child-Soldier Narratives, and the Problem of Form', *Research in African Literatures*, 42(4), pp. 39–59. doi: 10.2979/reseafrilite.42.4.39.

Moynagh, M. (2020): 'Frames of War: Thinking Child-Soldier Photography', *Photography and Culture*, 14(1), pp. 71-95. doi: 10.1080/17514517.2020.1734269.

Mukhtarov, F. (2021) 'Session 11: Narrative Analysis I' [PowerPoint Presentation]. *3210: Discourse Analysis*. ISS-EUR. Available at: https://canvas.eur.nl/courses/32511/files/folder/Lecture%20notes?preview=38934332 (Accessed: 2 June 2021).

Nichols, M. (2021) 'More than 8,500 children used as soldiers in 2020: U.N.', *Reuters*, 22 June. Available at: https://www.reuters.com/world/more-than-8500-children-used-soldiers-2020-un-2021-06-21/ (Accessed: 28 June 2021).

Padmi, M. F. M. (2017) 'The Role of NGOs in Liberal Peace Attempts', *Global Insight Journal*, 1(2), pp. 144-161. doi: 10.52447/gij.v1i2.752.

Peterson, J.H. (2016) 'Humanitarianism and Peace', in: Richmond, O.P., Pogodda, S., and Ramović, J. (eds.) *The Palgrave Handbook of Disciplinary and Regional Approaches to Peace*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 233-246. doi: 10.1007/978-1-137-40761-0_18.

Richard, A. and Rudnyckyj, D. (2009) 'Economies of Affect', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 15(1), pp. 57–77. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/20527634. (Accessed: 10 June 2021).

Richmond, O. P. (2006) 'Human Security and the Liberal Peace: Tensions and Contradictions', *The Whitehead Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations*, 7(1), pp. 75-87. Available at: https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/olj/shjdir/v7n1/v7n1_06.pdf (Accessed: 10 June 2021).

Richmond, O., and Franks, J. (2007) 'Liberal Hubris? Virtual Peace in Cambodia', *Security Dialogue*, 38(1), pp. 27–48. doi: 10.1177/0967010607075971.

Robjant, K *et al.* (2020) 'Trauma, Aggression, and Post Conflict Perpetration of Community Violence in Female Former Child Soldiers – A Study in Eastern Dr Congo', *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 11, pp. 1-10. doi: 10.3389/fpsyt.2020.533357.

Rosen, D. M. (2005) *Armies of the Young : Child Soldiers in War and Terrorism*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press.

Rosen, D. M. (2007) 'Child Soldiers, International Humanitarian Law, and the Globalization of Childhood', *American Anthropologist*, 109(2), pp. 296–306. doi: 10.1525/aa.2007.109.2.296.

Scheufele, D. A. and Tewksbury, D. (2007) 'Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming: The Evolution of Three Media Effects Models: Models of Media Effects', *Journal of Communication*, 57(1), pp. 9–20. doi: 10.1111/j.0021-9916.2007.00326.x.

Shenhav, S. R. (2015) *Analyzing Social Narratives*. New York: Routledge.

Shepler, S. (2003) 'Educated in War: The Rehabilitation of Child Soldiers in Sierra Leonne', in Uwazie, E. E. (ed.) *Conflict Resolution and Peace in Africa*. Lanham: Lexington Books, pp. 57-75.

Shepler, S. (2004) 'Globalizing Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone' in Maira, S., Soep, E., and Lipsitz, G. (eds.) *Youthscapes: The Popular, The National, The Global*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, pp. 119-133.

Sinervo, A. and Cheney, K. (2019) 'NGO Economies of Affect: Humanitarianism and Childhood in Contemporary and Historical Perspective', in Cheney, K. and Sinervo, A. (eds.) *Disadvantaged Childhoods and Humanitarian Intervention : Processes of Affective Commodification and Objectification*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1-35.

Steinl, L. (2017) *Child Soldiers as Agents of War and Peace: A Restorative Transitional Justice Approach to Accountability for Crimes Under International Law*. The Hague: Asser Press. doi: 10.1007/978-94-6265-201-9.

Stephenson Jr, M. and Zanotti, L. (2012) 'Implementing the Liberal Peace in Post-Conflict Scenarios: The Case of Women in Black-Serbia', *Global Policy*, 3(1), pp. 46–57. doi: 10.1111/j.1758-5899.2011.00102.x.

Uprichard, E. (2008) 'Children as 'Being and Becomings': Children, Childhood and Temporality', *Children & Society*, 22(4), pp. 303–313. doi:10.1111/j.1099-0860.2007.00110.x.

Veale, A. (2003) *From Child Soldier to Ex-Fighter, Female Fighters, Demobilisation and Reintegration in Ethiopia*. Africa Portal. Available at: https://media.africaportal.org/documents/Mono85.pdf (Accessed: 24 March 2021).

War Child (2021a) *Home*. Available at: https://www.warchild.org/ (Accessed: 18 August 2021).

War Child (2021b) *Our Vision*. Available at: https://www.warchild.org/vision (Accessed: 18 August 2021).

War Child Holland (2020) *Time to Think Again about Child Soldiers*. Available at: https://www.warchildholland.org/research-and-development/child-soldier/ (Accessed: 18 August 2021).

War Child Holland (2021a) *How We Work to Combat Stigmatisation*. Available at: https://www.warchildholland.org/research-and-development/stigmatisation/ (Accessed: 18 August 2021).

War Child Holland (2021b) *Donate*. Available at: https://www.warchildholland.org/donate/ (Accessed: 18 August 2021).

War Child UK (2019a) *Rethink Child Soldiers*. Available at: https://www.warchild.org.uk/sites/default/files/link-files/War_Child%20UK_Rethink_Child_Soldiers_Report_Final.pdf (Accessed: 20 August 2021).

War Child UK (2019b) 'It's Time to Rethink Child Soldiers', 11 June. Available at: https://www.warchild.org.uk/whats-happening/news/its-time-rethink-child-soldiers (Accessed: 20 August 2021).

War Child UK (2021a) *Donate*. Available at: https://donate.warchild.org.uk/?_ga=2.263438154.733986137.1631471030-1952687065.1631471030 (Accessed: 20 August 2021).

War Child UK (2021b) *Ways to Get Involved*. Available at: https://www.warchild.org.uk/get-involved (Accessed: 20 August 2021).

War Child UK (2021c) *Gaming*. Available at: https://warchildgaming.org.uk/ (Accessed: 20 August 2021).

War Child UK (2021d) *Music*. Available at: https://www.warchild.org.uk/what-we-do/music-entertainment (Accessed: 20 August 2021).

War Child UK (2021e) *Start Fundraising*. Available at: https://www.warchild.org.uk/get-involved/fundraise (Accessed: 20 August 2021).

Wells, K. (2008) 'Child Saving or Child Rights: Depictions of children in International NGO campaigns on conflict', *Journal of Children and Media*, 2(3), pp. 235–250. doi: 10.1080/17482790802327475.

West, H. G. (2000) 'Girls with Guns: Narrating the Experience of War of Frelimo's 'female Detachment'', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 73(4), pp. 180–194. Available at: 10.1353/anq.2000.0015.

Zarzycka, M (2016) 'Save the Child: Photographed Faces and Affective Transactions in Ngo Child Sponsoring Programs', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 23(1), pp. 28–42. doi: 10.1177/1350506814568362.