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Children in War:

A Discussion of Child Soldiers and the Concept of Childhood

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Declaration

I, Carina Svendsen, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

Signature.....

Date.....

Acknowledgements

To Theodor Tiger and Belle Amalie,

I dedicate this thesis to you in hope that your childhood may always be a safe one and that you grow up in a world where children no longer have to take part in cruelty and unfairness. May you always stay blessed, loved and secure in a peaceful world.

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Preface

Children and young people are affected by conflict in numerous ways, and are seen as constituting one of the groups that are referred to as the primary victims during and after war and conflict. In contemporary conflicts, children and youth are directly partaking in actions, and some as soldiers.

Children serving as soldiers are not something new as such, but despite the international efforts in prohibiting the use of children in war, it is still the reality for many children around the globe. The reasons for the recruitment of children are many, which are based on political, religious, social and economic aspects.

The perceptions related to children as being innocent, weak and vulnerable also reflects why children are involved as soldiers in war and conflict, since children are therefore seen as easier to recruit and to adapt to the circumstances brought by conflict within a rebel group. The children serving for these groups experience a lot of violence and horrible situations, and are witnesses and performers of atrocities such as killings, rapes and looting of communities. The life of a child soldier is therefore contradicting with what is expected and perceived as an ideal childhood.

Child soldiers are agents in conflict and war, although not legally. Their actions are challenging our perceptions of children, since it is the opposite of innocence, weakness, and even vulnerability. Therefore, the agency of child soldiers is a site of knowledge in understanding international relations, as they are actors that shapes state behavior.

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1. Introduction

In 2002, the first American Sergeant was killed in Afghanistan during an ambush and got hit by sniper fire while servicing in the War on Terrorism (WOT) (Singer 2004: 561). The same year, and in Afghanistan, another American Sergeant was killed by a grenade attack (*ibid.*). The casualties are not surprising *per se*, but the two killers were children (*ibid.*: 561-2). It is not a new phenomenon that children partake directly in violent conflicts and wars which has been a part of warfare for centuries. However, due to the change in warfare post-Cold War, there has been an increase in the use of child soldiers, and “children as young as six years old now comprise as much as 10% of the world’s combatants. Underage soldiers serve in 75% of the world’s conflicts” (Singer 2004: 562).

For almost a century there has been a focus on children’s rights on the international, regional and national level. Moreover, the use of children in war has in recent years been an integrated part of this, and there are initiatives developed with the intention to solve the issue of recruitment of child soldiers. In academia, there are several contributions and discussions of the role of children in war as well. However, despite that children in war, both as victims as combatants, is part of the international agenda and a well-discussed topic in academia, the role and agency of child soldiers is left unaddressed directly in International Relations (IR) theory.

Therefore, this thesis aims to explain and describe the role of children in war. This will be done by both focusing on children as victims of war, but also the causes for children’s participation in war/conflict, the treatment and situation for child soldiers during war and reintegration of them post-conflict. The case of Boko Haram in Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon illustrates how children are directly participating as agents or soldiers in a contemporary conflict, and is therefore used in this thesis as an example to explain children in war. However, by covering these aspects, the thesis do not aim to “just” circle around the sad and tragic reality of children’s participation, but also critically discuss children’s role in war and the efforts from the international community in addressing the issue. As a part of the discussion, the modern understanding of childhood will be guiding the thesis.

Included in this chapter, and below, the thesis will underline why it is important to understand children’s role in war, as this is a contemporary issue since children are seen as the one of the primary victims in war and that despite of the efforts to prohibit the

recruitment of children to serve as soldiers, there has been an increase in the use of child soldiers post-Cold War. Thereafter, the research questions are presented, with a brief explanation of the choice behind them. Following this, the main or key concept will be defined, explained and linked with other concepts that are relevant to the context of children in war and of this thesis. The end of this chapter, the outline or the structure of thesis is presented, and included in this is the chapters that the thesis consists of.

1.1. Why study this?

Child soldiers are an old phenomenon, and as mentioned above, a topic that has been a part of the international agenda and a well-discussed topic in academia. Sadly, the issue of child soldiering is as relevant today as it has ever been, and is a common feature of many contemporary conflicts. Children in war is also part of national and regional responses, but this thesis will focus on the international level, since human rights and international humanitarian law aims to be universal, and that states have agreed together on these aspects and the concern for children. Since there is no “global police” as such to assure the rights of children, it is the state’s responsibility after signing the documents regarding children and ratifies it to their national jurisdiction. Moreover, child soldiers are a “global local problem”, as this is discussed and addressed internationally, but also because it is often in contemporary civil wars or conflict it occurs. Therefore, for a student of a Master of Science in International Relations, due to the international aspect, it is relevant to try to understand the phenomenon.

In shifting away from the assumption that states are the main actors on the international scene, it is room to address other actors that has significance for state behavior. Child soldiers are relevant to this, since the children have some sort of agency by being active agents and directly partaking in wars/conflicts. Although, not an agency which is legal, since it is prohibited to use child soldiers. However, in the discipline of IR, the child is not addressed directly per se, and therefore the agency child soldiers represent is left unquestioned and without conceptualization as well. Therefore, the relevance for a student in the field of IR is to try to understand why this is so, or at best, try to “fill the gaps”. Furthermore, in the field of IR, despite the lack of addressing children or child soldiers directly, it is possible to apply theoretical lenses that will help understand various aspects related to this issue. This thesis focuses on the aspect to understand and challenge the

modern perception of childhood, and how this is a social construct developed through international initiatives regarding children rights. Moreover, by discussing the concept of childhood, the purpose of this research process is to find out how this has relevance for the child soldiers before, during and after conflict.

1.2. Research Questions

Research questions is an important part of the research process, and this is because it reflects what areas of the topic one wants to know more about (Bryman 2012: 10). Furthermore, the research questions are a way to narrow down and guides the research in the direction one wants to go (*ibid.*). This is especially crucial for the literature search, research design, and data collection (*ibid.*: 11). Another aspect of the importance of research questions is also to give an idea to the readers of what the research is about (*ibid.*). In the context of this thesis, the research question(s) should therefore include the efforts of the international arena on the issue of children in war, why this is relevant in contemporary conflicts and how the modern understanding of childhood and perception linked to this affects children in war.

The following two research questions will direct and guide this thesis:

1. How can child soldiers' agency be used as an analytical tool and/or empiric category in IR theory, and which, if any, existing theories can explain the role of children in international relations?
2. How does the concept of childhood and perceptions linked to this affect the situation for child soldiers from recruitment to post-conflict, and what, if anything, can we learn from past experiences?

The first research question reflects the lack of existing IR theories efforts of addressing or conceptualizing children's agency. Children are agents on a local, national, regional and international level. In a positive manner, there are efforts in creating political and social spaces for children's voices to be heard. Child soldiers are an example of how children can be agents, but on a negative note. This means that internationally, and by international law, it is illegal to recruit children into armed forces, but that it is a phenomenon that

occurs in many contemporary conflicts. Thus, child soldiers' agency should be understood and included in IR theory on a larger scale. However, it is possible to use existing theories to understand children's role and actions. The answer or results in regards to the first research question is included in the theoretical framework of the thesis. References to the findings will also be included in the analysis in chapter 4 and 5.

The second research question reflects how the accepted truth about the concept of childhood is a taken-for-granted reality, and a social construct. This reality or construct is shaped and created through international efforts in defining what a child is, and therefore also what an ideal childhood should include. The answer to this question will to some degree be reflected on in chapter 2, which is the theoretical basis for the thesis. Chapter 4 will elaborate on the answer in laying out the field of to what an extent child soldiers is an issue and the reality for the children serving for armed groups. Chapter 5, and the case of Boko Haram, will illustrate how the concept of childhood and its understanding or perceived reality is affecting the realities of the many children that are involved with this group.

1.3. Key Concepts

The key concepts that are included in this thesis to explain child soldiers are; a child, soldier, child soldier and children in war. The concepts are defined for the purpose of this thesis in the following manner:

A **Child** is defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and in Part I in Article 1 of the CRC it is stated that “[f]or the purposes of the present Convention, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier” (CRC, UN 1989). This definition is chosen for this thesis since this is an international initiative that 195 states have agreed on.

A **Soldier** is perceived as a person that is associated with strength and aggression, and a person with certain duties. These duties rely on the responsibility to defend and protect (Honwana 2006: 3). Moreover, soldiers are also expected to be actors which are responsible and have the maturity of adults (*ibid.*).

A **Child Soldier** is defined internationally as “any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes” (The Cape Town Principles 1997, The Paris Principles 2007).

In this thesis **children in war** will also be mentioned, and in this context it is meant as a broad term which includes all children who experience war, and not necessarily just those who are recruited as soldiers.

However, to understand how child soldiers challenge our understanding of the perceived role of the child, the main concept that will be discussed in this thesis is the modern understanding of ‘childhood’. The contributions of discussing this topic are many, but for the purpose of this thesis **childhood** is defined as something which is in “modern societies [...] usually associated with innocence, weakness, and dependence upon adult guidance and nurturance” (Honwana 2006: 3). By modern understanding of childhood, it is meant in this thesis post-1924, where children rights were first addressed internationally. The concept of childhood will be elaborated in the second chapter of the thesis since challenging the modern understanding of it will contribute in strengthening the argument of why children’s agency – and specifically that of child soldiers – in international relations is a site of knowledge. Furthermore, by challenging perceptions related to childhood, it can tell us something about child soldiers and these children’s realities. Or, at best, tell us something of the taken-for-granted realities, as the acceptance of what a child’s upbringing and life is determined by how we perceive the expected and preferred childhood.

1.4. Structure of the thesis

The second chapter of this thesis is the theoretical framework, which is divided into three parts. Firstly, children and international relations are discussed, with a focus on children’s agency, and why this is relevant to understanding international relations. Thereafter, the thesis’ theoretical framework is based on a feminist approach to international relations. Firstly, a brief presentation of feminist IR theory is given, and thereafter, elements of this theoretical lens are included to show how this is relevant and how it can be applied to

understand children in international relations. From this theoretical perspective it is especially the focus on discourse analysis that this thesis will include. The last part of the second chapter will include an explanation of the main concept of the thesis, which is 'childhood', and how and why this is relevant to children in war. On the basis of the theoretical framework and the emphasis on discourse analysis, this will also guide the methods used in this research, which is the third chapter of the thesis. In this chapter, firstly, there will be an introduction to why social research is a necessity, next part will explain why the choice fell on a qualitative research, followed by the choice of discourse analysis, the reason for choosing a case and lastly the issue of reliability, validity and limitations of the study will be presented.

The results of this thesis are in a way two-parted. Firstly, the role of children in war will be presented. This is a separate chapter because it is a lot of literature and aspects that needs to be involved to even grasp or understand the issue of child soldiers. Thereafter, a case will be used to explain how child soldiers are a reality in an ongoing conflict. In its introductory phase, this chapter will outline what the term 'new wars' is by giving a brief description of the characteristics of these conflicts. The choice to include this in the thesis is based on the aspect that these forms of conflict both are relevant to the chosen case, which is Nigeria, and its conflict with Boko Haram. Moreover, this intra-state conflict, which has spread out to various countries in the region, is also highly relevant to the issue of child soldiers, since recruiting children into their troops for different purposes are an occurring phenomenon. Lastly, the concluding chapter of the thesis will consist of conclusions of the various topics discussed in this thesis, together with some reflections.

2. Children, International Relations & Feminist IR Theory

In this chapter the objective is to outline and clarify the theoretical framework of the thesis by focusing on theoretical contributions within the discipline of IR to explain children in war, and more specifically, child soldiers. As mentioned above, the IR theories have not addressed children's agency or role on the international arena *per se*, but it is still possible to apply existing theoretical lenses to understand the issue of children in war.

In the first section of this chapter, children and international relations will be discussed, with an emphasis on the international arena addressing children in general. Secondly, this chapter of the thesis will include a brief introduction to feminist IR theory, where the focus will be on some aspects of this broad theoretical scope and its contributions that can be applied to children in IR. Lastly, this part and chapter will define and discuss the key, and the chosen main concept of the thesis, which is the modern understanding of 'childhood'.

2.1. Children & International Relations

Watson argues that children should be recognized as actors on the international level and that children's agency should be involved in the IR discipline as well (2006: 237). On the basis of this, international documents, protocols and treaties recognize children and "child rights advocates [...] places them centre-stage in the quest for the universal application of human rights" (Watson 2006: 237). Furthermore, children do directly partake in various roles, both of domestic and international character, and there are many examples of this.

On a positive note, in the past decades children is now more and more included in meetings on a local, regional, national and international level (Watson 2006: 238). They are encouraged to speak their minds and their voices are heard. The UN Special Session on Children in 2002 is an example of this. This was an initiative first of its kind that was concerned with children directly, and children participated as official delegates for the first time on the international arena (*ibid.*). However, and on a negative manner, in the aspect of labor, it is estimated that child labor constitute about 246 million of laborers worldwide. As a result of war and conflict, children become refugees, where half of the displaced people are children. Moreover, and relevant to this thesis, in contemporary conflicts, children are playing direct roles in war and conflict as soldiers (*ibid.*: 237-8).

Therefore, in international relations, children are recognized by international documents as individuals with universal rights and by the different roles, both positive and negative, children do exercise some sort of agency. However, whereas the first, and positive example, invites the children in and they are encouraged to speak their minds and their opinions are respected and heard, the latter is different. In negative matters, children arguably are being spoken for, where adults come together to discuss the best solutions for the children. In regards to child soldiers, this is also the reality, and this is related to the modern understanding of childhood.

In the discipline of IR, however, “despite the body of work that already exists in [other disciplines] traditionally seen as being of interest to international relations scholars”, the role of children has been left out and “the child remains a silent force [where] very few writers address in any critical way either their role, or the implications of conceptualizing it” (Watson 2006: 239-40). Moreover, if a recognition of children in IR is to take place, there is a need for understanding and conceptualizing their role (*ibid.*: 243).

In mainstream IR theory, both realism and liberalism are short-fallen in trying to understand or conceptualize children roles in the context of international relations. As a realist perspective emphasizes the state as the main actor, the attempt of including or explaining other actors on the international scene is therefore seemingly impossible (*ibid.*: 244). From a liberal theoretical standpoint, the task to include children’s role is not any easier. Although liberal thought in IR do shift away from the state in some sense, and emphasizes the individual as a rational, independent actor, this individual is not specified (*ibid.*: 244-5). More specifically, “this individual is an amorphous generalization” (Watson 2006: 245), and do not represent children, women or men *per se*. However, it should be mentioned as a side-note that the latter is more represented, as politics traditionally has been for and by men. This generalization of the individual, despite the liberal efforts of granting them rights just for being human and being born, are also reflecting adults. These adults are left with the responsibility of making rational choices on behalf of children, and making sure that the rights of the child is upheld (*ibid.*: 244). However, as the discipline has developed the past decades, with critics of the mainstream theories, there has been a shift in addressing actors on the international scene. Although, not directly addressing children, these theoretical lenses can be applied in understanding children and international relations.

2.2. Feminist IR Theory

Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth

- Simone De Beauvoir

International Relations (IR) as a discipline has prior to the 1980s consisted of theories that are referred to as mainstream theories (majorly realism and liberalism) today (True 2013: 242). In describing international relations, these theories have had a state-centered focus, and have left out explaining the role of individuals and people as agents (*ibid.*). There are various contributions of critical thinking in IR as a discipline. By including new aspects to the study of relations among states and a shifted focus to other actors on the international scene, the critical theories challenge the mainstream theories. This is for instance a greater focus on the individual level, and therefore it provides new knowledge and challenges the assumption of mainstream theories that states are the main actors in IR. Furthermore, the critical IR theories and mainstream theories vary in their approach to how one can know something about international relations in the way research is conducted. Critical IR theories emphasize various epistemologies that are concerned with relational aspects, the individual level in different settings, discourse, context and reflectiveness. Therefore, the critical contributions to IR are a bottom-up approach and the mainstream IR theories with their focus on the state as the main actor has more of a top-down approach.

In the mid-1980s, the feminist approaches to international relations were – after a long walk to freedom – invited to join in (True 2013: 241). Feminist theory is not one theory or approach, but consists of many. Despite some differences, the commonality between them is that they all seek to challenge the perception of gender by using the term as an analytical tool and an empiric category (*ibid.*). This is done by questioning “the powerful bond among men, states and war” (True 2013: 241). Feminism challenges international politics, power relations, the structure of the international society by drifting away from the mainstream approach to international relations as being centered around interstate relations, and emphasizes that there are other actors on the international scene as well (*ibid.*). Therefore, feminist theories – along with other critical theories – have brought variance to the discipline of IR by re-conceptualizing power, acknowledging the role of non-state actors and have given a voice to marginalized people (*ibid.*). After 2000, gender and international security has been one of the issues feminist approaches have contributed

with in describing international relations (*ibid.*). As earlier mentioned, no IR theory directly addresses children's role, so how can a feminist approach tell us something about children?

2.2.1. Applying a Feminist Perspective on Children in International Relations

As mentioned above, feminist IR theory challenges mainstream theories by including more actors to the scene than just states, how this affect traditional understanding of power and security, but also more importantly – in this context – give a voice to marginalized people. However, what categorizes marginalized people during conflict is not an unquestioned phenomenon. On the international arena and the efforts addressing war-affected people, it is often referred to as including women, children, elderly and other vulnerable groups.

As the “neo's” of realism and liberalism still shapes the academic discipline and policy practices of international relations, there is a need to challenge a system of international institutions that are the result of liberal values that promote state's self-interests (Sheperd 2008: 385). Thus, Sheperd argues that “it is necessary to undertake discourse-theoretical analysis to understand the ways in which the institutional logics of specific sites of power pre/proscribe particular policy realities” (2008: 384). Moreover, because “policy documents that order the lives of individuals everywhere, employing as they do concepts, that, like all concepts, are inherently value-laden” (Sheperd 2008: 384). This relates to how the international community has come together to define what a child and a childhood is in documents, which will be elaborated below.

Post-2000, the UN and the Security Council (UNSC/SC) have addressed thematic topics and issues (Carpenter 2005: 295), and amongst these are children in war. Moreover, children have been addressed as a part of the “protection of civilians”-agenda where the focus is centered on the international community's responsibility to the groups categorized as civilians which is particularly vulnerable during war and conflict (*ibid.*: 295, 296). In this context, these groups are women, children and the elderly (*ibid.*: 296). This represents not only that war- and conflict-trends has shifted in the post-Cold War era, but also that these initiatives on the international arena are an “indicative of a recent shift in the global

security agenda to include humanitarian affairs, and an increasing interest by the United Nations in war-affected populations specifically” (Carpenter 2005: 295-6).

Carpenter’s article *Women, Children and Other Vulnerable Groups: Gender, Strategic Frames and the Protection of Civilians as a Transnational Issue* “examines the use of gender essentialisms – tropes associating men and women with mutually exclusive and oppositional attributes – in these transnational efforts to advocate for the protection of civilians in international society” (2005: 296). However, this can be applied to and are relevant to children as well, since the focus on protection of civilians on the international arena “has been framed in such a way as to reproduce the traditional notion that “women and children” (but not adult men) are “innocent” and “vulnerable”” (Carpenter 2005: 296). This creates a linkage between women and children, which is two separate agents in international relations. Moreover, this also creates the view of women and children in need of protection and help. Therefore, women and children serving as soldiers and are directly being part of warfare is excluded in this. In the aspect of exclusion, men that are civilians are also neglected, since men are not perceived as particularly vulnerable (*ibid.*). However;

“Warfare is a profoundly gendered phenomenon. It is not just that men become soldiers while women work and wait at home, a popular image based on two relatively well-organized twentieth-century world wars. In European international and civil wars, as well as in African wars, women in the civilian population become targets of recruitment and sexual violence perpetrated by soldiers that is designed to demoralize, humiliate, and immobilize an enemy. Women and girls are raped in front of their male relatives. Sometimes, rape ends in murder” (Honwana 2006: 5).

It is the stereotypical view of men, women and children that also affects the individual experience during war. In society in general, these stereotypes exists, and therefore it is “natural” that these also shapes warfare.

In international affairs, there are more examples of women and children being interlinked to constitute one group. For instance, in the private space, which refers to the home or the household, women are often seen as the main-provider within the four walls. This has also been criticized by feminist scholars, as this underestimates a woman’s capabilities outside the home. Included in this, is the perceived notion that “the private space is the one that women inhabit [and] is largely predicated on their assumed role as mothers” (Watson

2006: 242). Children are therefore just beings under the care of women within the private space, and their actions are of no matter to the “outside” world or public space (*ibid.*). Therefore, by viewing both women and children as innocent and vulnerable, and limiting their agency to only exist within the private space, these two groups constitutes a form of a new human being or actor, which is “women-and-children” (*ibid.*). An actor which continues to be defined in “othering” to men, and subordinate to male power (*ibid.*: 243).

The fight of feminists and women in politics, academia and in society in general for equality and their opposing to this subordination of men has resulted in awareness of the issues, and that women are now on a larger scale acknowledged as actors in national and international affairs. Moreover, the fight of women to be recognized, both within the discipline of IR and as actors, in international relations, can somehow be seen as a fight for the children as well. Thus, since the two are interlinked, but also that the recognition of children is similar to the one of women. The contributions from feminist scholars in focusing on discourse analysis of the taken-for-granted realities relating to gender is reflecting how the same argument can be used in recognizing children’s agency, as challenging the concept of childhood and its impact on the realities for children will open up for a site of knowledge.

2.3. The Modern Understanding of Childhood

In the introductory chapter, the main concept of this thesis, which is ‘childhood’ was defined as a term which includes perceptions that children are innocent and weak. In this part of the thesis the concept of childhood will be elaborated. Related to this, though, child soldiers go beyond this definition, as ‘child’ and ‘soldier’ are contradicting concepts. This is since soldiers are seen in a way as something associated with the opposite of innocence and weakness of what a child is perceived to be, and are instead associated with aggression and strength. Thus, therefore also a person which is over the age of 18, and that has the maturity of an adult.

In the goal to prohibit and stop the use of children participating in war it is necessary to understand the modern definition of childhood (Kononenko 2006: 91). In the sense of modern understanding lies the universalism provided by the agreement on the international arena of human rights, and in this case the documents related to children and

child soldiers. This means that “upon social context and actors within a given political space, childhood is to be understood as a social construction, based on conventions and not on the natural state” (Kononenko 2016: 91). Furthermore, the universalism that the concept of childhood relies upon is generated through three aspects; that 18 years of age is the distinction between being a child and an adult, that people under the age of 18 are innocent, and that this group is particularly vulnerable (*ibid.*). This has paved way for children rights, and the need to protect children in time of peace and war or conflict (*ibid.*). Furthermore, this has impact on the agency and the tasks performed by child soldiers.

Kononenko suggests that the modern, or universal, perception of childhood, which is included in the CRC that is used to define a child in this thesis, also reflect children’s agency. While the Convention grants children economic, social, and cultural rights, a child has no political rights (2016: 91), as for instance voting in a democracy. Therefore, children only have agency to a limited point, where they are protected to have certain criteria fulfilled, but they are not entitled to another status than being a child (*ibid.*). However, child soldiers have a form of agency on their own, which is not recognized *per se* internationally, but that exists since children serving in armed groups are part of contemporary conflicts. This agency is a site of knowledge, which will help understand the role of children in war, and also international relations.

Historically, there have arguably been few contradictions between the perceptions of a child versus the perceptions of a soldier (Kononenko 2016: 89). However, with the conventions, protocols, treaties and regulations on children in war, “the introduction of a humanitarian and human rights discourse in the middle of the 20th century has changed the perception of children in conflict” where the legal frameworks “serve as the normative infrastructure for the protection of children in armed conflict” (Kononenko 2016: 90). Therefore, as these documents define what a child or childhood is, it also contradicts the duty or perceptions of a soldier. The complexness regarding children participating in war is related to the aspect that “the notion of ‘child soldiers’ often defies emotional and moral senses, due to the conflicting sub notions of childhood and warfare, whereby the ‘child’ is perceived as particularly vulnerable, as opposed to the ‘soldier’ who is regarded as inherently damaging” (Derluyn *et al* 2015: 2). However, as the actions of child soldiers is often the same as an adult serving for an armed group, the discourse relating to children and childhood is one that underestimated children’s capabilities (Watson 2006: 243). This

means that viewing children as weak, innocent and vulnerable agents is falling short when it comes to which tasks children actually are performing. This strengthens the argument that the emphasis and distinction between childhood and adulthood is fixed and a social construct (*ibid.*: 246). The idea of 18 as a “magical” number or age that divides children and adults is therefore not without complications, and the concept of childhood is a construct that can be contested, and a fixed idea that is flawed (*ibid.*).

Internationally, by humanitarians, human rights activists, state representatives, and media, the emphasis on children is that they are amongst the primary victims of war and conflict. However, as “contemporary warfare is often marked by fuzzy distinctions between perpetrators and victims” (Derluyn *et al.* 2015: 1), as child soldiers challenges our perception of a child and childhood, but also the perception of perpetrators. Of course, and with good reason, child soldiers are also viewed as victims, but this might not help to solve the issue of the increase in the use of children in war. To understand the complexity around child soldiers, one must go beyond the distinction between the “normal” views of a victim and perpetrator (*ibid.*). Therefore, in the analysis in the fourth chapter of this thesis, the role of children in war will be discussed, with a presentation of the realities for a child soldier with an emphasis on reintegration.

3. Qualitative Research: Discourse Analysis, Reliability, Validity & Limitations of the Study

The concept of and the term ‘social research’ refers to “academic research on topics relating to questions relevant to the social scientific fields” (Bryman 2012: 4). Therefore, social research “involves research that draws on the social sciences for conceptual and theoretical inspiration, [which means that the] research may be motivated by developments and changes in society” (*ibid.*: 5). In turn, the research already conducted on a topic that describes these developments and changes creates a wish for academics to do own research to reflect, question or fill gaps that adds to the existing literature (*ibid.*). Furthermore, social research is theory-based which means that it is influenced by and uses theories as tools to explain and interpret certain events (*ibid.*). It is therefore an important factor that the researcher is well-familiar with the existing literature and theories that are available on the chosen topic (*ibid.*). The usage of theory differs; it can be used to form an introductory basis and function as an element in hypothesizing later on in the research or it can be outcome-based (*ibid.*: 5-6). The latter refers to a view on theory as an end-result in a research process, in which is more open (*ibid.*: 6).

This part includes the methods used in this thesis and the process of writing it. The purpose of this section is to explain the choices made throughout the research process by outlining how information was gathered to guide the analysis and to reach the conclusion.

3.1. Qualitative Research

The choice of using a qualitative research method for this thesis is based on the fact that it “tends to be concerned with words rather than numbers” (Bryman 2012: 380). Moreover, the choice to use qualitative research in this thesis is that it is “an epistemological position described as interpretivist, meaning that, in contrast to the adoption of a natural scientific model in quantitative research, the stress is on the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants” (Bryman 2012: 380). Furthermore, a qualitative research offers the opportunity to suggest that various phenomena are socially constructed, and that these are results due to individuals or people interacting and their actions or decisions (*ibid.*). Therefore, taken-for-granted realities are created, and are seen as the “truth” and, thus, are normalized.

Therefore, the aim for this thesis is to go deeper into the issue and study what is behind the numbers, but also behind the words that are related to the topic of child soldiers, since the theoretical framework used in this thesis suggests the need for a discursive approach to the topic. Thus, this also guides the chosen method for the thesis.

3.2. Secondary Sources & Discourse Analysis

As the chosen topic of ‘child soldiers’ is a well-researched phenomenon, the choice fell on using the method of collection and analysis of texts and documents. In other words, this thesis is based on secondary sources. The available existing literature in regards to children in war, and more specifically child soldiers, are enormous. Therefore, this thesis aims to sum-up the trends in the already existing literature.

The focus and chosen method of this thesis is on discourse analysis, and this is done by researching which effect the modern understanding of childhood and perceptions related to this has on child soldiers during and after a conflict. The choice of using the method of discourse analysis is based on that this is an “approach to the analysis of talk and other forms of discourse that emphasizes the ways in which versions of reality are accomplished through language” (Bryman 2012: 711). Furthermore, as people we “sort and combine sensory impressions of the world through categories (or models or principles). Language, as a social system with its own relational logic, produces reality for human by mediating these sense data” (Neumann 2008: 61). These “realities” are socially constructed and reproduced, where a certain use of language or terms will over time become institutionalized and/or normalized (*ibid.*). Moreover, since language is both social and political, it generates and construct realities and meanings of identity, and also difference (Hansen 2006: 15).

Within the discipline of IR, some scholars representing different theoretical lenses such as post-structuralism, post-modernists, social constructivists and feminists are using discourse analysis as a theoretical concept or foundation (Milliken 1999: 225), as well as a method. What is shared among the theorists that use discourse as theory or method (or a mix between the two) is to challenge the reproduction of language. Moreover, to show that textual productions, such as international documents, are connected to social processes, and how this has implications for our actions (*ibid.*). Therefore, discourse

analysis can be referred to as critical theorizing as it challenges realities that are socially constructed, and over time accepted as the truth (*ibid.*).

The “correct” definition of what discourse entails is perhaps not the most meaningful task, since “the whole idea of discourse is that definitions play an important part in delineating knowledge” (Bacchi 198-9). Therefore, what is important is to lay out which role this method is expected to play in analysis and research (*ibid.*). Furthermore, Bacchi argues that one central aspect in the tradition of discourse analysis is “a political theoretical focus on the ways in which issues are given a particular meaning within a specific social setting” where “the goal is to identify [...] institutionally supported and cultural interpretive and conceptual schemas (discourses) that produce particular understandings of issues and events” (2005: 199).

Hansen argues that “policy discourse is seen as relying upon particular constructions of problems and subjectivities, but that it is also through discourse that these problems and subjectivities are constructed in the first place” (2006: 15). This is not negative *per se*, since it is important to address taken-for-granted realities that shape our understanding of certain issues and events. This thesis is based on this since the definition and perceptions linked to ‘children’ and ‘childhood’ in international documents are somehow realities that are repeated, reproduced and been normalized, which in turn have an effect on how we perceive child soldiers and how we give meaning to their agency.

3.3. Case Study

A case study is a “research design that entails the detailed and intensive analysis of a single case” (Bryman 2012: 709). Therefore, the choice of using a case for this thesis relies on the wish to show how child soldiers are a part of contemporary conflicts. Moreover, the rationale behind the case study is based on that although the international community has made clear restrictions on using child soldiers and that academia are filled with research on the impact the life as a child soldiers has on the children post-conflict, there is a need to take into consideration the perceptions related to the concept of childhood. Therefore, by challenging this, this thesis seeks to understand how these perceptions shapes our realities or reproduced truths about children in war, and more specifically child soldiers.

To study the phenomenon of children in war, the method of case study is often used. This is because case-based studies can tell us something about the topic more generally since the results of the research “often extend beyond the borders [of a specific area and that] comparative analyses of various cases highlight their similarities and differences as well as offering broader analytical perspectives on the impact of war on children” (Honwana 2006: 4).

This thesis will discuss the use of children in war/conflict by the extremist group Boko Haram. This group intentionally recruits children into their troops, which can be linked to our accepted truth about children as vulnerable. Moreover, this case will show how there are some trends in regards to child soldiers, as the causes for recruitment and the tasks of the children used by Boko Haram is similar to other armed groups that uses child soldiers.

3.4. Reliability, Validity & Limitations

A common limitation for qualitative research is the issue of subjectivity, which is also relevant to this thesis since the choice has been to use secondary sources and a discourse analytical method. In terms of reliability and validity, it is important that all articles and documents used in this thesis are well-referred to. This gives the opportunity to do a check-up that the material and text taken from references in this thesis is actually existing, and therefore verifiable. However, due to subjectivity and the researchers own interpretations, the secondary sources chosen are affected by this since well-suited articles are handpicked to serve to answer the research questions of the thesis. This is also applicable to the choice of the discourse analysis.

One limitation for this thesis is that there is no use of primary sources. By interviewing personnel within organizations that work as agents turning theory into practice, as for instance in prohibiting the use of child soldiers, it could perhaps function as a tool to research if actually they have accepted the modern understanding of childhood. Moreover, by meeting and interviewing former child soldiers, it would be interesting to see if they as well have the same understanding of childhood as accepted and reproduced in international documents. However, due to time-constraints and lack of experience interviewing, the choice fell on using secondary sources. Another limitation linked to this is the literature used in this thesis. As mentioned above, the existing literature on the topic

of children in war and child soldiers are enormous. Therefore, a challenge and a limitation in this thesis is the difficulty related to using the best possible sources or references.

4. Children in War

In war and conflict, civilians are the primary victims, and amongst the especially vulnerable are children and young people (Honwana 2006: 26) War and conflict destroys communities and its developments, and it also hinders people's development (*ibid.*: 2). However, as presented in the theory chapter, by viewing children amongst civilians that are one of the most vulnerable group in conflict and war, it excludes non-civilians, which child soldiers represent, since they are combatants or linked to armed groups.

The involvement of children in war does not constitute a new phenomenon but has gained new dimensions because of changes in the nature of warfare and current, modern, understandings of childhood (Honwana 2006: 4). Therefore, "the impact of armed conflict on children has moved to the forefront of political, humanitarian, and academic agendas. The international community has taken several significant steps to address the problem" (Honwana 2006: 2).

4.1. International Recognition of the Child

The first traces of an effort to address children on the international arena were in 1924 when the General Assembly (GA) of the League of Nations (LN) adopted the Declaration of Children's Rights (Marshall 1999: 103). However, as the LN failed its attempt to prevent another world war, the end of WWII left a need for renewed way of assuring world peace and security. Therefore, with the aspirations of the forerunner, the United Nations (UN) was established in 1945. Since then, the UN has functioned as a centerpiece of global governance with the aim that states have an arena to co-operate when it comes political, social and economic issues (Karns & Mingst 2010: 95-6). Within the UN system, there are several specific topics that are addressed, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is one of them. As with the UN itself, this convention was inspired by the former attempt by the League of Nations to address children on the international arena (Marshall 1999: 103).

The Convention was adopted in 1989 by the General Assembly and came into force in 1990 (OHCHR). There are 195 states that have ratified the CRC, and the message and goal is that all the member states who have signed it will ensure that all children have the

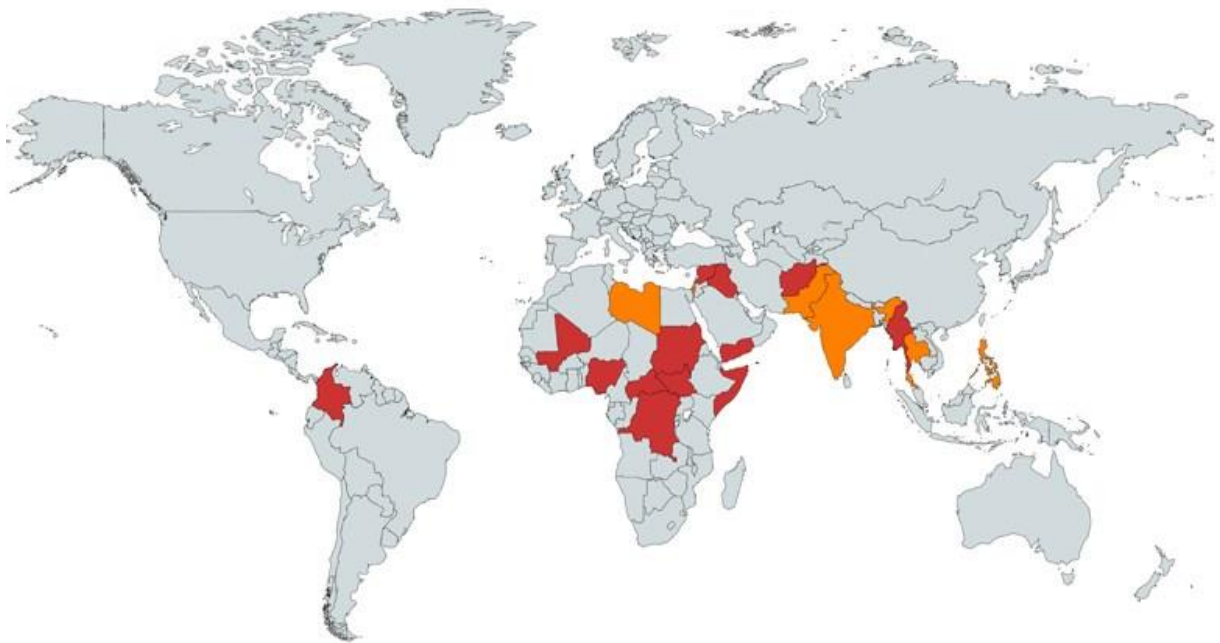
right to feel safe, loved, happy and being understood. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, a child in the CRC is defined as any person under the age of 18. However, in regards to recruitment into military forces, Article 38 paragraph 2 state that “States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that persons who have not attained the age of fifteen years do not take a direct part in hostilities” (CRC, OHCHR). Furthermore, paragraph 3 of the same article states that states should not recruit children under the age of 15 into their armed forces (*ibid.*).

The CRC has three additional protocols, whereas one of them is the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The Protocol was adopted, opened for signature ratification and accession in 2000 and came into force in 2002 (UN, OHCHR). Article 1 state that “State Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that members of their armed forces who have not attained the age of 18 years do not take a direct part in hostilities” (OHCHR). Article 2’s content is that children under the age of 18 are not recruited at all into armed forces of the state (*ibid.*). As the conflict trends post-Cold War has changed from inter-state wars to intra-state wars, this Protocol also addresses the use of children in war by other actors than the state. In Article 4 paragraph 1 it is stated that “[a]rmed groups that are distinct from the armed forces of a State should not, under any circumstances, recruit or use in hostilities persons under the age of 18 years” (OHCHR). Paragraph 2 of Article 4 reflects the responsibility of the state and that is to “take all feasible measures to prevent such recruitment and use, including the adoption of legal measures necessary to prohibit and criminalize such practices” (OHCHR).

There are other international documents addressing children rights, children in war and child soldiers as well. However, the choice fell on using the CRC as a reference in this thesis since its message of what a child is and the restriction of using humans under the age of 18 in war and/or conflict are clear. Moreover, the CRC also grants children the rights to a perceived ideal childhood, one which is filled with safety, happiness, and which is dependent on adult nurturance and guidance. This contradicts with the life of child soldiers and their agency as well, since the tasks and duties performed by them are the opposite of the expectations related to children. This is not to say that it should be allowed to use people under the age of 18 in war and conflict. However, this is the reality for many children, and therefore, as idealistic the international documents may be, child soldiers challenge the perceptions of children and its expectations to them.

4.2. Child Soldiers

As mentioned introductory, a child soldier is a human being under the age of 18 which has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group to complete different tasks. These tasks are not just carrying and using guns and weapons, or being fighters, but also include children who cook, functions as porters, messengers or spies, and children that are with the group for sexual purposes. The numbers of how many children that are directly participating in war and conflict varies, but recent numbers suggests that it is estimated that approximately 250,000 children are currently involved with an armed group performing one or more tasks listed above (Derluyn *et al.* 2015: 1, Liebenberg & Whitman 2015: 157) The reality of this is that children as young as eight years old are being taken advantage of (Honwana 2006: 1) and there are various reasons why children join armed forces, both for the armed groups, and more importantly, for the children themselves. Furthermore, it is common to refer to child soldiers as an “African problem”, since the majority of child soldiers are located on this continent (Liebenberg & Whitman 2015: 157). Although this thesis also is focused on child soldiers on the African continent, it should be noted that children are recruited as soldiers in Latin America, Asia, the Middle East and in Eastern Europe (*ibid.*). Below is a map of which countries that uses or is likely to use child soldiers, although Europe is not included.



(Map of which countries that uses (red) or are likely (orange) to use child soldiers, Child Soldiers International 2016)

As with addressing children affected by war, the “recruitment of children into armed forces has been hitting the headlines in politics and the media for many years” (Derluyn *et al.* 2015: 1-2). Reoccurring pictures of young children (especially boys) carrying weapons are arguably “normalized” images for most people in relating to child soldiers (Honwana 2006: 1). As mentioned above, the use of children in war or armed conflicts is not a new phenomenon *per se*, but has been a part of warfare for centuries. It is the modern understanding of what children and childhood are that challenge the use of children in war. Therefore, the combination of this reality and the new wars has led to a great amount of attention toward children as combatants or soldiers (Honwana 2006: 1). Child soldiers are arguably the phenomenon of children in war that has received the most attention, and this “despite the fact that this group constitutes only a small part of all children and adolescents who are affected, directly and indirectly, through armed conflict on a global scale” (Derluyn *et al.* 2015: 1-2).

The developments on the international arena in regards to child soldiers are a two-phased process. Firstly, the attempt was to address the issue and challenge the practice by actors using children in war by creating legal documents to protect the child. Whereas the second phase is the aim to enforce prohibition of using child soldiers and that people will actually get punished for doing so, which is through the International Criminal Court (ICC). The first jurisdiction by the ICC to punish leaders of armed groups or forces for using child soldiers was the judgement of Lubanga, one of the leaders in a rebel group in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). He was sentenced to 14 years in prison for recruiting children under the age of 15 to serve for him as soldiers. This is seen as a milestone in the enforcement of the prohibition of child soldiers regime and signaling that leaders do have to obey the rules agreed to by states on the international level (Kononenko 2016: 90).

In February 2017, a press release from UNICEF stated that approximately 65,000 children have escaped or been rescued from armed forces and groups during the past 10 years (UNICEF 2017). This year it is the 10th anniversary of the Paris Commitments to end the use of children in conflict, and the child rights organization saw the high number of rescued children as a celebration. The Executive Director Anthony Lake stated that “the world made a commitment to the children of war and matched with action – action that has helped give 65,000 children a new chance or a better life” (UNICEF 2017).

Furthermore, he stated that despite the success, the job is not done yet (*ibid.*). Of course, that this amount of children has managed to be set-free from an armed force or group is indeed an accomplishment or a success. However, still, for many children around the globe, their “everyday-life” is being a part of an armed group under hard circumstances. Therefore, definitely the job is not done, and unfortunately, even the children that have escaped or been rescued, their status as a ‘child soldier’ will forever be with them.

4.2.1. Why do Children Become Soldiers?

Gates argues that the involvement of children in armed forces or groups may have different reasons and explanations, but also that this might change from the first stage of recruitment and during the stay in the group (2011: 29-30). Children participating in war are “coerced into fighting; others are pushed into it by poverty and crisis in their communities; some may be seduced by promises of glory or excitement” (Honwana 2006: 1). Therefore, in a way, every child soldier has his or her own individual experience, but there are some commonalities and the causes for the recruitment of child soldiers are presented in this section of the thesis. This is part of this thesis since:

“[i]mmersion into the fighter’s world is an important disjuncture in the ‘normal’ pre-war life of children who become part of armed groups. On account of children’s incomplete socialization and maturation process within family settings, in-group experiences are important processual influences which impact on young minds, involving elements of identity transformation, and rebirth into the world of being a rebel or child soldier” (Özerdem & Podder 2011: 3).

One reason for the occurrence of children in war who functions as soldiers are, as mentioned above, due to the changes in warfare, and that intra-state wars are characterized by constituting of guerilla groups (Gates 2011: 32). This means that it is not state forces that meet on the battlefield, but that these are small groups within the state border that are “engaged in ambushes, raids and sabotage. Soldiers rarely face each other in combat. Such tactics minimize the difference between an adult and a child soldier” (Gates 2011: 32). Another aspect related to this is also the arms used in these conflicts. It is often small arms that are used, which children are able to carry, handle and use.

Another reason for the recruitment of child soldiers by militias and armed groups are due to children's "adaptability to new circumstances and their receptiveness to indoctrination" (Banholzer & Haer 2014: 111). This means that children adapt to the situation and way of life within the group and its surrounding settings easily and therefore perform the tasks wished for them to do.

However, although commonalities in the causes for the recruitment of child soldiers, as mentioned above, each child has its individual experience for the reason being involved in a group. Related to this is also the "bigger" picture, which is the specific context in which the armed group is situated. There are many contextual factors that explain the reason behind using children in war, which are; war, religion, ethnicity, identity, poverty, family-and/or home-situations, and the lack of a social network and/or access to opportunities of self-development, such as education (Gates 2011: 33).

Culture and cultural codes are also playing a role in the use of children. As the universalism of the human rights has been criticized for being a reflection of Western values, this also relates to children lives outside the West. In regards to the labor market, for instance, children are often entering this market before turning 18, and before the age accepted in the West or that are reflected in international documents (*ibid.*). Therefore, in some societies it is more accepted to use children for different purposes, which are seemingly meant for adults, and this includes the duties expected from a soldier as well. This is not to say it is ok or accepted *per se*, but it is an explanation for the recruitment of children. It should be noted, however, that laboring and child soldiers are not related or linked, since research shows that actually child employment reduces the risk of a child entering an armed group (*ibid.*).

4.2.2. The Life of a Child Soldier

As the definition of a child soldier suggests, the children participating directly in war and conflict have more tasks than just carrying and using guns and weapons. Although, the violence related to conflict is also part of the reality. "Children as young as eight or ten are transformed into merciless killers, committing the most horrendous atrocities with apparent indifference or even pride" (Honwana 2006: 1).

Socialization processes and identity-shaping are aspects of a child soldier's life after entry, and the group that the child is soldiering for have different methods of sending a message of which tasks that are expected right from the get-go (Özerdem & Podder 2011: 4). Although varying methods, but a trend is that most groups have a form of "ceremony" where the child has to perform violent tasks. These tasks are for instance robbing, looting, murder, mass killings and gang rapes of civilians (*ibid.*). Therefore, the message is clear; the child is expected to perform violent acts for the group while serving as well.

For child soldiers, their environment within an armed group and in relation to both commanders and co-soldiers are a feeling of stability and regularity (Özerdem & Podder 2011: 3). One must have in mind that the hardship of war and conflict are opposite of this and forces an insecure situation, both for fighters and civilians. Therefore, the environment within the group offers the children a certain form of safety and a way of life. This results in a situation where the children adopt the norms, values and rules of the armed group, and are loyal to their leaders, commanders and peers, and often with little resistance (*ibid.*). Therefore, the children perform violent actions and other duties, and sometimes even with some sort of pride. Gates refers to this as non-material rewards, which are benefits for the individual or the child soldier, such as a feeling of higher self-esteem due to the tasks performed successfully (2011: 37). Solidarity is another aspect of the non-material rewards, which reflects that the children fight for a collective goal, principles and cause for a collective they are a part of, which in turn results in the feeling of security (*ibid.*). Breaking out of these "habits" or way of life is not without complications, and the aspect of reintegration is therefore highly important.

4.2.3. Back to "Normal Life" for a Child Soldier: with an emphasis on reintegration

After the conflict(s) have ended, the state of negative peace poses new challenges for the state to deal with. When it comes to children post-conflict, they are victims that are among the most in need for rehabilitation back to "normal life" (*ibid.*). Their interrupted childhood and their disturbing experiences during the conflict is a pressing issue that must be taken seriously. Since the children are the future for the country and therefore are profoundly relying on assistance in dealing with their traumas to be able to develop in a healthy manner. Moreover, the international community should also play a part in this

because the “healing and reintegration of children affected by armed conflict need to be embedded in local world views and meaning systems in order to be effective and sustainable” (Honwana 2006: 4). Moreover, since the issue of children in war has been a part of the international agenda for decades, this also creates the need of responsibility from the international community in finding effective measures when it comes to reintegration of child soldiers. There are many efforts from international organizations, NGOs and states in recruiting children post-conflict. In academia, there is a lot of literature regarding child soldiers and reintegration, whereas there is often a focus on the reintegration program itself. The aspects of reintegration for former child soldiers both have successes and failures, and there are various explanations for this. Below, some of the key factors for a successful reintegration will be elaborated.

One argument in regards to a successful outcome is to move away from the explicit focus on the reintegration measures and rather shift the focus on the children and individual experiences in the armed group (Banholzer & Haer 2014: 112). Together with other factors, a successful reintegration of a former child soldier is dependent on “the level of attachment felt towards the armed group. In other words, if a former child soldier feels a high level of attachment to the armed group, the reintegration process back into society might be more difficult” (Banholzer & Haer 2014: 112)

The reintegration of child soldiers are dependent on well-established strategies, and measures that are inter-linked with other factors of social development as well, such as poverty for instance (Honwana 2006: 4). This is of importance post-conflict, both for the children themselves, but also the community they are re-locating back to. In the aspect of the children, focusing on reintegration in itself and other aspects of development is necessary to eliminate the chances for the children to return to or re-join an armed group.

The measures taken in consideration of rehabilitating former combatants, both children and adults, are often referred to as including disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programs (Banholzer & Haer 2014: 111). As mentioned above, there have both been successes and failures, and which practice is the best is yet not a solved puzzle and is an ongoing effort (*ibid.*: 112). One explanation of the failures is that there is often lack of documentation, and therefore affects reintegration- processes. Although that each individual experience should be taken into account, the trends in using children in

war as soldiers can serve as a platform of knowledge in dealing with their experiences post-conflict.

In academia, there are also mixed signals when it comes to reintegration of former soldiers. Some find evidence that the DDR programmes are highly effective, and with the focus on reunification with family and other social networks, services provided that cover basic needs and personal development such as education, trauma therapy and promoting acceptance in the community, it is possible to reintegrate people back into a “normal” life (*ibid.*).

5. Case: New Wars, Nigeria and the Rise of Boko Haram

In this part of the thesis, the case of Nigeria and Boko Haram will be included. However, to understand this conflict, introductory a focus will be on 'new wars'. The reason for including this is since the increase of use of children in war is an aspect of these intra-state wars or conflicts. It will also help to understand why the history of Nigeria post-independence has been conflictual and gave room for the rise of Boko Haram. The group is also a regional security threat, since its actions and presence has spread out to three of the neighboring countries; Niger, Chad and Cameroon. However, since Boko Haram has its origins in Nigeria, this case and country is used as a case of a 'new war'.

5.1. New Wars

In the aftermaths of the Cold War there has been a shift in warfare, where the "classical model of war between states [...] appears to have been discontinued: states have given up their de facto monopoly of war, and what appear ever more frequently in their stead are [intra-state conflicts]" (Münkler 2005: 1). Therefore, the intra-state conflicts post-Cold War is referred to as 'new wars'. These New Wars represents a trend where new patterns of conflict are occurring, where state authority and a state's territorial integrity are challenged (Ramsbotham 2011: 71).

The 'global society' strand of thought emphasizes that post-Cold War has led to an increase in global awareness and a higher number of global social movements (Baylis 2011: 240). However, it is acknowledged that globalization is processes which not only contribute to positive developments, but also some negative trends (*ibid.*). The conflict trends in the 1990s and the civil wars in Bosnia, Kosovo, Russia, Yemen, Somalia and Rwanda are illustrative examples of this. However, there are various explanations of the occurrence of these new conflict trends. The term 'new wars' is often related to Mary Kaldor, as she is the "founding mother" of the concept of this type of conflict. Kaldor emphasizes that intra-state conflicts should be understood in the context of globalization, where states finds themselves in a state of interconnectedness that increases due to the "whisking out" of territorial borders. This has resulted in "that ideological and/or territorial cleavages of an earlier era have increasingly been supplanted by a political

cleavage between [...] multicultural values and the politics of particularist identities” (Kaldor 1999: 6). This assumption based on some sort of a “clash of civilizations” is not agreed by everyone, and some argue that there are other factors than ideologies that clash that explain the new wars, which are the economic aspect of contemporary warfare. This will be elaborated below in presenting the trends and explanations of why contemporary conflicts are “new”.

The characteristics of the new wars, other than that they are within the border of a state, are that the actors that challenges the state are para-state, private or non-state actors, ranging from local warlords, guerilla groups and groups connected to terror networks (Münkler 2005: 1). In an economic aspect, funding and financing is another factor which differentiates contemporary conflicts with traditional warfare. The latter, since it was wars between states, financing wars were not an issue *per se*, since the state provided economic resources for fighting. As many of the leaders in the civil wars “are military entrepreneurs, who wage war on their own account and find various ways of obtaining the necessary funds” (Münkler 2005: 1). Externally, funding come from wealthy individuals, state agencies or officials, and émigré or diaspora communities. Notably, many oppositional groups also take advantage of international aid to the countries they reside. In addition, it is a commonality that the groups receive finances from resources in areas they have control over or other illegal activities such as trafficking of both drugs and/or humans (*ibid.*). The aspect of funding and financing is also an explanation of why civil wars are sometimes long-lasting and can go on for decades.

These so-called new wars have complicated the situation for conflict resolution and have worsened the situation for civilians (Honwana 2006: 26). This is majorly based on that since the conflict is within the state, the non-state actors that are violently challenging the state often results in the state striking back with violence as well (*ibid.*: 26). As these conflicts are challenging to resolve for the state, as they often is irregular, and that there can be several non-state actors raging against the state for their own purposes, the conflicts can be on-going for decades. Children suffer more under these circumstances since they are not only hurt and killed by the violence and denied basic rights as food, education and access to health care, but also are drawn into the conflict directly by participating as combatants or soldiers (*ibid.*).

5.2. Post-independent Nigeria: with a focus on conflict

Nigeria is located in the West African region, and with its population of approximately 190 million people (Population Reference Bureau 2016: 2) it is the most populated state on the continent (Thomson 2010: 74). In 1960, Nigeria became independent from the British Empire after being colonized for almost six decades. Due to the country's access to oil resources and its exporting reserves of the "black gold", Nigeria is one of the most developed countries in Africa (*ibid.*). However, post-colonial times, the differences between various groups and their disputes over the country's resources have held back the political and economic development (*ibid.*).

As the "Scramble for Africa" at the Berlin Conference in 1884-5 divided the African continent between various European powers without taking into consideration the existing groups of people prior to this, the differences between the people and the arbitrary boundaries has caused issues post-colonial times (*ibid.*: 12). Within Nigeria, there are about 250 different ethnic groups, and the three largest, which are the Hausa-Fulani in the north, Yoruba in the west and Ibo in the east, have dominated the politics in the country post-independence (*ibid.*). During colonial times, the Hausa-Fulani were part of the Northern Protectorate, whilst the two latter were part of the Southern Protectorate from 1906 (*ibid.*: 75). In 1914, the two protectorates were combined, and Nigeria was now united as one country. As the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Ibo were divided and combined into the regions during the colonial rule, the groups are a social construct in modern times (*ibid.*). However, "[g]iven this distinct regional administrative pattern, it was only natural that "tribes" would develop within, and identify with, these separate [...] regions. This was a rational way to lobby the colonial authorities for resources" (Thomson 2010: 75). Therefore, the common identity within the three groups have existed post-colonial times as well, and has resulted in many violent conflicts between them.

The bloody and conflictual history of Nigeria with its intra-state violence has shaped and has consequences for the stability in the country today (Walker 2012: 2). The violence has often been ethnoreligious and between Muslim and Christian blocs (*ibid.*). Although, despite the tensions between these groups, a difference in religious beliefs can only be seen as a cause at a first glance, and is not the primary cause of conflict (*ibid.*). Moreover, the causes of the conflicts are rather due to politics and economics, and especially the control of the natural resources in the country (*ibid.*).

In Nigeria, the political institutions are weak, and therefore threats to the internal security are not dealt with unless the politicians advantage from it or if violence or conflict has occurred (*ibid.*). Sadly, the response from the national or state security services to internal threats and conflicts are violent measures (*ibid.*). An example of consequence of Nigeria's weak institutions and violence is the creation of Boko Haram (*ibid.*). However, the rise of extremist groups took place in Nigeria long before Boko Haram.

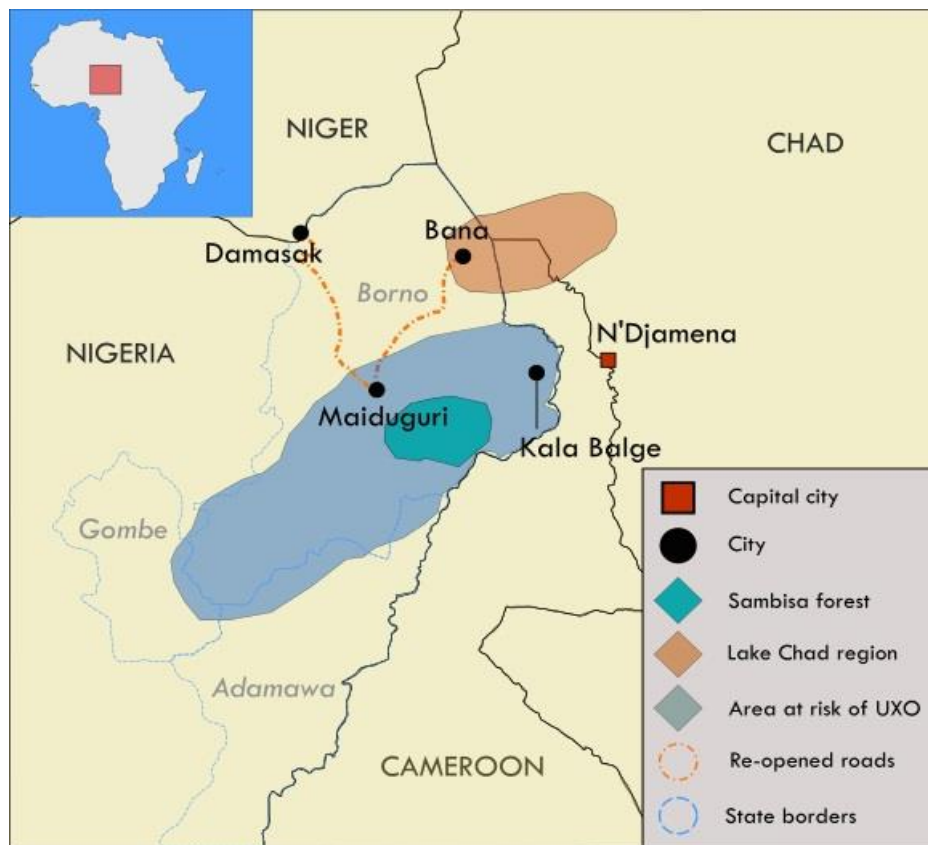
Due to the rise of Islamic extremism world-wide, Nigeria has been the site for the formation of various Muslim groups in the northern parts of the country (*ibid.*). In the 1980s, the Maitatsine sect was a slum-based Islamic group which attacked police and military forces with knives and bows and arrows (*ibid.*). The attackers were primarily women and children, and due to the use of basic weapons, the heavily armed forces brutally defeated the sect (*ibid.*). The asymmetry between the state forces and the members of the group led to a decline of the group and therefore it was eliminated after few years (*ibid.*).

Post-1999, and “Nigeria’s return to democracy [...], armed nonstate groups, largely using young men as foot soldiers, have significantly undermined the country’s internal security environment”(Onuoha 2014: 1). Thus, the instability posed by the rise of non-state actors and the participation of young men – and women – leads to the need to address why and how this has become the reality (*ibid.*).

5.3. Boko Haram

Jama’atu Ahlus-Sunnah Lidda’Awati Wal Jihad, which means “people committed to the propagation of the Prophet’s teaching and jihad”, is a religious group/sect that originates from the northern parts and the capital city of Nigeria, Abuja (Onuoha 2014: 3, Walker 2012: 1). However, the group is better known as Boko Haram, which means “Western education is sacrilege” and is linked to the group’s resistance to Western influences or values in Nigeria (Onuoha 2014: 3, Pérouse de Montclos 2016: 878). The origins, as mentioned above, are in Nigeria, but the group has spread and are now found in four different countries; Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Nigeria, of course (Pérouse de Montclos 2016: 878).

Boko Haram has therefore gone from being a national security threat in Nigeria, developing and spreading to other areas, and poses a threat to the security in Niger, Chad and Cameroon. Due to this, Boko Haram is a regional actor which poses a regional threat, since its presence is in various countries. Below is a map of areas Boko Haram operates or has control over. In Nigeria it is the largest area where the group has presence, and the expansion of the group has been on the borders of Nigeria to the other three countries.



(Map of where Boko Haram operates, Allan & Associates 2017)

Despite the threat posed by Boko Haram in the four countries, this thesis will focus on the threat the group poses to Nigerian national security. Therefore, the sections below will discuss Boko Haram's role in Nigeria, although some references to all four countries will be made.

5.3.1. The Origins and Actions of Boko Haram

There is no certainty when the group was formed and there are different events that are taken into account for when its existence began (Onuoha 2014: 3). According to Nigeria's intelligence community, the beginning of Boko Haram started with the creation of the non-violent Ahlulsunna wa'jama'ah hijra or Muslim Youth Organization (*ibid.*). However, in 2002, the group's visions of non-violent measures ended as Mohammed Yusuf became the new leader (*ibid.*). Despite that there are disputes and different opinions about their origin, motivation and the overall goal and aims of achievement, there is a consensus that Boko Haram is an extremist Islamic group (*ibid.*, Walker 2012: 1).

The group opposes a threat to Nigeria's national security and has conducted a number of violent attacks on churches, governmental institutions and international presence in the country, such as a United Nations (UN) compound (*ibid.*). Despite the attack on the UN compound, Boko Haram's vision is not to attack international institutions or a counter-response to Western values *per se*, and is therefore not linked to al-Qaeda or al Shabab (*ibid.*). However, it was after the attack on the UN presence and when 23 people were killed in 2011 that led to a greater attention to the group internationally (*ibid.*: 2). Moreover, the group received even greater attention internationally after kidnapping over two hundred schoolgirls in 2014 (Onuoha 2014: 2). Therefore, "the violent activities of [...] Boko Haram, have become a serious national, regional, and international concern" (Onuoha 2014: 2).

One motivation and goal for achievement for Boko Haram is to rule Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon as Islamic states which means a state ruled by sharia law (Walker 2012: 1). This is based on the belief that Nigeria is now ruled by false and corrupt Muslims and war is the mean to end this influence and situation in the country (*ibid.*). Furthermore, the group is diverse and highly adaptable, and the methods used "have evolved from poorly planned and open confrontations with state security forces to increasing use of improvised explosive devices, targeted assassinations, ambushes, drive-by shootings, suicide bombings, and kidnappings" (Onuoha 2014: 2). From mid-2011, Boko Haram's terror attacks have been mostly planting bombs in public or religious sites. However, since 2012, the group has also targeted and attacked schools (Walker 2012: 1). Although there is no clear numbers of the casualties caused by

Boko Haram, Nigeria's former president Goodluck Jonathan stated that the number of killed people in Nigeria is 12,000, 8,000 has been injured during the attacks, and thousands have fled their homes and communities (Onuoha 2014: 2).

Due to the operation of the group, which is based on members that are part of different terror-cells and fractions, it is a complex situation to handle for the Nigerian government (Walker 2012: 1). Thus, the hope of a successful dialogue between the two parts is vague since members of the group which the Nigerian state officials are in contact with are not necessarily representing the whole group (*ibid.*). Furthermore, the tactics enforced by the Nigerian government to address Boko Haram and other security issues is questionable itself (*ibid.*). The "reliance on extrajudicial execution as a tactic in "dealing" with any problem in Nigeria not only created Boko Haram as it is known today, but also sustains it and gives it fuel to expand" (Walker 2012: 1).

In 2016, Boko Haram was divided into two main factions as a response to the group's leader, Abu Shekau, refusal of attachment to IS (Kalejaiye & Summers 2017). The previous year the group had expressed support to IS and that they were a part of them. However, this led to a dispute within the group and the second faction is led by Abu Musab al-Barnawi. Nigeria's president, Muhammadu Buhari, has stated that this has weakened the group and now that Boko Haram is easier to defeat (*ibid.*). It should be noted, that the "Nigerian army has a history of embellishing its victories over the terrorist organization while underestimating its own losses" (Kalejaiye & Summers 2017).

Boko Haram has received international attention throughout the past years because of their role as a non-state, violent, actor in Nigeria. Since the group has spread out to various countries, and are now a regional actor, there have been concerns of how big the group can get. Therefore, although Boko Haram is not an international threat *per se*, since the goal is sharia law in the countries they operate in, there are some concerns that it will develop into it. Boko Haram has various factions, and in 2015, after one of the leader for one faction decided to express their support to Daesh or Islamic State (IS) and wished to be referred to as the Islamic State in West Africa (Pérouse de Montclos 2016: 878). This therefore raises some concerns of the development of the group and if their strategy will change. Recently (2015) the actions

of the group have not given any indications that their strategy has changed from wanting sharia law in the countries they operate in (*ibid.*).

5.3.2. Radicalization as an Explanation of the Rise of Boko Haram

Post-9/11 with the terror attacks that occurred in the United States (US) in 2001, terrorism has been a greater part of the international arena (Onuoha 2014: 2). One issue that is linked to terrorism and understanding its occurrence is to address the concept of radicalization (*ibid.*). Although there is a lack of a common definition of the phenomenon, “a loose consensus has emerged that radicalization, whether at the individual or group level, involves a process of rejecting the status quo and often democratic ideals; adopting an extreme political, social, or religious ideology; and condoning violence as means to achieving ideological goals” (Onuoha 2014: 2).

The causes for radicalization of people are complex which can only be understood in a certain context whereas differing factors are explanatory (*ibid.*). In general, the radicalization-process is linked to identity and the self-image of a person and the wish for a change (*ibid.*). On a group level, like-minded people gather around an ideology where individuals are integrated into believing in the same sets of beliefs and wishes (*ibid.*). In some cases, the group turns to violence to achieve the change they wish for, as Boko Haram is an example of (*ibid.*: 2-3).

The members of Boko Haram are consisting of “disaffected youth, unemployed high school and university graduates, and destitute children, [but] also includes some wealthy, educated and influential people” (Onuoha 2014: 3). The majority of the group-members are from northern parts of Nigeria, but there are also people that are from other parts of the country. Some are even from the neighboring countries, such as Niger, Chad and Cameroon (*ibid.*). It is the young people of the group that dominates the work on the ground as foot-soldiers and does so to support the visions of the group (*ibid.*). The preaching of the leaders in the group has affected the youth, and the influences of the leaders have led to a high radicalization of the members (*ibid.*: 4).

As mentioned above, there are various reasons and causes for radicalization, and this is relevant for the members of Boko Haram as well. However, despite of this, there are

some main causes that explain youth's involvement in Boko Haram, and these are based on religious, political, economic, and social factors (*ibid.*: 5).

5.3.3. Boko Haram and the Use of Children

Before writing this thesis, the reflections around the group was based on that it is a violent non-state actor operating in Nigeria (and in the region). In regards to children, the impression was more based on that the group kidnaps children, and not necessarily using child soldiers. This, it seems, is the impression of many people, and the dominating stories of Boko Haram published in the media.

There are various evidences that Boko Haram is using child soldiers, and one of them is pictures released from the group itself showing children in training camps learning how to use weapons. The images of the children were published Al Urwa al Wuthaqa, an online site related to the group (Hopkins 2015). "In Nigeria and neighboring countries, data verified by the United Nations and its partners indicate that nearly 2,000 children were recruited by Boko Haram in 2016 alone" (UNICEF 2017).

Recently (2017), reports show (UNICEF) that there have been a growing number of children used as suicide bombers over the past three years (Allen-Ebrahimian 2017). In the four countries Boko Haram operates in, a total of 117 children have been coerced into carrying out or attempting to commit suicide attacks since 2014 (*ibid.*). 27 out of these children are from 2017. The highest percentage of the children is girls, and constitutes approximately 80% (*ibid.*).

There are hundreds of children that have been detained by different Nigerian forces, as for instance the military (Allen-Ebrahimian 2017). The suspect is related to ties to Boko Haram, and the children are held in camps or barracks for an unknown period of time (*ibid.*). The circumstances for the children are challenging, where they are separated from friends, family and relatives, there is no health care available such as medical or psychological support, and they do not attend school (*ibid.*). If these children that are meant to act as suicide bombers are child soldiers or not, is questionable in some sense. Many of the 117 children that were captured for this purpose were not a part of Boko Haram *per se*, but only kidnapped, often drugged, and attached to explosives (*ibid.*). However, in the definition of a child soldier, there is no

specification of the duration a child has to be part of a group. The definition states that if a person under the age of 18 complete or attempt various tasks for a group such as Boko Haram, the person can be referred to as a child soldier.

5.3.4. Why Do Children Join Boko Haram?

The leadership of Boko Haram focuses on recruiting children, and therefore, one reason for the involvement of children to become soldiers is that it is part of group's vision in a way (Pérouse de Montclos 2016: 879). The former leader Mohammed Yusuf had a vision to attract young people who seek 'the peace of the mind', as a combatant expressed (*ibid.*). In the case of child recruitment into armed forces or groups, there are a lot of possible explanations of why the individual child ends up as a soldier or combatant. However, and as mentioned above, there are some main causes that can explain why the recruitment of children is a reality, and these are religious, political, economic, and social factors.

One factor for recruitment based on religion, is the ignorance or lack of religious teachings in Nigeria. This is linked to three different aspects; the growing number of sects, the role of the preachers, and the belief in what the leaders preaches and not the content of the holy books *per se* (*ibid.*). Thus, the extremist beliefs of groups and its leaders such as Boko Haram makes youth vulnerable for radicalization and recruitment since the knowledge about religions and views are lacking (*ibid.*).

Another factor is the issue of unemployment and poverty. Although these two socioeconomic aspects, which are interconnected, are not an explanatory or main factor for radicalization and recruitment *per se*, it is evident that this has relevance for children and youth's involvement in conflict and to the Nigerian context (*ibid.*). "In 2011, 100 million Nigerians lived in absolute poverty and 12.6 million more were moderately poor. The worst hit by these afflictions are young people, especially in northern Nigeria" (Onuoha 2014: 6). The life-situation for unemployed and poor people are filled with hardship, and with the lack of basic needs and access to health services, education, housing, and food, youth are easier to recruit into radicalized groups (*ibid.*).

Another aspect of why children or youth have joined Boko Haram is linked to family relations. For some it has been the loss of family members that led them to join, for others it has been disputes and unrest in families. Children with challenging upbringings constitute a social factor which explains why some chooses to become a member of Boko Haram. These are children that lack the guidance, protection, comfort and stability from parents, which are living in broken homes, abandoned, or orphaned (*ibid.*). This creates a vulnerable situation for the children, which in return Boko Haram is taking advantage of (*ibid.*). Even for some young men a reason has been based on the wish to get married without paying enormous amounts of money, often referred to as dowry (Pérouse de Montclos 2016: 879). As with most sects, the members in Boko Haram can only marry amongst each other, but the dowry is less, therefore attractive (*ibid.*).

5.3.5. The Life of a Boko Haram Child Soldier

As mentioned introductory, a child soldier is a human being under the age of 18 and that have tasks in an armed group in the battlefield, but also other tasks such as cooking, being porters, messengers or spies, or for the purpose of sexual abuse. As this has been and is the reality for many children around the globe, this is also the every-day life for a child in Boko Haram.

One factor for children joining Boko Haram, and a trend for children joining armed groups in general, is the promise of benefits or payments. In June 2013, the Nigerian military detained some children or youth due to suspecting them of having ties or being members of Boko Haram (Onouha 2014: 6). After interrogating, the military claimed there was evidence that figures in Boko Haram paid the children 5,000 naira – which is approximately 30 USD – to perform tasks for them. These tasks reflect the duties mentioned in the definition of what a child soldiers is. The children were paid to set schools on fire and to spy on Nigerian forces with the intent of reporting back to Boko Haram about their doings and locations (*ibid.*). The children did also perform duties such as carrying stolen items after looting, traffic and hide weapons and guns (*ibid.*). All of the children in this case were under the age of 18, with a range from nine to fifteen years, and can therefore be categorized as child soldiers due to the duties performed for Boko Haram.

5.3.6. The Challenges for the Future for the Child Soldiers in Boko Haram: With a Focus on Reintegration

Some children have already managed to escape or get rescued from Boko Haram, and one of these children is a 14 year old boy from Cameroon by the border to Nigeria (Obaji 2015). In February 2015, this child with 10 other friends was playing soccer in their village when Boko Haram militants surrounded their field (*ibid.*). Armed with machetes and machine guns, the group kidnapped the children with the aim of recruiting them (*ibid.*). The children were taken to a site, where they also met dozens of other kids, and were trained to handle and fire AK-47s (*ibid.*). The shooting practice lasted for a couple of weeks, and some kids were killed during this period of time due to the inability of some children to handle these heavy weapons (*ibid.*). After some time, while fetching water, Patrick and four other child members of Boko Haram managed to escape (*ibid.*).

The young people who have managed to escape Boko Haram, is often met with skepticism (Allen-Ebrahimian 2017). It is often a lot of stigma linked to the role as a child soldiers related to the tasks and duties performed while in the militia group. The stigma creates difficulties reintegrating back into their communities. One example is a 16 year old girl who survived after being drugged and were forced to commit a suicide attack. Together with three others, the girl was forced into a canoe wearing explosives and the goal for Boko Haram was a crowded market place. Two of the people in the canoe detonated the explosives, but the 16 year old managed to survive and got rescued. Despite of the reality that the girl was presumably only kidnapped to finish one mission for Boko Haram, the family had to be persuaded to accept her back into the family (*ibid.*).

The traumatic experiences for the children serving for Boko Haram should be taken into consideration when it comes to reintegrating them back to their communities, if possible. Earlier experiences with reintegration show that it not always possible to reintegrate the children back to their home-communities due to the stigma related to the actions performed by child soldiers. It is also important in the aspect of reintegration process that focusing on reintegration itself is not the most pressing issue, but rather that the children's experiences are taken into account and that their voices are being heard and therefore their needs can be calculated.

5.4. The Use of Child Soldiers and How it Relates to the Concept of Childhood

The use of children in war and the duties performed by child soldiers are contradicting to what is expected to be an ideal childhood, as reflected in international documents as something that should include safety, basic needs being met, stability and adult nurturance and guidance. As children are being viewed as innocent, weak and vulnerable, it is the adults' responsibility to uphold and assure that the rights granted to the children by international law.

The view of children as an opposite agent as adults, although performing the same tasks while serving as soldiers, underestimates children's capabilities and are neglecting the agency child soldiers represent. Internationally, it is not allowed to use people under the age of 18 in war or conflict, and this is related to how a child is defined and that these characteristics reflects how a child should grow up and what kind of childhood a child should have. However, the view of children as opposite of adults, and actors defined as being innocent and weak, makes them somehow vulnerable as well. This is reflected in armed groups, such as Boko Haram, and their strategies to recruit children into their forces. This because they view children as weak and easy to manipulate and children are therefore highly attractive as this will result in "personnel" or manpower to get the job done.

6. Conclusions & Reflections

This thesis has explained and described the role of children in war. By focusing on children as victims of wars and as agents in war and conflict, the purpose of this thesis has been to reflect on how the concept of childhood plays a part in this.

The following two research questions were answered in the thesis; 1) How can child soldiers' agency be used as an analytical tool and/or empiric category in IR theory, and which, if any, existing theories can explain the role of children in international relations?, and 2) How does the concept of childhood and perceptions linked to this affect the situation for child soldiers from recruitment to post-conflict, and what, if anything, can we learn from past experiences?

In the discipline of IR there is a lack of theories directly addressing children and their role as agents. However, it is possible to conceptualize and address children in international relations as they are active agents, which a child soldier is an example of. Their actions is shifting away from the modern understanding of childhood which is reflected in international documents, and are contradicting this as these children perform "adult" tasks. Therefore, although not by law, children can tell us something about state behavior and affairs as they too are a part of this. Despite the lack of directly addressing children, feminist IR theory can be applied to understand children in international relations. In shifting away from the assumption led on by mainstream IR theories, there is room for other actors, including children to be analyzed. As feminist scholars are concerned with including individuals, although concerned about women's role and gender-related topics, it is relevant to children as well. This because some feminist scholars emphasize that policy-making often reflects taken-for-granted realities, and by applying a discourse analysis behind the meaning of certain terms, it is possible to challenge these constructs. In the case of children, it is the perceptions linked to what a child is and therefore also what an ideal childhood is that can be analyzed and challenged to gain a better understanding of children's agency. Childhood is a fixed term and is not based on a natural state since the international community has come together to decide that the age of 18 is what is the distinction between childhood and adulthood. Therefore, since the concept of childhood is a result of human action and decision-making it is underestimating children's experiences, and also the ones of child soldiers.

The issue of child soldiering is not a new phenomenon, as stated numerous times in this thesis, but is something which has been a part of warfare since the beginning of time so to speak. It is the attention in regard to children in war by the international community and the characteristics of wars and conflict post-Cold War that represent the “newness” about children in war. Images of small children with big guns are reoccurring images posted by the media, and due to our perceptions of children, it is morally disturbing to see that adults are taking advantage of children and are forcing them to take part in this. Some children join armed forces voluntarily, and their presence in an armed group provides a form of stability and security for them. This is due to children’s ability to adapt easier to various circumstances and is therefore adjusting to and accepting the status quo.

The traumas posed by conflict and war are tremendous, for civilians, both adults and children, and soldiers as well. The international community, with state representatives, has obligations toward children in terms of securing their given rights. Despite of this responsibility that are expected from adults, one cannot underestimate children’s experiences during war and conflict and their coping mechanisms, be it their status of civilians that are particularly vulnerable or serving as soldiers. The experiences of child soldiers during a conflict and the duties they perform forces some sort of maturity. This forced maturity leaves the children in a stage between childhood and adulthood, and is not comparable to the idealistic goals stated in the CRC. These children have experienced atrocities done towards themselves, and have inflicted it on others. The result is that humans defined as children because of the limit of 18 years has witnessed more than most adults ever will. Child soldiers are not just helpless victims that are innocent and vulnerable, and is not always forced to do the actions they perform either. Therefore, to view children as incapable of having any understanding of what they have experienced, committed or been through is not without complications. This is not to say that it is ok that children serve in war and conflict, but to highlight that children are more aware of their experiences than what is suggested or perceived.

All the losses of human beings in wartime or during violent conflicts are a sad reality, and it is also extremely worrying for post-conflict realities such as conflict resolution and peace-building that children are taking such a big part in battlefields. Perhaps a cliché, but children are the future of a society, and their experiences as child soldiers are something that will follow them forever, and some struggle to go back to “normal life” at all. Therefore, reintegration measures are an important factor in peace-building processes. It is

important to move away from focusing on the reintegration program itself, though, and listen to the children's experiences. In doing so, one should also have in mind that the experiences shared by the children are valuable knowledge. Not necessarily a lesson learned about children in war *per se*, but actors that shapes, affect and impact state behavior.

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