

CONCLUSION

This monograph attempts to build a conceptual framework for the study of the use of children in armed conflict. Whilst chapter one provided a comprehensive review of the child soldier phenomenon by placing it within a historical, global and legislative framework, it was emphasised that it was after the end of the Second World War that the use of children in armed conflicts became a prominent feature in modern society, facilitated by the changing nature of war and the emergence of lightweight weapons. Furthermore, although the global nature of child soldiering was examined, it was necessary to go further and consider, in chapter two, the political and economic factors inciting and prolonging many African conflicts, which, in turn, lead to the participation of children in violence.

As various armed groups in Africa use significant numbers of children, it was then important, in chapter two, to consider the process in which they are recruited by armed groups, the reasons behind their use, the functions they perform and the treatment they receive. As it is a widely acknowledged that the development of children continues at all times, the study analysed the impact of their involvement in war on themselves and their society, focusing particularly on educational, physical and psychological consequences.

Finally, there is a general consensus that the subject of girl soldiers has been relegated to the 'back benches' of the child soldier debate—both in theoretical discourses and programme—related discussions. Therefore, it was essential for this study to document, in some depth, the experiences confronted by this group during war and its aftermath both as victims and active combatants.

The involvement of children in armed conflict in various African countries is a broad subject and this monograph has covered aspects that will be further developed and added to the existing literature and conceptual framework. Having argued the case for the pragmatic and economic considerations behind the use of children in conflicts and the impact of child soldiering on the numerous cultures affected by war, there is clearly still a need for validation from further fieldwork. Moreover, it would be interesting to research the

extent to which wartime practices and patterns reflect peacetime attitudes. By focusing particularly on the treatment of girls in different contexts, similarities emerge that enable us to appreciate the special requirements of girls in rehabilitation and reintegration programmes. Secondly, a study on the notion of 'childhood' focusing on the dialectical aspects of cultural relativity and universality would be a useful contribution to the existing literature. If notions of what a child is vary across cultures, what are the implications for the UNCRC, arguably the most universal of all international legal instruments?

Although children have indeed become a feature of most conflicts across the continent within the last twenty years, it is less a matter of 'African culture' (there is a great diversity of cultures throughout the continent) and more a matter of socio-economic and political factors. In fact, if child soldiers can be linked to culture at all, then it is likely to be a global culture driven by socio-economic and political pragmatism. Moreover, the consequences of child soldiering have affected various cultures afflicted by violence and created a notion of childhood that, some may call, 'dysfunctional'. This observation is of particular concern. Although childhood should by no means be considered simply a training ground for adulthood, children socialized in extreme violence are the future. A holistic approach encompassing both the socio-economic and political factors inciting conflicts and facilitating the involvement of children in them is vital for the successful prevention of child recruitment. Successful disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes depend on an understanding of how and why children or co-opted into violence.