

In/visible Girls: 'Girl Soldiers', Gender and Humanitarianism in African Conflicts, c. 1955-2005.

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*'...not much is known about the participation of girls in the wars of the end of the twentieth century, for the role of girls at war is rarely highlighted'.<sup>1</sup>*

*DDR [Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration] programmes for children are drastically under-funded. And, because of their invisibility and the discrimination they suffer, it is girls who particularly lose out'.<sup>2</sup>*

African girl soldiers have historically been subject to a triple invisibility: as females, as children, and as black Africans. Even when child soldiers became a major focus of international humanitarian concern in the late 1980s and 1990s, the stereotypical image of the 'African child soldier' that saturated human rights reports, news media and humanitarian appeals was that of a young boy, in a ragged t-shirt and flip flops, carrying an AK-47, staring dead-eyed at the camera. Girls were conspicuous by their absence in these initial campaigns against the recruitment and use of child soldiers, despite the fact that estimates suggested around thirty to forty per cent, or 120,000, of the 300,000 children associated with armed forces were in fact female. These girls occupied multiple roles ranging from being porters and cooks, to spies, to 'bush wives', and even armed combatants, forming a 'shadow army' that provided invaluable labour to armed groups.<sup>3</sup> When girl soldiers did emerge as objects of humanitarian concern in the later 1990s, attention focused not so much on their active participation in front line combat, as with boys, but in relation to their victimhood, and specifically on their experiences of sexual violence. When it came to 'saving' these girls and rehabilitating them from their traumas in post-conflict environments however, there was a clear failure within international peacebuilding efforts to include girl soldiers in the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration (DDRR) programmes that were formulated to turn 'soldiers' back into 'civilians'. This chapter seeks to explore why, despite the fact that African girl children figure so prominently in humanitarian imagery and discourses of salvation as 'universal icon(s) of

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Archives, Geneva, E/CN.4/Sub.2.AC.2.1992/6, Review of Developments in Contemporary Slavery, 'Report by Friends World Committee for Consultation', 17 January 1992, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Save the Children-UK, 'Forgotten Casualties of War: Girls in Armed Conflict' (London: Save the Children, 2005), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

suffering', African girl soldiers have been so marginalized in the delivery of humanitarian aid and action?<sup>4</sup> How was their victimhood constructed? What effect did such humanitarian imaginings have on interventions to prevent the recruitment and abuse of girls by armed groups, and on attempts to rehabilitate and reintegrate former girl soldiers back into their communities? The chapter thereby questions how ideas of age, race and gender have intersected to shape humanitarianism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, highlighting tensions between constructions of girls' victimhood and evidence of their agency.

The child soldier crisis is a relatively recent international, humanitarian concern. Whereas the 'boy soldiers' of the First and Second World Wars were largely understood as heroic proto-citizens, deserving of sympathy but also honour for their patriotism and suffering, today's child soldiers are constructed as victims of horrific rights abuses and 'barbaric' forms of warfare.<sup>5</sup> This shift is due not simply to changing patterns of children's participation in conflict globally, but to a confluence of cultural and political changes from the 1970s to 1990s that sparked new humanitarian campaigning. The growing dominance of human rights, and particularly child rights, combined with new developments in international law, media and communications technology, and the shifting geopolitical order in the late- and post-Cold War years, to drive concern about child soldiering, particularly (but not exclusively) concerns from the global North about children in the global South wars. Such concerns were exacerbated by the growing civilianization and delegitimization of conflict, exemplified by conflicts in Vietnam and Cambodia where the lines between civilian and military became increasingly blurred with total social mobilization drawing children into Viet Cong forces, and in countries like Mozambique where the liberation struggle against colonial rule gave way to a protracted civil war that infamously saw thousands of children forcibly recruited and used to commit atrocities by rebel group Renamo.<sup>6</sup> It was the so-called 'new wars' which gripped countries like Sierra Leone and Liberia in the 1990s however that sparked global action against the recruitment and use of children, wars which became infamous in for their purported barbarism and accounts of drug-addicted, dehumanized boy soldiers killing, raping and mutilating civilians. <sup>7</sup> Such hyper-

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<sup>4</sup> Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering* (Oxford: Polity, 2001), p. 178.

<sup>5</sup> See David M. Rosen, *Child Soldiers and the Western Imagination: From Patriots to Victims* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> See International Committee of the Red Cross, *Official Records of the Diplomatic Conference on the Reaffirmation and Development of International Humanitarian Law Applicable in Armed Conflict, Geneva 1974-77* (Geneva, 1978), volume XV, CDDH/III/SR.45, pp. 64-75.

<sup>7</sup> Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999); Robert Kaplan, *The Coming Anarchy* (New York: Random House, 2000); see Human Rights Watch/Africa, 'East Prey: Child Soldiers in Liberia' (September 1994).

violent wars and the crisis of the post-colonial state in Africa also helped drive a recrudescence of neo-colonial discourses in the global North depicting the continent as a ‘heart of darkness’ which required external salvation.<sup>8</sup> By the early 1990s then, child soldiering had become viewed as a particularly ‘African’ problem, indicative of a wider moral and social breakdown.<sup>9</sup> It was the emergence of a new, liberal humanitarianism however that primarily facilitated international advocacy and intervention against the recruitment and use of children in war. The post-Cold War era saw a fundamental realignment and expansion of humanitarianism, becoming avowedly political and increasingly intersecting with human rights and development. The emergence of post-conflict peacebuilding and reconstruction as a major United Nations (UN) action also drew humanitarian organizations into longer-term developmental rather than simply relief-based interventions, and brought humanitarians into former warzones and increasingly into contact with child soldiers who required rehabilitation, driving their advocacy against recruitment.<sup>10</sup>

Conceptions of child soldiers emerge from the pre-existing social, political and moral knowledge that shapes liberal humanitarianism, knowledge that is predominantly shaped by Western cultural norms and circulated by INGOs, but which often clashes with local socio-cultural norms and the realities of growing up in a warzone. Child soldiers are presented as victims of human rights abuses, as ‘politically innocent beings whose childhoods have been corrupted by chaotic, violent and tribal new wars, and can only be rescued and rehabilitated by donors in the global North’.<sup>11</sup> Humanitarian interventions to prevent the recruitment and use of children in armed forces are predicated on a contemporary transnational ‘politics of age’ that prioritizes Western norms of childhood as a space of innocence, education, and freedom from labour and sexual activity over local understandings of childhood in African communities, which rather highlight children’s capacity to be active social agents and productive members of a household, with girls in particular expected to contribute to domestic economies through undertaking household labour and childminding duties for siblings.<sup>12</sup> Tensions within local

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<sup>8</sup> See V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa* (London: James Currey, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> Alcinda Honwana, *Child Soldiers in Africa* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), pp. 166-9; Mark Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security* (London: Zed Books, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> Katrina Lee-Koo, ‘Horror and Hope: (Re-)presenting Militarized Children in Global North-South Relations’, *Third World Quarterly*, 32:4 (2011), 736.

<sup>12</sup> David M. Rosen, ‘Child Soldiers, International Humanitarian Law and the Globalization of Childhood,’ *American Anthropologist*, 109.2 (2007), 296-8; Afua Twum-Danso, ‘The Political Child’, in Angela McIntyre

norms of childhood and femininity also shape shifting conceptualizations of girlhood.<sup>13</sup> Across many African cultures, girls are expected to be obedient, submissive, and contribute to the domestic running of the household. They are socialized to be wives and mothers, with their value tied to the ‘bridewealth’ they bring to their families upon marriage, and their education is often neglected in favour of schooling boys.<sup>14</sup> It is precisely these qualities of obedience, labour and reproduction which make girls attractive recruits for many armed groups. Initiation, marriage and motherhood are key markers of the transition from girlhood to adulthood: these markers are however disrupted and reordered in war, with girl soldiers often becoming mothers without socially-sanctioned marriage or initiation. War can itself generate challenges to existing gender norms, with girl soldiers adopting violent behaviours normatively associated with masculinity and finding empowerment, agency and resilience in their new militarised identities.<sup>15</sup> Traditional norms of girlhood have also been challenged by the exportation of global ideals which promote girls’ education and empowerment, the spread of both Western and African feminisms, and also Communist ideals of gender equality during the Cold War. The category of girlhood really came to international prominence in the 1990s in development and humanitarian circles, with a particular focus on girls’ education as the most effective mechanism for delivering social change and successful development.<sup>16</sup> Rescuing and reforming girls has become a metonym for civilization, with the victimised girl child emerging as the chief signifier of the pathology of the global South and a justification for intervention. Inversely, the rescued girl-child then becomes a symbol of successful development towards membership of the global community and a marker of progress.<sup>17</sup>

For the purposes of this chapter, a child/girl soldier is defined following current international norms as anyone/any female under the age of eighteen years old attached to an armed force or armed group in any capacity.<sup>18</sup> The term preferred today by INGOs ‘girls associated with armed groups’ will also be used where appropriate to indicate where girls reject the stigmatization of being termed a ‘soldier’. The majority of girls under discussion here are

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(ed.), *Invisible Stakeholders: Children and War in Africa* (Cape Town: Institute of Security Studies, 2005), pp. 7-30; Allison James and Alan Prout, *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood* (London: Falmer Press, 1990).

<sup>13</sup> Jennifer Helgren & Colleen A. Vasconcellos, *Girlhood: A Global History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010).

<sup>14</sup> Twum-Danso, ‘The Political Child’, 12.

<sup>15</sup> See Susan McKay and Dyan Mazurana, ‘Where are the Girls? Girls in Fighting Forces in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone and Mozambique: Their Lives During and After War’ (Montreal: Rights and Democracy, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> Elisabeth J. Croll, ‘From the Girl Child to Girl’s Rights’, *Third World Quarterly*, 27.2 (2006), 1285-1297.

<sup>17</sup> Augustine S. J. Park, ‘Global Governance, Therapeutic Intervention and War-Affected Girls’, *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 34.2 (2009), 158-9.

<sup>18</sup> UNICEF, ‘Cape Town Principles and Best Practices’ (1997).

teenagers or have aged out of that category during their time in armed groups: the term ‘youth’ will therefore be used to indicate where girls understand themselves, and are understood by local communities, as young women instead of ‘girls’. This chapter will first explore the emergence of the ‘girl soldier’ as an object of humanitarian concern, and then assesses constructions of girls’ victimhood and agency in conflict. It will then focus on the marginalization of girls within DDRR programming, examining how international humanitarian actors have explained and then sought to rectify that marginalization, before analysing the gendered assumptions which underpin humanitarian interventions to rehabilitate and reintegrate former girl soldiers. Evidence is drawn from Quaker, United Nations [UN], International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC], Save the Children Fund [SCF] and colonial archives, as well as human rights, humanitarian international non-governmental organization [INGO] reports, working papers, journalism and the memoirs of former girl soldiers.

#### Histories of Girl Soldiering: Invisible Freedom Fighters v. Visible Victims

African girls may have been ‘invisible soldiers’ from the perspective of the international community until the late 1990s, but a close reading of humanitarian archives reveals traces of their presence in conflict before this time, a presence confirmed and expanded upon in memoirs, news, oral histories and anthropological research. Prior to the 1990s ‘girl soldiers’ were not absent from war: their presence was simply not seen as especially egregious or significant and therefore not highlighted, partially due to the auxiliary roles that they largely performed, but also due to contemporary conceptions of politicized youth, female agency, and the perceived legitimacy of armed liberation struggles against colonial oppression. Whilst girls were present in colonial armies as ‘camp followers’, it was not until the liberation struggles during the decolonization years of the 1950s when they emerged as active participants in armed groups, following the wider politicization of youth in the late colonial era.<sup>19</sup> Colonial archives reveal that teenage girls volunteered as bombers, nurses and provided essential support for National Liberation Front units in Algeria, whilst in Kenya Gikuyu girls were arrested and detained for their support of Mau Mau forces.<sup>20</sup> In both cases, youth involvement in these insurgencies saw juveniles become deliberate targets of state violence and ‘rehabilitation’

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<sup>19</sup> Richard Waller, ‘Rebellious Youth in Colonial Africa’, *Journal of African History*, 47.1 (2006), 77-92.

<sup>20</sup> Neil Macmaster, *Burning the Veil: The Algerian War and the Emancipation of Women* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); Katherine Bruce-Lockhart, ‘The “Truth” about Kenya: Connection and Contestation in the 1956 Kamiti Controversy’, *Journal of World History*, 26:4 (2015), 815-38.

efforts, as the colonial state sought to turn deviant young subjects into productive adults.<sup>21</sup> In the post-colonial era, politicized female youth were also involved as militants and supporters in the liberation struggles in Zimbabwe, Namibia, and in the armed struggle against apartheid in South Africa.<sup>22</sup> There was little international concern exhibited about the involvement of these teenagers in fighting however, at least before the later 1980s when the growth of child rights mobilized humanitarian sympathies. Of course, whilst child soldiers may have been invisible actors in Africa's conflicts, younger children, and girls in particular, had become icons of suffering in humanitarian imagery of war and emergency.<sup>23</sup> The 1967-70 Biafran civil war with Nigeria marked a new mediatisation of children's images as victims, bringing the African child as starving, kwashiorkor-ridden, famine victim to the foreground of international humanitarian consciousness in a series of images that have been criticized in subsequent humanitarian thought as almost pornographic in their display of suffering.<sup>24</sup> The most iconic image of all is that of a starving young Ethiopian girl, Birhan Woldu, who became the face of the 1985 Live Aid campaign for famine relief in Ethiopia.<sup>25</sup> The affective force of these images overshadowed other forms of children's and youths' involvement in conflict. Perhaps significantly though these famine victim infants were often portrayed in sex/gender-less terms – images of young girls suffering were powerful tools for generating public responses to humanitarian crises, but their 'girlhood' has historically not been central to the portrayal of their suffering: their symbolic vulnerability was rather located in their childhood/infancy and their African-ness. The 1980s saw growing concern about both women and children in war, linked to the civilianization of conflict more broadly, with UNICEF reporting two million child casualties in conflict between 1985 and 1995.<sup>26</sup> However, there was a tendency to collapse 'women and children' into a single humanitarian category of concern, and, as a result, girls' specific experiences of navigating adolescence, reproductive health, and trauma and

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<sup>21</sup> Paul Ocobock, *An Uncertain Age: The Politics of Manhood in Kenya* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2017), pp. 166-225.

<sup>22</sup> Tanya Lyons, *Guns and Guerrilla Girls: Women in the Zimbabwean Liberation Struggle* (Asmara: Africa World Press, 2004); Weston Library, University of Oxford, Anti-Apartheid Movement Archives, MSS.AAM.1120, 'Children, Apartheid and Repression in Namibia, 1988'; Emily Bridger, 'Soweto's Female Comrades: Gender, Youth and Violence in South Africa's Township Uprisings, 1984-1990', *Journal of Southern African Studies* (forthcoming).

<sup>23</sup> Laura Suski, 'Children, Suffering and the Humanitarian Appeal' in Richard Ashby Wilson and Richard D. Wilson (eds.), *Humanitarianism and Suffering: The Mobilization of Empathy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 202-22.

<sup>24</sup> Jorgen Lissner, *The Politics of Altruism* (1977). See Kevin O'Sullivan, 'Humanitarian Encounters: Biafra, NGOs and Imaginings of the Third World in Britain and Ireland', 1967-70', *Journal of Genocide Research*, 16:2 (2014), 299-315.

<sup>25</sup> Oliver Harvey, *Feed the World: Birhan Woldu and Live Aid* (London: New Holland Publishers, 2011).

<sup>26</sup> UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 1996* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 13.

developing survival strategies in warzones were largely neglected in both advocacy and action.<sup>27</sup>

The papers of pioneering child soldier activist Dorothea E. Woods of the Quaker United Nations Office [QUNO], Geneva, reveal that it was in the Eritrean liberation struggle against Ethiopia in late 1980s that large numbers of teenage girls first began to attract international humanitarian attention, with girls comprising around a third of Eritrean People's Liberation Front [EPLF] forces at the time; strikingly, these accounts appear to accept the girls' volunteering to serve with groups like the EPLF as a rational, justifiable and patriotic impulse, reassured by evidence of formal training and promises the girls were not being sent to the front lines.<sup>28</sup> Teenage girls joined armed groups for many reasons: to defend their communities, to avenge their families, or to better their lives, and many actively demanded to fight in battle. During the Cold War, the rhetoric of gender equality espoused by many Communist-aligned forces drew many female youths into liberation and rebel forces, particularly those who sought to escape abuse, marginalization or early marriage at home; of course, many found that rhetorics of equality did not match the reality of their exposure to violence and exploitation within armed groups.<sup>29</sup>

A turning point for international humanitarian concern about the presence of African children in armed groups was the seizure of Kampala in January 1986 by Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Army [NRA], which was noted by humanitarian, media and diplomatic observers to contain some 3000 *kadogos* (little soldiers, child soldiers), including '500 girls'.<sup>30</sup> These girls included China Keitetsi who wrote a memoir detailing how 'the NRA gave us weapons, made us fight their war, made us hate, kill, torture, and made us their girlfriends'.<sup>31</sup> The *kadogos* were initially hailed by many Ugandans as heroes. Even UNICEF's Regional Director, Cole P. Dodge described them as 'highly motivated, reliable and dedicated' soldiers and praised the 'humanitarian nature of the NRA's overseeing of the children', many of whom were

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<sup>27</sup> See Charlotte Lindsay, 'Women Facing War: International Committee of the Red Cross Study on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women' (Geneva: ICRC, 2001), 34-5; Dyan Mazurana, Angela Raven-Roberts and Jane Parpart (eds.), *Gender, Conflict and Peacekeeping* (Oxford, Rowman and Littlefield, 2005).

<sup>28</sup> Swarthmore College Peace Collection [SCPC], Philadelphia, Dorothea E. Woods Papers, 4726/14, Dorothea Woods, 'Children at War in Africa', 4 and 4722/10 'Girls in Military Training in War, 1992'; Chris Kutscera, 'Guerre et Faim', *GEO*, Paris, 1985.

<sup>29</sup> Harry G. West, 'Girls with Guns: Narrating the Experience of War of Frelimo's "Female Detachment"', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 73:4 (2000), 180-94; Angela Veale, *From Child Soldier to Ex-Fighter: Female Fighters, Demobilisation and Reintegration in Ethiopia* (Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2003); Senait Mehari, *Heart of Fire: From Child Soldier to Soul Singer* (London: Profile Books, 2006).

<sup>30</sup> SCPC, Dorothea E. Woods Papers, 4725, 'Children Bearing Arms Monthly Reports, December 1986, March 1987.

<sup>31</sup> China Keitetsi, *Child Soldier* (London: Souvenir Press, 2004), p. 154.

war orphans.<sup>32</sup> However, following failed negotiations to demobilize the *kadogo* into humanitarian care rather than military schools, and Museveni's dismissal of Western fears about the trauma inflicted by militarizing children, international concern about African child soldiers mounted. By 1987, the focus had shifted to the long-running civil war in Mozambique, at which point narratives of child soldier brutalization and dehumanization developed in relation to Renamo's forcible recruitment of an estimated 9-10,000 children, some as young as six.<sup>33</sup> Alongside discourses of brutalized boys, concern about girls being forcibly recruited to provide sexual and domestic labour also emerged, in both Mozambique and Angola.<sup>34</sup> Then in the early 1990s during conflicts in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Rwanda and Northern Uganda, thousands of girls were recruited into government forces and rebel groups, many being forced into conjugal slavery as 'bush wives' of fighters.<sup>35</sup> It was at this point that discourses surrounding girls' participation in armed groups shifted from empowered liberation fighters to a focus on forcible recruitment, and then sexual victimization.

What drove this discursive shift from viewing girls as active participants in conflict to seeing them as war's ultimate victims? It was part of the broader shift from agency to victimhood in constructions of child soldiers highlighted above, but there was also a distinctly gendered dimension to shifting humanitarian discourses. New global norms of childhood and child rights intersected with women's rights movements to highlight female victimhood, with gender becoming a significant category for public policy making and international development. The expansion of the category of 'child' from fifteen to eighteen years of age with the Convention of the Rights of the Child saw female teenagers branded 'girls' rather than 'youths', a tactic deployed by rights organizations and humanitarians to highlight their youthful innocence and victimhood. More significant was the emergence of violence against women as a topic for transnational social movement and network action from the 1980s, with major campaigns against sexual and gender-based violence emerging by the mid-1990s.<sup>36</sup> Girls' exploitation in war became linked to broader gender inequality and structural violence. As World Vision

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<sup>32</sup> Cole P. Dodge, 'Child Soldiers in Uganda: What does the Future Hold?', *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, (December 1986).

<sup>33</sup> Miguel Mause, 'The Social Reintegration of the Child Involved in Armed Conflict in Mozambique' (Cape Town: Institute for Security Studies, 1989).

<sup>34</sup> Vivi Stavrou, 'Breaking the Silence: Girls Forcibly Involved in the Armed Struggle in Angola' (Christ Children's Fund Angola Research Project, 2006).

<sup>35</sup> Stacey Hynd, "'To be taken as a wife is a form of death': The Social, Military, and Humanitarian Dynamics of Forced marriage and Girl Soldiers in African Conflicts, c.1990-2010" in Benjamin Lawrence, Richard L. Roberts & Annie Bunting (eds.), *Marriage by Force? Contestation over Consent and Coercion in Africa* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2016), pp. 292-312.

<sup>36</sup> Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 166.



highlighted in a discussion paper on the impact of armed conflict on girls in 1996, ‘In much of the world, girls are subordinate, voiceless and imperilled, even at the best of times. In times of war, even the slightest protections afforded them by society are torn away. Not only do they face bombs and bullets, starvation and sickness. Increasingly, belligerents treat girls as a spoils of war and make the abhorrent ordinary as they routinely brutalise her in body and spirit’.<sup>37</sup> Girls were increasingly constructed as the ultimate victims of war, their suffering bodies proving central to the ‘iconography of rescue’ in humanitarian campaigns.<sup>38</sup>

The 1993-6 Machel Committee proved to be a pivotal moment in the gendering of child soldiering – studies conducted prior to this made little mention of either girl soldiers or sexual violence; for those afterwards it became a discursive priority.<sup>39</sup> Following sustained pressure from child rights groups and consultative NGOs like the Quaker Friends World Committee for Consultation, Defence for Children International and Rädde Barnen, in 1993 the UN commissioned renowned Mozambican women’s and children’s rights campaigner and humanitarian Graça Machel to investigate the effects of armed conflict on the world’s children. The Machel Report, published in August 1996, has become the foundation text for human rights advocacy and humanitarian action on children affected by conflict, with its focus on the child as the ultimate victim of modern conflict, downplaying child soldiers’ agency in favour of adopting child rights based narratives of victimhood. After receiving evidence from humanitarian campaign groups and conducting field visits to Angola, Rwanda and Sierra Leone, Machel added specific investigations into the treatment of girls and sexual and gender-based violence to the report, investigations which were expanded upon in follow-up reports.<sup>40</sup> This was in part driven by the emergence of sexual violence as a subject of human rights and humanitarian concern in the 1990s, particularly in the aftermath of conflicts in former Yugoslavia and Rwanda.<sup>41</sup> This era also saw a shift within humanitarian language towards

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<sup>37</sup> World Vision International, ‘The Effects of Armed Conflict on Girls: Discussion paper for the UN Study on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children’ (July 1996), 5.

<sup>38</sup> Burman, ‘Innocents Abroad’, 242.

<sup>39</sup> See Ilene Cohn and Guy S. Goodwin-Gill, *Child Soldiers: The Role of Children in Armed Conflicts, a Study on Behalf of the Henry Dunant Institute Geneva* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Rachel Brett and Irma Specht, *Young Soldiers: Why They Choose to Fight?* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2004).

<sup>40</sup> United Nations General Assembly, Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Children: Impact of Armed Conflict on Children: Report of the Expert of the Secretary-General, Ms. Graça Machel, 26 August 1996, A/51/306, 3 [hereafter Machel Report]; UNICEF/United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, *Machel Study 10 Year Review: Children and Conflict in a Changing World* (New York: UNICEF, 2009).

<sup>41</sup> Kerry F. Crawford, *Wartime Sexual Violence: From Silence to Condemnation as a Weapon of War* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2017); Miriam Ticktin, ‘The Gendered Human of Humanitarianism: Medicalising and Politicising Sexual Violence’, *Gender & History*, 23:2 (2011), 250-65.

discourses of trauma, victimhood and witnessing, drawing from human rights, with a focus on aid recipients as suffering bodies rather than political subjects.<sup>42</sup> Seminars held with Rädde Barnen and UNICEF spoke of ‘empty-eyed girls who had been raped and abused’.<sup>43</sup>

There is a distinct gendering of discourses of violence in humanitarian reports on child soldiering, and in the memoirs of former child soldiers which have been adopted by humanitarian groups to support their campaigns. Boy soldiers’ narratives are focused on explicit, often detailed accounts of the violence they perpetrated, which is then contrasted to the guilt and trauma they later experience, this suffering and perpetration marking them out as worthy recipients of salvation.<sup>44</sup> Representations of girl soldiers’ experiences however are predominantly made through narratives of girls as victims of human rights abuses, and their suffering and trauma is located around their experiences of sexual violence in particular: relating to their body and their gender, rather than their status and experiences as soldiers. As a report by Save the Children put it, ‘Many are killed in combat. Most are raped and sexually abused’.<sup>46</sup> Cultural taboos and silencing around sexual violence shape these narratives. Accounts of rape and sexual abuse by girls given in interviews and memoirs tend to be given in a very sparing and matter of fact manner, the detail and the emotion is starkly restrained, and the horror remains largely unspoken.<sup>47</sup> So why then is there such a focus on sexual violence in humanitarian reports? Many girls did experience sexual violence, but not all, and even for those who did, many of their testimonies suggest that sexual violence was experienced as part of a broader landscape of suffering rather than as demarcated events that triggered especial trauma.<sup>48</sup> In human rights and humanitarian reports however, girls’ testimonies are excerpted and/or translated into humanitarian texts by researchers with a domestication, or vernacularization, of their experiences into Western or Global North registers of trauma, with excerpts from multiple testimonies often combined to create a ‘composite portrait of victimization’. Testifying to a growing concern with the treatment of women’s bodies in war, sexual violence has become foregrounded in humanitarian discourses as a form of severe

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<sup>42</sup> Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), pp. 200-22.

<sup>43</sup> SCPC, Dorothea E. Woods Papers, 4737, ‘Seminar report on the UN Draft Convention of the Rights of the Child, October 1988’, 4.

<sup>44</sup> See Ishmael Beah, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of A Child Soldier* (London: Harper Perennial, 2008), p. 125.

<sup>46</sup> Save the Children, ‘Forgotten Casualties of War’, vi.

<sup>47</sup> See for example Mehari, *Heart of Fire*; Faith J. H. McDonnell and Grace Akallo, *Girl Soldier: A Story of Hope for Northern Uganda’s Children* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2007), pp. 110-2.

<sup>48</sup> See Evelyn Amony, ed. Erin Baines, *I Am Evelyn Amony: Reclaiming My Life from the Lord’s Resistance Army* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015).

trauma because of its violation of taboos, and its potent combination of physical and psychological pain: sexual and gender-based violence is a more comprehensible form of trauma than bombing or gunfire to Western donors, more immediate and horrifying than the daily grind of survival in a warscape. Emphasizing such forms of violence is an affective narrative strategy that aims provoke empathetic responses in readers/donors, and thereby generate action.

Shortly after the Machel Report's publication, the abduction in Northern Uganda of 139 schoolgirls by Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army in October 1996, and the seizure of thirty of these girls as 'bush wives' for Kony's favoured officers, provoked international outrage and reinforced narratives of girls' sexual exploitation in conflict.<sup>49</sup> As a result of such scandals and concerted humanitarian advocacy, the Cape Town principles of 1997, which were developed by UNICEF and other groups to establish best practice for preventing child recruitment and rehabilitation, explicitly expanded the definition of a child soldier to 'girls recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriage', and noted that 'particular attention should be paid to the special needs of girls' in demobilisation and reintegration.<sup>50</sup> In the aftermath of the Machel Report's publication, and the UN's creation of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children in Armed Conflict in 1997, humanitarian actors and researchers increasingly turned their attention to the problem of girl soldiers, marking a growing intersection between academic research, activism and humanitarian interventions.<sup>51</sup> It is perhaps significant that the vast majority of humanitarian actors and scholars working on girl soldiers in the 1990s-early 2000s were themselves women, like Rachel Brett and Dyan Mazurana. This is less Spivak's 'white men saving brown women from brown men' than 'predominantly white women trying to persuade global elite men to save brown girls from brown boys and men'.<sup>52</sup>

### Girls in Contemporary Armed Groups: 'Victimhood' v. 'Agency'

If narratives of perpetration are almost automatically gendered as male, then narratives of victimhood in contemporary conflict are deeply feminised, conjuring women as passive

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<sup>49</sup> Els de Temmerman, *Above Girls: Children Abducted in Northern Uganda* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2009).

<sup>50</sup> UNICEF, 'Cape Town Principles and Best Practices' (1997).

<sup>51</sup> See Dyan Mazurana, Susan A. McKay, Christopher C. Carlson and Janel C. Kasper, 'Girls in Fighting Forces and Groups: Their Recruitment, Participation, Demobilization and Reintegration', *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 8:2 (2002), 97-123.

<sup>52</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), p. 289.

participants of war. The emphasis is laid on women's and girls' forced recruitment, forced marriage, sexual slavery, sexual abuse, and other types of victimhood and vulnerability.<sup>53</sup> The 'victim' construction of the girl child is 'integral to maintaining the myth of the young "aggressive" African male', which thereby justifies the intervention of the 'white saviour'.<sup>54</sup> But, as Denov argues, 'while highlighting girls' victimization is critical, a danger is that girls become personified as voiceless victims, often devoid of agency'.<sup>55</sup> More recent research has stressed the variation in girls' experiences of conflict, and highlighted the considerable tactical agency that many display in socially navigating warzones.<sup>56</sup> Girls occupy multiple, often concurrent, roles in armed groups, in both auxiliary and front-line capacities: the same girl can act as a porter, wife, mother and fighter as the situation demands. Girls experiences will vary according to their age and maturity, whether they are armed combatants or not, the nature of the armed group, their rank, and the length of their association with the armed group: 'The cheerful twelve year old who was abducted by an armed group may come home as an aggressive sixteen year old, carrying her own child, brutalised by abuse and with a confused sense of loyalties and identity'.<sup>57</sup> Yes, many girls in armed groups were abducted, but others joined to avoid domestic abuse or early marriage at home, or to escape being sexually abused as a civilian, whilst some joined for survival, economic motivations or as a form of personal empowerment.<sup>58</sup> Some groups, including Biafran forces in the Nigerian civil war 1967-70, recognised that the inherent liminality of teenage girls made them particularly well-suited to intelligence and infiltration work, being sent behind enemy lines to undertake normative childhood roles like performing domestic labour, but girls were also able to mobilise their sexualities by posing as girlfriends to soldiers.<sup>59</sup> Some became effective fighters and commanders, attaining rank and status: for them, war was a time of empowerment and gender-

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<sup>53</sup> Dyan Mazurana, Roxanne Krystalli, and Anton Baaré, 'Gender and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration: Reviewing and Advancing the Field', in Fionnuala Ni Aoláin, Dina Francesca Haynes, Naomi Cahn and Nahla Valji (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 442-66.

<sup>54</sup> Alice Macdonald, "'New Wars, Forgotten Warriors": Why Have Girl Fighters been excluded from Western Representations of Conflict in Sierra Leone', *African Development*, 33:3 (2008), 135-45.

<sup>55</sup> Myriam Denov and Alexandra Ricard-Guay, 'Girl Soldiers: Towards a Gendered Understanding of Wartime Recruitment, Participation and Demobilisation', *Gender and Development*, 21:3 (2013), 476. It should be noted however that girls themselves can effectively mobilise 'victim' identities in order to secure access to aid, and some of the emphasis on victimhood may be driven by their adoption of such narratives. Mats Utas, 'Victimcy as Social Navigation: From the Toolbox of Liberian Child Soldiers', in Alpaslan Özerdem and Sukanya Podder (eds.), *Child Soldiers: From Recruitment to Reintegration* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 213-228

<sup>56</sup> Honwana, *Child Soldiers in Africa*, p. 51.

<sup>57</sup> Rachel Brett & Margaret McCallin, *Children: The Invisible Soldiers* (Växjö: Rädda Barnen, 1998), pp. 123-4.

<sup>58</sup> See McKay and Mazurana, 'Where are the Girls? Yvonne E. Keairns, 'The Voices of Girl Child Soldiers: Summary' (New York: QUNO, 2002).

<sup>59</sup> Talent Chioma Mundy-Castle, *A Mother's Debt: The True Story of an African Orphan* (London: Author House, 2012).

progress. Liberian rebel forces infamously contained both Small Girls Units and the Women's Artillery Commandos, whose slogan was 'women can do better than men'.<sup>60</sup> As one Liberian girl soldier asserted: 'We were dangerous...people had better not come to bother us... or we killed you! When you are a girl you have to be harder, or the men they don't respect you'.<sup>61</sup> But as Burman asserts, '[i]f the price of innocence is passivity, then the cost of resourcefully dealing with conditions of distress and deprivation is to be pathologized'.<sup>62</sup> Views of females as active agents capable of violence, being wild and dangerous, did not fit well with international humanitarian discourse with its emphasis on war-affected women and girls as innocent victims. The privileging of depictions of female victimhood rather than agency is a key reason why little significant effort was made initially to include female combatants in DDDR processes.<sup>63</sup>

#### Demobilization, Disarmament, Rehabilitation and Reintegration and Girl Soldiers: Moralizing v. Securitizing

With the emergence of liberal humanitarianism in the post-Cold War era, humanitarian organizations became increasingly involved in the new UN-backed international peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction sector. Moving from advocacy to action, the main site of humanitarian intervention in 'saving' child soldiers emerged within DDDR. As Enloe argues, demobilization and rehabilitation are inherently gendered processes, requiring the redefinition and demilitarization of both masculinities and femininities.<sup>64</sup> DDDR may 'appear neutral, but men are effectively over-privileged' during both policy and implementation phases.<sup>65</sup> Early 1990s peace operations largely ignored gender issues, but after 1995 gendered policies began to emerge following concerted feminist advocacy. A key turning point came with Resolution 1325 in 2000 which recognised women's importance to post-conflict reconstruction and called for their protection. Following pressure from both child rights and women's rights movements, the UN then formally noted in 2000 that 'special protection measures should be implemented to respond to the needs of girl soldiers', with particular intervention and community

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<sup>60</sup> Irma Specht, 'Red Shoes: Experiences of Girl-Combatants in Liberia', (Geneva: International Labour Office, 2006), 61.

<sup>61</sup> Brett and Specht, *Young Soldiers*, p. 85.

<sup>62</sup> Erica Burman, 'Innocents Abroad: Western Fantasies of Childhood and the Iconography of Emergencies', *Disasters*, 18:3 (1994), 244.

<sup>63</sup> Chris Coulter, *Bush Wives and Girl Soldiers: Women's Lives through War and Peace in Sierra Leone* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), pp. 241-2.

<sup>64</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 13-4.

<sup>65</sup> Fionnuala Ni Aoláin, Dina Francesca Haynes and Naomi Cahn, *On the Frontlines* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 133.

sensitization required for '[g]irls or women who have suffered sexual abuse, have been forced to participate in violence, or had had to bear children to their victimizers'.<sup>66</sup> However, whilst these resolutions recognized women and girls' participation in conflict, they constructed this primarily through the lens of victimhood and there remained a striking gap between rhetoric and reality within gender mainstreaming efforts in DDRR programming, with many staff lacking gender awareness.<sup>67</sup> Weaknesses in gender responses were compounded by structural failings in meeting child soldiers' needs more broadly. Humanitarian efforts to provide appropriately gendered interventions for children were hindered by disjointed approaches to DDRR: agencies involved in child soldier demobilization included the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (UNDPKO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and World Bank, whilst the reintegration phases were normally run by partnerships of UNICEF and INGOs like SCF, in conjunction with local NGOs, charities, churches and government ministries.<sup>68</sup> Reports from these programmes increasingly deployed a rhetoric of recognising the 'special needs' and 'special vulnerabilities' of girls, but knowledge of their existence did not readily translate into action to meet those needs.<sup>69</sup> A 2005 SCF-UK report raged against the underfunding of DDRR programmes for girls, particularly in Africa where programmes overall received less funding. The public report sought to shock and guilt donors into rectifying the situation by emphasising the victimisation of girl soldiers and their subsequent neglect by asserting that 'girls face discrimination on a daily basis, including from the international community'.<sup>70</sup>

Whilst it is estimated that around thirty to forty percent of child soldiers are girls, as UNICEF's own reports acknowledged, girls were 'often excluded' from child DDRR programmes, which focused on the needs of boys.<sup>71</sup> Early peacebuilding operations made little arrangement for boy soldiers, never mind girls. In Angola, the 1994 Lusaka Peace Accords saw 9000 boys registered for demobilization, but there was no inclusion of girls in the UNICEF programme, despite the 'deliberate, systematic strategy' of recruiting and exploiting girls' domestic and sexual

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<sup>66</sup> United Nations Security Council, 'The Role of the United Nations Peacekeeping in Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration: Report of the Secretary-General', 11 February 2000, S/2000/101.

<sup>67</sup> Angela Raven-Roberts 'Gender Mainstreaming in UN Peacekeeping Operations: Talking the Talk, Tripping over the walk', in Dyan Mazurana, Angela Raven-Roberts and Jane Parpart (eds.), *Gender, Conflict and Peacekeeping* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), pp. 43-64.

<sup>68</sup> UNIFEM, 'Getting it Right, Doing it Right: Gender and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration', (New York: UNIFEM, 2004), 3-4.

<sup>69</sup> Jean-Claude Legrande, 'Lessons Learned from UNICEF Field Programmes for the Prevention of Recruitment, Demobilization and Reintegration of Child Soldiers', (October 1999), 31.

<sup>70</sup> Save the Children-UK, 'Forgotten Casualties', 1-2.

<sup>71</sup> Legrande, 'Lessons Learned', 21.

labour.<sup>72</sup> Girls were also absent from demobilization schemes in Mozambique and Rwanda. The 1999 Lomé peace accords in Sierra Leone were the first to make child soldiers an explicit priority in peacebuilding, but did not address girls' specific experiences or needs. There were an estimated 12,056 girls in armed groups in Sierra Leone, but only 506 formally went through demobilization, 4.2% of the total (other reports say 8% of children registered in all demobilization were girls).<sup>73</sup> In Liberia, of 102,193 people processed in demobilization, only 2% were female children, with UNICEF figures showing 2738 girls demobilised.<sup>74</sup> Fewer than 2% of children in the SCF-UK programme in the Democratic Republic of the Congo were girls, despite there being an estimated 12,5000 girls associated with armed forces there.<sup>75</sup> This marginalization was driven by weaknesses in the planning and delivery of demobilization, and a failure to adequately address both girls' fears and their needs. Disarmament and demobilization schemes commonly excluded girl soldiers as inclusion was premised on either possessing or being able to 'cock and load' a gun, and many girls either lacked firearms training or had their guns taken away by commanders prior to registration. Male commanders who controlled access to registration often excluded girls from demobilization in favour of male fighters, or because they sought to keep control of girls and their labour. A sense of shame and fear of being targeted for retaliation if they identified as members of armed groups also dissuaded many girls from entering formal demobilization programmes.<sup>76</sup> Even where girls did have access to DDDR, programme logistics and encampment spaces prioritized male needs: clothes and sanitary supplies for girls were often non-existent, poor security put girls at heightened risk of sexual assault, and reproductive health care was neglected.<sup>77</sup> 'Child mothers' have been the most underserved population within DDDR programmes, with little provision made for child care to facilitate the rehabilitation of girls who return with babies.<sup>78</sup> In Sierra Leone, child protection agents tried to appoint 'strong female staff' to manage the children's

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<sup>72</sup> Human Rights Watch, 'Forgotten Soldiers: Child Soldiers in Angola' (2003); Michael G. Wessells, 'Girls in Armed Forces and Groups in Angola: Implications for Ethical Research and Reintegration', in Scott Gates and Simon Reich (eds.), *Child Soldiers in the Age of Fractured States* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), p. 185.

<sup>73</sup> UNICEF, 'The Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration of Children Associated with Fighting Forces: Lessons Learned in Sierra Leone, 1998-2002', (Dakar: UNICEF, 2005), 16.

<sup>74</sup> UNICEF, *Machel Study 10 Year Review*, p. 17; Specht, 'Red Shoes', 102.

<sup>75</sup> Save the Children-UK, 'Forgotten Casualties of War', 1-2; Amnesty International, 'Democratic Republic of Congo - Children at War: Creating Hope for their Future' (October 2006).

<sup>76</sup> Coulter, *Bush Wives and Girl Soldiers*, pp. 241-2.

<sup>77</sup> Mazurana, McKay, Carlson and Kasper, 'Girls in Fighting Forces', 118.

<sup>78</sup> Susan McKay, Malia Robinson, Maria Gonsalves and Miranda Worthen, 'Girls Formerly Associated with Fighting Forces and their Children: Returned and Neglected', (London: Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2005).

camps but ‘the atmosphere was inevitably masculine and geared towards the support of male adolescents’.<sup>79</sup>

As feminist scholar of international relations Megan MacKenzie argues, a major reason for the marginalization of females in DDRR is because women and girls are not ‘securitized’ like men and boys in post-conflict spaces: due to military roles automatically being gendered as male, females are not seen as threats to security and order, and are routinely classified as ‘camp followers’, ‘sex slaves’ or ‘girls associated with fighting forces’ rather than ‘combatants’. Categorized as ‘victims’, their roles in conflict are thereby depoliticized, excluding them from potential benefits of post-conflict reintegration initiatives.<sup>80</sup> For MacKenzie, a patriarchal ‘conjugal order’ dictates post-conflict reconstruction regulating female behaviour and sexualities. ‘Female reintegration is seen as a social rather than political process, a “returning to normal” that will happen naturally, or at least privately’, with marriage being the prime mechanism for successful reintegration.<sup>81</sup> If girls are not securitized, then they are instead moralized within DDRR programmes.

This tendency can be traced back to colonial counter-insurgency campaigns for reforming children involved in anti-colonial insurgencies. The post-1945 era was marked in Africa, as elsewhere, by heightened colonial, and elite African, concerns about juvenile delinquency and the need to ‘rescue’ girls from the dangers of urban life, poor parenting, and exposure to the destabilizing effects of Western modernity, particularly from that archetypal form of female deviancy: prostitution.<sup>82</sup> At a time when the patriarchal bargains of authority struck between African male elders and colonial authorities were viewed as under threat from female mobility missionaries, charities and colonial officers alike increasingly intervened to police girls’ sexuality, with the developmentalist colonial state aiming to save endangered young girls ‘from peril, from themselves, and most fundamentally from the societies that surrounded them’.<sup>83</sup> During the Mau Mau emergency, this concern transmogrified into a fear that morally-disruptive urban teenage girl and young women constituted a ‘serious security risk’ because they ‘encouraged their menfolk in subversive activities’, whilst younger girls were being pulled into

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<sup>79</sup> UNICEF, ‘Lessons Learned in Sierra Leone’, 6.

<sup>80</sup> Megan H. MacKenzie, *Female Soldiers in Sierra Leone: Sex, Security and Post-Conflict Development* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), p. 56.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>82</sup> Abosede George, *Making Modern Girls: A History of Girlhood, Labour and Social Development in Twentieth-Century Colonial Lagos* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2015), pp. 91-135.

<sup>83</sup> Abosede George, ‘Within Salvation: Girl Hawkers and the Colonial State in Development Era Lagos’, *Journal of Social History*, 44:3 (2011), 40.



prostitution by the social disruption caused by displacement or the loss of parents.<sup>84</sup> Children detained as Mau Mau fighters and adherents became a major focus of colonial ‘rehabilitation’ efforts to turn them into productive colonial citizens, but these efforts were distinctly gendered. Whilst considerable effort was invested in the rehabilitation of boys, disciplining them, educating them, initiating them into an economically productive colonial manhood, the limited efforts towards girls’ rehabilitation instead focused on turning them into well-behaved mothers and wives, adding skills like sewing and childcare to basic education and citizenship classes.<sup>85</sup> Successful rehabilitation was described as transforming girls from being ‘sullen, sour, unpleasant and downright ugly’ to ‘really pretty’.<sup>86</sup> Humanitarian concern with teenage girls’ behaviour and sexuality in post-conflict spaces reappears in the post-colonial welfare and juvenile reform projects conducted by INGOs. In the aftermath of the Congo Crisis, various SCF personnel noted that orphaned and displaced girls were becoming prostitutes, whilst others were too easily distracted by ‘the soldiers and the night clubs’.<sup>87</sup>

Such moralization also strongly informs contemporary attitudes towards girls associated with armed groups. Girls returning home are often (but not always) marginalized and excluded from their communities. Girls who had learned to socially navigate the violent and precarious but meritocratic hierarchies of armed groups often find it hard to readjust to the gendered and gerontocratic expectations of traditional communities, and many post-conflict societies experience a patriarchal backlash against women’s gains in war.<sup>88</sup> Humanitarian reports stress that girls become viewed as ‘violent, unruly, dirty or promiscuous troublemakers’.<sup>89</sup> Shepler highlights how boys in Sierra Leone were able to use discourses of ‘abdicated responsibility’, explaining away their wartime violence through claims of abduction, forced recruitment, drug

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<sup>84</sup> See International Committee of the Red Cross Archives, Geneva, B-AG 225 108-003, Rapport de mission du délégué Henri Phillipe Junod au Kenya 20 Feb-18 April 1957, 1954 Report, p. 20; Kenyan National Archives, Nairobi, AH/14/25, ‘Homes for Parentless Children and Unattached Females in Nairobi’, 15 July 1954; AB 2/69/18/1, R. B. Lambe, ‘Girl Children Beyond Control’, 22 March 1957.

<sup>85</sup> National Archives, Kew, FCO 141/6331 ‘Detainees and Detention Camps – Juvenile Detainees’, R. F. F. Owles, ‘Rehabilitation of Juvenile Detainees’, July 1955. Other records reveal the harsh treatment and neglect of many girls. Kenyan National Archives [KNA], Nairobi, AB/9/37, ‘Kamiti Women’s Camp – Complaints’, 64/1, 1955. See Ocock, *An Uncertain Age*; Bruce-Lockhart, ‘The “Truth” about Kenya’.

<sup>86</sup> KNA, AB/1/112 ‘Rehabilitation Administration- Women’s Camp Kamiti’, Monthly Report, 25 August 1956.

<sup>87</sup> University of Birmingham Cadbury Archives, Save the Children Fund UK, Box A122, Congo 1961-5, Visit to Leopoldville by the Secretary-General of the International Union for Child Welfare, 13-21 July 1961; Archives d’Etat de Genève, L’Union Internationale de Secours aux Enfants, Congo/Zaire, 92.63.14 T Ri/69-14, Centre d’accueil par jeunes délinquents, 1969-70.

<sup>88</sup> Legrande, ‘Lessons Learned from UNICEF Field Programmes’, 31; Elise Fredrikke Barth, ‘Peace as Disappointment: The Reintegration of Female Soldiers in Post-Conflict Societies: A Comparative Study from Africa’ (International Peace Research Institute, Oslo, August 2002).

<sup>89</sup> Save the Children-UK, ‘Forgotten Casualties of War’, 1-2.

use and indoctrination. Girls however are subject to explicitly moral discourses, and are therefore less able to use discourses of abdicated responsibility.<sup>90</sup> SCF-UK noted that communities displayed mixed responses to returning boy soldiers, but ‘unambiguous concern and moralizing about girls’. Girls are viewed a source of moral as well as physical (HIV, STDs) or spiritual (spirits of the dead) contagion: ‘communities also fear that [former girl soldiers] would “contaminate” or corrupt other girls, encouraging them to have sexual relations without family consent, dowry and official sanction’.<sup>91</sup> Marginalization or rejection by communities leaves former girl soldiers with few means of supporting themselves other than sex work, which compounds their stigmatization and isolation. Reports emphasizing the plight of girls formerly associated with armed groups justify humanitarian intervention on the grounds of a lack of community care and, as Burman and Pupavac argue, thereby rejuvenate colonial welfaristic and developmental discourses that suggest western organizations are better able to provide for children than their own families.<sup>92</sup>

Tempering these narratives of humanitarian salvation, however, discourses surrounding girls’ sexuality and the corruption of their ‘innocence’ in conflict zones were also likely underpinned by concerns about their sexual exploitation by the very forces that were supposed to protect them, with scandals surrounding UN peacekeepers and under-age prostitution reported by Rädde Barnen and SCF in Mozambique, and in subsequent DDRR processes.<sup>93</sup> A UNICEF report on Interim Care Centres for children in Sierra Leone quietly noted that the ‘risk of sexual abuse and exploitation exists in all forms of care’, whilst United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) remarked on how camp geographies at Gbarnga in Liberia left young women exposed to sexual harassment each time they had to walk through the male compounds to reach their own, illuminating a strain of self-criticism in the public reports of humanitarian organizations.<sup>94</sup>

Whilst early DDRR programmes were shaped by de-securitized constructions of girl soldiers as passive ‘victims’ of conflicts, gender-mainstreaming efforts and research in the early 2000s

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<sup>90</sup> Susan Shepler, *Childhood Deployed: Remaking Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 156.

<sup>91</sup> Save the Children-UK, ‘Forgotten Casualties of War’, 20-1.

<sup>92</sup> Burman, ‘Innocents Abroad’, 241; Vanessa Pupavac, ‘Misanthropy without Borders: The International Children’s Rights Regime’, *Disasters*, 25.2 (2001), 106.

<sup>93</sup> See Machel Report, 32; Elisabeth Rehn and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, ‘Women, War and Peace: The Independent Expert’s Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women’s Role in Peace-building’, (New York: UNIFEM, 2002), 61; UNHCR/Save the Children Fund-UK, ‘Sexual Violence and Exploitation: The Experience of Refugee Children in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone’ (2001).

<sup>94</sup> UNICEF, ‘Lessons Learned in Sierra Leone’, 27; UNIFEM, ‘Getting it Right, Doing it Right’, 15.

stressing girls' agency, plus efforts by local and international NGOs to incorporate girl's own voices and requests into their programs has somewhat shifted the tenor and focus of DDRR, leading to a greater focus on reproductive healthcare and support with community-reintegration. Since the early 2000s girls in the global south have been constructed as ideal neo-liberal subjects, more responsible than their young male counterparts and more 'worthy' recipients of aid for developing the future of their communities.<sup>95</sup> DDRR programmes became more responsive to girls' needs and began to stress girls' agency and resilience. Girl soldiers are increasingly viewed as particularly 'recoverable', with stress laid on their self-discipline, pragmatism, and determination to (re-)enter civilian, domestic life. The UNIFEM report on Gbarnga girls' interim care centre in Liberia reads as an almost Foucauldian disciplinary space, gendered female in its focus on domesticity: the girls were noted to have had input on the requirements and expectations for communal living, and were praised for how 'exceptionally' clean the camp was, and how everything ran efficiently on schedule, with the girls observed moving outdoors to play kickball at the precisely scheduled time of 3.30pm. 'Other scheduled activities included numerous daily classes on a host of subjects, devotion hours for religious observation and conflict resolution, and chores'.<sup>96</sup> UNICEF noted 'girls were more committed to skills training and income generating activities than formal education', as they sought to provide for their children or families.<sup>97</sup> However, whilst (I)NGOs emphasize that their vocational training programmes make girls self-reliant, the skills they are taught – like soap-making or hairdressing – often do not lead to sustainable livelihoods in local economies, and are more effective as psychosocial interventions promoting confidence than in providing employment.<sup>98</sup> Girls' rehabilitation and reintegration still relied on their ability to (re-)conform to traditional gender roles of female domesticity, productive labour and family duty: to be good daughters, wives and mothers. DDRR programmes for girl soldiers remain markedly underfunded and under-developed, and still struggle to address the immediate needs of girls formerly associated with armed groups, never mind tackling wider gender inequality.

## Conclusions

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<sup>95</sup> Offra Koffman and Rosalind Gill, 'The Revolution will be led by a 12 year-old girl': Girl Power and Biopolitics, *Feminist Review*, 105 (2013), 83-102.

<sup>96</sup> UNIFEM, 'Getting it Right, Doing it Right', 17; Michel Foucault, *Punir et Surveiller: Naissance de la Prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979).

<sup>97</sup> UNICEF, 'Lessons Learned in Sierra Leone', 21.

<sup>98</sup> Chris Coulter, 'The Girls Left Behind Project: An Evaluation Report for UNICEF/Freetown' (2004).

So what then does the shifting conceptualization of girl soldiers reveal about the relationship between gender and humanitarianism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century? Humanitarianism was heavily gendered, but insufficiently gender-aware or cognizant of the impact of its gendered assumptions, and particularly in how they intersected with ideas of age and race, leading to the marginalization and sometimes even disempowerment of African women and girls within humanitarian structures that were supposed to rescue, rehabilitate and even empower them. From colonial to contemporary eras humanitarian action has operated within and tended to reinforce patriarchal structures of power and authority, at state and community levels. Tensions between local and global constructions of both gender and age have led to contested assumptions about who is a 'girl' and to what forms of assistance they require and should receive. African girls were initially 'invisible soldiers' because gendered and generational assumptions about conflict prevented girls' involvement being recognized. Military roles were automatically gendered male, and adult by the international humanitarian bodies involved: girls' recognized roles were as victims, where they formed the main focus of aid appeals, with femininity and childishness collapsed to evoke sympathy, and intervention justified through (neo-)colonial discourses of African 'primitivism'. This focus on victimhood, however, 'politically disenfranchises children from their active roles in war and survival'.<sup>99</sup> Whilst children's involvement in warfare became increasingly recognised in the 1970-80s, 'children' were read as 'boys'. It took a confluence of child rights with women's rights, and concern about sexual violence, to render girl soldiers visible and bring them to the foreground of international humanitarian advocacy in the 1990s. High-profile victimhood however did not translate into effective intervention to 'save' and rehabilitate these girls: as Burman argues, a 'focus on suffering children avoids addressing the broader circumstances that give rise to problems'.<sup>100</sup> African girl soldiers' victimhood was shocking enough to generate awareness and advocacy, but not enough to generate sufficient action, perhaps because it was read as normative in an African environment – the iconography of suffering mobilized to evoke humanitarian sympathy and reduce distance between the victim and donor can also normalize that suffering and inhibit action.<sup>101</sup> Girls were triply overlooked in post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation, as children, as women, and as Africans, being either excluded from or marginalized within DDDR programmes. Girls were not securitized in post-conflict spaces; instead they were moralized. Girls', and particularly teenage girls', essential liminality here

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<sup>99</sup> Burman, 'Innocents Abroad', 243.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>101</sup> See Lilie Chouliaraki, *The Spectatorship of Suffering* (London: Sage, 2006).

comes to the fore: girls could be – and be construed as – victims, as innocent children and abused women, but they could also be dangerous and deviant females, or vectors of moral contagion. They could be sexually abused, and subject to abuse because of their sexuality. It is of course, cheaper and easier to focus on reforming girls’ morals than to address the wider structural violence and gender inequalities that marginalize them and drive many into identified deviant, ‘immoral’ behaviours like child soldiering or prostitution. Girls who had learned to socially navigate warscares to survive life in an armed group now had to navigate post-war economies and humanitarian networks that, despite the best of intentions, continued to underserve their needs, learning to adopt the gendered roles that would secure their survival: abused victims, dutiful daughters, or caring mothers. Humanitarian advocacy and intervention in the later twentieth century privileged representations of girls as victims of abuse, and largely supported the return of girls into ‘traditional’ gender roles as wives and mothers, but from the later 1990s, driven by feminist research and girls’ own testimonies there has been an increased recognition of their agency, and a reprioritizing of them as ideal recipients of neo-liberal aid. Whilst significant progress has been made in recognizing and supporting the needs of girls formerly associated with armed groups, DDDR and humanitarian interventions more broadly need to recognize girls’ personal and political agency, acknowledging both their vulnerability and their resilience. Girls, to paraphrase Graça Machel, need to be seen as a resource rather than a problem for post-conflict peacebuilding, but that resource needs to be appropriately acknowledged and supported in order to flourish.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Graça Machel, ‘Foreword,’ in Sharanjeet Parmar, Mindy Jane Roseman, Saudamini Siegrist and Theo Sowa (eds.), *Children and Transitional Justice: Truth-Telling, Accountability and Reconciliation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Law School/UNICEF, 2010), p. xi.