



Child Soldiers and the Impact of Violence and Trauma on Their
Psychosocial Development in the Democratic Republic of Congo
(DRC)

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degree of Master of Social Sciences (Conflict Transformation
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Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal**

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Declaration

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Mnikeni Comfort Phakathi
Student Name



Signature

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Date

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my late Father, uHheshe mtaka Nomahheshe waseNtuthwini ozalwa uThikithi. Ngiyacelwa boMncwango ukuthi ningivumele ukuba ngiqhubeke nalemfundo ngize ngethweswe iziqu ze (Masters). Thank you for guiding and strengthening me all these years. I know you wanted this and I'm certain that you are smiling with my entire family laphe nikhona.

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Table of abbreviations

AI	Amnesty International
BTT.....	Betrayal Trauma Theory
CAFF	Children Associated with Fighting Forces
CS	Child Soldiers
CNDP.....	National Congress for the Defense of the People
CPTS.....	Conflict Transformation and Peace Studie
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DSM4.....	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental disorders
FAES.....	Forces Armada de El Salvado
FARDC	Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo
FDLR	Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda
FMLN	Frente Farabundo Martí Liberación Nacional
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ILO.....	International Labour Organisation
IPSTC	International Peace Support Training Centre
LCA	Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement
MONUC	UN Organisation Mission in the Democratic republic of Congo
M23.....	Mouvement du 23
NGO.....	Non Governmental Organisation
PTSD.....	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
RCD	Rassemblement Congolais Pour la Democratic
SALW	Small Arms and Light Weapons
UK.....	United Kingdom
UN.....	United Nations
UNCRC.....	United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNICEF.....	United Nations International Children Emergency Fund
WV	World Vision

Abstract

This study has reviewed psychological, social, economic and political literature, which focus on analysing and quantifying the Child Soldier (CS) phenomenon. It acknowledges the contributions made by lawmakers and theorists in trying to understand and prevent the scourge from persisting in the Democratic republic of Congo and spreading globally. As proposals increase on how the children can be rehabilitated and reintegrated into original societies or places of safety, some activists prefer a long lasting political solution particularly an accountable management of natural resources through a democratically elected government. There are many factors contributing to the devastation suffered by child soldiers such as wide spread poverty and lack of infrastructure such as roads, schools and recreational facilities for children which inhibits development. Psychologists suggest digging deeper into the effects of stress and trauma on children affected by war because such children suffer pathologies greater than a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). In addition, political economists argue that natural resources dependence and the unequal distribution have prolonged the war in the DRC and neighbouring countries. Research proves that children show remarkable resilience when faced with danger and abuse. They choose to forget the life threatening events as a survival mechanism. Misremembering helps them survive initially at the military camps. They apply the same mechanisms during reintegration with safer communities.

Key words: child soldiers; armed conflicts; psychosocial wellbeing; DRC; Great Lakes Region; DDR

1. Chapter One. Introduction and Historical Background

1.1 Introduction

This study reviews psychological, social, economic and political literature, which focuses on analysing and describing the Child Soldier (CS) phenomenon. The study acknowledges the contributions made by lawmakers and theorists in trying to understand and prevent the scourge from persisting in the Democratic republic of Congo and spreading globally. As proposals increase on how the children can be demobilised and reintegrated into original societies or places of safety, some activists prefer a long lasting political solution particularly an accountable management of natural resources through a democratically elected government. There remain many factors contributing to the devastation suffered by child soldiers such as wide spread poverty and lack of infrastructure such as roads, schools and recreational facilities for children.

Psychologists suggest digging deeper into the effects of stress and trauma on children affected by war because such children suffer psychiatric problems worse than Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders (PTSD) (Shaw, 2003, Klasen et al., 2010 and Betancourt et al., 2013). In addition, political economists argue that natural resources dependence and their unequal distribution have prolonged the war in the DRC and neighbouring countries (Ndikumana, 2000). This study aims at building on the accumulated body of knowledge in understanding the effects of recurring violent conflict on the psychosocial wellbeing of children in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The study zooms in on resilience, positing that the children choose to forget the occurrences to survive the life as a soldier, on the one hand, as a reintegrated former child soldier and civilian on the other hand.

1.2 Historical Background

The Democratic Republic of Congo

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), former Zaire gained independence from Belgium in 1960. It was one of the first few African countries to gain independence in its time. The population is estimated at just over seventy million. The capital city is Kinshasa surrounded by 11 provinces (Weiss et al. 2013). The DRC is in the Great Lakes Region and has experienced recurring turmoil and sporadic violence for decades distressing not only local people but neighbouring states. In 2005 there were over three million people who had died and more had been displaced as a result of the drawn-out civil war (Vlassenroot and Huggins,

2005). These figures do not represent the statistics of deaths since 1960 when the DRC gained independence.

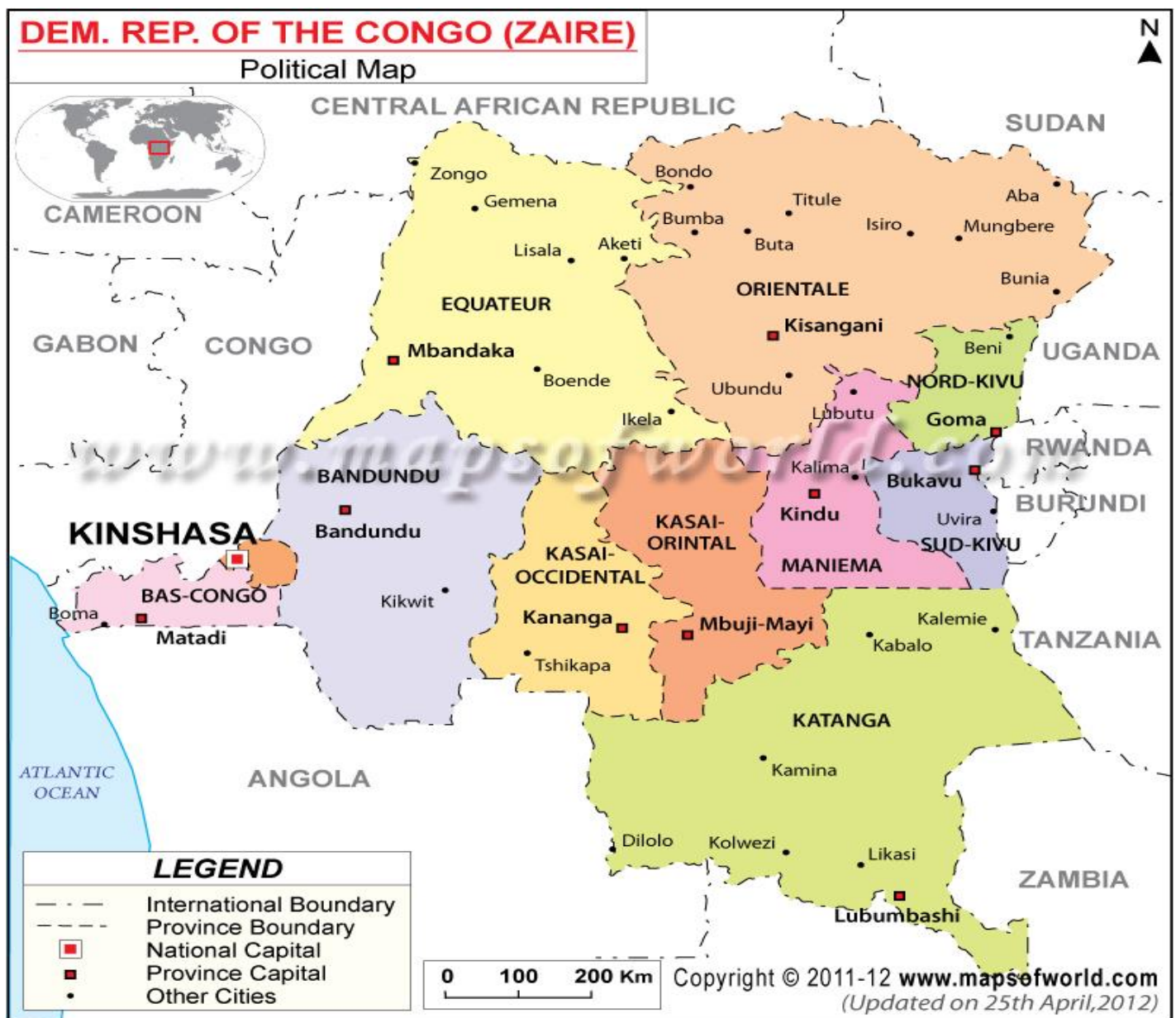
The key role players have been the *Mouvement du 23* (M23) politically opposed to the presidency and leadership of Joseph Kabila and known for the unchallenged seizure of Goma in 2012 (Kets, and De Vries, 2014 and Koko, 2014). In addition, the *National Congress for the Defense of the People* (CNDP) was established in 2006 and a proponent of ending presence of foreign militias on Congolese soil. The Politico-military movement led by General Nkunda also advocates for the conversion of the DRC into a federal state (Spittaels and Hilgert, 2008). In addition, there is the *Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda* (FDLR) composed of former Rwandans some of whom had directly participated in the genocide. They are the largest armed group in the Kivu Provinces (Spittaels and Hilgert, 2008). The *Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo* (FARDC), a politico-militaire group made up of integrated army units from different militias such as the Mayi Mayi and the government army (Spittaels & Hilgert, 2008). Significant contributors in the DRC conflict are the local defence militias called Mayi Mayi/ *Mai Mai*; it was formed in 2007 and is mainly made up of self-defence groups in the Kivu and beyond (Spittaels and Hilgert, 2008: 14 and Rouw & Willems, 2010).

The DRC government and militias have signed a considerable number of peace agreements but the war persists (Solomon and Swart, 2004). Important milestones towards peace have been taken including signing peace agreements and plans to implement, among other things Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration and Peace-building (Rouw and Willems, 2010). Agreements include the Lusaka Ceasefire agreement that was signed in July 1999. It brought about an elongated process that fostered some form of understanding between the government delegation and three rebel group representatives (Solomon and Swart, 2004). The Lusaka Ceasefire included other states, such as Zimbabwe, Namibia, Angola, Rwanda and Uganda (Solomon and Swart, 2004). Immediately after the assassination of Laurent Kabila however, Joseph Kabila (current DRC President) took power. He, therefore, expressed that although, on the one hand, it was a sad moment following the assassination of his father; on the other hand, it became an opportunity to rectify the injustices suffered due to war in his country. He openly criticised the influence of other countries in the DRC intrastate violence arguing that such involvement of countries such as Rwanda and Uganda had to cease immediately (Koko, 2007).

The speech by President Kabila was meant to restore confidence in the government and people of the DRC as well as the Great Lakes. He promised to support the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement (LCA) as long as “aggressing armies from Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda withdrew unconditionally and without delay” from the DRC (Koko, 2007: 35). He further criticised the agreement not only because it seemed complicated but also due to the fact that it allowed neighboring Rwanda and Uganda to remain in the DRC and squander natural resources while perpetrating wars (Koko, 2007). He ultimately decided to suspend the agreement and began direct talks with Rwanda and Uganda, among other countries, while rejecting the UN peacekeepers program (Koko, 2007: 35-6).

The 2003 Pretoria Agreement sponsored by the UN and South Africa, facilitated by former Botswana President Sir Ketumile Masire, saw a new era of peaceful dialogue between an embattled government and rebel movements. That was despite criticism for leaving out spoilers at the negotiation table. An inclusive agreement was reached that was to affect both the DRC and the entire Great Lakes Region’s political landscape (Rodríguez, 2011). The Great Lakes has had what Vorrath, (2011) referred to as mutually reinforcing, widespread and linked violent conflicts. She argues that the continuous civil wars in the Great Lakes are “strongly linked in a regional conflict formation that at times seemed almost impossible to break up” (Vorrath, 2011: 2). While conflict is commonplace, there is not much expected change in establishing and sustaining peace-building because there have not been profound changes in government leadership (2011: 3). The rebels are able to operate in different countries relying on the financial muscle built by exploited natural resources (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004) for mobility and negotiating access. The map below expounds the nature of proximity DRC and the neighbouring states have. The closeness creates opportunity for uncontrollable access not only as a result of wars from other countries but abundant natural resources to sustain guerrilla tactics and the recruitment of child soldiers.

Figure 1. A Political Map of the Democratic Republic of Congo.



Web1. (Accessed August 2014)

The political map indicates the landscape of a country ravaged by intrastate wars particularly in the Eastern region. It also shows how close to the borders are the neighboring countries that have contributed directly and or indirectly in the wars including Rwanda and Burundi. The DRC does not only share borders with nine other countries in the Great Lakes Region but is easily accessible through its porous borders (Ettang, 2011). Actually, the country's natural resource endowment makes it lucrative to neighbouring legal and illegal migrants who flock the country in search of resources and a better life. The DRC faces cross-border challenges, increasingly rife sexual violence and rebel groups from neighbouring states. It is affected by a

“proliferation of small arms and light weapons, refugee flows, displacement of population, migration, and land conflict continue to increase the threats to regional peace and security” (Ettang, 2011: 184). The inclusive government was meant to reduce both the cross-border challenges which mainly threaten security and thrive through the weakened government institutions but the persistent violence became a stumbling block (Boshoff, 2004).

Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo started before independence and continued immediately thereafter. The country became the private property of King Leopold II which led to the involvement of Europe, America and other countries in the West that participated in the prolonged civil strife. The assassination of Patrice Lumumba by Belgian and CIA agents coupled with the Backing of Mobutu Sese Seko demonstrate the unprincipled participation of the West in the DRC affairs (Gegout, 2009). The main source of conflict has consistently been access to easily available and heavily endowed natural resources. Other problems, such as ethnic clashes and territorial clashes, cannot be ignored. Evidence shows how profit-driven war-related interests have maintained the war in the DRC (Samset, 2002). For example, significant deposits of cobalt, copper, uranium, coltan and other natural resources including timber are the main reason for political and economic conflicts to strive persistently. Rebel groups in the East use such resources to fight the government (Lujala et al., 2005).

Historical accounts moreover, reveal that the name of the state changed three times from Congo Free State, to Zaire then DRC. Since the discovery of the land of plenty, the people are subjected to frequent civil wars, cheap forced labour and the recruitment of children for military work (Brett & Specht, 2004 and Carpenter, 2012). Besides, the involvement of local and international actors in exploiting easily available and seriously in-demand resources including coltan and gold fuel the conflict (Rodríguez, 2011). The state's violence also emanate from neighbourhood violent conflicts and the movement of people from neighbouring countries through the porous borders into the DRC plus continuous search and harvesting of timber (Putzel et al., 2014). For example, as already indicated, dissidents from Rwanda fled Rwanda and regrouped in the DRC and formed the *Forces De'mocratiques de Libe'ration du Rwanda* (FDLR). Even though they cannot be clearly referred to as Rwandans as some were born in the DRC, such population consists of Rwandan Hutus in the main. They escaped Rwanda during the genocide period (Rodríguez, 2011: 176). They formed rebel groups and began amassing huge quantities of natural resources to fund their movement while hoping to establish a comeback on the Rwandan government (Rodríguez, 2011).

Child Soldiers in the DRC

Empirical data on the DRC has demonstrated consistent trends in the continual practice of recruitment of child soldiers for military responsibilities. Evidence also shows the DRC to have the largest concentration of child soldiers in the world with estimated Nine Para-militia groups involved in the conflict and enlisting child soldiers (Bell, 2006). The states' army and rebel groups are perpetrators and have actively contributed to this humanitarian crisis (Becker, 2004 and Wessells, 2006). To be precise, all the parties involved in the DRC conflict recruit children to become soldiers (Becker, 2004: 2). Researchers have argued that these children become exposed to gruesome violence and they witness the worst atrocities during the recurring violent conflicts. They either witness or commit butchery, burning and boiling of bodies, cannibalism, decapitation, killing of own families, repeated rapes and mass killings with the phenomenon almost exclusively occurring in developing countries (Van Bueren, 1994, Becker, 2004, Clemesac, 2007 and Szijj, 2010). Child soldiers should not be analysed as a DRC and Africa only singularity as it remains a global phenomenon. The international community has been affected directly and indirectly for decades by such injustices occurring outside of the recognised World Wars.

An example may be found in Central America where the smallest yet densely populated state of El Salvador experienced volatile transit from a violent and repressive government to a civil war that lasted over a decade between 1980 and 1992. The left wing *Frente Farabundo Martí Liberación Nacional* (FMLN) rebel coalition and the *Forces Armada de El Salvador* (FAES) alliance of state armed forces are reported to have recruited children less than 16 years of age to participate in the civil war. Legislation was manipulated to allow for the recruitment of children into military activities (Verhey, 2001).

Research has revealed the complexities relating to child soldiers and violent youth in countries not experiencing civil wars in the full sense but with a strong presence of gang and organised criminal activity such as the United States of America (USA) (Wessells, 2006). The broader analysis by Wessells has its shortcomings, however, as it is a view that depicts an analysis that criticises the classifying of children involved in any form of violence whether formal and or informal duties, compelled or voluntary as *child soldiers* or any other stigma imposing names. The criticism lacks a clear and credible definition of such children. What it clearly points out though is how children in Africa, Asia/Pacific, the Americas, Middle East and Europe/ Eurasia constitute the contested number of child soldiers that has constantly been

about three hundred thousand. In essence, the research shows exploitation of children for military reasons from almost all corners of the globe. Africa and Asia have been the most affected by the phenomenon (Wessells, 2006).

It is difficult to establish and conclude on one specific cause for children's participation in military work. The reasons vary from country to country and they also differ from one conflict to the other within a state (Brett & Specht, 2004). The estimated figure as critics argue cannot be verified because it is almost impossible to access the military camps and ascertain the number of child soldier at a given time. Child soldiers include both boys and girls younger than ten years of age up to the age of 18. Africa has more children involved in war than any other continent currently because of the civil wars and escalating regional and ethnic tensions (Wessells, 2006). Children's rights are grossly violated in many ways during violent conflicts leaving them brutally maimed and murdered regardless of whether they become part of the armies or not. Actually, children have (and continue to in current wars) suffered from trauma, exploitation, displacement and socio-economic and political deprivation. Despite political, humanitarian, legal and academic attempts to understand and propose solutions to the phenomenon, the number of child soldiers and the nature and extent of atrocities grow (Wessells 2006 and Honwana 2006).

The involvement of children in wars is a humanitarian crisis as it results in children being deprived of opportunities to play, to be protected, acquire basic education, live with families and interact with their immediate environment peacefully. The natural environment and involvement of adults in their development constitutes what Lareau (2011), refers to as 'cultural repertoires' for raising children. The repertoires are applicable despite family's economic and social status and gender related interpretations. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) under the theme 'World Summit for Children' concluded that children have rights to health, education, and freedom from violence and exploitation. Significantly, the Summit noted that the "first line of protection should be the family...in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding" (Web3, Roscoe, 2011 and Diers, 2013). Furthermore, the summit proposed that day care centers are an important form of support (web 3.). The protection of children and their fundamental rights have positive implications for the broader society. If children and their rights are placed at the centre of policy development and needs and interests at the forefront, societies will develop and heal (Roscoe, 2011: 14).

It is worth noting, moreover, that several international organisations including the United Nations (UN), Amnesty International (AI), Human Rights Watch (HRW), World Vision (WV) and many Non-Governmental Organisations have contributed to the intensification of campaigns aimed at reducing the number of children in the bushes (Roscoe, 2011). Research and proposed legislation are evidence of the meaningful contributions by local and international institutions fighting to protect children from all forms of deprivation, war, and exploitation and forced labour. Efforts to establish and enforce international law to prevent children under 18 in participating in military work are in advanced stages. However, there are still major contestations about the age restrictions. Even though 15 years old is mostly recognized by international criminal law, “eighteen is becoming the new normal” (Drumbl, 2012: 135). The Optional protocol I and II to the Convention of the Rights of a Child (CRC) adopted in 2000, the International Labor Organisation’s (ILO) Convention no. 182 and The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of a Child brought into action in 1999 are among major international steps taken to protect children from participating in military work and child labor in general (Drumbl, 2012).

1.3 Definition of key terms

a) Child Soldiers

The definition of a child soldier was initially created in the meeting that established the Cape Town Principles in 1997. This followed the assignment given to Graca Machel by the then Secretary General of the United Nations Boutros Boutros-Ghali (Wessells, 2006 and Szijj, 2010). The landmark enquiry into the impact of war on children remains unfinished business. It has also led to a plethora of other pertinent investigations on children in affliction and their wellbeing on short and long term basis.

The Child soldier concept can be hypothesised contextually. This means that it is crucial that one recognizes the differences attached to the definitions of a ‘child’, on the one hand, and child soldier on the other hand, in different autonomous communities around the world. Formal definitions emanated from the Cape Town principles (1997), and defined a child soldier as any person under the age of 18 years involved in any kind of regular or irregular armed group in any capacity. It further explains that the activities may include but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers and accompanying of such groups other than family members. The children include girls recruited for sexual purposes (Szijj, 2010). The United Nations

International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) uses the same definition; adding that it does not refer only to children carrying arms but by simple association (MacMullin & Loughry, 2004: 460).

Szjj, (2010: 334) contends that the term 'child soldier' in itself when pieced together is hazardous and problematic. The definition of the term childhood should be understood not only from an age point of view. In fact, due to certain social practices, such as child headed household, children cease to be referred to as children before they cross the 18-year mark. In essence childhood may be better explained from a responsibility perspective than an inference only drawn from their chronological age. It is as a result of social expectations that childhood is then defined by social roles, expectations and responsibilities (Honwana, 1999: 52). An example outside of conflict may be that of girl children getting married and bearing children at the ages of thirteen and fourteen years (Honwana, 1999). It stands to reason, therefore, that a child taking similar responsibilities as a ten-year-old soldier can no longer qualify to be called a child since they begin to play roles and responsibilities of adult beings (Honwana, 1999: 52). The UNICEF defines a child irrespective of socio-cultural conditions as someone less than that of 18 years of age unless the laws of a particular country set the legal age for adulthood younger than 18 years (Web3.). The UNICEF's position, however, negates the realities about socio-cultural perspectives that may not have been currently enacted into state laws such as the early marriages. Further arguments on the definition are discussed in the magnitude of the child soldier phenomenon under literature review.

b) International Law

International Law can be interpreted as the law only concerned with governing relations between nation-states and intergovernmental organisations (Buergethal et al., 2009).

Hughes-Wilson and Wilkinson, (2001) defined Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration as follows;

c) Disarmament

Is the collection, documentation, control, and disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives, and light and heavy weapons of combatants and often also of the civilian population. Disarmament also includes the development of responsible arms management programs.

d) Demobilisation

Is a formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from armed forces or other armed groups. The first stage of demobilisation may extend from the processing of individual combatants in temporary centers to the massing of troops in camps designated for this purpose (cantonment sites, encampments, assembly areas or barracks). The second stage of demobilisation encompasses the support package provided to the demobilised which is called reintegration.

e) Reintegration

Is the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. Reintegration is essentially a social and economic process with an open time frame, primarily taking place in communities at the local level. It is part of the general development of a country and a national responsibility and often necessitates long-term external assistance.

1.4 Research Problems and Study objectives

This study is designed to fulfill the requirements of a Master's degree in Conflict Transformation and Peace Studies (CTPS) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Knowledge acquired will enable the researcher to formulate a view on the plight and challenges faced by children in the Democratic Republic of Congo paying needed attention to the Eastern region. The research will build a body of knowledge on Conflict in Africa, the DRC, the dynamics in the Great Lakes Region, Sub Saharan Africa and the involvement of the International community in African security issues.

1.5 Ethical considerations

This study reflects an analysis of existing research findings and official documents. Essentially, plagiarism and academic honesty had to be carefully considered. Fowler (2003: 1) cautions that "using someone else's ideas or phrasing and representing those ideas or phrasing as your own, either on purpose or through carelessness, is a serious offense". The study went through an evaluation to detect plagiarism using a credible *turnitin* scan. In addition, Fowler advises that avoiding plagiarism safeguards the integrity of every writer. This was part of an ethical consideration in writing this study.

Apart from plagiarism, this research had to be conducted "to the highest ethical and procedural standards within the limitations imposed by time, money and opportunity"

Becker, Bryman and Ferguson, (2012: 57). This study had to be subjected to those rigorous ethical considerations. Firstly, it was of great importance to look at the nature of people chosen as a sample for this research and these are children in a coup and war prone country. Secondly, the study requirement stipulates that subjects (such as children) be protected from any social, political, economic and physical harm or costs after the research is completed (Becker, et al. 2012). Despite being desktop, the study shows an ethical consideration that proves 'reflexivity' in order to imagine what the children under 18 years go through when associated with armies. In fact, deliberate attempts have been made, such as investigating their thinking patterns, to show thoughtfulness and awareness of what transpires in the bushes and camps where children are oriented into armies (Lahman, 2008). Besides the needed consciousness on researcher-child participant, this study has limited ethical research consideration because children are neither interviewed nor interacted with regarding the content requirements and methodology of a desktop short study.

1.6 Hypothesis

Children participating in war directly and/or indirectly suffer tremendous stress and other forms of psychosocial challenges. The appalling and life-threatening events endured by soldiers even well into adulthood was the basis for the research that occasioned the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) found in the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM4) (Kerig & Wainryb, 2013). The description in the DSM4 reveals the nature and extent of trauma suffered by children in conflict and other disastrous conditions such as hurricanes and child trafficking. This study assumes that children exposed to recurring conflict and in forced movement and abuses suffer tremendous psychosocial development inhibition. Secondly, children suffering from extreme levels of trauma would consciously or unconsciously decide to misremember their plight. The Betrayal Trauma Theory (BTT) as espoused by (Freyd, 1998 and DePrince et al., 2012) elaborates the hypothesis at length under chapter two.

1.7 Key Objectives

Following are the reasons accounting for why the study focuses on the DRC,

- a) The DRC has had the worst forms of killings outside the World Wars and natural disasters.

- b) It has the largest concentration of child soldiers in the world constantly at approximately 7000 and these child soldiers are mostly between 12 and 17 years old (Johannessen and Holgersen, 2013: 55).
- c) The war has occurred for over a decade and still continues especially in the Eastern region.
- d) Displaced people are recorded mostly in the East that is the main focus of the study and records also show displacement from the West and Northern region of the DRC (Bell, 2006).
- e) The violent conflicts are not only associated with the natural resources such as diamond but have devastating effects on the Great Lakes region (Marten, 2009).
- f) Furthermore, the affected children do not only get exposed to atrocities but contribute to the violence. They are deprived of opportunities to basic health, education, family and community life.
- g) Significantly these children are exposed to extreme forms of trauma, discrimination and isolation.

1.8 Limitations of the study

The study is almost absolutely dependent on other researchers' views on the subject because of the very sensitive nature of the discussion on child soldiers. Secondly, the research could not be done in the DRC because of distance and availability of resources. It cannot be ignored that information regarding the conflict in the DRC is mostly "Western media representations"... resulting in 'repeated familiar colonial and postcolonial imagery' (Baaz and Stern, 2008: 58). The outsider account, however, cannot downplay the significance of the child soldier phenomenon and its ramifications on both the country and the international community because it is also a global problem. The limitations are addressed by an analysis that draws from both historical ethnographic research and current news bulletin to identify and construe new findings.

Journal articles and books were identified as main sources for this study. The content was divided into topic-related groups with the aim of illuminating the salient topics seen to be crucial for the study. Over (*n*-122) articles were identified for this study. The first topic consisting of a sample of (*n*-14) articles discussed definitions of children involved in armies, the reasons for enlisting and their estimated figure globally. Secondly, Articles and books focused on the psychosocial wellbeing of children in war (*n*-19). Articles quantifying the role

played by natural resources to fuel conflict, which has a significant bearing on the use of children in wars, were ($n=11$). Reintegration of former child soldiers forms an important part of this study. As a result ($n=15$) articles were identified to expose the dynamics of reintegration, which form part of an important recovery process for ex-combatants. The other journal articles, dissertations and news bulletins covered topics such as *Law and child soldiers*, the *Betrayal Trauma Theory* and *politics in Africa* in relation to the plight of children as a result of violent conflicts. The choice of articles followed a purposive technique because the researcher purposely selected those books and articles that specifically discussed each of the relevant topics mentioned above. The purposive technique was based on the intentions of the study and knowledge of the topic by the researcher. Both the topic and the historical background became useful in selecting material. Another technique used was snowballing. Each article identified had similar sources listed as related articles, which were useful. The researcher was able to find both similar and or differing views on each chosen topic under the list of references provided by already selected readings.

The credibility of desktop studies in general and content analysis in particular stems from a long history. It is done by repeatedly reading and coding data to “achieve immersion and obtain a sense of the whole” of the studied phenomenon (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005: 1279). The analysis of existing content may be used to validate existing theoretical framework. For example, the BTT is validated by being tested against extreme forms of abuse instead of the conventional domestic abuse previously associated with. The theory gets supported and extended (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

The study remains a relevant and important niche area for knowledge production relating to child and human development juxtaposed with impeded development as a result of violence and disturbed patterns for child and human development. It highlights on the impact of violence on children of which some are not considered to be in a position of taking rational decisions because of age and dependency. In addition, the chosen country has been confronted with a recurring scourge of ruins, social fragments, and humanitarian crisis and unaccounted for natural resources. The volatile social, political and economic situation in the DRC warrants not only empirical data collection but also rapid content analysis and refining. The analysis of existing empirical data represents an opportunity for increasing the body of knowledge on African security, child soldiers, psychosocial response to violence and abuse. Furthermore, this study analyses an important context, which is the DRC, emphasising its

location in the African continent and the Great Lakes (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls and Ormston, 2013).

The methodology reflects the objectives of the study highlighting the relationship between violence and diminished chances for a universally envisaged child development pattern. The research is limited to an analysis that emanates not only from secondary data directly focusing on violent conflicts and the involvement of children but gradually introduced means to prevent such. Apart from focusing on research and official documents, more information was drawn from news-focused sources. The diversity in the data collection may prove demanding, but enabled the analysis to be diverse and relevant. Actually, the news aspect deliberates on current affairs and responses from such institutions as the United Nations and International Labour Organisations (ILO) on such violent occurrences.

There is particular attention allocated to the Eastern region because of continuing wars despite recorded state and regional agreements. That region is the most affected by the civil war. Secondly, many of the rebel groups both from Congo and the neighbouring countries get started in the same region because of the porous borders and plentiful natural endowments (Mumwi 2012). Those include underground resources such as coltan and others such as timber. The natural resources are easy to access and play a significant role in funding the establishment of insurgents and their sustenance.

1.9 Research Questions

- a) What contributes to children enlisting for military responsibilities?
- b) What is the impact of war and violence on children living in the DRC?
- c) What programs are in place to enhance disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of child soldiers in the DRC?
- d) How effective is implementation of the application of local and international law in preventing recruitment of children into military work?

2 Chapter Two. A Summary Review of Literature on Child Soldiers in the DRC

2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on examining how children in the DRC have had to adjust to the lives of combatants. They become perpetrators and or victims of continuous violence that has led to mass victimisation and displacement in Africa and beyond. The nature and extent of brutality and victimisation of children in armed conflict has invited significant attention from researchers and policy makers (Mann, 1987, Cohn, 1994, Macksoud & Aber, 1996, Faulkner, 2001, Oliveira, 2003, Becker, 2004, Betancourt et al., 2009, Lee, 2009 and Maxted, 2010). The body of research quantifies the atrocities that rob children of an opportunity to be nurtured and developed reasonably, normally, and morally in accordance with the standard expressed by the UN agencies such as the UNICEF. Notably, there is certainly a challenge faced by many African states. However, the DRC remains the major focus because of the civil war that started in 1998. The DRC is under scrutiny because in 2005 alone, thousands of children were killed, displaced and socially deprived. These atrocities were accompanied by 25 000 reported cases of rape in the Eastern region (Bell, 2006: 3).

2.2 The Magnitude of the Phenomenon

The nature and extent of the child soldier happenings is quantified in three different aspects. Firstly, it is an estimated number of the children in violent conflicts with particular emphasis on the DRC. Secondly, there is an attempt to respond to the question of the affected countries around the world. The third aspect studies the contended definitions of the phenomenon to justify the current estimation of the child soldier humanitarian issue.

The child soldier phenomenon has dreadfully been part of almost all civil unrests in Africa and beyond. In fact, despite Africa being the most affected recently, the entire globe has experienced in one form or the other of forced recruitment of children to directly participate in wars (Verhey 2001). Government armies and rebel/liberation movements alike have recruited children for military and other responsibilities such as spying (Wessells, 2006). If the definitions of a child include the age and responsibilities and expectations from the individual, then these people cease to fit in such a definition. The vacuum demands a befitting definition of the individual who cannot be an adult because of age but also not a child as a result of behavior and experience. It should, indeed, probe a necessary question on the acceptable definition/s of a soldier as well. It is becoming essential that there be an

investigation on the definitions, number, location and the activities the children do to predict the possible future occurrence of the phenomenon. The investigation is likely to encourage research aimed at separate philosophical definitions of children, on the one hand, and soldiers younger than 18 years of age on the other hand.

Besides a clear definition of the term 'child' in such circumstances, researchers also grapple with the legitimacy of using 'child soldiers' as an umbrella term. The challenge lies in that the term tends to be limiting. For instance, in Northern Uganda children were abducted for sexual exploitation purposes while others spied and some became carriers of supplies but were never trained to carry arms and use them (Wessells 2006). There are, therefore, difficulties in defining them as children or adults who are soldiers (Wessells 2006: 6). It is in that regard, therefore, that some researchers crafted and preferred the disputed term *Children (minors) Associated with Fighting Forces* (CAFF).

The controversy associated with the label is centered on the deprivation of support for those who maybe be seen as porters, spies and sex slaves instead of child combatants. Also, it is important to understand how the social and environmental alterations such as displacement and the abrupt and forced creation of refugee camps (largely due to violent conflicts) impact on the psychosocial wellbeing of these children. It remains a daunting mission for researchers and policy makers. Wessells (2006: 4) holds the view that an understanding of the urgency and scale of the calamity may "leverage both public support and governmental and intergovernmental action to end child soldiering". Important as it may be, the position lacks clarity on what is to be done when the atrocities mostly on poor individuals and communities are sustained intentionally by both local and international power structures such as governments. The separation of children based on forced allocation of duties-such as military work, leaves the children with stigma and creates unnecessary prejudice. Such affect children differently at times according to their gender. This becomes evident during reintegration into original communities.

Child soldiers are part of almost every war and conflict globally. In most cases they are victims. Child soldiers can be traced as far back as the thirteenth century. Fox (2005) and Szijj (2010: 344) relate to the historical existence of child soldiers by arguing that they should not be seen as a new occurrence. The writers further claim that if there is anything new, it can

only be the unprecedented proportions and not the uniqueness of the phenomenon (Fox 2005: 28). What further exacerbates the issue is that it has now spread globally and across cultural backgrounds, which could easily make the occurrence seem new. Moreover, the importance of the recruitment of children for military purposes should not only be interpreted as phenomenal because of numbers but significantly as a result of rising frequency and distribution (Fox 2005: 29). It has, indeed, become a new approach to modern interpretation of violent conflict.

There is an estimated global figure of three hundred thousand children recruited for purposes of military work consistently (Becker, 2004, Betancourt et al., 2009, Lee, 2009 and Szijj 2010). Wars in more than 80 countries globally have not only seen the slaughter of two million children but many have been displaced and disabled (Betancourt et al. 2012). Even though the statistics on survivors are not publicised as much as those about displaced and killed child soldiers, there are many children that survive recruitment and horrific military camp life (Klasen et al. 2010). There is also an omission on the survival mechanisms children employ to endure violence in the camps and stigma in communities after reintegration. The Betrayal Trauma Theory is one of the useful theories that explain the survival mechanisms employed by the harmed children. Due to uncertainty on the figures and the difficulty in obtaining accurate ones, the figures remain virtual estimations. Child soldiers are either abducted or become soldiers voluntarily. Both circumstances leave psychological and physical scars that no form of aid may repair. Becker (2004) argues that the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda forced over 8000 children to become soldiers between 2002 and 2003. This is an example of a rebel movement operating in Central Africa including the DRC that contributes to the global harm on children.

The warlords in most instances and government armies to a certain extent see children as a force that is cheap, compliant and effective (Becker 2004). While conflict is resolved in one state or between states, new wars erupt across the globe opening space for the recruitment of children under 18 years. That leads to the recruitment of more children to become soldiers (Becker; 2004). Despite commitment by states and the international community to protect children from violence and child labour through legislation such as the 1989 UN convention on the Rights of the Child; children under the age of 18 continue to be recruited into military tasks in many civil wars (Singer: 2004). In order to understand children outside of military life there is, moreover, a need for a proper understanding of military thought and life. What is

a soldier outside the ‘child’ definitions? Due to the scope of this study, defining a soldier is only limited to those soldiers under 18 years of age. It is the thinking of the army personnel that influences the recruitment of children. It should, therefore, form part of the broader enquiry to understand military officers. According to Huntington, (1957), military life in accordance with national security policy should “enhance the safety of the nation’s social, economic, and political institutions against threats arising from other independent states” (1975: 1). Clearly, the recruitment of children is a clear violation of such policy.

As evidenced by the increasing non-state militias, the crafting of security policy cannot, therefore, only be within the scope of independent states. It should, however, extend to all forms of threats on an autonomous state. In essence, the existence of non-state militias seem to be inevitable, hence the need for regulation despite formal recognition from the UN. The regulation will help children living in isolated camps far from their communities that are almost impossible to access because of strict security measures put in place by rebel leaders (Sziij 2010). In the Democratic Republic of Congo, children have been involved in and became victims of conflict that has left over five million victims since the war started in the late 1990s. The rate of the death of children due to war in the DRC is greater than general child deaths caused by normal diseases in China which is a country 23 times its population (Bell: 2006).

2.3 Reasons for enlisting as child soldiers

The involvement of children in any form of labour is heavily dependent on the political and economic conditions of that specific society. Consequently, the political and economic conditions have a bearing on how the society organises itself and the relations built with the external world. Ideological differences probably stemming from instability and volatile political history influence the choice of solutions amidst indecisive and panic-stricken dialogues or lack thereof. Angola, Sudan, the DRC have had many African peace deals strained by political instabilities (Englebert, and Tull 2008). The political decisions on peace excluded stakeholders considered insignificant in those conflicts and the resolutions thereof. The exclusion gives birth to the uncertainty of adherence to the agreements. In many cases, the government is unable to protect its people and the people find relief in violence (Sziij 2010: 348). This has been the norm in the DRC.

Children are an extension of a broader society dominated by adults and their prescribed views. Dictating for children to become child soldiers, as their society and its government plays a vital role especially in condoning and perpetrating the practice. It can be argued thus that child soldiers get recruited within a state or outside of a state because they are affected directly or indirectly by the conflict. For instance, child soldiers recruited in the DRC include children from the DRC and the neighbouring countries such as Rwanda. The recruitment of Rwandese shows the effect of war, whether positive or negative, on neighbouring Rwanda. Despite the relationship between their accessibility juxtaposed with the Rwanda Genocide, they contribute on the fueling of war in the DRC currently (Spittaels and Hilgert 2008).

It is already documented that the reasons for enlisting vary revealing profound continuum between internal and circumstantial choice on the one side and coercion on the other (Derluyn, Vindevogel and De Haene 2013). While some rebel groups recruit through forced methodology such as abduction, violence and threats, there are instances where children are encouraged by their families and broader social networks to join the military. Those circumstantial choices are meant to address family problems such as poverty. They also seem ideal when a community is threatened. For instance, conflict on land and ethnic disputes leave children convinced by the community to train as soldiers for its defense. It is mostly done on the basis of ideological motivation, economic prospects and protection from violence (Derluyn et al. 2013). When interviewed the former child soldiers cite ideological commitments, access to economic activities and prospects for education likely to be provided by the armed groups (Derluyn et al. 2013).

Children as young as ten years are forced to leave school, family and their communities to participate in civil war. The practice was abolished by almost all states except Myanmar in the mid-twentieth century but resurfaced as more rebel movements were formed (Brits and Nel 2012: 467). Brett and Specht (2004) alluded to three major factors contributing to children joining armed forces. Firstly, most of the children come from poor backgrounds and they come from conflict torn areas. Secondly, the choice of a combatant lies in individual personal history which enables the child to decide on participating or not. The third and last aspect illustrates how children are compelled to be combatants because all support structures that form their world crumble and leave them unable to choose anything else but enlisting as child soldiers (Brett and Specht 2004: 3-4). In essence, the three reasons for joining have been found to be unique to individuals. The unique ability to make a choice to participate can

be attributed to the ability of a child to show resilience and the attitude towards reintegration. If child reliance to brutality and stigma is real, then the BTT is justified in proposing that children choose to repress their experiences of abuse. These children escape from the camps and risk being recaptured and punished in other instances killed for possible fear of sharing internal information to enemies.

Honwana (1999: 52) describes the reasons for recruitment from the view point of the rebel leaders and posits that children are seen as being “synonymous with wealth” because of their abilities to grow and excel under strenuous conditions. In a rather radical position Rosen (2014) argues that local, national and international reasons for the recruitment of children should be considered when analysing child soldiers. Premising the argument on the wellbeing of child soldiers, the author suggests that countries immersed in war leave not just adults but children with no option but to join and become direct participants in the war. This proves then that research should not only investigate the impact of war on children but also how a community can prevent an ongoing conflict because that in turn will save children from enlisting as soldiers.

In addition, in a different book Rosen (2005) states that it would be a misguided conclusion if analysts were to formulate a view on child soldiers from a stigmatised point of view. The writer discourages an analysis emanating from a well-propagated view of “a young boy, dressed in a tee shirt, shorts, flip-flops, holding an AK-47...a tough-talking twelve-year old in a camouflage” (Rosen 2005: 1). Firstly, the view is skewed because it excludes women and girls as soldiers. Secondly, the stigma-oriented view provides incomplete information about other critical activities the children get to do in the camps such as spying. The conditions are unique and despite similarities with regards to reasons for war such as disputes over natural resources, there continue to be socio-cultural and political differences in the manner in which the conflicts start and persist. In quintessence, it is being too idealistic to imagine that the children live in peaceful areas and brutal rebel leaders/groups ‘forcefully conscript’ them all over the world. Therefore, Rosen (2014: 3072) contends that an analysis into the phenomenon “require[s] a more nuanced perspective of the conditions under which” they assume the military responsibilities. An example of essential investigation should be a focus on the effect of being a spy of a terrorist grouping on children involved.

2.4 Political economy of the DRC war

Historical events show weak and unstable governance entrusted with huge quantities of natural resources to be vulnerable to violent conflicts. The 1999 Lusaka Ceasefire agreement, 2002 Pretoria Agreement and many other agreements including the 2005 elections were significant political moves towards peace. However, protracted conflict especially in the Eastern region has rendered the DRC a collapsed state (Sziij 2010: 344) because it fails to establish itself as a country with a government accountable, democratic and protective of its citizens. Even though ethnic violence including but not limited to alienation of Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge from the rest of Congolese population (Rouw and Willems 2010) natural resources remain at the heart of the DRC violence (Carpenter 2012).

War is driven by certain economic values, ideological convictions and transactions to continue. Similar to any commodity to be exchanged in a market, the existence of war requires an easily available human resource, easily obtainable weapons such as Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and unsettled dialogues between communities and governments. Children have become a commodity in conflicts and serve handlers to advance their missions resulting in continued devastation and exposure to brutality. The DRC has had constant conflicts and civil wars resulting in millions of victims so many times and it has been dubbed a country that has experienced Africa's World War (Sziij 2010: 354). The economy plays a pivotal role in the involvement or lack thereof of the neighbouring countries. Evidence point to implicit and or explicit involvement of the Central African Republic, Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda and many others even outside of Africa in the conflict in the DRC. Interference by countries in the Great Lakes Region and rest of the world happens for ethnic reasons, Rwanda bears testament to this. However, the role of economic interferences as a centripetal force cannot be underestimated due to the great demand for natural resources (Sziij 2010: 354).

Figure 2. Child labour (Mining of coltan)



Web3. (*Accessed in November 2014*)

The figure above demonstrates how children are used mostly for illegal mining of coltan. This is part of the DRC's economy that is not accounted for and contributes to the perpetration of conflict. While agriculture remains the major contributor to the DRC economy, it is not disputed that the mining sector both formal and informal remains likely to be the country's primary vehicle for economic growth (Dagne 2011). The question would be on policy promulgation and implementation to the favour of the DRC than proving an antithesis. The country boasts almost all natural resources in demand in the international market and more especially needed by the developed countries. In fact, in 2001 a panel of experts appointed by the United Nations reported how the mineral resources and other forms of wealth were exploited in the DRC. The scramble is even done by people and companies outside of the DRC local economy. Needless to say, the international actors "operate as gatekeepers between different competing groups and thus can never resolve conflict between them" (Vlassenroot, and Raeymaekers, 2008). Bringing an end to the conflict would jeopardise their interests in the natural resources.

Political regimes also played important unique roles in opening spaces for local, regional and international actors to access control to the places and plunder their resources. Mobutu Sese Seko through his divide and rule tactics did not only open space for neighbouring Rwanda, Uganda and Angola to access the DRC but promoted ethnic polarisation. That has contributed into the economic dynamics and exacerbated the conflicts particularly in the Kivus (Mumwi 2012). There is contention on semantics especially on whether the process should be termed, illegal, exploitation or even looting. Despite accuracy on terminology, evidence indicates that since the discoveries by colonial masters and the promotion of conflict by King Leopold II

there has always been massive mineral deposits in the DRC (Marten 2009: 467). Additionally, the natural resources made the DRC one of Africa's main economic powers before the discoveries and demand for oil in the 1970s (Marten 2009).

According to the DRC Ministry of Mining between 1989 and 1995 copper, diamonds, oil and zinc were the most produced minerals and metals in the DRC. The natural resources are wide spread and demands fluctuate but quantity is undeniably massive. The resources are not only sources of income and livelihood but also sources of the ongoing conflict. The DRC Soldiers with armies from Rwanda and Uganda through an initiative called *Rassemblement Congolais pour la Democratie* (RCD) dispossessed a syndicate of stockpiles of money and other valuables looted and illegally transported to Kampala and Kigali for exports (Jackson 2003). Suffice to say, conflict is also between local and neighbouring countries seeking to amass the heavily endowed resources. Millions of Congolese could not be prevented from relocating to the Eastern region because of mining even though the region is extremely violent. As a result, mass exodus responded to an abrupt demand for Columbite-tantalite commonly known as coltan in the year 2000 (Jackson 2003 and Nest 2011). It was again an opportunity for economic empowerment and inevitably a contributing factor to tensions and violent conflict due to population growth and competition.

The DRC has abundant natural resources (Szijj 2010) that were referred to as conflict minerals on the Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act signed by the USA president in 2010 (Dagne 2011). Children are used, therefore, as soldiers in the fight for the resources as well as exploited as child labour to extract them. The international community has been involved in taking important policy decisions about the DRC civil wars. For instance, since 1999 the United Nations Security Council essentially deployed personnel to constitute the UN Organisation Mission in the DRC (MONUC). The mission was meant for peacekeeping missions authorised to use force if necessary (Dagne 2011: 9-10). Adversely, the mission has been criticised for its inability to provide sufficient protection to civilians constantly targeted by government forces and rebel groups. The UN secretary general Ban Ki Moon admitted to the uncontrollable humanitarian crisis in the DRC in 2008 (Szijj 2010).

2.5 Psychosocial wellbeing of child soldiers

Even children leading normal lives experience childhood trauma in peaceful communities. Trauma experiences vary in nature and depend on intensity of the experience and resilience

by the affected child. For example, constant movement of family, changing of immediate environments, friends, parents' divorce and strict parenting may cause stress and trauma (Suárez-Orozco, 2000). However, distinctly, children in war-torn areas such as the Democratic Republic of Congo experience severe forms of trauma. They become targets and lured into military responsibilities by state armies and Para-militias (Johnson et al. 2010) thus hindering their nature-nurture growth and development patterns. The children involved in the wars according to Bell (2006: 5) suffer chronic lack of education. These children suffer recurring traumatic experiences for a long time since both boys and girls could get recruited from the age of seven (Wessels 2011: 8) and may be kept until their adulthood. This is done in the DRC. War leaves over four million children in the DRC unable to attend primary school education. Extreme levels of poverty, displacement and abduction make school out of reach. The children are unable to pay for the school fees as they live in bushes far from any infrastructure including schools, safe homes, and recreational facilities resulting in distracted yet necessary routine life because of the volatile civil strife (Collier and Hoeffler 2004).

In essence, their mental state has to shift from being a child to a soldier with responsibilities much more demanding than that of adults in peaceful environments. These children (child soldiers) are compelled to choose between two distinct moral conditions formed by the difference between social peace and civil war (Honwana 1999). This is evident in Kerig and Wainryb's (2013) research that posited that children's involvement in armed combat is calamitous and chronic. The children suffer from exaggerated levels of trauma. Their trauma is complicated and widespread (Kerig & Wainryb 2013). In a sample of over 280 former child soldiers in Sierra Leone, findings reveal a complex nature of the trauma suffered by children. In addition, data shows how a significant number of families misconstrued what their children suffered as child soldiers (Kerig & Wainryb 2013). A misunderstanding of the experience would consequently bring about failure in reintegrating and rehabilitating the ex-combatants.

Child soldiers do not only suffer from challenges relating to socio-political and economic issues but research illustrates the extent of psychological predicament that is likely to be fatal as compared to physical wounds. Psychological scars gradually haunt the child and a cycle of violence and yearning for vengeance become inevitable. A vengeful former child soldier is a clear threat to humanity and global peace. Writers describe the severity of trauma suffered by

children in war zones as a phenomenon beyond Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The researchers postulate that the type of child affected directly or indirectly fit

The profile of a complexly traumatised child: Their traumatic experiences not only have been repeated and pervasive, but they have involved interpersonal assaults, both suffered and perpetrated, at the behest of the adults on whom these youth should have been able to rely for nurturance and guidance (Kerig and Wainryb 2013: 687).

In essence, the trauma is intense regardless of being a victim or perpetrator. Apart from the emphasis on traumatic experience, Kerig and Wainryb (2013) demonstrate that the children have a strong sense of resilience because they are able to resume normal lives. Also, they are considered resilient because the experience is intermittent yet they are able to recover each time it happens. They suffer remarkable atrocities but never succumb to permanent mental damages. Wessels (2006: 29) proved that child soldiers withstand the worse conditions but they “remain functional and engage in the roles and activities appropriate to their culture, age, gender and historical context”. Kerig and Wainryb (2013) further show that social support has become a pivotal component in the reintegration of child soldiers into their respective communities because it restores mental instability and sanity.

Children according to Wessels (2006: 29) need the following resources to strengthen their resilience. Thus, child soldiers’ need

- a) Strong individual temperament coupled with emotional support from a caring parent and or guardian,
- b) To develop age appropriate competencies together with group support from peers,
- c) To participate in local traditions and stable routines meant to provide a sense of meaning and continuity and
- d) To provide basic needs by community including safe public spaces, quality education and training on problem solving capacities to enable them to cope with adversity.

2.6 Local, Continental and international law on child soldiers

According to Verhey (2001), the two pillars of legal framework on the involvement of children in armed conflicts are the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and Additional Protocols thereto of 1977. Protocol 1. Article 77 of the 1949 provides that “children shall be the object

of special respect and shall be protected against any form of indecent assault” (2001: 25). Also, the Article stipulates that parties involved shall give children needed care and aid for any reason including age. To enhance the effectiveness of the international law on children in armed conflict, the United Nations adopted an Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict to the existing Conventions. Critically, the Optional Protocol replaced Article 38 of the CRC, effectively, increasing the minimum age of direct participation in hostilities to 18 years (Verhey 2001: 25).

Other significant milestones in international law and child soldiers include but not limited to Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 1999 which, characterized recruitment of children into the military as a worst forms of child labour (Verhey 2001: 26). Also, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of a Child stipulates that states should ensure that there are necessary measures to achieve maximum prevention of children from taking part in hostilities (2001: 26). However, such legal framework and provisions as provided for by the Conventions are only applicable to state armies rather than “non-state parties” (Verhey 2001: 26). The Democratic Republic of Congo has become a clear example of a country experiencing human rights violations and the abuse of children’s rights specifically. Johnson et al. (2010) found in the Eastern DRC that 67% of the households have experienced conflict related human abuses. In addition, children became direct victims of such human rights abuses (Johnson et al. 2010: 559). Research reveals that legislation directed at the prevention of the recruitment of children for combat responsibilities have continuously been reactive and patch work that has resulted in many inconsistencies (Fox, 2005).

There are two main pillars that strengthen the protection of children in local and international conflicts. The first one falls under the notion of the protection of general civilians of all ages in any form of violent or armed conflict; the second is based on the protection of the vulnerable to any effects of armed conflict (Mann 1987: 33). The pillars illustrate the importance of protecting the vulnerable in many different ways such as avoiding the use of the civilians as human shields. Equally, civilians should not be used as hostages during wars or any form of attack (Mann 1987). The difference between the growing nature of law that protects children in general and child soldiers during war and current use of children as hostages and soldiers is profound. For example, the Insurgent group called Boko Haram in Nigeria abducted over two hundred young girls in what is referred to as disregard for human rights (UN Special Representative, 2014).

The reaction by the UN Security Council (UNSC) promised to actively follow the matter and institute sanctions on the Islamists militants (Reuters, 2014). Achieving success in the protection of children in general remains a significant challenge. It stands to reason that many remain vulnerable to insurgents in Syria and Palestine where killings are indiscriminate and children are being used as human shields and victims of terror tactics (Almanar news 2014). The United States of America has made significant strides in contributing to the prevention of children as child soldiers. Despite its dwindling economic power, it is still considered a super power in many fronts. The USA has improved its outlook and commitment to the prevention of child soldiers in Africa and beyond. In a paper titled *From Opponent to Ally*, Becker (2014) elaborates on policy changes that show the US moving from being an obstacle to a transition that has seen the enactment of laws aimed at ending the child soldier debacle.

The US has firstly, supported international efforts to end child soldier through agreeing to 18 years as minimum age for direct participation on hostilities (Becker 2014: 600) on the Optional Protocol. Secondly, it established two significant policies aimed at preventing child soldier recruitment and follow up on accountability. In 2008 the US passed the Child Soldier Prevention Act aimed at restricting provision of military education and training and other forms of related aid to countries recruiting and using child soldiers (2014: 602). Among the six countries found to still use child soldiers were Burma, Chad, DRC, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen. Ironically, a majority of these countries received military assistance from the US (Becker 2014: 603). The US furthermore in 2008 passed the Child Soldier Accountability Act aimed at enforcing the international standards on the Federal states with considerable penalties such as life sentence if the child is found dead (Becker 2014: 603).

Apart from a significant transition on legislation, the US also cut military financing of the DRC demanding for an action plan with the UN focused on ending the use of child soldiers. For seven years the UN struggled to solicit a UN action plan from the DRC. Through diplomatic pressure and sanctions on military finance, in 2012 they signed the Action Plan and agreed to end the recruitment of child soldiers and allowed the UN to conduct verification visits to the DRC army barracks (Becker 2014: 606). The significant milestone can only deal with international recognised structures such as the state army, which leaves the child soldier recruitment by the rebel groups unaccounted for.

2.7 Reintegration and current issues

National consciousness, instead of being the all-embracing crystallization of the innermost hopes of the whole people, instead of being the immediate and most obvious result of the mobilization of the people, will be in any case an empty shell, crude and fragile travesty of what it might have been. (Fanon, 1961)

Developments in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are a reflection of a disastrous national consciousness that was predicted by Fanon. Coincidentally, the prediction happened during the country's transition from colonial rule. The liberation of the Congolese people from Belgium represented a travesty of what was meant to be a liberation of the people and their territory. The DRC, like many African countries, established a development agenda through the mobilization by political party leaders of "trade unions, farmers' organizations, merchants' groups, students and intellectuals...and [their] views fell within the more liberal politics of 1950s African Nationalism" (Cooper, 2002: 159 &164). Fanon predicted this consciousness as 'an empty shell, crude and fragile'. Many calamities including the recruitment and use of children as child soldiers can be attributed to false consciousness. Similarly, the failure to reintegrate the former child soldiers into their communities remains the consequence of a faulty decolonization agenda and process.

Becker (2004) argues that despite numerous attempts to reintegrate former child soldiers, the demobilization and reintegration programs are less effective. As a result child soldiers experience severe violence before and after the reintegration into their communities. During the recruitment process they are forced to kill even their own family members or witness the killing of close relatives. They are abducted from schools, homes and from the streets into military camps for training (Howana 1999: 2 and Derluyn, et al. 2004). Also, Boyden (2003: 344) argues that children get subjected to interpersonal violence, assault, murder, rape, physical and sexual abuse and robbery.

Despite meaningful progress initiated and advanced by the UN MONUC and USA of the tripartite plus process meant for local and regional stability. In the DRC particularly, the Eastern region remain with insecurities that have ripple effects on the Great Lakes Region. The Eastern region of the DRC remains marred by violent conflicts exposing children to condescending rebel groups. The circumstances persist despite the widely noted involvement of the international community in bringing stability (Dagne 2011: 3-4). Furthermore,

dwindling diplomatic relations with neighboring states and the involvement of rebel groups such as the Lord Resistance Army escalates the instability (Dagne 2011: 4).

There is, however, literature proving that women and girls suffer even worse psychosocial and economic deprivation during the reintegration process because their specific needs are not given reasonable attention (De Watteville: 2002). That is, despite daring reports indicating that girls cover a relatively large portion of the conscripted youth also exposed to sexual exploitation, they get discriminated against (Derluyn, Vindevogel & De Haene 2013: 870). Notably, girls are not only combatants but get subjected to double victimization because they are stigmatized for being sexual slaves. The scars, visible or not, suffered by young girls in armies have long-term implications on their wellbeing and relations with communities. Honwana reveals that

Young women's sexual reputations and marital prospects can be seriously compromised by their captivity and, in some cases, maternity. Women's experience of sexual violation can be more difficult for them to overcome, in part because it is often an "open secret"—recognized by everyone but seldom discussed or dealt with. Female survivors of captivity in military camps bear traces of their war experience as indelible, although not always as visible, as the victims of landmines (2009: 7).

Bayer, Klasen & Adam, discovered that more than a third of former child soldiers from both Uganda and the DRC "met symptom criteria for PTSD" (2007: 558). Importantly, such children presented unwillingness to reconcile. Whether this was an innate attribute to reject reintegration on the part of affected individuals or deliberate rejection of the credibility of reintegration programs remains to be proven. Besides, there is a clear indication that the children suffer tremendous psychological problems due to the recruitment and having them used as child soldiers. That should form a basis for inclusive and effective reintegration programs. However, there is no clear correlation between reaction caused by individual psychological problems and their socio-political and economic conditions' responses. As a result, another important question could be whether the traumatic experiences or leaders of the groupings such as the *M23* and *Interhamwe* influence those preferring revenge even in their psychiatric beds (Kwon, 2009). Significant in many of the studies on child soldiers and consistent with many findings, is the consensus that child soldiers suffer "high levels of

exposure to violence” (Betancourt et al. 2013). Notwithstanding different conceptions and reactions to violence, the former soldiers are likely to prefer revenge than reconciliation during and after reintegration (Bayer et al., 2007).

Reintegration is frustrated by lack of political will from the government and dissidents. Bayart (1993) strongly believe that leaders neither promote peace nor ensure successful reintegration because they get preoccupied with retaining political power. In an excerpt, Bayart (1993) argues,

As soon as he has acceded to the highest office having escaped the traps set by adversaries, the lucky successor must in as comradely a way as possible attempt to weaken his opponents in order to prevent them from attempting to take their revenge. But he must also take care not to demoralize them too much, and offer them remunerative sinecures, thereby compromising his plans for renewal; liberalization and moralization of political life...confront the designs of the patrimonial officials who, having helped into power, lose no time in starting to talk about the replacement (Bayart 1993: 224).

The DRC is ravaged by a seemingly complicated political cataclysm. In the words of Bayart (1993), obsession with power is at the center of the disastrous puzzle. Even though romanticized that those who ascend to power do so out of sheer *luck*, the passage demonstrates the inevitable hurdles that prevent leaders from achieving their personal/movement aspirations (to liberate their people) and promises (to do it during term of office) before being elected. Reno (2002: 837) presents a similar observation, stating that DRC politics is infested with factionalism and “economic interests appear to predominate, crowding out ideologically motivated mass reform and revolutionary movements”. Where economic interests and factionalism are the order of the day, patronage politics and remunerative sinecures become a sense of the security for those in power (Bayart 1993). Patronage and sinecures conveniently prolongs the discussion for replacement but leaves noticeable trails of destruction. Equally, the neglected agenda of peace building and reunifying ex-combatants, in the context of this study, with own communities gets held in abeyance.

The impact of the political will to end conflict transcends individual influence to mobilize for war. That is, the involvement of political organizations both local and international such as

local NGOs within the DRC and the UN sanctioned organizations-if sensitive to local issues, are likely to establish peaceful communities. However, in the DRC war remains a recurring phenomenon partly because of the already stated factional and economic interests. Also, children remain vulnerable to recruitment for military purposes. The child soldiers do so voluntarily in other instances (Honwana, 2009 and Brett, & Specht, 2004). The motivation to join voluntarily is a sense of security and escaping socio-economic problems such as poverty. In 2011, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) supported reintegration efforts in 22 countries and territories, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) was in 9 countries while United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) deployed the missions in 15 countries (McMullin, 2013:1). It stands to reason that a successful demobilisation should precede a successful reintegration. However, it remains a fallacy as postulated by the UN Secretary General High-Level Panel on Threats, that "demobilizing combatants is the single most important factor determining the success of peace operations" (McMullin, 2013: 2). Even reintegration is not the single most important process towards a successful peace-building program. Needless to say, all processes in their unique nature remain essential components of quelling violence, establishing and maintaining peace.

The support aimed at reintegration should entail both resources and sensitivity to gender related needs if it is to be successful. Resources include human capital such as trained social workers. It also comprises of the availability of infrastructure (roads), employment and education facilities. Sensitivity to community reasons for rejecting the children is not enough. Instead, their gender based needs are of long-term importance. Such needs should form priorities in the programs aimed at reintegrating the devastated youth. There is consistent documentation of social adversities experienced by former child soldiers upon return to their communities of origin and organised settings such as refugee camps.

Derluyn, Vindevogel & De Haene (2013: 871) contend that the former child soldiers get subjected to processes that end in discrimination, stigmatisation and exclusion. As a result, they do not only struggle with adjusting to their new environments but the stigmatisation elongates their emotional and psychological suffering. The challenge also resides in the inability to consider the needs of both the community and the former soldiers in trying to reintegrate the two hostile groups. Communities are themselves horrified. They need attention and preparation before they accept the ex-combatants some of whom are known to have killed and destroyed property. In many instances the affected communities receive no

orientation into the life with former soldiers leaving them skeptical and non-receptive. Their needs are hardly considered or even catered for by the rehabilitation and humanitarian programs (Derluyn, Vindevogel & De Haene 2013).

Reintegration remains a problematic process if established into a hostile environment. According to McMullin (2013), due to the possibility of atrocities inadvertently, or intentionally committed by the former child soldiers, communities would not be willing to accept their return or even worse, living in the same community with them. They are also opposed to humanitarian assistance given to the former soldiers that does not include them as former victims and affected community members (2013: 3). A political will, therefore, according to McMullin (2013: 5) especially that of intervention, would likely fail as a result of

- a) A misconception by external political actors of the challenges faced by local people in as far as security is concerned,
- b) Misinformed conceptions result in unforeseen problems that defeat the existing plans orchestrated by both local, national and international role players,
- c) Political actors are reacting only to current problems, hence they lack insight to utilize distant past experiences that could have been successful and may be applicable to new experiences,
- d) Since a lot of aid comes from international actors, their skepticism and lack of commitment in providing aid to former child soldiers hinders the programs' success chances,
- e) The perception that a successful reintegration actually means taking the children back to their poverty stricken and violence prone communities prevents possible reintegration programs,
- f) The care and honor accorded to military veterans for example liberation movements, have differ significantly to that of former child soldiers, hence it encourages detrimental stigma and stereotypes that are unnecessary in a sensitive process such as reintegration.

We also know that on the political level our own reality, however fine and attractive the reality of others may be, can only be transformed by detailed knowledge of it, by our own efforts and by our own sacrifices (Cabral, 1966).

The view by a political figure well respected by his contribution in the liberation of Guinea-Bissau and ushering into independence is relevant to the reintegration woes in the DRC. Despite the boldness and sternness at which the speech was composed, these African liberation movements seem to have been ill-prepared to not only take over from colonial rulers but also to introduce new forms of governance. The new forms of governance would have culminated in independent ways leading society, managing natural resources and controlling trade. Actually, the colonial masters already consciously neutralized the African liberation leadership, which explicitly employed national consciousness as a tool for mobilizing masses and liberating their people. Religion was used as an important weapon for neutralizing the leadership. For example, “Christianity brought the convert into relation with the colonizer’s God...signified the colonization of the mind” (Cooper, 2002: 27). It can be argued, therefore, that dependency on the God of the colonizer resulted in systematic dependency on the aid of former colonial masters such as Belgium in the DRC even for reintegration programs.

Reintegration programs in their different communities record both negative and positive perceptions and outcomes. With regards to perceptions, the programs are accepted because of the belief that they consequently will foster peace in the communities (Rouw and Willems, 2010). Practical impacts include “fewer robberies, and roadblocks; and ex-combatants taking part again in their communities” (2010: 20). There are, however, recorded deficits associated with reintegration and the involvement of local communities. The successes or lack thereof of uniting a community seemingly depends on the status of the conflict. That is, if the conflict continues, there are obviously going to be challenges in demobilising the young soldiers and reintegration into their disintegrated communities. Like all the other components of DDR, Reintegration is hindered by “ongoing conflict, implying a constant possibility for demobilised combatants to return to fighting” (Rouw and Willems, 2010: 20).

The second noticeable challenge faced by the local role players is the flow of funding and information from funders to their international allies which triggers down to local NGOs. Besides unclear and bureaucratic lines of communication, there are also conflicting purposes for which the money is allocated. There are also imbalances in the allocation of funds which created tension amongs reintegrated groups (Rouw and Willems, 2010). Furthermore, the programs are hindered by the realities that there “are too many demobilised children” (2010:

20) to receive reasonable support. These numbers turn to exceed the expectations and mandate of the UN missions meant for children alone.

There is clearly recorded lack of capacity to cover all the needs associated with children that are ex-combatants cannot be ignored in this study. Even UN officials confess that the numbers of claimants are way beyond their capacity. As a result, both government and international organizations are accused of false promises and lack of commitment in ensuring successful reintegration programs (Rouw and Willems 2010). In essence, former child soldiers are neither given sufficient time to recover from their traumatic experiences nor equipped with survival skills to be able to live civil lives again. Even salaries are only paid for only three months to the unemployed former child soldiers, subjecting them to poverty and dependency (Rouw and Willems 2010).

There can be no effective analysis of the local/ internal and international influence that excludes the government involvement in relation to opposition organizations. Signed agreements include the Lusaka cease-fire agreement in 1999 and the Provisions establishing the Transitional Government in 2003 buttressed by the involvement of international community in trying to end the calamities in the DRC are a few of many recorded attempts (Beneduce et al. 2006). To elaborate, Beneduce et al. (2006) postulates that significant stalemates that include; military composition, misapplication of power-sharing agreements and embedded ethnic and political cleavages that prolong violent conflicts. Inevitably, children get recruited into the ideological differences and military activities. The international efforts whether for appropriate reasons (Congolese interests) or not (access to natural resources), to reintegrate the former child soldiers remain futile. After all, reintegration is hindered by the persistent violence in the communities. To put it in context, Mbembe (1992) wrote,

Conflict arises from the fact that the postcolony is chaotically pluralistic and that it is in practice impossible to create a single, permanently stable system out of all the signs, images and markers current in the postcolony; and that is why they are constantly being shaped and reshaped, as much by the rulers as by the ruled, in attempts to rewrite the mythologies of power (Mbembe, 1992: 8).

There is no doubt that fragmented approaches to effecting reintegration mostly between local and international role players, play a significant role in the recorded failures. Evidently, there

are divergent systems at times in stark contrast, which cause conflict and stumbling blocks in the reintegration programs. The Psychiatric hospitals called Soins de Sante Mental (SOSAME) and traditional healers in the city of Bukavu and Eastern Congo represents such. These institutions existed before the colonial era but continue to haunt communities subsequently depriving them of the opportunity to access effective healing from their trauma from war (Kwon, 2009). The head of these Psychiatric hospitals remains adamant that people suffering from psychological problems can be treated using traditional methodologies. Dr. Winkler carelessly argues, “Traditional medicine and healers are the main reason why people often come late” for treatment and care in institutions such as SOSAME (2009: 368). The argument represents firstly, ignorance of the effectiveness of traditional healing methodologies Africans living in the DRC use. It also represents the exaggerated supremacy of Western healing methodologies.

There are clearly different perceptions to mental health problems associated with trauma from war and other similar events. While it is a reality that the communities believe that psychiatric problems may emanate from witchcraft, it remains problematic when Doctors interpret traditional healing as witchcraft itself. Traditional healing remains one of the preferred approaches used on patients from war related psychiatric problems. The effectiveness on every patient requires a critique that could be applicable to Western forms of healing. It is indeed inappropriate to argue that SOSAME as a Western healing medical center “is a scene of uneasy coexistence between witchcraft and modern psychiatry” (Kwon, 2009: 367). Instead, it should be seen as an institution working side by side with traditional healing institutions irrespective of their status and recognition by government. Such conceptions and misconceptions create an opportunity for dialogues and action. They should result in efforts that would merge Western and local methodologies of healing. This is likely to help former child soldiers suffering from psychiatric problems as a result of traumatic experiences.

Verhey posites that the essence of traditional methods to reintegration (inclusive of healing) should be centered on knowledge that the former soldier is in a process of “establishing a civilian life” (2001: 15). Traditional methods include re-establishing destroyed family relations. Actually, the reunification of child soldiers with families and similar alternatives remains the most “effective reintegration strategy” as compared to temporary centers (2001: 15). The ex-combatants need families because they still need to establish lost attachment

patterns. Attachment will assist in their independent decision of bearing children and living “with or without a partner” (2001: 15). The family component is besides key foundations such as psychosocial support, education, skills development and employment opportunities.

The former child soldiers need reintegration as a first instance and essentially require immediate healing and rehabilitation but remain in need of access to all basic human rights as espoused by the United Nations charters. The involvement of political, medical, traditional role players needs concerted efforts to carry this process to its finality. A peaceful community (with reunified families) represents an integral part of such finality. Another aspect of the finality, in addition, is respecting and upholding the people’s dignity. That includes clean wards, social workers, religion for moral regeneration and economic empowerment. Merging traditional and Western clinics effectively cluster into convenience psychological, religious and medicinal approaches to be used on the ex-combatants.

In a postcolonial era-as conceptualized by Mbembe, conflict would likely subside if the many *chaotically pluralistic* approaches can be used to the advantage of the distressed communities as a result of war (Mbembe, 1992). In essence, there is potential that-as part of reintegration and rehabilitation; the systems of healing would work together. The Western approaches, derive authority and supremacy from official recognition by government through ‘limited’ funding (Kwon 2009). This represents a government disregarding the Congolese traditional healing, subverting African intellectualism and causing long queues to the psychiatric hospitals obviously becoming an overburden. That on its own remains a potential source of conflict. Mbembe argues that people in positions of authority encourage confrontation when they force people into submission (2002). It clearly becomes forced submission if the government does not recognize African healing methods through budget allocation and monitoring and instead promotes disparities between the competing institutions of healing. Religion, notwithstanding Western influence has a role to play in demystifying traditional healing negative outcomes.

2.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, there is evidence pointing to poor governance, heavily endowed natural resources and infiltration by external factors in the recurring violent conflict in the DRC. Ethnographic research shows, in addition that globally, there are systematic programs instituted to support children emerging from traumatic military life. Despite government involvement noted as being partial, many of the DDR programs are carried out by Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) (Derluyn, Vindevogel & De Haene 2013). Challenges in reintegrating the former soldiers with communities are evidently exacerbated by behavioral disorders from the children as a result of trauma. It is also inevitably caused by a focus on the children's rehabilitation excluding the needs of the equally traumatised communities. Apart from fear of former child soldiers, NGOs addressing reintegration suffer bullying from donors and insufficient funding to mend the fragile relationships.

3 **Chapter Three.** Data Analysis and Interpretation

3.1 Introduction

The empirical data has shown the nature and the extent of the recruitment of children into military responsibilities. The constant recruitment of children as young as ten years old has maintained the figure of child soldiers at three hundred thousand over decades argues Betancourt et al. (2012). Despite the contending views on the number, there is consensus on the existence of such occurrence globally. This chapter is a summary of an analysis developed from the different perspectives on the definition of a child soldier including questions of where they can be found? How do they become child soldiers? How are they affected by the exposure to the violent conflicts especially on their psychosocial wellbeing? Significantly, there is an analysis on the phenomenon in the DRC paying attention to the programs established to prevent the recruitment, effect the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) into communities. Significant in the analysis is the position that children affected by conflict decide to forget so as to avoid pain, overwhelming information, or terror (Freyd 1998: 61).

This study paid the needed attention to a country experiencing recurring humanitarian crisis. The DRC since 1998 saw the killing of people and other related deaths higher than WWII. It became a site of unthinkable atrocities on a daily basis (Baaz and Stern 2008). Actually, according to the Child Alert, a bulletin sanctioned by the UNICEF recorded approximately 4 million people that died or disappeared as a result of the violent conflict. Importantly, over half of the deceased are children. Equally important, children are involved in the killings as perpetrators (Bell: 2006). The children are recorded as victims, witnesses and or perpetrators. The UNICEF bullet recorded that the devastating news does not make headlines anymore. Also, those conflicts are isolated and in remote areas resulting in challenges accessing the children for aid and relief. Disappearance of children can be closely linked with displacement of millions never accounted for even after episodes of the recurring civil strife (Bell: 2006).

A study on conflict analysis and the understanding of violence on victims as well as perpetrators forms part of the developmental agenda in Africa. Indeed, such studies ensure a thorough analysis of the conflict. In addition, they become starting points for policy development. Ballentine and Nitzschke (2005) argues that,

The political economy of armed conflict should be seen as an important addition to contemporary conflict analysis and policy development by those in governments, international organisations, donor agencies, NGOs and the private sector who are concerned with war and peace (Ballentine and Nitzschke, 2005: 3).

3.2 The views of the soldiers

Between 2005 and 2006, Baaz and Stern conducted research that was meant to locate the views of the soldiers in the DRC (Baaz and Stern 2008). The aim was not to show support and side with the soldiers whom have continued to cause havoc in the Eastern region and the country. On the contrary, this was meant to “comprehend and articulate their identities, their roles as soldiers and the violence they perpetuate...” (Baaz and Stern 2008: 61).

There is no significant difference in the lives of younger soldiers from the adult ones. They experience similar training. They kill and get killed in a similar fashion (Vlassenroot and Huggins 2005). Besides, they are frustrated and dissatisfied in their daily conditions even after demobilization. The income earned both on illegal militias and government soldiers is extremely low and result in soldiers’ involvement in illegal income earning activities (Baaz and Stern 2008: 65). Soldiers get beaten up and argue that it becomes a requirement to do so. In addition, the cruel treatment is justified as an important preparation for war; those who fail to make are labeled as inept and women. The “place... prove one’s manhood” (Baaz and Stern 2008: 67). A clear association of military with masculinity is demonstrated.

Female soldiers have to work harder to fit in the military since they suffer prejudice as a weaker sex. Absurdly, in the interviews, females seem too keen to emphasise the stereotypes than male soldiers. Seemingly, the stereotypes “appealed to some of the women soldiers...” (Baaz and Stern 2008: 68). The female soldiers joined the military because they intended to fight and prove their strength (Baaz and Stern 2008). The adult soldiers literally joined for different reasons as against those of the children. They even said they wanted to mimic famous Western actors they observed in films (Baaz and Stern 2008: 69). However, children enlisted under different conditions.

Similarly, girl child soldiers enlist for almost similar reasons to that of male child soldiers. For example, they get recruited in two distinct instances. On the one hand, they are abducted or forced to join the military. On the other hand, they enlist voluntarily (Brett 2002).

However, there are significant differences in the manner in which girl child soldiers are treated in the trenches. In a study investigating the experiences of girl child soldiers around the world, Brett (2002) found that they are likely to suffer sexual abuse. Brett argues that “there is significant correlation between abduction/forced recruitment of girls and wide scale and systematic sexual exploitation...” (2002:2). Importantly, the girls show tremendous resilience such that they would act fearless when in the face of threat and brutal treatment (2002: 5).

Girl soldiers enlist because they want to escape abuse at home. In the DRC, because of the violence in communities, girls cannot wait to be victimized hence decide to join the army. In a quest to escape violence from her home in Colombia, a girl soldier accounted how she planned to escape.

One of my mother’s men tried to abuse me when I was younger.
He tried to abuse and because I didn’t let him he got angry. He used to
fight with my mum and he used to fight with me...so I didn’t want to live
with my mum anymore (Brett 2002: 3).

Also, child soldiers are discouraged from thinking, talking or even establishing a contact with their families. They begin to lose their sense of self, time and attachment with families. The leaders of army groups ensure that both girls and boys forget where they come from. This includes forcing the children to forget their parents. As soon as they joined the military, another girl soldier in Angola added that; “At the base you cannot talk about your family, or talk about your village. They told us: here just forget your parents” (Brett 2002: 2).

3.3 Theoretical Interpretation of the reaction of children to conflict

A scientific view into the reaction of children when confronted by adversity may differ mostly from intensity and frequency. Even though the previous line may become agreeable it may prove inconsistent. As a result, this study reflects on the betrayal of children by family, community and country and exposure to extreme forms of trauma that leave permanent scars. To draw from a related theory, Freyd (1998) attempts to explain why instead of healing children in Congo may decide to forget or misremember their plight. They tend to live as though they had never been in war where they disremembered and killed other soldiers and civilians while abused by their leaders. The theory applies to both male and female former

soldiers whom despite experiencing different forms of trauma such as repeated rape for girls resolve to hide that knowledge from awareness. That is called knowledge isolation (DePrince et al. 2012).

One of the significant aspects relating to forgetting by the abused is the challenge the support structures have in accounting for the memory of the victims. Since they rely on self-reports of the experiences, misremembering implies that even those children whom may have experienced worse form of atrocities and trauma are likely to filter the information and project what may seem (to the victim) significant at a given period (dePrince et al. 2012). This explanation gives a clear picture of possible behaviour of former child soldiers desperate to be reintegrated before they even heal from their experiences, self-hate and other behavioral disorders likely to come out over time and haunt them and their community again. Children do not only remain malleable after the military experiences but the atrocities remain out of their grasp and interpretation leaving them delusional. They are likely not only to mix and confuse experiences but the Betrayal Trauma Theory postulate that these children choose to be selective on what they want to remember and share. The repression of information is perceived by the victim of war as an inevitable reaction to trauma to lessen mental pain. The victims of abusive life experiences inflicted in the camps remain with a defensive mechanism which is to misremember and repress memory to “ease the burden of mental anguish” and social stigmatization (Freyd 1998: 61).

Explaining the nature of trauma and sequence of events, Johannessen & Holgersen (2013: 56) argue that child soldiers have experienced numerous traumatic events as witnesses, victims and obviously perpetrators. To explain the congruence between their experiences in relation to their perception and interpretation of the experience, again we draw from BTT. Notwithstanding what critics say, the theory explains what is it that influences forgetting on victims. The theory purports that in order for the children to prove resilience and obedience to the abusive army leader, they consciously or unconsciously choose to forget their traumatic experiences. Research proves that children are meant to accept the army as their only hope and home. Inadvertently, they then see the army as a home and army leader as guardian. It is that kind of close relationship that obscures the realities faced by the child. Similarly, the feeling and acceptance of the army as a home influences the choice to forget the past horrors.

As a result, the perception and interpretation of events and relations as abusive and traumatic are misremembered and isolated from awareness. The child, therefore, selects internally what it is they want to remember and or forget for their safety and survival. The children tend to be cruel and abusive during the army life. In fact, communities struggle with accepting them back because of the peculiar behavioral disorders. This is referred to as partial forgetting (DePrince et al. 2012). Child soldiers would choose to remember being shot at, raped, trained hard but do not remember killing and eating human flesh. The choice of what is to be remembered depends on the likelihood for acceptance into the community and presenting a recovered and healed former soldier to the curious and unstable communities.

The psychosocial wellbeing of child soldiers as children that experienced severe trauma suffer from two significant anomalies. Firstly, the children suffer what some have diagnosed as severe forms of PTSD. However, there are still arguments addressing the PTSD as simply a small component of a much larger set of problems (Johannessen & Holgersen 2013). Anxiety is also reported in a significant number of former child soldiers. Apart from psychological distress, children struggle to form part of the society. The community loses human capital if children are involved in violent conflicts. That is, the children likely to improve on education, economy and knitting the social fabric tend to be a liability to the society. Noticeably, schools lose capable students and the economy loses needed skills (Verhey 2001 and Johannessen & Holgersen 2013).

3.4 Children in conflict

Children have for many decades been easy and reliable sources to buttress military and ideological convictions of adults in conflict. Their existence and participation in intra and interstate conflicts is undoubted. It is also certain that they are exposed to gruesome and inhumane activities more in Africa than in any other part of the world currently because of civil wars and volatile civil strife in East, Central and West Africa. Child soldiers are undoubtedly forced into becoming soldiers. Notwithstanding the forced recruitment by both state armies and rebel movements or even liberation movements, children volunteer to become soldiers to the advantage of their provision of safety, food, belonging, patriotism and other ideological convictions. States even review constitutions to make provision for allowing people less than 18 years to be part of or associated with other labour activities but significantly to be part of the military.

Research accounts for how children, are roped into playing dangerous roles in violent conflicts. They represent a group ready to be tamed. Children in conflict seemingly cannot escape victimisation. Even if they escape recruitment, children run the risk of being killed with their families. They also get victimised through constant exposure to violence that affect infrastructure such as schools, clinics and roads. Such violence forces families to relocate and such displacement leave children suffering from stress and trauma (Pine, Costello and Masten 2005). There is indeed increasing research addressing the pathologies emanating from exposure to atrocities but more significantly research focusing on other life events such as parental divorce (Pine et al. 2005: 1782), deprivation and displacement as a result of natural disasters. This dimension begs an important question on whether the reintegration programs are able to address trauma caused by life events such as parental divorce of children in war torn communities.

3.5 Child soldiers and the complexities

There are many reasons why different groups remain convinced that the recruitment of children under 18years to participate in military is inevitable and necessary. These groups suspected of recruiting children as child soldiers do that with full knowledge of the international humanitarian law in place to prevent such. While other communities think that even the 17 year olds are adults, there remains an important question on when a child can really cease to be a child and take responsibility for the welfare of their community and country. Apart from countries such as the United States of America (USA), United Kingdom (UK) and Canada not experiencing any internal wars, they recruit children who are 17 years old as long as they participate in non-hostile missions (Szijj 2010: 347).

The major difficulties when examining the challenges faced by children in conflict can be summed up into two fundamental categories. Firstly, it is a struggle understanding recruitment and involvement of children in armies. One is faced with fundamental questions such as, how is the boy or girl child chosen from the many? To understand some of the issues involved, one should have a clear picture of how this is done in most cases. Recruitment of children to form part of an army happens through legal means where countries knowingly chose to use 17 year-olds in the army. This is common in countries affected by war but practiced in Europe and America. Recruitment is also voluntary. That is, children under 18 years may out of poverty, ideological orientation or even as a matter of seeking a sense of belonging decides to join an army. There is mostly no coercion involved in such instances.

Even though all forms of recruitment and enlisting are forbidden by International law, the most horrendous one is recruitment through coercion. In such instances, children are dragged out of their homes, communities, forced to desert families and driven to bushes where they get systematic indoctrination and training. Key in the latter form of recruitment is the use of threat (MacMullin & Loughry 2004: 461).

Secondly and equally important is the major task in reuniting the children with their own families and communities. Even though children find themselves without parents at times, their communities remain a possible safe haven during the process of DDR. Noting that the process of recruitment becomes systematic and preplanned, it becomes critically important that reintegration be a systematic, multi-stakeholder and a consistent process. In the event of this, psychological, economic and social challenges such as trauma lack of employment and discrimination force children to go back to safer environments which are the military camps. A lack of systematic establishment and constant evaluation of reintegration programs has resulted in failed DDR programs in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Moreover, programs that cannot include the protection of the former child soldier resulting in re-capturing and stricter security force the children to remain in military work up to their adult lives (Brett & Spetch 2004 and MacMullin & Loughry 2004).

3.6 The realities about DDR in the DRC

Child soldiers are forced to become part of the military. They are forced to kill since they understand the possibility of being killed as well. However, upon realizing the possibility of being reintegrated, they have at times shown remarkable regret and remorse for participating in such heinous activities. For instance, Honwana (2004: 5) quoted a 16-year-old former girl soldier after demobilisation as saying,

I feel so bad about the things that I did. It disturbs me so much that I inflicted death on other people. When I go home I must do some traditional rites because I have killed. I must perform these rites and cleanse myself. I still dream about the boy from my village that I killed. I see him in my dreams, and he is talking to me, saying I killed him for nothing, and I am crying (Honwana, 2009: 5).

The above quote indicates two major challenges faced by children during the process of reintegration. Firstly, it is the major psychological problems the child faced after

killing other people. Secondly, the preference of traditional methods of healing as opposed to standard methods proposed by local and most importantly international NGOs. As expected, the NGOs work on certain methods within particular time frames to meet their targets within their budget.

The process of demilitarisation and reintegration of children with their communities and families becomes an initial step towards rehabilitation. A significant process of tracing and uniting the child with family member remains an equally important transition process. Children remain in need of psychosocial support that encompasses numerous kinds of pillars such as skills development, vocational training, constant follow up and continuous counseling (Derluyn, Vindevogel & Haene 2013). The DRC is in a post conflict period if the 2002 agreements are to be considered. However, realities suggest that the agreements were necessary but did not yield much needed peace. Much has been discussed in this study about the wars and their extent. There is the recognizable need to zoom in on DDR and the challenges thereof. The Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration programs seek to rehabilitate the former soldiers and their bereaved communities. As a start, the DDR should be understood in three ways that are not mutually exclusive. The reintegration program should be understood as a remedy targeted at demilitarizing and rehabilitating former young combatants. Secondly, it should be cognizance of gender issues leading to an ineffective rehabilitation program. Lastly, DDR should be established with the recognition of the plight of families and communities.

The targeting group of young people and reintegrating them with their communities is not sufficient but essential. The young people form part of a society as a youth and expected to be at their most adventurous and productive stage in life. The adventure forms part of the reason why they would enlist as child soldiers. More specifically, former soldiers need each other to recover as they may be isolated and discriminated against by families and communities. They also need one another to heal from the collective trauma experienced. In the process of reintegrating the children, it becomes important to create and “reinstall a sense of normalcy and to support formerly conscripted youth to re-create normative life-cycle milestones such as employment, housing, and marriage” (Derluyn, Vindevogel and Haene 2013: 877).

The second aspect, which is gender sensitive, emanates from the need to demystify the thoughts that child soldiers are boy soldiers (De Watteville 2002). Girls represent a significant share in the number of abducted child soldiers. Besides the military of training, carrying and using arms, girls suffer double victimisation through repeated and consequential rape. The girl soldiers either fall pregnant or are infected with diseases such as HIV/AIDS. They are stigmatised and discriminated against by their communities. In essence, the trauma is doubled. The victims of such atrocities need careful consideration during the reintegration programs. Unfortunately such groups and their needs remain unattended to during the DDR process (De Watteville 2002).

During the course of war and recurring violent conflicts in the DRC, long term trails of a disrupted community life and structure become evident. Therefore the trauma affects both the abducted children and their tormented communities. Many reasons result in communities finding it difficult to reintegrate or even refuse to but remain in need of fixing the life-long changes forced by conflict (Derluyn, Vindevogel and Haene 2013). Also, it is recorded scenarios such as the eccentric behaviour of former child soldiers and the difficulties communities have in accepting and living with them. In an article addressing concerns about moral development of former child soldiers, Boyden (2003: 353) cautions on treating children as generic victims of war but pointed out that increasing literature conclude that children in war cease to develop moral socialisation. While emphasis on DDR and rehabilitation has been widely suggested, reconciliation remains a key component of family and community reintegration (Derluyn, Vindevogel and Haene 2013).

The DDR program and other multifaceted approaches to salvaging child mortality, child labour and conflict prevention are as a result of precarious conditions that affect children daily in the DRC. For instance, there is acknowledgment of poor nutrition, low access to drinking water and insufficient and unreliable health services (Kandala et. al. 2014). Consequently, the noticeably devastating repercussions point to children deprived of human dignity in many ways than being recruited to be child soldiers. Indeed, the programs aimed at military detachment encounter deep embedded socio-economic frustrations experienced by the state for a longer period.

Indeed, many attempts have been made mostly by the UN and NGOs to ensure the establishment and continuity of the DDR programs in the Eastern Congo. The government

has also been involved particularly in policy work and aid. Since 2003, President Joseph Kabila created numerous commissions that were meant for orientating and conceptualising finance and procurement, planning and execution of the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration of soldiers. There was a lot of confusion on specific role-playing on the part of the commissions. For instance, the commission ended up competing, hence conflict ensued between them (Rouw and Willems 2010: 9). Nonetheless, the government, international role players and local and regional NGOs combined efforts to start DDR programs that can be divided into the national, Ituri, the programme for the Demobilisation of Child Soldiers and the Disarmament, Demobilisation, Repatriation, Resettlement and Reintegration (DDRRR) (Rouw and Willems 2010).

The establishment of concrete and widely supported programs resulted in thousands demobilised into DRC communities. However, they are riddled with problems. On the one hand, the former soldiers remain with an embedded stigma. Besides labeling and isolation, former combatants remain a form of insecurity in the communities. They are considered to possess the military spirit, taking advantage of the financial benefits from DDR and others remain attached to their command structures through what Rouw and Willems call auto-demobilisation (Rouw and Willems 2010). On the other hand the support structures such as the local NGOs suffer immense pressure of having to choose between an appropriate program addressing local needs or toe the line of donors. These NGOs feel sidelined in the decision making resulting in detrimental adjustments to their projects, which in turn cause an imbalance between what the communities need and the donor's demands. They also feel left out because they are not trusted by the international organisations, working with them proves to be a nightmare. Furthermore, local NGOs suffer budgetary constraints to effectively execute their expected DDR programs in the Eastern DRC (Rouw and Willems 2010: 27).

3.7 Conclusion

The Betrayal Trauma Theory may have proven effective in describing the behavior of children abused by people well known to them. However, the behavioral patterns displayed by child soldiers in reaction to their abusive rebel or army leader demonstrate, not only the accuracy of the theory in relation to information isolation, repression of information and misremembering but also its relevance to former child soldiers in the DRC. There appears to be noticeable congruence between how child soldiers appear to have healed to be accepted by communities even though they would have only suppressed certain information from

awareness. Despite accuracy in defining repression of information, the theory also shows that not all repressed information gets locked out of awareness. Child soldiers tend to display peculiar behavioral patterns such as using skills learnt in the army to intimidate and commit crimes in the communities. The community workers and volunteers are likely to find difficulties in achieving successful reintegration and peace building because of the incomplete information they are accessible to in order to improve the psychological and social wellbeing of the former soldiers. In essence, the damage cannot be sufficiently addressed by simply bringing demobilized child soldiers and poverty-stricken to conflict prone communities.

4 Chapter Five. Conclusion and Recommendations

4.1 Introduction

This study has managed to review articles that form part of the broader scope of knowledge that intended to describe the plight of children associated with armies. In fact, numerous reports and papers have been documented on the plight of children in general such as child labour and trafficking. Essentially, some articles further discussed the plight suffered by child soldiers in Africa and abroad, noting the continuity in recruitment and increasing number of rebel groups in the DRC. Machel (1996) in her comprehensive report quantified the nature and extent of the plight of children associated with armies. Machel (1996: 54), on specific recommendations, emphasized that governments, humanitarian organisations and civil society have a pivotal role to play in curbing the recruitment of child soldiers in conflict torn states. For example, governments were expected to adopt legislature that were to ensure the implementation of relevant standards such as the Geneva conventions and their additional protocols.

4.2 Conclusion

It stands to reason that children growing up in war torn regions do not only suffer as a result of recruitment into armies. Before they get recruited, they already become victims of such violence because their growth and human development patterns are hampered. Poverty, insecurity and displacement compel their communities to approve of their recruitment in other instances. Such children are robbed of opportunities to learn family attachment, access basic education and growth in enabling and peaceful environments. Although some communities in the Eastern region of the DRC are developing peacefully, the recruitment of children for military purposes persists. There is also an increase in the formation of rebel groups demonstrating the need for an enquiry unique in setting to the Congo but applicable to many of the countries suffering from the same across the globe. From the documented involvement of the international community, it is reasonable to argue that while there is need for aid from developed communities, there remains an important need for local communities to institute and head peace-building programs. The study has shown how clashes regarding ideas on using funding from international stakeholders delay program implementation and hinder reintegration of ex-combatants. Civil society and community leaders remain the focal points for which information may be attained about the plight of the children. Indeed they are important informants with regards to what needs to be done.

Civil society is expected to “actively disseminate humanitarian and human rights and engage in advocacy, reporting and monitoring of infringements of children’s rights” (1996: 54). The report by Machel exposed the phenomenon while the recommendations revealed the lack of commitment on states such as the DRC on ensuring adherence to international laws guiding the protection of children from participating in armed conflicts. The government in the DRC, despite ratifying many of the conventions, is still lagging behind on implementation.

Besides the nature of the phenomenon, child soldiers are exposed to gruesome and traumatic recurring events. In their concluding remarks, Mackson and Aber (1996: 85) argues that recurring armed conflicts cause devastating ramifications on “developmental adjustments by children and youth, characterized by mental health symptoms of continuous Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and depression”. These affected children would also struggle with adjusting to pro-social and organized behavior during reintegration (1996: 85). The recurring trauma as a result of direct and indirect participation in the war and separation from parents, “tax children’s development by imposing PTSD and depressive symptoms” (1996: 85). Children associated with armies in Uganda and DRC who showed clinically relevant symptoms of PTSD “had significantly less openness to reconciliation and significantly more feeling of revenge...regard acts of retaliation as an appropriate way to recover personal integrity and to overcome their traumatic experiences” (Bayer et al. 2007: 558).

There is no single approach that would effectively help the children recover from their traumatic experiences. Equally, there shouldn’t be any mechanism proven null unless evidently causing harm to both the aggrieved communities and revenge-seeking former child soldiers. Be that as it may, the involvement of Western psychiatric hospitals and traditional healing methods in helping the former child soldiers has proven insufficient. Psychological problems, therefore, require considerations to their broader social and political challenges. For example, if a former child soldier is taken back to an impoverished family, they may easily use tricks learnt in the army to commit crimes. In essence, the recovery process requires a systematic introduction into a civilian life.

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) report 14 years after the report by Machel assessed the situation and significant deficits in advancing human rights issues in the DRC. The A/HRC/13/63 (UNHRC, 2010: 26) revealed that “overall, the human rights

situation” had not improved and remained a cause for concern. The report concluded that government commitment was “insufficient, making it difficult for partners to provide related technical assistance” (UNHRC, 2010: 26). Many child soldiers were identified and released, but, the recruitment “continues to exist...[which] requires Government to prepare and implement an action plan for the prevention of recruitment and use of child soldiers” (UNHRC, 2010: 26). The report identified unresolved land disputes and illegal mining of natural resources as major causes of the human rights violation. Violence against vulnerable groups such as women and children remain at the center of the catastrophic events in the DRC.

Recently, the International Peace Support training Centre (IPSTC) reported that even though on a lesser scale, recruitment of children into military still happens in the DRC. The organization’s (IPSTC) occasional paper (2013) revealed that child soldiers are not recruited once but they struggle with re-recruitment. Concluding remarks of the IPSTC argue that “re-recruitment of child soldiers by various armed groups in the eastern DRC poses a serious challenge for effective reintegration” (IPSTC 2013: 22). On a positive note, however, the organization briefed that there has been “some success in the rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers in the country”(IPSTC 2013: 22). As a result, both the national army and the different armed groups have begun to refrain from such recruitments. The indictment of “high ranking army officers at International Criminal Court (ICC)” has been seen as a deterrent to such violations of human and children’s rights in the DRC (IPSTC 2013: 22). The organization takes a similar approach in recommending regional peace agreements. Also, like the initial report by Machel (1996), they recommend child protection-training programs to capacitate key stakeholders such as local leaders, military officers and political leaders on measures to be employed in protecting children particularly during demobilization and reintegration (IPSTC 2013: 23).

This study has established an analysis of the impact of violence on children and their psychosocial well being in the Democratic of Congo. Its relevance without doubt is evidenced by the need to broadly contribute to urgent policy proposals concerning Child soldiers, peace and security in Africa and International Law on child rights. The deliberate investigation of the DRC as explained in earlier chapters has a chance to yield results that will affect even the neighboring countries particularly those suspected of influencing the conflict. It is not only the neighboring states that participate on the prolonged civil strife, the

study through an assessment of the application for international law reveals the role played by peace builders and keepers and the challenges among which is monitoring recovery of psychologically wounded child soldiers, access to camps and the long term solutions established.

The DRC conflict juxtaposed with recorded challenges in peace building, remain a concern for the international community. It has been for a long time. The UNSC resolution 2136 (2014) demonstrates the international reiterated condemnation of the use of children in the DRC as child soldiers. The resolution stated categorically that the Council members condemn smuggling of light weapons within and into the country, while acknowledging the link between illegal extraction of natural resources and the increase in the purchasing of light weaponry as significant contributing factors fueling the recurring wars. Significant in the resolution, moreover, is stressing the importance of the DRC government in protecting its citizens. That includes the prevention of any form of human rights abuses (UNPress 2014).

The UNSC resolution among many other local and international condemnations and commitments regarding the child soldier's humanitarian crisis reveals the already noted involvement of insurgent groups in using children for war purposes. Para-militia groups from within and outside of the DRC are on record stating that they are struggling to meet agreements to demobilise children and reintegrate them with safer environments. Honwana (2004: 4) argue that programs such as demobilisation have been successful particularly when conducted in areas where there is a cease-fire agreement. For example, "in Mozambique, the fact that the program took place after the cease-fire and in a climate of relative peace, assured its successful implementation". However, due to the fact that many children in the DRC were recruited by armed forces and the location of the programs being in places that experienced continuous violence, the demobilisation program failed (Honwana 2004). Demobilisation and reintegration are pivotal steps to recovery. Also, recovery requires a successful reintegration with families, which proves to be unachievable in the Eastern DRC because of the continued violence. Actually, the war across all regions in the DRC "officially ended in 2003 after the Sun City Peace Agreement. However, the Kivu regions are still in conflict" (Honwana 2004: 4).

Literature has shown that children do not only suffer immeasurable torture during recruitment but also that it intensifies during their stay in the bushes. Indeed, the discussion about

whether they still fit the 'child' description is evoked by two equally important revelations. On the one hand, the children take responsibilities to face death chose between being killed and killing their enemies. They are at times forced to kill their own families and community members well known to them. On the other hand, the children associated with armies, notwithstanding their voluntary enlisting, find it difficult to interact with their communities as children upon a successful reintegration process. They are treated with considerable caution and skepticism. They suffer from altered behavioural patterns and ruptured childhood lives.

The Betrayal Trauma Theory posits important dynamics pertaining to children's reaction to abusive and life threatening events. The significance is in the choice of response. Literature has shown how children naturally suffer from trauma and as a result are subjected to a deprived childhood normalcy experience. They are deprived of time to be dependent, enabling environment to play, of protection and enabling environment to learn attachment. The theory argues that children are able to consciously repress and isolate from awareness information that is traumatic and threatening to their wellbeing. The theoretical framework of this study advocates for a different understanding on how children should be reintegrated. It is a position on altering the structures of the rehabilitation programs. It acknowledges the importance of giving attention to both the former child soldiers and their communities in order to allow the children to feel free to express their carefully isolated trauma related memories. That is how the children, would be able to holistically recover, thus preventing relapse into their military life that are reported to be a cause for the regrouping of the militias and as a result re-haunt the rehabilitated communities. It is also in the same vein that communities will, on the one hand be rehabilitated while, on the other hand, learn to accept and renew the broken relationships they have with former soldiers.

The study has investigated and brought to the existing bare two critical issues. Firstly, child soldiers, irrespective of the manner in which they were recruited, suffer tremendous amounts of trauma. It is an experience beyond Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. The major sources of traumatic reaction emanate from the entire process of identification, recruitment (voluntary and forced), training, abusive life and unsuccessful reintegration and recapture. For example, while recruited, the children are at times ordered to kill their own families and community members (Klasen et al. 2010). The child soldiers are exposed to all different types atrocities including murder, decapitation, cannibalism, rape and strenuous exercise. To a ten year old the events are not only overwhelming because they get deprived of the chance to grow as a

child but they are also traumatic (Macksound & Aber 1996). Consequently, the children's lives, wellbeing and development stages are altered significantly. They suffer worse experiences than adults themselves.

4.3 Summary and ending remarks

The recruitment of children into armies remains a common practice in the DRC. Both girls and boys find themselves forced to leave their families and communities to reinforce the ideas of Para-militias and the government army. In addition, research has demonstrated the extent to which the children volunteer to join these armies counting numerous reasons including safety and poverty alleviation as reasons for voluntary enlistment. They get subjected to intense training and also witness the worse forms of brutal killings. For example, they are at times forced to kill or watch the killing of their families. Also, children from neighboring countries such as Rwanda remain targets for militias that intend on fighting for and protection of territories in the Eastern region. These territories are heavily endowed with easily extractable natural resources. Indeed, war is used to protect both ideological and financial interests of dissenters. Local NGOs and international institutions sanctioned by the United Nations remain instrumental in the Demobilisation, Demilitarisation, Reintegration and Rehabilitation of child soldiers. They are equally playing a pivotal role in preparing the wounded communities for the reintegration processes. Socio-economic conditions and threats remain obstacles in the process of maintaining the former soldiers in their communities.

Graça Machel paved way for numerous investigations into the child soldier phenomenon. Studying the *Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, the study had incredible revelations about the nature of violence children get exposed to and the impact it had on them holistically. The long study and findings thereof had profound discussion on the psychological wellbeing of children in violent conflicts. Recommendation by the author advised that health, psychosocial wellbeing and education were supposed to be “pillars of all humanitarian assistance for children in emergencies” (UNICEF). As already discussed in this study, even though the study was done in 1996 and not in the DRC, there is clear evidence that children exposed to war and extreme forms of violence require a lot more than medical treatment during emergencies. Children require communities (mostly local) to adjust to normal productive life after an effective DDR process. The same local communities through its civil society groups remain central in preventing further devastating heinous acts by

fighting groups by setting up dialogue platforms where in communities, child soldiers and armies engage on security needs and proposals (Kets & De Vries 2014)

Research has shown the causes of the war to include territorial disputes, natural resources and infiltration by mostly illegal immigrants. Tribal and religious conflicts also contribute to the protracted violence. However, in many instances researchers and activists participating in quantifying the tragedy posit that, the lack of political will to improve the conditions of the communities remain a major impediment towards an effective DDR and peace building. This is despite the DRC being party to numerous human rights bodies that advocate for the protection of children from forced labour and most importantly their recruitment into military camps. Political will remains an important factor in implementing and adhering to the international treaties. Adversely, it remains a white elephant in the DRC. The long-drawn violence in the DRC particularly on vulnerable groups such as women and children remain a threat to global stability and peace. Moreover-in relation to this study, children are left with permanent psychological and physical scars. The recurring trauma and training in violent tactics has permanent destruction on a social fabric of the former Belgian colony.

As alluded to in the analysis of this study, children during reintegration processes present with major psychological problems. They also suffer from major adjustment problems pertaining to social and child life. The former child soldiers try to hide some of their experiences but many experience sleeping, isolation and mood problems. Social problems include using the skills learnt in the armies to commit crimes such as theft and violence (Gupta & Zimmer 2008 and Johannessen & Holgersen 2013). The major contributing factor to prolonged forms of trauma is the exposure of children associated with armies in different forms of extensive training and physical wars. They witness worse atrocities that include butchery, burning and boiling of bodies, cannibalism, decapitation, killing of own families, repeated rapes and mass killings happening mostly in developing states (Van Bueren 1994, RIAT 2004, Becker 2004, Clemesac 2007 and Szijj 2010). These types of experiences happen while at ages between 10 and 17 consequently tempering with their human rights as protected by conventions such as Convention of the Rights of the Child. The conventions define a child as a person below the age of 18 years unless otherwise stipulated differently by the laws of a particular country. The convention encourages institutions (family, religious group) and governments to ensure that children's rights are respected, protected and fulfilled (web 3. UNICEF).

Despite numerous versions of the interpretation of the plight of children in bushes that are trained and used as soldiers, a lot needs to be done on how the children react to their plight. Firstly, the Betrayal Trauma Theory argues that children do not only suffer trauma in different ways, they also interpret it differently (Freyd et al. 2007). Significant in driving their reaction, is their cognitive development. For instance, BTT practitioners agree that “if children were especially young at the time of the war, [they] may have failed to understand the betrayal...until after having recalled the abuse later” (Freyd et al. 2007: 308). In essence, children depending on age and cognitive development may avoid thinking about the event or may subconsciously isolate the incidents from consciousness. However, it also explains why former child soldiers are likely to start new militia groups and torment communities after years of reintegration. Actually, these children-given the nature of events and the subsequent trauma and repeat trauma will seldom forget the incidents. They are likely, out of fear of breaking up trust with military leader and exposing family to what they went through, to intentionally repress the traumatic events (Freyd et al 2007).

To sum up, in response to Collier & Hoeffler’s question on whether Africa is ‘becoming more dangerous’? There are grounds for a response that suggest a yes to the question. When Africa remains impoverished, increasing violent political contestations (Shola, 2010 and Lodge, 2014), unaccounted for exploitation of natural resources and recruitment of children for worse forms of labour becomes the norm (Carpenter 2012). The Democratic Republic of Congo is plagued with high rates of child mortality caused mainly by disease, poverty and violent conflict (Kandala, et al. 2014). Child health and wellbeing represents an important indicator for a healthy and developing population, similarly, child mortality indicates dismal failure in achieving the global Millennium Development Goals. Needless to say, indeed there are justified concerns on mortality rates, which remain high in most parts of the DRC (Kandala, et al. 2014: 7). As a result, it may be postulated that Africa has become a danger to itself.

Statistics showing Under 5 mortality (U5M) rates indicate that the whole country is affected including those regions that never experienced recurring violent conflicts (Kandala, et al. 2014). Significantly, “One reason for this is the country’s reliance upon a physical and health infrastructure that has suffered from a lack of investment and fallen prey to decades of protracted conflict, poor governance and economic mismanagement” (Kandala, et al. 2014:

2). Indeed, conflict is at the center of the precarious conditions affecting the DRC with influence from at least six nations in the Great Lakes (Honwana 2006 & Kandala et al. 2014). As a result, the DRC has a responsibility to reflect on the wellbeing of children. The government is required to find long lasting solutions to the systematic violence on children. Besides conflict, the country has a long-term responsibility to prevent child mortality as a result of diseases and poverty. Actually, that is another form of violence on the young Congolese.

A careful examination of the causes of the deaths in the DRC-like many African, Central and Eastern Asia countries devastated by war, reveal that “non-battle causes of mortality, especially the effects of displacement, malnutrition and disease, account for more fatalities than battles” (Williams 2013). The Democratic Republic of Congo will have to consider the following in curbing the children’s rights violation, which include the avoidable spread of diseases, recruitment of children in all forms of labour and violence on children and their recruitment as child soldiers.

- a) The country has to use internationally recognised human and children’s rights standards and principles as a compass for the reduction of conflict and recruitment of children for military purposes.
- b) The Democratic Republic of Congo has a national obligation, despite international law making and implementation, should use available means to recognize and uphold the fundamental human rights of children as espoused by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (UNCRC) (Roscoe 2011: 15).
- c) Children should be involved in the protection and psychosocial development during reintegration instead of being seen as helpless victims and charity work or even passive recipients of aid (Roscoe 2011: 9).
- d) Apart from deaths caused by conflict related violence, Under 5 Mortality remains a great concern requiring the state to ensure access to clean water and sanitation, prevention of mother to child transmitting of a vast number of diseases and curbing worrying trends of poverty related malnutrition and deaths particularly in war torn eastern regions of the second biggest African country in landmass (Kandala et al. 2014).
- e) The profound and at times clashing disparities between the DRC laws and international Conventions confirm the reasons for continuous delays in ensuring child protection and prevention of child soldier recruitment in the DRC. The clash

juxtaposed with the rejection of international standards by non-state actors delays the effective implementation of DDR programs and prevention of re-recruitment of children into military responsibilities (Rosen 2011).

- f) Through locally driven and internationally funded reintegration programs, children that have experienced recurring traumatic experiences are likely to recover over an unaltered period of time depending on availability of protective systems such as family, social acceptance and support, accessible amenities such as those for education, leisure and employment (Betancourt et al. 2013). This is a mechanism that may not be expected to yield immediate positive results.
- g) There is still a challenge in replicating findings in one context to others because of the nature and extent of violence on and by children on themselves and others; hence the need for broader investigations on how affected children may be assisted to recover and avoid recruiting younger generations in future (Betancourt et al. 2013).
- h) Children subjected to endless war suffer from poverty and malnutrition as a result of dwindling economies. It stands to reason that countries with economies that do not grow are vulnerable to civil strife and protracted violence (Ndikumana et al. 2003 and Hoeffler & Reynal-Querol 2003). Moreover, economies such as the DRC, which is in constant war, experience more volatility because significant portions of their budgets are redirected and misused.
- i) Such funds are redirected to military expenditure, similarly, significant resources have to be used to recover destroyed infrastructure, hence preventing the establishment of new essential amenities critical in the psychosocial development of children. Indeed, a major cost comes from a destruction of infrastructure as a military strategy (Hoeffler and Reynal-Querol 2003).
- j) Even though literature has not come up with concrete proof that former child soldiers will definitely start their own rebel groups or lead government's as if they are in an army; conclusions can be made that the experience of being in an army results in conflict prone governments in the Great Lakes (Vorrath 2011) which basically is driven by the experienced former child soldiers, resulting in bleak prospects for a consolidated approach to democracy for the countries of the Great Lakes (Vorrath 2011: 9).
- k) Therefore, a regional political will is an essential remedy to ending the war in the DRC. Regional collaborations towards Peace Building are necessary efforts that would guard against exploitation of humans and their natural resources. Subsequently,

the extraction of natural resources and their usage will result in the building of infrastructure such as roads, schools, health facilities, recreational facilities and provision of water and sanitation. Management of human and natural resources requires a democratically elected government. Ultimately, countries such as the DRC would improve governance through a sound democratic process; the people will recognize a legitimate government instead of forcedly and or voluntarily associating themselves with Rebel Movements.

- l) The easily extractable natural resources including water, timber and underground resources have resulted in tremendous loss of life to a region of over 5 million victims in approximately two decades (Szijj 2010). As a result, there is a need for emphasis on prevention than intervention during already widespread and fierce wars. Prevention of the actual war is crucial remedy to the prevention of the recruitment of child soldiers (Szijj 2010: 356).
- m) It is, however, delusional of (Le Billon, 2013) to even suggest that a remedy for conflict prevention in a country like the DRC which is heavily endowed with natural resources would be through need for multinational corporations to “manage the demands for key commodities” (Le Billon, 2013: 56). The approach does not only undermine the ability of struggling economies to establish control measures convenient to their needs but may expose countries in wars to new perpetrators and influence. New influence in wars-particularly of external actors severs the uncertain pillars established by local communities meant to end the war. Therefore, this prolongs the war while external businesses flourish.

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