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CHILDREN AS NEGLECTED AGENTS IN THEORY AND POST-CONFLICT REINTEGRATION

By

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A mini-dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the
degree

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I declare that this mini-dissertation is my own original work and has not been previously submitted for another degree at a different university. Where secondary resources were utilised, these have been appropriately acknowledged and referenced in accordance with departmental requirements.

I understand what plagiarism is and am aware of the University's policy in this regard.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation is to evaluate the current state of literature surrounding childhood and child agency, and how dominant notions of these concepts result in practical implications pertaining to the nature of the participation of former child soldiers in post-conflict reintegration programmes. As the literature and practice surrounding children in post-conflict environments currently stands, there is a recurring preoccupation with traditional notions of childhood which uphold notions of innocence, vulnerability, and dependency, with only minimal attempts to conceptualise child agency as a crucial factor once the guns have been put down. This ultimately results in former child soldiers being dealt with as objects to be secured, as opposed to fully-fledged participants and agents in their own reintegration processes. This research thereby seeks to answer the question: “How would the formulation of a normative framework of child agency alter the orientation of post-conflict reintegration programmes in the future?”

The researcher will engage the matter of child agency in post-conflict reintegration through a critical lens, both in terms of the literary and conceptual foundations contributing towards current narratives, as well as the current state of reintegration programmes as they target former child soldiers in northern Uganda. The qualitative approach of a critical literature review, followed by a critical analysis of the case of northern Uganda, will be employed as the key methods of this research. The literature to be used will be purposively sampled secondary sources. This mini-dissertation upholds the position that, in order for post-conflict reintegration programmes to be successful in their endeavour to reintegrate former child soldiers, children should not be rendered as peripheral actors in these processes. Rather, they should be present as key participatory agents in their own right.

Key Words: child, child soldiers, agency, child agency, actor, reintegration, participation, northern Uganda, normative theory

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DDR:	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
FCS:	Former Child Soldiers
GUSCO:	Gulu Support the Children Organisation
HSM:	Holy Spirit Movement
ILO	International Labour Organisation
LRA:	Lord's Resistance Army
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organisation
NUSAF:	Northern Ugandan Social Action Fund
UCRNN:	Ugandan Child Rights NGO Network
UN:	United Nations
UNCRC:	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF:	United Nations Children's Fund
UNPAC:	Ugandan National Programme of Action for Children
UPE:	Universal Primary Education

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1. CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

1.1 Background and Introduction to the Research

Child soldiers may not be a new phenomenon, but the nature and impact of their role once the guns are put down has only recently garnered attention and further exploration. The growth of literature acknowledging child agency in the disciplines of Security Studies, International Relations, and Child Studies has fuelled advocacy for recognition of this agency beyond the context of war. The purpose of the study is to engage with normative frameworks on children, and determine their applicability to the case analysis of the reintegration of northern Uganda's former child soldiers (FCS).

Exploring child agency through new normative conceptions has both theoretical and practical implications in the realm of Security Studies and International Relations. Firstly, it could unsettle pre-existing accounts of the array of actors who "both affect and are affected by" reintegration programmes, as well as contribute new narratives surrounding the nature of war, solutions for peace, and agency (Watson 2006: 250). Secondly, they could inspire reforms of reintegration programmes aimed at facilitating equal participatory avenues for FCS (Beier 2015: 11; Bordonaro & Payne 2012: 365, 369; Fernandez 2011: 487; Kaufman 2016: 1500; McMullin 2011: 760, 743; UNSC 2000; Watson 2006: 245-250).

Serving as a practical reference, the case of northern Uganda clearly depicts the inherent top-down nature and vulnerability lens of reintegration programmes. While programmes target psychological and social reintegration, they continually lack designated outlets for participation that account for the altered identities amongst returnees and desires to "contribute to peace" (Akello *et al.* 2006: 230, 240; Maina 2009: 118; Russel & Gozdzia 2006: 63-64).

1.2 The Research Problem and the Articulation of the Problem Statement

As stated by Creswell (1994: 50), the research problem is the "issue that exists in the literature, theory, or practice, that leads to a need for the study." The research problem of this study emanates from discussions present within the discourses of Security Studies, International Relations, and Childhood Studies surrounding childhood, agency, and 'the child's place in post-conflict environments. Evident in these discussions is how this problem

of children's agency is not contained solely to their absence in theoretical and practical realms. Rather, the true problem lies within underlying assumptions surrounding childhood that are continuously reproduced theoretically and practically throughout concepts of child soldiers, agency and reintegration.

Therefore, the problem statement of the study is as follows: Due to the nature of recognition and prescription of children's agency within normative and conceptual analyses in Security Studies and International Relations, their participatory involvement is minimal in post-conflict reintegration programmes. The unit of analysis, also known as the "what" of the research study, or the major entity being analysed (Mouton 2001: 51; Yin 2014: 31), is child agency amongst FCS being reintegrated in northern Uganda.

1.3 The Research Question/s

Stemming from the research problem, the research question to be asked in the study is, "How would the formulation of a normative framework of child agency alter the orientation of post-conflict reintegration programmes in the future?" The sub-questions to the former would be, "What is the nature of agency demonstrated by former child soldiers? and "How does this child agency impact conceptualisations of agency and childhood in respect of reintegration?"

1.4 The Research Aim and Objectives

The *aim* of this research is to contribute a new normative understanding of child agency in post-conflict environments, where children are the primary referents of analysis. To achieve this research aim, the study has three *objectives*. Firstly, to explore the diverging conceptualisations afforded in the literature towards the concepts of 'the child' and childhood, child soldier, agency, and reintegration. Secondly, to critically examine each concept's applicability to the case of FCS being reintegrated in northern Uganda, or lack thereof. Thirdly, to determine whether a new normative framework of child agency in post-conflict settings is required, based on findings from the case analysis.

1.5 Literature Overview

Guiding the literature review is the interconnection between current debates surrounding childhood and agency, and their relation to the formulation of participatory post-conflict reintegration programmes. Within academia, a vast amount of texts engage directly with the

broader socio-political contexts of arguments towards positioning children, both in literature and in practice. A key argument is that the weakness of participatory approaches towards reintegration lies within traditional conceptions of ‘the child’ that are inherent in the discipline (Beier 2015; James & Prout 1997; Lund 2007; Fernandez 2011; Mason & Hood 2010; Watson 2006).

These traditional conceptions emerged out of a history of various ‘truths’ about the child throughout history. Within foundational texts, such as those of Aristotle (1905), Rousseau (1979), Locke (1689; 1693), Ariès (1962) and Piaget (1936), the sources of modern normative assumptions towards children become clear. While conceptualisations have expanded through critical and sociological contributions with the work of L.S. Vygotsky and, notably, James and Prout (1990; 1997), the basis of dominant conceptions of children, and their dominance in practice, still lack a non-Western view. While present through the OAU’s (1990) African charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, as well as traditional concepts present in African societies (Cheney 2007; Kilbride & Kilbride 1990), they fail to coexist alongside traditional conceptions both in academia, as well as practice particularly in cases pertaining to children in non-Western societies.

Further, a trend exists where the normative assumptions inherent in understanding childhood result in a conflation of child agency as a factor solely experienced by “children at-risk” (Abebe 2019: 12; Bordonaro & Payne 2012: 367, 414; Robson *et al.* 2007: 138). Studying child agency during conflict in an ambiguous or quantifiable manner makes it easy for this agency to be attributed as merely as the responses undertaken by victims (Eickelkamp 2010; Bordonaro & Payne 2012; Lund 2007; Van der Burgt 2018; Honwana 2009; Moncrieffe 2009; Elder-Vass 2008). This victimised notion of child agency transcends into post-conflict environments, to the detriment of any recognition of the agency of FCS to participate in their own reintegration.

While the discussion of agency amongst child soldiers during conflict are growing in their presence, McMullin (2011: 744-745) notes that the discourse is “strangely silent about child and youth agency after war,” a consideration echoed by Watson (2006: 241). It is from this gap that this literature seeks to contribute knowledge.

1.6 Research Methodology

1.6.1 Research approach

Having a clear and substantiated research approach is imperative, as it indicates the “plan, structure and strategy of investigation” towards answering the research question and “controlling variance” (Ackoff 1953: 5; Blaikie 2010: 37; Kerlinger & Pedhazur 1973: 300). Guiding the direction of the study, a qualitative research approach will be adopted. The qualitative focus of “locating the observer in the world,” and “understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem,” aligns with the objectives of the study (Creswell 2007: 37; 2014: 4; Denzin & Lincoln 2005: 3). The study will explore how dominant conceptions of ‘childhood’ and ‘the child,’ impact understandings of child soldiers, child agency, and, thus, influence the structure of reintegration programmes. Particular attention will be afforded to how these normative conceptions inform how programmes target FCS, as recipients, rather than as participants (McMullin 2011: 745-752; Moncrieffe 2009: 3).

An additional consideration to put forth, are the paradigms that impact the researcher’s ontological and epistemological assumptions. A paradigm is a way of looking, model, or a framework, which shapes what we see and how we understand it” (Babbie 2007: 31 – 32), as well as a “basic set of beliefs that guide action” (Guba 1990: 7). The researcher of this study departs from the notion of mind-world monism and a critical lens, which uphold that perceptions and ways of thinking about the world, or topics within it, impact how these matters manifest in practice. Moreover, a transformative outlook and emancipatory knowledge interest is adopted, whereby research inquiry should intertwine with action agendas and reform (Creswell 2014: 9-10). As such, the study does not quantify or perceive the world ‘as is,’ but rather encourages qualitative exploration of how contextualized perspectives of ‘the child,’ childhood, and agency could impact post-conflict reintegration programmes.

1.6.2 Research design and methods

The next step is to address the method of data collection in the study. Due to the constraints of time and access through fieldwork, a literature-based study will be employed. A literature review, as defined by Hart (2001: 13), is the selection and use of available documents on the

topic of study. Effective literature reviews provide a “firm foundation for advancing knowledge” (Jesson *et al.* (2011: 74) and contributing new insights (Samnani *et al.* 2017: 635). The study recognizes that research and knowledge do not exist in a vacuum. With new insights and productions, knowledge is built on old and new discoveries (Jankowitz 1995: 128-129; Samnani *et al.* 2017: 635). Therefore, the aim of the literature review is not to merely describe what is present in the literature, but rather to ‘tell a story’ that will “advance our understanding of what is already known” and what more can be said (Jesson & Lacey 2006: 139; Jesson *et al.* 2011: 87; Samnani *et al.* 2017: 637; Saunders & Rojon 2011: 156-157).

This study will employ a critical literature review to present, analyse, and synthesise material from a variety of different sources (Grant & Booth 2009: 93; Samnani *et al.* 2017: 637). Sampling, being shaped by the researcher’s analytical goals, thereby targets the sources used to yield required insights of the topic and concepts (Emmel 2014: 48; Gentles *et al.* 2015: 1778; Mason 2002: 127-128; Patton 2015: 264). In the case of this literature-based study, a purposive sampling method of texts from the disciplines of Security Studies and International Relations and Childhood Studies will be adopted. Included texts will be secondary sources, covering both traditional and critical discussions of ‘the child’ and childhood, as well as how these concepts inform understandings of child soldiers, agency, and post-conflict reintegration. By targeting these sources, one can critically examine the applicability of arguments to the case analysis.

1.6.3 Data analysis

Data analysis is the process of bringing logical order, structure, and meaningful interpretation to the mass of data collected throughout the study (Marshall & Rossman 1999: 150; Schwandt 2007: 6). To interpret the data acquired from the critical literature and conceptual review, a critical analysis will be adopted. A critical analysis investigates the underlying relationships between power and knowledge with the purpose of challenging and offering alternative perspectives towards “theory-building and even social reality” (Holland & Novak 2017: 2). The historical and socio-political contexts of texts play a crucial role in the type of knowledge created and its manifestation in practical realities and goals (Fairclough 2012: 9; Holland & Novak 2017: 3). The critical analysis of this study will thereby investigate this relationship between knowledge and practice to determine whether current conceptualisations

support the chosen case, or if a new normative conception of child agency, as it pertains to post-conflict reintegration, is warranted. This endeavour would contribute knowledge through a contextualised narrative of children as agents in the literature, and potentially inspire reforms surrounding child participation in reintegration programmes.

The hope to inspire reforms, albeit to a limited degree within the scope of a mini-dissertation, reflects the researcher's transformative and emancipatory knowledge interests. Further, it underpins the reasoning behind the link of the conceptual literary reviews to be conducted and the engagement of a northern Ugandan case analysis. While analyses have covered the exercise of child soldier agency during conflict, contributions lack a similar analysis within a post-conflict time-frame. By engaging with northern Uganda, one can determine the nature of agency exhibited and utilise this knowledge to either motivate for, or discourse the creation of, a new normative framework of child agency.

1.7 Structure of the Research

This first chapter of the research introduces the study, the research problem, question/s, aim and objectives, and the research methods to be employed. The second chapter provides a literature review, including insights of foundational debates surrounding 'the child' and childhood, that inform the normative bias present in the conceptualisations of other key concepts. The third chapter offers a conceptual framework of these key concepts, including alternative conceptualisations and indicating the relationships between concepts. The fourth chapter introduces the case analysis of northern Uganda's FCS and examines the contextual applicability, or lack thereof, of current conceptualisations. Insight will be drawn from this case analysis to determine whether a formulation of a normative framework of child agency is necessary. The final chapter contains the concluding remarks and summary of the findings.

1.8 Ethical Considerations

As the study is reliant on secondary literary sources, it is important to note that all sources utilised are within the public domain and will be adequately referenced to distinguish the thoughts of others from my own.

1.9 Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, this chapter provided a background surrounding the endeavours of this mini-dissertation regarding the nature of child agency in post-conflict reintegration programmes. Being guided by the question of “How would the formulation of a normative theory of child agency alter the orientation of post-conflict reintegration programmes in the future?” the aim is to invigorate discussions that could potentially inform reconfigurations of reintegration programmes. This dissertation upholds that conversations about the manifestation and nature of agency in reintegration are crucial to understand the dynamic present on the ground. Currently, participatory avenues that embrace child involvement from the onset are stunted by programmes reinforcing top-down preoccupations to the detriment of child agency. Informed by narratives surrounding children, it is important that the sources of these perspectives are critically engaged to fully comprehend why practices are undertaken in a certain manner. The critical literature review undertakes this task and illustrates how they have unfolded over time from Western sources of knowledge.

2. CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Behind every action taken, every policy put in place, and every programme formulated is a complex set of normative assumptions in academia that have, over-time, evolved and fluctuated in tandem with our practical world. This theory-practice nexus is crucial to understanding how approaches taken towards children's agency are embedded in a broader academic debate – one that continues to unfold. This nexus, to be addressed throughout this mini-dissertation, resonates with a statement made by Stables (2008: 1), asserting that “how we think about children does affect how we deal with them,” with actions being confirmation of these thoughts (Archard 2004: 96). As reflected in the academia engaged with, knowledge is rarely ever static but, rather, the product of a particular time and place. The aim of this literature review is to tell a story of how the understandings of ‘the child,’ childhood, and agency have evolved over time, and to demonstrate amidst the academic ebbs and flows where this study can seek to contribute towards existing knowledge.

While being the topic of discussion, it should be made clear that children are not the story-tellers; this is a position overwhelmingly fulfilled by adults. Adult worldviews drive the plots, character traits, and lessons to be drawn. Despite childhood being a ‘phase’ that we all seemingly experience to some extent, it is, without a doubt, highly contested and imbued with adult bias over centuries. This evolution stems from what adults have wanted/needed children to be throughout history and the subsequent construction of childhoods that “suit them best” in their environment, and not the child's (Selmer-Olsen 2007: 534). As such, it is clear that concepts and debates reflect a continuous execution of adult power in controlling the narrative.

This chapter will breakdown the various turning points in literature concerning childhood and the child that have substantially impacted conceptualisations and normative frameworks present in the discourse of children's rights. These turning points will include historical approaches, modern approaches, views of childhood as a separate development, socio-cultural approaches, and, finally, the simultaneous developments in practice that have and continue to inform academic discussions. Following this breakdown, the researcher will note current gaps and highlight how predominantly Western academic perspectives dominate the

discourse to the exclusion of non-Western conceptualisations. Finally, a link will be drawn between these Western normative influences and their practical impact on child soldiers in northern Uganda, as a primary example.

2.2 Historical Approaches to Childhood

Childhood has not always been a period to be revered, praised, or necessitating additional attention. Typically seen amongst the Romans and Greeks during antiquity, children were often cast as “little imperfect adults” (Elias 1967: 452). Their ‘distinct’ nature had yet to be sectioned out against the identity of adults; evident in the scattered remarks within foundational historical texts. Children were mainly studied peripherally through other actors and institutions. Beginning with Aristotle’s (1905) *Politics*, children are discussed alongside slaves and women where, despite possessing a deliberative element, are still seen as incomplete.

Along a similar vein is the work of John Locke and his discourse of children as a “*tabula rasa*,” a blank slate so to speak (Kehily 2009: 5). Despite discussing children through other matters, Locke’s writing still contributed to normative conceptions from which a Western conception of the child would emanate (Archard 2015: 1-2). His principal argument is that children are “blank sheets filled by experience” (Archard 2015: 2). Through receiving an upbringing that meets *ideal standards*, children grow in their capacity to reason and become “citizens in the making” (Archard 2015: 2). Regards for human knowledge as accumulating gradually, introduces notions of childhood as a developmental process that ends in adulthood. Facilitating this transition is education to bring children out of their “imperfect, incomplete versions of their adult selves” (Locke 1689 cited in Archard 2015: 2). Children are thereby deemed inherently separate from adults due to their lack of the knowledge and moral sense to reason (Archard 2015: 3-4). According to Locke (1693: 120 cited in Archard 2015: 3 - 4), they are “travellers newly arrived in a strange country, of which they know nothing.” Therefore, their capacity for reason must be cognitively awakened in a manner, which avoids a maturity into “creatures of mere natural proclivities” (Locke 1693: 81 cited in Archard 2015: 4, 8).

According to the Puritans, a child’s natural proclivities were not solely something to be ‘avoided’ but also a factor present since birth (Archard 2015: 46; Peddle 2001: 5). Driven by the writings of Thomas Hobbes and recorded sermons since the sixteenth century, was the

view that children were “innately evil” (Freeman & Mathison 2009: 2) or “wicked” (Kehily 2009: 5). As “sinful beings, their will had to be broken by strict discipline, punishment, and denial of pleasure” (Kassem *et al.* 2010: 6), drawing upon Christian values (Kehily 2009: 41 – 42) to correct their “wild and unregulated” proclivities (Woodhead 2005: 5). Families became the institutions undertaking their education with a mindset that this would ensure the families’ and the child’s salvation (Kassem *et al.* 2010: 9). Regarding children as ticking time-bombs, to be corrected and concealed, recurs in contexts where children experience perverse childhoods that stray from the ‘ideal.’

With the Age of Reason and Enlightenment of the eighteenth century religious influences and ‘sinfulness’ fell away to prioritising intellectual support and educational development (Freeman & Mathison 2009: 2; Kassem *et al.* 2010: 9; Kehily 2009: 56). Two diverging standpoints then stood strong: Locke’s view of the child as a *Tabula Rasa*, and Romantic outlooks of children entering the world with a ‘natural innocence’ (Freeman & Mathison 2009: 2; Kassem *et al.* 2010: 9, 19).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his crucial literary work, *Émile* (1779), is foundational to the Romantic discourse and still informs Western normative assumptions surrounding children and their place in the order of human nature (Jones *et al.* 2005: 42; Kassem *et al.* 2010: 19). The key proponent of Rousseau’s work is the ascription of spirituality to the child, placing them “close to God, nature, and all things good” (Kehily 2009: 5). This Apollonian view advocates heavily for children’s purity, natural innocence, and curiosity which, according to Kehily (2009: 5) is subject to a threat of contamination by a “corrupt outside world” (Archard 2004: 46; Beier 2015: 4, 8; Freeman & Mathison 2009: 2). Adults are tasked with protecting children’s innocence and goodness and guiding their development within an environment that advocates pleasurable experiences of the natural world (Cassidy 2012: 60; Hoffmann-Ekstein *et al.* 2008: 6; Kehily 2009: 5; Woodhead 2005: 5); free from “adult oppression, especially in the adult setting” (Kassem *et al.* 2010: 9, 19). Although different vantage points are taken in depicting the ideal child’s upbringing, they all ascribe to the same norm; children’s socialization and upbringing into values and reason.

However, Rousseau’s notion of children’s environments needing to be free from any external corruption in order to nurture and protect innocence is simply not feasible in all cases. As will be depicted in the case analysis, children are not always sheltered from the dangers of the

world. At times they are directly embedded in environments where escaping these realities is not easily achieved. Therefore, it is necessary to understand that these contributions do not account for realities outside this narrative.

Featuring in a wave of post-Enlightenment thinking were debates concerning animal versus human nature where any deviation from what was believed to constitute ideal human nature was savage-like, chaotic, and a dangerous “other” (Kehily 2009: 115). Crucial to these debates was whether this “other” could be civilised. Conducive environments for childhood development construct another side, where those failing to meet the ideal norm are cast negatively as being lower down the “evolutionary scale” (Kehily 2009: 115). Thereafter, children’s places in society are understood in relation to the nuclear family and education–institutions which perpetuate a child/adult divide (Cassidy 2012: 58).

Rousseau departed from the notion of the “child in the child” (Archard 2015: 13), whereby children are regarded as “*sui generis*” (Elias 1967: 453), with their own unique way of “seeing, thinking and feeling” (Jenks 2005: 3) and a distinct place in the order of human life, as opposed to solely “adults to be” (Archard 2015: 12-13). Rousseau thereby argues that we actually know nothing of childhood due to our mistaken notion of trying to find the adult within the child and asking “what a man ought to know?” and not “what a child is capable of?” before becoming a man (Rousseau, quoted in Jenks 2005: 3). Seeking to make a child an adult before their time perverts the natural order and creates “premature fruits which are neither ripe nor well-flavored, and which soon decay” (Rousseau, quoted in Jenks 2005: 2).

To avoid this decay, Rousseau pioneered child-centred approaches to children’s education, premised on respecting the natural order and stages of a child’s development (Archard 2015: 30; Woodhead 2005: 10). Education is more than how and what is taught, and rather more greatly dependent on “when one teaches certain matters” (Archard 2015: 30). Thereafter, a new progressive pedagogy grew, drawing upon natural phenomena and the potentialities of child achievements (Archard 2015: 30; Jones *et al.* 2005: 43).

2.3 The Modern Conception of the Child

What has changed historically is not a newfound awareness of the child, but rather the structural form and architecture of childhood in everyday life (Archard 2015: 21; Qvortrup 2009: 645). In the *Centuries of Childhood* (1962) Philippe Ariès upholds that the childhood

we know from a modern social standpoint can only be understood from the late seventeenth/eighteenth century onward (Archard 2015: 19; Cheney 2007: 11-12; Matthews 2007: 325). Modern childhood, as a “social construction,” pertains to an awareness of its “specific nature” in time that distinguishes the child from the adult (Ariès 1982 quoted in Norozi & Moen 2016: 77). This distinction, according to Ariès, did not exist in medieval societies. The crucial difference of prior ideals of childhood lies in the manner of their recognition, representations, and relationships, which differ in accordance with what has become the modern, Western standard (Ariès 1962: 125; Jenks 1996: 63; Kehily 2009: 43).

Children’s worlds are now predicated on their innocence and institutionalised to protect their welfare along emotional, physical and even financial lines (Guldberg 2009: 48). Prior to this shift, childhood could be argued to have been merely “something to get through on the way to something better,” whereas now, the quality of this state of being is engaged more intently (Cunningham 2006: 15). Ariès identifies three sources causing this shift: the “changing emotional economy of the family” (Prout 2005: 9) towards innocence and protection (Norozi & Moen 2016: 77), childhood becoming an “immature period,” requiring extended discipline and training to reach a state of maturity (Prout 2005: 9-10), and childhood’s institutionalisation through age-graded institutions and schools (Prout 2005: 9 – 10; Norozi & Moen 2016: 77). This transformed the landscape of the child’s world to become places where they “properly belonged” (Prout 2005: 10).

Ariès’ work, while foundational, has been subject to scrutiny concerning the evidential credibility of paintings as a source of history, the ambiguity and generalised nature of his claims, and their essentialist and value-laden nature (Archard 2015: 22; Norozi & Moen 2016: 77). The term “presentism” is used to represent his predisposition to “interpret the past in light of present-day attitudes, assumptions and concerns” (Archard 2015: 22). Two critical aspects underlie this presentism. First, is the tendency to utilise contemporary society as a benchmark to highlight something that is lacking or absent in the past (Archard 2015: 22). The absence Ariès sought to disclose was solely a “dissimilar presence” (Archard 2015: 23 - 25) to the Western standard being painted as equal and universal (Kehily 2009: 45). Modernity did not “invent or discover childhood,” it merely produced a framework of meaning that differed from those preceding it, based off of a complex historical social construction (Prout 2005: 10).

Second, is the assumption that modern conceptions of childhood are the moral benchmark for their nature and the behaviour to be directed towards them (Archard 2015: 23). According to Ariès, once we recognise what children are really like, this requires learning the “moral sensibility” to treat them “properly” (Archard 2015: 23). This paints a black-and-white scenario of assimilation to the morally right standard, or deviation into a “no childhood” category – a common picture within childhood literature that discusses a “disappearance of childhood” (Prout 2005: 10). Important to remember is how “modern” conceptions of children boil down to a social construction of the meanings and assumptions of a “certain social group at a certain point in time” (Kehily 2009: 45).

2.4 Childhood as a Separate Stage of Development

The evolving nature of perspectives and actions taken towards children are, without a doubt, an embodiment of the environments, economies, and politics of the time. Surging capitalist competition, urbanisation, and liberal economies of the nineteenth century, with their concomitant industrialisation and child labour, provided fertile soil for romantic ideas to flourish (Arce 2012: 388). Objectives of producing an engaged citizenry of rational adults out of a “mob, mass or herd,” set a standard for many across the board (Kehily 2009: 114-115). Resurging once more is the correction and concealment of undesirable behaviour to produce these citizens out of children (Kehily 2009: 115). However, children working hand-in-hand with adults under industrialisation did not support this goal and, thus, a wave of initiatives challenging their place as labourers emerged.

This new sympathetic social climate bred a mind-set of “save the children and put them in school” (Arce 2012: 388), to prep them for the work needed in liberal societies and protect them from the “scourges of labour and disease” (Kehily 2009: 18). A narrative of an “infantilized childhood” emerged, upholding a culture of neediness within child-adult relations and quarantining children from the world of adults through family and school as the two primary domains of social control (Arce 2012: 388; Hogan 2005: 30; Kassem *et al.* 2010: 19; Scott 2008: 87). The dominant view was that “the child should know no other endeavour but to be at every stage of development wholly what this stage calls for” (Froebel quoted in Woodhead 2005: 11). Not only did this portray what was deemed ‘normal’ for a child at a certain age, but it also enabled universal assumptions about the “normality of any child” (Rose 1990: 142 cited in Kehily 2009: 98).

Notable in this regard are the influential twentieth century psychological theorists, most notably, Jean Piaget (Hart 2008: 28; Kehily 2009: 18, 27; Tisdall & Punch 2012: 253). Piaget's developmental approach regards rationality and intellectual growth as accrued through stages of socialisation and enculturation by structures of thinking in our environment (Fattore *et al.* 2007: 7-8; Jenks 2005: 21; Kehily 2009: 96, 116; Podder 2011: 143). More than being chronological, these stages are hierarchically arranged from "low-status infantile 'figurative' thought" to "high-status, adult, 'operative' intelligence" (Jenks 2005: 22). The cornerstone of Piaget's research is that "*all* children acquire cognitive competencies through a universal sequence" (Piaget cited in Archard 1993: 65-66), which gained traction globally in academia and practice (Archard 2004: 93; Kehily 2009: 96).

Whilst noting a child's active engagement with the social world, these social and emotional realms are confined to being merely influencing factors as opposed to constitutive for development (Scourfield *et al.* 2006: 21). The developing mind is "analytically distinct" and separate from the outside/social world, which serves the sole purpose of being the occasion for/the scene of personal change (Archard 2004: 43), or "something to be controlled" and quantified (Scourfield *et al.* 2006: 7, 21). The natural attainment of reason thereby serves as the linear goal of development and not a factor determined by culture (Scourfield *et al.* 2006: 23). Prior to acquiring the capacity for advanced thought, children only possess a "tenuous grasp on moral judgment" (Boyden cited in Hart 2008: 281) and thus require adult guidance in regulating their behaviour away from "mindless atrocities" (Hart 2008: 281-282).

Archard (2004: 94) asserts that it becomes easy to cast children in a light where they are deemed cognitively incompetent when they are evaluated against a culturally specific, Western perspective. By pushing a "universal" standard to childhood development, Piaget decontextualises children's actual lives, rendering them "opaque" (Fattore *et al.* 2007: 7-9; Scourfield *et al.* 2006: 23). Nevertheless, these orthodox perspectives have either implicitly or explicitly supplied the ontological roots of humanitarian action concerning children. Child-focused humanitarianism, alongside the infamous United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), exhibit universalist norms derived from Piaget and his intellectual progeny. This is clear with the straight-18 standard's criminalisation of child involvement in activities deemed antithetical to an 'innocent childhood' (Hart 2006: 223-224; Podder 2011: 143). Prioritising "universal truths about 'the child,'" as stipulated by Mayall (1994: 1180),

“blinds us to the personhood of children” and favours a comfortable view of children being the same, regardless of where they live.

Despite good intentions of promoting a child’s ‘best interests,’ these approaches can also be seen as sources of oppression, segregation, enforced exclusion (Archard 2015: 23, 71; Cheney 2007: 12). Moreover, propagating a moral ideal for children and childhood disregards critical socio-cultural variations of childhood which may not fall squarely along this ‘neat’ trajectory.

2.5 Socio-Cultural Approaches – Childhood as a Social Construction

The late twentieth century marked the beginning of the contemporary period of childhood studies, spanning until present day. Reflexivity is given attention with questions pertaining to how we come to know what we know, as well as how the subjects of these inquiries are engaged. This inclusion sought to break academics out of the disciplinary confines deemed the norm for centuries (Kehily 2004: 7). New academic inquiries fostered an alternate version of ‘the child,’ with its own requisite form of childhood. Fundamental to this period was the adoption of sociological perspectives, viewing childhood as simply not universal, but rather “a product of culture,” varying across time and place (Kehily 2004: 7).

The work of L.S. Vygotsky reframed childhood development and cognitive competence to be equally based on culture and on natural determinants (Hart 2008: 282; Norozi & Moen 2016: 77; Woodhead 2005: 11). This perspective coincided with recognition of children as a “social group,” placing greater emphasis on the context of socialisation, inter-subjective processes, and how children become members of their societies (Kehily 2004: 7-8). Children were now being recognised as participants, “social communicators and meaning makers,” as opposed to solely passive throughout their development (Kehily 2009: 29; Woodhead & Faulker 2008: 27). This new approach redirected attention away from the prioritisation of a singular deterministic pathway towards rationality by introducing more dynamic and multi-faceted examinations of children’s mobilisation (Hart 2008: 282; Smith 2002: 77; Tisdall & Punch 2012: 253).

Borne out of this sociological turn was the “new sociology of childhood” with parameters set out through the work of James and Prout. Initially, work in this field during the 1980s stood as a “counter-paradigm” to the conceptual and literary foundations of the past. However,

through being interrogated more critically, bodies of knowledge became more “rich, nuanced and diverse” (Tisdall & Punch 2012: 251). Foundational to this field is the basic proposal by James and Prout that “the immaturity of children is a biological fact of life, but the ways in which it is understood and made meaningful is a fact of culture” (James & Prout 1997: 7). A variety of key features and mantras have come to be associated with this emergent paradigm and would go on to redefine conceptualisations of children and childhood as equally embedded in context and culture as through biological influences (Kehily 2004: 8).

The first feature of six representing the paradigm is childhood as a social construction, requiring contextualised interpretations that account for societal beliefs and other aspects of culture. Childhood, being distinct from biological immaturity, is constituted as neither natural nor universal. Moving away from common-sense reasoning of ‘naturalising’ the child enables acknowledgement of their particularities and cultural differences (James & Prout 1990: 8-9; James & Prout 1997: 3; Kehily 2009: 93 - 94; Norozi & Moen 2016: 78). Furthermore, James and James (2008: 122) maintain that social constructivist views recognise how different realities arise from varying interactions and relationships that people undertake in a social environment and how these interactions shape our perceptions (Crotty 1998: 58; Freeman & Mathison 2009: 13; Morrow 2011: 4). Childhood, being socially constructed, is thereby not universally experienced in the same fashion everywhere (Kehily 2009: 94).

The second feature of the new paradigm is that childhood is not divorced from aspects, like gender, class, and ethnicity. Jenks (2004: 78) expresses that “childhood cannot be seen in isolation,” as it is deeply intertwined with circumstance, as it is on context, time, and culture (Norozi & Moen 2016: 79). Upheld in this view is a multiplicity of childhoods, varying in their particularities (Åkerström 2014: 36; James & Prout 1990: 8-9; James & Prout 1997: 3 - 4; Jenks 1996: 121; Kehily 2009: 93; Matthews 2007: 325; Norozi & Moen 2016: 78). Although prior narratives saw children as fixed and passive within overarching structures, latter approaches further engage with structure versus agency, as seen in Latour’s (1993) ‘actor-network’ model (Hanson *et al.* 2016: 605). By acknowledging variations in childhood experiences and well-being, it becomes meaningful to differentiate children as a social group (Åkerström 2014: 36-37; Alanen 2009; Qvortrup *et al.* 1994).

The third feature acknowledges the deficit of children’s independent perspectives of childhood, irrespective of the concern of adults. The argument is that their perspectives,

relationships, and cultures should be studied “in their own right,” as opposed to under the broadest of umbrellas of other actors like women (James & Prout 1990: 8-9; James & Prout 1997: 4; Hoffmann-Ekstein *et al.* 2008: 11; Kehily 2009: 93, 105; Norozi & Moen 2016: 78). The work of Charlotte Hardman (1973: 87) similarly states that children are “worthy of study as any other section of society.” Adopting a focus that brings children’s perspectives to the forefront could reveal aspects of social life that conventional ethnographies overlooked. In doing so, we begin the process of recognising their status as international actors in and of themselves (Watson 2006: 237).

The fourth feature regards children as active social agents/participants in creating knowledge, determining their own lives, and constructing society. No longer are they seen as “passive subjects of structural determinations” (James & Prout 1997: 3) enculturated by adults and awaiting their protection (James & Prout 1990: 8-9; Kehily 2009: 94; Matthews 2007: 324; Morrow 2011: 15; Norozi & Moen 2016: 78). Building on this point, Corsaro (2005: 24) argues that “children do not simply imitate or internalise the world around them.” In fact, they are active co-creators, meaning makers, and shapers of the environment which subsequently shapes them (Alanen 2009: 12; Freeman & Mathison 2009: 4; Hartung 2017). Agency, according to Prout (2005: 65), has been “glossed over” and “taken to be an essential, virtually unmediated characteristic of humans, particularly by adults.” This new paradigm moves beyond the binaries of being versus becoming, with agency being an end-goal acquired through adulthood (Abebe 2019: 1). As such, new frameworks have emerged to conceptualise children’s agency along a continuum by accounting for its interdependent nature (Abebe 2019: 1).

The fifth feature advocates for ethnography as the ideal method in studying childhood and giving children a platform to have a more direct voice and participate in the production of data (Freeman & Mathison 2009: 3; James & Prout 1990: 8-9; James & Prout 1997: 4; Kehily 2009: 94; Norozi & Moen 2016: 78). By researching *with* children, instead of solely *about* them (Matthews 2007: 328), children are recognised as possessing legitimate knowledge of their experiences and circumstances, as opposed to ‘becomings’ that lack rationality (Freeman & Mathison 2009: 14; Matthews 2007: 327).

The final feature is that researchers move beyond rhetoric to “engage in and respond to the process of reconstructing childhood in society itself” (James & Prout 1990: 8-9; James &

Prout 1997: 4; Kehily 2009: 94; Norozi & Moen 2016: 78). The emerging discipline, the Geographies of Childhood, echoes this view by advocating for understandings of how adult conceptions of childhood impinge on the spaces, places, and daily aspects of children's lives (Morrow 2011: 17). Therefore, it is not enough to reconstruct childhood in theory if these new statements and conceptualisations continue to lack follow-through in practices involving children (Matthews 2007: 325).

2.6 Theory-Practice Nexus

Simultaneously, with the rise of the new sociology of childhood, the 1980s through to the 1990s also demonstrated the close affinities between policies, practices, and theory – better known as the theory-practice nexus (Tisdall & Punch 2012: 249). Developments of this time exhibit a broader critical shift within Security and International Relations discourses. Discussions of new referents of analysis, as well as the rapid ascendancy of a human rights regime, created a niche where children emerged more prominently, not only in theory, but in initiatives concerning their rights (Beier 2015: 10). New narratives challenged notions of children as inferior, vulnerable, and a bundle of needs, and transitioned towards a new norm of children as citizens with rights (Hoffmann-Ekstein *et al.* 2008: 3; Mayall 2006). At the forefront was the UNCRC, which was published in 1989 and entered into force in 1990. The UNCRC became the quintessential display of a normative framework for the promotion and protection of the ‘best interests of the child’ (Fernandez 2011: 487; Franklin 1995: 16; Honwana 2009: 743; Watson 2006: 237).

The UNCRC embodies 54 articles covering “civil, economic, social and cultural rights” that a child is entitled to for their well-being. More broadly, these rights are divided into the three P’s: protection, provision, and participation rights (McMullin 2011: 743; Tisdall & Punch 2012: 250). Underpinning the three P’s are calls for non-discrimination (Article 2), children’s survival and development (Article 6), respect for the views of the child (Article 12), and their right to participate, be heard, and guided properly in accordance with their “evolving capacity” (Article 13 and 15) (Abebe 2019: 4; Ben-Arieh 2010: 16-17; Cassidy 2012: 69; Hart 2008: 279-281). The UNCRC’s positive construction of childhood recognises children as “social actors and human beings with their own rights,” where their welfare and vulnerability should be balanced with participation and agency.

However, growing academic interest in the proliferation of ‘new wars’ and ‘irregular conflicts,’ without clearly defined state actors or spaces of warfare, alongside increasing humanitarian interventions, fostered a ‘politics of pity’ within academia and practice (Angucia 2009: 80; Beier 2015: 2; Honwana 2009: 63). Participating in the “moral project of childhood,” the UNCRC depicts the rights and wrongs of how children’s wellbeing should be engaged and protected by adults (Hart 2006: 220; Kaplan 1994: 44, 76; Lee 2009: 12-13; Rosen 2007: 298). The child became an “integrative symbol for the world,” a “unifying moral force,” and an “instrument” in addressing crises involving children (Lee 2009: 7; Machel 1996: 89; Pupavac 2001: 99).

Further, the depiction of the ‘global child’ against images of children whose childhood has been lost to conflict, or other nefarious forces, coincided with a resurgence back to notions of vulnerability, innocence, victimisation, and age-grades (Hart 2006: 220; McMullin 2011: 752; Podder 2011: 145; Rosen 2007: 296). Realities deemed antithetical to a normal childhood, such as child soldiers, become “objectifiable political problems” (Beier 2015: 7 – 9), where childhood should be restored (Angucia 2009: 79; Lee 2009: 26; McMullin 2011: 752; Verma 2012: 444). The political realm, particularly in the context of war, is dominantly portrayed as a space that children should not inhabit nor participate in (Lee 2009: 3; Rosen 2007: 298).

This continued preoccupation with a child’s right to protection and provision, habitually to the detriment of fully harnessing their participation, transcends into reintegration programmes targeting child soldiers. Child soldiers are cast under “universal truths” as victims of tremendous atrocities, psychologically traumatised, and in need of assistance and care. By approaching scenarios with a preconceived problem perspective, programmes exhibit a “fire-brigade” (Angucia 2009: 78-79, 91) and paternalistic attitude (McMullin 2011: 744, 752; Verma 2012: 452).

Within critiques of these traditionalist preoccupations, child agency during war has become a popular theme, but the nature of agency beyond war currently relies on a brief basis of what it could (McMullin 2011: 755, 757, 761). The nature of agency, how it is displayed, where it falls within existing social structures, and how it can be included within reintegration programmes of FCS, lacks conceptual and practical clarity. This gap not only evidences how academic assumptions impact practice, but also where room for improvement lies in truly

understanding child agency. Bottom-up perspectives that account for indigenous theorisations and recognise realities on the ground are a growing advocacy in academia (Tisdall & Punch 2012: 259).

2.7 What is Missing?

What becomes clear in tracing back discussions concerning children is that academia has been in a constant state of flux from various ‘truths’ about children throughout history. Consistently present, however, is the strong impact that assumptions have in defining ‘the child,’ their capacities, and their ‘place. Implicit in these assumptions is a common treatment of the child as a peripheral factor to be guided, controlled, and moulded to an adult society’s needs. Despite the leaps and bounds exhibited in recognitions of the agentic capacity of children, particularly in uncontroversial roles and contexts, a continued gap exists with understandings of the nature of child agency amongst FCS.

The assertion is that a correlation exists between Western normative dominance and the manner in which post-conflict reintegration programmes are formulated. Reference will be made regarding to how the lack of contextualised accounts of norms and realities on the ground depict an incomplete story. Nevertheless, to account for this gap does not mean replacing current narratives. What is necessitated is a coexistence of Western conceptions drawn from the academia engaged with, with those encompassing norms, values, cultures, and lived realities falling outside, or even challenging, current norms. The chapter to follow will undertake the task of balancing out these narratives through a conceptual framework, embracing a variety of vantage points, including non-Western insights.

3. CHAPTER THREE: Conceptual Framework

3.1 Introduction

While a Western locus of enunciation, meaning those emanating out of academia and policy from European and North American contexts, undeniably correlates with the norms and understandings attributed to the child and childhood, these normative influences are not the only interpretation of children that exists. Due to the case analysis to be engaged with, it is critical that one acknowledges how situations on the ground reflect an interface between Western conceptualisations and those of an African nature, also referenced as non-Western. The reintegration of FCS in northern Uganda as a case study demonstrates how post-conflict environments not only exhibit transactions between a range of actors, but also an engagement of their cultural and normative contributions.

For the purpose of critically analysing the nature and manifestation of agency amongst FCS in post-conflict reintegration programmes, this chapter seeks to deconstruct the key concepts which influence engagements with children during humanitarian interventions, as well as at a local level. The concepts to be engaged with include the child and childhood, child soldier, agency – or to be more specific, child agency – and reintegration. Interpretations of these concepts are certainly not universal across the board. Therefore, the conceptual framework will encompass traditional, critical and African insights. In doing so, the framework will incorporate aspects of a multitude of diverse vantage points. This will enable the critical analysis, which follows, to deduce whether these conceptual foundations adequately reflect the reality of FCS' reintegration and agency, or if a new normative understanding of child agency is required.

3.2 What is a Child and How Do We Understand Childhood?

“The child” is a term that we have all, at one point or another, experienced very intimately as both an identity and an existence that moulded our relationships, environment, and nature of our being to a large extent. While it is irrefutable that we gain skills and undergo physical development after being born, the designation of childhood as a separate stage to adulthood is fundamentally a human construct with many variations and interpretations. This literature review provided insight as to where certain normative understandings of the child originated, and why they evolved in the way they did. Ultimately, these norms have largely been

rendered as universal truths which have transcended into policies and approaches towards children in the modern day.

Out of these understandings a few factors become clear: children have been defined in relation to age, what they lack in terms of attributes and capabilities, the spaces and relationships which guide them in their transition to adulthood, and, lastly, according to an apolitical stance. To ensure this framework does not fall into the same trap of collapsing alterity and assuming a homogeneous view of children, conceptions from more than one outlook will be acknowledged.

3.2.1 Age-based conceptualisations

With a concept as complex and contested as ‘the child,’ the simplest conceptualisation arises from age-grades. Age-grades provide an insight into both the identity attributed to a particular age and the nature of engagements, capabilities, and spaces deemed suitable. The UNCRC, along with the 1990 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, define children in this manner, as anyone under the age of eighteen (Angucia 2009: 80; Archard cited in Mastey 2017: 42; Lorey 2001: 9-10; McIntyre 2003: 1; OAU 1990). As such, ‘the child’ becomes a broad signifier of a developmental phase of life, beginning with birth and ending in adulthood.

However, childhood is anything but homogenous, as it houses multiple overlapping and consecutive stages within it – most notable to the study are adolescence and youth (Mastey 2017: 42). Beginning with adolescence, this stage is attributed to the older sub-section of those children ranging anywhere from ten to eighteen years of age who are close to entering into adulthood (Lee 2009: 14-15). The age-grade of youth particularly shows contestation between sources. While the World Bank’s Development Report (2007) and the UNCRC indicate different commencement ages, with the former indicating twelve and the latter fifteen, they both align in their view that youth extends no further than 24 (Del Felice & Onyeigwe 2018: 12-13; Lee 2009: 22). However, the African Youth Charter adopts a prolonged conception of youth as “a person between the ages of 15 and 35 years of age;” effectively adding ten years to the range of the UNCRC, and thirteen to the range given by the World Bank (Del Felice & Onyeigwe 2018: 12-13; Maina 2012: 9, 12). The significance of these designations is the particular rights, expectations, responsibilities, and accrual of accountability that stems from them (Mastey 2017: 42).

3.2.2 Attributes and capabilities

Implicit in childhood's depiction as an intermediary and separate stage from adulthood are connotations of Apollonian innocence, immaturity, and irrationality by virtue of their physical, mental, and emotional development. Adult protection of children thereby becomes essential to offset their inherent vulnerability while completing this natural transition towards adulthood (Maina 2012: 94-95; Podder 2011: 144). Protection only ends once children become independent, rational, and autonomous individuals/adults who possess cognitive capacities, a sense of identity, are conscious of their beliefs and desires, and can make informed decisions to which others can hold them accountable (Archard cited in Mastey 2017: 42-43). Competencies under this perspective are natural factors that change and grow in accordance with developmental stages, mediated by enculturation and socialization (Hoffmann-Ekstein *et al.* 2008: 12; Podder 2011: 143). Children are thereby conceptualised according to that which they seemingly do not possess as attributes and capabilities. Being defined by absence, they are separated not only conceptually, but spatially, from adults (Mastey 2017: 43).

Alternatively, cultural relativist schools of thought and the new sociology of childhood view childhood as a fact of culture and competencies as historically and culturally determined (Hoffmann-Ekstein *et al.* 2008: 12; James & Prout 1997: 10-14; Podder 2011: 143). Culturally-informed conceptualisations enable the recognition of heterogeneous meanings and capabilities attributed to childhood. One such distinction is the designation of childhood in social terms than in relation to chronological age (Lee 2009: 14).

Social conceptions of childhood further brings into question the applicability of universal, overarching normative frameworks such as that of the UNCRC. In fact, while the UNCRC was being drafted, many developing nations did not participate. Concerns arose regarding the (mis)application of a Minority World conceptualisation of a 'global child' to countries and societies of the Majority World with their own conceptions and norms (Cheney 2007: 57-58; Hart 2006; Norozi & Moen 2016: 79; Plante 2008: 27; Tisdall & Punch 2012: 250, 254-255, 257).

Amidst this backlash, the OAU (1990) responded by adopting their own African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Tisdall & Punch 2012: 257). Unlike the UNCRC, which mainly delineates adult obligations and duties to the child, the OAU Charter emphasises

African values of responsibility, reciprocity, and community belonging on the part of the child (Cheney 2007: 58). Consequently, children are no longer just vulnerable, passive recipients; they are also competent persons who bear “social, economic, and political responsibilities for their families and communities” (Lee 2009: 14), particularly those who fall under the older stages of the childhood phase (Åkerström 2014: 48; Holloway *et al.* 2019: 463; Tisdall & Punch 2012: 257-259).

Stages of adolescence and youth both illustrate how realities faced in different societies impact notions surrounding their status. In Western societies their affluence mainly renders adolescence as a “period of liminality, lack of responsibility, and education” (Lee 2009: 15). The negligible difference of these qualities with childhood makes it easy to collapse all of those falling within the age bracket into a “single category of children” (Lee 2009: 15). In contrast, other societies conceive of adolescence as a “period of responsibility” due to lived realities that foster alternative considerations during childhood (Lee 2009: 15). Similarly, within the AU’s Agenda 2063 document positive terms of “potential, empowerment, transformative leadership and innovation” are used to depict youth as a force for change, as opposed to solely a target for predation (Del Felice & Onyeigwe 2018: 11; McIntyre 2003: 1-2). Therefore, conceptualising all children under notions of vulnerability and innocence disregards lived realities in favour of ideologies that adopt a paternalistic outlook (Cheney 2007: 64; Lee 2009: 15).

The global rights discourse’s notion of the child as a sovereign individual, imbued with rights and growing capabilities, contrasts with the OAU Charter’s view that collectivity takes precedence over individuality. Alternatively, children are viewed as potential ‘persons,’ possessing competencies, albeit to a limited degree, who grow until they reach a state of ‘full personhood’ (Cheney 2007: 58-59; Kilbride & Kilbride 1990: 84-85; Morris 1994; Wells 2009: 166; Valentin & Meinert 2009). The use of “personhood” as opposed to “adulthood” reflects the emphasis on community and belonging. The ideal person is socially, rather than developmentally, framed as someone who firmly roots themselves within their social group and possesses a commensurate orientation that prioritises social responsibilities (Cheney 2007: 58).

As “social persons” children are raised to be oriented properly towards the needs and views of their community, resulting in them being an “extension of their parents’ social

personhood” (Harris 1978: 79; Kilbride & Kilbride 1990: 84-85). Local views of development, as clarified by Hansen and Twaddle (1998: 232), depict it as a “continuous and creative interaction” taking place across and between the “universalist, the individualist, and the familial.” Individual development and achievements, therefore, do not occur separately from family growth and prosperity or that of one’s community (Cheney 2007: 58-59; Reynolds & Whyte 1998: 237). ‘The child’ is no longer an identity ascribed to an individual, but to a person with a group identity that is continuously acquired through relationships and contributions made within the spaces of their household and community (Afua 2005; Angucia 2009: 79; Cheney 2007: 58).

3.2.3 Spaces and relationships

In many ways the context and spaces of childhood determine the possibilities presented to the child in navigating this phase. As conceived by UNICEF (2005) and in the UNCRC, childhood should entail a safe space and family environment, as well as an “atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding” (UNGA 1989; Lee 2009: 26). A unidirectional relationship thereby ensues where adults are tasked with providing the environment, care, and protection while the child is free to “grow, play and develop” (Angucia 2009: 79).

As discussed in the literature review, the notion of experiencing a ‘normal childhood’ in spaces such as school and home assumes that all children have access to the ‘safety’ of these spaces. Abebe (2019: 11) notes that in many African contexts family circumstances will determine whether a child participates in activities outside of these domains, namely pertaining to work, as well as how to “combine work and school.” This interdependency lies at the core of child-adult relationships, with them being reciprocal, rather than one-sided (Abebe 2019: 11; Tisdall & Punch 2012: 257). As a philosophical area of inquiry, reciprocity is largely under-represented in relation to the literature available on children’s rights. However, it is a crucial factor in understanding relations in African contexts and could potentially bridge the gap between the dominance of rights in discourse and practice with other values such as “responsibility, respect, and entitlements,” such as during post-conflict reintegration (Twum-Danso 2009: 430).

Reciprocity features strongly in “responsibilities of the child” within Article 31 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Tisdall & Punch 2012: 257). Article 31 (OAU 1990) stipulates that *every child* shall have responsibilities towards their family,

society, state, other legally recognised communities, and the international community. While subject to their age and abilities, responsibilities depict how the child is not just an individual to be nurtured, but also a person with accountability (OAU 1990; Tisdall & Punch 2012: 257).

Accountability can also be evidenced in a local concept of *mpisa* – drawn from Bagandan society, one of the single largest ethnic groups in Uganda – which refers to a custom, habit, and proper code of conduct guiding child-adult relations. Kilbride and Kilbride (1990: 89) explain that *mpisa* concerns obedience towards authority figures whereby a child should not interfere in adult conversations, shouldn't improperly greet others, or neglect their social expectations – to name a few. *Mpisa* exemplifies the complex interdependencies between children and adults that render children as persons within a larger social/communal identity (Cheney 2007: 59).

To regard children solely through their rights could hold contradictions with the manner in which societies engage with children. According to Cheney (2007: 60), she was informed by Virginia Ochwo, a trainer in the Ugandan Child Rights NGO Network (UCRNN) in Kampala, that many local languages often don't have a word for 'rights.' The closest term she could link to rights was one from the local Lugandan language, "*ddembe*", which roughly translates to "you are free to do what you want." Naturally, this stirs up discontent within communities, as it contradicts notions of responsibility, reciprocity, and accountability. As such, Cheney (2007: 60) notes that these contexts may warrant a balance between viewing children as rights bearers and as persons imbued with responsibilities.

This brings one to ask: how does a child within these interdependent relationships transition to become an adult? The answer, broadly, is through rites and practices. These rites and practices take a variety of forms and are executed differently depending on context (Lee 2009: 14; Maina 2012: 93). While biological markers also come into play, social factors are equally profound in this transition. Adulthood within traditional African societies, according to Maina (2012: 92-93), was exclusively reserved for men with social status and wealth, while the rest of society remained in a "status of perpetual minors," irrespective of age. This changed with societies implementing rites, rituals, and other practices to elevate those who fall within categories of youth (Maina 2012: 13, 93). Therefore, adult spaces and roles are socially constructed, earned, and ritualised statuses that tie the individual to their community,

and illustrate a negotiation of “positions of power, authority and social worth” (Christiansen *et al.* 2006: 12; Maina 2012: 92-93).

3.2.4 Children as outsiders in politics

While it becomes evident that there is no singular construction of children to depart from, the conceptual tug-of-war ultimately gets overshadowed when matters of children’s security place image of the ‘ideal child’ on a pedestal above all others. This “iconographic symbol of what is to be protected” (Podder 2011: 144) has forged a ‘kindred space’ for children in international politics, where they are subject to “sympathetic interventions” (Mastey 2017: 39) under a “moral project of childhood” (Cook 2017: 4-5). Certainly not a new venture, this moral project, according to Cook (2017: 4 – 5), stems from the “varied efforts over time by various parties to determine, arrange, or otherwise deem appropriate (or inappropriate) the boundaries and dimensions that make up the childhoods at hand, and thus of childhood generally.” Notions of what children can and cannot do in the eyes of the law are evident during instances where lived realities of children challenge the dichotomy between right and wrong (Abebe 2019: 3-4).

The rights of the child, as embodied in the UNCRC, (UNGA 1989) follows a model of the three P’s: protection, provision, and participation. While executing the three P’s, the Convention upholds a principle of “devotion to the best interest of the child,” which is equally ambiguous as it is culturally motivated (Åkerström 2014: 50-52). In many cases, ‘best interests’ are driven by the same stereotypes and norms unpacked in the literature review and conceptual foundations of the child. Furthermore, the matter of pursuing these best interests is based on the protection of the child from what is deemed worst-case scenarios. Following from this outlook of protection is the overarching view that children and childhood should be situated in “peculiar political space” outside of politics (Cohen 2005: 221; Bosco 2010: 384).

The shift from interstate to civil wars has warranted new responses to impacts which now predominantly emerge from within, and in many cases involve children. Childhood, a seemingly innocent and apolitical phase of life, is now intimately affected as a new battleground (Angucia 2009: 80). Children have become “pawns of conflict,” with Clausewitz’s stipulation that “war is politics by other means” holding just as true today as when it was written (Angucia 2009: 82). However, apolitical stances continue to prevail, with

any involvement of children in places deemed “outside of childhood” being treated as a “moral affront and social crisis” (Bosco 2010: 384; Hart 2006: 220; Rosen 2007: 298). Consequently, classifications of childhood as a “period of happiness and innocence,” excludes those for whom this is not the case, and casts children present in these political spaces as “unchild-like” (Cheney 2007: 17; James 1993: 29).

3.3 Child Soldier – Victim or Perpetrator?

Regarding the conceptualisation of the child above, the concept of a child soldier not only contradicts notions of childhood innocence and protection, but also classifications of age, competencies, spaces and relationships, and the preferred apolitical role of children. Following the release of Graça Machel’s United Nations (UN) Study on the “Impact of Armed Conflict on Children” in 1996, child soldiers rose to prominence as an issue framed in accordance with children’s rights, humanitarian law, and the UNCRC (Lee 2009: 6-7). Beyond propagating the moral repugnance of children in war, the UNCRC stands as a stark portrayal of the legal and normative backlash concerning underage recruitment (Lee 2009: 3-4, 7). As stated by Child Soldiers International, there is no viable excuse that would justify the arming and use of children as a means to fight adult wars (Keairns 2003: 2).

The current ‘child soldier crisis’ did not emerge out of a newfound use of children in war; rather it is a depiction of how our perceptions surrounding its legitimacy and morality have altered in accordance with historical, political, economic, and social developments (Lee 2009: 3-4; Rosen 2007: 304; Ryan 2012: 4). During World War I, soldiers under the age of 18 were painted as brave young men and praised for their service. Slogans such as “only a boy but a hero,” and “o so young & yet so brave” are but a few examples of positive ascriptions given for their participation in warfare (Lee 2009: 3). Following World War II, the global children’s rights discourse shifted perspectives towards a criminalisation of child involvement in warfare (Lee 2009: 4, 7, 12). By virtue of their innocence, children are pigeonholed as victims, and any agency executed through their participation is downplayed, even into post-conflict environments (Beier 2015: 6; Cheney 2005: 36; Jenks 1996; Lee 2009: 12; Schwartzman 2001: 28).

3.3.1 Straight-18 position and legal prescriptions

Foundational to the shift illustrated above are the series of policy prescriptions which reinforce an assumption of the “universalised and naturalised vulnerability of under-18s” (McMullin 2011: 751). The straight-18 position stipulates that, by virtue of a childhood conceived as a “period of innocence, dependency and immaturity” (Lee 2009: 14), no political military participation is appropriate or acceptable for a child under eighteen (Rosen 2007: 296). Moreover, any variation within the under-18 category is not accounted for, leading to a straight-18 position that promotes a tendency to “infantilise older children” within a child soldiering experience (Hart 2008: 281). This strong aversion to children’s involvement in war, deriving from the conceptual foundations of childhood, illustrates how shifting political agendas such as the politics of age can impact the framing of cultural norms (Honwana 2009: 64; Plante 2008: 31; Rosen 2007: 296-297).

3.3.2 Child soldier – 18 and below

As referenced in the Cape Town Principles and Save the Children’s “Child Soldiers: Care and Protection of Children in Emergencies” field guide, a child soldier is “any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity” (cited in Lorey 2001: 3; Lee 2009: 3). Further, a child soldier is not solely a child who is or has carried arms. Additional roles include their engagement as cooks, messengers, or porters, as well as the use of young girls as wives and other sexual purposes (Brett & McCallin 1996: 17; UNICEF 1997: 8). Providing further depth, Gates (2011: 31) emphasises that children’s participation is undertaken under groups/forces which systematically and strategically employ violence in a variety of ways. Violence manifested either physically or emotionally through socialisation tactics, impacts children’s experiences, involvement, and reintegration after war. Instead of classrooms, these children develop in “war rooms,” where new normative frameworks complicate any transition back to “normality” (Mastey 2017: 45).

3.3.3 Child OR soldier

One of the most contested parts of the term, is the conflation of two opposing elements with the child and a soldier; often a skilled adult (Angucia 2014: 364). Further, the term “child soldier” controversially merges the victim with a perpetrator. While child soldiers do not adhere to traditional notions of the child, they also do not exhibit the typical identity of a

soldier as being strong and able to make life and death decisions (Weyns 2012: 547). Honwana (2008: 10) expresses that these children are in an unsanctioned position that neither positions them solely within the realm of childhood, nor that of adulthood.

3.3.4 Murphy's model of child recruitment

The manner by which children enter into a child soldiering experience is clarified through Murphy's detailed analysis of four types of recruitment (Angucia 2014: 357-358; Murphy 2003). Firstly, under the coerced youth model children are victims of violent coercion, and thereby not willingly conscripted (Murphy 2003: 64). Secondly, children under the revolutionary youth model become involved as "revolutionary ideologists," motivated through an aim to change their society (Murphy 2003: 64). Thirdly, children within the delinquent youth model seek out military involvement as a matter of escaping a life on the streets. These children, often considered opportunists, exploit the so-called "spoils" of warfare and social turmoil (Murphy 2003: 64). The final model is the youth clientelism model where relationships built between the children and those commanding them are predicated on these commanders providing for their protection in exchange for service and loyalty. This instance highlights how children often manage dependency with use of their agency (Murphy 2003: 65). While Murphy's model clearly portrays varying experiences of children's military involvement, they all get blanketed under the same term of "child soldiering" (Lee 2009: 8).

3.3.5 The child soldier as a deviation from the norm

The manner in which international law theorises child soldiers is fundamental to their portrayal as deviant products and victims at the hand of adult abuse and criminality (Rosen 2007: 297). Implicit in these notions is a reiteration of common themes of dependency, exploitation, and the child's inherent powerlessness in comparison to adults (McMullin 2011: 751; Rosen 2007: 297). These recurring themes play into humanitarian narratives that predominantly uphold Murphy's "coerced youth model" to the detriment of any other narrative depicting competence, mindful participation, resilience, or agency (Murphy 2003: 64; Rosen 2007: 298). Children, in this light of emotional and rational deficiency (Hart 2008: 281; Lee 2009: 9), are narrowly painted to base their actions on belief, feelings, and their senses as they "do not know, understand, judge, or decide" (Rosen 2007: 299). This makes child soldiering a dangerous divergence that raises concerns of children being "sleeper agents

ready to be activated into violence at the flip of a switch” (Machel cited in McMullin 2011: 752; Maina 2012: 130; McMullin 2011: 760; Verma 2012: 443).

Moreover, a child soldier reality does not simply end once the guns are put down. Upon returning home, FCS are met with strong protection-first efforts to hopefully reinstate some level of an “ideal childhood” (McMullin 2011: 752; Verma 2012: 446). This only replaces one extreme with the other, while ignoring the in-between. In many ways, children and childhood have largely been delegated to the terrains in which security practices concerning them are played out, but this is slowly changing (Beier 2015: 10).

3.4 Child Agency – A Fundamental Development or a Pipe-Dream?

As expressed by Lee (2009: 24), war compels people to “constantly negotiate, adapt and strategise their options and relationships, however difficult their circumstances might be.” However, when discussing a child’s experience of war, as well as their transition to a post-conflict environment, discussions of their ability to negotiate, adapt, and strategise are downplayed to fit a protection narrative (Beier 2015: 4). While academia and practice have grown in their recognition of the child as an actor, very little insight has been given beyond merely providing “evidence of agency” amongst “at risk children” in various contexts (Abebe 2019: 12; Bordonaro & Payne 2012: 367, 414; Robson *et al.* 2007: 138). More is still left to be said about the nature of their agency, how it manifests, and how different contexts alter and shape it (Abebe 2019: 6; Bordonaro & Payne 2012: 423; Durham 2011; Holloway *et al.* 2019: 459; Watson 2006: 243).

3.4.1 Agency and what it means to be an agent

By virtue of developments in academia and practice, children have acquired recognition as competent social actors with the right to be involved and heard in decisions made about their lives (Bordonaro & Payne 2012: 365; Fernandez 2011: 487; Holloway *et al.* 2019: 459). Important to discussions stemming from this development is that an actor need not be equated with agency. As stipulated by Mayall (2002: 21), the two terms differ: as an actor is “someone who does something arising from a subjective wish,” whereas an agent is “someone who does something in relation with other people” (Abebe 2019: 6). This distinction lies in the former’s performativity, while the latter is relational and involves a negotiation with social and cultural assumptions, constraints, and processes (Abebe 2019: 6;

Asad 2000: 35; Tisdall & Punch 2012: 255). The social agent is thus “someone whose actions have a bearing not only on their own life but also on the lives of others” (Åkerström 2014: 40). Therefore, understanding the socio-cultural contexts and relations surrounding agency is equally important as identifying the agent and what it means to act with agency (James 2009: 41).

Taking the conceptual classification further, Ansell and van Blerk (2007), as well as Panelli *et al.* (2007), emphasise thinking and doing as crucial components to understanding agency. Along this line, Asad (2000: 29) and Moncrieffe (2009: 4) define agency as the individual’s capacity to act consciously and voluntarily in making purposive choices upon their environment. Agency, in a broad sense, is imbued with certain capacities, competencies, and activities to be undertaken by an individual in navigating the contextual factors in their lives, and their position while doing so (Abebe 2019: 8; Robson *et al.* 2007: 135).

An additional factor at the basis of agent classifications is individuality and autonomy, which are strongly regulated through normativity (Asad 2000: 30; Barandiaran *et al.* 2009: 1-2; Bordonaro & Payne 2012: 366). The normativity condition stipulates that the agent informs their actions and agenda from a particular set of goals, values, and norms (Barandiaran *et al.* 2009: 1-2, 5; Christiansen & Hooker 2000: 133). Further, norms also inform structures— a matter captured within Anthony Giddens’ (1984) structuration theory (Eickelkamp 2010: 502-503; Elder-Vass 2008: 455-456; Maina 2012: 128). The theory’s basis is that each individual’s agency, as the “ability to deploy a range of causal powers in decision making,” engages with a structure made up of the various “rules, norms, resources and patterns of choice and power in society” (Maina 2012: 128). During their agential moment, an actor can either reproduce or transform these structures present in their environment. However, the agent is not immune from conditions in their environment, which can either positively endorse, or negatively constrain, their agency (James 2009: 43; Moncrieffe 2009: 3-4; Tisdall & Punch 2012: 255).

Confronted with these conditions, agency is often associated with “positive moral goals,” including “resilience, resourcefulness, responsibility and constructive action/coping” (Bordonaro 2012: 422; Bordonaro & Payne 2012: 366-367; Jeffrey 2012: 246). The result is the possession of agency being painted good and its absence as bad, as well as repercussions

regarding ambiguous actions which “go against the grain” through a lens of limitation (Bordonaro & Payne 2012: 367; Gigengack 2008: 205).

3.4.2 Ambiguous agency

Ambiguous agency is a term used to signify the nature of agency employed by children in situations that stand in stark contrast to normative moral and social ideals of childhood and children’s behaviour (Bordonaro & Payne 2012: 366). These “inappropriate” spaces are inhabited by children labelled at risk, true victims, unchild-like, and out of place. As such, they are placed in limbo; “an unrecognized in-between social space between childhood and adulthood” (Abebe 2019: 7; Bordonaro & Payne 2012: 368; Durham 2000: 116). Alongside its contradiction of a global childhood, moral assessments undertaken by NGOs and state actors also regard ambiguous agency as an obstacle to practices and interventions (Bordonaro & Payne 2012: 366; Holloway *et al.* 2019: 462). Concealment and correction are employed to return the child and their behaviour to a morally acceptable state (Bordonaro 2012: 423; Bordonaro & Payne 2012: 368). Children’s agency must be of the “right kind” to be praised and to align with social and behavioural requirements within programmes (Bordonaro & Payne 2012: 368; Durham 2008: 151 - 152). Only actions meeting the moral standards under the “politics of children’s agency” will be treated as “unconstrained agency” (Bordonaro 2012: 422; Bordonaro & Payne 2012: 370; Holloway *et al.* 2019: 462).

3.4.3 Quantitative ideas of agency

An additional layer present in this moral tug-of-war is the ethical conundrum of accepting agency to the detriment of vulnerability, support, and protection. To account for child agency, while seeking to avoid proliferating this ethical conundrum, “quantitative ideas of agency” have emerged (Bluebond-Langner & Korbin 2007; Bordonaro & Payne 2012: 369; Durham 2008: 152; Tisdall & Punch 2012: 255-256). Even children who inhabit the same context and boundaries could exhibit very different manifestations of agency. Agency is thereby fluid and cultivated along a continuum, through continuous engagement of material conditions and contexts, as well as the norms and values informing them (Abebe 2019: 8-9; Moncrieffe 2009: 6-7). With the positive values exhibited in understanding children’s wartime agency, actions of resilience; resourcefulness; and resistance are seen as proper reactions under extremely constrictive circumstances (Bordonaro 2012: 422). It is from this lens that child

agency in these contexts is painted under limitations, with labels of tactical, thick, and thin agency.

3.4.3.1 Tactical agency

At the basis of these limited classifications is an engagement with influence, position, autonomy, and, therefore, power. It is through these factors that one will comprehend the nature of how tactical agency is conceptualised and distinguish tactic from strategy. De Certeau (1984: xix) defines strategy as the “calculation or manipulation of force-relationships, which requires a defined physical and social space, where the actor has autonomy to generate relationships.” While a tactic is a calculated action, similar to strategy, the person taking action lacks autonomy to act in a space that is not their own; a “space of the other” (de Certeau 1984: 37; Honwana 2009: 65). Therefore, tactical agency is a means of dealing with one’s immediate circumstances, taking advantage of opportunities present, and depending on chance offerings (Abebe 2019: 8; Honwana 2009: 63, 66; Langevang & Gough 2009: 752). In essence, an agent employing tactical, or “bounded,” agency has “no power base and no locus from which to act independently,” and is thereby classified as the “art of the weak” and the “agency of victims” (Honwana 2009: 66; Utas 2005: 403).

3.4.3.2 Thick and thin agency

To comprehend the continuum of how constraints impact child agency’s manifestation, Klocker (2007) suggests the notions of “thick and thin agency.” Thickness, under Klocker’s classification (2007: 85), refers to the “latitude to act within a broad range of options,” whereas thinness pertains to everyday actions and decisions made within “highly restrictive contexts,” where few alternatives are available (Abebe 2019: 6; Tisdall & Punch 2012: 255). Tisdall & Punch (2012: 256) note that by virtue of the constraints present in childhood environments and relationships, and the “spatial limits of their action spaces,” children could possess more of a thickness of agency within local situations, and a thinned agency at macro and policy levels. Hence, thick and thin agency are not situations of either/or, equally as much as a person can be dependent and independent in different circumstances.

3.4.4 Assumptions pertaining to child agency

Similar to the concepts of the child and child soldier, the assumptions in conceptualisations of child agency have been subject to intense questioning. The first to be questioned is that of child agency as a universal condition of an autonomous agent (Abebe 2019: 5). This assumption brings together notions of autonomous agency and the responsible liberal citizen with the broader umbrella of the “the child” (Abebe 2019: 5). Approaching agency in a unilinear fashion that views competence to enact agency as universally given, also suggests that “behaviours and actions in the here-and-now are not good enough” (Abebe 2019: 5-6). This leads one to the second assumption of incremental agency, which faces counter-arguments that agency has multiple dimensions and identities which can often be contradictory, in a continuous state of flux and coexisting in different contexts. Rather than quantifying agency, it should be understood in a qualitative manner, grounded in interrogations of context (Abebe 2019: 5-6).

Finally, the assumption of Western Individualism and the autonomous agent faces arguments that it incorrectly represents agency in a way that fails to acknowledge notions of community. The individual versus community debate draws heavily on arguments for contextualised understandings which account for cultural differences, lived realities, and how these impact norms and practice. Agency as “tied to an independent selfhood” (Abebe 2019: 5) ultimately portrays the individual as separate to structure and, while being influenced by it, still able to exercise free will. Conversely, a reconceptualisation is necessary in societies with cultures where agency is interconnected and the community is placed above the individual self (Abebe 2019: 5).

3.4.5 Interdependent agency

Interdependent agency addresses the communal dimension of participation and regards child-adult relationships through a lens of interdependencies, reciprocity, societal obligations, mutual needs, and familial notions of care (Abebe 2019: 10-11; Åkerström 2014: 54-55). In many African societies child agency is seen as the capacity to “attract and support dependents” (Abebe 2019: 10). Agency is executed through engendering support networks under an ethics of care, and acknowledged as acquired following an “ability to support interdependent livelihoods and fulfil familial expectations over time” (Abebe 2019: 11; Åkerström 2014: 54-55; Crockburn 2007; Durham 2011). It moves beyond the mere

“manifestation of competence” on the part of the individual child actor to recognise agency as a “strategy of collective existence through which social reproduction is sustained” (Abebe 2019: 11).

3.4.6 Importance of context

Equally important in determining the nature of agency is acknowledging the extent to which an agent’s context can either “open or foreclose possibilities for meeting their current and future needs” (Holloway *et al.* 2019: 463). According to Holloway *et al.* (2019: 464) personal agency should be conceptualised as “always constrained within a larger field of social forces and power relations.” Acknowledging the importance of context brings us one step closer to understanding how intervention programmes for children in a post-conflict environment can either promote agency, or constrain it (Abebe 2019: 12).

3.5 Reintegration and Participation – Fit for Its Purpose or Lacking in Depth?

Forming a strong part of the study’s case analysis is reintegration. Reintegration is a process that falls under the broader scale of post-conflict peacebuilding and follows on from Disarmament and Demobilisation practices enacted by the UN (UN 2018). The premise behind instituting Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) is to secure peace and prevent a country’s reversion back to a state of conflict (Muggah 2009: 1). According to the Paris Principles, and echoed by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, reintegration is an inherently long-term process that requires an open time-frame and stable sources of commitment and finances from a multitude of actors, both within and external to the conflict. A key aim of reintegration is that actions form part of a country’s broader development and enable the building of local and national capacities on a continuous, long-term basis (Mels *et al.* 2012: 16; Porto *et al.* 2007: 18; UNGA 2005).

3.5.1 Three stages of reintegration

Typically, the reintegration process entails three main stages. The first stage is the reinsertion phase where FCS experience a brief initial stopover, no more than 48 hours, at a reception centre/demobilisation site to receive once-off packages and be reunited with their family – if possible (Lorey 2001: 24-25). The second stage takes place at interim care centres where daily routines and responsibilities are re-established (Lorey 2001: 25). Resources included

during the child's stay are screenings to determine their needs, access to education, health care, psychosocial support, vocational training, and other key services to facilitate an easier transition 'home' (Angucia 2009: 90; Cheney 2007: 28; Lorey 2001: 26-27; Mels *et al.* 2012: 17; Özerdem & Podder 2011b: 321; Plante 2008: 23; UNDPKO 1999: 5-15). The final stage is longer-term reintegration where "family reunification and re-establishment of emotional bonds" are fundamental for an "effective social reintegration" (Lorey 2001: 30). In this light, reintegration is an "inherently communal process of creating social acceptance and reconciliation through social justice" (Machel 1996: 73). However, despite an advocacy that the children re-enter meaningful roles and identities within their communities, not all children receive acceptance or resonate with these post-war roles and identities (Lorey 2001: 31; Mels *et al.* 2012: 17).

3.5.2 Return to a "normal childhood"

A crucial underpinning to the programmes and services provided in a child soldier's reintegration is the desire to transform them back into a child, and then a citizen (Muggah & Baaré 2009: 229; Porto *et al.* 2007: 20). This seemingly "minor correction" of this transformation is largely a misconception, downplaying the extent of changes emanating from their return (Porto *et al.* 2007: 20). In many ways, short-term priorities within DDR, executed in a "one size fits all" manner, cloud the contextual, holistic, and long-term processes required that move beyond a "quick return to the 'normality' and childhood lost to war" (Douglas *et al.* 2004: 65; Lee 2009: 26; Porto *et al.* 2007: 20-24; Verma 2012: 444).

3.5.3 The element of participation

Often neglected at the onset of reintegration is the participation of returnees. Participation in interventions, as both a means and an end, could be crucial in bridging the contributions of all actors: individual, community, and external (Lund 2007: 140). Facilitating child participation is becoming a growing consideration in the formulation of programmes, but what exactly would this look like in practice? As stipulated by Article 12 of the UNCRC, participation is the child's right to both engage and have a voice in all decisions concerning them (UNGA 1989). Additionally, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009: 5) defines participation as an "exchange between children and adults on the development of policies, programmes and measures in all relevant contexts of children's lives" (Åkerström 2014: 52).

Moreover, it requires that four key elements are present: space, voice, audience, and influence (Lund 2007). Without all these factors, Lund (2007) argues that a child's participation will be sufficiently compromised and have very little impact (Cassidy 2012: 67). Furthermore, to ensure participation is empowering, any tokenistic, superficial, and decorative inclusions of children in these relations should not be tolerated. If not a voluntary and mutual exchange, participation will be another source of manipulation (Ruiz-Casares *et al.* 2017: 4).

3.5.4 Capacitate

The nature of participation can also be understood through “capacitate” – a concept meaning “participating actively for change” (Lund 2007: 134). Regarded in this fashion, participation could take the form of any type of action, formal or informal, so long as it is an active contribution for change. Furthermore, what empowers today may not always empower tomorrow (Lund 2007: 145). Therefore, conceptions of participation and agency should be situated and revisited on an on-going basis to acknowledge the continuum of agency in different contexts (Ruiz-Casares *et al.* 2017: 3-4, 6).

3.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the key concepts of this study can all be tied back to the manner in which children are viewed and defined. Crucial to these views, are the sources of definitions, as different conceptualisations depict contradictory standpoints. Beyond solely illustrating a conceptual divergence, the differences reflected between a Western and non-Western approach have critical influences on the subsequent framing of child soldiers, the nature of agency both during and post-war, and how this all culminates into the directions pursued in reintegration. Determining whether the current state of conceptual understanding is sufficient to reflect what is taking place, practically, is the goal of the case analysis to follow.

4. CHAPTER FOUR: Case Analysis – Northern Uganda

4.1 Introduction

The concept of the child soldier, while embodying everything deemed traditionally antithetical to ‘the child,’ is a reality that many children in northern Uganda have been forced to experience very intimately. Crucial to understanding the nature of a case like northern Uganda are the normative assumptions that fuel narratives of child soldiering experiences, as well as inform post-conflict reintegration programmes. Narratives of what is lost through their engagement, as opposed to what they gained, are reflective of this broader relationship between academia and practice going back centuries.

To begin this critical analysis, a background of the conflict driving the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency will be engaged, alongside a breakdown of the ideals and socialisation guiding Joseph Kony's conscription of children. How this culminates in a reality that directly contradicts dominant conceptualisations of the child will be discussed. The second part of the analysis is the post-conflict stage, where the structure of reintegration programmes, the stories surrounding them, and the broader socio-cultural and political environment will be unpacked. Further, the current state of participatory avenues for children, the ideals underpinning them, and the nature of child agency will be addressed. To conclude, the researcher will determine whether the key concepts, as presently conceived, capture the realities seen in the case analysis, or if a new normative framework encompassing the findings of post-conflict child agency is required.

4.2 Background to the Conflict

The child soldiering experience in northern Uganda manifested out of a complex political history and decades of warfare. As written by Ugandan historian, A. B. K Kasozi:

Inequality has been the main source of social conflict in Uganda, generating the structural violence from which all subsequent political, military and civilian violence would erupt (1994: 7).

Long-standing tensions between northern and southern ethnic groups since the colonial era ignited a ruthless civil war in 1987 between the Museveni administration, the LRA, and the local Acholi population; only to be reprieved in 2006 with the LRA dispersing to

neighbouring countries (Cheney 2005: 23; Vermeij 2011: 174). These historical tensions informed the LRA's socialisation tactics towards child rebels – a matter that ultimately complicated their reintegration upon returning home from the bush.

4.2.1 LRA's conscription of children – the ideal soldier

Following the disintegration of the 'witch of the North,' Alice Lakwena's, Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) against the Ugandan government in 1987, rebel soldiers continued to operate under Alice Lakwena's relative, Joseph Kony. Kony's proclamation of inheriting Lakwena's spiritual direction, Kony similarly desired to cleanse the Acholi people of evil sins, overthrow the Museveni government, and establish a new moral order based on his Ten Commandments (Acker 2004: 349; Finnstrom 2008: 5; Human Rights Watch 1997: 10 – 11, 65). This new order sought to counter the violence within Uganda's post-colonial history through removing leadership that only plays to the interest of the Southern population (Finnstrom 2008: 5; Human Rights Watch 1997: 30-31).

Kony's leadership exhibited blatant violence through coercion, terror, and ultimately abduction, to achieve the insurgency's divine goal (Acker 2004: 349; Human Rights Watch 1997: 11). This was due to the lack of northern Acholi support for Kony, despite his pursuits being seemingly in their interest (Acker 2004: 339; Haynes 2007: 311; Vinci 2007: 339). In response, Kony decided to undergo an ethnic cleansing of his own people and supplemented this "agency-loss" with an alternative avenue of child abductions, speculated to have potentially surpassed 70,000 cases (Angucia 2014: 358; Temmerman 2001: 156; Zyck 2011: 174). The premise behind recruiting children is that "it is easier to build strong children than repair broken men" (Uganda Rising 2006). To cultivate the "ideal" child soldier, the LRA utilised socialisation methods to not only physically subdue the child, but also encourage their submission to their new reality, identity, and social space.

4.2.1.1 Negative socialisation – physical and emotional tactics

Within the LRA's "army of children" (Zyck 2011: 174), the threshold between childhood as an apolitical space and the reality of warfare is crossed (Lorschiedter & Bannink-Mbazzi 2012: 243-244). Crucial to avoiding desertion and ensuring children remain with the LRA is the manner and use of socialisation as the "glue that keeps the LRA together as a cohesive group" (Vermeij 2011: 174 – 175). Through socialisation, children not only learn new roles,

but also begin internalising and taking for granted a new set of norms, identities, and behaviours. This enables a child soldier's integration, allegiance, loyalty, and sense of belonging with the LRA (Checkel 2005: 804; Gates 2011: 30; Özerdem & Podder 2011a: 13; Özerdem & Podder 2011b: 311; Vermeij 2011: 182).

Socialisation is “the process of inducting new actors into the norms, rules, and ways of behaviour of a given community,” with an aspiration of internalisation (Checkel 2010: 12; Gates 2011: 43). Processes commonly vacillate between different ways of learning and teaching, and primarily target “naïve individuals” – those susceptible to outside influence who are easily taught the “new skills, behaviour patterns, values and motivations needed” (Grusec & Hastings 2007: 13; Podder 2011: 176). Child abductees and their socialisation fit this categorisation (Gates 2011: 45; Özerdem & Podder 2011a: 1; Podder 2011: 176; Vermeij 2009: 27). The indoctrination of the child soldier into the LRA thereby embodies a complex process, ranging from the strategic use of fear and violence, to the indirect forms of misinformation, spiritual training, and incentives (Blattman 2007: 18; Vermeij 2011: 184).

4.2.2 Re-writing and forging a new generation of ‘the child’ within and beyond the LRA

The LRA socialisation process effectively combines both formal and informal components which facilitate a complex renegotiation and creation of “behavioural spaces removed from the norm” – within which a new rebel identity is forged and beliefs realigned (Özerdem & Podder 2011a: 13; Özerdem & Podder 2011b: 311). The premise behind this socialisation goes beyond cooperation and compliance to entail a transformation that is intended to be long-term (Gates 2011: 40, 43).

The violent nature of abduction is the first socialisation process that new recruits encounter. Along with the ritualised violence and killing of close relatives, recruits face caning and beatings with a machete, as well as gruelling and endless marching in difficult conditions (Gates 2011: 44; Human Rights Watch 1997: 13; Singer 2006: 74; Vermeij 2011: 176). Brutal induction tactics are intended to “break the children’s physical resistance, and psychological pressures,” and, ultimately, their “moral resistance” (Høiskar 2001: 343).

The next step is ‘boot camp,’ where intense military training drills a soldier identity into recruits (Gates 2011: 44; Vermeij 2011: 176). While everyone receives this training, relative capabilities are also assessed so child soldiers are “taught the right skills and perform

maximally” (Gates 2007: 4 cited in Vermeij 2011: 177 - 178). Skills move beyond traditional military roles to include medical personnel, cooks, porters, and even motherly roles (Vermeij 2011: 177). The duties ascribed give children a sense of purpose beyond that of an abductee.

Upon completing boot camp, informal socialisation through welcome ceremonies registers new members and leads to the subsequent shedding of a child’s individual identity. This stasis environment allows these children to be ‘reborn’ as soldiers – a similar instance to traditional coming-of-age ceremonies (Angucia 2014: 363; Cheney 2005: 37; Gates 2011: 36; Özerdem & Podder 2011a: 3, 15; Vermeij 2011: 176, 184-185). By replicating a similar circumstance within the LRA, they create an alternative set of norms that parallel those back home (Gates 2011: 43-44; Özerdem & Podder 2011b: 311; Slim 2008).

Re-identification, as well the smearing of shea nut butter on recruit’s bodies, is reminiscent of Lakwena’s symbolic rituals and practices to locate and protect new recruits from bullets (Human Rights Watch 1997: 11; Temmerman 2001: 150; Vermeij 2011: 176-177). Following the shea butter ceremony, recruits are separated, guarded and required to not wash their body for a period of days – three for boys and four for girls (Vermeij 2011: 177). This cleansing practice directly resonates with the symbolic and spiritual new-born practices seen amongst the Acholi in northern Uganda (Vermeij 2011: 177). The LRA’s socialisation practices thereby demonstrate an active manipulation of traditional cultural values and practices in the bush (Angucia 2009: 92).

Spirituality and faith strongly drive the LRA’s socialisation tactics and hold the group together as a cohesive unit with mutual beliefs (Acker 2004: 349; Finnstrom 2008: 5; Gates 2011: 44; Wood 2008: 546). Kony’s belief that he is a “disciple from God” guides his leadership (Vermeij 2011: 178-179). As revealed in interviews conducted with former rebels, this belief of Kony’s ability to “predict the future” through his spiritual encounters was seen as true in most cases (Vermeij 2009: 46). The basis of spiritualism within the LRA not only drives the group’s direction, but also informs the rules and behavioural conduct deemed appropriate (Vermeij 2011: 178).

The appropriate behavioural patterns and conduct of new recruits towards those higher up in the organisational hierarchy further coincides with the northern Ugandan principle of *mpisa*. Entering in at the bottom of this hierarchical system, new recruits/abductees need to respect already integrated LRA rebels. Beyond respect, they are also taught that behaviour that does

not meet expectations for living in the bush will be “reported and punished” (Vermeij 2011: 179-180). In essence, social control from seniors and elders, as well as other factors mentioned, resonates with dynamics within communities back home.

Through the mechanisms mentioned above, rebels begin viewing the group as a “new family.” Fellow rebels treat one another like brothers and sisters and even “protect and take care of each other” (Vermeij 2011: 179; Wood 2008: 546). “Fighting for your brothers” and pursuing broader interests, *ceteris paribus*, fosters comradeship and community (Gates 2011: 41-42). While recounting time in the bush, some former abductees use notions of “we” versus “them” to illustrate the sense of togetherness acquired amongst rebels and disconnect with the “outside” (Angucia 2009: 93).

To avoid tension within the group, a hierarchical system is enforced. New abductees enter at the bottom, but can build their status through “correct behaviour” (Vermeij 2011: 179). Upon doing so, integrated rebels are given “their own group of new abductees” to integrate into the LRA (Vermeij 2011: 179). Good behaviour and allegiance directly benefit the child, and even intrinsically motivate them to remain with the group and reach new ranks (Gates & Nordås 2010: 2).

This hierarchy also coincide with local agency as being achieved once one acquires dependents. In this sense, children who integrate and transition through these ranks exhibit agency by negotiating new “peer pressures and power relationships” (Özerdem & Podder 2011a: 13). This goes beyond solely the tactical, thin, or ambiguous agency deemed common amongst children “at risk.” Furthermore, children’s participation is reciprocal, as their actions are integral to the group’s functioning. In this environment, the child soldier exhibits actions and responsibilities that are equivalent to, if not the same, as those of an adult soldier (Høiskar 2001: 342).

During their time with the LRA the identity of ‘the child,’ as traditionally conceived, was essentially wiped clean and rewritten according to new norms and standards that go against notions of age, capabilities, relationships, spaces, and the child as apolitical. Therefore, reintegration no longer solely deals with reinstating and returning the child back to a “normal childhood;” it requires that they be socialised back into society and out of the norms they acquired during conflict, or find a middle-ground between both (Özerdem & Podder 2011a: 4; Vermeij 2011: 176, 187).

4.3 Post-Conflict Environment

Following this transition from a wartime experience to a post-conflict reality, a child's identity is subject to renegotiation by differing socialisation processes (Podder 2011: 150). The nature of this newfound identity, rather than being a primary departure within their reintegration, is subjected to concealment and correction according to a moral and normative standard. This downplays the full nature of the child soldier experience, favouring "victimcy" and negating the active agency undertaken in "navigating evolving spaces," both during and within a post-conflict environment (Özerdem & Podder 2011a: 15).

While the "victim card" is an easy blanket solution to approach the reintegration of FCS, it insufficiently equates half-truths as sufficient to comprehend the recruitment-reintegration link (Özerdem & Podder 2011b: 319; Podder 2011: 150). Reintegration should not be conducted in a vacuum of preconceived notions, norms, and expectations that fail to account for the identity-altering experiences of recruitment (Özerdem & Podder 2011b: 313, 319). Nevertheless, the structure of reintegration programmes in northern Uganda predominantly adheres to standardised approaches that reflect the norms inherent in the UNCRC.

4.3.1 Structure of reintegration programmes

Since 1986, children in northern Uganda have only known war (Cheney 2005: 32). Their direct involvement as "traumatized former combatants" and socialisation into violence has necessitated child-focussed reintegration programmes which target their mental, emotional, physical, and psycho-social well-being (Blattman & Annan 2009: 113; Feinstein & O'Kane 2008: 161; Russel & Gozdzia 2006: 58). At their basis, these programmes embody emergency child-saving attitudes where resources are marshalled to prevent children's re-recruitment, enable recovery and healing, and re-build their "identity, self-esteem, self-efficacy" and relationships (Angucia 2009: 78; Fernandez 2011: 489). By focussing on negative symptoms of war and viewing these behaviours as symptoms to be treated, healing and correction are upheld over a navigation of indicators that may contradict the victim format (ICRC 2003: 4, 14; Lee 2009: 12).

Lost in these institutionalised transactions, is the long-term well-being and development of the child (Angucia 2009: 93; Ben-Arieh 2010: 1; Russel & Gozdzia 2006: 60). Indicators drawn from this post-conflict space warrant an inclusion of provisions for children's well-

being. Well-being in this sense would require engaging with children as social actors and acknowledging their experiences and opinions (Ben-Arieh 2010: 4, 6). Moreover, it would require a deeper consideration of the dynamics inherent in the child's community, particularly traditional norms and social codes of behaviour that were lost, or manipulated, during the war (Høiskar 2001: 353).

The bulk of reintegration assistance in northern Uganda emanated out of both local and international NGOs in conjunction with government and financial donors (Blattman & Annan 2009: 109). Since 1995, the primary local NGO group responsible for the formal reintegration of FCS is the Gulu Support the Children Organisation (GUSCO) – a group that incorporated local Acholi traditions as part of the healing process (Akello *et al.* 2006: 230). Traditional cleansing ceremonies, typically performed by community elders, cleanse the returnee from “spiritual pollution, or *cen*,” and “appease the spirit with an animal sacrifice” (Blattman & Annan 2009: 109). Hauntings by spirits, or *cen*, are typically seen through episodes of serious emotional distress, nightmares, or flashbacks which present a threat of pollution to the family and community of the child that should be neutralised (Blattman & Annan 2009: 109-110). Symbolised in this purification ritual is the movement of a child away from a “realm of sanctioned norm-violation or norm suspension” and a return to “peaceful behavioural and social norms” (Green & Honwana 2001: 96). These practices work alongside government programmes and provisions, including the Amnesty Act of 2000, one-time reinsertion packages given to returnees since 2005, and the Northern Ugandan Social Action Fund (NUSAF) (Angucia 2009: 90-91; Blattman & Annan 2009: 109-110).

Additional services come through international NGOs like World Vision which runs two reception centres with a holistic reintegration approach. Formal ceremonies in these centres follow a step-by-step process; beginning with “handing over ceremonies” once an escapee is brought to the rehabilitation centres. Medical care is given, but the bulk of non-emergency aid falls under psychosocial care and counselling (Blattman & Annan 2009: 109). The next step is one-on-one and group counselling (Russel & Gozdziaik 2006: 63-64; Akello *et al.* 2006: 230). Counselling provides a space for children to share their experiences, forget the past, and practice repentance and forgiveness so that they can be reunified with their communities (Akello *et al.* 2006: 230-233). To ease this process, psychosocial programmes are supplemented with options of education and vocational training to “give them something

to do so as to forget about the past” (Lee 2009: 29). Warfare and the resulting experiences of child-soldiering have no place in this framework (ICRC 2003: 4, 14; Lorey 2001: 30).

Reintegration programmes in northern Uganda also exhibit a top-down nature (Maina 2009: 118; Tabyshalieva & Schnabel 2013: 19). Present dynamics link back to narratives of adults as the primary caretakers and providers for children’s protection and needs (Akello *et al.* 2006: 231). As such, a clear adult-orientation in executing reintegration processes takes precedent, with children as passive recipients. Victimising child soldiers in the new mode of warfare, leads to any and all involvement being cast under trauma and a vulnerability lens. Consequently, any agency exhibited, particularly following their return, is lost in the “macro-context of political and social crisis” (Lee 2009: 2, 12, 29).

Children’s exclusion in reintegration is present in a statement made by a FCS who said, “I can help bring peace in northern Uganda if only my views are heard and acted upon” (Tabyshalieva & Schnabel 2013: 33). She further elaborates on how returnees are mainly asked about their experiences and their escape, but not about how they can participate in peace processes, even though they “also fought in the war” (Akello *et al.* 2006: 240; Lenz 2017: 213; Tabyshalieva & Schnabel 2013: 33, 217). Implicit in this statement and the departure of reintegration programmes is the notion of reinstating the child within their requisite place, behaviours, and relationships and leaving the soldier behind.

4.3.1.1 The construction of stories – about the child, by the child, and those falling outside the “ideal”

Upon their return from the bush, FCS enter into a discursive arena where they are met with a range of constructions of “morality, time and deviance” (Verma cited in Bordonaro & Payne 2012: 370). Pre-defined categories and expectations not only determine homecoming experiences and reintegration processes, but also evidence a broader categorical control of stories about recruitment, identity, and children’s post-conflict positions (Bordonaro & Payne 2012: 370; Verma 2012: 441-442). The ideal homecoming story is continuously repeated and replicated in spaces like the reception centres (Verma 2012: 446). The subtle practices of silencing that coincided with these endeavours left divergent narratives largely unsaid, with stories that fall outside a clear-cut home-bush-home narrative being reworked to match expectations (Verma 2012: 441-442).

The moral framing of the home-bush-home phases begins by depicting a child's home prior to abduction as a "happy time of normal childhood in a family setting" (Verma 2012: 446). With their forced recruitment and time spent in the bush, the moral values instilled in the home are broken down, and children suffer from "traumatizing abuse." Upon returning home, rehabilitation centres seek to provide children with a "happy ending" by restoring the "things that make childhood meaningful" (Verma 2012: 446).

The Acholi term "*lum*" similarly paints 'the bush' as the opposite to the domesticated village. Evident in the phrase "*i tim*," meaning "in the bush," it is juxtaposed as non-Acholi, and thus a foreign territory deemed "out of place" (Girling 1960: 9; Verma 2012: 446). To be in the bush means to be with the rebels. It becomes an "immoral and destructive place," not only of the child and culture, but where danger, pollution, and evil acts occur (Douglas 1976; Save the Children 2004: 6; Verma 2012: 446). As such, no meaningful values exist in the bush, as well as "no rational thinking, and no sound forms of relationships" (Verma 2012: 446). Consequently, any maturation that took place is perceived negatively, and necessitates a reversal within a therapeutic setting; "otherwise they are lost" (Verma 2012: 445-446).

Counselling and the daily interactions at the centres are the first instances where returnees are essentially told how to view their pasts so that they can let go and heal. Returnees are painted as "small babies who return naked, don't know anything good" and are confused. As such, they are told to recall being "forced to fight and kill," but know that they are forgiven as they are "just young children" who have a "right to be children" learn to "become free," and "see how somebody should be living" (Verma 2012: 446). These statements are a significant re-socialisation tool used to gear FCS towards a "general acceptance in the present" (Verma 2012: 446).

4.3.1.2 Former child soldier stories

Confronted with this environment upon their return, FCS have moulded their stories according to "time, situation, and audience." As expressed by Cecilie Verma:

What the returnees had been through, what they dreamed to achieve, what they feared, and what the current political scene would allow them to identify with – in the present – all played their parts in the making of their stories (2012: 447).

As such, the stories told were ones that reaffirmed sensationalised depictions of an “innocent child forced into a violent and destructive lifestyle of extreme violence and abuse” who now needs counselling and “motherly care” (Verma 2012: 442). However, many were continuously altered, diverse, and multifaceted, depending on the setting in which they were told.

Alluding to this silencing of the other side, a statement given by Bosco, a 26-year-old former LRA abductee, captures the nature of story-telling by former rebels. Noting how the truth is “like a coin,” with only one side shown, Bosco explains why this occurs, stating:

When you turn it over, people will start fearing you. They think you are still someone who wants to fight or kill them ... but the other side of the coin is there ... the other side of the truth (Verma 2012: 441).

This other side of the coin is the realities experienced in the bush – a reality that is currently only depicted in alignment with humanitarian narratives.

Many stories recounting this child soldiering period depict varying perspectives concerning whether this identity was positive, or something to be feared. One particular former child soldier, Okech, exhibited this exact contradiction during his interviews with Verma (2012). When his answers were translated by a social worker, Okech’s life story directly portrayed a “child in need of protection” (Verma 2012: 442). However, in the evenings the stories told outside the boy’s tent were “barely recognizable,” with this other side picturing a “naturally talented fighter” (Verma 2012: 442). As time went on, his stories also alluded to the friendships and daily situations in the bush. When amongst other returnees and away from staff, the groups would laugh with one another, recount stories, and even sing songs and prayers that were taught to them in the bush (Verma 2012: 442-443). Not only did these evening stories contradict those told during the day, they also demonstrated how some returnees viewed themselves as neither child nor a victim (Verma 2012: 443).

While homecoming is typically portrayed as an “experience of reunion and retrieval” of all that was lost, returnees also encounter an “experience of loss” (Verma 2012: 450). In Verma’s interview with Miriam, an attempted “escapee from the reception centre,” she states that while the reception centre was good, she “had to lie to them there” (Verma 2012: 450). During her encounters with staff, she realised

they only wanted to hear “one thing.” Initially she resisted their efforts, but eventually conceded by pretending that she had forgotten and was happy so that they could send her home (Verma 2012: 450). Returnees also mentioned how radio appearances often had a script of “what is good to say and what is not good” (Verma 2012: 451).

4.3.1.3 Loss of culture and community backlash

Resulting from decades of warfare and the upbringing of children within the LRA is also a death of Acholi culture, values, and inter-generational relationships (Cheney 2007: 199-200; Oloya 2002). The nation, traditionally seen as a sentimental space where children are “presumed innocent,” now faces a new generation that is “threatened and threatening to Acholiland and the nation” (Cheney 2007: 201). Lost in this new rendering of childhood are the complex day-to-day experiences and post-war dynamics that lack clarity in traditional normative understandings of childhood (Atiken 2000: 126). It is this threat to culture and misapplication of normative confines of a child’s renewed innocence and vulnerability that fuel anger, resentment, and suspicion amongst community members (Cheney 2007: 198).

Going back to the conceptual framework, not all societies view the child as a vulnerable individual that is entitled to rights and protection (Cheney 2007: 44). Rather, they advocate for the betterment, development, and security of the community, with all individuals forming part of a collective unit. As noted with *mpisa* and *ddembe*, both concepts indicate the saliency of authority, interdependency, reciprocity, and responsibilities that exist within Ugandan societies and how notions of individual rights conflict with communal priorities (Cheney 2007: 59-60). Therefore, members of society regard the institutionalising reintegration frameworks that enforce this “alien notion of what a child should be entitled to” as an “unjust privilege” that neglects the child’s responsibilities and place in generational relations (Lee 2009: 30). Advocating for children’s rights during post-conflict reintegration in northern Uganda should simultaneously recognise and balance rights with responsibilities and obligations (Cheney 2007: 60, 210).

4.3.1.4 Children – citizens for Uganda’s future

At the fore of post-conflict reconstruction was the premise that government signatories to the UNCRC who willingly recognise children’s rights as essential to their nation’s development would receive assistance from UNICEF under the Global Movement for Children campaign

(Cheney 2007: 11, 49; Iskander 1987: 26). Ugandan civil society invested strongly in children's rights, their citizenship education, and their role as agents for the country's future development (Cheney 2007: 9-11). The motto "develop the child; develop the nation" drove developments and prescriptions in this post-conflict period (Cheney 2007: 44). Drawing upon the Luganda proverb, "*Akakyama amamera: tekagololekeka*," meaning "that which is bent at the outset of its growth is almost impossible to straighten at a later age," Ugandans strongly believe that the solution to past injustices lies in earlier behavioural development (Kilbride & Kilbride 1990: 89). The "construction of the child citizen" is perceived as the ideal manner in which to do this (Cheney 2007: 43).

One of the crucial developments was the Museveni administration's Ugandan National Programme of Action for Children (UNPAC) which led to the 1996 Children's Statute and creation of policies such as Universal Primary Education (UPE) (Cheney 2007: 50, 54-55). Furthermore, children's rights prescriptions are evident in First Lady, Janet Museveni's, priorities to "put children first, educate every child, and protect children from war" (Cheney 2007: 50). However, as expressed by UNICEF external relations officer, Mads Oyen, while Uganda is seen to have one of the "most progressive constitutions in Africa," the primary concern is whether it has filtered throughout society (Cheney 2007: 52). While the constitution was supposedly "made by the people, for the people," it did not evolve from "local moral frameworks" of reciprocity and communal obligations that the majority of Ugandans ascribe to (Cheney 2007: 52).

The final development stemming from these governmental initiatives is the growing recognition of children's voices. While promising, these developments take place externally to formal reintegration programmes and the nature of child participation and agency still lacks sufficient clarity. Ultimately, having a voice and a seat at the table is not enough and participation and agency require a further engagement of the spaces, audience, and influence these stories have within returnees' everyday post-conflict lives (Beier 2015: 2; Hoffmann-Ekstein *et al.* 2008: 18; Lund 2007: 67). To do so requires that we acknowledge the 'inclusive exclusion' children face, with broader structural dynamics in society impacting the nature and execution of their participation and agency (Fernandez 2011: 489; Tisdall & Punch 2012: 255).

4.4 Current Avenues Present – Participatory or Passive?

In the post-conflict period children's roles are commonly reshaped to coincide with expectations of the child prior to any involvement in war. Returning FCS to this previous state of being is neglectful of their current identities, roles, and spaces. The context of war created an environment in which children constantly “negotiated, adapted, and strategized their options and relationships” (Lee 2009: 24). These abilities were formative to their upbringing, regardless of how divergent it was. It is thereby crucial to recognise the roles they play – or could play – in a post-conflict environment, through both formal and informal participatory avenues (Chawla 2001: 5; Watson 2006: 243). By seeing what children do, rather than what they are, we can begin to comprehend the nature, degree, and influence of the agency exhibited in these practices (Bosco 2010: 386).

4.4.1 High-level, formal participatory engagements

Drawing upon the conceptual insights of the previous chapter, children's participation, particularly in the post-conflict setting, is increasingly recognised within the UNCRC. Broadly understood as the mutual exchange between children and adults in discussions, development, and execution of policies and programmes in “all relevant contexts” of a child's life, participation could provide the bridge needed in a post-conflict environment (Åkerström 2014: 52; Hoffmann-Ekstein *et al.* 2008: 12). However, how this participation manifests and the levels at which children are engaged with differ in the extent, type, and context of engagements.

Beginning with the higher-level, formal engagements undertaken by NGOs, children's participation illustrates only minimal negotiation prescriptions (Chawla 2001: 3). During the Juba Peace Processes, over 200 children from various peace clubs across the region were invited in September 2007 to engage in wider consultations and discussions taking place during the formal peace talks (Tabyshalieva & Schnabel 2013: 45). Their inputs on recommendations and special provisions were presented to government representatives, whom also directly consulted with the children. While children were assigned a participatory role with a level of negotiation, these initiatives were clearly adult-initiated and controlled. As such, they were tokenistic gestures, as opposed to fully collaborative, equal exchanges (Bordonaro 2012: 12; Bosco 2010: 384). Moreover, it is also important to recognise the

extent through which children were genuinely participating, or whether they were merely aiding in the advancement of a “predetermined agenda” (Hart 1994: 13).

4.4.2 Participation at the community-level

While higher level, formal participation can reach bigger and more powerful audiences, participation at the community level has more of a targeted influence on the audiences that matter most in spaces that are more accessible. NGO involvement in creating participatory forums is present with Save the Children as well as GUSCO (Tabyshalieva & Schnabel 2013: 39). While this participation is assigned by adults, children are given opportunities to train themselves in participation and to negotiate its level and execution (Chawla 2001: 3). Through children’s clubs and other association forums, children are further trained in the realm of peacebuilding and informed of their rights. Being undertaken in regular and accessible spaces these enable children to plan and implement actions collectively to realise their rights, as well as simultaneously engage in peace initiatives within their communities. Initiatives can take the form of meetings, cultural and artful expressions, radio broadcastings, and school or local governance forums. The intention is to enable debates and dialogue that sensitise fellow peers and community members on children’s rights and peace discussions, as well as potentially inform policy-making developments (Feinstein & O’Kane 2008: 7; Tabyshalieva & Schnabel 2013: 37, 39).

An additional participatory demonstration is seen with Friends of Orphans, a non-profit created by a small group of FCS in 1999. Unlike previous initiatives, Friends of Orphans evidences self-initiated and controlled participation by FCS (Chawla 2001: 3). Their aim is to train other FCS to also become peacebuilders in their communities (Davis 2013: 197, 201). Amidst the greater humanitarian responses of 2002, Friends of Orphans, along with the Children as Peacebuilders Group, expanded their programmes to include training in vital skills such as cooking and tailoring, and financing of micro-enterprises to empower children to earn their own livelihoods and be of value within their communities (Anderson *et al.* 2004: 24; Davis 2013: 205). Additionally, children’s clubs and children’s parliaments are facilitated to pass resolutions and raise awareness of children’s rights abuses (Davis 2013: 207). Media and radio broadcasting also serve to amplify and raise the voices of the youth to demonstrate their agentic capacities and perspectives (Tabyshalieva & Schnabel 2013: 59).

While there is an inclusion of the everyday practices and cultural engagements within one's community, these feature mainly as additional activities, as opposed to crucial avenues for participation. Understanding how children's activities in the more mundane contexts of their daily lives can promote their citizenship and amplify their voices in a culturally-aligned manner is a matter deserving of recognition (Bordonaro 2012: 421; Bosco 2010: 386; Vanderbeck 2008: 397). Participation that is decentred and brings other generations into engagements with children is also notable in this context.

4.4.3 Everyday participation through cultural and artistic avenues

As Ali Mazrui (1978: 218) emphasises, the "slogan of nation-building in Africa" is often tied to cultural engagements that help to create a sense of "common national heritage." Illustrated above, the abduction of children by the LRA not only altered the normal progression of these children's childhoods, but also resulted in a "death of Acholi culture" amongst this new generation. Efforts to invoke national belonging have led to the creation of national music, dance, and drama festivals as a "way to preserve (and even revive) cultural forms in which Ugandans feel pride," and spread development messages (Cheney 2007: 29). Festival performances became a "microcosm of the ideal Ugandan constitutional society," aimed towards redressing "social and legal discrimination against historically marginalized groups" (Cheney 2007: 248). This was done by re-popularising indigenous traditional dances indicative of rites of passage, as well as providing a space for new collective cultural production (Cheney 2007: 220, 223-224, 227, 241). Serving as political moments, these programmes not only evidence children navigating "adult spaces," but also depict their capacity to become stewards and purveyors of national cultural traditions (Cheney 2007: 34, 241, 245-246).

Once the objects of socialisation, children are now part of a mutual process of socialisation targeted at the nation (Cheney 2007: 126, 222). Nevertheless, while children are increasingly regarded as agents of social change, they are still rendered subservient and are limited in their power to act by virtue of the same ideology that empowers them (Cheney 2007: 10, 126). Adult hegemony when acting in the "best interests of the child" typically disempowers children in a variety of spaces in their daily realities (Cheney 2007: 141, 220-222). The festivals are no different with them being "highly structured spaces" and adult-directed performances. However, children's performative role, while outwardly painted as play, still

evidences their opportunity for action, negotiation, and voice – albeit indirect (Cheney 2007: 144, 255; Thorne 1997: 4-5; Turner 1986: 76).

In traditional Acholi society, children’s open and emphatic expression of their opinions is commonly discouraged (Cheney 2007: 31, 190). Drawing upon concepts like *mpisa*, the notion of children being “taught to listen rather than talk,” as well as to “speak quietly and briefly in the presence of adults,” directly contradicts the open expression advocated for in communication-based therapy present in rehabilitation centres (Cheney 2007: 33, 190). Unlike other avenues present for children’s “participation,” festival stages are one of the few safe spaces that enable indirect modes for children to tell their stories, “express their concerns and frustrations,” and “launch cultural critiques” about children’s rights contradictions in society (Cheney 2007: 29, 190, 234, 254).

The festival stage also provides a more culturally effective mode of disseminating information, as opposed to utilising mass media (Cheney 2007: 260). The use of national music festivals to sensitise the community about certain issues can be traced back to 1985 and 1986 where dramas about HIV/AIDS were the focus (UMOES 1998). Taking place in an accessible public space, festivals intimately target the ideal audience – the community in which the child resides. Ultimately, this very direct method of projecting stories through music, dance, and drama in an informal space is more effective than the disconnected use of higher-level, formal avenues. Moreover, it enables the gradual changes in society to be seen, as opposed to solely relying on direct feedback at one point in time (Cheney 2007: 260).

4.5 Child Agency – Accurately Reflected or Necessitating a New Framework

By assessing the various participatory avenues present for children in their post-conflict environment, coupled with their respective constraints and circumstances, we gain an insight into the choices children make, as well as their ability to “change and empower” (Lund 2007: 136). Depending on the spaces children inhabit and their “relationships, values, norms and experiences into which they are socialised,” agency will be cultivated differently (Barandiaran *et al.* 2009: 3; Lund 2007: 137; Moncrieffe 2009: 7).

Throughout this case analysis, the complexities and ambiguities of applying prior conceptual ideas within a practical space that contradicts these pre-determined notions were evident (Tisdall & Punch 2012: 256). While academic inquiry is present concerning children’s

agency in dire circumstances of war, discourses are strangely silent about its manifestation in a post-conflict space (Honwana 2009: 254-255). Moreover, very little reflection has been given concerning how the “abstract concept of agency itself relates to the more mundane domains of morality, responsibility, citizenship, and politics” in children’s post-war roles (Bordonaro 2012: 421; McMullin 2011: 761; Vanderbeck 2008: 397). Evidenced throughout this analysis is a need to move beyond the restrictive normative views of children that inhibit recognition of their agency. Only then can we fully comprehend the degree, impact, and nature of the agency exhibited and deemed productive by FCS, as well as how their relationships enable or restrict it (Abebe 2019: 12; BlueBond-Langner & Korbin 2007: 242; Tisdall & Punch 2012: 255).

Taking into account the relationships, actions, and structures surrounding FCS in northern Uganda, a very particular nature of agency is reflected; one that contrasts with notions of the “individual agent.” Communal notions of the child, predicated on their responsibilities and obligations, transcended into LRA socialisation tactics. Aiming to foster comradeship and cohesive belonging, and instil favourable behaviours and supportive actions, the LRA further magnified collective notions of being. The agency embodied by ‘children’ navigating this environment evidenced strategies of collective existence as individual realities were very much entangled with those of fellow recruits (Abebe 2019: 11). Upon returning from the bush, these bonds failed to dissipate, with returnees often recounting the relationship they acquired. Nevertheless, formal reintegration programmes continually treated each “child” through an individualised, “non-political victim format,” with very little provision for collective participation beyond counselling (Christiansen *et al.* 2006: 211).

Looking to the participatory avenues afforded to children outside their formal reintegration, and accounting for aversions towards open expression in Acholi society, the use of cultural and artistic avenues are better suited to empower children to amplify their voices, albeit indirectly. These participatory engagements return the child to their community and work to further break down cultural barriers placed between them during their socialisation into the LRA. Additionally, the cultural performances undertaken by children serve as mechanisms through which children can locate themselves within a public space that “makes certain claims on children, but from which they are typically excluded.” While adults are still the “gatekeepers” of these processes, these engagements open an exploratory space for

negotiations that could potential forge new avenues of “positive and engaged participation by all involved” (Cheney 2007: 263).

The nature of children’s agency in these engagements is predominantly relational and embedded in intergenerational relations (Abebe 2019: 5; Bosco 2010: 384; Cassidy 2012: 62; Van der Burgt 2018: 219; Wyness 2013). The extent of children’s agentic influence upon a community audience is certainly not minimal, thin, or ambiguous in nature during these engagements. Moreover, the ascription of tactical agency, particularly with its connotation as the “agency of the weak” (Lee 2009: 25), fails to represent the growing influence children are gaining in a post-conflict space, especially being viewed as social agents for the country’s development. In fact, the presence of new avenues that bridge local factors with the agency of FCS is promising.

As one of the defining characteristics of the post-conflict landscape in northern Uganda, storytelling could provide a new basis from which to comprehend agency, particularly amongst FCS. From evening reminiscing by returnees, radio visits, or the festival’s projection of traditional and new cultural traditions, these stories hold agentic potential to cross and re-contextualise the “boundaries between seemingly contradictory elements” (de Boeck & Honwana 2005: 10). Drawing upon a model of Acholi campfires, signifying a bridge between the “old and the new,” could provide a new basis from which “people of all ages can speak, be heard, and receive respect,” and thus undertake their agency collectively in reintegration processes (Cheney 2007: 217). Capacitation with adults thus presents an effective depiction of the nature of former child soldier agency that would enrich their reintegration back into their communities, whilst respecting local, reciprocal relations.

4.6 Conclusion

With the formal framework of reintegration programmes departing from a “victim narrative” that aligns with traditional conceptualisations of “the child,” a gap emerges between that which is expected of FCS and the complex and divergent reality that ensues. By taking the time to listen to the opinions, stories, and voices that go beyond solely those supportive of the official discourse, we open up our understandings to those that “exemplify the capacity to question, cross, and re-contextualize” this very same discourse (Christiansen *et al.* 2006: 211, 224; de Boeck & Honwana 2005: 10; Durham 2000: 114). Moreover, local factors, coupled with the avenues created in this post-conflict period, serve as crucial factors to be considered

in determining the nature, type, and influence of child agency. Essentially, agency should not be ascribed broadly to children, as their circumstances differ and alter the manner in which agency manifests.

Drawing upon the case analysis of the reintegration of FCS in northern Uganda, it is clear that traditional and local normative understandings of the child fail to provide a full account of “the child” that returns from war and the agency they exhibit. This agency, evidenced in the emerging participatory avenues seen in this post-conflict space, requires that rights exist alongside responsibilities, and agency coincides with intergenerational reciprocity; something that has yet to be acknowledged across both literary and practical domains.

5. CHAPTER FIVE: Concluding Remarks

5.1 Introduction

The manifestation of children's agency, while increasingly analysed in relation to conflict, continues to lack the same conceptual and practical clarity of its nature in post-conflict environments. This problem, although stemming partly from a general absence of children's agency in academia and practice, truly lies in the normative assumptions that have informed conceptualisations of 'the child.' Not only do these assumptions inform engagements with children, they also paint a clear picture of the factors that place children outside these desirable confines of an 'ideal childhood.' Resulting from the nature of recognition and prescriptions of concepts surrounding children, namely the vulnerability lenses ascribed to child soldiers, reintegration programmes targeting FCS are more attune to protectionist priorities, as opposed to fostering avenues for participation that recognise their agency.

Driven by this problem within academia and practice, this study sought to answer the question, "How would the formulation of a normative framework of child agency alter the orientation of post-conflict reintegration programmes in the future?" Substantiating this main question were the additional considerations, asking "What is the nature of agency demonstrated by former child soldiers?" and "How does this child agency impact conceptualisations of agency and childhood in respect of reintegration?" The aim of asking these questions was not to discredit previous normative understandings of children and agency, but rather to potentially contribute to a new normative understanding of how child agency manifests in a post-conflict environment. To answer these questions and meet the objectives of the study, a culmination of a purposively sampled, critical literature review and a critical analysis of the case of northern Uganda were employed.

5.2 Key Findings

Using a critical literature review, the second chapter broke down the various 'truths' about children throughout history. What became evident through this process was how modern normative assumptions about children stem from academic works dating back centuries. Crucial to this academic history are the sources from which this knowledge was drawn. Emanating mainly from a Western locus of enunciation, the perspectives put forth by these authors draw upon assumptions of a "certain social group at a certain point in time" (Kehily

2009: 45). The importance of these findings is that the seemingly ‘universal’ normative conceptions surrounding children and childhood depict an incomplete story; one that fails to account for norms and values drawn from non-Western sources.

Following this literature review, a conceptual framework was drafted for the purpose of clarifying key concepts within the study. Drawing upon the findings of the literature review, particular attention was given to ensuring that conceptualisations capture both Western and non-Western contributions. It soon became clear that sources varied in their depiction of the child, and the requisite capabilities and places deemed supportive of childhood. Consequently, these conceptions of the child would greatly impact perspectives towards child soldiers, agency, and reintegration approaches. Nevertheless, the aim was not to further dichotomise these views, but to bring them into conversation with one another with the hope of providing a solid conceptual basis from which to approach the case analysis.

Notable amongst Western normative conceptions is how children have mainly been treated in an individualised fashion, pertaining to their respective ‘vulnerability’ and ‘innocence.’ While children’s relation to adults has expanded beyond one of a caretaker and a dependent to include their ability to participate and undertake agency, the nature of this agency is still unclear. Explicit in the violent recruitment and socialisation of children into the LRA, as well as present in the broader of northern Ugandan society, is a very different reality to the Western ‘norm.’ Alongside the traditional academic and conceptual dimensions that inform policy prescriptions – like the UNCRC – are equally salient communal notions of the child emphasising their responsibilities and obligations as much as their rights. While the child, as traditionally conceived, is effectively counteracted under the LRA (Lee 2009: 12), communal notions of belonging are magnified through socialisation tactics. However, intergenerational Acholi relations and culture are caught in the cross-fire which negatively impacts the ability of FCS to identify with their community upon returning from the bush.

Reintegration seeks to encourage children to conceal, correct, and forget these identities and behaviours forged in the bush, and thus frames programmes along psycho-social lines of vulnerability, protection, and returning these children to a “normal childhood” (McMullin 2011: 752). While local practices are incorporated with the cleansing rituals to dispel negative spirits – *cen* - these practices uphold notions of concealment and correction. Very little formal prescriptions for the participation of FCS are included beyond counselling due to

the preoccupation to replace one extreme identity with a return to another: that of a vulnerable, innocent, and apolitical child.

Evident in the breakdown of participatory avenues seen in the analysis, many fall outside of formal reintegration practices as they are feature mainly as additional considerations after the fact. Moreover, the nature of FCS participation varies considerably from adult-initiated to self-initiated practices. While the final outlet of everyday participation still features adult gate-keeping, children's voices are projected in a manner that has a considerable influence on the audience – their community. From the nature of how children's voices are expressed, while still respecting traditional values, as well as the direct engagement children have in creating messages, launching critiques, and forging new cultural paths, this avenue evidences a clear executing of child agency.

5.3 Final Considerations – New Framework?

According to the third objective of this study, there is a need to determine whether the findings of the case analysis motivate for, or discourage, the creation of a new normative framework of child agency to account for its manifestation in a post-conflict environment with FCS. Based on the findings, this study argues that pre-existing frameworks predicated on children's vulnerability, innocence, and a protection-first mentality in reintegration fail to adequately account for the new identities and circumstances of returnees. Moreover, looking to the post-conflict participatory avenues present in northern Uganda, a majority of these prescriptions fall outside the formal processes of reintegration. Notable in these demonstrations is also a depiction of how children's participation can take a variety of forms, each with their own level of influence, spaces, and audience. While each participatory avenue serves its own particular purpose, cultural engagements through festivals held in the community stand out.

The nature of child agency within these everyday forums exhibits more of an alignment with intergenerational relations, community, and strategies of collective existence than that of an "autonomous" agent. The strong correlation between agency and community stems partly from local notions of reciprocity within northern Uganda, but also draws upon the collective notions of being within the LRA's socialisation tactics. Through these processes, acquired identities support collective participation and expression as opposed to the "non-political victim format" ascribed to the individual child soldier being reintegrated (Christiansen *et al.*

2006: 211). Within these festivals, children exhibit agency by harnessing these platforms to launch critiques and their ability to cross the traditional boundaries set against them: boundaries of age, capabilities, spaces, and the desired apolitical nature of the child.

Through these platforms, FCS are also brought closer to their communities and are able to express themselves in a manner that still respects traditional values. In the case analysis, a final argument was made that festivals could bridge older and newer cultural traditions, as well as forge new avenues for participation, negotiation, and agency. Utilising the example of Acholi campfires as a platform where “people of all ages can speak, be heard, and receive respect,” a contextualised approach towards children’s agency would prioritise their capacitation with adults and community members (Cheney 2007: 217).

Within this framework, reintegration would require a “move away from universal solutions” and generalised notions of the ‘best interests of the child’ to structuring programmes in a manner that addresses locally-situated challenges (Zyck 2011: 170). Community engagements beyond the incorporation of cleansing rituals should form a greater part of programmes to reunify and socially reintegrate FCS. It is through these local avenues that agency and participation can be more attuned to contextual realities. Ultimately, the presence of agency amongst FCS in northern Uganda is not the demonstration of an antithesis of childhood, but rather a variation that requires recognition.

5.4 Research Constraints and Recommendations for Future Research

Resulting from restrictions of time and access, fieldwork engaging with the case of northern Uganda’s FCS fell outside of the capabilities of this mini-dissertation. Due to the confinements of existing literature on the topic, deeper insights that will be gained from fieldwork are still required. Therefore, future research that engages directly with children and their communities and acknowledges the current state of attitudes regarding participatory avenues created for children in northern Uganda, both within and external to reintegration programmes, would be fruitful.

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